



## Serious value-for-money questions linger amid State Budget 'transport blitz'

The Andrews State Government maintains its solid commitment to suburban and regional public transport with its Budget handed down in May. New projects include the Western Rail Plan, Cranbourne train line duplication, Hurstbridge and Sunbury line improvements, new trams, and early works on the Airport Rail Link in cooperation with the re-elected Morrison Federal Government.

The commitments are in accordance with the government's promises at last year's state election. Some new funding is also forthcoming for the more prosaic service initiatives and network improvements that are critical to getting value from infrastructure investment. As with previous initiatives under this government, the focus has been on the suburban and regional rail network; less so on trams and buses.

There is concern in the budget 'fine print', however, that the government is proceeding more slowly on committed projects such as the Ballarat rail upgrade. For many of the new rail initiatives too, such as the Cranbourne duplication and Hurstbridge upgrade, most of the 'Total Estimated Investment' is not actually allocated in the forward estimates period to 2023, raising questions over the actual timeframe for this work.

A related issue is the exhaustion of funding for the Murray Basin Rail Upgrade, a vital rail freight initia-

tive for western Victoria which is facing a budget overrun and where (as reported by *Stock and Land* on 19 June) necessary work is now likely to be curtailed due to unwillingness to extend the budget. This includes gauge conversion on the wheat-belt corridor to Manangatang and Sea Lake, and possibly the Geelong to Ballarat line.

This tightening of investment makes it all the more foolhardy that the government has announced a full commitment to the \$16 billion North East Link without re-assessing its wider infrastructure strategy. This one road project by itself outweighs all the government's new commitments on public and active transport put together. Overall, even if level crossing removal is considered exclusively as a public transport project, new road spending in the budget exceeds new public and active transport spending by over 40 per cent. Acknowledging on the other hand that level crossings are 50/50 for motorists and public transport users, spending for roads and cars is more than double the rest.

Quite apart from the real damage the North East Link will do - and which cannot be greenwashed with false claims about congestion relief or what a wonderful busway there will be - this deprives the government of opportunities to invest in big

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Expenditure on new initiatives in 2019/20 budget (level crossing funds counted 100% against 'public transport') (\$M)			
	Capital	Operating	Total
Roads/Cars	16,620	579.8	17,199.8
Public Transport	11,571	601.5	12,172.5
Active Transport	42.3	23.4	65.7

Expenditure on new initiatives in 2019/20 budget (level crossing funds counted 50% against 'public transport')(\$M)			
	Capital	Operating	Total
Roads/Cars	19,895	579.8	20,474.8
Public Transport	8,296	601.5	8,897.5
Active Transport	42.3	23.4	65.7

## PTUA office

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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

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PTUA members can obtain cheap yearly Myki passes – see [www.ptua.org.au/members/offers](http://www.ptua.org.au/members/offers)

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Paul Westcott – Convenor

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## Member meetings

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.

## PTUA Members Meeting

6:30pm, Thursday 25th July 2019  
Ross House, 247 Flinders Lane, Melbourne

Guest Speaker: Cr Nic Frances Gilley, City of Melbourne

Come and hear Cr Frances Gilley, Chair of the Transport Portfolio, speak about the Draft Transport Strategy 2030, which aims to meet the transport, access and liveability demands of the City of Melbourne, today and into the future.

Open to all PTUA members. Non-members welcome to attend, if they join on the night.

More details/RSVP on Facebook or on the PTUA web site.

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# Community coalition to keep the government honest on Upfield grade separations

**As part of its ongoing level crossing removal programme, the State Government announced plans late last year to grade separate three road crossings on the Upfield line - at Moreland Road, Munro Street and Bell Street in Coburg. As at many other locations, the government's preferred solution is to elevate the rail line.**

In May the Level Crossing Removal Authority announced two community 'drop-in' sessions as part of its formal consultation on the project plans. Following the first of these sessions on 25 May, a public meeting at Coburg Library attracted 70 local residents determined to shape the outcome. This meeting led to the formation of the Upfield Corridor Coalition and framed a 'Vision Document' with a set of demands that was subsequently presented to the LXRA.

