



Budget: Transport policy reform stumbles to a halt

The 2018 State Budget signals that Victoria is in serious danger of regressing to a 20th century car-dependent model for transport planning, and that the Andrews Government needs to renew its ambition on public and active transport.

After the big initiatives of previous years, this state budget calls to mind an earlier era when governments felt they could ignore community demands for bold action on public and active transport, and let the road lobby prescribe planning and funding priorities.

That's not to say the budget contains nothing new for public transport: there are important initiatives such as a major signalling upgrade on the Sunbury to Dandenong corridor (as should always have been pursued alongside the Metro tunnel project), and improvements to the Shepparton and Ballarat lines. This builds on the government's existing major initiatives such as the Metro tunnel, road-rail grade separation and the Regional Rail Revival package.



But for every dollar of new spending on public transport there is \$2.40 of new spending on roads and car travel, which is just going to feed congestion. Overall service provision for public transport barely keeps pace with population, providing little room to help those wanting an alternative to sitting in traffic.

The Andrews Government headlined a record \$13 billion spend on infrastructure. But with this level of spending, the Victorian public is entitled to know if it's really the right infrastructure, and how the public will benefit a decade or two into the future.

As former Vancouver chief planner Brent Toderian likes to say, a government's true priorities and aspirations are revealed not in its statements, but in its budget. Funding totals for new initiatives in this

budget soon tell whether it's more focussed on additional road capacity that's going to fill up in two years, or on embracing the 21st century model of efficient movement and choices. And indeed the total of \$4.3 billion for new road initiatives dwarfs the \$1.8 billion for new public transport initiatives.

It's often suggested an imbalance in capital spending in favour of roads is 'balanced' by the fact public transport takes more recurrent operating expenditure. Yet even on the 'opex' side this budget directs more attention to roads: new road initiatives will boost recurrent spending by \$550 million in the forward estimates, compared with just \$350 million for new public transport initiatives.

The overall impression is of a government suddenly reluctant to build on its record in growing public transport, and instead doubling down on roads. The Premier wants Victorians to get excited about the North East Link, the Mordialloc Freeway and \$2 billion worth of road widening in the suburbs. Yet

barring some encouraging words about high speed regional trains, there's really nothing new that's comparable on the public transport side.

Is this really all there is, as the Andrews Government goes to Victorians to seek re-election in November?

With Melbourne's population set to grow by close to 1 million per decade, the state cannot afford to drop the ball on public transport. We need to be planning the next big rail capacity boost in the west, given official suggests the Metro tunnel will be 'full' almost as soon as it opens. Meanwhile, there is ongoing need to boost regular service frequency, including on our long-neglected suburban bus network.

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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

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Phil Bourke – Treasurer

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Daniel Bowen
Tim Long
Stuart McKenzie
Anna Morton
Bruce Sutherland
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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

6pm, Thursday 14 June, 2018

Hayden Raysmith Room, Level 4, Ross House,
247 Flinders Lane, Melbourne

Guest Speaker: Dr Ian Woodcock,

RMIT University, Centre for Urban Research

Topic: The Future of Transport - Is Melbourne Getting it Right?

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

Movie screening

Friends of the Earth Melbourne is hosting a movie fundraiser! "Tunnel Vision", is an award-winning documentary, about how the East-West link toll road was stopped. "Never Again: A Story About a Highway and Remnant Bushland" tells the story of the Roe 8 Highway in WA. There will also be some very special guests speaking after the showings. Have a drink, talk to experts in the field, and get involved.

Loop Project Space & Bar (23 Meyers Place, CBD),
Tuesday 12th June 6:30pm

Tickets through https://www.melbournefoe.org.au/sustainable_cities.

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Edited by Anna Morton.

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NELink to kill Doncaster rail forever?

Detailed design plans for the North East Link and its accompanying busway, released in April, will include taking over the median reserve for additional car lanes.

If this proceeds this is likely to deal a death blow to any long term plan for trains to run to Doncaster.

Under the current plans, the wide median between Victoria Park and Bulleen Road, which has been set aside for a train line since the 1970s, will be deleted and used for car lanes. This provides space for bus lanes on the outside of the road—but the outside will likely not be suitable for rail due to conflict with freeway entrance and exit ramps.

Everything was done in the 1970s, when the original road was built, to ensure a rail line could be built free of obstructions. This included building the bridges so as not to have central piers that would get in the way of railway infrastructure. This is important, because the largest cost component of most such projects is land acquisition and earthworks, which can be avoided so long as the median reserve is used.

With the median reserve gone, there is no longer any certainty that cost blowouts would not result from the need to work around a massive roadway in future.

Seizure of the median adds to the threat from previously announced plans, for a 16-lane road monster between Bulleen and Doncaster, resembling the traffic-choked superhighways seen in US cities like Los Angeles or Houston.

