

A renewed campaign for an election year.

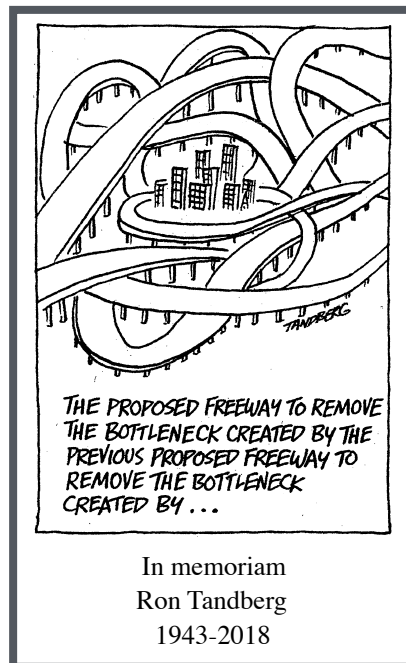
As is customary, the PTUA Committee undertook its annual strategic planning retreat in January. 2018 is shaping up as a challenging year for the sustainable transport movement, with a State election due in November in which transport policy and planning is likely to feature as a major issue.

Since the cancellation of the East West Link in 2014, the road lobby has sought to reassert its predominance in Victorian transport policy. The same government that cancelled the East West Link contracts is now ironically proceeding with the West Gate Tunnel, another inner-urban motorway with a dubious benefit-cost analysis and no electoral mandate.

The government is also keen on the North East Link, the ‘missing’ portion of the Eastern Ring Road that was deliberately excluded from the environmental assessment of EastLink to ensure the flow-on damage to the Yarra Valley would not count against that earlier project. The government has relied on a glowing assessment of the North East Link produced by Infrastructure Victoria, based on a now-erroneous cost estimate between \$5 and \$7 billion. With the budget cost now \$16 billion, its true benefit-cost ratio is scarcely greater than the East West Link’s absurd 45 cents in the dollar.

The State Opposition, for its own part, is promising to reanimate the East West Link zombie to lay waste to inner Melbourne if it wins government in November. And despite its show of opposition to both the West Gate Tunnel and North East Link, it is not clear this extends to actually stopping these projects going ahead were it in government.

Yet as PTUA President Tony Morton pointed out in a recent letter to The Age, the people of Melbourne never actually ‘chose’ to turn the city into a southern version of Los Angeles. Opinion polls have routinely shown majority support for giving priority to public and active transport solutions over road building. But if politicians are to be made to heed their electorate rather than the road lobby, it’s clear this will only occur through a renewed campaign effort to assert the public interest.



Accordingly, this year the PTUA will be building up its community campaign through its joint Sustainable Cities initiative with Friends of the Earth. Early in February this campaign launched its #GetOnBoard initiative, which aims to build grassroots support behind a new ‘People’s Plan’ for transport in Melbourne. A broader coalition of planning groups and academic experts is being assembled to lend further weight to the campaign.

Alongside this major campaign initiative, PTUA will continue to work toward long-standing policy priorities such as our ‘Every 10 Minutes to Everywhere’ initiative for

a Melbourne-wide frequent network, the ongoing push for airport rail, traffic priority for trams and buses, and making the most of our extensive and growing infrastructure. Many of these initiatives featured in our State budget submission, as another article describes.

We will continue to hope and to campaign for this election year being one in which a new Parliament commences the work of policy and planning reform for a sustainable transport future.

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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Phil Bourke – Treasurer

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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

PTUA Members Meeting

"Transit Policing in Victoria - Making our Public Transport Safer"

Guest Speakers:

Superintendent Alison Boyes and Inspector Allan Price

Victoria Police - Transit Safety Division

Date and location:

Thursday 5th April 2018

6:30pm - 7:30pm

Ross House

247 Flinders Lane

Melbourne VIC 3000

Open to all members. Non-members welcome to attend, if they join on the night.

In this issue

- **Planning for an election year p1**
- **Alternative to NE link p3**
- **End the fighting over transport planning p4**
- **First skyrail section opens p5**
- **Geelong branch report p6**
- **PTV performance statistics announced p6**
- **Ballarat branch report p7**

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NELink - to reduce car use, improve the buses.

Most people reading this will already be well aware of the downsides of the North East Link road proposal. Improving bus transport in the area is an alternative which would substantially improve transport connectivity between the City of Manningham, and the areas to the south and northwest. The North East Link proposal dismissed the central role public transport should be playing in these areas.

A major deficiency in the current SmartBus system through the Manningham area is the very poor interchange arrangements. Although the four Doncaster Area Rapid Transit (DART) routes (905/6/7/8) to the Melbourne CBD, and the 903 orbital SmartBus runs to Box Hill and beyond in one direction, and Heidelberg and beyond in the other direction, every 15 minutes or better through the day on weekdays, and until 9pm at night, interchange between the CBD routes and the 903 orbital route is woeful to non-existent.

