



V/Line woes cause passenger frustration

Frequent problems with V/Line services continue to plague regional passengers. Maintenance, timetabling and driver shortages have all contributed to the operator's inadequate performance over recent years. Punctuality and reliability regularly fail to meet the required standard.

V/Line can't be blamed for most infrastructure shortcomings, particularly the flawed nature of the Regional Rail Link (RRL), which requires V/Line to provide an overcrowded pseudo-Metro service on the Geelong line. However, the management of them has been below par.

There was the timetabling mess-up when the RRL first opened, despite months of planning time, and we see an ongoing failure of V/Line to reach its punctuality and reliability targets.

We share the concern of some senior transport bureaucrats about the V/Line's personnel management. For months, driver shortages have caused sudden disruption to passengers, with abrupt cancellations and substitutions, and inadequate numbers of carriages on many services.

It is bewildering that V/Line spokespeople claim there are enough staff to run all scheduled services. If they can't cover drivers who are unavailable due to illness, on leave, or have reached their fortnightly service limit, it seems obvious that staffing levels are insufficient.

If a driver isn't available to "prep" a VLocity set it can't be put into service. That can mean a three-car set is run even though the level of patronage requires six cars.

It reached an especially illogical point in June when some V/Line services were cancelled because drivers

were being trained on the newly-opened elevated sections of the Dandenong line.

In April, the Public Transport Minister ordered a review of V/Line staffing problems. We've heard nothing since, but it should be full and frank, and it must be made public.

Then there are ongoing concerns about maintenance. The problems with rust and collapsing culverts on the Gippsland line earlier this decade, and the massive wheel wear crisis a couple of years ago, have rightly led to the dismissal of very senior V/Line staff.

However, problems regularly plague the system and frustrate passengers. These range from breakdowns or trains suddenly being declared faulty, to Geelong passengers on one service having to cram aboard a three-car set because it was

discovered at the last minute that the other set had insufficient fuel.

V/Line's woes underline the need for strong oversight of our public transport operators, whether they're publicly or privately-owned. The government has the power to make the necessary changes at V/Line, and they need to ensure the organisation is managing its staff and assets properly.

Dependable train services are essential to keep large numbers of people mobile in a sustainable way, so these festering problems must be resolved. The recent appointment of PTV head Jeroen Weimar to also be chairman of the V/Line Board is interesting, but a single change at the top is not enough.

Mr. Weimar will be speaker at our next members' meeting - see page 2 for details.



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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

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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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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 23rd August, 2018

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

Guest Speaker: Jeroen Weimar.

Mr. Weimar is CEO of Public Transport Victoria (PTV) and the newly appointed chair of V/Line.

Rowville Rail Forum

There will be a forum on Rowville Rail at 7:30 on Friday 10th August, at St. Simon's Parish Hall, 2 Taylors Lane, Rowville.

Speakers will include the federal Member for Aston, Alan Tudge, the state Member for Rowville, Kim Wells, and leader of the Rowville Rail Study, William Mc Dougall. There will also be a screening of the short film 'No Pain, No Train'.

Further details available at the Fund Rowville Rail Facebook page. [facebook.com/Fund-Rowville-Rail-156504685029544/](https://www.facebook.com/Fund-Rowville-Rail-156504685029544/)

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Airport rail: What should it do, and how much should it cost?

Supporters of a long-overdue rail link to Melbourne Airport got a boost from the announcement as part of the Federal Budget that up to \$5 billion would be set aside to build the train line. But the Turnbull Government's announcement has also sown more confusion about the project's scope and cost.

Since 2001 the 'official' preferred route for airport rail has been via Sunshine and the existing Albion-Jacana freight rail reserve, with a new spur to the airport from Keilor East. Because a planning reservation exists for this route, it largely avoids the need for land acquisition or major civil works to establish a right-of-way, which generally make up the largest component of construction costs for new infrastructure.

