

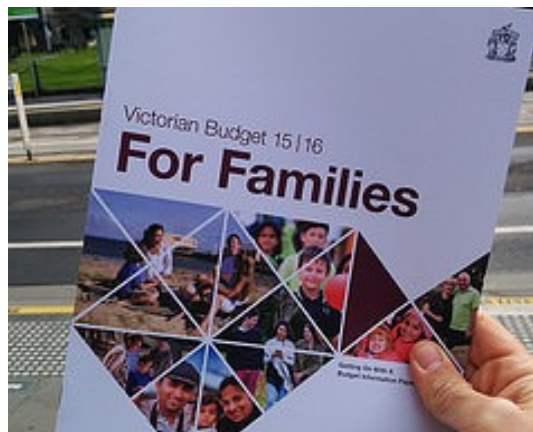
State Budget delivers for rail, but less so for tram and bus

Funding provided in this year’s State Budget means the government will take significant strides to bring the rail system into the 21st century, however tram upgrades are more limited, and most bus routes are unlikely to see any improvements.

The Budget included:

- \$2.4b to commence the removal of 20 level crossings by 2018
- \$1.5b to for full planning and early works on the Metro rail tunnel
- \$1.3b for 37 new design high capacity metro trains for the Dandenong line
- \$274m for an additional 20 E-class trams
- \$257m for 21 V/Locity carriages and a maintenance facility at Waurin Ponds
- \$90m for 5 X’Trapolis trains
- \$75m to refurbish the Comeng train fleet
- \$21m to commence refurbishing the B-class tram fleet
- \$56m to begin trials of high-capacity signalling
- \$50m to trial “Homesafe” all-night trains and trams on weekends
- \$100m for bus upgrades including additional university shuttles
- Up to \$220m for the Murray Basin rail project
- \$9m for planning the Mernda rail extension

The Andrews Government deserves credit for taking rail transport seriously. High capacity trains and signalling, more V/Line carriages, level crossing removals, and a start on the metro rail tunnel will all help improve the rail system, which is the backbone of our public transport network and essential for the prosperity of our city.



But there’s less in this budget for trams and buses, which provide vital connectivity for communities not blessed with trains.

While the budget funds 20 additional E-class trams, the PTUA is concerned that the government’s 2015-2025 rolling stock plan (released just before the Budget) includes a reduction in tram fleet size until 2021. In the short term, larger E-class trams will replace multiple smaller Z-class trams, indicating that some routes will see less frequent tram services.

And there appears to be no new funding for tram priority initiatives, which would help reduce delays and make better use of the tram fleet. More low-floor trams are welcome, but having them sitting waiting at traffic lights is not.

Buses get targeted improvements, including worthwhile upgrades to interchanges such as Huntingdale, and new university shuttle services for Latrobe and Deakin. But it appears overall bus service upgrades will be limited, with most routes remaining at relatively poor service levels.

Also missing from the Budget is duplication of single track sections, which remain a significant barrier to reliable, frequent train services. The Mernda rail extension has only been funded for planning, with the government saying construction funding will follow next year.

The lack of a comprehensive public transport plan remains a concern. PTV put out its rail plan in 2012, but their long-term plans for bus and tram have never been publicly released. Perhaps there’s an overall strategy, but if there is, it’s being kept secret.

Keeping in touch...

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Our web site is at www.ptua.org.au

The PTUA runs email lists for member discussions, and to stay up to date with PTUA events. Members can also view archived newsletters online:

www.ptua.org.au/members/resources

Committee

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Geelong Branch:

Paul Westcott – Convenor

Member meetings

Melbourne:

Meetings will be advertised in PTUA News and on our website
www.ptua.org.au

Geelong:

First Saturday of every month (except Jan), 10:30am
Mary MacKillop Room, St Mary's Parish Offices, cnr. Little Myers and Yarra streets, Geelong.

Membership Enquiries

Call or e-mail the office (see above)

PTUA members can obtain cheap yearly Myki passes – see

www.ptua.org.au/members/offers

Movie screening

On Friday 17th July, the PTUA will present a screening of the Outer Circle railway documentary, with filmmaker Ron Killeen taking questions afterwards. Hayden Raysmith Room, Ross House, 6:30pm. Admission \$5, proceeds to go to the PTUA and to the filmmakers for their next production

In brief...

