

PTUA plans for 2017

As is customary, the PTUA committee took time in January to carry out its annual strategic planning exercise.

2017 will be a period of regeneration for the Association. Following our campaign success against the East West Link in 2014, there has been a period of adjustment to a new government with a mixed record on transport policy, albeit with much more to show on the positive side than previous governments with regard to public transport.

It is now time to relaunch a strong community campaign, as public transport's legacy problems continue without solution, new road projects threaten Melbourne's liveability, and the state faces another election in 2018.

Expect to see the following among the PTUA's campaign focus for 2017:

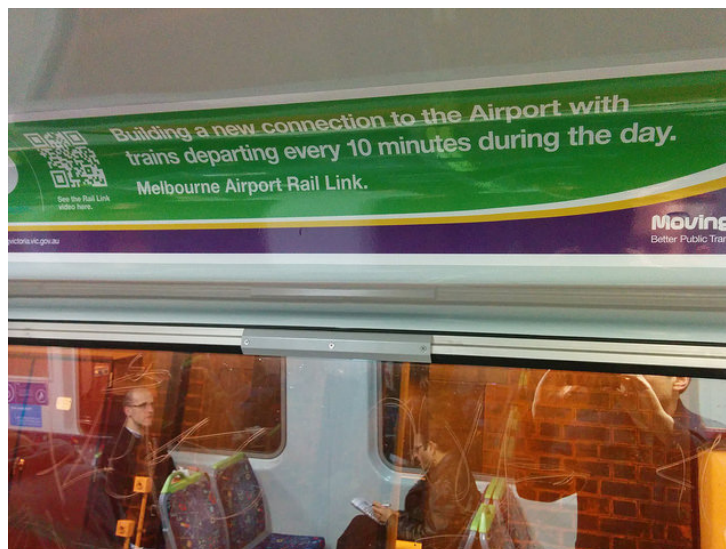
- **Airport rail.** With every passing year as more of the world's 100 largest cities build airport rail links, Melbourne becomes increasingly isolated in having neither an airport train line nor a timeline for building one. While Skybus provides a useful niche service for the minority of travellers that use it, a city of 4 million people with a strong dependence on air travel needs to be planning a higher capacity transport link that can bypass traffic congestion. Airport rail remains consistently among the most popular suggestions for improved public transport infrastructure.

- **North East Link.** Infrastructure Victoria claims this as Melbourne's highest priority transport project, but has done so based on flawed modelling that fails to account for induced traffic. As we have argued since the project was first whispered about in the 1990s, it threatens to do to Melbourne what the M25 did for London: convert green space into traffic sewers and entrench car dependence. With the State Government keen on committing to this project, it will require strong resistance.

- **Every 10 minutes to everywhere.** We will be commencing a renewed effort at demonstrating the benefit of frequent suburban transport networks, including 10 minute off-peak train services and high-frequency bus routes following the arterial road grid.

- **Governance.** With the expiry of the current train and tram franchise contracts this year, and newly announced government initiatives on bus contracts, there is an important opportunity to re-inject a public service ethic into the management of public transport, and ensure public transport operations serve the public interest and put passengers first. Hence we are lending support to campaigns by unions and academics to overhaul the flawed Kennett/Bracks privatisation model.

All of this of course takes money and volunteer efforts. Stay tuned for more on how you can help.



So when are we actually going to get it? Photo from Daniel Bowen.

PTUA office

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Internet

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

Membership Enquiries

E-mail the office (see above).

PTUA members can obtain cheap yearly Myki passes – see www.ptua.org.au/members/offers

Committee

Anthony Morton – President
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Daniel Bowen
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Geelong Branch:
Paul Westcott – Convenor

Ballarat Branch:
Ben Lever – 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 January), 10:30am
Mary MacKillop Room, St Mary's Parish Offices, cnr. Little Myers and Yarra streets, Geelong

Ballarat:

Second Thursday of each month (except January), 7pm
Freight Bar, corner Mair and Peel Streets

Odd Spot - Spider on a train

It was reported on Twitter and by *The Age* recently that a large spider managed to take at least six seats for itself on a Metro train.

Passengers were reluctant to sit near the spider, leaving a number of vacant seats. The decline in passengers reading actual newspapers may have led to an increase in such incidents, as passengers are reluctant to use a tablet or phone to get rid of a spider.

It believed the spider was travelling without a valid Myki, but it is not known whether it had its feet on the seats.

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Bus replacement on Ringwood lines

Recently, there were two sets of disruptions on the Belgrave line with buses replacing trains for multiple weeks. First there were buses replacing trains between Belgrave and Ringwood during most of November. Then there were buses replacing trains between Ringwood and Box Hill stations during most of January. These were due to level crossing removal works being carried out.

The second of these, at least, was timed so many regular commuters would be taking holidays, minimising disruption.

