

Paul Mees Award recognises freeway fight

The 2019 Annual General Meeting of the Association took place at Ross House on 14 November, before about 50 members of the PTUA.

At every AGM the Association presents the Paul Mees Award—dedicated to the memory of former PTUA President and prominent Melbourne academic the late Dr Paul Mees OAM—to recognise outstanding commitment to sustainable transport activism or journalism. This year’s recipients were the Residents Against the Mordialloc Freeway (RAMF), a coalition of local community and environment groups in Dingley, Braeside, Mordialloc and Aspendale Gardens who for several years have fought Andrews Government plans to drive the so-called Mordialloc Bypass through sensitive wetlands.



Winners of the Paul Mees Award with PTUA President Tony Morton (right) at the AGM

As past issues of PTUA News have reported, the end result from construction of the Mordialloc Freeway would be that only a few traffic lights stand between a continuous motorway from the Mornington Peninsula to the end of South Road in East Bentleigh - and those traffic lights would soon enough yield to ‘improvement’. It is a long-standing road lobby objective, but one that only shifts traffic bottlenecks closer to the city and threatens to bury the region in further induced traffic. With the exception of the 902 Smartbus and recent improvements to Frankston line

train frequencies, little has been done to remedy the decades-old neglect of public transport in the City of Kingston.

RAMF representatives including current President Michael Poulakakis and former President Scott Fothergill were present to receive the award.

Our guest speaker at the AGM was James Pinder, chief executive of V/Line. James spoke frankly about the challenges facing the regional rail and coach operator and how V/Line plans to improve from some well-publicised shortcomings in the recent past that have let passengers down (most notoriously the wheel-wear issue that took trains off the tracks for weeks at a time). James gave generously of his time to answer a series of questions from PTUA members.

It is with pleasure the Association was able to announce a full complement of Committee nominations for 2020. Our current office bearers will continue in their positions, as will our regional branch convenors Paul Westcott in Geelong and Ben Lever in Ballarat. We welcome onto the Committee new members Jessica Broadbent and Declan Martin, and recognise the contributions of departing member Bruce Sutherland.

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
David Robertson – Secretary
Phil Bourke – Treasurer

Michael Bell
Daniel Bowen
Jessica Broadbent
Stuart James
Tom Killip
Tim Long
Stuart McKenzie
Declan Martin
Anna Morton
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.

*We wish all our
members a
happy festive
season and New
Year.*

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Edited by Anna Morton.

Newsletter contributors - Michael Bell, Daniel Bowen, Claudia Gallois, Ben Lever, Tony Morton and Paul Westcott.

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Route 58: a yardstick for growing cracks in our tram network

The entire length of William Street in the city was recently out of action for two weeks, as Yarra Trams replaced tracks and built two new superstops at Bourke Street and LaTrobe Street. This will for the first time provide accessible tram stops on tram route 58 from Toorak to West Coburg, in parallel with the rollout of additional low-floor trams on this route.

We may hope that the works provide an opportunity to make further operational improvements to a line that over the past few years has gained a reputation as the 'ugly duckling' of the tram system. Patronage on the line has ballooned without any corresponding increase in service frequency, such that the relatively reliable running times of a decade ago have given way to chronic delays, overcrowding and bunching of trams. And since a route review by Yarra Trams several years ago, the line has also inherited the problems of the Toorak Road run, which have been the stuff of angry news headlines for 30 years or more.

The line also suffers as a result of the great popularity of evening events at Queen Victoria Market, where it is now typical for those making the short trip from the city to Peel Street to crowd out peak-hour commuters going home from work. The proper response to this kind of situation is not to hand-wring about 'overuse' of public transport, but to actually factor special event demands into a

continuously updated service plan - and ensure that Victoria is buying enough new trams to actually handle the passenger load.

(Importantly, while the Free Tram Zone is of dubious policy merit, this isn't an instance where one should immediately blame the FTZ. Leaving aside a few tourists and CBD residents, as long as patrons of QVM events have used public transport to get into the city,



Works in William Street

they will hold all-day Myki fares and be entitled to free travel regardless of the FTZ. If it turned out many such patrons were driving in and parking at the edge of the CBD, then the FTZ could be held responsible.)