Infrastructure Victoria (IV) recently obtained a costing of this line as part of their 2016 strategy report. Their consultants estimated the 'direct cost' of building the line as between \$1.2 and \$1.9 billion. They then inflated this 'direct cost' by about 160% to allow for 'indirect costs' such as planning and contingencies, to obtain a 'capital cost' estimate of \$2 to \$3 billion. Finally, Infrastructure Victoria added a 'present value' estimate of between \$1 and \$2 billion to operate the line over 40 years, to arrive at a gross cost estimate of \$3 to \$5 billion. (Confusingly, this is also called a 'direct option cost'.) We understand the operating cost does

not take into account any offset from user fares.

If the Federal government were to share 50:50 in the capital cost of building airport rail, it would therefore be up for a bill of \$1 to \$1.5 billion. If the Commonwealth were also to share in the operating cost (unprecedented for a public transport project) the total bill might be up to \$2.5 billion in present-value terms.



Where's the Airport train?

This is of course a fraction of the \$5 billion budget commitment made by the Prime Minister in May. The reason for this inflated figure appears to be to 'keep alive' the Turnbull Government's own preferred option, which is for a long underground tunnel on a direct route to the city, which could also serve a future urban-renewal project on former defence land at Maribyrnong.

The PTUA remains open to such alternative route options, and even multiple routes and modes, provided each demonstrates a net social benefit—as the Albion route does on IV consultants' estimates—and can function seamlessly as part of the existing public transport network. We may recall again that the CityLink Concession Deed rules out compensating Transurban for the effect of airport rail if the line is built "as part of the metropolitan heavy rail network".

Our biggest concern with the \$5 billion figure is it risks establishing a new, exorbitant 'anchor point' for the cost of airport rail. Already on the back of this announcement, media commentators are framing the line as a \$10 billion project rather than as a \$2-\$3 billion project. While such massive figures might be useful as political spin for governments wanting to impress voters with apparent generosity, we know from experience that an inflated price take is also a ready pretext for delay and denial.

Now that the state government has again confirmed Sunshine as its preferred option, it falls to both levels of government to work together on project plans with expeditious timelines and realistic cost estimates. And of course there is no end of worthwhile public transport projects the Federal government might fund with the amount left over from its \$5 billion.

Return of the Triple Bypass

As others have remarked, when the doctor says you need a triple bypass it's a sign you need to change your diet.

Curiously this hasn't stopped the road lobby adopting this as a slogan - whether in 1995 to spruik CityLink or today for the Victorian Opposition's bid to revive the East West Link tollway alongside the West Gate Tunnel and the \$16 billion North East Link.

The Opposition has understandably said nothing so far about the cost, or on how a massive and destructive project can be justified, so soon after its previous attempt was found to

provide just 50 cents benefit for every dollar of expenditure.

Of course, this hardly shows the Andrews Government in any better light for itself wanting to build two out of these three motorways. That there's a bipartisan consensus on sticking up the Victorian taxpayer for tens of billions on road projects, that are known to be ineffective in reducing congestion, should not be all that surprising: it was after all the status quo for the half-century up to 2010.

What has changed is that the public itself is less willing to believe fairytales about the magical effects of road-building,

and would prefer governments to invest in public transport instead. Recall that the platform Labor took to the 2010 election included both the North East Link and a different version of the West Gate Tunnel via West Footscray instead of Yarraville; it lost to the Coalition who - at the time - were not promising any major road projects.

Between now and November's State Election a major campaign effort will again be required to deter both Labor and the Coalition from the path of replicating Los Angeles' road system in Melbourne, at enormous expense, for grossly damaging results.

Productivity Commission backs user-informed planning

By chance, our attention was drawn to a report released with little fanfare by the Productivity Commission in August 2017: "Shifting the Dial - 5 year productivity review".

One section of the report deals specifically with cities and their transport systems. The transport section focusses almost exclusively on roads, but the PC does attempt to justify this focus saying that "roads are...most susceptible to poor decision-making and inefficient usage patterns". It also suggests that "the improvements...will, over time, help clarify policy choices on how best to improve the efficiency of transport networks as a whole".

Amid the recommendations dealing with familiar themes such as road pricing and funding transparency, the following strikes us as particularly remarkable:

"Authorities should restructure governance arrangements to ensure that representatives of those who pay for roads—that is, users—contribute to project selection and funding decisions. Processes to appoint such representatives should be independent of government. The Commission envisages that appointees will have both the right mix of technical skills and community interests to effectively gauge and promote users' preferences."

