

Setting the transport agenda for a second-term Andrews Government

As reported in our last issue, November's state election was a vindication for the government's forthright approach to infrastructure renewal and expansion, particularly in the public transport sphere. Victorians have once again demonstrated their appetite for robust action on public transport, after so many decades of official inertia and dismissiveness.

That said, the Andrews Government is anything but off the hook when it comes to ruinous road projects. The West Gate Tunnel, advanced as a solution for removing trucks from residential streets, appears set merely to shift them from one suburb's backyard to another, while also generating thousands more car trips into the inner city that would be better accommodated on public transport. The North East Link is a \$16 billion money pit that destroys local amenity for similarly dubious reasons.

While great progress has been made on rail infrastructure in Andrews' first term, trams and buses continue to fall behind.

Aside from a much-needed catch-up effort to procure more E-class trams, there have been no substantive tram or bus network initiatives in the past five years, nor do there appear to be any on the horizon. Yet overcrowding has become a sizeable drag on tram operations, and buses are still failing, caught in the very traffic they should be helping to displace.

Across the system, action is overdue on boosting service levels to ensure major new infrastructure is put to proper use. A key initiative to the credit of the Baillieu/Napthine Coalition Government was the introduction of Melbourne's first 10-minute all-day train services, on the Frankston and Dandenong lines

and on the Ringwood line on weekends. Despite the substantial return on a very modest investment, there have been no additions to this list since 2014. In addition, while politicians of all stripes have been keen to spend up big on railway station car parks (the latest proposals costing \$45,000 for each car space!) there is an ongoing reluctance to invest in frequent feeder bus networks to provide the crucial everyday linkages between homes, shops and stations. Instead this has been left to local councils willing and able to dedicate scarce funds to running their own service, as in Middle Brighton. While these councils are to be commended it should not be left to cash-strapped municipalities to fund vital services.



Time to improve bus services.

The PTUA Committee at its annual planning retreat in January mapped out a new strategic plan for the Association over the next five years. The plan aims both to strengthen the PTUA as a grassroots social change organisation and to build winning campaigns to improve our transport system. Our

joint Sustainable Cities campaign with Friends of the Earth

will continue, as a valuable partnership that combines PTUA's depth of knowledge and historical legacy with FoE's community organising capabilities. We will also build a particular focus on bus network reform in the coming year, to drive further action on this strategically vital but neglected transport mode.

When the next state election comes around in 2022, we aim to see both major parties embracing action on frequent, multimodal public transport, running on 21st-century infrastructure, as a genuine competitive alternative to car travel.

PTUA office

Ross House,
247 Flinders Lane, Melbourne
e-mail: office@ptua.org.au

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
David Robertson – Secretary
Phil Bourke – Treasurer

Michael Bell
Daniel Bowen
Tom Killip
Tim Long
Stuart McKenzie
Anna Morton
Stuart James

Bruce Sutherland
Jennifer Williams

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:
Meetings will be held regularly - watch the newsletter and website for details.

**Watch the
website for
details of our
first members'
meeting for
2019 - coming
soon.**

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Edited by Anna Morton.

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

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Infrastructure Australia's latest 'Priority List' raises too many questions

Federal advisory agency Infrastructure Australia (IA) released its latest 'Infrastructure Priority List' on 15 February. In most respects, little has changed since the 'priority list' framework was launched in 2016, replacing the earlier more rigorous four-stage assessment process. But recent changes are worthy of comment, including for what they reveal about the underlying process or lack thereof.

The IA list is separated into 'Projects' and 'Initiatives', depending whether they have a confirmed business case. So 'Projects' are similar to 'Threshold' (stage 3) projects under the earlier four-stage process, while 'Initiatives' are early stage ideas. But IA also classifies both Projects and Initiatives as 'High Priority' or 'Priority', on what can appear to outsiders to be quite vague criteria. At the bottom of the list are the 'Priority Initiatives', and this is where one finds all the suburban rail upgrades the media has highlighted as new in 2019.