Buses Upper Ferntree Gully to Ringwood - November

Boarding the city bound buses was rarely a problem in the morning, considering there were not crowds waiting. Sometimes there was a wait of almost 10 minutes for the next bus, which in turn meant the bus was more likely to be stuck in traffic jams due to later time.

The trip was very inconsistent, especially with the express bus services. Some buses would go via Canterbury Road and some via Boronia Road. Some of the buses to Belgrave would come back via the Eastlink to Boronia Road, most would not. This meant the trip time varied greatly, depending on which traffic jam the bus got stuck in.

The return trip was less convenient, and delays could be

compounded for those wishing to catch buses home from stations past Ringwood.

Buses Ringwood to Box Hill - January

This was a very inconsistent experience. Sometimes the queues were long, sometimes short. Some buses went via Maroondah Highway, some went via the Eastern Freeway and Eastlink tunnels (much faster). One went via the Eastern Freeway and turned off before Eastlink on Springvale Road (very slow).



Level crossing removal works at Bayswater station
- photo from Daniel Bowen

During the first phase, when all trains were stopping all stations, some trains went direct from Flinders Street to Richmond (probably the Blackburn services), and some went around the loop (probably the other trains).

It was faster to catch the direct services, plus these were a lot less crowded.

Even after some express services resumed, the direct services were scheduled to take the same time as

the express services, and in practice were often faster.

Towards the last week staff were obviously under more and more pressure to fill the buses to maximum capacity - standing room included - as fast as possible. People understandably objected to standing on a bus for 30+ minutes, especially since the following train would be standing room only. Some preferred to wait for the next bus, however staff would say things like "there are seats still at the back" even though there was

no possibility of reaching the seats in time.

Some passengers would get off again if there were no seats. Since some people didn't mind standing to get a faster trip, it would have been better if they filled the standing room with people who wanted to stand, not by tricking people who wanted a seat.

Conclusion

The replacement buses were mostly okay, although rather inconvenient. One correspondent found their morning commute around 40 minutes longer, and the evening commute about 55 minutes longer, although this involved a bad connection with a normal route bus, which worsened the travel delay caused by the bus replacement.

Hard thinking needed at Metro tunnel / St Kilda Road

In our September 2016 issue we noted our concern at the increasing struggle between the preservation of historic trees and the provision of new transport infrastructure. In the past this focussed around major road projects, but more recently it has also involved rail projects that have strong PTUA support, such as level crossing elimination and the Metro tunnel.

On 10 February, Federal Environment Minister Josh Frydenberg granted National Heritage protection to St Kilda Road and its avenue of long-established trees. This was in response to an application made by former ALP

Minister Barry Jones and Liberal Party identity Tom Harley.

It is our understanding that the heritage listing does not overrule the environmental approval already granted for the Metro tunnel works, and we would not wish to see the project further delayed beyond its already lengthy mid-2020s timeframe. However, the PTUA supports the listing on its merits, and urges the Andrews Government to carefully scrutinise the construction method for the Domain section of the tunnel, with the aim of reducing tree loss.

A deeper alignment to reduce tree loss would mean significant additional cost, and would likely

compromise access to and from Domain station. On balance we do not support such calls—much as we don't believe providing Metro tunnel access from South Yarra in the current project scope is in the best interests of Victorians, given the substantial cost and the effect on homes and businesses. However, we believe a good deal more should be done to minimise tree losses under the current design.

Further application of design expertise to mitigate the enduring impact on St Kilda Road is what the late Julianne Bell would have wanted. The government now has another reason to consider it.

Camp Road, Campbellfield - Level Crossing Removal

The Camp Road level crossing is a potentially tricky site, bordered by deep former landfills, with a methane gas collector pipe across the northern end of the site, and contaminated groundwater (leachate) running to a treatment plant at the southern end of the site.

Despite these challenges, it has been decided that the Camp Road level crossing will be removed by lowering the train line into a cutting beneath Camp Road. This reportedly takes advantage of the natural elevation of the site, avoids steep grades on Camp Road that might cause danger and inefficiency for freight vehicles, avoids the need to modify the existing rail bridge over the Ring Road, and eliminates another of Melbourne's 'relics of the past'. Brilliant, right?

Well, brilliant for 20,000 daily vehicles that use Camp Road. But not so brilliant for equitable public transport in Campbellfield, because it doesn't include two logical and long-proposed improvements – track duplication, and a station at Camp Road.

The new cutting and bridge will be wide enough to accommodate two tracks, but the project will only install one track. The single track section between Gowrie and Upfield won't be duplicated during the project. This is a wasted opportunity to eliminate another 'relic of the past', and to provide improved reliability and frequency of train services to Upfield.