New national Greens leader

The PTUA thanks Christine Milne for her leadership of the Australian Greens from 2012 until her retirement announced in May, and wishes her well in future endeavours where she will doubtless continue as a staunch defender of environmental conservation and sustainable economic infrastructure.

The new national Greens leader is Victorian Senator Richard Di Natale. We are confident the Greens under his leadership will build on their strong political record of advocacy for sustainable public transport alternatives to road building. Their leadership, alongside that of the ALP, is particularly vital at present given the ideological atavism of Prime Minister Tony Abbott in denying Federal funding to meritorious urban rail projects.

Station skipping statistics

A welcome initiative in recent months from Transport Minister Jacinta Allan is that PTV will

now collect and publish monthly data on station skipping by Metro Trains.

The statistics, published in early May, confirms passenger suspicions that unscheduled bypassing of stations has become a routine occurrence, not just a sporadic response to emergencies, with around 15 services each day altering their timetabled run to skip one or more stations.

Private operator Metro Trains is now on notice that station skipping is to be used as intended - as an emergency measure to restore schedules after major disruptions, not for routine timetable management.

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Edited by Anna Morton.

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Not quite dead: Andrews Government revives western tollroad

Our new State Government has assured Victorians of the demise of the East West Link. Yet at the same time it is considering an 'unsolicited proposal' by Transurban for a tolled motorway through Yarraville, connecting to CityLink and a new exit to Dudley Street and the City.

Judging by its route and, crucially, by the road capacity it adds on the main approaches to the city, the 'Western Distributor' proposal looks much more like the supposedly cancelled East West Link western section than the original 'Westgate Distributor' the government took to the election. That proposal was about adding off-ramps to the West Gate Bridge to divert trucks from local streets; it did not involve building a bigger pipe to funnel more car traffic into the inner city.

Given it appears designed to boost private car traffic, it is unlikely to fulfil its alleged purpose of speeding up freight travel. As with all projects to expand road space with freight as a pretext, it is likely (just as CityLink and the Western Ring Road did before it) to encourage a resurgence in private car travel, including from many who previously used public transport. It is this private car travel, driven on to the roads by poor public transport alternatives, that is the primary impediment to road freight.

But perhaps what is most alarming about this proposal is that it elevates Transurban, a private company that makes money out of tollroads, into the role of de facto transport planner for Victoria.

The proposal was revealed to the public only in April, compete with claims that it has a benefit-cost ratio of \$1.60 to the dollar and that it has been in active development for two years. As with the East West Link, the public has not been given any evidence to support the economic benefit claimed, nor is it clear why Victorians are only now hearing about it.

When Sir Rod Eddington studied

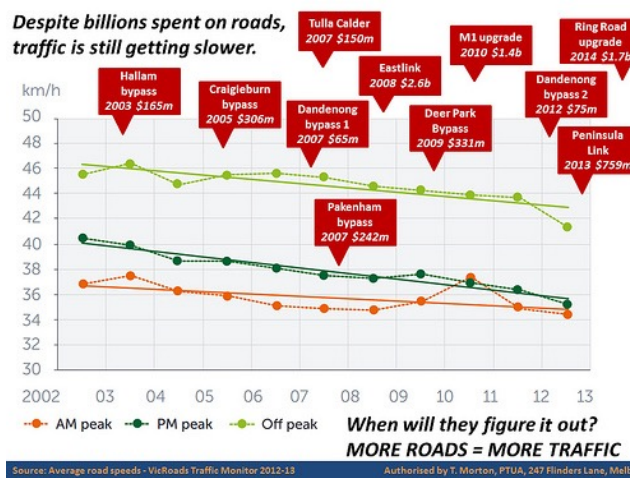
because no other road has ever done so. Instead, it will further entrench car dependence and lead to more traffic snarls in the city and suburbs. For example, it will divert car traffic from Footscray Road into the western end of the CBD, worsening traffic-sewer conditions in Spencer St and King St and creating conflict with the life and business of the city.

The road is also likely being used to cover serious gaps in Victoria's freight strategy. Webb Dock is being expanded with no rail access, and threatens to unleash a spate of B-triple road trains on the West Gate Bridge. We cannot just keep dumping rail freight in the too-hard basket – we know there are plenty more goods that could move smoothly, safely and efficiently by rail if it weren't for the weak links that are often in Melbourne itself.

If Victoria takes Federal money for this road and it proves not to work, that is billions of dollars less we'll be entitled to claim in the future for any purpose. Victoria may be vulnerable to being bullied by the road-obsessed Abbott Government right now, but if a project is a waste of money, it's a waste of money regardless of the politics. People would rather have more money to spend on their families than fork out top dollar for road tolls.

