



## State Budget 2020 - rail investment welcome, but more funding for services needed

The delayed Victorian State Budget, released in late November, includes some welcome investment in public transport infrastructure and fleets, including a planned upgrade to the Geelong line (see page 7) and funding for the long-awaited Airport rail line. There's also money for regional rail upgrades and zero-emissions buses, and \$2.2 billion to get the Suburban Rail Loop (SRL) kick-started.

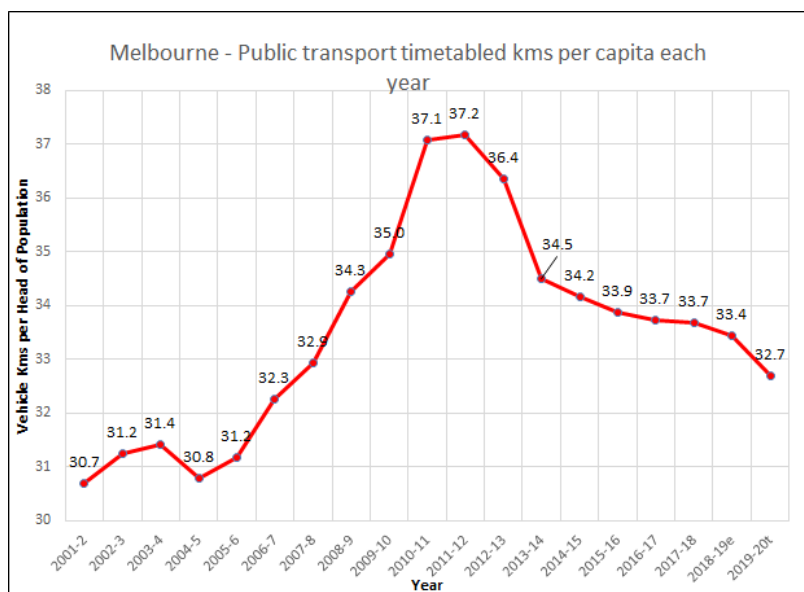
SRL is the type of project that can help the shift from a car dependent to a sustainable transport community - in contrast to the government's major motorway projects such as North East Link and West Gate Tunnel, which unfortunately are pulling Melbourne in the opposite direction.

The funding for 100 new low-floor trams will make a big difference, though obviously this will need to be followed-up with further investment to make the whole tram fleet accessible, and the government must work harder at accelerating the rollout of tram platform stops.

Funding for bus and tram network planning was also welcome, but the key disappointment was so little funding for additional services - limited to a handful of bus routes.

Public transport isn't just about infrastructure. It's also about fast, reliable, frequent services - these are key to encouraging people to use the system, and getting the maximum return for the substantial investment in that infrastructure.

The graph below shows figures compiled by Monash University which make it clear that public transport services are not keeping up with population growth.



Credit: Public Transport Research Group, Monash University.

As the state comes out of COVID-19, it is vital that the government supports the recovery, particularly by targeting public transport upgrades at the suburban and regional communities hit hardest by the economic downturn.

Good quality public transport has a vital role to play in ensuring that people

right across Melbourne and Victoria have good access to jobs, education and opportunity - without the financial burden of every adult in the household having to own and run a car.

More frequent trams, trains and buses across the day are desperately needed to cut waiting times, improve connections, and provide a viable alternative to driving.

## PTUA office

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## 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  
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.

*We wish all our  
members a happy,  
healthy and safe  
holiday season.*

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Edited by Anna Morton.

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Our thanks to Margaret Pullar and the dedicated mailout team.

## Status quo on Free Tram Zone, but calls for fairer fares

**The Victorian parliament's Economy and Infrastructure Committee (EIC) has proposed minor tweaks to the Free Tram Zone (FTZ) boundary, while recognising the importance of system-wide improvements to boost public transport.**

The EIC's Inquiry into the FTZ offered an ideal opportunity to review the zone after five years of operation. While the EIC largely rejected proposals in the inquiry's terms of reference to expand the FTZ, they recommended extending the zone in two places by one stop each to include both the Arts Centre and the Convention and Exhibition Centre. Arguably this reflects the original intent of the zone's introduction without fundamentally altering the footprint of the FTZ, although it does potentially create an anomaly by excluding a similar stop at Southbank on route 58. Either way, unequal treatment of stops either side of the FTZ boundary is an inherent problem with the FTZ wherever that boundary is drawn and a key argument for gentler fare increments at zone boundaries.

While the EIC agreed on the importance of encouraging public transport use, they recognised that expansion of the FTZ as proposed would encourage lobbying for further expansion with no logical end other than the end of the lines. The EIC also recognised that a more holistic approach to boosting public transport would deliver "frequency, safety, speed and access". This was reflected in the EIC's support for prioritisation of trams at traffic lights.