The plans run contrary to the public's clearly expressed

preference and are likely to have nightmarish consequences for the Doncaster region in the long term. Rail is without parallel for moving large numbers of people around a big city effectively. The proposed buses, on the other hand, will not be future-proof and will in time become slow and crowded just like the busway services in Brisbane today.

The PTUA currently hears daily from bus users in the north east who suffer overcrowded, late, cancelled and defective services. This has come about since the Department of Transport signed a supposedly 'innovative' contract with private operator Transdev in 2014, which leaves the government powerless to enforce basic service standards on behalf of passengers. It's doubtful that anyone who uses these buses today trusts government assurances that buses can do the work of trains in 30 years' time, when Melbourne is the size of London or Paris.

Residents of Manningham and other suburbs are being sentenced to a congested Los Angeles future. What is to happen after the state spends \$16 billion to build this 16 lane monster, and it fills up with 16 lanes of single-occupant car traffic? Our government cannot solve anyone's transport problems—passengers or freight—until it gives people real choices. And ultimately, in a city the size of Melbourne, that means rail.

The government's new Infrastructure Victoria agency is supposed to be a source of independent advice on major projects like this, but unfortunately has become just another conduit for advice from a rail-hostile

bureaucracy. It found against Doncaster rail—despite the urging of some members of its own citizen jury—because it booked the entire cost of building a Metro 2 rail tunnel against the benefit to Doncaster travellers alone. Meanwhile it gave the tick to the North East Link by accepting a costing of \$5 to \$7 billion, when the price tag is now \$16.5 billion.

The danger is that every time we impinge on such reserved public transport corridors as exist, we weigh down every future project like Doncaster rail with added costs that make our future problems harder and harder to solve. And for what? The Eastern Freeway is actually where the current buses already run the fastest—the real solution is needed not on the freeway, but rather in Hoddle Street and Victoria Parade where well over half the travel time is spent.

We have called on the government to publish the multimodal transport plan for Victoria that is required by its own legislation. This would clarify whether planners are softening us up to turn Melbourne into Los Angeles, when the long-expressed community view is we should be more like Vancouver or Vienna, with a strong role for public and active transport—especially rail—even though a lot of people will still drive cars.

Do you currently use Doncaster area buses? We are currently 'crowdsourcing' data from bus users to support a campaign on preserving the rail median. Visit ptua.org.au/campaigns/doncaster

Care Urged on Rowville tram proposal

The PTUA has cautiously welcomed a proposal to develop a tram line connecting Rowville to Caulfield railway station via Chadstone Shopping Centre. But we remain seriously concerned the project could leave the community worse off in the longer term by precluding a conventional train line along Wellington Road.

The 2012 network plan, under the previous government, envisaged a regular rail link from Huntingdale as the appropriate long term option for this corridor. Likewise, there was a strong view on Infrastructure Victoria's citizen jury in 2016 that Rowville rail would be imperative in the next 15 years. The Federal Government in its own May budget has now expressed a preference for conventional 'heavy' rail.

PTUA believes heavy rail is the only option in the longer term to drive significant mode shift to public transport and deal with traffic problems. It is difficult to see any other option providing a competitive travel time for longer journeys.

The proposed tramway will run parallel to the Dandenong train line as far as Oakleigh before heading east, and will not include the existing interchange at Huntingdale station. This route has advantages for local travel: unlike a train line it could have stops both at Monash University and at the Synchrotron nearby. Its main advantage is delivering on the need for an improved public transport connection to Chadstone Shopping Centre, and indeed there is speculation that the proposal itself is being commercially driven by Chadstone interests.

The key risks for the tram, however, are speed and interchange capacity. Without serious attention to traffic priority, it will be uncompetitive with train travel over any distance greater than a few stops. The interchange at Caulfield also needs to cater for potentially hundreds of people at a time without getting stuck in queues—an area where our system has a particularly poor performance record to date.

At present, a journey from Monash University bus interchange to

Flinders Street Station can be done in 40 minutes (10 on the 601 bus and 25 on the train, assuming an average 5 minute connection). For a tram connecting at Caulfield to match what the bus and train can do currently, it would need to achieve a 30kph average speed—which means it has to be faster than the existing 75 tram along Burwood Highway, and even faster than the Gold Coast Light Rail which is currently best-in-class in Australia for traffic priority.

A train would likely cut the time for the same journey from 40 to 30 minutes. This represents a critical longer term opportunity for the Monash high-tech precinct, that we would be worried about losing.

PTUA will continue to press for an integrated long-term plan for transport in the south-east, which needs to be adequately future proof. Reports continually confirm that public transport is slowing down and becoming less reliable across the board. This is a direct consequence of not building in adequate capacity ahead of growth, that everyone could see coming decades ago.

