

Back from the dead: Melbourne’s motorway insurgency

When the East West Link was defeated in 2014, defenders of sustainable transport understood it wouldn't be the end of the story. This has been emphatically confirmed.

An unfortunate legacy of that episode is that policy has remained unnecessarily partisan—a result of both the Napthine Government’s misplaced enthusiasm for a \$16 billion road providing at most \$8 billion of dubious benefits, and Tony Abbott’s conviction that private cars are the only method of travel worthy of public largesse. This ideological battleground belies the fact that for ordinary folk, the preference for prioritising spending on public transport over roads transcends party loyalties, winning majority support among Coalition, ALP and Green voters alike.

The bigger inconvenient truth, meanwhile, is that giving free rein to the road lobby has been a commitment of both major parties over decades, as governments took turns building motorways planned under their political opposition. Adding to this is Transurban’s emergence as de facto transport planner, by way of the ‘unsolicited proposal’ scheme initiated by the Coalition and continued under Labor.

East West Link's cancellation was the first welcome sign of an apparent break in the pattern. Yet it wasn't long before the Andrews Government itself looked favourably upon an unpromised, costly, inner-urban road with no independent benefit-cost analysis. Unlike earlier projects claiming to be ‘bypass’ roads, the West Gate Tunnel is explicitly aimed at bringing

more private car traffic into central Melbourne, contradicting over 30 years of planning policy.

The government has also resuscitated the North East Link, the infamous ‘missing link’ in the Eastern Ring Road which no government spoke of prior to EastLink opening in 2006, but which was placed on the agenda by the Brumby Government in 2008. In a PR exercise to give the community the illusion of choice, the government put forward four route ‘options’, before announcing in November that Option A—the Brumby proposed route through Bulleen—had been selected for development.

The project includes massive widening of existing freeways, and there's also an attempt to ‘greenwash’ the project with a busway along the Eastern Freeway median from Doncaster to Victoria Park, along what is already the fastest section of the route to the city. As we have explained previously, the priority for bus improvements in the north-east (ahead of a future Doncaster rail line) needs to go to priority measures between the CBD and the freeway entrance, and improvements to service reliability in the suburbs.



Traffic on the Eastern Freeway

Infrastructure Victoria previously described the North East Link as a “priority road project”—a finding tainted in our view by modelling deficiencies such as William McDougall outlines in this issue. But even taken at face value, the IV assessment projects ‘worst case’ costs of \$7.1 billion and ‘best case’ benefits of \$10.1 billion. Yet the *continued on p3*

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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:

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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

PTUA members who attended this year's AGM were privileged to hear Mr. William McDougall speak of his deep concern about the Westgate tunnel project.

Mr McDougall conducted the Northern Central City Corridor Study in Melbourne in 2001-3 and advised Sir Rod Eddington's East West Link Needs Assessment Study in 2007. In the UK he directed a transport study into major redevelopment around Battersea Power Station. Since 2010, he has directed the Rowville Rail Study, a landside access strategy for Melbourne Airport, a review of the future for Melbourne's tram system and assisted in the national High Speed Rail Study.

Mr McDougall's presentation focused on the viability of the West Gate Tunnel proposal. He emphasized that the economic and traffic benefits of Transurban's proposal were deliberately distorted and misrepresented Infrastructure Victoria's assessment of the road. He also said that the justification for taxpayers spending billions of dollars of public money on the proposed road was "based on flawed traffic modelling and cost benefit analysis." Finally, he reminded PTUA members that the officials and consultants appointed by the Andrews government to review the traffic projections justifying the Westgate Tunnel were largely the same group behind the East West Link assessment.

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Edited by Anna Morton.

Newsletter contributors - Daniel Bowen, Ben Lever, Paul Westcott, Jennifer Williams, Tony Morton. Apologies to Stuart McKenzie who was incorrectly acknowledged in the previous issue.

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2017 Paul Mees Award

The 2017 Paul Mees Award was presented to the Altona Loop Group in recognition of over 6 years of advocacy in the south western suburbs of Melbourne.

The group formed in 2011 when it was announced that the through train service would be reduced to a shuttle off peak between Newport and Laverton. In addition, peak hour trains were scheduled to run to a 22 minute service, which is poor for an area close to central Melbourne. The three stations on the Altona loop (Seaholme, Altona and Westona) were, and still are, frequently bypassed by Metro to make up time due to late running and the single track. Passengers can

be dumped at Newport or are sometimes kidnapped and sent to Laverton without knowing their station will be skipped. To make matters even worse, there are many track and signal faults in the area and an unstable system that means a lightning strike nearby leads to line suspension on a regular basis.