For example, although the 905 Templestowe/Bulleen to City and 903 orbital services cross at the corner of Thompsons and Manningham Roads in Bulleen, the bus stops are well away from the intersection, so it's a significant walk between them. If you need to cross both roads at the lights, that can add significant further delay. Where the 906 Doncaster East to City and 903 orbital services cross, interchange is impossible, because the 906 is on the Eastern Freeway, whereas the 903 runs along Tram Road over the top.

In the case of the 905/903 crossing, if the bus stops were moved into pairs in the northern and southern corners of the intersection, with a pedestrian tunnel connecting them, this could become a convenient interchange. In the case of the 906/903 crossing, the 906 could have bus stops beside the Freeway under Tram Road, with steps and ramps up to 903 bus stops beside Tram Road above.

Another feature which would add value to these interchange points, would be shops selling coffee, food, newspapers, etc, allowing people to top up their Mykis, and providing better shelter in bad weather. Even just a convenience store is a big improvement on a street corner with nothing (like the current 905/903 crossing point). As much as Box Hill Interchange is sometimes criticised, it has these kinds of facilities, and is a more pleasant place to interchange than any of the DART/903 crossing points.

In the case of Doncaster Shoppingtown, interchange between the 907 and northbound 903 services is also problematic. Finding your way between the 907 bus stops on Doncaster Road and the Bus Interchange requires a spirit of adventure to explore the Shoppingtown carpark! The best solution overall for Shoppingtown buses would be to keep Doncaster Road buses on Doncaster Road (907s already stay there), keep Williamsons/Tram Road buses (like the 903) on those roads, and run pedestrian tunnels under Doncaster and Williamsons Roads directly into the southwestern corner of Shoppingtown.

This just happens to be the corner where the long hours entertainment area and supermarkets are, which would provide commuters with a variety of useful facilities, even out of business hours.

Anyone who would like to see how a pedestrian underpass can provide good connectivity between a Westfield Shoppingtown, a bus interchange and a railway station, could visit Parramatta in Sydney. Yes, it has a Westfield Shoppingtown too, and an underpass directly out of the shops under the bus interchange, with ramps up to the bus bays, then under Parramatta Railway Station, with ramps up to the platforms. Doncaster doesn't have the railway station (yet), but the same style of bus connectivity would work well.

A big upside of this proposal is that transport connectivity between the City of Manningham, and the areas south of it, and northwest of it, could be substantially improved without having to run any more buses, just the capital cost of fixing the interchanges. Most of the extra bus patronage would be either counter peak, or further out of the City than existing congestion problems.

Improved bus interchanges would cost money, but this would be a microscopic fraction of the cost of North East Link. Alongside improved bus priority, reliability and service frequencies, this would be a small but important step towards providing good quality public transport for those in the northeast, and an alternative to driving everywhere.

End the partisan brawling over big infrastructure.

There is a major infrastructure planning crisis in Victoria and only a public interest ‘circuit breaker’ will end it.

The recent attempted scuttling of Transurban’s destructive West Gate Tunnel project by the Legislative Council is merely the latest manifestation of the crisis, which reaches back more than a decade.

Historically, large infrastructure projects in Victoria have proceeded with essentially bipartisan support, in accordance with some kind of plan and with all the required statutory approvals. Governments could also claim to have an electoral mandate for these projects: even Jeff Kennett claimed a mandate for CityLink in 1996.

The problem governments have faced more recently is that to gain this kind of support, a major project has to both stack up on triple-bottom-line criteria and reflect the wishes of the community. Yet there’s lately been a deplorable tendency to announce huge, multi-billion dollar projects with dubious benefit-cost analyses, then scramble to sign contracts and start construction with unforeseen haste. It’s as though governments are scared of their electors, fear not getting a mandate for their actions and want to force a *fait accompli* instead. We saw it five years ago with East West Link, and we see it now with the West Gate Tunnel.

It’s little wonder these projects turn into ugly partisan brawls, and alarm Victorians at the betrayal of public trust involved.

In December 2017 a public letter to the Premier from 28 urban transport and planning experts

documented their concerns with Victoria’s planning crisis, and with the West Gate Tunnel project in particular. This followed a submission by transport modelling expert William McDougall to a Senate inquiry on tollroads in July 2017, citing serious concerns with the way major road projects are assessed.

There is a striking disconnect between the approach taken to the West Gate Tunnel and to the Metro rail tunnel. The Metro tunnel was studied almost to death over three election cycles and strengthened its case as a result. There is a clear public mandate for this project, and we have come to acknowledge its huge benefit for Melbourne’s west in particular. This rail tunnel will indeed move three times as many people as the West Gate Tunnel without breaking a sweat.

