

Planning Confusion Sells Melbourne's West, Air Travellers Short

The PTUA has stated publicly its concern with recent commentary on new rail developments in Melbourne's west, specifically the promised rail link to Melbourne Airport, and the implied pressure to rush into major decisions in the absence of a comprehensive plan for public

transport development. Recent stories across the news media have suggested a brand new tunnel between Sunshine and the city is urgently needed to cater for Airport and regional trains, even while the Metro 1 rail tunnel is not yet complete and barely five years after the \$4 billion Regional Rail Link opened for service.

At a high level, while we can cheer on the procession of transformative projects such as the Regional Rail Link, Metro 1 rail tunnel, Airport line and Suburban Rail Loop, it comes with a sense of unease: that they are proceeding in the absence of any kind of coherent transport plan that addresses the needs and aspirations of Victorians, and speaks to the kind of places Melbourne and Victoria's regional cities aim to be in 50 years' time. In place of this have come a succession of often contradictory half-plans and vision statements, mostly developed without community input.

PTV's 2012 plan provided for new suburban lines to both Melbourne Airport and Melton, alongside the existing line to Sunbury. Yet within five years it had been discarded. Airport rail was absent from successor plans in 2017 even as a long-term prospect, only to be reinstated as government policy in 2018.

Virtually all the subsequent confusion about rail options for the airport and western Melbourne more generally can be attributed to this fickle, on-again-off-again approach to planning.

We recommend a staged approach toward managing peak-hour carrying capacity between the city and Sunshine, with well-considered

plans in place to guide future augmentations in response to need. With such a plan in place there should be no need to speculate about the adequacy of existing capacity projects that are still under construction.

The likely driver for future capacity requirements, beyond tracks already operating or under construction, will be the need to provide electrified suburban train services to Wyndham Vale and Tarneit. Options for expansion are not limited to a new tunnel duplicating existing lines between Sunshine and the city. The Metro 2 tunnel proposal, for example, would route Werribee suburban trains

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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
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Anna Morton
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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:

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

**Watch this
space and
our website
for details of
our first
members'
meeting for
2020.**

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Edited by Anna Morton.

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Printed by Kosdown, Port Melbourne.

Our thanks to Margaret Pullar and the dedicated mailout team.

Preparing the PTUA's 2020 vision

As we do every year, the PTUA Committee went on a weekend retreat during January to brainstorm the organisation's strategy for 2020, and update our five-year strategic plan as developed last year.

As our usual venue at Commonground near Seymour was taking a break from hosting groups, the Committee went for a change of scene to Pennyroyal in the Otways, near a station on what is now very much a ghost railway from Birregurra to Forrest.

This year, the PTUA will continue to work toward its long-term

strategic goals around membership development, transport network reform ('Every 10 Minutes to Everywhere'), tram and bus priority and network extensions. Regarding the latter, we will continue our push for the Melbourne Metro 2 rail tunnel from Newport to Clifton Hill, and will also be working to shape the government's Suburban Rail Loop project.

We have also identified a need for a new strategic focus on personal safety, and specifically on making the public transport system a safer place for women. Stay tuned for more news on this campaign.

There will be other 'organisational machinery' initiatives around funding, staffing and member engagement that will be developed over the course of the year. And of course our periodic member meetings and our regional branches will continue: see page 2 for more information about forthcoming events.

This will be a year for the PTUA to consolidate as we prepare for State and Federal elections both due in 2022. Please get in touch via our email and social media contacts if you are keen to get active.



Members of the PTUA committee after a successful planning weekend.

Punctuality figures getting later and later

There's some irony in the publication of tram and train punctuality figures having been increasingly delayed in recent months.

PTV says that performance results are usually published on the 10th of every month.

As shown in the graph below, this self-imposed deadline is being consistently missed, and making it difficult for eligible passengers to claim compensation, as the claim

window normally closes at the end of the month.

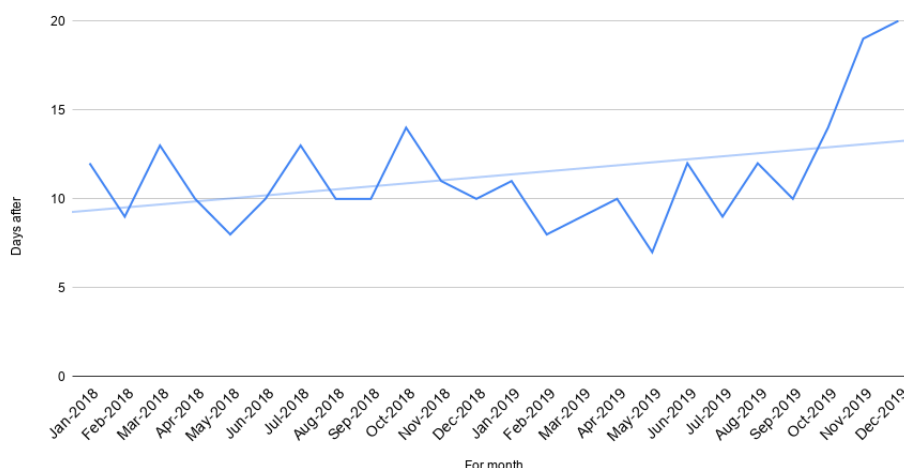
The deadline was missed for every month in the last quarter of 2019. November's figures were released on the 19th of December, allowing Yarra Trams passengers just 12 days to claim.