The coalition's Vision Document is intended to outline a positive vision for the project, making clear the community action should not be dismissed as a mere NIMBY (not in my backyard) protest. At the same time it makes clear demands around multi-modal design, access for all, respect for residents' security and privacy, and preservation of local environment and heritage including the historic Gandolfo Gardens (pictured) adjacent to Moreland station. The group has conducted tours of other 'skyrail' projects including on the Dandenong line to understand what lessons can be learned.

The Upfield grade separation links into an existing campaign for service improvements along the entire

Upfield line. At present, the single track between Gowrie and Upfield at the far end of the line is a barrier to improving frequencies past the every 20 minutes the line is stuck at presently. The other barrier is capacity in central Melbourne, although there is the potential to exploit underutilised terminating capacity at Southern Cross to alleviate this constraint in the case of Upfield. The State Government has yet to seriously investigate this option.

A community campaign supported by local councillors and MPs, including Sue Bolton, Fiona Patten and Tim Read, is demanding that the Andrews Government fund the duplication from Gowrie to Upfield, initially as a measure to improve reliability on the northern section of the line beyond Coburg, where frequent cancellations cause serious problems for local residents and workers. A temporary solution to some of these cancellations would be installation of a crossover at Gowrie so trains can be turned around there rather than at Coburg, allowing extension of services from the current crossover at Coburg to Gowrie when there are delays other issues on the northern part of the line. This would be particularly important if the crossover

planned for Anstey during the upgrade works replaces the Coburg one.

There is ongoing regret that the grade separation at Campbellfield did not include track duplication or provide for a station at Camp Road with interchange to northern suburbs bus services.

It's now hoped that the Moreland-Coburg grade separation will give fresh impetus to meeting the needs of communities on the outer reaches of the Upfield line. The Upfield Corridor Coalition has included consideration of more frequent and reliable services as part of its vision for the corridor.



Community action at Moreland station - Image by John Englart.

The local Moreland City Council at its June meeting approved \$30,000 of funding for local groups including the UCC to campaign on getting the best community outcome from the Upfield line grade separations.

To learn more about the UCC's activities and Vision Document, please visit their facebook group at [www.facebook.com/groups/2334442800168951/](https://www.facebook.com/groups/2334442800168951/).

## **‘Stronger Together’ Fast Rail**

**In early June, the Stronger Together report commissioned by the City of Greater Geelong was released. The report calls for a shift to 200km/h electric regional trains, running via Sunshine and the airport rail link, to be built within around six years at a cost to government of \$11 billion (which would not include the undisclosed amount provided by commercial partners in a Public Private Partnership).**

The PTUA warmly welcomes local government involvement in advocating for better regional rail services – they are hugely important to the vitality of local economies, so it is very much in the best interests of regional cities to ensure they are getting the level of service they need. However, we do view the claims about the timeframe and the cost with a lot of skepticism. A project of this size would require the electrification of hundreds of kilometres of line, realignments of several curves, and the procurement of an entirely new fleet – none of which are cheap or quick to do. The report argues that many rail projects could be done much quicker if the political will existed, and points to the speedy removal of level crossings in the Andrews government's first term as proof; there is some truth to this, but even assuming this project were tackled with as much fervour as the level crossing removal project, six years is too short a timeframe.

The general rule that projects can be delivered more quickly if governments are willing to spend more money butts up against the other

claim of the report; that it could be completed with initial capital investments of \$5 billion each from the state and federal governments, plus \$1 billion for the procurement of the new fleet. Where the rest of the funds required to build such an enormous project would come from, and the revenue model to recoup those costs, remains a mystery.