Of course, all the problems that beset route 58 are also seen elsewhere on the tram network: route 58 just manages to concentrate all of them on one line. With every passing year, the entire tram network suffers more and more from the government's lack of action: on growing the tram fleet on the one hand, and on providing adequate traffic priority on the other.

For a few years under the previous Napthine Government, there were no new trams bought for the system at all. More recently, the government has been ordering 10 new E class trams a year, which is the bare minimum required to maintain fleet capacity given the retirement of older Z class trams and the ongoing need to renew the fleet overall with low-floor rolling stock. But the rise in patronage, driven by a combination of population growth and a generational shift in transport habits, means that the minimum does not suffice. The government should be doubling the annual order from 10 to 20 E class trams, at least.

Likewise, even a larger tram fleet will continue to be hamstrung if trams spend 20 to 30 per cent of their running time waiting for red lights to turn green, as at present. Vicroads and Yarra Trams have carried out trials of

signal priority for trams within the road network, yet no permanent action has eventuated. Without any such action, Victorians will not only continue to be needlessly delayed getting from A to B, but will not even be getting a proper return on the investment in tram infrastructure.

The route 58 works might be taken as a sign of visible progress, if backed up with a sense that government was acting on the key underlying issues of fleet size and traffic priority. Such action is now decades overdue.

Premier Andrews - Give us a new Transport Plan!

On 27 November, community members took to the steps of Parliament House to mark the 50th anniversary of Melbourne's first (and last) integrated transport plan and demand a plan for the next fifty years.

This year marks 50 years since the 1969 *Melbourne Transportation Plan* which envisioned a car-reliant city. The plan allocated 86 percent of its budget towards roads with only 14 percent for public transport.

Community members are calling on Premier Dan Andrews to commit to a new transport plan that integrates train, tram and bus services and prioritises public and active transport over car use.

Melbourne is still being shaped by that plan today, with proposed road projects such as the North East Link stemming from outdated 1969 blueprints.

Mayor of Yarra Council Danae Bosler, said "Whether people need to get to hospitals, to schools, or to work, we need an integrated transport plan."

"We know there's only one solution for the traffic crisis that

we have here, and that's public transport."

Public Transport Users Association (PTUA) spokesperson Daniel Bowen said, "All of Melbourne desperately needs a public transport alternative, that we can rely on, that is fast and frequent and that provides a solid alternative to jumping in the car."

will lock Melbourne into a car-dominated future."

"The Victorian government must prioritise mass public transport that gets polluting cars off roads to meet its legislated commitment to zero emissions."

"Will Premier Dan Andrews take the lead on bringing Melbourne's transport into the 21st Century?"



Community members and campaigners calling for a new Transport Plan.

"We need a government transport plan that concentrates on mass transit, not continuing to build roads," added Bowen.

Friends of the Earth's Sustainable Cities Coordinator Claudia Gallois said, "Integral infrastructure such as Melbourne Metro 2 and Doncaster Rail must be prioritised over major road projects which

Transport is the second largest and fastest growing emitter of carbon emissions.

Sustainable Cities and the community have a vision for a *new plan*, one that's future-focussed, better-connected, with public transport run on clean, renewable energy.

Suburban Rail Loop to be standalone

The State Government has announced that the Suburban Rail Loop will be an independent, standalone rail line.

The technology on the current suburban rail network is largely tied to technology chosen when it was electrified in the 1910s and 1920s, including the use of 1500 volt DC power, which necessitates a lot of substations.

Building the SRL as a separate line means freedom from those constraints, with the potential for initially short trains to be extended as demand grows, with better acceleration and steeper gradients in the tunnels than might be possible with the current network. Platform Screen Doors are also

possible, which would improve safety.

The decision does raise questions about how the Airport will be served, and whether Airport to City express trains will share the tracks with the SRL. We suspect not - but a final answer on this is likely to be years away given the initial stage of SRL will only run from Cheltenham to Box Hill.

Equally unclear is whether the line could potentially run with driverless trains, similar to the new Sydney Metro line, using technology also seen in cities such as Singapore, London, Paris and Vancouver.

There is a strong argument for the addition of a few intermediate

stations along the route, for better spacing to allow easier access to the line, and to provide opportunities for development to offset the cost.

