

## Metro's 13 July Meltdown, and Contract Future

**The train control system failure that brought the entire suburban rail system shuddering to a halt one Thursday evening peak hour highlights that for all the effort our government is expending on new infrastructure, the system continues to struggle with failure-prone equipment that too often leaves passengers in the lurch.**

On the train system, operation and maintenance of this legacy equipment is entrusted to private operator Metro Trains. A decision on Metro's contract is imminent: renew, re-let to a new operator or return to public operation.

The Rail Tram Bus Union, supported by the PTUA, has been calling for a return to public ownership. Overseas experience attests that public operation with a dedicated, competent planning authority is a straightforward way to promote good passenger outcomes, and in Melbourne's case could spur PTV to acquire the discipline to take charge of a publicly responsive rail operation.

Nonetheless, it appears far more likely that a new contract will be offered to Metro Trains. It would be a disappointment if the government were simply to do so without - at least - taking the opportunity to substantially improve system management.

Private or public ownership aside, the critical factor in well-run systems is careful, competent management by a planning authority like PTV or Transport for Victoria. This should also include agreement to full 'follow the money' powers for the Auditor-General, so that Victorian taxpayers can be

assured of full financial transparency and value for money.

This latest meltdown on the train system reminds us we continue to have a systemic problem with the whole management chain for public transport - it can't be laid solely at the feet of one private operator or even one Transport Minister, but implicates the entire system of governance. Just as with Myki, the buck ultimately stops with government and its capacity for competent, strategic planning.



The train control room we now use finally went live in 2014 after a long drawn out process that lasted a decade and a half and spanned five Ministers and three private operators. Prior to this latest incident it had failed on three separate occasions - in October 2014, June 2015 and November 2016 - due to false fire alarms. Unlike equivalent control rooms elsewhere, ours does not reside in an isolated facility but occupies a floor in a Collins Street office

building where it is vulnerable to disruption.

The latest failure, however, appears to have a different cause and more troublesome implications. We're yet to learn the outcome of the root-cause investigation, but in our view, given the history of this facility, the real problem is one that goes further than Metro Trains.

Whether the new contractor is Metro Trains, another operator or a public entity like V/Line, there needs to be accompanying reform to ensure stronger passenger outcomes both operationally, and in the provision, design and maintenance of the underlying infrastructure.

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## Internet

Our web site is at [www.ptua.org.au](http://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](http://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](http://www.ptua.org.au/members/offers)

## Committee

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

Michael Bell  
Daniel Bowen  
Anna Morton  
David Robertson  
Bruce Sutherland  
Jennifer Williams

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](http://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

## Rail Futures Institute Geelong Forum

Rail Futures, in collaboration with Deakin University School of Architecture and RMIT Centre for Urban Studies, are sponsoring a panel discussion on the key issues for future rail travel, and public transport generally, on the Geelong corridor.

Panellists will provide an independent perspective on these issues, and discuss short, medium and longer term solutions that need to be adopted to ensure that Greater Geelong and Wyndham can deal with population growth and emerging travel preferences.

Come along and hear what can and should, be done.

Speakers

Elaine Carbines, CEO, G21 Group of Geelong Regional Councils

Griff Davies (TBC) , Manager City Transport, City of Wyndham

John Hearsch, President, Rail Futures Institute

Paul Westcott, Convenor, PTUA Geelong Branch

Date: Wednesday, 9 August 2017

Time: 7:30pm to 9pm

Venue: Costa Hall, Deakin University Waterfront Campus, 1 Gheringhap Street. Geelong

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## Road rule changes: PT users, cyclists take note.

**A number of changes to Victoria's road rules came into force on 1 July with little fanfare. Many of these are simply clarifying provisions or technical changes of no import to most road users. However, as reported by *The Age* and the RACV, some of these rules may have important flow-on effects for public transport services (in particular buses) and for cycling.**

For public transport, the most significant change relates to bus lanes. Previously, these lanes were restricted strictly to public buses unless signed otherwise (although other vehicles could use them when turning). As of 1 July, there is now blanket permission for use of bus lanes by cyclists and by private coaches. The latter is of some concern to the PTUA as we do not necessarily see a public-interest justification for private vehicles - even those with higher than average occupancy - to use lanes whose purpose is maximising the efficiency of public transport

services. In Victoria the same private companies generally operate both public bus and private coach services, but these should not necessarily be seen as equivalent functions.

