

No more tears,

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Melbourne editor

If the train seats on your daily commute fill you with existential anguish it seems you're not alone.

Metro Trains' "streamers and confetti-inspired" seat fabric design (a hangover from Melbourne's old suburban train operator Connex) was recently named among some of the world's most garish.

"[This] summons a bleak reminder of that tear-filled childhood birthday party you had the year Daddy left," urban-focused website CityLab caustically opined in an international round-up of bus, train and subway seat designs.

The Atlantic-owned CityLab invited followers on Twitter to send examples of public transport seat coverings from all over the world.

The website also singled out the "delirious kitschiness" of fabrics

such as those used on Canberra bus seats.

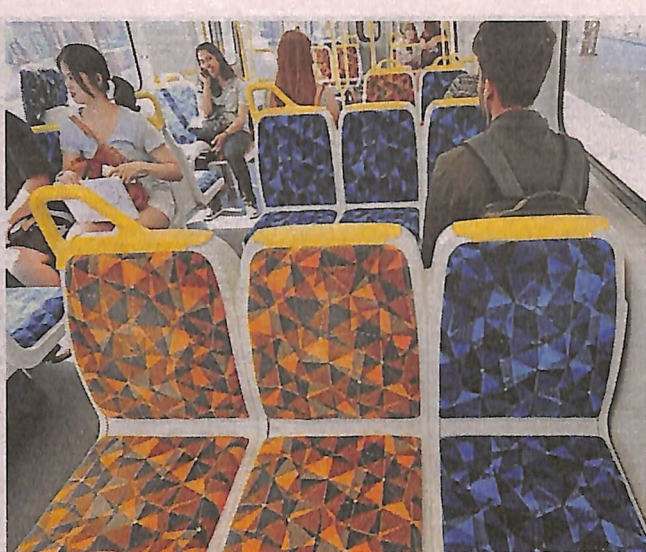
"These ... must be like what a drugged, woozy fly sees as it is slowly digested alive inside a Venus flytrap," CityLab declared.

When ACTION, the bus operator in Canberra responsible for these seats, completed its refurbishment a few years ago, the headline in CityNews.com.au stated cheerfully: "You'll never see the vomit now".

There is a science behind these lurid, slightly trippy patterns on moquette, the velvety textile usually used on public transport seats.

"A lot of the bad and ugly examples around the world are trying to create visual noise," says Dean Butler, the creative lead at Public Transport Victoria's customer service division.

While this visual noise camouflages graffiti, vandalism, stains and wear and tear it is "not a



Dean Butler, creative lead at Public Transport Victoria, with the colourful new seat designs. Photos: Eddie Jim, Joe Armao



it's the trip of happiness



good basis for getting a nice design aesthetic outcome”.

So what does Mr Butler think of CityLab’s claim that the streamers and confetti design on some Metro trains evokes a “tear-filled childhood birthday party”?

“I don’t disagree with it,” he says, adding, “but it was of its time”.

For the past 18 months, Mr Butler has been the lead designer of a new

moquette that will replace the seat fabric on all trams, trains and buses in Victoria over the next five to ten years.

It is being first used in the fleet of 70 upgraded Comeng trains currently being rolled out.

The moquette will come in five colours – blue for Metro trains, purple for V/Line trains, green for trams and a darker colour being developed for buses. The fifth colour – a bright orange – will be used across the entire fleet to make more visible priority seats for people who have a disability or are pregnant. (This is opposed to incorporating a symbol into the design to indicate for whom they are intended; CityLab suggested Scottish rail company ScotRail’s attempt to do so “give the impression of being covered with images of women apparently caught mid-poop”.)

Mr Butler’s team researched the

best and worst public transport seat designs from all over the world.

“We are design nerds, we live and breathe that stuff,” he said. “We tried to come up with a consistent pattern that allows us to tick the boxes for wear and tear and maintenance but at the same time is a bit more harmonious.”

The new, comparatively sober moquette design incorporates the triangles that make up Public Transport Victoria’s logo and are prominently displayed on the exterior of trains, trams and buses.

But the shards also echo the faceted angles that are embedded in the architecture of Melbourne, including Federation Square.

“Most people will put a bum on it and not give it a second thought,” Mr Butler says. “But it’s often a feeling people get when they walk into a space that they may not consciously even acknowledge.”