

All Change in Canberra - Will Mr Turnbull revive our stalled transport future?

National political news in the past month has been all about the replacement of Tony Abbott with Malcolm Turnbull as Prime Minister. There is a widespread belief that Mr Turnbull's election just puts a new face on existing Federal Coalition policies, but one area where we can be cautiously optimistic about real change is the Federal funding of urban public transport.

Mr Abbott maintained that the Federal Government would not fund urban public transport projects.

Although some claimed this reflected an anti-urban bias within the Coalition, it is clear it was largely due to Abbott himself. Even the Howard Government canvassed funding urban public transport in its 2002 AusLink green paper, though this faltered in the actual legislation. Far from being "not in the knitting", there is a sizeable history of Federal involvement in urban public transport, including the Cranbourne line electrification in 1991.

The Federal funding freeze had the practical effect of sabotaging public transport investment by all three levels of government. Without Federal funding, almost any large infrastructure project is a non-starter. Mr Abbott by all accounts understood this, and intended that public transport development would wither in favour of a 1960s road agenda.

Mr Turnbull however has made strong statements in the past supporting public transport as the foundation of liveable cities, and many know his

habit of posting selfies on Twitter while using trains, trams and buses. In 2006 he told *The Age*, "It is one of the highest priorities for our major cities to improve public transport. I get around almost invariably by public transport and I find it quite impractical to drive." In 2010 he said to a Western Sydney population summit, "We complain bitterly

about crowded roads but do not provide enough of the only thing that can be relied on to get people off the roads - efficient and reliable mass transit... Cities dependent on cars discriminate against the old, the poor and the young."

However, as we go to press the Turnbull Government is yet to make any firm

commitment to urban public transport in Victoria. When asked recently, Mr Turnbull said he had yet to see a proposal from the Victorian Government for public transport funding. It is not clear whether this is a delaying tactic, or a genuine invitation to Premier Daniel Andrews to submit a case for a rail project.

The State Government indicates it is giving priority to the Melbourne Metro rail tunnel, but progress toward a formal business case appears slow, in contrast to road projects such as the expansion of CityLink and the Tullamarine Freeway to the airport. Treasurer Tim Pallas has indicated a business case for Transurban's Western Distributor can be expected at the end of October, but will we be made to wait months for progress on rail projects?

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Malcolm Turnbull @TurnbullMalcolm - Jul 28

At Sth Geelong station with @SHendersonMP before going to Torquay to inspect the @NBN_Australia rollout.



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

Anthony Morton – President
Tim Long – Secretary
Phil Bourke – Treasurer

Daniel Bowen

Alison Clarke

Matthew Ferrantino

Ian Hundley

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David Robertson

Petra Stock

Bruce Sutherland

Jennifer Williams

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

Notice of Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting of the Public Transport Users Association will be held at 6:30 pm on Wednesday 2nd December, in the Hayden Raysmith Room, 4th Floor, Ross House, 247 Flinders Lane, Melbourne. The meeting will be addressed by the Minister for Public Transport, the Hon. Jacinta Allen MP who will also answer some questions from members.

Nominations for committee must be received in writing by the returning officer no later than 25th November. The nomination form is available on our website at www.ptua.org.au/members/meetings, or contact the office for a paper copy. Nominations will only be accepted from the floor at the meeting if insufficient nominations are received to fill required positions.

A reminder that you must be a current financial member to attend and vote at the AGM. You may renew your membership at the meeting if it is still current or no more than four months lapsed.

Airport Rail link forum

There will be a forum about the economic and social case for the Melbourne Airport Rail Link at RMIT on 30th October. For further information please see www.ptua.org.au/members/meetings

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Edited by Anna Morton.

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Level crossing progress

The Andrews government has embarked on the level crossing removal program it committed to at the 2014 state election. The government envisages the removal of 50 level crossings in Metropolitan Melbourne by 2022 which is to cost an estimated \$4 billion.

The Burke Road, Gardiner level crossing removal is the first scheduled to be completed, and is progressing, with a trench parallel to the existing rail line being dug for the new line.

A week-long closure of the Glen Waverley line during the September school holidays had passengers carried by bus from Darling to Caulfield, and seemed to run relatively smoothly. More major works are expected to be carried out over Christmas, with the project finished in 2016.

