



Road Safety Strategy needs mode shift vision

In 2019, 266 people died on Victoria's roads, one of the highest numbers in the past decade, and five weeks into 2020 things were looking even worse. But three weeks into May, fatalities are down 28% for the year to date, and the past seven weeks are down by over 50% on the same period in 2019. Restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic have slashed motor vehicle use around the world and road trauma has fallen too. Meanwhile walking and cycling have surged, putting pressure on the limited space provided for these activities in many places.

The lesson for road safety is clear - cutting motor vehicle use cuts road trauma. This is the central message of the PTUA's recent submission to the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into the Road Toll.

Unfortunately road fatalities do not appear to have fallen by as much as road traffic during COVID-19 restrictions. Faced with wide open roads relatively free of traffic, there have been increases in speeding and the severity of crashes. Once again, better catering for active and public transport is part of the solution. Currently road space allocation overwhelmingly favours private vehicles and there is often little or no dedicated space for vulnerable road users or public transport vehicles. This provides no protection for people who are walking or riding, and it slows down buses and trams. As we have seen, it also entices high speed driving.

Reconfiguring our road reserves to provide more space for people, whether they are on foot or bike, and more priority for public transport can keep people safe and cut travel times for public transport

users. Providing adequate space for physical distancing while walking and riding is an important response to the COVID-19 pandemic, as is cutting traffic delays for public transport to reduce in-vehicle travel times. Public transport priority would also allow the same number of buses, trams and drivers to provide more frequent services and therefore more space for physical distancing onboard. Improvements to off-peak services would also allow passenger loads to spread out beyond peak periods.

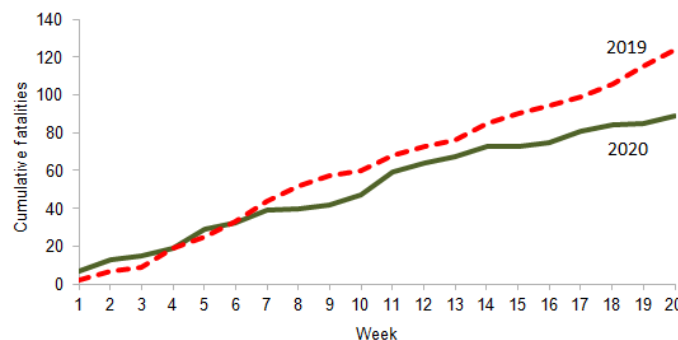
Melbourne City Council has announced plans to widen footpaths and install bike lanes. The New

South Wales government is also offering grants to councils for projects to make more space for people walking and riding. After feeling the effects of failing to control COVID-19, several European governments have announced large programs to better cater for walking and riding, including GBP2 billion for

projects such as 'pop-up' walking and cycling infrastructure in the

UK, 35km of road turned into bike lanes in Milan, and a target of 650km of bike lanes in Paris. The Victorian government is yet to announce its plans to cut delays to road-based public transport or improve the connectivity, capacity and safety of walking and riding networks in response to COVID-19. The fact that these responses also provide longer term benefits for road safety beyond the pandemic emphasises the need to take advantage of this period to lock in those benefits now.

Submissions to the road toll inquiry close 30 June. See our submission at: www.ptua.org.au/publications/papers-and-submissions.



Source: Transport Accident Commission.

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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

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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.

Note that all branch and in-person member meetings are temporarily suspended - watch this space and the website to find out when they resume.

Due to COVID-19, we have limited paper copies of this newsletter to those for whom we have no email contact, or where they are required. This will continue until we feel it is safe to ask our mailout volunteers to come in again.

We apologise for any inconvenience, but are sure you will understand that we don't wish to put the health of our mailout team at risk.

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Edited by Anna Morton.

Newsletter contributors - Jessica Broadbent, Claudia Gallois, Ben Lever, Tony Morton and Paul Westcott.

Our thanks to Margaret Pullar and the dedicated mailout team.

#LifelongLockdown campaign

Sustainable Cities and the Disability Resources Centre have been working together on a digital action calling for accessible transport for all of Victoria.