There are also significant concerns about the proposed design of the new faster rail network. On lines with relatively few stations, like the Ballarat and Geelong lines, the proposal seems to be for trains to stop at all the existing stations (peak expresses notwithstanding). However on the Bendigo line, where the stations are more numerous, the report proposes for the new higher-speed trains to skip some of the smaller stations entirely – not just for a limited number of express trains, but for all trains. It does vaguely suggest that some solution might be devised to continue running Vlocity trains to these stations so as to continue to provide service, but this is very clearly an afterthought and the implications have not been fully thought through.

Similarly, the report relies on regional trains using the same tracks as airport trains between Sunshine and the CBD; despite the fact that the details of this corridor have not been finalised, it seems to rely on the assumption that this will be a mostly-underground line which does not stop at Footscray. Based on media reports about the airport rail link, it does seem likely that

this is how that line will go – but is that the best path for regional trains to take? Footscray station not only provides opportunities to interchange with the Werribee line, trams and buses, it is a huge trip generator in its own right.

When a regional train service has a high frequency of services, it definitely makes sense to provide some express services in the peaks – to speed through small regional towns and suburban stations alike. But the benefits of stopping at those stations for most of the day dramatically outweigh the costs. Permanently removing the possibility of stopping at those stations through infrastructure choices – just to shave a measly minute or two off the journey time in an attempt to grab a headline – would represent a degradation of service which would not serve the people of Victoria well.

The PTUA is very much in favour of improving regional rail services, and while the short-term focus needs to be on increasing frequencies, reducing overcrowding and improving reliability, now is the time to start talking about speed improvements that could be delivered in the medium term. The Stronger Together report, to its credit, does help advance that conversation. But if higher-speed rail is ever going to be more than something politicians pull out every time an election rolls around, we need to ensure that we get realistic plans for a network that would serve all our needs.



# Sydney Road Improvement Options Rebooted

**After a long hiatus, Vicroads has reopened the planning process to reconfigure Sydney Road in Brunswick and Coburg, to better prioritise the movement of trams and provide safer conditions for cycling.**

Conditions in Sydney Road have long been contentious, with trams, through traffic, car parking, cycling and a high level of footpath activity all competing for limited space. There have been a number of incidents involving death and injury to cyclists due to the confusing nature of the current street environment.

The full or partial removal of car parking to provide more space for other road users is now supported by the RACV, as well as groups such as Bicycle Network. Sydney Road traders continue to oppose removal of car parking, despite new Vicroads evidence that only 1.3% of people using Sydney Road actually park cars on the street. Substantial tracts of off-street parking adjacent to Sydney Road are often underutilised at present.

The options formally being considered by Vicroads are the following:

1A. Raised tram stops similar to High Street in Northcote, with parking retained during off-peak periods and a protected bike lane.

1B. Similar to 1A but with 'easy access' stops on the Bridge Road model, that can be used by cars in peak periods.

2. A minimalist option with parking retained during off-peak

periods but a dedicated tram lane enforced during peak periods. A kerbside bike lane would also be provided during peak periods.

3. Removal of all parking in favour of a full-time protected bike lane, with trams and cars sharing the centre lanes.

4. Removal of some parking to extend footpaths, with remaining parking banned in peak periods to provide bike lanes. Trams and cars would share the centre lanes as for option 3.

Not among the options considered is the 'Reimagining Sydney Road' plan produced in November 2018 by the Institute for Sensible Transport and Atelier Red+Black



Sydney Road Brunswick on a Saturday morning.

Architects. This would have provided separate right-of-way for trams, cars and bikes, but without the same opportunity to widen the footpath as envisaged by Vicroads.

There is no question that any practical option for reconfiguring Sydney Road will involve awkward trade-offs. The width of the corridor does not allow simultaneously for a wide footpath, a protected bike lane and separate right-of-way for trams and cars, not to mention space to park cars as well.

