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ASSOCIATION

TABLE TALK

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RAIL & TRAM NEWS

NEW SOUTH WALES



NSW Budget 21/22

On 22 June, the state government handed down its budget for financial year 2021/22.

NSW Transport cluster* FY 21/22 recurrent expenses: \$16.8 billion (up 4% year-on-year).

NSW Transport cluster* FY 21/22 capital expenditure: \$18.7 billion (up 11% year-on-year).

* Transport cluster includes TfNSW and all operating agencies across all modes.

Key rail funding commitments for the new fiscal year include:

- \$3.1 billion – Sydney Metro City and Southwest (includes \$45.7 million for Central Walk).
- \$2.9 billion – progressing Sydney Metro West.
- \$1.13 billion – More Trains, More Services program.
- \$943 million – planning and construction of Western Sydney Airport Metro.
- \$627 million – Parramatta Light Rail project (Stage 1).
- \$365 million - Transport Access Program.
- \$320 million – Regional Rail Fleet program.
- \$281.4 million – New Intercity Fleet project.
- \$232 million – Commuter Car Parking program (state & federal funded).
- \$117 million – Regional Seniors Travel Card program.
- \$63.8 million – Fixing Country Rail program.

- \$45 million – Fast Rail planning and pre-construction works (includes \$12.7 million for new alignment between northern Sydney and Woy Woy) (state & federal funded).
- \$35 million – Automatic Track Protection program.
- \$30 million – Parramatta Light Rail project (Stage 2 – planning).
- \$25 million – Main Western Rail Line Capacity Enhancements program (Lithgow to Dubbo/Parkes).
- \$12.1 million – Lower Hunter Freight Corridor planning and preservation (Hexham to Fassifern).
- \$6 million – Macquarie University station Transport Interchange upgrade.
- \$1.7 million – Toongabbie rail bridge upgrade.

NSW GOVERNMENT

Bankstown line closedown

From 28 June to 11 July, the railway line between Bankstown and Sydenham will be closed as part of works to convert the heavy rail line to metro standard. Subsequent to the publication of June's *Table Talk*, in fact 14 days prior to the beginning of the closedown, Transport for NSW released the final plan for services during the closedown.

On **weekdays**, the following bus routes will operate:

- 10T3: Sydenham, and all stations to Bankstown.
- 51T3: Sydenham, and all stations to Hurlstone Park.
- 52T3: Bankstown to Padstow.
- 53T3: Punchbowl, Wiley Park, then Beverly Hills.
- 54T3: Lakemba, Belmore, then Kingsgrove.
- 55T3: Canterbury express to Central.
- 74T3: Campsie express to Central.

Three Waratah train sets provide a 15-minute frequency shuttle service between Bankstown and Lidcombe, while limited stop T3 Liverpool services operate every 30 minutes via Strathfield (from the City, all stations to Redfern, Newtown, Ashfield, Burwood, Strathfield, Lidcombe then all stations to Liverpool).

Additional T8 Revesby services will stop at Sydenham, St Peters and Erskineville stations in lieu of cancelled T3 services. Some existing peak-hour T8 Airport services make an additional stop at Revesby to support interchange.

The additional stopping patterns on the T8 line to/from Revesby sees added risk for train crew, in particular, in keeping a close eye on scheduled stops.

During **AM peak**, an additional 8 services operate from Revesby (stopping all stations to Kingsgrove, then Sydenham then all stations to the City Circle, while another 3 additional services operate all stations to Turrella, Sydenham, then all stations to the City Circle). The additional counter-peak direction services from the City operate every 15 minutes stopping all stations to Sydenham, Kingsgrove, then all stations to Revesby (except Narwee). Some SWTT (Standard Working TimeTable) Revesby services extend to/from East Hills to facilitate the additional train turnarounds at Revesby.

During **PM peak**, an additional 15 services operate from the City to Revesby (stopping at all stations to Sydenham, Kingsgrove, then all stations to Revesby). The additional counter-peak direction services from Revesby operate every 15 minutes, stopping all stations to Kingsgrove (except Narwee), Sydenham then all stations to the City Circle. Some SWTT Revesby services extend to/from East Hills to facilitate the additional train turnarounds at Revesby.

Outside peak periods, additional services operate every 15 minutes from Revesby (stopping all stations to Kingsgrove [except Narwee] then Sydenham and all stations into the City Circle).

On **weekends**, the following bus routes will operate as follows:

- 10T3: Sydenham, and all stations to Bankstown.
- 13T3: Sydenham, Canterbury, then Campsie.
- 33T3: Sydenham, Belmore, then all stations to Bankstown.