Following questions raised about the deadline, the December figures were again released late - on the 20th of January - ten days late - but the compensation claim period was extended by ten days.

Unfortunately, on 31st January, Yarra Trams was hit by a data breach when they erroneously emailed 91 compensation claimants in such a way that revealed their email addresses.

Both the delays in publication and the data breach once again raises the question: if Myki data can be used to determine if claimants are eligible or not, why can't it be used to proactively pay compensation, instead of expecting people to submit a claim?

Public transport performance publication: days after month end



Airport Planning Confusion

Continued from p1

from Newport to the city via Fishermans Bend, and has potential to also carry Geelong trains via Werribee (with provision of dedicated parallel tracks between Werribee and Newport).

We therefore reject claims that Airport trains cannot be accommodated in the next decade without a new tunnel between Sunshine and the city, or that Victoria is missing some kind of “now or never” chance to build

such a tunnel. We do call for a comprehensive transport plan that could consider such a tunnel as a future option, alongside other, possibly superior options to build capacity. It would also give careful concern to methods of financing, avoiding in particular the scenario where future governments are obliged to pay rent to a private operator for every train that runs through a future rail tunnel.

Virtually every airport rail link in the world exhibits design compromises that cause them to

fall well short of ‘ideal’, yet many are well-used and well-regarded nonetheless. Melbourne’s airport link needs to be ‘done right’ but this does not demand a radical departure from existing technology or from incremental approaches to development. Global experience suggests it is more likely to provide an affordable and popular service for passengers if its development is integrated with that of the wider suburban network.

Read the full statement on our website: www.ptua.org.au

PTUA Opposed to Extending Free Tram Zone

A proposal to extend the CBD Free Tram Zone is currently the subject of a State parliamentary enquiry. Public submissions to the enquiry were due at the end of January, and the PTUA's was one of numerous submissions received.

Superficially, the idea of getting something for nothing is attractive, and this is reflected to some extent in the submissions received. However, the PTUA has not been supportive of the Free Tram Zone, due to the problems it causes, including crowding, and the lack of benefits it provides to paying public transport users. We likewise do not support the Zone being extended.

Data indicate the Free Tram Zone has increased tram usage largely at the expense of 'active' modes

(walking and cycling) rather than driving. Of more concern is that it appears to have encouraged more people to drive into the City and Docklands. This is possibly to be expected given that existing public transport users, who have paid to travel into the City from the suburbs and back again, have already paid for travel all day within the whole of Zones 1 and 2, with the Free Tram Zone making no practical difference. On the other hand, those who drive into the City obtain a real benefit from the free zone as it avoids them having to pay for public transport at all.

The money spent on providing the Free Tram Zone would be better spent extending

and upgrading services across Melbourne, particularly in the middle and outer suburbs, to provide more people with viable alternatives to car travel.

Read the full submission on our website: www.ptua.org.au



Councils launch legal challenge to North East Link

The Cities of Banyule, Boroondara, Manningham and Whitehorse - representing a swathe of eastern Melbourne stretching from Heidelberg to Mitcham, and south to Burwood - have commenced legal action against the state government over the environmental approval for the \$16 billion North East Link project.

The councils' case turns on exactly what was 'approved' by the Andrews Government when it ticked off the project's Environment Effects Statement.

According to the relevant legislation, the EES is supposed to set out the details of the project's construction, with maps

identifying which homes and businesses will be acquired, which parklands will be paved over, and so on. A vital measure to ensure transparency for the community and the assessment panel, this practice was followed - if imperfectly - for all previous major projects in Victoria, from Citylink to the Metro rail tunnel.

But the approach for the North East Link is entirely different. Here, the government has sought environmental approval on the basis of a 'reference design' - that is to say, a draft concept - with the details filled in later by the winning private tenderer. In other words, the government is trying to outsource not only the construction

and operation of the project but also key elements of its planning and design - and moreover to shield the designers from planning consequences or public appeals when the final design deviates from the draft.

We can only agree with the four councils that this premature approval, before the completion of detail design, amounts to an abuse of process. Of course, we would go further - pointing out the benefits of the project itself are based on modelling forecasts entirely at odds with the real world. Nonetheless, this action is a welcome step inviting closer scrutiny of this massively expensive and destructive project.

Ballarat branch report

To the extreme disappointment of all concerned, the Ballarat rail line's timetable has not yet been upgraded.

Despite official pronouncements that “major construction” had been completed at the end of 2019, a cursory inspection of the line showed a lot of work still to be done as of February 2020. Near Ballan, level crossings do not even have track in place – let alone ballast and signalling. Thus far we have received no word as to when the works really will be finished, and when the new timetable will be introduced.