Other crossings on the Sunbury and Frankston lines are undergoing early works.

But the first full series of crossings to be removed on one line - the nine between Caulfield and Dandenong on the Cranbourne/Pakenham line - are yet to begin,

with two consortia shortlisted, and construction expected to start in 2016.

The PTUA has been repeatedly told that the Caulfield to Dandenong line projects will include "passive" provision for future expansion to four tracks. This means authorities will not acquire properties for additional tracks, allow but neither will they allow new buildings to be built on the alignment.



Given the importance of additional tracks in the future to cater for additional trains, including expresses, V/Line and freight, we urge the government to implement the extra tracks as part of the grade separation project. They will be needed eventually, but doing this now with so much other construction occurring will result

in huge cost savings compared with deferring this work until later. As the popular saying goes: "Do it once, do it right."

Over or under?

Much is not clear about the program. This includes whether grade separations other than what has been the traditional approach in Victoria of sinking the rail line under the road are to be considered.

This is not always the best solution. It may result in significantly increased costs which would be avoided in many cases if the rail lines were to be elevated above the road. Elevated rail lines in many cases would result in superior land use and enhanced values in the area. There should also be significant potential with many grade separations

and associated construction of new railway stations to secure significant revenue through "value capture" in the redevelopment of these locations. This appears to have not progressed beyond a "thought bubble" within the Victorian government but it needs to.

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The Federal Opposition, meanwhile, is setting up for a bidding war on public transport funding. They have announced they will elevate Infrastructure Australia to become an investment 'facilitation' body as well as an evaluation body. It will initially commit to a list of 10 projects of

which six are urban rail, including the Melbourne Metro tunnel.

Our State Government needs to grasp the opportunity raised by these changes, and exert pressure on Mr Turnbull and newly anointed Cities Minister Jamie Briggs to fund the public transport that the people in Victoria need and want. This includes not only the Metro tunnel but also the many

other initiatives to renew our public transport network: high-capacity signalling, level crossing grade separation, short rail extensions to growth areas and new accessible bus and tram fleets.

The grim alternative, already gaining pace as population grows, is that Melbourne will deteriorate to be a liveable city for just a select few.

Infrastructure pushing ahead, but what about service planning?

There's no doubt that the Andrews government is pushing ahead with rail infrastructure - surveying and planning for the metro rail tunnel, the extension to Mernda, level crossing removals, new stations at Southland and Caroline Springs and more.

But what about the other vital aspect of good public transport: upgraded services?

When the Regional Rail Link opened in June, accompanying local bus route changes were implemented, but Metro timetable changes were deferred - including

upgrade frequencies to cut overcrowding on key routes such as Warrigal Road, have been planned since last year, but were postponed in April. It's still not known when and if they will be implemented, and in what form.

Even the simplest of changes, the opening of Flagstaff station on weekends, pledged by both major parties in the 2014 election, hasn't happened yet.

Some of these proposed service changes aren't perfect. The Metro proposal would remove remaining Frankston trains from the City Loop, while not using all the freed

operations (and passenger trips) made quicker and more efficient, and better co-ordinated with other routes. The key is that the benefits should heavily outweigh disadvantages.

This type of bus network change in Brimbank in 2014 seems to have proven successful. More direct, more frequent routes, reduced duplication and better alignment to train timetables were introduced - and have resulted in increased patronage.

We hope that the government isn't putting off changes that will provide the majority with a better



resolving the Altona Loop shuttle mess. The result is that much of the huge rail capacity boost provided by this multi-billion-dollar project is not yet being used.

Tram network changes designed to provide more capacity on key routes such as Swanston Street/St Kilda Road and William Street, and introduce low-floor trams to the hospital precinct, were also planned for June, but have been deferred as well.

Transdev bus route changes intended to improve service reliability (by splitting the long orbital routes), reform routes and

capacity for other services, which may result in crowding. Parts of the bus plans would cut frequencies on some services, particularly in the western suburbs.

From that point of view, some aspects may need review and consultation. But they shouldn't be put on ice indefinitely.

Some changes, such as making bus routes more direct, may mean some passengers have to walk slightly further to get to a stop, or have to change services. This is not unacceptable if it means services can be more frequent, the network more legible and bus

service because a small number of people will be slightly disadvantaged.