Over the last few weeks, the COVID-19 lockdown has given us a shared experience of physical and social isolation. Many people have struggled. But the COVID-19 lockdown will end.

For many people with disabilities this lockdown is normal life. Inaccessible public transport means that people with disabilities cannot fully participate in education, work, community and life. They are just not there. It means that many people with disabilities are living a #LifelongLockdown.

Equal access to public transport (trains, trams, buses, taxis and ride shares) is a human right. Victorian activists have been campaigning for a fully accessible transport system for almost 50 years. The state response? “It’s complicated, we need more time.”

If ever there was a time for us all to question what kind of society we want for the future, it is now. All over the world responses to the pandemic have shown us that remarkable feats of achievement are entirely possible when they are considered essential.

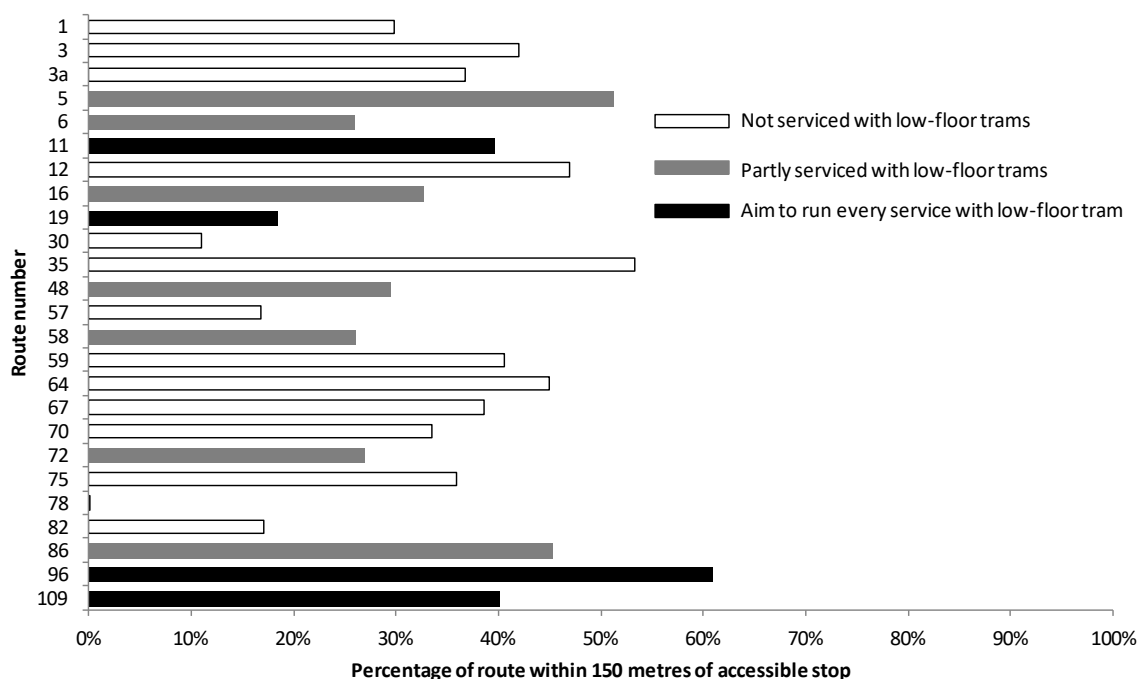
Under the National Disability Standards for Accessible Transport the Victorian government is required to make public transport fully accessible by 2032, and 80-90% accessible by 2022. However despite decades of

promises there is no commitment to these dates, no sense of urgency and, without a renewed focus, there is no hope of meeting these deadlines. The Melbourne Tram network for instance is currently only 30% accessible.

Meanwhile lives are passing, and people are living a #LifelongLockdown.

We asked all participants to take a picture of themselves with the hashtag #LifelongLockdown and post it online or send it to us.

If you are someone with a disability; if you have a friend or family member with a disability; if you push a child in a pram or buggy; if you are an older resident; if you know in your heart that every single one of us deserves equal access to life’s opportunities, please support access for all.