Most T4 Eastern Suburbs services will stop at St Peters and Erskineville in lieu.

A shuttle train service operates between Bankstown and Lidcombe, while T2 Homebush services extend to Liverpool stopping at all stations (except Flemington).

Special Train Notices 1308, 1328 and 1330-2021 provide train workings affected during the first 12 days of the closedown. **TRANSPORT FOR NSW, SYDNEY TRAINS**

Lockdown

A growing COVID-19 infection cluster in Sydney's eastern suburbs caused the state government to announce a one-week lockdown for four of the city's local government areas – City of Sydney, Waverley, Woollahra, and Randwick from 23:59 on Friday, 25 June.

However, the very next day, an alarming increase in infections together with infections in other parts of the Sydney forced the government to install a two-week lockdown for the entire Greater Sydney region starting from 18:00 on Saturday, 26 June. This includes the Blue Mountains, Central Coast, Wollongong, and Shellharbour.

Transport secretary Rob Sharp confirmed that Sydney Trains and NSW TrainLink would continue to deliver the full timetable of services over the next two weeks for essential travel. Masks continue to be mandatory on board all services, and the green dot seat system has been officially re-instated for the length of the lockdown.

NSW TrainLink Brisbane XPT services are currently only operating between Sydney and Casino, with a coach service operating between Casino and Roma Street, Brisbane.

NSW TrainLink Melbourne XPT services are currently only operating between Sydney and Albury, with a coach service operating between Albury and Melbourne. **TRANSPORT FOR NSW**

Parramatta light rail progress report

The Parramatta Light Rail project team advises construction work is full steam ahead for the \$2.4 billion Westmead-Carlingford light rail line.

Parramatta Light Rail advises that by 2026, 28,000 people will use the line every day, with 130,000 residing within walking distance. Transport for NSW says it will timetable a “turn-up-and-go” timetable during peak periods, with services running every 7.5 minutes.

As of 18 June, 52 per cent of the track for the project had been laid. The below provides an overview of recent works:

Westmead/Parramatta

The new 64-metre long bridge across the Parramatta River near the existing Bridge Road Bridge is in place. In the Cumberland Hospital precinct, “grass track” (“grass grown in and around the track”) has been installed. Almost a kilometre of track has been installed along Church Street in North Parramatta, while works in the corridor surrounding the track are ongoing. Closer to the CBD, Eat Street/Church Street station is currently under construction.

In Parramatta, between George and Market Streets, as at 18 June, 83 per cent of the track had been laid.

Rosehill-Carlingford

During the last weekend of May, the steel bridge over James Ruse Drive was installed. The abutments to the bridge over Parramatta River at Camellia were widened in May to facilitate the neighbouring "Active Transport Link" (shared walking and bike-riding path), which will run from Boundary Road in Carlingford through to the future Tramway Avenue station near Camellia. As of 18 June, 72 per cent of the Active Transport Link had been constructed.

As at 18 June, 65 per cent of the track had been laid in this section. **PARRAMATTA LIGHT RAIL**

Renewable power push

The state's Transport Minister unveiled an ambitious plan in June that would see the Sydney Trains network powered by renewable energy by 2025.

Minister Andrew Constance said this would be achieved by changing its power supply contract to a supplier that provides a renewable power source. **ABC NEWS**

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY



School bus timetable adjustments

From Monday, 12 July, with the start of Term Three of the school year, the following school route changes will take effect:

- Route **2070** extends to/from St Mary Mackillop College (Isabella Campus), with inbound AM trip operating 15 minutes earlier, and outbound PM trip operating 15 mins later.
- Route **1060** incurs a minor route adjustment. The outbound PM trip departs University of Canberra High School Kaleen 4 mins earlier.

ACT TRANSPORT

Metro Trains

Line/s	Disruption	Works start	Finish
Werribee	Buses replace trains between Laverton and Werribee.	Wednesday, 9 June	Wednesday, 16 June
Frankston, Cranbourne and Pakenham	Buses replace trains between Richmond and Westall/Moorabbin across the weekend.	Friday, 11 June (20:30)	Sunday, 13 June
Mernda, Hurstbridge, Lilydale, Glen Waverley and Belgrave	Trains do not run through the City Loop, instead run direct to Flinders Street station. <i>Change at Flinders Street for Southern Cross station, also change for a tram towards Parliament, Melbourne Central or Flagstaff.</i>	Friday, 11 June (21:00)	Sunday, 13 June
Werribee	Buses replace trains between Newport and Laverton.	Friday, 11 June	Monday, 14 June
Sunbury	Buses replace trains between North Melbourne and Sunbury.	Saturday, 12 June (01:00)	Sunday, 13 June

Table Talk – July 2021

VICTORIA



Montmorency duplication flies away

Government plans to duplicate a kilometre of railway between Greensborough and Montmorency have been cancelled due to the location of a rare butterfly species, the Eltham copper butterfly.