The Western Distributor is likely to become a major focus for our Public Transport Not Traffic campaign in the coming months.

Visit the campaign website for more details: publictransportnottraffic.org.



an east-west motorway for Melbourne in 2008, the resulting figures gave the road – combining the eastern and western sections – a benefit-cost ratio of just 45 cents in the dollar. The previously secret 2013 business case for the eastern section obtained the exact same figure.

The Andrews Government must hold the line on transparency in infrastructure decisions. It rightly favours the Metro rail tunnel, which provides around six times the passenger capacity of the proposed road and whose net benefit has already been endorsed by Infrastructure Australia. This project ought to take priority over any new road.

The Western Distributor is unlikely to cut travel times in the long term

Amcor redevelopment will backfire without public transport

The proposed redevelopment of the 16.5 hectare Amcor site at Alphington's Chandler Hwy and Heidelberg Rd corner represents a major opportunity to substitute sustainable infill development in an inner suburban location for the urban sprawl we have witnessed in recent decades.

But the proposed development is massive. It will house an estimated population of 4,000, and have over 18,000m² of commercial and retail space. The footprint for the retail component is substantial and is foreshadowed to attract customers from as far as Heidelberg and North Balwyn. It is estimated that with no improvements in public transport, the development would add an extra 18,000 daily car trips to the road network in the area. Currently, Chandler Hwy caters for

about 40,000 daily trips and Heidelberg Rd about 24,000.

The PTUA has made a submission to the City of Yarra highlighting the poor quality public transport in the area, and the consequent need for improvements in bus services and a study to demonstrate the potential for increased use of public transport. While Alphington railway station is within relatively easy reach of some residents and visitors to, the bus services on Heidelberg Road (route 546) and Chandler Highway (route 350) are very poor, providing an inferior level of service on weekdays and none on weekends.

As it is anticipated that over half the residents are likely to work in the city, and large numbers in the local area, these services need to be upgraded as an immediate

priority. Given that there is no north-south bus service of any quality on Chandler Highway across the Yarra, that gap should also be plugged to make public transport a viable choice for residents in Alphington.

The City of Yarra has been at the forefront in the campaign against the East West Link and for a rail service to Doncaster. The PTUA has also recommended that the City of Yarra ensure any work on the duplication of the Chandler Highway bridge, as recently announced by the Victorian government, provides for separate bus lanes and does not put at risk the future construction of a rail line to Doncaster on the Eastern Freeway reservation and the construction of a railway station at Chandler Highway for Alphington and Kew passengers.

About your membership: A few changes to processes and categories

Over recent months we have needed to make some changes to 'back-office' processes. It had become clear our systems for managing memberships and Commuter Club tickets were increasingly unreliable and error-prone, to the extent we found it necessary to suspend Commuter Club orders for a brief period in April.

We have now completed a transition to the NationBuilder platform to manage records for our members and supporters. NationBuilder is increasingly used for this purpose by many nonprofit organisations.

At the same time as making the transition to NationBuilder, the Committee has discussed and

decided on some administrative changes to PTUA subscriptions.

First, there is no change to the existing membership levels: Gold, Silver, Bronze and Concession.

These different levels exist so that those with greater capacity can choose to financially support the PTUA at a greater level (since member subscriptions are our primary source of funding). As a further guide to members, we are now proposing suggested income levels for each as follows.

- Concession: unwaged or connection card holders.
- Bronze: annual income up to \$40,000.
- Silver: annual income \$40,000 to \$70,000.

- Gold: annual income above \$70,000.

Of course, these income levels are a guide only and we are delighted to welcome members at any level of membership.

Second, it has been decided to discontinue the two-year membership option from July. This is to simplify the range of options, and because NationBuilder allows us to streamline annual renewals. We recognise that payments every 2 years involve less effort than every year, but believe there is greater overall benefit in moving to exclusively annual subscriptions.

Members whose subscriptions are due may still elect to renew for two years until 1 July.

Regional Rail Link finally opens

Regional Rail Link (RRL), the \$4 billion V/Line route through Melbourne's west, and Melbourne's first major suburban rail line in 85 years, opens on June 21st.

The line will divert Geelong trains off the Werribee line, and serve new stations in the growing suburbs of Wyndham Vale and Tarneit. For years there has been speculation over how long Geelong trains would take via this circuitous route, with the government resisting releasing any detailed information until now.