As for the station, it's been mooted for decades, there are already three natural feeder bus routes (530, 538, 902 SmartBus), high density residential development is coming

nearby on Sydney Road, and a station in Campbellfield would help to reduce local reliability on driving. But a station has not been included in the project. The cutting will have a long level section just north of Camp Road – suitable for a station – but it will have battered earth slopes, meaning significant future disruption to pile, excavate and construct a station.

The Camp Road level crossing removal is the poster-child of missed opportunities. It illustrates how the Andrews government's blinkered focus on delivering an election promise (level crossings removed) has caused obvious, simple and desirable network improvements to be overlooked. It might look like clever short-term politics, but it's failing to deliver holistic long term advantage for the people of Victoria.

PTUA joins call to put public interest into public transport

The PTUA is lending its support to a campaign by the Rail Tram Bus Union to strengthen the government's role in operating public transport, to put the public interest first and foremost.

The RTBU together with Trades Hall, academics and community groups launched the campaign on 3 February. It is calling on the government to consider all options when the current train and tram franchise contracts expire, including a return to public ownership, or re-contracting with strong ironclad guarantees of good passenger outcomes.

We believe this campaign is important given the PTUA's own long-stated unease about the failure of governance in Victoria's transport. There is concern the government will simply allow the contracts with the current operators to roll over, missing a crucial opportunity to strengthen network planning and management in the public interest.

The current flawed privatisation model, inherited from Thatcher's Britain via Jeff Kennett, with subsequent tweaks by governments of all colours, has delivered none of the benefits promised 20 years

ago. As the Auditor-General and even some Transport Ministers have acknowledged, privatisation has not delivered substantial cost savings or transferred 'risk' to the private sector.

Despite record public expenditure on train and tram operations—\$10 billion in the past 7 years alone—there has been scant 'innovation' and no hint of a renaissance in first-rate customer-focussed transport. Instead we have a crumbling rail network that fails on a regular basis, padded timetables, an unwillingness to boost service to relieve overcrowding, slow action on traffic priority and disability access for trams, and an opaque system of contract management that appears remote from the outcomes that actually matter to passengers.

But we should not necessarily rush to blame the operators. The root cause of our problems is a failure of government to manage transport operations in the public interest, with a firm hand and robust expertise.

With up-to-date technology and more careful management, we could actually have world-beating transport service to match our generous provision of

infrastructure. But this will require a different approach to just doling out money to maintain the status quo, especially when the public can't easily see if it's being wisely spent.

There is little doubt the easiest way to ensure transparency and accountability to the public is with a fully public operation, and it has always been within the government's power to take operations back into its own hands. But we stress this is not our only option, and we have seen how public operation can also fail without strong central planning by government in the public interest. Contracting to private operators is trickier from a management point of view, but can be made to work with strong planning.

The bottom line is the government has to use the upcoming contract expiry to put expertise and public service at the heart of transport planning and management. Whether operated by the private or public sector, good or bad public planning makes the difference between success and failure.

The RTBU campaign page is at www.publictransportpublichands.com

PTUA calls for Night Network to stay

The PTUA has proclaimed the Night Network trial a success, and that it needs to be a permanent feature of Melbourne's public transport network – but said it must be reformed to improve the service and make it financially

sustainable and more useful for passengers.

The major improvements suggested involve inefficiencies in train operation, and route duplication.

For more details, see www.ptua.org.au/2017/02/24/ptua-night-network-efficiency/

Geelong branch report

The "City in a Park" plan, commissioned in 2015 by the now-defunct Central Geelong Task Force, must be unique in world terms - in a bad way. Despite being a central city plan developed by supposed experts in urban design, it failed to even mention public transport, let alone try to improve it.

In fact, some of the ideas contained in the plan would stifle the effective operation of public transport in central Geelong. Developed without any consultation with Public Transport Victoria, the plan proposed putting the main city bus stops in an unworkable location, and closing the street connecting them directly with the main railway station.

Now that the council's Central Geelong Taskforce has been subsumed into the state government's new Geelong Authority, we are told that things have changed. The mind-set which influenced the "City in a Park"

plan still lingers with some of the bureaucrats who remain in place however, although the former CEO of the Central Geelong Task Force has moved on.

The Branch is pleased that a fourth week-day rail service to Warrnambool was added to the timetable introduced last month, and that the idea of reducing all Warrnambool trains to a shuttle between there and Geelong did not eventuate. Now we hope that much-needed extra weekend services to and from Melbourne, promised in last year's budget, will eventuate with the mid-year timetable change, when sufficient drivers should be available.

Sadly the benefits of the extra Warrnambool service might be offset by the appalling timekeeping on that line of late. Only 12 per cent of trains were "on time" last month, remembering that any long-distance train that is up to ten minutes late is still considered to be on time.

At least the speed restrictions at a number of open level crossings should be removed within a year, following the announcement last week of a \$10million program to install boom barriers at 20 level crossings between Waurin Ponds and Warrnambool.