The EIC found that FTZ extensions to include city-fringe

universities and hospitals would be poorly targeted. As the PTUA pointed out in its submission and evidence, most people travelling to these destinations will still have paid for tram travel as part of their fare into the city, while people attending similar institutions outside the inner city miss out completely. People that drive cars or catch taxis into the inner city - adding to congestion and pollution - are the main beneficiaries of the FTZ.

Some submissions warned of worsening parking availability for healthcare workers, clients and families if CBD commuters parked near hospitals to take advantage of an expanded FTZ. Instead, the EIC wisely proposes broader measures to address affordable access to health care such as changes to the Victorian Patient Transport Assistance Scheme so that it covers travel between appointments and accommodation while in Melbourne. Similarly, the report recommends a review of public transport subsidies for school-age children to ensure their effectiveness. While we support such a review, we are not as convinced as the EIC that existing concession arrangements for postgraduate students are adequate.

We are pleased that the EIC picked up our recommendation for Early Bird to apply equally across trains, trams and buses. This would allow 'Early Birds' to catch their local bus to the station instead of filling up station carparks, and also benefit parts of Melbourne with crowded peak bus services such as Manningham. Recommendations to upgrade data collection and network control technology are also welcomed.

However the report's recommendations overlook the elephant in the room. Submitters pointed out how the FTZ encourages them to drive to the FTZ to catch a free tram for the remainder of their journey instead of catching and paying for public transport closer to home. With Zone 1 fares subject to annual increases and the fare increment to cross the FTZ boundary growing with every increase, the incentive to drive to free trams will become stronger every year. This is not a sustainable fare structure.

The report does call on the government to assess the merits of network pricing as proposed by Infrastructure Victoria (IV). While we have concerns with some of IV's proposals, we share their view that the FTZ is ineffective and unfair. We also agree that cheaper off-peak fares are needed in Melbourne, so we welcome the government's recent announcement of a temporary discount in early 2021 for weekday travel between 9.30am and 4pm or after 7pm across Zone 1 and Zones 1+2. While Zone 2 fares have risen twice as fast as inflation since the FTZ was introduced, the off-peak discount will not apply to Zone 2-only travel as this is supposedly already discounted. However together with Zone 1-only, Melbourne's single-zone fares are among the highest short distance fares in Australia. The discussion on fares will continue elsewhere.

The government has six months to respond to the EIC's report which can be found at: <https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/eic-ic/article/4273>

## 2020 Annual General Meeting

**The Annual General Meeting of the Association took place on 12th November. For the first time in the PTUA's history, the meeting was conducted remotely via Zoom in place of the usual face-to-face gathering at Ross House. Notwithstanding the unusual arrangements, we were pleased to have at least 70 members present for part or all of the proceedings, a slight increase on typical AGM attendance.**

We were pleased to have incoming Transport Minister Ben Carroll as guest speaker for the AGM. The Minister spoke of his own experience growing up in north-west Melbourne remote from the train system, and spoke positively about having read *Transport For Suburbia*, the last book by former PTUA President the late Paul Mees OAM. Minister Carroll referred to the need for further action on accessible tram stops, electric buses, and the need to reassure the travelling public about COVID-19 safety measures to enable a return to public transport use amid a global pandemic.

Understandably members had many questions, several of which the Minister answered in the time allotted. Members pressed for more detail on timeframes for an electric bus trial and for rollout of accessible tram stops; other questions related to pedestrian safety, fare reform, COVID safety, and addressing car dependence. The remaining questions were put to the Minister in writing, but a reply wasn't received before the newsletter deadline. We will let members know when we receive an answer.

Every year the PTUA confers the Paul Mees Award at the AGM to recognise an outstanding contribution to public transport advocacy in Victoria. This year's recipient was the Disability Resources Centre who has conducted a prominent campaign to accelerate the rollout of fully accessible trams and tram stops. Kerri Cassidy accepted the award on behalf of the DRC, noting in her acceptance speech the Auditor-General's finding that only 15% of tram stops are both accessible and serviced by accessible low-floor trams.



Committee member Anna Morton presenting the Paul Mees award to Kerri Cassidy.

PTUA President Tony Morton addressed the meeting, focussing on the response to the COVID-19 pandemic and what this is likely to mean for urban transport in the aftermath - in particular the sustained shift to office work being done from home, which would mean a partial refocusing of transport policy interventions from peak-hour commuting to local area networks.

Secretary David Robertson noted the substantial achievement for the organisation in shifting its back-end membership processing to a more reliable cloud-based platform, and thanked Committee members Michael Bell, Jennifer Williams, Phil Bourke and Paul Westcott for their back-office support. Treasurer Phil Bourke then presented the annual financial statements, confirming the overall financial health of the Association with stable membership numbers despite COVID-19's effect on Commuter Club subscriptions in particular.