In any case, the key for the new line is good interchanges to other public transport modes, and high frequency services at all times - not just on the SRL but across the rail network - as well as good quality feeder bus services to make accessing and using the line easy.

Construction is expected to start in 2022, in time for the November election.

Time for Tram Cams

Among Australia's road rules is one that applies when trams share the road with other vehicles, requiring drivers to stop when trams stop to allow passengers to board and alight safely. It's a rule that is often broken, with potentially fatal results. Last month, a passenger was struck by a car in Parkville, "with witnesses claiming the driver failed to stop when passengers were getting off a tram".

It's not a new problem. In 2015, Herald Sun reported "between 2011 and 2014 there were at least 951 incidents across Melbourne when a motorist failed to give way to tram passengers."

Going back further, in 2011, Yarra Trams reported 234 occurrences of drivers passing trams illegally, and more than 108 in 2012. At the time, PTUA President Tony Morton called for a fix, demanding cameras be installed on trams to catch motorists who endanger pedestrians.

The idea is not new. A TramCam trial undertaken in 2005 estimated that the number of cars illegally passing trams is being grossly under-reported, and the true figure may be closer to 50,000 cars a month. TramCams did not proceed past the trial stage.

A more recent effort to introduce TramCams was undertaken in 2013, with two new E-Class trams

involved in a trial. Once again, the trial ended without a rollout plan.

Other jurisdictions are following a similar path. Traffic cameras will soon be introduced on streetcars in Toronto, Canada, with legislative changes to support the cameras being prepared this year.

The PTUA now says enough is enough: tram passenger safety must be given the highest priority. Tram-mounted camera technology exists, and the PTUA is calling on the Minister for Public Transport, Department of Transport, and Yarra Trams to implement TramCams to enforce the road rules.

“Big Build” continues into 2020

Rail disruptions continue through summer, with construction on the Metro tunnel and level crossing removals set to disrupt numerous lines in coming months.

The inner sections of the busy Cranbourne/Pakenham and Frankston lines will be shut for most of January, also affecting V/Line Gippsland services.

Shorter weekday shutdowns have already occurred during November and December, including the Mernda and Ballarat lines, William Street for tram works, which caused widespread disruption on numerous tram and bus routes in the CBD, and evening and weekend bus replacements are a regular occurrence right across the public transport network.

Public transport infrastructure upgrades are vital, but it's also imperative for authorities to ensure that

adequate resources are put into bus replacements, and accurate and timely information is provided to people - we've seen issues with inaccurate, incomplete and even contradictory details for such basic information such as the location replacement bus stops.

It's also been revealed that the levels of staffing can vary for rail replacements, depending on whether they're caused by infrastructure project works or Metro maintenance works, with Metro tweeting in response to an enquiry from a passenger (who is also an Age reporter) that:

Project works teams such as @levelcrossings do deploy additional staff to assist and provide information in regard to those works but for normal planned maintenance work, we normally don't deploy additional staff to intermediate stations or bus stops.

Consistent information and staff assistance should be provided for any planned disruption, no matter whose project has initiated it. More advance warning of planned disruptions would also be helpful, particularly those affecting week-day commute times, allowing for some passengers to plan leave from work for part or all of the closure.

Major works have been planned out to at least October 2020 (the Upfield line's 3 month closure for level crossing removals is planned to run from August to October) but the government seems reluctant to flag these in public, apart from works on the Gippsland line, where apparently enough complaints have been received to justify it. Queensland Rail, Transport for NSW, and Transperth all have online calendars noting scheduled closures well into next year. It's high time this practice was adopted in Victoria.

Ballarat branch report

The Ballarat line has been in a multi-week shutdown for a major upgrade blitz, with construction expected be completed soon.

The new Cobblebank Station between Melton and Rockbank is opening, taking pressure off Melton station and preparing for passenger growth as new families move into nearby estates. As promised, it will be served solely by short-run services from Melton and Bacchus Marsh during peak hours, with peak Ballarat trains running express, however interpeak and evening Ballarat services will all stop at Cobblebank in the December timetable.