PTV finally released a condensed version of its review of the new Geelong bus system. The information is not nearly as comprehensive as a properly accountable public transport authority should provide, but they are better than the black hole that existed previously.

There are no patronage numbers, only selective percentage changes, so a clear picture of how all individual routes are performing is impossible to determine accurately. However, ridership on the system is up overall, and complaints have dropped back to level they were at before the changes were introduced.

What are we missing thanks to the Western Distributor?

The government is pushing Transurban's Western Distributor tollway, a massive \$10 billion road through Melbourne's inner west. The taxpayer contribution is set to be at least \$1.6 billion, with the rest paid for by allowing Transurban to levy additional tolls on road users for decades to come.

It's billed as a road to get big trucks out of our residential streets.

Yet unlike the original West Gate Distributor proposed before the election, it doesn't directly address this issue. Instead, it's planned to

run directly into the city centre, encouraging an extra 5,000 cars an hour into central Melbourne and boosting Transurban's already swollen bank account at the expense of more cost-effective, congestion-busting alternatives.

There is no requirement for trucks to use the road, and they will pay heavily to do so.

What could our government do with \$1.6 billion instead of building another destructive inner-urban tollroad that won't solve our traffic problem?

The PTUA, with community and environment groups, the Greens and planning experts is building a new campaign around alternatives to the Western Distributor. These include rail freight initiatives, more frequent train and bus services in the western suburbs, and better planning for new services.

Our campaign page is at ptua.org.au/campaigns/western-distributor. Please take a look, and raise your own concerns with your local MP. We will have more news about this campaign in the coming months.

Ballarat branch report

There has been a lot happening in Ballarat lately, the most significant being the introduction of the new bus network on 29 January.

In the consultation sessions last year, PTV indicated that they would be saving money by making the network more efficient (straightening out some routes, and deleting others altogether) and that these savings, combined with some extra funding, would result in a much better timetable across the network. Unfortunately it seems they didn't save enough that way, because service levels on many of the remaining routes have been cut to fund improvements elsewhere – parts of town like Mt Pleasant and Soldiers Hill that used to have half-hourly services now only have hourly services, and post-7pm services seem to have been reduced across the board. There seems to be a lot of padding in the timetable at the moment, so hopefully once the drivers are used

to the new routes this can be refined, and the savings used to return some of what we've lost. There have been some positives – for example, the frequency to Creswick going from 1.5-hourly to 1-hourly, and a lot more services on weekends for several routes – but clearly this hasn't been the wide-ranging improvement we'd hoped for.

Announced shortly before the timetable of the new bus network, the introduction of drop-off and layover bays north of the railway line on Lydiard Street has caused a lot of anger among those who live across the road from Ballarat station, and their campaigning has won some concessions from PTV; initially all these bays were to be on Lydiard Street, but in the end two of them were placed on Ararat Street. Ultimately an interchange within the grounds of Ballarat Station is needed, and the SOS (Save Our Station) group have also been mounting a strong campaign

in the media for this. Whether this pressure will see the Station Precinct Plan changed dramatically to match SOS's vision, or see the construction of the as-planned bus interchange brought forward, remains to be seen.

In our February branch meeting, the team from the Ballarat Line Upgrade project came to brief us on the project and answer some questions. They will be planning and conducting technical investigations this year, with major construction planned to start early 2018, and finish late 2019. An appallingly high percentage of the Ballarat line is single track (about 75%) which has serious implications for the reliability and the capacity of the line; the project will bring it down to about 50% single track, and pave the way for full duplication and for electrification to Melton in coming years.

Vale Julianne Bell

It is with great sadness that PTUA records the death of Julianne Bell, Secretary of Protectors of Public Lands, who died on January 27, 2017.

Julianne was a long-term PTUA member and a relentless campaigner for the built and natural environment in metropolitan and country Victoria. As a coalition group formed in 2003, Protectors of Public Lands has fought many campaigns to protect built and natural heritage, and particularly to maintain and improve public parkland.

In particular, Julianne and PPL were in the lead in many campaigns against ill-conceived freeway and other road expansion plans by successive Victorian governments. In addition to her relentless community campaigning and organising, Julianne was well known and respected for her thoroughly researched and powerfully written submissions to government on policies and projects in areas of interest and concern to PPL.

The major contribution that Julianne and PPL made in the community - wide campaign to

head off the proposed East-West Link project in 2014 was a highlight. PPL also played a major part in the campaign against Peninsula Link on the Mornington Peninsula in 2008 and 2009 and in seeking to fend off multiple adverse effects of many other freeway and roads projects.

Julianne Bell was an inspiration to many and a genuine servant to all with the humour, energy and organisational flair she brought to campaigning. A standard bearer for so many years in many struggles and who will be greatly missed in the campaigns to come.

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