

‘Metro 3’ shows transport politics has turned a corner

The Andrews Government’s announcement that it is planning a massive orbital rail line through Melbourne’s middle suburbs took everyone by surprise. The orbital railway has apparently been under consideration within government agency Development Victoria, and is mooted to involve decades’ worth of construction and a price tag in the order of \$50 billion - far cheaper than the equivalent length of motorway, if the \$16 billion price tag for the North East Link is any guide.

The PTUA has dubbed this project ‘Metro 3’, for a number of reasons. First, its scale puts it on a par with the Metro 1 tunnel project now underway, and the proposed Metro 2 tunnel from Newport to Clifton Hill. Second, it places the proposal in the context of a *de facto* development plan for

Melbourne’s public transport infrastructure, where both Metro 1 and Metro 2, as key projects to boost connections between the fast-growing western suburbs and job-rich inner Melbourne, should still have overall priority.

While not detracting from the imperative to progress Metro 2, it is clear that the government’s new proposal has merit. The PTUA has long adopted a cautious approach to orbital public transport in Melbourne, recognising that the need is currently limited due to the predominantly radial focus of long-distance travel. While this approach makes sense for a medium-sized city, it is steadily being overtaken by Melbourne’s sheer growth, much of which is occurring in middle-suburban areas. If Melbourne is

not already in a position to compare itself with large cities such as London, Paris or Singapore, it almost certainly will be within Metro 3’s planning timeframe. These large cities, while retaining very strong core areas, also possess high-quality orbital public transport links.

Perhaps even more important, the Metro 3 announcement demonstrates that transport politics in Victoria has well and truly turned the corner, to where Premiers and Transport Ministers are prepared

to take seriously audacious, big-ticket rail projects, not just as once-in-a-generation initiatives like the 1970s City Loop, but in a rolling programme of works. We are finally seeing public transport take its deserved place on the political stage.



Source - State Government of Victoria.

Of course, this is still early days.

The Metro 3 project as yet carries no ‘business case’ or formal evaluation. Asking for one in the short term is difficult, given that Victoria’s official systems for project appraisal are severely compromised, riddled with question-begging assumptions, and require a thorough overhaul.

What is imperative for the State Government now is to produce the Transport Plan that its own legislation calls for. This should feature Metro 2 and Metro 3 as guiding priorities for transport infrastructure, embedded within a comprehensive multimodal network plan and a competent authority charged with its execution, and carefully targeted rail and road solutions for freight movement.

At least the outline of such a plan should feature in all parties’ platforms for November’s state election.

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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

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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

Notice of Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting of the PTUA will be held on Thursday 18th October at 6:30 pm. in the Hayden Raysmith Room, 4th floor, Ross House, 247 Flinders Lane, Melbourne.

Nominations for committee must be received in writing by the returning officer no later than 3rd October. The nomination form is available on our website at www.ptua.org.au/members/meetings, or contact the office for a paper copy. Nominations will only be accepted from the floor at the meeting if insufficient nominations are received to fill required positions.

A reminder that you must be a current financial member to attend and vote at the AGM, or to be nominated, or nominate someone for, the committee. You may renew your membership at the meeting if it is still current or no more than four months lapsed.

The guest speaker at the meeting will Rachel Lynskey from the Sustainable Cities campaign jointly funded by PTUA and Friends Of the Earth.

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Edited by Anna Morton.

Newsletter contributors - Daniel Bowen, Ben Lever, Tony Morton and Paul Westcott.

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What is Metro 2?

We've all heard of Metro 1 - the rail tunnel under construction to link the Sunbury line with the Dandenong line, via Parkville and Domain (to be known as Anzac station).

Metro 2 is the proposal for a second metro rail tunnel.

It would be a connection from the Mernda line, just north of Clifton Hill station, tunnelling under Fitzroy (probably with a station there), Parkville (with interchange to Metro 1), then Flagstaff, Southern Cross, and then out to stations around new development at Fishermans Bend, then under the river to Newport, to connect with the Werribee line.

So the Mernda line would be separated from the Hurstbridge line, boosting capacity on both (and allowing the Doncaster line to be built - though some argue that this can be done sooner, with high-capacity signalling).