Regarding use of bus lanes by cyclists, there is often a practical necessity for cyclists to use the left lane of roads with no dedicated cycling facilities, whether this is reserved for buses or not. The new rule appears to recognise this necessity; however we would hope that it does not become a pretext to delay the wider provision of safer alternatives. We believe that cyclists, public transport users and bus operators have a shared interest in ultimately making the use of bus lanes by cyclists unnecessary, through the wider deployment of protected bike lanes as an integral part of the road network.

Cyclists, meanwhile, are most affected by a new rule tightening restrictions on the use of mobile phones on bicycles (or other non-

powered vehicles). Although this has actually been unlawful since 1999, on-the-spot fines can now be given to cyclists who operate a mobile phone (other than in a prescribed hands-free manner) on a bicycle that is moving, or is "stationary but not parked". There has been much debate on what it actually means to 'park' a bicycle: it appears the rule is intended to prevent phone use while stopped at a red light, but not when a motorist or cyclist is legitimately 'pulled over'. A clarifying provision for motorists was recently inserted, stipulating that a vehicle could be considered 'parked' even if its engine is still running. (This was apparently removed by accident from the latest rules and is to be re-inserted.) By analogy, we would not expect that a cyclist needing to make a phone call would be first required to lock up their bike, or even necessarily dismount, provided they had pulled over and stopped. This debate evidently has some way to run, however.

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## High capacity signalling for MetroTunnel corridor

**On 18 July the State government announced the successful tenderer for signalling technology on the new Metro Tunnel corridor linking the Sunbury, Pakenham and Cranbourne lines.**

Bombardier has been selected to provide high-capacity signalling in the corridor, which is expected to allow trains to run every two minutes or better at the busiest times. This represents an improvement of between 25% and 100% on present capacity, and should allow (for example) the

extension of train services to Rowville, the restoration of V/Line service to South Gippsland, and provision of additional peak services to meet demand in these significant growth corridors.

As further details of Bombardier's scope of work emerge, we expect to learn more about the technicalities: in particular whether the system is to be a version of the CityFlo technology (proposed but withdrawn for the London Underground), or a newly developed technology based on the more recent European Train

Control Standard (ETCS) which we understand is favoured by local rail planners. Whatever the technology used, we would insist on assurance that it will achieve the 'best practice' standard of 30 or more trains per hour.

The current high-capacity signalling trial on the outer reaches of the South Morang line (moved from the Sandringham line a year or so ago) is expected to inform the development of the Bombardier technology. We look forward to learning more about the outcomes of this trial.

## Airport Rail: What do we really want?

**On 31 May, RMIT hosted a public forum on options for a Melbourne Airport rail link. President Tony Morton spoke on behalf of the PTUA.**

Given the continued inaction on airport rail and the plethora of options and questions that have arisen to fill the void, it's worth clarifying the PTUA's position on airport rail.

Firstly, we support the construction of a rail line between Melbourne Airport and the city centre, as soon as reasonable planning and funding provision will allow. A station and complementary bus interchange should be conveniently and directly accessible from the main terminal building.

Provision of a rail connection is justified by the airport's strategic role as one of the largest single destinations in the metropolitan area outside the city centre; by forecast growth in air travel and other airport-based activities; and by the need for a mass transit alternative to car travel, to address chronic congestion in the Tullamarine Freeway corridor.

Airport rail must be fully integrated with the existing multimodal transport network when it comes to service planning, interchange facilities and ticketing. While the private sector may potentially be involved in construction and operation of the

line, this must be subject to strong planning by a central agency. This extends to the need for convenient interchange and timetable coordination with other train lines and relevant bus services, and includes consideration of suburban interchange points between the airport and the city consistent with a strategic regional land use plan.

We acknowledge several route options for airport rail exist, and offer different trade-offs between cost and overall public benefit. The ultimate route chosen must permit a travel time between the airport and the city competitive with private car travel: preferably less than half an hour. A variety of rail technologies and construction

and provides a strategic interchange point with suburban and regional lines at Sunshine. Options that function as extensions to the conventional suburban rail network are also specifically excluded from triggering compensation to Transurban under the CityLink concession deed. All these facts should be given appropriate weight in a final route decision.

We don't believe insurmountable technical or financial barriers exist to progressing airport rail ahead of or in parallel with construction of the Metro tunnel. In the timeframe before this additional capacity is available, airport trains as part of the suburban network may use



So when will Melbourne get one? Photo from Daniel Bowen.

methods may be considered subject to broad public acceptance, cost and practicality. However, experience has shown that isolated point-to-point, bespoke technology solutions tend to perform poorly when not compatible with the balance of the network. Meanwhile, the already planned route via Albion (using conventional suburban rail technology) is not expected to involve substantial land acquisition or right-of-way costs,

paths made available by the Regional Rail Link, and the surplus platform capacity available for terminating trains at Southern Cross.