Improved infrastructure is welcome, but alone won't provide the public transport Victoria needs. Timetable and service reform is needed on our trains, trams and buses.

Nobody would pretend the network is perfect, and it does need to evolve as the city grows - but the government can't stall forever on changes.

Race for PT continues

The Race for PT continues this month with an event scheduled to coincide with the Preston Market Food and Wine Festival on Saturday 24th October.

This will provide an interesting snapshot of people travelling to a community hub and help bring to life a variety of local transport issues like poor weekend services and connectivity.

We have partnered with the Darebin Council, Preston Market and the Preston Central Traders Association who have kindly offered \$10 vouchers to the first 50 people who RSVP. We are also working with a range of community groups such as Darebin Climate Action Network,

Transition Darebin and Friends of Merri Creek to help build the movement for increased investment in public transport infrastructure and services.

Also coming up is the Race to Moreland Town hall in Coburg which will coincide with the annual night markets at the reserve opposite the town hall. We hope to be able to partner with Moreland Council to try and spread a message of taking PT instead of driving and adding to the parking woes locally. We will be holding a planning meeting with local groups including Moreland Citizens Alliance for Transport, Revitalise Sydney Road,

environment groups and residents groups.

Key dates

Race to Preston Market Saturday October 24th

Race to Moreland Town Hall (Coburg) Friday December 4th

To register for the event go to race4pt.org.au

Or contact Eleisha Mullane at eleisha.mullane@ptua.org.au or Berish Blander at berish@ptnt.org if you would like to discuss hosting an event in your area.

Industrial Action on Trams and Trains: Hopes for a positive outcome

The Rail, Tram and Bus Union exerted some of its industrial muscle in August and September, with the train and tram divisions staging various actions including some half-dozen daytime strikes.

The action was associated with negotiations for new Enterprise Bargaining Agreements with Metro Trains and Yarra Trams. Some industrial action took place in the years following privatisation in 1999, however these recent actions were the first stop-work actions this century that affected the entire train or tram network at one time.

Although the formal stop-work covered the period from 10am to 2pm on most occasions, practically this meant that services began to wind down at the tail-end of the morning peak, and did not fully recover until around 4pm.

As an advocate for all passengers on public transport, the PTUA was disappointed that the union felt the need to resort to stop-work action that disrupted hundreds of thousands of passengers. As we were not privy to the negotiations we do not presume to apportion blame for this between the union and the private operators.

We understand that one of the matters under dispute concerns Metro wanting to divide the train network into five sectors with most drivers allocated separately to each. To us it has always made sense to separate the train groups operationally, as this is common practice overseas and helps avoid knock-on delays, though importantly, this does not necessarily require dedicated driver fleets or the wholesale removal of crossovers and some of

the measures proposed by Metro may have adverse consequences.

But overall it is our view that industrial negotiations should always be conducted in good faith by all parties and genuine effort be made to secure sensible negotiated outcomes balancing established workers' rights with the need for operational efficiency.

In any case we are pleased to see that the operators and workers are reportedly close to agreement and that further stop-work action has been averted as at the time of writing. This has been achieved in part through the active intervention of the State Government, as we believe is appropriate in the case of disputes affecting critical infrastructure.

Geelong branch report

The Geelong meeting for the PTV Regional Network Development Plan (RNDP) was quite well attended, with a number of members present. It was sidetracked to an extent by people who were there to complain about the adverse consequences for them of the new bus system. Fortunately, the facilitator managed the situation skilfully and there was a focus on medium and longer-term goals for public transport in the region.



The earlier stakeholders meeting for the RNDP was heavily populated by bus industry people, some from Melbourne. About six “non-stakeholders” attended, apparently at the suggestion of local state Labor MP Christine Couzens, to complain about changes to the bus system. They were admitted after a bit of hesitation, and seated at their own separate table. A number of the stakeholders were puzzled by the complaints because they didn't know what local bus routes went where.

Someone who attended a couple of Branch meetings earlier in the year, angry that changed bus routes would mean she would be trapped in her house, recently contacted our Convenor to ask if a redundant bus shelter on her former route could be moved to the nearby stop she was obviously now using. Not wanting to downplay the inconvenience to some people of the bus changes, it's significant that the person involved is still able to travel.