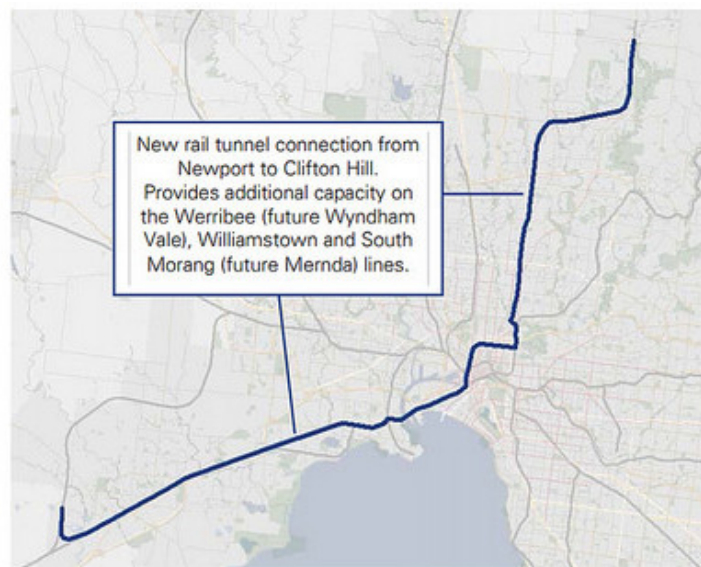
The Werribee line would be separated out from the Williamstown and Altona Loop (Laverton) lines.

This has a lot of merit. Although the Werribee line has been freed of the constraints of the Geelong line trains thanks to the Regional Rail Link project, it serves a massive growth area to Melbourne's south-west, and eventually the line will fill up again. Mernda is also seeing a lot of growth, and enabling high frequencies on the line might also make possible a branch to Epping North.

Alongside other rail projects it would improve connections, allowing far more trains to run.

Passengers on both lines would have a faster, more direct trip into the CBD, which if accompanied by quality local feeder services (buses) and infrastructure (bus and bike lanes, and pedestrian facilities) would better compete with car travel.

From Werribee the new direct route would make the train a better match for the Westgate Freeway. And not just for western suburbs to CBD commutes; it would also cater much better for trips to and



Melbourne Metro 2 - Source - Infrastructure Victoria.

from the Fishermans Bend area - currently completely noncompetitive by public transport.

If the line ran 15 trains per hour (up from about 7 in the busiest hour now), that's at least 8800 additional people, assuming the new design 7-car high capacity metro trains, well above what the

proposed 3-lane West Gate Tunnel could handle.

But that wouldn't be stretching the rail infrastructure. More can be squeezed out the current lines right now, and a new tunnel should be able to run at least 24 trains, but up to 30 or more using high capacity signalling, and if built for it, 10-car trains.

There is a strong case not to delay building such a project until after the Metro 1 tunnel is finished in 2025 - rather, start now with detailed planning, surveying, soil testing, property acquisition, all the work that Metro 1 went through ten years ago in preparation for the major works now underway.

Then preferably major works (including excavation) can start on Metro 2 as they finish on Metro 1 - which isn't the end of the first project, but some time early next decade. This would allow expertise and equipment to roll off one onto the next.

There's a cost to all this of course - well above \$10 billion, according to Infrastructure Victoria.

But ultimately, Melbourne has a choice: a big boost to rail infrastructure and services, getting thousands more people onto public transport, or continued construction of massive motorway projects, bringing thousands more cars onto the roads.

Cranbourne line: Extend vs duplicate? Why not both?

As we move towards the state election, the mainstream parties have each pledged upgrades to the Cranbourne line, but have differing views on the priority.

In July the Coalition promised that if elected they would extend the line five kilometres at a cost of \$487 million, with new stations at Cranbourne East and Clyde. They've said that road and rail would be grade-separated along the extension, including at Cranbourne (South Gippsland Highway). Construction would commence in 2019, to be completed by 2022.

In August the Labor government promised that if re-elected, they would complete the duplication of

the line from Dandenong to Cranbourne, with associated track upgrades around Caulfield and Dandenong at a cost of \$750 million, with completion by 2023.

Labor claims this is a prerequisite to extending the line to Clyde, so it can cope with the extra passengers, and they say they will do planning work for the extension. But it's unclear why the duplication plan is costed at 50% more than the extension.

The fact is, the south east needs both of these upgrades.

Single track continues to cause havoc with the busy Dandenong line, limiting service frequencies, and resulting in minor delays

quickly snowballing into larger ones.

Single track has no place on a modern metro rail system, let alone the busiest rail line in Melbourne.

But the extension is also vital, and shouldn't wait until well into next decade. The growing outer suburbs are crying out for better access to public transport, not years after travel patterns are established, but as new residents move in, before they fill their driveways with a car for every adult in their household.

Ultimately, voters will determine which plan gets priority. But to whichever side gains power in November, we say: do both.

Vale Shaun Ashdowne.