From PTUA submission to the Inquiry into the Free Tram Zone.

After the hiatus: doing transport better

If there were a silver lining from the virus putting us into not-quite-lockdown, it's that after decades of teeth-grinding over traffic congestion and crowding, an unfamiliar quiet descended on streets, trains and trams.

Traffic volumes fell by 40%. Those still driving or riding experienced mostly light-and-easy traffic not seen since last century. The air became cleaner, with reportedly more birdlife in the streets, lured by the relative absence of traffic noise.

There were hard-headed productivity benefits too. Although the situation for many businesses remains dire, supermarket deliveries were full steam ahead—up 30% on some reports. Home-delivery providers ticked along, as a crucial support to consumer-goods businesses around the country. And somewhere, people in freight logistics with a food or homeware focus would have booked a lot of travel-time savings straight to their bottom line.

Of course it won't last. We've been on hold as a sometimes deadly, infectious disease mandates the most draconian restrictions on personal freedom since World War II. Restrictions have saved thousands of lives just in Australia. It'd be dangerous to imply the side effects—no matter how welcome—provide any added justification for shutting down half the economic and creative engine of the nation.

But it should give us cause to reflect. And not just in response to the sometimes dismissive views on the role of public transport in a health crisis that mandates physical distancing. Those who in normal times would be tempted to measure the success of public transport simply by how many can pack onto

peak-hour services are now compelled to take a broader view. As US planning consultant Jarrett Walker points out, the value of public transport goes well beyond its raw carrying capacity: it literally holds our civilisation together by providing travel options, including to alleviate social disadvantage.

But those travel options disappear when one can't catch public transport because the service can't take more passengers under distancing restrictions. It's readily seen that attempting to restore 'normal' travel volumes by relying on people switching to cars would soon grind cities to a halt. It underlines the need for public transport in our recovery phase to be clean, reliable and *plentiful*.

ity for policy adjustments, learning from others about how cities can work better and live with eased traffic permanently?

It pays not to be too optimistic. Failed efforts at 'congestion busting' abounded even after it became obvious congestion can't be solved by road building or widening. Staggered work hours, carpooling, and more recently new kinds of ad-hoc taxi service have been touted but found not to have much effect.

COVID-19, likewise, has breathed new life into the idea a new working-from-home revolution might spell the end of peak hour forever. Sheer necessity has removed some of the 'fear of the unknown' that blocked flexible options for white-



A nearly deserted Bentleigh station in peak hour, late March 2020.

It is to the State government's credit that the full timetable has been kept where possible, ensuring service remains available to all who need it. This becomes even more imperative under any loosening of restrictions.

But we could do better. When life returns to some semblance of normality, must it inevitably 'snap back' to the congested mess we were used to? Or is there opportu-

collar workers. But on past experience it will barely affect traffic.

This is owing to the psychology and mobility needs of the travelling public. When this period of sacrifice and deprivation does end, people may retain some new habits, but will also hanker for what they've missed. 'Face time' with colleagues, family, friends. Getting work done on the slick office network instead of battling an under-

powered VPN. Lunch at that cosy city eatery and drinks after work. And one may hope, a cornucopia of arts, sport and entertainment.

fiscal capacity for big transport infrastructure projects.

Fiscal restraint could be a blessing in disguise. Spending billions on

get better at providing them. Policy sunk billions into pretending to ‘bust’ congestion with new roads, while letting other options stagnate—especially buses, the nearest public transport for 80% of us. Streetscapes were engineered to make people feel like pariahs for walking or riding a bicycle. Little wonder cars seemed the only option. Despite this, every poll backs spending priority to public and active transport ahead of new roads.



COVID-19 precautions on a bus.

We should anticipate psychological backlash against habits that become associated in people’s minds with deprivation. When Menzies abolished postwar petrol rationing in 1949, Australians ceremonially burned their ration cards and embarked on one of the most rapid behaviour shifts in favour of personal car travel (and away from public and active transport) seen anywhere in the world. Likewise, Americans following the 1970s oil shocks rushed out to buy gas-guzzlers, apparently as a rejection of the fuel-economy drives they linked with hardship and pain.