As anticipated, the result of the downgraded service was a patronage decline of 30% while the number of passengers on the Werribee line increased dramatically. The Altona Loop Group collected many stories from affected locals who either stopped using public transport or drove to Newport for better service. Angry

local residents attended a series of public meetings with 500 people at one of the sessions. Former PTUA president Paul Mees attended a meeting in December 2011 and was critical of the decision to reduce services. People wanted through trains restored and a journey that wasn't an endurance test. Protests were held including one to Parliament. It was ironic that the line was suspended and the protesters had to squeeze onto a rail replacement bus, and a Liberal politician experienced a total service debacle first hand on his way home from one of the meetings.

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Melbourne's Motorway Insurgency

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government's current budget estimate is \$16.5 billion, meaning the benefit-cost ratio is well below 1 even including the dubious "wider economic benefits".

The State Opposition is now making a show of non-cooperation with the government's road agenda. It has declared its intention to 'disallow' the 12-year extension of CityLink tolls that will part-fund the West Gate Tunnel. It is also signalling opposition to North East Link Option A, which runs through the electorate of Opposition leader Matthew Guy. This may help delay both projects, providing opportunities for the community campaign against them.

Unfortunately, we cannot assume the Opposition's tactics come from any great enthusiasm for

sustainable transport. It is clear they still want the East West Link, and are bidding for time so they can substitute the East West Link if they win the 2018 election. Mr Guy has stated the North East Link makes no sense without the East West Link, which given the road's origins as a radial commuter freeway (the F18) in 1969 is in fact a realistic view of how the road would operate, compared with the government and IV's contention that it's really a freight bypass (when freight comprises well below 10 per cent of traffic). But it also begs the old question of how city-bound traffic would fare once it passes Royal Park.

It's important that opponents are not distracted by "someone else's backyard" arguments. Regardless of which road is considered a priority and by whatever route, the case for big urban motorways has been shown again and again to be without merit. They do not reduce congestion and do not speed up

travel. The one thing they do provide is more capacity for car travel, but this comes at the expense of more congestion on the existing road network, and increased dependence on private cars undermining public and active transport futures.

A charitable interpretation of the situation is it's the perhaps-inevitable road lobby backlash against the East West Link decision. Whatever the underlying political motives, we are now witnessing an unseemly brawl over which wasteful, economically and environmentally damaging road projects Victorian taxpayers will be made to fund over coming decades at the expense of public transport. Supporters of Melbourne as a liveable city would do well to contribute where able to campaign efforts, and consider carefully their vote in forthcoming elections.

Southland Station

A station at Southland was first proposed in the 1880s when the Frankston line first opened, but the case for a station became far more compelling in 1999 when Southland Shopping Centre first expanded across the Nepean Highway, to abut the rail line.

PTUA has campaigned extensively on the issue, and governments of both stripes have promised action, but it was perhaps only multiple electorates along the rail line becoming marginal that finally saw

action, with both sides pledging the project in 2010.

The Coalition government (2010-2014) didn't provide funding until 2013 - surely a severe tactical error, as they went into the 2014 election with no visible progress on the project.

Subsequently Labor has completed the project, with the station finally opening on 26th November, with the attendance of local MPs and

the Minister for Public Transport, Jacinta Allan.

The station includes two platforms, a subway connecting them, and the usual equipment such as ticket machines and facilities for Protective Service Officers.

In what might be a first for a Melbourne railway station, toilets are provided despite the station being unstaffed, with two "Exceloos" being provided on the outbound platform.



Both platforms have some rain cover, though it certainly could be better. The outbound platform is accessed via a ramp, and the inbound platform via ramps or stairs.

There is no exit to the streets on the western side of the rail line, though we are told there is provision for that to be added later.

Westfield has provided a pedestrian path from the station to the shopping centre. This is reasonably direct, but not entirely intuitive as you exit the station; many shoppers have been observed instead walking through the car park. The path also suffers from poor drainage, as evidenced by large puddles on the rainy opening day.

Despite these issues, the station already seems to be a success. Frequent trains and a travel time competitive with driving from nearby suburbs mean there is huge potential for patronage growth, particularly outside traditional commuter peaks.

Southland station may have been a long time coming, but it's great to see it finally open.