Sustainable Cities community organiser

Members may have noticed in some of our social media posts that we've mentioned Rachel Lynskey and the Sustainable Cities campaign.

This campaign is a joint effort from the PTUA and Friends of the Earth Melbourne. We contribute half the funds for Rachel's wages, and are part of the steering committee that sets the strategic

direction of the campaign. It's really vital that the PTUA works together with like-minded groups like Friends of the Earth Melbourne so we can pool our resources and help push politicians to deliver our vision for a city and a transport system that is environmentally and economically sustainable.

Rachel has a background in community organising, and has been doing a great job so far campaigning in marginal seats against the multi-billion dollar mega roads, the West Gate Tunnel and North East Link. Again, you may have seen us promoting some of these events, like the Sustainable Cities organised day of

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Geelong branch report

The big news recently has been the state government's budget-linked announcement of \$50 million for detailed investigation of a high-speed rail link between Geelong and Melbourne.

Ever since the significant upgrade of the line under the Regional Fast Rail program, and the introduction of the VLocity trains, there have been calls from various quarters for the introduction of "very fast trains" to Melbourne. Some early political spin put on the Regional Rail Link (RRL) was that it was "Melbourne express rail".

We welcome the sort of advance planning for public transport improvements which the recent announcement entails. An obvious failing of the RRL was that when the Rudd government gave Victoria \$3.2 billion for the project, it was little more than a line on a map. As a result, in the rush to spend the money, some poor decisions were made, costings were very rubbery, and the design of the RRL was regularly modified.

While long-range planning is important, people using Geelong line trains have told us that they are much more concerned about the day-to-day problems they encounter in using the rail service today. They want sufficient money and time spent on fixing those, and the \$50 million set aside for providing for trains of the future won't be available for that.

As one example, the shortage of V/Line drivers continues to plague the service. Drivers are not allowed to work more than twelve days in the fortnight, so by the end of any fortnightly period, more and more drivers have been used for their 12 days. That leads to some cancellations and substitutions every second Friday and Saturday.

The practice of terminating late-running South Geelong or Waurn Ponds trains at Geelong is becoming too regular. It obviously disrupts those on the trains themselves.

However, the consequent cancellation of trains heading to

Melbourne from stations beyond Geelong is even more disruptive, particularly because Marshall and Waurn Ponds only have a 40-minute off-peak service. We hope that the reliability of the massive VLocity fleet, some of which is now over a decade old, will not become a problem.

Some good news is that weekend trains are now more consistently formed by six-car sets, which has lessened overcrowding a bit. However the huge patronage at Tarneit and Wyndham Vale continues to be a problem. This is highlighted by recent news that Wyndham Council now wants the government to build all three of the other stations planned for the line

Unless the two extra Geelong-only tracks from Wyndham Vale to Sunshine are built, all five stations will only be served by Geelong trains, and the potential overcrowding will be unmanageable. We hope to partner with Wyndham Council to advocate for the provision of the two extra tracks to Wyndham Vale.

Sustainable Cities community organiser

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action on Monday the 23rd April. She'll keep getting out there meeting members of the community and running events for the Sustainable Cities campaign, so we hope you'll go along and support these events.

The PTUA is keen to campaign as effectively as possible in the lead-

up to the state election in November, and we may need to hire another campaigner to support the great work Rachel is doing - particularly focusing on securing public transport commitments in key marginal seats. We'd encourage you to help us fund this by renewing your membership, signing up a friend, or even making a small donation - you can

find details at www.ptua.org.au and www.melbournefoe.org.au/donate_sustainable_cities.

You could also attend the Sustainable Cities fund-raising film night in June - see page 2 of this newsletter for details.

Put our buses to work for everyone

Melbourne's buses need to be overhauled to follow the heavy-lifting example set by Melbourne's trams.

Infrastructure Victoria's recently released "Five Year Focus" strategy outlines short term actions to tackle Melbourne's traffic congestion. The report calls on the State Government to make better use of existing infrastructure and bus fleets, restructuring bus networks to be more efficient and managing road space to improve priority for high-occupancy public and active transport.

In this context, it is worth looking at the five year plan the PTUA produced in 2005, and how many of the things we were asking for then come up in this 2018 strategy. These include initiatives like better bus and tram priority, network planning reform, and SmartBuses linking rail corridors. These are perennial problems that cost little to fix, yet have languished for want of political attention.

However, the IV report omits other low hanging fruit that we identified all those years ago. An example is network connectivity, which IV mentions almost solely in the context of roads. Just in the tram network, there are many lines that stop barely a kilometre short of railway stations, and where a valuable network connection could be made with a short extension, costing the same as a couple of kilometres of new road.