Only one Victorian public transport project has received a 'High Priority' classification: the so-called Melbourne Rail Network Capacity project. It refers generally to rail capacity improvements in central Melbourne, such as high-capacity signalling improvements, but also potentially includes the Melbourne Metro 2 rail tunnel from Newport to Collingwood via Fishermans Bend and Parkville. It

complements the Metro 1 tunnel already under construction, and the PTUA has strongly supported this as a circuit-breaker for the western and northern suburbs' traffic problems, that only get worse with each new addition to the road network.

This is however one of just six (previously four) 'High Priority' projects or initiatives for Victoria, and the other five are all urban motorways. The two new inclusions are the North East Link

Monash upgrade has miraculously emerged as a 'High Priority Project' despite not even figuring in the 2018 priority list at all. This should raise questions about the integrity of IA's classification process, alongside the heavy weighting toward motorway projects more generally.

IA in its pre-Tony Abbott incarnation took a much more sceptical view of motorway projects, emphasising that road-building has never succeeded in relieving congestion. The tension between this evidence-based perspective and the more lobbyist-friendly, post-2013 approach was revealed spectacularly with the report "Spend more, waste more" released briefly by IA as a 'consultation draft' in 2014 before disappearing into the government's memory hole. Judging by its pronouncements since, IA appears to be regressing to the pre-2005 Roads of National Importance model, geared more toward 'solutionism' and appeasement of political lobbies than to independent expert appraisal.

Both IA and its local counterpart Infrastructure Victoria remain fond of the ostensibly reassuring line "you can't build your way out of congestion". Meanwhile, governments continue being advised to build their way out of congestion. It is less an authentic sentiment than a cynical tool to deflect criticism.



INDUSTRY CONSULTATION DRAFT



Spend more, waste more. - the short lived IA take on road funding.

and the Monash Freeway upgrade, announced as budget commitments by the Andrews State Government last year.

The North East Link appeared only as a lower-ranked 'Priority Initiative' in 2018, while the

Australia's "road deficit": up from \$16 billion to \$24 billion in a decade

The road lobby has long been fond of arguing that governments spend less on roads than they raise in fuel tax and registration fees, and the idea has readily been taken up by populist politicians and commentators. But it's a fairy tale, and has only become more and more inaccurate with the passage of time.

The full story is featured on our website as one of our 'Common Urban Myths about Transport' (ptua.org.au/myths). With the current media attention on 'tax expenditures' on such things as negative gearing and dividend imputation, we decided it was time to refresh the figures once again.

The concept of the 'road deficit' originated with author Andrew Laird in his book *Rail Back on Track*. It's simply the difference between the annual public expenditure on roads and road transport and the annual revenue collected from motorists. Expenditure has always exceeded revenue - substantially so - mainly because all three levels of government spend large sums on roads, but only the Federal government collects fuel tax.

Even if one limits consideration to purely 'financial' costs, leaving aside economic externalities such as climate change that the public pays for indirectly, the shortfall remains.

In the mid-2000s when we first did the calculation, the road deficit hovered around \$15-16 billion. Since then, expenditure

Annual costs of motor vehicle use in Australia	
Item	\$million
<i>'Financial' costs</i>	
Road construction and maintenance	26,200
Road trauma and damage	16,500
Tax concessions for car use	7,500
State fuel subsidies	0
<i>'Economic' costs (externalities)</i>	
Land use cost	10,000
Noise	1,000
Urban air pollution	4,300
Climate change	3,100
Total	68,600
Annual revenue collected from Australian motorists	
Item	\$million
Petrol and diesel excise (net of rebates)	11,600
GST on fuel and vehicles	4,000
Vehicle registration fees	7,000
Insurance premiums	15,600
Tolls	2,700
Other revenue	3,900
Total	44,800
Road deficit	23,800

Australia's "road deficit": up from \$16 billion to \$24 billion in a decade

Continued from p4

on roads has increased massively but revenue has barely grown with inflation. (Fuel tax rates were famously frozen by the Howard Government in 2001 and only unfrozen in 2014.) As a result, the road deficit has also grown, now sitting at nearly \$24 billion.

One figure we might single out here is that for tax concessions on

car use. This is the revenue forgone due to the tax deductibility of motor vehicle expenses, and to measures such as Fringe Benefits Tax discounts for salary-packaged cars. Many of these concessions are unavailable to public transport users, and where they are, involve vastly smaller amounts. At \$7.5 billion annually, this 'tax expenditure' cancels out two-thirds of the revenue raised by fuel tax!

