



## PTUA concerned on curfew cuts Essential workers left in the lurch

**PTUA has expressed concern at the rush to cut public transport services during Melbourne’s stage 4 lockdown and curfew, which has caused confusion and delays for those who have to travel.**

While one can appreciate the need to scale back services at a time when much of the economy has shut down due to COVID-19, there was a severe impact on passengers, and a lack of information.

On Monday 3rd August, details of drastic evening service cuts for trams and trains were only published as they took effect, giving travellers no time to plan ahead. This left trams running mostly every 40 minutes, and gaps between trains of up to an hour or more.

While the capacity is probably sufficient to maintain physical distancing given the curfew and the shutdown of most workplaces, the big problem is the wait times. Imagine finishing your shift at 11pm and having to wait up to 90 minutes for a train home.

The public transport system should be supporting essential shift workers such as hospital staff or those working in food distribution centres, not making their lives more difficult.

In discussions with the Department Of Transport, we argued that the cuts needed to be refined, with a better outcome being a paring back of near-empty high frequency peak services, and leaving something closer to the usual service in place after 8pm. In the case of trams and trains, this might be the equivalent of a Saturday timetable - a far better outcome for passengers.

Obviously the changes were planned in a hurry. We urge the government to look at this again: ensure a minimum 30 minute frequency on metro train lines in the evenings so those who have to work still have a service they can use.

The screenshot shows a mobile app interface for a public transport service. At the top, there is a navigation bar with a menu icon, the PTUA logo, a star icon, a location pin icon, and a 'TODAY' button. Below the navigation bar is an orange banner with a warning icon and the text 'Possible service disruption'. The main content area shows a route from 'Flinders Street to Craigieburn' which is 'CANCELLED'. Below this, there are four train service entries, each with a train icon, a time, a destination, and a 'CANCELLED' status. The entries are: 10:52 PM to Craigieburn (All Stations to Craigieburn, Platform 9), 11:22 PM to Craigieburn (All Stations to Craigieburn), 11:52 PM to Craigieburn (All Stations to Craigieburn), and 12:30 AM to Craigieburn (All Stations to Craigieburn). Each entry has a blue button with the time and 'PM' or 'AM'.

Time	Destination	Status
10:52 PM	Craigieburn	CANCELLED
11:22 PM	Craigieburn	CANCELLED
11:52 PM	Craigieburn	CANCELLED
12:30 AM	Craigieburn	CANCELLED

Imagine finishing work and seeing this...

## PTUA office

Ross House,  
247 Flinders Lane, Melbourne

(currently closed)

e-mail: [office@ptua.org.au](mailto:office@ptua.org.au)

## Internet

Our web site is at [www.ptua.org.au](http://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](http://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](http://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

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

Melbourne:

Meetings will be advertised in PTUA News and on our website

[www.ptua.org.au](http://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.

**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 - Daniel Bowen, Jessica Broadbent, Claudia Gallois, Ben Lever, Tony Morton and Paul Westcott.

Our thanks to Margaret Pullar and the dedicated mailout team.

## On being a public transport advocate during a pandemic

**In our last issue we reflected on what public transport should look like when we eventually emerge from the confusion of COVID-19. But given the renewed outbreak in Melbourne, requiring the imposition of Level 4 restrictions and curfews from early August, it's apparent any post-COVID scenarios are still well into the future.**

It's also understandable some might question the relevance of public transport advocacy at such a time. Recent media commentary, not all of it mischievous, has pointed the finger at public transport as a primary vector for disease transmission - some going as far as to question whether urban life and collective forms of transport can survive the threat posed by novel infectious diseases.

Predictions of the death of cities are unsupported by history, as City of Melbourne councillor Nicholas Reece has pointed out in *The Age*, in April and again on 28 July. Our human need for social life and culture - for shared enjoyment of art, sport, entertainment and craic (as the Irish say) - survives and endures. But this shared life and culture is critically dependent on cities - the concentrations of activity that allow diverse cultural expressions and trades to find their audiences and markets and thereby flourish. And bringing those together relies on transport networks - including mass transit networks built on rail and buses, if they are to operate efficiently at the scale required and provide access for all.