The new timetable is basically the same as the old one, in that the new

20 minute peak/40 minute off-peak services have not yet been implemented, however many Ballarat trains have been tweaked to add a minute or two to the journey time, even accounting for the extra time to stop at Cobblebank. It is hoped that this mostly reflects speed restrictions on new track, as well as the usual conflicts with Geelong trains on the shared sections; the Ballarat line should be getting its full timetable refresh with higher frequencies in January, so hopefully by then the speed restrictions can be removed, conflicts with Geelong trains avoided, and faster travel times resumed.

At their recent State Conference in Ballarat, the Liberal party passed a motion to call upon the Federal

Liberal Party to “commit to fund and liaise with the State Government to construct Fast Rail to Ballarat within the current term of government”, including quadruplication and electrification between Sunshine and Melton. This echoes the State Coalition's policy for faster rail at the 2018 election, and as then it's not entirely clear how the timeline they propose would be feasible; procuring a whole new fleet and building substantial amounts of infrastructure take time. Nonetheless, it is heartening to see the State Liberal party recognising how important regional rail is, and how infrastructure in Melbourne's west has huge impacts further down the line.

Ballarat branch report (continued)

The PTUA's position is clear – the highest priority for the Ballarat line is to electrify the line to Melton, bring the western suburbs onto the Metro network, and provide express tracks for V/Line trains from Sunshine to Melton – or at the very least, to Deer Park Junction. As the electrified Melton line would need to plug into the Melbourne Metro 1 tunnel, it should be built concurrently to MM1, and open at the

same time (2025). This means construction will need to start within the current term of government, but not necessarily finish until the next term.

Progressive duplication of the Ballarat line is the key to increasing reliability and capacity – running more trains, more often, more reliably. A project that increased train speeds, but left huge swathes of the line single-track, would be a bad

outcome – on the other hand, seriously increasing speeds would require a lot of trackwork, so further duplications could be done at the same time.

While the proposed timelines may raise some eyebrows, it is clear that the Federal government needs to start diverting funding to worthwhile rail projects as a matter of urgency. Hopefully this motion will help that happen.

Geelong branch report

As mentioned in too many Geelong Branch reports, we've been waiting about three years for the Transport Network Operating Plan (TNOP) for central Geelong to be finalised. During that time we have faced the constant need to battle influential forces wanting bus routes removed from Moorabool St.

Consultants were engaged by the Department of Transport, at considerable expense, to look at how, or even if, buses should run through the city. Consultation meetings were held, one of which was picketed by PTUA members.

At the end of 2017, the consultants reached the well-researched conclusion that all buses should continue to run to Geelong station via Moorabool Street. Frustratingly, the state government's Geelong Authority, and elements in Geelong Council, insisted that recommendation be reconsidered. Months later, the consultants' recommendation remained basically unchanged.

Finally we read in the media in October that Geelong Council had voted to release a draft TNOP for

public comment. The council website was eagerly searched, and we were bemused to read the following disclaimer: "As a Department of Transport responsibility, bus routes do not form part of the council's public feedback opportunity and the draft plan does not include direction or planning for bus movements in central Geelong." The draft TNOP only dealt with traffic, parking and bicycles.

So the whole convoluted process has ended (maybe) with a whimper. We surmised that the bewildering statement reflected the continuing stalemate over bus movements involving the Department of Transport, Greater Geelong Council and the Geelong Authority.

That was confirmed by the DoT bureaucrat who has been managing the process the whole time. The state government, particularly at the urging of local MP Christine Couzens, is effectively backing the DoT in saying that buses must not be moved from Moorabool St.

While there has been no formal outcome after such a stressful saga, at least inertia is on our side. While nothing is done, buses will still run

in Moorabool St and the city's main bus stop, where over 1.3 million people board every year, will remain there as well.

The former member for Corangamite, Sarah Henderson, who was very supportive of the duplication of the rail line from South Geelong to Waurin Ponds, has been thrown a political lifeline and appointed to the Senate by the Liberal Party. She has just set up an electoral office in Moorabool St. Annoyingly, she has quickly begun an attempt to "wedge" the state government, spruiking the Morrison government's vague "fast rail" pre-election promise and accusing the state government of being weak for embracing it.

Of course, what passengers on the Geelong line actually need is trains that are more reliable, have more capacity, and are more frequent. Slightly faster trains will do nothing to solve those daily problems.

Now that she's back in town, we hope to meet Sarah Henderson shortly to encourage political cooperation rather than competition. A vain hope?

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