The 2021 Committee election proceeded based on nominations, with nominations not exceeding the available positions and all nominees therefore elected. The PTUA gave thanks to departing Committee member Jen Williams and welcomed Declan Martin, freshly elected to the Committee.

The AGM also passed a set of technical changes to the PTUA Constitution, proposed following a periodic review. These will make the Constitution more self-contained, ensure alignment with current legislation, strengthen checks and balances, and improve some provisions (including allowance for conducting meetings electronically).

Thanks are extended for all those who attended the AGM and asked questions. Stay tuned for further news of meetings and strategy for 2021.

## Ballarat branch report

**As a very unusual year draws to a close, we've had a flurry of news affecting the Ballarat line. Trains will be replaced by coaches from 28 December to 30 January for a final push on the Ballarat Line Upgrade project, connecting passing loops at level crossings and commissioning signalling.**

Once completed, these works should allow an upgraded 20 minute peak/40 minute off-peak service, and we hope to see this implemented at the big end-of-January timetable update. The completion of these works will also mean the decommissioning of the longer Bungaree Loop, so for those of you who might be keen to see and photograph the last trains along this stretch of track, you'd better be quick!

The recent announcements regarding Airport Rail and the Geelong Line diversion via Werribee also have implications for the Ballarat line. The decision to send Airport trains down the existing Sunbury line tracks into Melbourne Metro 1, rather than building a new dedicated Sunshine-city tunnel

for Airport trains, means that the capacity in this corridor won't increase. However, the simultaneous announcement that many Geelong trains will divert to the Werribee corridor has the potential to free up a lot of the existing capacity, which is a huge

win for the lines that will continue to run through Sunshine.

The government has announced that they will build at least one new express track for Geelong trains between Werribee and Laverton – though they are apparently still deciding whether it will be one track or two. The more tracks they can add in this section, the more capacity the Werribee corridor will have, and therefore the more pressure this can take off the Sunshine corridor – so it's very much in the interests of Bendigo and Ballarat passengers if the government adds a full track pair, and the PTUA will be advocating for this.

It now seems that Sunbury trains will use up 12 of the Metro 1

disappointing that no formal announcements about Melton electrification, or other outcomes of the Western Rail Plan, were made alongside the Airport and Geelong announcements, but this does answer a lot of the questions about what this corridor will look like in years to come – which is definitely a good thing.

Confirmation of the decision to send Airport trains via an upgraded Sunshine station, and of the base 10-minute frequency of Airport trains, also means we know a bit more about what the trip to the airport will look like for Ballaratians. The Age quoted this as a 90-minute journey, but this seems to be a worst-case scenario involving the slowest Ballarat-line

trains and the maximum connection time, walking off the Ballarat train just as the Airport one leaves. Assuming a common Ballarat-Sunshine journey time of 64 minutes, average wait time of 5 minutes, and 11 minutes journey time to the Airport, this comes out as 80 minutes; a best-case scenario trip, with a peak express train and a perfect connection, could be as low as 70 minutes. In any case,

this all represents a significant improvement on the current option of taking the train all the way into Southern Cross and then the SkyBus back out, which can take up to 2.5 hours when traffic is poor.



Wendouree station

tunnel's 24 paths per hour, and Airport trains will use 6 – which leaves 6 for Melton trains, and quite a lot of capacity left on the RRL tracks to be shared between Bendigo, Ballarat, Geelong and Wyndham Vale trains. It's slightly

## Geelong Branch report

**Plans for this report quickly changed with the unexpected announcement regarding 'fast rail' to Geelong. It's theoretically part of the Western Rail Plan, but where is the plan?**

The vague outline provided inevitably raises questions and concerns. There's a sense of *déjà vu* - reminiscent of the information black hole surrounding the Regional Rail Link 12 years ago, with its subsequent period of uncertainty and confusion.

The reappearance of the Werribee route was a complete surprise. When we heard, in 2008, about the diversion of Geelong trains away from Werribee on the RRL, we campaigned against it. However, the government and bureaucrats insisted that the RRL would be all wonderful.

We long ago dropped advocacy for the resumption of the Werribee route and concentrated on trying to get the RRL problems fixed. We have stressed that the journey time is not the problem - it's the lack of capacity, reliability and frequency.

If these new proposals deal with

those problems, they are beneficial; if they don't, then they are more-or-less beside the point.

Note that the 17:32 train from Southern Cross already gets to Geelong in 50 minutes - having stopped at three stations. So the 50-minute journey being touted (with an unspecified stopping pattern) is little faster than now!

The new scheme seems to obviate the provision of the planned four tracks to Wyndham Vale. However, four tracks from Sunshine to Deer Park Junction will still be needed, to facilitate electrification to Melton and Wyndham Vale. Geelong trains will continue to provide a lot of the Wyndham Vale services until any electrification.