Pandemics interrupt this pattern of activity but don't prevent it coming back with a vengeance after the threat recedes. Per-capita

public transport use in Melbourne peaked in the 1920s, a few years after the flu pandemic of 1919. It peaked again in the decade after World War II, notwithstanding the polio epidemic of 1950 (before the first vaccines were available).

But for now we are stuck with stay-at-home orders, somehow even less tolerable than the original shutdown in March and April. What makes the COVID-19 virus so irksome to live with is that it preys on our normal social instincts. Halting the spread obliges us to hide behind our front doors and avoid social contact. This freeze on social activity - which does make transport networks almost superfluous for most - will be tolerable only as long as the virus makes it necessary.

As has become more evident with time, it is those normal social activities that are implicated in the spread of the virus, from family gatherings to shared workplaces. Transmission has been linked to these extended episodes of close indoor contact much more than to travel on trains, trams or buses, where passengers have generally made an effort to comply with physical distancing, and more recently in Melbourne, mandatory face coverings. Experience elsewhere has been consistent: authorities found no substantial virus transmission either on the Paris Metro or on Tokyo's train system.

Early US findings to the contrary now appear to have been based on premature data and flawed methodology. In particular, the early pattern of US spread, with large outbreaks in the north-eastern states (among the only regions of

the US where public transport accounts for more than a tiny percentage of travel) led researchers to postulate a link between COVID-19 death rates and a region's habit of public transport use prior to the pandemic. This finding has almost certainly been invalidated by the subsequent pattern of spread in the sunbelt states (especially Texas, Florida and Arizona with their high car dependence) although updated analysis has not been forthcoming to date.

During this crisis the PTUA has played an ongoing role locally. This has included consultations (via Zoom) with outgoing Minister Melissa Horne and incoming Minister Ben Carroll, where we have continued to advocate for adequate services to support travel with physical distancing for those currently relying on public transport, including health workers and those in essential industries like food services. We have also relayed feedback from passengers and highlighted expert advice from other parts of the world on protective measures such as face coverings.

**Your continued membership and support of the PTUA during this difficult time is appreciated and valued. We all look forward to the surge of activity including on public transport that will follow the eventual easing of restrictions. We are currently offering a discounted rate of \$45 for annual membership - the cost of a weekly Myki. So if you're not travelling, why not use a week's worth of saved fares to renew your PTUA membership?**

## Level crossing removals: halfway through

The State government's Level Crossing Removal Program recently reached the halfway point, with 38 of the pledged 75 crossings now removed.

Has the program targeted the right crossings? By and large it appears yes - a review of the most dangerous crossings - from the

government's ALCAM (Australian Level Crossing Assessment Model) some years ago shows that of the top 20 priority crossings, all but two have been included - see the table below.

At issue is the designs of some of these projects. There have been some missed opportunities - at

Camp Road on the Upfield line (not in the top 20) they could have duplicated the line, but didn't.

Some projects are not upgrading the adjacent railway stations, leaving issues such as DDA ramp non-compliance unresolved.

And some projects such as at Werribee, Hoppers Crossing and Aircraft (Laverton) are "road over" designs which are likely to be cheaper and quicker than other options, but which result in environments which are hostile to pedestrians and cyclists.

With these misgivings in mind, the program has still brought broad benefits - obviously to road users, including cyclists, pedestrians, and tram and bus passengers.

Safety has been improved, and some projects such as the "skyrail" sections have added open space to communities. Those stations that have been rebuilt to modern standards also directly benefit train passengers.

A recent RACV survey of passengers showed that most of the stations that rail users ranked the highest were those recently rebuilt as part of level crossing removals.

Grade separation has also proven to be popular with voters, and it would be politically smart for both sides to continue the program.

We look forward to the next tranche of projects to be pledged as the 2022 election approaches.

Priority level crossings listed in the ALCAM report.