Public transport is often criticised as being dependent on government subsidy. Yet, the vast sums of public money propping up the road transport system show it to be equally or more dependent on public largesse.

For more details, see ptua.org.au/myths/petroltax

Geelong branch report

In December, our convener attended the final (stakeholders only) consultation meeting regarding the much-delayed Transport Network Operating Plan (TNOP) for central Geelong. The TNOP essentially determines where buses will run in central Geelong.

A few PTUA members bravely formed a picket outside the meeting room. That displeased a couple of the attendees, but didn't faze the Transport for Victoria (TfV) staff, and bus company representatives even expressed their approval.

If the meeting was any indication, it seems that the opposition to running buses along, and stopping in, Moorabool Street, may have dissipated at last. Attendees from the Geelong Authority and the Central Geelong Revitalisation Project, both of which have been sources of opposition, were largely silent on the matter.

We will know more about their actual position when TfV releases

the TNOP sometime early this year. We fully expect the report to maintain the consultants' finding that Moorabool St is by far the most appropriate route for buses through central Geelong.

We still have no information about which route the government's promised bus service in Armstrong Creek will take. Hundreds of houses have already been built in the various emerging suburbs making the Armstrong Creek development.

As mandated, developers have installed some bus stops, but they are only used by school buses. In the meantime, car dependence is being locked in, reinforced by the relative remoteness and scattered nature of the development.

Almost a decade ago, our branch managed to get the duplication of the rail line from South Geelong to Wairn Ponds on the agenda of local councils and related lobby groups. It finally achieved bipartisan political support a couple of years ago.

Four months ago, the state government called for expressions of interest from potential contractors. Although nothing further has been heard, a continuing spat between the local federal and state politicians over the financing of the project contributed some background noise during the state election.

In his other capacity as PTUA regional representative, our convener has been in regular contact with Max Semken, a PTUA member in Leongatha. Max has been campaigning about the neglect by VicTrack of Leongatha station, which is still used as a V/Line bus stop.

His efforts twice made the front page of the local paper at the end of last year, and has gained the support of the South Gippsland Shire Council. The PTUA can only ever be as strong as the support of our members and supporters, so we thank and commend Max for his efforts.

A splash of colour at Flinders Street

A splash of colour has arrived at Flinders Street Station.

Passenger Information Displays (known as PIDs for short in the public transport industry) have been revamped, and are now colour coded by line:

- Sandringham - pink
- Frankston/Werribee/Williamstown - green
- Cranbourne/Pakenham - light blue
- Lilydale/Belgrave/Alamein/Glen Waverley - dark blue
- Mernda/Hurstbridge - red
- Upfield/Craigieburn/Sunbury - yellow
- V/Line - purple

These colours match those introduced with the new rail map published in 2017.

Progress is very slow, but we understand the line colours are likely to be adopted elsewhere around the network, not just on PIDs but also on other signage, particularly at interchange stations.

These measures can make the rail network more usable, though what is also needed are timetable and operational reforms to improve

consistency. For instance, while most Frankston trains run through to Southern Cross and the Werribee or Williamstown lines on weekdays, peak hours and weekends have quite different patterns.

Consistent, simple running patterns, accompanied by clear maps and signage and screens are vital to ensure people, including occasional users, can easily find their way around the public transport network.



Ballarat branch report

The Ballarat Line Upgrade (BLU) project has been proceeding quickly, with coaches replacing trains for several line shutdowns – and a lot of work happening while the line is still running as well.

Much of the Caroline Springs-Melton section is rapidly nearing completion, with a lot of new track laid. The revamped Rockbank station is starting to take shape; the new Toolern station has the beginnings of platforms, but still seems to have a long way to go.

The new stabling facilities at Bacchus Marsh seem to be quite close to completion, with some early works taking place at

Bacchus Marsh station itself. Ballan station is further along, with platforms taking shape and footbridge pylons in place – and substantial earthworks for duplications either side of the station. All-in-all, the project seems to be making excellent progress, and should hopefully be completed by the end of 2019 as planned.