Yet positive responses can avoid the backlash. Dutch cities responded to those same oil shocks by building first-rate cycling networks. It became a lasting habit: people found it a new kind of freedom, not a sacrifice.

How can our big cities avoid choking on the enthusiasm of newly liberated Aussies? Especially when governments—notwithstanding Victoria’s \$24.5 billion loan—are likely to find themselves without

roads doesn’t bust congestion: it does the opposite. Over 50 years, Melbourne’s population increased 120% (from 2.3 to 5 million) but vehicle kilometres rose nearly five-fold. Decision makers fed a vicious cycle of demand for car travel, one road at a time. Had car travel per person remained at 1960s levels—15 years after burning those ration cards, mind—it wouldn’t take a public health crisis to reduce traffic. Even with massive population growth, there’d only be half as much to begin with.

Demand for trips is irrepressible, and economically useful. The key is to keep this from exploding into vehicle-kilometres and bringing everyone to a halt. That means shifting as much as practical from private cars, the most energy and space-hungry form of transport.

But Australia has only begun to develop policy to support the many public and active transport options available, or to drop 20th-century policies actively hostile to them.

Aussies will embrace a range of mobility options if governments

The PTUA has backed health professionals and researchers in a call to follow other cities around the world, taking advantage of quieter streets to accelerate rollout of better, safer options for walking and cycling. It’s encouraging the City of Melbourne and others are bringing forward such improvements.

But a ‘new deal’ to help people back to work should also focus on bus networks beyond the big CBDs. They are the weak links in a go-anywhere-anytime system not relying on single-occupant cars—with ample spare capacity before distancing is a problem.

Many can be put to work building new buses—ideally electric—and driving, cleaning and servicing them. These would run every 10 minutes during the day, to serve diverse needs and spread passengers. In Melbourne, around 500km of such high-quality routes could be put in place for one-tenth of the \$16 billion North East Link. New fare-paying passengers would help meet the cost.

Public transport is a vital part of our post-COVID future. Not least as developing a genuine multi-modal alternative to private cars also moves us in the right direction against climate change—the other big sleeping crisis looming ahead.

Ballarat branch report

Things have been fairly quiet in Ballarat during the COVID-19 lockdown. There does not seem to have been significant progress on the Ballarat Line Upgrade works during this time – although with travel restricted to essential trips only, it's not possible to check this for ourselves.

There has however been a bit of a maintenance blitz, with several shutdowns on the Ballarat corridor for V/Line maintenance works. Now is certainly a good time to perform such maintenance, with lower passenger numbers requiring fewer replacement coaches, and less traffic in Melbourne making it easier to keep those coaches on time – and it should hopefully help V/Line get the rail infrastructure in better shape for when passengers return. There are many issues underlying the punctuality and reliability issues on the Ballarat line, but infrastructure faults are certainly among them, so hopefully these

works can prevent some of those.

It's been disappointing to see that some of the same old communication issues are still arising, though. When researching some essential travel from Ballarat to Ararat, we noticed that PTV's Journey Planner, V/Line's Journey Planner, and the PDF timetable on V/Line's website, all gave completely different timetables. This is of course not a new problem that's arisen under COVID – this kind of thing that has been happening for years. In the case of the PTV Journey Planner – and the Google Maps planner – it seems that V/Line regularly misses the deadlines for their temporary timetables to be included in planner data, so it uses the normal train timetable data with an asterisk noting that trains are disrupted. This is not good enough when the coach timetables are often very different to the trains they're replacing, with wildly different journey times and stopping patterns. Given that these commu-

nication issues are so long-standing, and given the impact they can have on people's lives – if you miss a coach in regional Victoria you may have an overnight wait till the next one – it is something that V/Line needs to seriously address within its organisation.