The single line, which connects two marginal Labor seats with Melbourne CBD via the Hurstbridge line, is being duplicated as part of a project being delivered by a consortium of Acciona, Comeman Rail, WSP and Metro Trains Melbourne, with a 'not significant' cost increase.

Upon opening, trains are planned to operate every 10 minutes from Montmorency and Eltham, with some other services starting out of Greensborough. The Age reports that there is no change in this plan due to "additional signalling and power works".

Source supplied by - ROSS MORRISON

Source - THE AGE

Yarra Trams: St Kilda Road shutdown

From 02:30 on Sunday, 27 June to last service on Sunday, 11 July, infrastructure upgrades will see St Kilda Road closed between Flinders Street and Southbank Boulevard, with Southbank Boulevard closed onward to Sturt Street.

Routes 1 and 67 trams divert via Kings Way, William Street and La Trobe Street, Route 5 trams only operate between Stop 38 and Malvern, Routes 3, 3a, 64 and 72 trams only operate between Stop 17 and their south-eastern termini, while Route 6 and 16 trams will be broken into two sections, with nothing operating between Stops 11 and 17.

Additional tram services will also operate on route 58 from Domain Interchange, while bus route 605 services will divert around the closure using nearby streets.

Source supplied by - ROSS MORRISON

Sources - DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT, YARRA TRAMS

Big Build

Left, and pages 4-5 we have a list of recent and upcoming service disruptions across the state's rail and tram networks due to the *Big Build* and other works (specific times only provided where sourced).

Source supplied by - ROSS MORRISON

Sources - BIG BUILD, PTV

Metro Trains (Continued)

Line/s	Disruption	Works start	Finish
Werribee and Williamstown	Buses replace trains between North Melbourne and Werribee/Williamstown.	Sat/Sun, 12/13 June (20:30 both days)	Sun, 13 June (04:00); last service on Sun, 13 June
Cranbourne and Pakenham	Buses replace trains between Caulfield and Westall.	Monday 14 June	(all day)
Sunbury	Buses replace trains between North Melbourne and Sunbury.	Friday, 2 July	Sunday, 4 July
	Buses replace trains between Sunshine and Sunbury.	Monday, 5 July	Thursday, 8 July
Lilydale	Buses replace trains between Ringwood and Lilydale.	Monday, 19 July	Sunday, 25 July
Frankston and Stony Point	Buses replace trains between Mordialloc and Frankston/Stony Point.	Sunday, 25 July	Sunday, 1 August
Williamstown	Buses replace trains between Newport and Williamstown.	Friday, 20 August	Friday, 12 November
Hurstbridge	Buses replace trains between Macleod and Hurstbridge.	Monday, 30 August	Thursday, 2 Sept

Yarra Trams

Route/s	Disruption	Works start	Works finish
86	Buses replace trams between Stop 25 Clifton Hill and Stop 71 Bundoora RMIT.	Saturday, 29 May	Sunday, 6 June
58	Buses replace trams between Stop 123 Fawkner Park and Stop 139 Glenferrie Road.	Friday, 11 June (22:00)	Friday, 18 June
78	Buses replace trams on the whole route between Stop 65 Victoria Street and Stop 36 Brighton Road.	Wednesday, 16 June	Thursday, 17 June
Routes 1, 3, 3a, 5, 6, 16, 64 and 72	No trams between Stop 11 Collins Street and Stop 17 Grant Street. Pedestrian access into the city.	Sunday, 27 June	Sunday, 11 July
70	Buses replace trams between Stop 6 Russell Street and Stop 31 Fordholm Street.	Saturday, 14 August	Saturday, 21 August