Similar support would likely exist for the original West Gate Distributor project that Labor took to the 2014 election. It solves the problem of getting trucks out of residential streets, at a cost one-tenth that of the West Gate Tunnel, and without putting more trucks in other residential streets, or overwhelming central Melbourne with more car traffic contrary to 30 years of planning strategy. The government could safely claim a mandate for it.

Of course, changing direction is never easy. We know the road lobby really wants to be in charge of transport planning again like they were last century. But the public has different ideas now: most of us don’t accept that the only way to get cities to work is by turning them into Los Angeles.

Instead the road lobby, and those like Transurban who seek to make money whenever traffic gets worse, has fallen back on the ‘market-led initiative’ process, which is essentially a licence to subvert proper planning.

To get Victoria out of the present crisis, the PTUA and other planning groups have renewed the call for a planning ‘reset’ on explicit public-interest criteria.

We could start by tasking Transport for Victoria with the creation of the Transport Plan actually required by Victoria’s Transport Integration Act. It ought to be publicly tested in accordance with the Act, on triple-bottom-line criteria, and informed by a well-supported view on what kind of city we want to be. It also needs community groups, local councils and planning experts to be actively involved in its construction, and not subject to veto by faceless men in Collins Street who answer only to the road lobby.

In the meantime, Premier Andrews and Minister Donellan could gainfully employ the several hundred project workers on the original West Gate Distributor, which remains in the West Gate Tunnel plans, does the job the public needs and already has community support.

More importantly, the government can get started on serious public transport network reform, in the western suburbs in particular. As The Age also documented in the same week, people in the west are being literally driven away from public transport by chronic failures in planning and funding for adequate services.

First section of "skyrail" opens at Noble Park.

The first section of the Caulfield to Dandenong "skyrail" opened in mid-February, with three level crossings now closed and the train elevated through Noble Park, with a new station there.

Passengers on trains get a view of the surrounding area, however there are privacy barriers along the tracks that prevent you seeing much of ground-level at close range.

The new Noble Park station is an island platform, with a booking office, waiting room, toilets and Myki gates at ground level.

Parts of the platform have full rain cover, with a wraparound structure providing shelter. Other sections are out in the open, and it remains to be seen how effective this will be in the wind and rain of Melbourne's winter.

Lifts, stairs and escalators are provided between the platform and ground level.

Although the station is operational, construction work continues underneath the elevated structure, with car parks and open space to eventually be provided.

It's unclear if all of the noise attenuation treatments are fully installed, but from below the trains are relatively quiet - seemingly



Looking towards Sandown Park from Noble Park

quieter than when they were at ground level.

Noble Park is probably the least controversial section of skyrail.

Elevated sections through Clayton, and through Carnegie/Murrumbeena/Hughesdale are expected to open later this year, before the November state election.

Some closures will continue on the line, but the Level Crossing

Removal Authority assures us that the overall disruption is far less than would have been the case if the nine crossings between Caulfield and Dandenong had been removed using other methods. The government also tell us there will be continued disruptions for upgrades to cater for the new High Capacity trains.

Most people recognise the benefits of level crossing removal, for cutting delays to pedestrians, cyclists, bus/tram users and

motorists, as well as improving safety and enabling more frequent train services.

But perhaps the acid test for the government is whether they can provide a pleasant environment underneath the skyrail. Will it be the graffiti-ridden mess the Coalition claims, or will the improved access and landscaping provide an area that people actually want to use? Time will tell.

Geelong branch report.

The seemingly never-ending campaign to save Geelong's central bus hub had to be cranked up again in January.

A front-page article in the Geelong Advertiser on 6 January, headlined "City Bus Stops Must Go", quoted a "developer" making the all-too-familiar assertion that our city bus stops must be moved from Moorabool Street. He wants them scattered to disconnected locations around the fringes of the city, as they were from 2005 -2010, when patronage dropped considerably.

The journalist, who asked our convener for a comment about the Moorabool Street stops a couple of days before, merely said the paper felt it was time to look at the issue again. There was no mention of the developer's views or line the paper was going to push.

A reasonable amount of space was given to our point of view at the end of the article. In fact, despite the headline and introductory paragraphs, the article might have been headlined "City Bus Stops Must Stay Where They Are". It seems that the Advertiser, edited

by former Herald-Sun transport reporter Liam Houlihan, is determined to push an anti-bus agenda.

Branch members took various actions in response. Our convener's letter to the paper, which was circulated to members, was also sent in by another member, where it was published under her name.