The "extra track" to be provided between Werribee & Laverton should be two tracks. If it does turn out to be only one track, will that be only because installing two tracks is "too hard" (e.g. existing road over-bridges)? That's not a good justification for any planning decision.

Although most Geelong line

passengers go to and from city stations, in the five years since the RRL opened, not inconsiderable patronage has developed between Wyndham Vale/Tarneit/Deer Park and Geelong ("build it and they will come").

Splitting services over two routes (Werribee & Tarneit) is never desirable. In this case, passengers from the western suburbs to Geelong will experience a worsening of their service frequency provision, unless the current frequency from there to Geelong is maintained by running more trains in total.

The old Newport - Footscray "bottleneck" has naturally been mentioned. The Melbourne Metro Two tunnel (MM2) might eventually divert Geelong trains from that, but MM2 is barely on the horizon at the moment.

Another incongruity: the super transport hub at Sunshine, allowing regional passengers to transfer to airport trains, has only recently been announced. But now the intention is to route some Geelong line trains away from it.

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## Timetable shakeup

**A revamp of train timetables will take effect from the end of January. Among the changes are more trains running direct to Flinders Street, including Werribee, Frankston and Sandringham lines on weekends. The remaining Frankston peak**

**Loop services will also switch to run direct.**

Williamstown trains will run all the way into the City at most times on weekends, and the Dandenong line will run anticlockwise through the Loop at all times.

There are some welcome improvements to train frequencies, with the Werribee and Frankston lines running every 20 minutes in the evenings until midnight, and Williamstown and Laverton (Altona Loop) services improving to every 20 minutes in peak.

## Timetable shakeup

While these changes will cause some disruption for some passengers, it will speed up journeys for others. Overall it looks like a good package of improvements, bringing more consistency and better separation

of lines, which should help reliability.

V/Line also sees some changes, including the Ballarat line running every 20 minutes in peak, 40 minutes off-peak, taking

advantage of the recent Ballarat Line Upgrade works.

Also just announced are major changes to Mornington Peninsula bus routes, including a service boost for the often overcrowded route 788.

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## Murray Basin Rail Project goes off track

**The Murray Basin Rail Project as originally conceived would have been a huge step-change in rail freight efficiency in Victoria, bringing the Murrayville, Yelta/Mildura, Sea Lake and Manangatang lines onto Standard Gauge for the first time, reopening the Maryborough-Ararat SG link, dual-gauging Maryborough-Ballararat-Gheringhap/Geelong, and generally restoring track bed quality and increasing axle loads throughout.**

In addition to the obvious benefits of restoring track quality and increasing tonnages, this would have complemented the work completed in the 1990s to standardise the main line to Adelaide via Gheringhap, Maroona and Ararat, and the line to Portland – meaning that the whole west of the state would be on standard gauge, and that freight from all these destinations would have quick and easy access to ports at Portland, Geelong and Melbourne.

Unfortunately the project has been beset by many problems, and the initial allocation of funds has run out with the project half-complete. The Murrayville and Yelta/Mildura

lines have been converted, but the Sea Lake and Manangatang lines have not. The Maryborough-Ararat line has been reopened, but the Maryborough-Geelong link hasn't been touched. And speed restrictions and axle loads are, in many cases, worse than they were before the project. This means that freight from the north west now has a longer and slower trip to port than it did a few years ago, while the State and Federal government argued about who would pay to finish the project off.

After months of waiting, the business case the State put to the Federal government has been released, and it's a significant de-scoping of the original project. It would essentially be a program of further repairs and improvements to the lines as they stand today, with no further gauge standardisation – leaving the Sea Lake and Manangatang lines, as well as the Maryborough-Gheringhap link, broad gauge.

While the proposed works are all sorely needed, they would still leave freight on the Murrayville and Yelta/Mildura lines with a longer path to the ports of Geelong and Melbourne than before the

project – they can still get there, but they need to go via Ararat, adding about 135km to their journey to Geelong, and over 170km to Melbourne.

This would mean a huge competitive disadvantage for rail freight compared with road freight, which can travel direct to any port it pleases, and which sees continued investment in roads without needing to jump through the same hoops rail projects do.

This increased competitive advantage will see more trucks on our roads, which means more congestion, more road damage and maintenance costs, and more carbon emissions in our atmosphere – poor outcomes indeed.

As we emerge from COVID lockdown and the government is seeking to stimulate Victoria's economy, there is a big need to spread that stimulus around the state, rather than focusing the majority on Melbourne. It's disappointing to see that economically productive regional infrastructure like the Murray Basin project wasn't seen as a priority in the budget.

# 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:

### **State Budget 2020 Annual General Meeting report, Free Tram Zone**

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