On May 31st they finally released the timetables. Despite the longer route and extra stations, trains will take around the same time as previously, but with dedicated V/Line tracks, services are likely to be more reliable.

While the timetablers could have used the higher speed track to rush trains into the city, it's logical to have many stop along the way to serve the new stations, if it can be done without making the overall trip slower than at present.

The line will also get a boost in services, with trains from Geelong about every 10 minutes in peak, and every 20 minutes off-peak on weekdays - however services

beyond South Geelong will be less frequent due to the largely single track.

Most trains will stop at Wyndham Vale, and about half at Tarneit. A few "short starter" services will run between Wyndham Vale and the City in peak hour.



Wyndham Vale Station

Many trains from Geelong and also Ballarat will stop at Deer Park, vastly improving services in that area, which has seen much development in the past decade.

Local bus services in the Wyndham and Geelong areas have been revamped, with an emphasis on frequent services along trunk routes, connecting to stations and with timings co-ordinated with trains. This is good to see, though frequencies remain poor on some routes, and bus priority will become important as traffic congestion grows in the area.

Will train services cope? Time will tell. Presumably there is scope to keep boosting train lengths and frequencies as more V/Line carriages come into service, and to increase bus services in the future.

Overall it's good to see the project completed and the new line and connecting buses coming into use, though there are some concerns:

- While weekday services are reasonably frequent, weekend and evening services will remain mostly hourly, which will be a dampener on patronage outside working hours.
- Passengers between Geelong and Werribee will have a timed bus connection (new route 190) at Wyndham Vale, but this is expected to add at least 20 minutes to their journeys each way.
- Changes to Metro and Yarra Trams timetables have largely been deferred. The new track capacity freed up by the opening of RRL will be mostly unused for now.
- No relief for the Altona Loop, with Newport shuttle trains continuing on weekdays between the peaks, meaning an arduous journey for passengers into the City, particularly to the underground stations.

V/Line: Metro passengers barred from June 21st

With the RRL opening and timetable changes, there are changes to the rules for passengers at Sunbury and Pakenham, who will no longer be able to use V/Line trains between those stations and the city.

On balance, we think this makes sense. With booming patronage, and increased Metro services to those two stations, space on V/Line trains needs to be saved for those who have no choice.

However, the Sunbury line beyond Watergardens only sees trains every 40-60 minutes outside peak hour - this should be increased to ensure those denied access to V/Line do not face long waits between trains.

Geelong branch report

The annoyingly persistent push to remove the central bus interchange from Geelong's main street was given some further oxygen by the recent release of a "Central Geelong Action Plan" by the City Council's Central Geelong Task Force.

In fact, there are two specific problems with the report. One is the proposal to relocate the interchange to the narrow Little Malop Street. The other is the abolition of the direct Gordon Avenue/Railway Terrace approach to Geelong railway station with its incorporation into an extended park.

While at least the Little Malop Street site would still be centrally located, there is no evidence that the planners have given any thought to how bus services could efficiently operate into and out of the much more cramped site.

Similarly, little consideration seems to have been given to how enforcing a more indirect approach to the key hub at Geelong station, by abolishing established approach roads, would actually work.

Essentially, however, the plans contain a fundamental contradiction. On the one hand there is the laudable aim to reduce car dominance of the central city, the corollary of which must surely be to improve the provision of the sustainable alternatives. Yet, rather than improving the operation of buses through central Geelong, the plan actually make it less convenient.

It is sadly indicative of this



confused thinking that when our convenor Paul Westcott made this point to the City Council at its May 12 meeting, the councillor with portfolio responsibility for the central city replied that the report was only about "greening" the city, not about public transport!

We are looking forward to the revelation of the final form of the new bus network for Geelong, which will be inaugurated on 21 June. The many positive changes to the current system are well overdue.

Unfortunately the new arrangements will not remove some basic aspects of the "social service" model our bus system has long laboured under. Most weekday off-peak services will have frequencies of 40 minutes or more, there will still be no buses after 9:30 pm, and there are only hourly urban services on weekends.

At the start of May we held our first Branch meeting in our new venue - the Mary MacKillop Room at the St Mary's Parish Offices, on the corner of Little Myers and Yarra streets. We are very grateful to the parish for making the room available for very little more than we were paying prior to the massive increase in the charge at the location we've used since Tim Petersen founded our Branch 16 years ago.