The recommendation is however open to misinterpretation. A recap by Jack Waterford in the *Canberra Times* on 28 April rephrased it as "Bringing roads and motorists associations into the process for both choosing and funding transport projects." In reality this is merely what happens already, albeit informally - of the major projects identified in the RACV's 2012 Growing Pains report, the

only ones not currently endorsed as policy priorities by the current State or Federal governments are the Doncaster and Rowville rail lines.

It must be emphasised that the recommendation is for user representatives that are independently selected for their expertise and user perspective. And of course the idea applies equally well to public transport, walking and cycling.

At the same time, governance and planning have a responsibility to the broad public interest rather than any section of the community, and so 'user' involvement is best understood as 'community' involvement as opposed to policy prescription by elite interests. In cities, both roads and public transport are pervasive urban systems that impinge on all our lives, and a vital part of the public realm.

Geelong branch report

There has been a significant, and mostly positive, development in the long running and tedious battle the Geelong Branch has had to retain bus routes and bus stops in central Geelong.

In a sad display of twentieth century thinking, there has for many years been a campaign from various influential but unenlightened quarters to remove bus routes entirely from the CBD, even including the idea of a single circular bus route around its fringes.

Transport for Victoria (TfV) has been commissioned to develop a Transport Network Operating Plan for central Geelong and environs. A key requirement is to decide the routes buses take through the city, along with the location of bus stops.

Unknown to us, TfV commissioned GTA Consultants to do a bus service review, especially focussing on bus routes serving the central city. At a recent

meeting of "stakeholders" the consultants presented their results.

The depth and quality of the work GTA Consultants had done was very impressive. It was especially gratifying that they had kept the need to promote active and sustainable transport at the forefront of their analysis.

They investigated three alternatives for bus routes through the city to Geelong's main station, factoring in usability, the need to increase patronage, and the costs of operation.

Their strong conclusion was that buses should continue to run into and through the city along Moorabool Street. Unfortunately, due to the heavily-promoted "Green Spine" being developed in Malop Street, they were told not to include that street as part of the route to and from Geelong station. That meant that Brougham Street, one block to the north, has to replace Malop Street as the link - a slightly longer route. Brougham Street is currently unable to

accommodate the number of buses that would involve. However, we have been assured that parking will be removed to create bus-only lanes, and that buses will be given active traffic light priority.

Any change is some way off yet. It should not happen before the planned relocation of the current bus terminal at the station, slightly to the north and closer to the end of Brougham Street.

To remove buses from Malop Street, along which they (and trams) have run directly to the station for over a century, is bizarre. Although public transport will be eliminated from the street, cars will still be allowed to use it. Enlightened cities don't favour cars over sustainable transport.

The move isn't surprising, however, given that the "Malop Street Green Spine" idea arose from the 2015 "City in a Park" plan, a strategy for "reviving" central Geelong which didn't even mention the existence of public transport!

City of Melbourne looks to rid itself of car dominance

Not before time, the City of Melbourne has released a discussion paper on measures to make the central city safer and more welcoming for its major mode of transport: walking.

Ideas for consideration include redesigning the street environment within the Hoddle Grid to provide wider footpaths and separated bike

lanes. This would be done by limiting motor vehicles to one lane in each direction - already the de facto situation on most city streets - and removing some kerbside car parking.

This can be justified given that car travel into the CBD, which accounted for nearly half of all journeys as recently as the 1990s,

now accounts for less than 20 per cent.

The discussion paper is not binding policy at this stage, but public submissions are being sought. We would encourage anyone interested in a friendlier and safer city to lodge a supportive submission.

Caulfield to Dandenong skyrail nears completion

The new elevated stations at Carnegie and Murrumbeena opened in mid-June, along with the third section of "skyrail" between Caulfield and Hughesdale.

Hughesdale station itself will follow later in the year., and the government has quietly confirmed what the PTUA had called for: all

block the view into homes and gardens close to the track.