The PTUA committee were saddened to hear of the recent passing of Shaun Ashdowne after a long illness. Shaun was very involved in the development and maintenance of the PTUA website in its early years, and the artwork for It's Time to Move (a PTUA policy document). He was at the time partner of then PTUA secretary Vaughan Williams. We extend our condolences to Vaughan, and Shaun's husband, family and friends.

Since many election promises are still to be made, PTUA will be issuing an evaluation of party policies for the state election closer to polling day. Watch for updates via email, Facebook/Twitter and www.ptua.org.au

Geelong branch report

The two main concerns of the Geelong Branch as the state election approaches are the unacceptable situation on the Tarneit section of the Regional Rail Link (RRL), and the fact that the burgeoning suburban development in Armstrong Creek still has no internal public transport.

The recent announcement of an orbital ring rail scheme for Melbourne was attention-grabbing. However, that long-term project by no means obviates the need to fix existing problems with the rail system, of which the RRL is a prime example.

The RRL was originally marketed to Geelong residents as an "express route to Melbourne". However, there was never sufficient funding to build it fully, including four tracks between Sunshine and Wyndham Vale, so that was never going to be the case.

Only three years after opening, Wyndham Vale and Tarneit stations

are the busiest on the V/Line network. They are suburban stations, but can only be served by V/Line Geelong trains. The patronage generated adds to the existing pressure on Geelong trains during busy periods, as well as slowing the end-to-end journey for Geelong passengers.

New subdivisions seem to pop up along the Tarneit section almost monthly, and Wyndham Council wants the three other stations planned for the line to be provided as soon as possible. Geelong trains could not possibly accommodate the extra patronage generated by those new suburban stations.

We are advocating to politicians and in the media that the only viable solution is to complete the RRL as designed - four tracks to Wyndham Vale, two electrified to provide a true suburban service, with the other two providing the bypass for Geelong trains of the suburban rail network that was falsely promised back in 2008.

In the meantime, we are campaigning for both the government and opposition to take the lack of any internal bus transport in Armstrong Creek seriously. We know PTV has a long-standing plan for a bus network in the rapidly-growing development, and that it has submitted a request for funding to provide the first part of it.

The local Liberal Party state member hasn't displayed any real concern about the inevitable car dependence of Armstrong Creek residents, seemingly oblivious to the link to his campaign for major road expansion to cope with growing car traffic.

His Labor competitor for the November state election tells us that, when door-knocking in Armstrong Creek, the lack of buses in the development has been a common concern. We have told him about what is required to fill that gap, and about PTV's so-far unsuccessful attempt to get buses running in the area.

PSOs on trains - win for PTUA policy

The State Government in September announced a change in the arrangements for Protective Service Officers (PSOs) on the public transport system. Key to the new arrangements is flexibility for PSOs to travel on trains as well

as patrol stations to ensure passenger safety and security.

The PTUA has long pointed out that personal safety problems on public transport are not restricted to station platforms, and that targeting PSOs to where they can

protect passengers most effectively, including on trains, is a better strategy than restricting them to a one-size-fits-all role on stations (including many that have never reported a violent incident and are unlikely to do so).

Mernda line opens

Thanks in part to marginal seats, but mostly to a concerted community campaign, the Mernda rail extension opened in August. A community day the week before the line opened attracted thousands of visitors to the three new stations: Mernda, Hawkstowe and Middle Gorge.

While there are misgivings about name of the latter, already the new stations are proving popular with passengers.

Local bus routes were also re-organised around the rail extension, and will hopefully give many residents an alternative to driving to the station - as we know from experience, car parks are never enough to satisfy demand.

Mernda station is currently next to an empty paddock, but a planned town centre will be developed there soon. In the meantime, we encourage train users to watch out for dragons at Middle Gorge!



PTUA spokesperson Daniel Bowen at Middle Gorge station.

Connecting to trains in Frankston, for less than \$30 million

Public transport advocates in Australia are perpetually challenged to justify generous service provision in economic terms, given it requires a substantial public subsidy.

Yet the call for justification is oddly selective. Aside from the enduring double standard vis-a-vis road projects, scrutiny of benefit versus cost tends to evaporate when car parking at stations is considered. Take the promise by the State Opposition to provide an extra 450 car parks at Frankston station, at a cost of \$30 million for a multi-storey parking structure

Simple division places the cost at over \$66,000 per individual space - and while this is comparable to the cost per space at other multi-storey parking facilities already built at stations such as Glen Waverley and Syndal, it clearly raises the question of value for money. In purely nominal terms, \$66,000 pays for almost 40 years' worth of Zone 1/2 Myki fares.