Inside Metro's nerve centre

PTUA's Tony Morton and Daniel Bowen recently got a tour of Metro's network control centre (aka Metrol).

The centre has hundreds of flat screen displays showing tracks and the trains running on them, displays of CCTV of stations, and summaries of punctuality and service delivery data. Train controllers can see most of the network, but not all - some observations still have to be relayed from signal boxes.

Metro were able to explain some of the operational changes they've been making in recent years.

In the past, train controllers have been very focussed on keeping trains running. A recent innovation has seen additional staff working alongside train controllers and focussing on responding to passenger issues. For instance during an incident that requires suspending part of a rail line, they might monitor CCTV at the stations concerned, and deploy additional staff and buses to help deal with crowds, as well as make

PA announcements and use online channels to update passengers.

Deployment of trained medical staff onto key stations has also been seen as a success. Responding to an ill passenger sometimes now involves running trains express to one of those stations, where the situation can be dealt with more easily and quickly than waiting for an ambulance.

Communications with emergency services have improved, with responses to some types of incidents, such as suspected trespassers, now resulting in trains running slowly rather than suspending rail services. Metro can also monitor hotspots via CCTV for vandals.

Incidents can happen with little warning, and can play havoc with train services. On a good day, everything might run smoothly with little special intervention from train controllers. Sometimes, they tell us, this is down to luck (no ill passengers or other incidents) more than anything else.

Metro tell us that one reason for City Loop bypasses is that they are reluctant to keep sending trains into the Loop if there are delays, as they risk having a long backlog of trains stuck between stations.

They also told us a little more about the 13th July shutdown, when all lines were completely suspended for about an hour during evening peak. Their systems produced low-level warnings which at the time didn't appear important. In retrospect these were a forewarning of a problem that ended up shutting down both the main control system and the backup.

Because moving hundreds of thousands of people in the few buses available is a near-impossible task, they instead prioritised resolving the issue, which was eventually fixed by disconnecting the back-up system from the primary. Since then, they have put in place measures which should prevent the same situation happening again.

Our thanks to Metro for the tour.

Paul Mees Award

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Residents were told they would have to wait years for RRL to open before through trains could be run. After considerable exposure in the media and community action, Labor pledged a return of the service if they won the 2014 election. Services were finally restored in August 2017, a disappointing 14 months after RRL opened but only as far as Laverton. Anyone travelling to Werribee must change off peak and the 22 minute peak service remains.

Bypasses continue to occur on a regular basis and no one is ever sure if they'll arrive at their destination. Some residents have sold their houses and moved to nearby suburbs with better public transport. Others have found it so difficult to get to work they have given up and drive, while a lot of elderly residents have found it all too arduous and become isolated. The Altona Loop Group stood up for all of these people.

Long term advocacy for almost 7 years has been challenging however the Loop Group never considered giving up. Poor

decisions for public transport provision are ultimately signed off by politicians and the consequences can be huge for individuals. The group pushed for partial duplication of Kororoit Creek Road crossing after it was announced only single track would be built. Fortunately this decision was reversed and LXRA have stated that the additional 800 m of track will improve reliability on the line. The Altona Loop Group will continue to advocate on behalf of residents until a satisfactory service is provided for this growing area.

Geelong branch report

The battle to keep buses running simple and usable routes through central Geelong seems never-ending. We are faced with an push to establish a "green spine" in Malop Street, which will prevent buses running directly from the city to the railway station.

Extraordinarily, the green spine plan envisages the creation of a boulevard-style streetscape, but one in which car traffic will be allowed and buses will be excluded. That's despite cities around the world actively discouraging car traffic in favour of public transport, cycling and walking.

The "green spine" arose from a 2015 plan, entitled "City in a Park", commissioned by the then city council and developed by a Melbourne firm, Design Urban. The document

was remarkable because, despite being a plan for the improvement of the central city, it did not mention public transport at all.

It's disheartening that the Geelong Authority, the state government body which took over many aspects of central city planning after the council was dismissed in 2015, adopted the "green spine" as part of its "Revitalising Central Geelong" project.

The project director, who has no transport planning background, has vowed that buses will not run in

Malop Street, although he can't exactly identify where they will run. Maybe he hopes it will be far away and out of sight.

Neither TfV nor PTV support the idea of making buses run to out-of-the-way places in the city, by obscure and wasteful routes. Last year, there were 1.3 million boardings at the central bus stops in Moorabool Street, which were only re-established there after a lengthy battle a decade ago, clearly demonstrating the success of that central location.