For many airport travellers, including the large workforce based at the airport, an airport-to-city link will not function well as (part of) a competitive travel route between the airport and their ultimate origin or destination. For this reason, complementary mass transit options must be developed as part of a complete airport rail and transport package. This should include the provision of frequent bus services to Sunbury,  
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## Airport Rail: What do we really want?

*Continued from p4*

improvements to frequency, reliability and right-of-way for the existing 901 and 902 orbital bus services, and the provision of the 'missing portion' of the 902 orbital route between Airport West and Werribee via Keilor, as originally planned in 2006. An extension of the 59 tram route to the airport interchange should be considered on its merits. Plans for airport rail should also contemplate the future extension of rail from the airport to a junction with the existing rail network at Sunbury.

Service frequency on an airport rail line should match that of equivalent train services in Melbourne. This should include some level of overnight service in

keeping with the airport's 24-hour operation. Other than between midnight and 6am, frequency on the airport line should not drop below one train every 20 minutes. Design of the infrastructure must ensure that 10 minute headways are possible at any time of the day.

Passengers must be able to travel on airport rail and complementary services using Myki cards, with regular adult and concession Mykis being available for purchase at all airport line stations. While a premium may be charged on the regular Myki fare for train travel between the airport and the city, this must not be set at such a high level as to thwart the strategic objective of achieving a substantial mode shift to trains from single-

occupant car or taxi travel. In assessing airport rail options, cost must be given appropriate weighting to ensure fares remain competitive. Consideration may be given to special financing methods such as value capture or improvement rates to help achieve this objective. No fare premium should apply for travel on services other than the airport rail line.

Prior to airport rail being built and available, we agree with Infrastructure Victoria on the need for immediate improvements to right-of-way provision for SkyBus and public bus routes that serve the airport. This should include provision of permanent SkyBus lanes on a widened CityLink/Tullamarine Freeway corridor.

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## Metro Tunnel tender announcement

**The government announced on 16 July that the major "design and build" contract for the Metro Tunnel has been awarded to the Cross Yarra Partnership.**

This is a consortium that includes Lendlease Engineering, John Holland, Bouygues Construction and Capella Capital. Readers may recognise these as the same companies that were awarded the Naphine Government's rushed contract for the East West Link - and with whom the Andrews Government had to negotiate the contract's cancellation after the previous government attempted to

force the issue with its 'side letter' in the leadup to the 2014 election.

There are two useful observations from this successful outcome. The first is that there was, after all, no substance to fears in 2014 about 'sovereign risk' in regard to cancelling the East West Link contract. The parties to that deal were not only compensated, but have now won a substantial and lucrative construction tender from the same State government.

The second observation goes back to the 'side letter' compensation itself. It was an exaggeration to speak of "\$1.3 billion down the

drain" when the contracts were cancelled. The value of the actual compensation was closer to \$900 million - the rest being the value of the real estate acquired, which as of February this year is being gradually re-sold. This \$900 million included, according to Treasurer Tim Pallas, a 'finance facility' that was drawn down on contract signature. Is it conceivable that this same facility might now be at least partially usable on the Metro Tunnel project, further reducing the sunk cost of the East West Link debacle? The question is an interesting one.

## Geelong branch report

**In a sad irony, a much-needed increase in weekend Geelong rail frequencies, scheduled for August, will cause a fundamental problem for the local public transport network as a whole.**

V/Line has chosen a 40-minute frequency for its weekend services. Trains will therefore not be able to link with our hourly or (a few) half-hourly weekend bus services. Our convenor was alerted to the problem a couple of months ago by the timetabler for McHarry's, one of two local route bus operators, who was annoyed that he couldn't achieve the desired coordination of weekend bus and train schedules.

40-minute headways are deprecated in timetabling practice, for obvious reasons. They are only able to match 20 or 40-minute schedules for other services, and they aren't "clockface" - they can't form a repeated hourly pattern.

Since 2010, the principal legislation governing public transport has been the Transport

Integration Act, which has the stated aim of creating a "framework for the provision of an integrated and sustainable transport system in Victoria". V/Line's decision will result in transport disintegration.