Rank	Road	Suburb	Status	Year removed
1	Main Rd	St Albans	Completed	2016
2	Furlong Rd	St Albans	Completed	2016
3	Bell St	Coburg	Planning	2022
4	Werribee St	Werribee	Planning	2022
5	Clayton Rd	Clayton	Completed	2018
6	Macaulay Rd (Craigieburn line)	Kensington	NOT INCLUDED	
7	Bell St	Preston	Planning	2022
8	Glenroy Rd	Glenroy	Planning	2022
9	Grange Rd	Carnegie	Completed	2018
10	Cherry St	Werribee	Planning	2022
11	Union Rd	Surrey Hills	Planning	"by 2025"
12	North Rd	Ormond	Completed	2016
13	Aviation Rd	Laverton (Aircraft)	Completed	2020
14	Blackburn Rd	Blackburn	Completed	2017
15	Buckley St	Essendon	Completed	2018
16	Old Geelong Rd	Hoppers Crossing	Planning	2022
17	McGregor Rd	Pakenham	Planning	"by 2025"
18	Riversdale Rd	Camberwell	NOT INCLUDED	
19	Ferguson St	Williamstown	Planning	2022
20	Lower Plenty Rd	Rosanna	Completed	2018





Some photos of the Upfield line level crossing removal works, looking south towards Bell Street from around Batman station.



The bottom photo demonstrates an issue of concern for locals - the normally busy Upfield bike path has been closed, with no convenient and safe alternative provided.





## Ballarat branch report

**After many delays, the City of Ballarat resumed consultation on its Integrated Transport Plan (ITP) in June. The City released “discussion papers” on rail and walking in June 2019, with the intention being to release papers on buses/urban transit, aviation, and so on, before combining the feedback from all papers into the Integrated Transport Plan. Unfortunately they encountered significant delays, and ended up releasing the urban transit paper alongside the draft ITP about a year later.**

The good news is that there’s a lot to like in the urban transit paper and in the draft ITP. The urban transit paper clearly identified many of the issues identified in the PTUA’s 2018 Connecting Ballarat proposal, including indirect and inefficient bus routes and excessively padded timetables – and was able to go much further in

quantifying these problems. For example, it was calculated that by shifting from a “worst-case traffic” to a “most likely traffic” timetable, bus travel times could be improved by up to 30%. It also highlighted issues with lack of frequency, short span of hours, and indirect bus routes contributing to slower journey times – generally a very strong diagnosis of the problems we face. Importantly it also included a good template for how to improve buses in the future – and how to leverage those improvements to shift land use patterns, to use those shifts to justify further bus improvements, and ultimately pave the way for light rail.

The ITP lists six immediate priorities, the first of which is to review and overhaul Ballarat’s bus network; it’s great to see the City give this such priority in its advocacy. Some of the other

priorities include road projects that the PTUA perhaps wouldn’t prioritise, but it’s great to see that better rail connections to Melbourne, and better walking and cycling, also rank highly.

Consultation on the drafts has now closed, but it’s clear that this won’t be a “set and forget” plan – once feedback has been incorporated into a final plan and it’s adopted by council, they will be active in pursuing it, both through the infrastructure they directly control and through advocacy to other levels of government. PTUA members are encouraged to look through the City of Ballarat’s documents at <https://mysay.ballarat.vic.gov.au/integratedtransport> and the PTUA’s detailed responses at <https://www.ptua.org.au/publications/papers-and-submissions/> so we can all work together to push for a better transport future for Ballarat.

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## Sustainable Cities campaign

**The Sustainable Cities Collective has been forging ahead with transport action campaigns despite months of lockdown.**

Earlier this year, we partnered with the Disability Resources Centre to support their Transport For All campaign in support of Victorians living with disabilities. The action highlighted inaccessibility of Victoria’s public transport, calling on decision makers to prioritise making all transport accessible for people with access issues. The campaign was published by the ABC and aired on ABC News.