V/Line

Line/s	Disruption	Works start	Works finish
Geelong	Buses replace trains between Marshall and Waurn Ponds.	Saturday, 5 June	Sunday, 13 June
	Nightly, coaches replace trains between Southern Cross and Waurn Ponds/Geelong.	Sunday, 13 June	Wednesday, 16 June
Warrnambool	Coaches replace trains between Geelong and Warrnambool.	Saturday, 5 June	Sunday, 13 June
	Coaches replace trains between Southern Cross and Warrnambool.	Saturday, 12 June	Sunday, 13 June
Bendigo and Echuca	Coaches replace trains between Southern Cross and Gisborne.	Saturday, 12 June	Sunday, 13 June
Swan Hill	Coaches replace trains between Southern Cross and Bendigo.	Saturday, 12 June	Sunday, 13 June
Geelong, Ballarat, Ararat and Maryborough	Coaches replace trains between Southern Cross and Sunshine.	Saturday, 12 June	Sunday, 13 June
Ballarat, Ararat and Maryborough	Nightly, coaches replace trains between Southern Cross and Ballarat	Sunday, 13 June	Saturday, 19 June
Bendigo	Coaches replace trains between Southern Cross and Bendigo.	Sunday, 27 June	Sunday, 11 July
Echuca and Swan Hill	Coaches replace trains between Southern Cross and Echuca/Swan Hill.	Sunday, 27 June	Sunday, 11 July
Bendigo	Coaches replace trains between Southern Cross and Bendigo.	Sunday, 27 June	Sunday, 11 July
Echuca and Swan Hill	Coaches replace trains between Southern Cross and Swan Hill/Echuca.	Sunday, 27 June	Sunday, 11 July
Seymour/ Shepparton	Coaches replace trains between Southern Cross and Seymour/Shepparton.	Friday, 27 August	Sunday, 5 September
Echuca	Coaches replace trains between Bendigo and Echuca.	Tuesday, 31 August	Monday, 1 November

V/Line close call

On 14 May, a close incident occurred where two V/Line trains running on the same line avoided a head-on crash near Seymour.

Nine News reported “the V/Line trains came close to disaster after power problems caused signals to fail... [one train, operating from Melbourne] is believed to have passed two faulty signals affected by a power outage, putting it on the same single stretch of track near the station”. The news report also said “the drivers... [hit] the brakes as they spotted each other’s headlights”.

State Member for Euroa, and Deputy Leader of the Nationals, Steph Ryan, said “the line still runs on the 19th century double-blocking system... [like] something out of Harry Potter”. She also said that previously stolen copper had not been replaced, leaving the operator to rely on back-up systems “for years”.

A V/Line spokesperson said it was working with the Office of the National Rail Safety Regulator to investigate the incident.

Source supplied by - ROSS MORRISON

Sources - NINE NEWS MELBOURNE, VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT

V/Line restructure

Still on V/Line, the government announced that, from 1 July, it will restructure the regional rail operator and maintainer from a State-Owned Enterprise to a Statutory Authority, which the government claims will improve oversight, with an advisory board to be appointed to provide advice and support to the chief executive officer (CEO).

Matt Carrick, CEO of State Trustees, has been appointed as acting CEO at V/Line for 12 months “to oversee the implementation of this reform”.

Source supplied by - ROSS MORRISON

Source - VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT

SOUTH AUSTRALIA



Level crossing removal cancelled

On 22 June, the state government announced it would not be going ahead with the Hove level crossing removal project due to budgetary considerations.

The state government's statement reads: "after extensive stakeholder consultation and detailed analysis of both rail-over and rail-under design options, ... found that the least costly of the two would still be around \$120 million more than the available budget".

The government simultaneously announced it would create a new *Ten Year Level Crossing Removal Program*, which would be tasked "to identify and prioritise the removal of level crossings across Adelaide based on potential benefits, strategic importance within the network and affordability". **SA DEPARTMENT OF INFRASTRUCTURE AND TRANSPORT**

July rail shutdown

Authorities are using the opportunity provided by school holidays in July to closedown the Belair, Outer Harbour & Grange, and Seaford & Flinders lines, as part of the ongoing Gawler line electrification project.

- **Outer Harbour and Grange:** Full-line closure between Saturday, 3 July and Sunday, 18 July, with the following substitute bus routes:
 - **G1:** Adelaide-Grange (all stops, weekdays every 30 minutes until night, then hourly to end of service, hourly service on weekends. *NB: on weekdays, one additional trip has been provided in the peak direction only to provide a short-term 15-minute frequency*)
 - **H1:** Adelaide-Outer Harbour (all stops, every 30 mins till midnight. *NB: on weekdays, one additional short-working trip departs Glanville at 08:47, to provide a 15-minute gap between the adjacent H1 services into Adelaide*)
 - **O1:** Adelaide, Woodville, then all to Osborne (every 30 mins in peaks only)
 - **X1:** Glanville, Ethelton, Port Adelaide, Adelaide (peak period, peak direction only, every 15 mins)

The line will experience its next full closedown between 25 September and 10 October.