A train at South Geelong station.

At the recent elections which restored elected representatives to the council, it was disappointing to see the return of some familiar, and not particularly sympathetic, faces. However, Geelong did elect its first Greens councillor, Sarah Mansfield. Her policy statement says she wants a "fast, reliable and connected transport network", and we intend to discuss with her what needs to be done to achieve that.

The Premier's recent talk about a 40-minute rail service from Geelong to Melbourne, associated with the building of an airport rail link, was short on detail. It seems to be a statement of intention, setting TfV the task of working out how to do it.

It can happen if the additional pair of tracks from Sunshine to Wyndham Vale are constructed. That has to be done before any more of the planned stations on the Tarneit section of the line are provided.

It's very hard to see how the proposal to the federal government by the MegaRail consortium for a high-speed rail route between Geelong, Melbourne and Dandenong could be achieved as described in its one-page media release. It seems to misread the Australian

Government's "Faster Rail" prospectus, which envisages Regional Fast Rail-type improvements to rail services, not hugely-expensive bullet trains.

The idea has got past Stage 1 of the process, but that only seems to require convincing the bureaucrats that the idea isn't completely absurd. We need to see the detailed project proposals, submitted as Stage 2 of the bid process which closed on 8 December 2017.

Ballarat branch report

Works have recently begun on the new multi-storey carpark at Ballarat Station, in the first phase of the Ballarat Station Precinct Redevelopment project. The new structure will not add to the total number of parking spaces, and will instead offset the loss of ground-level parks which will soon be built over for a block of serviced apartments.

Works on a new bus interchange are planned to commence early next year, although no detailed designs have yet been released, and we remain concerned that insufficient funds have been allocated to design and build the bus interchange – which should by rights be the most important aspect of the precinct redevelopment, given that the station must first and foremost be a public transport hub.

The government recently increased the scope of the Ballarat Line Upgrade project to include a new station at Toolern, the new

development being built on Melton's southwestern edge. The government is definitely to be commended for getting ahead of the game and building the station as the houses are built - rather than waiting until everyone's moved in and car dependence has become entrenched - but unfortunately seems to be doing only half the job. The station will be adjacent to the Ferris Rd level crossing, which is currently relatively quiet, but will undoubtedly get a lot busier - both in terms of road traffic and train numbers - in the very near future.

The costs of removing this level crossing as part of building the station would be a lot less than doing it in 5-10 years when it becomes a chokepoint, so it seems very short-sighted for the government to miss this opportunity. Given that the government has been open to sensible expansions of their projects in other cases - adding a

second platform to the design of Caroline Springs halfway through construction, and adding a second track to the Kororoit Creek Rd grade separation - we are hopeful they will be open to revising this project as well, and will be lobbying hard to get them to do so.

The Premier recently gave a speech to the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and discussed planning for a future airport link to be combined with faster trains to Geelong and Ballarat, along with shifting the suburban stations along those lines to the Metro network. Details of what this might entail has not yet been revealed, and indeed given the speech was delivered the day before the premier announced the route for North East Link, it may have simply been an attempt to pre-emptively shore up his PT credibility. We will be keeping a close eye on this when and if more details are revealed.

2017 AGM, and looking ahead

The Association's 2017 Annual General Meeting was held on 9 November at Ross House, with around 50 members present.

Members were treated to an informative presentation by transport modelling specialist William McDougall, explaining the shortcomings of the approach used to forecast the benefits of transport projects (see p2).

The annual Paul Mees award for community activism was presented to the Altona Loop Group and its spokesperson Jennifer Williams, for their years of unending

advocacy on behalf of the beleaguered Altona train service (see p3).

Our incoming Committee for 2018 is listed on page 2. This year we give special thanks to Tim Long who steps aside as PTUA Secretary after many years, in favour of David Robertson. Tim will continue as an ordinary Committee member. We also welcome new Committee member Stuart McKenzie.

We look toward 2018 as another big year for the Association, which will see a State election with urban

transport expected to play a major role. As always, our incoming Committee will be formulating strategic plans for the year at its annual retreat in January.

Playing a key part in our efforts for the coming year will be our community campaign run jointly with Friends of the Earth. The Sustainable Cities campaign coordinated by Rachel Lynskey will be continuing the work of our Public Transport Not Traffic campaign as we strive for public transport alternatives to motorways on multiple fronts.

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