Sustainable Cities’ online forum, The Future of Public Transport in

Victoria, was a huge success. Dr. Crystal Legacy from the University of Melbourne, Daniel Bowen from the PTUA, Dr. Jodie Valpied from Moorabool Environment Group and Professor Peter Newman AO from Curtin University presented an insightful and thought provoking discussion on how we might re-think the way we move around cities. [The recording is available online.](#)

The collective welcomed lots of new faces to our skillshare on ‘How to talk to your MPs about transport issues’, where we shared ideas on how to effectively engage with local MPs. [Find useful resources on the FoE webpage.](#)

As well as sustainable active and public transport infrastructure, Sustainable Cities is fighting for the construction of Melbourne Metro 2 (MM2) as the vital next addition to Melbourne’s 21st century rail network. As part of this campaign, we have launched an online action to tell our politicians it’s time to build MM2. Check it out and sign the petition from the FoE webpage!

If you’re interested in getting involved with Sustainable Cities, come along to our weekly Sustainable Cities meetings, **Mondays 6pm**, online via Zoom. Contact [claudia.gallois@foe.org.au](mailto:claudia.gallois@foe.org.au) for the Zoom details.

## Geelong branch report

**We field occasional inquiries from journalists and others about the duplication of the South Geelong-Waurn Ponds rail line. We've heard nothing new for months. However, at a recent meeting with our convener, local MP Darren Cheeseman mentioned, without explanation, that the crossing of the Barwon River flood plain was a challenge.**

A Major Road Projects manager told us that Rail Projects Victoria might not have fully understood that adding extra dirt to the flood plain to expand the railway embankment must be matched by the removal of the same amount of material from somewhere else in the flood plain.

However, the basic civil engineering principle of "cut and fill" can't simply apply, because the requirement for soil testing and analysis means you can't just dig

up dirt and cart it around willy-nilly.

The engineering department of the City of Greater Geelong (CoGG) tells us they have done an audit of all the bus shelters they are responsible for, including assessing them for maintenance or replacement. They estimate the shelters, as a whole, have a value of over \$4 million dollars.

Unfortunately, a good many of our local bus shelters consist of a steel frame in-filled with pebble-dash concrete panels. They must now be well over 50 years old, so it isn't surprising that a number suffer from varying degrees of rust decay. Some have been removed for that reason in recent years, and at least one hasn't been replaced.

When we raised that with the responsible officer, he said that CoGG has spent some time designing a new "basic" shelter, which will be installed at one of the sites as a test. They hope the

new design can be used for replacement shelters, because it will be more economical to construct than the current metal mesh shelters. We have been promised some photos in due course. Presumably they have taken DDA requirements into account.

V/Line recently trialed a 9-car VLocity on the line from Melbourne to Wyndham Vale. There were technical barriers to running VLocitys with more than six cars, but we were told a year or so ago that all new VLocitys, and existing sets being overhauled, are being modified to allow for the longer configuration.

However, 9-car trains can't be used on the rest of the Geelong line because some platforms and signalling don't accommodate them. A disappointing example of a lack of future-proofing is that the new platform being constructed at Waurn Ponds will only be long enough to cater for 6-car VLocitys.

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## One of our newer committee members - Jessica Broadbent

**I began attending PTUA Committee meetings in 2019, and joined the Committee at the AGM in 2019. My public transport use really took off from Year 7, when I was given a yearly bus ticket and was allowed to take the bus or train to school, and to meet up with friends. I liked public transport so much, I just kept using it!**

I'm from the Northern suburbs of Melbourne, and mostly take the tram, but I also particularly love taking the Geelong V/line to visit

friends.

Outside the Committee, I work in administration for a university, and read as much as possible.

I was inspired to join the PTUA to increase the representation of women on the Committee, and I have a particular focus on increasing safety on public transport. I'd love to hear from members about what they feel would make their journeys safer.

You can email Jessica at [jessica.broadbent@ptua.org.au](mailto:jessica.broadbent@ptua.org.au)



# PTUA News

Newsletter of the Public Transport Users Association, Org. No.  
A-6256L  
Print Post: Publication No. PP 100002658  
If undeliverable, return to:  
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## Inside:

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[www.ptua.org.au](http://www.ptua.org.au)

#### **Join us**

If you are reading a friend's newsletter and would like to join and help the fight for better public transport, it's \$50 per year (\$25 concession). Contact the office, or see [www.ptua.org.au/join](http://www.ptua.org.au/join)

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