At Noble Park, where the first new elevated station opened in early 2018 (see PTUA News March 2018), the progress beautifying the area underneath the tracks is moving slowly. One of the key benefits to local communities was increased open space and amenity

skyrail station piers and foundations have been "future-proofed", and extending the platforms later will be relatively simple and not cause major disruptions.

One of the benefits of the removal of all crossings from Caulfield to Dandenong is enabling more trains without impacting the road



three of these stations will be upgraded to Premium status, with staff available from first to last train, helping to provide assistance to passengers travelling at any time of day.

Access to the opened stations is currently by temporary stairs. Lifts and escalators are being constructed in the old rail alignment, and will open in coming months.

The view from the stations and trains is certainly better than being in a trench, even with privacy barriers in place, which partly

Around Noble Park Station.

- if the government were smart, they'd be working hard to show it off in time for the state election in November.

Questions are also being asked about how the new stations will cope with 10-car trains, likely to be introduced when the Metro 1 tunnel under Swanston Street opens in 2025. (The City Loop can't cope with trains that long, so they're unlikely to be introduced sooner.)

The Level Crossing Removal Authority assures us that the

network. Some extra post-PM-peak evening services are expected to start on the Dandenong line during August, which will be very welcome, but it's unclear when the government will make full use of the grade separated line to run more trains in peak.

These issues aside, the level crossing removals are welcome, with benefits including improving train reliability by reducing accidents, new stations with improved amenity for passengers, and of course cutting delays not just to motorists, but also for buses, cyclists and pedestrians.

Ballarat branch report

Members might remember that VicTrack revealed draft designs for the new bus interchange at Ballarat station earlier this year.

The proposed design did not seem adequate for the task at hand – namely, there weren't enough bays for all the bus routes that call at the station, and the removal of V/Line coaches from the scope of the project. The PTUA gave strong feedback to VicTrack on the proposed design, as did a number of other local groups such as Save Our Station Ballarat, but the updated design revealed recently does not differ much from the original. It has an extra pedestrian crossing, and more weather protection on the bus shelters, but is otherwise identical – so still has

the same fundamental flaws. Despite the need to receive approval from Heritage Victoria, this updated design is being billed by the government as the “final” design – and with work due to commence soon, it's unlikely the design will change substantially.

This outcome is disappointing but not surprising. The Ballarat Station Precinct has had the wrong focus since being taken over by Regional Development Victoria, with private development being given centre stage and the public transport improvements getting what's left over. With the limited land and funding available to them, VicTrack would not have been able to do much more than tweak the design.

One of the things local media have focused on most recently are the huge problems with V/Line over the last few months (see “V/Line woes” page 1). On the plus side, the Ballarat Line Upgrade project is making good process, with earthworks being visible at most of the project sites along the line. It's been good to see a lot of work being done safely while trains continue to run, with fences protecting workers from the trains going past. Although V/Line has a long list of troubles to work through, fixing infrastructure bottlenecks like this undoubtedly makes their lives easier, and they will no doubt be as keen to see the project completed as we are.

Sustainable Cities campaign - fighting road mania

With 5 months to make a difference before the state election, #GetOnBoardVic is building momentum.

We are up against the biggest money this state has ever seen going into roads. The Victorian Opposition leader Matthew Guy has released his \$30b roads package, with 2 of the 3 projects also backed by Labor.

This road mania will not get Melbourne moving. Building roads only gives drivers short relief before the roads fill with congestion again.

The community are taking action into their own hands. We have to

do what governments have failed to - disrupt the politics of transport policy in our city.

The last state budget saw over \$2 invested in roads for every \$1 spent on public transport. Despite growing demand, the short changing of our public transport means we won't be ready to keep Melbourne moving in the future. Mr Guy's plan will shift funding even more strongly in favour of mega roads, at the expense of public transport.

To truly tackle our congestion crisis, Melbourne needs 21st century planning and investment in efficient transport solutions.

This July we are supporting local actions across the city from Point Cook in the west, down south in Mordialloc, up in Heidelberg in the north east, and in the inner city.

If you want to get involved, sign on at www.getonboard.org.au

Follow our updates on Facebook facebook.com/WeSustainCities/ and Twitter [@WeSustainCities](https://twitter.com/WeSustainCities).

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