Community support appears to be moving toward Vicroads' option 3, which resembles other proposals raised during the last round of consultation in 2016. Although trams and cars would share space under this proposal, the PTUA considers this is potentially a workable solution, given that the removal of on-street parking would also mean an end to the parking-related manoeuvres that are a substantial root cause of delay at present. (It should be noted that at peak times when traffic is heavy but there is no parking, there is relatively little delay to trams at present.)

The PTUA does not support the view sometimes expressed that cyclists should avoid Sydney Road in favour of using the Upfield Path. This is akin to suggesting that because Citylink provides a dedicated north-south corridor for car travel, motorists should use this and avoid Sydney Road entirely. The Upfield Path is also shared with walkers, very narrow for most of its length and unsuitable for safe movement of large numbers of walkers and cyclists.

During the daytime period when traffic problems in Sydney Road are at their worst, most travellers whether in cars, on bikes or in trams are travelling relatively short distances with destinations on Sydney Road. The allocation of road space must respect the status of Sydney Road as a key activity centre with its associated travel needs, and meeting these needs in an efficient and sustainable manner.

## State Budget 'transport blitz'

*Continued from p1*

infrastructure to help the millions of people who will call Melbourne home in the future. Projects like Melbourne Metro 2 from Newport to Clifton Hill appear not to be even on the government's radar.

The lack of funds for improved bus services is similarly disappointing. In the 5-year forward estimates there is \$8 million in new money for bus services, compared with \$150 million for car parking at railway stations. This is despite

the fact that more Melbourne commuters report getting to the station by bus or tram than by car. Little wonder there are traffic problems in district centres: the government spends up to \$40,000 per parking space to get one extra person onto a train while neglecting the bus services that can bring dozens at a time, all day, without adding to traffic.

Public transport has to keep up with demand, and with the growth trend in patronage confirmed in the budget figures. It is critical that

additional services are provided - in peak where possible, but also right across the day - to cut waiting times and to help prevent overcrowding spiralling out of control as population grows.

The bottom line is the budget contains some welcome news, yet is designed to reinforce the status quo, like all the 'balanced transport' exercises of the past. It still pushes Melbourne toward greater dependence on cars and promises a more traffic-congested future.

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## Ballarat branch report

### **June was a big month in public transport advocacy in Ballarat, particularly at the council level.**

It started with the City of Ballarat releasing its rail discussion paper as part of the consultation for its upcoming Integrated Transport Plan – this is an ambitious document and worth PTUA members reading and commenting on. It details the importance of a fully duplicated line to Melbourne, with frequent and reliable trains, the return of direct passenger trains to Geelong, and increased frequencies to nearby destinations like Ararat and Maryborough.

Much of what it says is fantastic, but it is let down by the fact that it still places too much emphasis on car parking at stations. The assumption that permeates the paper is that people will, and must continue to, drive to stations, and that more parking must be provided to facilitate this – both at existing stations and at new park-and-ride stations. While the City of Ballarat will be looking more closely at

buses and active transport in later discussion papers, there needs to be a change in thinking about how people access the rail network – as Ballarat grows, it will be very important for more people to arrive at stations by walking, cycling and bus.

The rail discussion paper can be found and responded to at [mysay.ballarat.vic.gov.au/itp-trains](https://mysay.ballarat.vic.gov.au/itp-trains)

A few days after the ITP rail discussion paper was released, the Stronger Together paper commissioned by the City of Greater Geelong was launched. It describes a vision for 200km/h electric trains to Geelong, Ballarat and other large regional centres around Victoria – see page 3.