Other inexpensive initiatives include extra stations on suburban lines where spare capacity exists. Our 2005 plan envisaged a station at Campbellfield on the Upfield line connecting with the 902 SmartBus, and at Newport West on

the Altona line. Only recently, the government wasted the opportunity to build a station at Campbellfield as part of the grade separation at Camp Road. A glaring omission from the IV report is advice on how the government might learn from such examples, to plan and maximise the benefits from such relatively small projects in future.

The most promising short-term initiatives come from opportunities to reform bus services, especially those IV identifies as 'underperforming'. But these opportunities can be endangered by trendy knee-jerk 'solutions' that make things worse. For example, the IV report hints strongly at the idea of removing underperforming bus routes and replacing them with taxis. However this is sweetened with terms like 'ride sharing' and 'customer responsive service', all it actually does is add cars to the road. In cities that have tried using such services to replace public transport in their suburbs, congestion has got noticeably worse.

A better model for improving the performance of suburban buses is hiding in plain sight. Our tram system provides frequent all-day service to a range of often quite low-density suburbs, with a very low operating subsidy per passenger. Comparing Balwyn or Preston with Tarneit, and ignoring the age of the houses, there's actually about equal potential to attract passengers who might not want to sit behind a steering wheel in traffic for two hours each day.

A presentation by PTUA President Tony Morton to the Victorian Transport Infrastructure

Conference in April highlighted that the cities with the best public transport provide a range of options for local travel, led by excellent feeder bus networks.

As the IV report states and Dr Morton highlighted to the conference, the government spends some \$600 million a year running suburban buses that are often virtually empty, as no active effort is made to recruit passengers. Governments could get smarter about how they spend this money: each \$1 million of annual expenditure could, on industry figures, provide a bus service every 10 minutes, 7 days a week, for a population of around 8,000 people in most Melbourne suburbs. And every extra passenger pays a fare to help meet the cost of the service.

On current figures, to provide parking for 8,000 cars costs anywhere between \$100 and \$350 million. For just a fifth of that population, it costs more to finance a carpark than to just run a bus service, that can take people where they want to go all day long.

Melbourne and Victoria are crying out for strategic, sustainable transport planning that works for everyone. Infrastructure Victoria is correct to warn against taking a scatter-gun approach and throwing money at every politically expedient project. At the same time, we must not have such low expectations of public transport services when decades of bad policy has made us so dependent on cars. Good planning demands calm, careful consideration of our actual needs, for people and freight, for infrastructure and for decent services.

Ballarat branch report

In March, Ballarat Branch convener Ben Lever attended a conference of regional rail advocates in Castlemaine, organised by the Rail Revival Alliance.

Present were representatives of a number of groups from different parts of the state, including the North West Rail Alliance (who are focused on returning trains to Mildura), Horsham Rural City Council (who along with neighbouring councils are pushing for trains to return to Horsham and Hamilton), and of course the Rail Revival Alliance themselves (who are primarily pushing for

passenger trains Geelong-Ballarat-Bendigo). A great discussion was had about priorities for the upcoming election, and on strategies for achieving the various groups' goals.

Pleasingly, we've recently seen some pre-election announcements from the Coalition that meet some of these goals. In a whirlwind day of announcements, Opposition Leader Matthew Guy announced that if elected in November, the Coalition would fund a detailed business case for returning trains to Horsham and Hamilton. He also announced they would extend the Maryborough line to Donald,

which is seen as the first step in returning passenger trains to Mildura. Given the breaks of gauge in the region, there are certainly going to be technical obstacles to overcome, but it's great to see these issues on the agenda and in-principle commitments on the table.

With Ararat, Stawell, Maryborough, and Donald all in the marginal electorate of Ripon, this seems to be the first salvo in a battle for the seat. In the recent state budget, Labor did not promise the same suite of initiatives, but did fund \$130 million worth of track and



signalling improvements to the Ararat and Maryborough lines. It's unclear at this stage exactly what improvements these will be, but in a media release the Premier did note that they were “an essential requirement for any future return of passenger services to Dunolly.” Clearly this is not the last we'll hear from Labor on the issue, and we will be aiming to get bipartisan support for the key upgrades our

region needs in the lead-up to the election – and of course, we will be holding whoever wins the election to account, to ensure they deliver on their promises.

Labor has also recently made some announcements closer to Melbourne that will be important for the Ballarat branch. They have funded \$50 million for some fairly wide-ranging planning, including high speed rail to Geelong, an

airport rail line that connects with regional trains, and electrifications to the western suburbs of Melbourne. Although details are scarce at this stage, this seems to be a positive step towards electrifying the line to Melton, adding capacity and better segregating regional and suburban passengers – among the most sorely-needed projects for passengers on the Ballarat line.

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