Get on board – Tell Tony Abbott to start funding public transport.

Tony Abbott blanket refuses to put any money into urban public transport, saying his government must "stick to its knitting" – meaning fund more mega roads. This ideologically motivated roads-only platform is out of step with world best-practice, contrary

to what Victorians voted for in last year's election and poses a very real threat to our economy and environment. Instead of lining up toll road after toll road, Mr Abbott needs to get serious and fix our traffic crisis by investing in public transport. We are encouraging all

members to go online to our Public Transport Not Traffic campaign site and sign the petition: "Hey Tony: Invest in PT".

www.publictransportnottraffic.org/tony_invest_in_pt

Commuter Club – the discounted 365 day myki Pass.

PTUA exclusively offers members a discounted yearly Myki Pass through Public Transport Victoria's (PTV) Commuter Club.

The offer involves a substantial discount on the retail price of a 365-day Myki Pass. This means that 12 months travel costs less than ten 30-day Passes, so it is an excellent deal for regular travellers. If you are not a PTUA member already, even after paying our membership fee the PTUA Commuter Club Myki still gives you a substantial saving.

For some years, a dedicated volunteer, Cameron, has single-handedly looked after the PTUA CC "back office" tasks, however, due to a sudden change in circumstances earlier this year, Cameron's services were no longer available to us. Regrettably we had to temporarily suspend the Club while other volunteers were sought and trained. We apologise for any inconvenience this caused intending purchasers, but the Club system is now operational and anyone may order a Commuter Club ticket here (and join as a

PTUA member if not already) - www.ptua.org.au/members/offers/

In addition, with the changes to fares for Zone 1&2 travel from January, refunds were due to those who purchased a Zone1&2 yearly pass in 2014 – those affected were notified by a PTUA email in March, but some may have been blocked by email filters. If you believe you are entitled to a refund, please email us at tickets@ptua.org.au. The PTUA thanks those members who have donated their refund or used it to extend their membership.

Level crossings push ahead, but are we getting the best solutions?

With the State Budget pledging \$2.4 billion to commence 20 level crossing removals by 2018, it's clear that the Andrews Government is pushing ahead with its bold (and welcome) agenda for grade separation.

The first contracts have been awarded, those being for the Burke Road (Gardiner) and North Road (Ormond) crossings (both of which were fully funded in 2014 by the Coalition) and the McKinnon Road (McKinnon) and Centre Road (Bentleigh) crossings.

This makes sense, as North, McKinnon and Centre Roads are within a two kilometre stretch, so combining the projects will reduce costs and disruptions to train services, as well as avoiding the potential 'roller coaster' up and down track which might have resulted from doing all three separately.

It also makes political sense, with all three either in or bordering the highly marginal seat of Bentleigh,

and likely to be completed before the next election.

Most recent grade separations have involved moving rail lines to go under the road. But there is growing concern about the cost of this method. The St Albans grade separation will cost \$200 million - the same cost as the 237 bed Women's and Children's Hospital to be built at nearby Sunshine.

Also of concern are the long trenches resulting from lowering railway lines, which is just as much a divider through communities as ground level railways can be.

In contrast, elevating or dropping the road has poor outcomes for amenity, especially for pedestrians - Huntingdale, Sunshine and Burnley are some examples of this.

But one method of grade separation not widely explored is elevated rail. Ian Woodcock from The University of Melbourne presented to a PTUA member meeting in April on this topic,

showing numerous examples of good and bad station design, and pointing out the pros and cons of elevated rail.

Chief among the advantages are the reduced cost of projects, but also that modern elevated rail can provide much-needed space underneath the railway line. This also means numerous places to cross the line can be easily provided. While noise and visual impact are a concern, with careful planning these can be minimised, and Ian pointed out that some of Melbourne's most desirable suburbs - such as Hawthorn/Glenferrie/Auburn and Canterbury have elevated railways and stations.

With dozens of stations expected to be rebuilt in the next few years, it makes sense for the government to carefully consider the option of elevated rail - in many locations it may provide a better community outcome, and at a fraction of the price of the alternatives.

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Join us

If you are reading a friend's newsletter and would like to join and help the fight for better public transport, it's \$30 per year (\$15 concession). Call the office, or see www.ptua.org.au/join

Responsibility for electoral comment in PTUA News is taken by Tony Morton, 247 Flinders Lane, Melbourne.