Later in June, City of Ballarat renewed their push for a review of Ballarat's bus network, echoing calls made in the PTUA's Connecting Ballarat proposal launched last October. Transport Minister Melissa Horne was in Ballarat to inspect buses coming off the line at a local

firm, and commented that a review could take place after the new bus interchange at Ballarat station is completed; this was supposed to be finished by the end of 2018, but has suffered from delays to other aspects of the Ballarat Station Precinct Redevelopment project, and is now expected to be finished by the end of 2019. As the Connecting Ballarat proposal pointed out, the Ballarat Line Upgrade project will be complete at the end of 2019, and this will trigger an increase in train frequencies from hourly to every 40 minutes, which will break the connectivity with the existing 30/60 minute frequencies of Ballarat's bus network. Given that a complete revamp of the bus network – and associated driver training – will generally take several months, it is important that this planning work starts soon, so that everything is ready to go once the new interchange is complete, and the new bus network and new train timetables can be launched simultaneously.

## In Defence of Buses

**From time to time politicians and others push the misleading line that passengers don't like buses, and that they're only a last resort form of public transport. It's true that patronage on many bus routes is poor, but is not because of some intrinsic fault of buses.**

The solution to this is to roll out more SmartBus style routes, and upgrade existing routes to SmartBus standards, which provide direct, high frequency "tram like" services. SmartBuses run at least every 15 minutes through the day

on weekdays, and more frequently during the peaks. They also provide quite direct routes without meandering through the back streets. That's why they're popular. Many other bus services run every hour or less, and take roundabout routes. That's why people don't use them. It's not about buses *per se*—it's about frequency and directness.

Interchange is another area where Melbourne's bus system desperately needs improvement. Even where high frequency routes cross, often no effort has been made to put bus stops on intersecting routes close

together, no signage to other bus stops is provided, and no services are provided at interchange points.

New train and tram lines are great when the political will and funding can be found, but realistically such new lines will be built only rarely. For the two thirds of Melbourne which doesn't have train or tram services, high quality bus services are the only option. We can't afford to let politicians dodge this necessity by claiming that people don't want buses.

*This is an abridged version of an article available online at [ptua.org.au](http://ptua.org.au)*

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## Geelong branch report

**According to "The Age", its unsuccessful effort to save Corangamite MP Sarah Henderson, saw the Coalition making promises to her electorate (comprising a lot of our Branch area) equating to \$25,000 per voter!**

That largesse is still supposed to be delivered, of course. However, as with many election promises, a lot of the money isn't "real". Either it takes in a number of budgetary cycles, during which circumstances can change, or it depends on the state government making matching sums available.

We are told that the duplication of the South Geelong-Waurn Ponds rail line is more-or-less ready to go, once the promised federal funding has been locked in.

However, the Coalition's promised \$2 billion for "fast rail" is another kettle of fish. The real need on the Geelong line is for greater reliability, capacity and frequency. "Fast rail" has all the hallmarks of a

fetish or, perhaps, a cargo cult. We continue to stress that none of the line's problems will be overcome by having trains run a bit faster.

The headline 32-minute Geelong-Melbourne running time is completely beside the point. No trains now run express between those two stations, and neither should they. What about the substantial wayside patronage, in particular from stations such as North Geelong and Lara?

The reality is that the recent federal budget allocated only \$50 million over the next four years for planning the project. Improvements must be properly planned for, but the need for real solutions is urgent.

The state government and the City of Greater Geelong (CoGG) have been in dispute for eighteen months regarding the provision of new bus shelters.

In January last year, CoGG revealed that it was not intending to

install any more bus shelters, noting that the Road Management Act (2004) makes that the responsibility of the DoT/PTV. (CoGG said it would continue to maintain existing shelters.)

PTV has offered grants for new shelters that include a portion to cover the cost of maintenance, but believes that local councils are best placed to both install and maintain shelters. However, CoGG has not budged.

Consequently, no new bus shelters have been installed since January 2018, and at least one DDA-compliant shelter on a defunct bus route has not been moved to a better location.

The impasse has dragged on far longer than we ever expected, and we have now enlisted the aid of local MP for Geelong, Christine Couzens. She has written to the council asking for a "please explain", and will alert the Minister.

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### **State Budget Upfield line and Sydney Road. Fast Rail**

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