

Government's transport plan flops 20% by 2020 target dumped

The government's long-awaited transport plan "Meeting Our Transport Challenges" was released on 17th of May.

But far from being the all-encompassing solution for Melbourne (and Victoria's) problems with transport that they had promoted it as being, the government has missed the mark.

While there will be a number of improvements for people lucky enough to live on a train, tram or Smartbus route, many of these changes will be a long time coming, and for everyone else services will continue to be inadequate.

There will be no rail or tram extensions for at least ten years. SmartBus routes will be extended, but only on four orbital routes around Melbourne.

Two-thirds of Melbourne will continue to be car-dependent, with only hourly or half-hourly bus services serving them. This means the government's goal of 20% of motorised trips on public transport by 2020 is effectively dead (indeed, it's not mentioned in the document at all), and they are providing no solutions to the problems of traffic congestion and spiralling petrol prices.

To make things worse, the government will spend billions on expanding the Westgate and Monash freeways, in a futile attempt to build their way out of congestion. They appear oblivious to the fact that this will only result in more induced traffic using those roads, with a negative effect on public transport modal share.

The operation of the privatised public transport network is set to continue into the future. There will be virtually no change to how transport is managed in the state – 300 bureaucrats will continue to administer Byzantine franchise contracts. A Co-ordinator-General of Infrastructure will provide guidance over future infrastructure projects, but this

role is yet to be fully defined, and may have no real power over agencies such as VicRoads.

On the announcement of the plan, the PTUA reacted swiftly and publicly called for the resignation of transport minister Peter Batchelor, for poor targeting of the massive expenditure and spectacularly failing to improve upon previous efforts over the last 7 years.

(Premier Steve Bracks was later to claim that we had not read the plan when we commented. This is incorrect.)

Other groups joining the call include the Better Rail Action Group (Bendigo) and the South Morang Rail Alliance, who are outraged that their rail extension, promised in 1999, has been delayed until at least 2016.

Some welcome upgrades

It's not all bad news. For the first time, local bus route upgrades mean that almost all Melbourne households will have 7-day-a-week services (albeit hourly in many cases) within 400 metres. This significantly reduces the problems of social exclusion due to lack of public transport.

Duplication of the Hurstbridge line between Clifton Hill and Westgarth should help more trains run on the line during peak hours. Replacement of Metrol and selected signalling should facilitate higher train frequencies across the network, and the (eventual) addition of a few stations will be welcomed by residents of those suburbs.

The tram network will gain more DDA-compliant (wheelchair accessible) stops and trams, which is to be welcomed (subject to specifics, such as tram stop design and rationalisation). And more funds will be provided for tram and bus priority.

More on the government's plans ⇒ Pages 3-4

Government plan fails 15 minute test

Why mode share is stagnant

There's nothing that discourages public transport usage more than the prospect of long waits for services. Anybody with a choice does simply not put up with waiting, nor do they want to check timetables to minimise that waiting. They drive instead.

Studies such as the government's unreleased Bus Plan have shown repeatedly that until services run at 15 minute or better frequencies (for most trips), large numbers of choice passengers will remain in their cars.

Yet as the maps on this page show, few public transport services in Melbourne run at or better than every 15 minutes. Even during peak hour, a number of railway stations, including locations as close to the CBD as Brunswick and Yarraville, have services worse than every 15 minutes, underscoring why parallel motorways are so congested.

During weekday off-peak hours, trams and some train lines offer frequencies high enough to travel without timetables, but vast swathes of Melbourne's suburbs have only infrequent services:



15 min or better services, weekday off-peak

The second map below shows weekend daytime services, and is even more stark – for the most part only those living in walking distance of tram lines have access to routes running every 15 minutes or better:



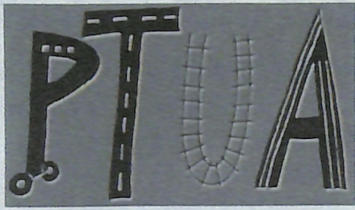
15 min or better services, Saturday daytime

During the evening the situation is even worse, and it becomes crystal clear why just 8% of trips are by public transport, and why roads are increasingly congested during most times of the day.

The state government's Meeting Our Transport Challenges plan, announced in May, does little to alleviate this – which is why the PTUA has branded it a failure. Despite including billions in spending, virtually the only upgrades to 15 minutes or better will be a small number of orbital Smartbus routes, many replacing existing routes which largely meet that standard already.

Until services right across Melbourne offer frequencies that minimise waiting time and don't require users to schedule their trips to match timetables, patronage growth and mode share are likely to remain stagnant.

These maps and more ⇒ www.ptua.org.au



State election looms: Parties challenged on transport

Going into the state election, the PTUA is challenging the major political parties to commit to funding real solutions to Melbourne and Victoria's transport problems.

With endemic traffic congestion and pollution, and (despite a brief respite recently) petrol prices set to continue to climb, it is time to offer more people a genuine alternative to driving.

Key commitments must include:

- Reform of the Planning and Transport Ministries to overhaul the management culture and ensure a holistic view of land-use planning and transport issues, to ensure the best "triple-bottom-line" (environmental, social, economic) outcomes
- Redesign of the bus system into a co-ordinated, direct, frequent, easy-to-understand network that genuinely complements the train and tram systems in providing all of Melbourne with transport choices
- Commitments to build rail extensions into suburban areas that desperately need them now: South Morang, Doncaster, Rowville, and electrification to Baxter, Sunbury and Cranbourne East
- Relatively cheap extensions to the tram network so that routes terminate in logical locations: Route 48 to Doncaster; Route 75 to Knox City; Route 57 to East Keilor; Routes 3, 5, 6 and 67 to their local railway stations
- New stations to better serve suburbs and traffic generators close to existing rail services: Southland, Lyndhurst, Coolaroo, Campbellfield and North Eltham
- Upgrades to service frequency to provide more of Melbourne with services at least every 15 minutes, 7 days a week, including evenings

(including duplication of single track and signalling upgrades where this is necessary)

- Upgrades to regional town bus services in line with those taking place in Melbourne: routes to operate 7 days a week into the evening
- Genuine priority for bus and tram services to ensure these vehicles are not delayed by heavy traffic
- Commence removal of level crossings, beginning with those worst affected by high train frequencies, tram/train crossings and buses held up in traffic

The PTUA was highly critical of the government's *Meeting Our Transport Challenges* document when it was released in May, because for all the money being spent, very little is going towards getting people out of their cars and onto public transport. With a few trivial exceptions, there is no commitment to any the urgent priorities listed above.

Now is the chance for the government, opposition and minor parties to commit to the types of upgrades that will cut car use, and give more Victorians real transport choices.

With this issue is a sticker you can display to show your support for better public transport. And see inside for more information on our campaigning leading up to the state election.

For more details of the PTUA's short-term transport priorities:

⇒ www.ptua.org.au/publications/fiveyearplan

PTUA celebrates 30 years – See pages 4-5