The Ballarat Station Precinct Redevelopment has progressed a lot further over the summer months, though it is still behind schedule. The carpark and access roads are now essentially finished – and will probably be open to the public by the time you read this. The bus interchange was supposed

to have been completed by the end of 2018, but at the time of writing, has not even really commenced. Recent media comments from the government indicate that it will commence in February, though a new completion date has not been specified.

The government has previously tied the completion of the new bus interchange to the timing of a review of Ballarat's bus network – and given that bus timetables will need to change when train timetables do upon completion of the BLU project, we will be working hard to ensure that a comprehensive review process starts soon.

PTV web site updated - and Mobile Myki trial widens

PTV's IT boffins were busy in January, launching a new web site and a public trial of Mobile Myki.

The new web site is the first major revamp in a decade, and has introduced improved journey planning, and a design that works better on mobile devices, which PTV tell us accounts for a large percentage of their web site users.

Overall the design looks more modern, and does bring some welcome improvements. However there are problems with it, including the loss of many of the maps (including local council area maps), and the introduction of timetable pages which are even clunkier than the old ones - which is quite an achievement.

The page listing real-time network disruptions now bears little resemblance to the colour network status screens around the rail system, which also seems like a step backwards.

PTV to their credit are happy to take feedback, and admit freely that there will be changes. We encourage members to send in their feedback to PTV so the web site will continue to see improvements.

Clear accurate information online, via the web site, apps or social media, helps users as they navigate their way around the network.

Meanwhile the Mobile Myki trial, which started last year, has expanded to up to 4000 participants from around the state.

Mobile Myki works as a 'virtual Myki card' within the Google Pay app on Android phones. Once set up, it works like a real card, except the user touches their phone to readers to travel. Response times seem similar to Myki cards.

Top-ups (Myki Money or Myki Pass) can be done from a linked credit card on the phone, but unlike when using the web site, they are instant instead of taking up to 90 minutes.

The system has an Auto Load feature (similar to Myki's Auto Top-up, but separate) which automatically adds Myki Money when the balance falls below a threshold.

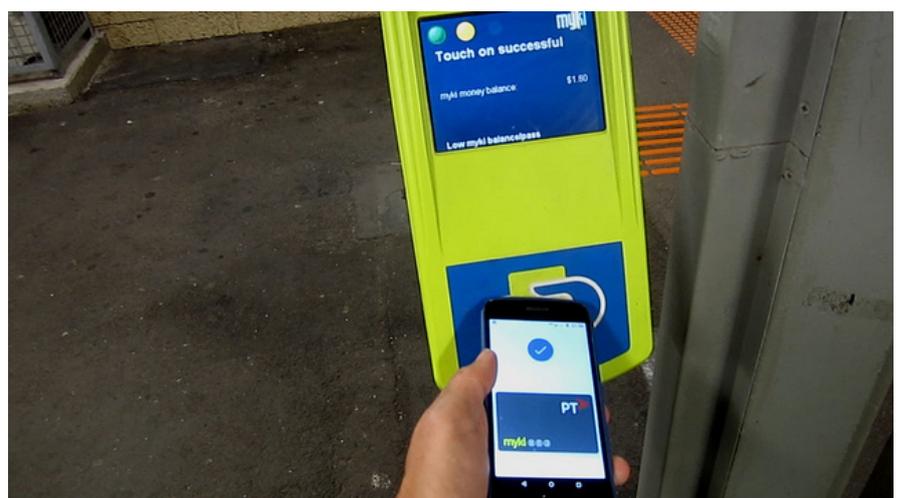
Fares charged are identical to those used on Myki cards, however the

system is separate to any existing cards the user might have.

Importantly, Myki Mobile is just an option, designed to sit alongside conventional Myki cards.

For now it is only available on Android phones that are equipped with NFC ('Near-field communication', the technology used for 'touch' transactions). We understand there are some practical barriers to getting it working on iPhones, which is a shame - hopefully this will be overcome.

Overall it's good to see additional options for fare payments. The trial will conclude in March - presumably if successful there will be a wider rollout later this year.



Touching on with a mobile phone.

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