Ultimately the PDF timetable turned out to be the correct one – but this also revealed a much poorer level of service than those in the Journey Planners, or indeed when compared with normal operations. Where normally there are three services (two coaches, one train) after 5pm for people who wish to travel after work or university, on this temporary timetable there was only one coach at 8pm – nearly four hours after the previous coach departed. The official government stance is that service levels aren't being reduced during COVID, but during this maintenance shutdown at least, it seems this wasn't the case.

Personal safety on and around public transport.

The Department of Transport has begun to develop a Transport Personal Safety Strategy, and invited various stakeholder groups including the PTUA to meet and contribute.

A workshop was held in February with the specific topic of antisocial behaviour and assaults on public transport. It was great to see representatives from so many stakeholders come together to talk about safety on public transport – Metro, Yarra Trams, bus operators, the Rail, Tram and Bus Union, Victoria

Police, the Department of Transport and others.

There was discussion of what a Transport Personal Safety Strategy might look like. Two related problems flagged are that there is no centralised reporting system of incidents, and that incidents are under-reported. Without a clear picture of the whole problem, it's difficult to come up with a comprehensive plan to make public transport safer (not just *seem* safer).

Attendees highlighted many specific incidents that they had experienced, as well as broader themes

and types of violence, including youth violence, violence towards women, violence from drug-affected individuals, violence towards staff (usually conductors and those checking tickets) and more. This ties in with some work done at the PTUA Committee's planning weekend, where we decided that we wanted to focus on personal safety on public transport.

Suggestions were collected from workshop participants and will contribute to the strategy. We'll keep our members informed of any new developments.

Geelong branch report

What a change from our previous report in February. Branch activities have almost come to a halt. Towards the end March, we were informed by our meeting venue at that it was closing its doors until at least June.

Holding meetings in any other form isn't feasible for us, so our April and May meetings have not been held, and a June meeting seem unlikely at the moment.

Similarly, some scheduled face-to-face meetings with politicians and bureaucrats have been cancelled. Before the total shutdown, our convener attended a meeting of the Geelong Fast Rail Reference Group. As with previous meetings, it was mainly a briefing from Rail Projects Victoria staff about progress, with questions and comments from the 15 or so attendees,

who represent interest groups and other government departments.

We were told that because negotiations between the federal and state governments about the scope and funding of the fast(er) rail project were ongoing they were not able to be reported on.

The last personal meeting with a politician was with Libby Coker, with the shutdown only days away. She was holding off any major campaign on the duplication of the South Geelong - Waurn Ponds line due to the ongoing federal-state negotiations. However, she said that concerns about the COVID-19 crisis were occupying most of her time.

Unfortunately, there has been some confusion about the various projects in the pipeline affecting Geelong rail services. The South

Geelong-Waurn Ponds duplication, the quadruplication between Wynndham Vale & Sunshine, and the Airport rail project, as well as the "fast rail" notion overall. They are all marginally related, but are not infrequently conflated by some advocates and the media.

It has been very gratifying that the state government has kept public transport going on normal schedules, which has allowed effective social distancing on all services.

Geelong bus drivers quickly took action to ensure social distancing by stringing hazard tape across some seating to safeguard both themselves and their passengers. Although patronage has dropped considerably, Geelong buses are still being reasonably well used, and clearly provide an essential service.

Meet the convener - Paul Westcott

The Geelong Branch of the PTUA turns 21 this year. It was founded by Tim Petersen, now with the W.A. Department of Transport.

Current convener, Paul Westcott, succeeded Tim in 2006, having been secretary before that. Paul was a founding member of the Branch, and has been a PTUA member for over 25 years.

He has lived in the Geelong area all his life, except for four years at Monash University, which he travelled to using a combination of tram, train and bus for much of the time.

Paul grew up in Corio. The family used the train to travel to Melbourne from the local station, then served by only four or five trains a day (two on Sundays). The 20-minute off-peak service to South Geelong, now his nearest station, with the journey to Melbourne taking just over an hour, wasn't even a dream back then.

Paul was a secondary teacher at Geelong High School, retiring over a decade ago. His main concern as convener has been the never-ending fight to keep buses running directly through the centre of the city, a battle that has been going on since Tim Petersen was convener.



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