Similarly, the new bus interchange at Ballarat station has suffered massive delays, despite being described as “on schedule” by a government spokesperson recently. The interchange was originally supposed to be finished by the end of 2018, but as of February 2020 there has been no visible progress

on the project. The other aspects of the Ballarat Station Precinct Redevelopment Project seem to be proceeding apace, with the multi-level carpark already completed some time ago, the new serviced apartments rising quickly, and the renovation of the goods shed well underway. The government has indicated the whole project will be finished at some point in 2021, but given that the bus interchange is much smaller and easier than the other aspects underway, hopefully it can be finished by the end of this year.

The main reason the bus interchange is important is because the government has always tied the completion of this project to triggering a review of the bus network. The delays on the upgraded train timetable have an impact on this too, because the timetable change from trains every 60 minutes to every 40 minutes would break connectivity with the

buses running every 30 or 60 minutes – frequencies will need to be upgraded in order to maintain that connectivity, so it's an ideal time for a more comprehensive reform. Not only does it generally make more sense to do it all in one hit, to minimise people's confusion and other negatives associated with change, but a truly comprehensive reform of Ballarat's bus network would remove a lot of inefficiencies, freeing up resources that could be used to fund the increased frequencies.

The longer these projects get delayed, the more pressure is building on the government to finally reform the bus network. Hopefully by the end of 2020, we'll have trains running more frequently and more reliably on more duplicated track, connecting with a reformed bus network at the new interchange. Good things are on the way – just not as quickly as they should be.

Meet the convener - Ben Lever

I'm the founder and the Convener of the PTUA's Ballarat Branch. I grew up in Ararat and moved to Ballarat for University – taking public transport back to Ararat on weekends. After Uni, I spent a few years living in Deer Park, and after doing the reverse-commute to Ballarat for a while I decided to move back.

After some frustration with PTV's changes to my bus route in 2015, I joined the PTUA and formed the Ballarat branch to make sure that the people of Ballarat and western

Victoria had a voice and could be at the table when these kinds of changes were being considered.

One of my key motivations for working with the PTUA is public transport's role in fighting climate change, by reducing the emissions caused by the transport sector.

Outside the PTUA, I work in International Education, and am studying a Master of Business Administration, with a focus on sustainable business.



Geelong branch report

There has been some recent publicity in Geelong about so-called trackless trams. A trackless tram looks like a multi-section tram, but runs on the road system on rubber tyres, which surely makes it a bus. The tyres are mounted on rail-type bogies rather than on axles.

The tram/bus operates on battery power, and can be driverless where the appropriate guidance system is built into the road, but there is also a driver at the controls. The system is being promoted by CRRC Times Electric Co, a large Chinese train manufacturer.

The idea is being pushed in Australia by the urban design and development firm Urbis. Late last year, an Urbis director took some of the city's leading lights to the city of Yibin in China, which is the only place in the world where a trackless tram system currently operates.

Unfortunately, some people who, up to now, have been supporters of what the public transport system really needs to be more usable, seem to have become converts. It is another example of the promotion of technological solution to a problem which can be more cheaply and simply solved by adapting existing systems.

Service frequency is fundamental to making public transport more attractive. It would be far cheaper to introduce "conventional" 14-metre buses which run on batteries (and could have driverless technology installed). While electric buses are more expensive than diesel ones at present, they are far cheaper than a trackless tram,

so you get more vehicles for far less cost.

China can be an example in that regard too. The city of Shenzhen, just across the border from Hong Kong, has over 16,000 buses in its fleet and all of them are battery-electric. That means lots of routes and high service frequencies.

If Geelong was intending to introduce light rail, trackless trams might be a cheaper alternative. As

journey from the terminal to the plane.

Everyone continues to be in furious agreement that the duplication of the rail line from South Geelong to Waurn Ponds, first suggested by the Geelong Branch a decade ago, needs to happen. However, the authorities have gone very quiet about it.

In his effort to retain the seat of Corangamite last year, Prime



A trackless tram/train. By N509FZ - Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia

it stands, the only possible application we can see for the system is at Avalon Airport. Avalon wants its terminal to be combined with a new railway station on the Geelong line.

From there, the airport authorities envisage a shuttle service to the runway, using the dedicated route set aside for a rail connection, which can't possibly be justified. A driverless bus would work well to convey passengers on the one-stop

Minister Morrison promised funding for the project, but there was nothing in the latest federal budget. In addition, the state government says that amount offered was insufficient.

Once again, we will contact the two relevant local federal parliamentarians, new member for Corangamite, Libby Coker, and her predecessor, Senator Sarah Henderson, to seek answers.

PTUA News

Newsletter of the Public Transport Users Association, Org. No.
A-6256L
Print Post: Publication No. PP 100002658
If undeliverable, return to:
PTUA Office, 247 Flinders Lane, Melbourne 3000

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