The key point is that 1.3 million people boarded at the Moorabool Street stops in the year ended July 2016 (the latest figures we have). They shopped and did other business in the city without adding to traffic and parking problems.

It was noteworthy that another correspondent to the paper, who isn't a member, quoted the 1.3 million figure in opposing the removal of the bus stops. Not surprisingly, TfV, PTV and the bus companies all want the central stops to stay. We will continue to work with them.

We seem to have had a bit of a win in regard to weekend V/Line services to Melbourne. On Saturday morning 20 January, with

major cricket and tennis action, only three-car sets were run, resulting in severe overcrowding on services leaving Geelong. Buses had to be provided for Tarneit passengers, who would not have been able to get on the trains.

Jam-packed passengers were annoyed to see idle V/Line sets when they passed the stabling yard at Geelong West. V/Line said the problem had been noted on the day, but a driver shortage, and the time it takes to "prep" a train (which must be done by a driver), meant it wasn't possible to add to the short sets. That doesn't explain why six-car sets weren't provided in the first place.

However, in the last few weeks it has been good to see that weekend morning services to Melbourne, and afternoon service to Geelong, have been run by six-car sets.

Authorities will need to continue to upgrade services on the Geelong line, to cope with patronage growth, cut waiting times, and fix train/bus connections.

PTV releases performance statistics.

Public Transport Victoria has published train and tram performance data going back to 2001, allowing those with a knack for statistics to review long-term trends on the public transport network.

This is a positive move. PTV says it's an effort for more transparency in how the service is operating.

The next logical step would be to start providing detailed bus performance data. We think it would also make sense to add other indicators such as patronage

and crowding figures, which help provide some context around the increase in service delays as the network has come under pressure.

You can find the PTV data on their web site, or use this shortcut: <https://goo.gl/pzm46K>

Ballarat branch report.

VicTrack have recently revealed draft designs for the new bus interchange at Ballarat station, which is a belated addition to the Ballarat Station Precinct project.

While there is merit in bringing the buses right into the station to allow for easier interchange with trains, the space and funding allocated to the bus interchange seems totally inadequate.

The draft bus plans show only twelve bays, despite there being fourteen bus routes that all converge on the station at roughly the same time, so they connect with the trains. This will prove logistically difficult from day one, and will leave no margin for PTV to add more routes or run the existing routes more frequently in future.

Previous plans for the precinct showed V/Line coaches being included in this new interchange, but they've been quietly removed from the scope as well – they will stay put for the foreseeable future.

This trend of allocating all the land and funds to the private development, and giving public transport users the scraps left over, is characteristic of the Ballarat Station Precinct Redevelopment project. The branch has given strong feedback to VicTrack and the government on the matter, and will continue to as plans progress through 2018.

In December, the Ballarat Line Upgrade team announced some changes to the project, including changing the location of one of the crossing loops. The project originally included 3km of duplication works at Warrenheip, but this was changed to 3km of

duplication west of Bacchus Marsh.

The rationale given for this change was that it meant less tree removal and excavation, and that it allowed trains to more quickly move in and out of the stabling facilities that are also planned as part of the BLU project – which is sensible.



Ballarat branch convener Ben Lever talking to Win News at Ballarat station. Picture from Committee for Ballarat.

However, indicative maps released as part of public consultation show that this duplication will end approximately 1km short of the Rowsley Loop, which was constructed in 2016 – meaning the line will go from double-track to single-track and back again in a very short distance.

It's unclear exactly how much more it would cost to simply extend the duplication 1km further

and link the two loops, but it is clear that it will be more expensive to double-handle it and redo this section in a few years. The Ballarat line needs to be fully duplicated as soon as possible, so the government should provide the extra funding to do this section of track once, and do it right – and save themselves money in the long run.

The government recently announced that the Melbourne Metro Tunnel will be completed a year ahead of schedule, in 2025. It's great to hear that this critically-needed infrastructure will be able to start taking pressure off the City Loop earlier than first thought – but it does underline the need for the government to start detailed planning on western suburbs extensions that will use the Metro Tunnel, like electrifying the line between Sunshine and Melton.

Electrifying the line to Melton is urgently needed to provide a better service to Melbourne's west, and to take pressure off the Ballarat line.

The 14km electrification from Watergardens to Sunbury took around two years of construction, but required several years of planning and tendering beforehand. The electrification project from Sunshine to Melton will be 25km long, and if done properly, will include 7km of track quadruplication and three level crossing removals – so may take even longer than the Sunbury project. For this to be built and ready to open in 2025 when the Metro Tunnel opens, detailed planning will need to begin in the next year or two – which means all parties should be taking it to the 2018 election.

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Inside:

End the partisan brawling over infrastructure planning

Skyrail opens

Alternative to North East Link

PTV performance stats

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