Not to be outdone, the Andrews government has responded with a massive \$150 million programme to provide 11,000 station car park spaces. This averages just 8 years' worth of Myki fares per space, but raises the same question.

There is no question Frankston and other stations have big car parking problems, but just as with trying to 'bust' traffic congestion by building more roads, it is not at all clear that more parking is the solution - particularly since natural growth by itself will fill the additional 450 spaces in the time taken just to build the facility. Other methods that should be considered to provide convenient access to the station include expanding feeder bus services and improving bicycle facilities - both of which have much greater potential to scale up to meet demand, and can continue to function all day, not just for peak-period early birds.

The argument for feeder buses is

often clouded by the idea that a car park represents 'infrastructure' - a fixed asset - whereas a bus service is merely recurrent expenditure with little 'capital' value. But in reality, even fixed assets have a limited life span, and the government itself has accounting rules that allow the two to be directly compared. Both a car park and a feeder bus provide a valuable outcome for the public, after all.

Using a basic 'future value' calculation of the sort the Victorian Treasury would do, a car park with an upfront capital cost of \$30 million and a notional life span of 50 years is equivalent to a 'real future cash flow' of about \$2 million per year. (Technically, this is based on a 'real discount rate' of 7% p.a. for future expenditure.) This annual sum, applied to boosting the frequencies of existing bus services to Frankston, could deliver substantially more than 450 additional passengers to the station, in car-free comfort, all day long.

Ballarat branch report

In the last few months, Ballarat has been the epicentre of the state's bus strikes; CDC operates about half the routes in Geelong and a handful of routes in Melbourne, but all the routes in Ballarat.

When CDC drivers went on strike, Ballarat was entirely without a bus network for a day or half-day, which had a serious impact on many. Poor communication was a serious issue throughout the strike – in several cases, people did not realise a strike was happening at all, so were left waiting for a bus that wasn't coming. In other cases, the official information said that the strike would be from 2pm-6pm, but this was the time buses would be at the depot protesting; services could be affected for up to an hour either side of this, so anyone who thought they'd be able to catch a bus around 1:45pm or 6:15pm would be similarly stranded.

Eventually, as Transdev's drivers threatened to join strike action and impact a larger area of Melbourne, a last-minute deal was struck and the issue now seems to be resolved. This strike action is the first of its kind for many years, and it has highlighted just how important buses are to the public transport network at large, and Ballarat in particular – and how important it is for PTV and operators to be crystal clear when communicating planned disruptions to passengers.

There has been a noticeable improvement in mobile coverage

along the Ballarat line in the last few months, as more mobile towers have been built and more VLocity trains have been fitted with the signal-boosting repeaters. It's taken a lot longer than first planned, but the government has recently announced that the entire VLocity fleet has been converted. Several towers have already gone up, and while some are still being built, the difference is already noticeable – data connectivity seems constant for the whole journey between Ballarat and Melbourne. Despite the delays, this is a huge win for passengers on regional lines, with commuters being able to work, study or talk with friends and family much more easily. There will also be benefits for passengers on the Ararat and Maryborough long-distance lines; despite not getting extra mobile towers, the signal repeaters will still boost their signals, giving them significantly more coverage than before.

There has also been good progress with the Ballarat Line Upgrade project. Sleepers and tracks are starting to be laid in the Caroline Springs-Melton section, and the spans have been installed for a second bridge over Toolern Creek. New stabling facilities at Maddingley are well under way, and early works have commenced on the Ballan and Millbrook loops. At this stage it looks like the project is on track for its completion date in late 2019, and it's possible the Caroline Springs-Melton section could see trains running even earlier than that.

The PTUA's Ballarat branch will soon be launching its *Connecting Ballarat* paper to the media and general public. The paper proposes to reform route maps by connecting routes on opposite sides of town together, so they can take a straighter and more sensible path through the CBD, as well as making some tweaks to routes out in the suburbs. When the Ballarat Line Upgrade project is completed in late 2019, the line will shift from a 60-minute frequency to a 40-minute frequency – this upgrade is very welcome but will mean the 30-and 60-minute buses will struggle to align with trains. This presents an opportunity to upgrade bus frequencies to maintain those connections and to provide a more attractive and usable service for people getting around Ballarat. The paper also pushes for excessively-padded timetables to be tightened up for a faster service, and for buses to run earlier in the morning and later in the evening. The PTUA will be lobbying local candidates, council and other bodies to support this proposal in the lead-up to the 2018 election. The *Connecting Ballarat* paper will be launching in the next few weeks, so keep an eye on our social media channels for the details.

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