Local Liberal MPs reacted to complaints about the new bus system and the Regional Rail Link by holding a public forum at Grovedale, which was attended by about 100 people. Our Branch Convenor was invited to make some brief remarks. To try to dampen party-political bias, he noted that the new bus system was entirely developed by PTV under the previous state Coalition government, and Regional Rail Link planning had occurred under both Labor and Coalition governments. Therefore neither

side of politics has any monopoly on virtue when it comes to PT.

The most popular sentiment at the meeting appeared to be that the system should revert to the way it was. Remarkably, a Lara resident said they now had too many buses, and someone who didn't use buses maintained that the old system was fine. The Liberal MPs said they would campaign to have an immediate review of the system.

Our Convenor met Christine Couzens to try to clarify when any review of the bus system might be held. She has been saying it would be before Christmas, whereas PTV originally said it would be held in a year. She explained that she has been pushing PTV to have reviews in specific locations (as has already happened at Lara) before the end of the year, and is frustrated that she hasn't been able to get PTV to agree to that.

The Branch's view is that PTV should start the review process as early as possible in the New Year.

Someone who travels from Geelong to work at Laverton, and previously had a simple cross-platform connection to Metro trains Werribee station, now has to use the Wyndham Vale-Werribee station connecting bus. He said the new arrangements have virtually doubled his daily travel time, and he's seen the patronage of the connecting bus decline noticeably since 21 June.

Altona Loop Group - still waiting for decent services

The Altona Loop Group was formed in 2011 prior to the introduction of a new timetable on the Werribee line that would disadvantage local residents.

The three stations on the Altona loop are Seaholme, Altona and Westona. Peak hour services were reduced to an impossible to remember 22 minutes and a shuttle operates between Laverton and Newport off peak with lengthy waiting times for connecting services to the city or Werribee. Three trains are required to travel to a city loop station off peak.

To make up time, Metro sometimes bypasses these stations due to the limiting single track. This occurs on a regular basis as a bypass only counts for 1/8th of a cancellation. There have been 391 bypasses in the last 12 months and the figures are increasing¹. Passengers are dumped at Newport of an evening outbound and have to wait another 22 minutes for the next train while the train runs direct to Laverton to make up time,

skipping the very stations it is supposed to service. There are also many infrastructure faults on the line that add to the problems.

PTV data showed an immediate and sustained decline in patronage of 30% on the Altona loop after the current timetable was introduced². In the latest patronage data, Seaholme and Westona boardings



Will it or won't it go via Altona? - Werribee line train near Footscray station.

have decreased further while patronage on the rest of the Werribee line has soared. The station car park and surrounding streets at Newport are overflowing as people drive to a station with a better service and there is a petition from local traders and residents to sort out the mess. Others have simply given up on

public transport and drive to their destination.

At previous community meetings, residents were advised they could not have their service reinstated until Regional Rail commenced. At the Metropolitan Transport Forum prior to the 2014 election, the local Member for Altona, Jill Hennessy MP stated that the off peak through service would be restored under a Labor Government. The improved timetable was rejected by the incoming Andrews Government fearing a backlash from people in marginal seats on the Frankston line. Commuters on the Altona loop are still waiting for an acceptable train service 4 years later.

¹ Track Record 63, April to June 2015

² PTV Train Station Patronage Fact Sheet www.ptv.vic.gov.au/about-ptv/ptv-data-and-reports/research-and-statistics/

Commuter club reminder

Want to make sure you get your 2016 discounted 365 day yearly pass – a new Commuter Club card or renewal?

In December, PTV will announce new fares for 2016 and they also bring forward the application date for December Commuter Club

passes – in previous years many of our CC patrons have missed out on their December renewals before the price rise. Last year we only got a single day's notice that the cut-off date was being made earlier than 10 December. Don't miss out – order yours **before 30 November** so you are guaranteed

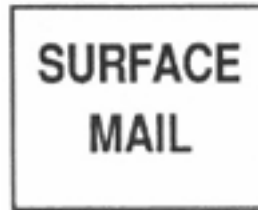
get your pass at the 2015 prices and beat the early December cut-off.

Order now at www.ptua.org.au/members/offers/

Note your new pass is not active until first use.

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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.