No doubt, only a minority of people use buses to connect with trains, so most rail passengers will benefit from the increased weekend frequencies. However there will be hardship, confusion and annoyance for those who are most reliant on public transport, particularly because weekend services are already less frequent, and it will clearly decrease the number of people who might use a bus-train connection.

We have been told that CDC Geelong, the other local bus company, proposed changing all its weekend frequencies to 40 minutes. However, the Minister's office rejected that because it involved a frequency reduction on a few routes.

There are only two ways the problem can be solved. Both involve spending extra money. The simplest is for V/Line to run 30-minute weekend headways. Another is for the current hourly weekend bus services to be increased to 40-minute frequencies, although that won't solve the problem with the routes running 30-minute headways.

We have spoken or written to all relevant politicians and bureaucrats, and got quite good local media coverage about the problem. The Minister has replied with a vague assurance that TfV "has advised that coordination was happening", and that "many buses will coordinate with train services", although that seemed to be news to our local TfV office. We note that V/Line is dissembling, by saying that schedules of bus services that connect with trains will be adjusted "to reflect the new timetable", rather than "to ensure that connections are maintained".

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## South Yarra trams re-routed

**As of Monday 10 July a significant change has occurred to tram routes in South Yarra. The tram to Toorak, which for the past century has followed a route via Domain Road and Park Street, thence along Toorak Road, now runs direct via St Kilda Road and Toorak Road, using new track built for the purpose.**

This rerouting was necessary due to the closure of Domain Road to allow for construction of the Metro Tunnel over the next several years.

So far there's been no official word whether the re-routing is going to be permanent, or only for the duration of the works. The PTUA considers that while there are some directness and legibility advantages to a direct route along Toorak Road, there is also important value in the existing Park Street route (serving the Botanic Gardens and shops and offices near Domain Road).

We believe there is in fact an opportunity presented here to implement another long-standing proposal, linking South

Melbourne with South Yarra through the construction of 400 metres of 'missing track' in Park Street, South Melbourne. This would potentially provide a pure east-west route connecting Albert Park and South Melbourne direct to Domain Interchange, then proceeding via Domain Road to South Yarra station. Such a route would be a convenient complement to the existing route 58, providing convenient linkages between the City of Port Phillip and the Frankston train line.

## Ballarat branch report

**June 21 was the anniversary of the Ballarat branch's first meeting, and it's been a very interesting year for the region.**

In January 2017 a new bus network was implemented in Ballarat. Several of the new routes are a big improvement, but several are less useful than the old routes. All the routes have severe issues in the CBD, with circuitous and counter-intuitive pathways through the city, and a controversial layover arrangement at Ballarat station. The new timetables were plagued with issues too; late running is common in some sections, while in others timetables have been padded out, forcing drivers to stop and wait at major timing points. Frequencies are a mixed bag; some routes had services cut while others had improvements.

Six months in, the drivers have become more familiar with the routes and punctuality issues are less severe, but none of the systemic issues have been addressed. We are expecting PTV to review the implementation of the new network, but it's not clear when that will happen – or whether anyone but PTV will get a say.

In December 2016, the plans for the Ballarat Station Precinct Redevelopment were revealed to the public. The redevelopment will revamp the historic bluestone

goods shed and surrounding carpark, to include a hotel and convention centre. Drafts presented during earlier consultations had included significant upgrades to pedestrian and DDA access and an on-site bus interchange, but both were notably absent from the December plans. The project has alarmed many, and groups like Save Our Station (SOS) Ballarat have actively

further down the line. The project is an important first step towards both electrification to Melton and full duplication of the Ballarat line – both high priorities. A preferred consortium was recently announced, and construction will occur in 2018-19.

A group of western Victorian councils have commissioned a Passenger Services Feasibility Study and are now making a coordinated lobbying push to provide extra services to Ararat, return trains to Horsham and Hamilton, and improve a number of coach connections. They have had some great success already, with extra services to Ararat recently announced – it will be interesting to see how they fare with the more ambitious requests.



A Ballarat bus

campaigning for a more PT-user focused redevelopment – thus far, the government has announced funding to bring forward construction of the bus interchange, but little else has changed.

The Ballarat Line Upgrade project was announced shortly after the branch launched, and represents one of the most significant projects in the line's history – duplicating the track between Deer Park West and Melton, and providing a number of long crossing loops

After many years of poor mobile coverage along regional lines, in April 2017 the government announced that telecommunication providers will build 35 new towers along the lines, and Vlocity carriages will have repeaters installed to counteract the carriage body weakening ambient signals. The project is expected to be completed in 2018.

# PTUA News

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