- **Belair:** Buses replace trains between Adelaide and Goodwood on consecutive weekends - 3-4, 10-11, and 17-18 July.
 - **B1:** Mitcham-Adelaide (all stops, expected to be every 30 minutes – *timetable was not available at time of publication*)

The line will experience more weekend closures during the Sept/Oct school holidays, while a full network closure is planned for later in October.

- **Seaford and Flinders:** Buses replace trains between Adelaide and Adelaide Showground, and between Woodlands Park and Flinders on consecutive weekends – 3-4, 10-11, and 17-18 July.
 - **N4:** Adelaide-Adelaide Showground (express, every 30 mins)
 - **N7:** Woodlands Park-Flinders (all stops, expected to be every 30 mins – *timetable was not available at time of publication*)

On the Seaford line, Adelaide Metro provided a five-minute changeover time at Adelaide Showground between the train and the bus.

The line will experience more weekend closures during the Sept/Oct school holidays, while a full network closure is planned for later in October.

ADELAIDE METRO

WESTERN AUSTRALIA



Mandurah line closedown

Transperth has announced that the Mandurah line will have a four-week closedown over the Christmas period this Summer. The closedown will enable work to progress on the Metronet Thornlie-Cockburn Link project. Train services will be replaced by buses between Elizabeth Quay and Aubin Grove, while reduced services will operate between Aubin Grove and Mandurah. The closedown is scheduled from Sunday, 26 December until Friday, 14 January.

Transport Minister Rita Saffioti, acknowledging the disruption expected, said "We encourage everyone who may be impacted to start thinking about what they may be able to do to make travel throughout this period easier, such as catching the Armadale train line, using a rail replacement bus or even looking to see if you can take annual leave or work from home".

PERTHNOW, TRANSPERTH

Claremont

Updating the April edition of *Table Talk*, article titled 'Claremont closure extended' which provided a late April re-opening for the station, Metronet advises that Claremont station reopened on 1 June. **METRONET**

Fare freeze

The state government confirmed on 31 May that the state's public transport fares would stay the same in the new financial year. A two-zone structure for the city of Perth is due to commence from 1 January 2022. **ABC NEWS**

* costing not updated.

NZ TRANSPORT AGENCY, KIWIRAIL, STUFF.CO.NZ

Puhinui station opening

Auckland Transport has confirmed that Puhinui station and the attached bus interchange will open on 26 July (see *Table Talk's* December 2019 edition for further information on the project). The opening has been delayed by COVID-19 lockdown impacts and logistical issues from associated rail line shutdowns.

The rail/bus interchange forms part of the Auckland Airport to Botany Rapid Transit project. **STUFF.CO.NZ**

NEW ZEALAND



NZ Upgrade Program

Initially announced by the Prime Minister in January 2020, the scope of projects under the New Zealand Upgrade Program was recently revised due to cost blowouts with multiple projects. *Stuff Online* reports that the original list of all transport projects, which were supposed to cost \$NZ6.8 billion had blown out to \$12.8 billion.

The rail projects currently due include:

- Auckland: **Wirri to Quay Park third line** (\$318 million) – new third track between Wirri and Westfield, and Ports of Auckland rail access improvements at Quay Park. Enables increased service capacity between South Auckland and Britomart.
- Auckland: **Papakura to Pukekohe electrification** (\$375 million) – extension of the city's existing electrification infrastructure to Pukekohe.
- Auckland: **Drury station development** (\$247 million*) – construction of three railway stations (Drury Central, Drury West and Paerata), with a bus/rail interchange constructed at Drury.
- Wellington: **Wairarapa rail upgrades** (\$156 million) - Provide passing loops at Carterton and Maymorn, a second platform at Featherston, bridge & signalling upgrades, and removal of some level crossings.
- Wellington: **Wellington station safety improvements** (\$88 million) – station and junction capacity improvements.
- Wellington: **Capital Connection – interim rollingstock refurbishment** (\$26 million) – extend the service life of trains before the procurement of new trains expected by the end of the decade.

INTERNATIONAL

US: NY MTA sets new post-COVID records

On Friday, 11 June, New York's Metropolitan Transportation Authority achieved its highest patronage since the COVID-19 pandemic took hold, with almost 2.5 million passengers carried across the day. It breaks recent record-breaks achieved on 9 June, 27 May, 14 May and 7 May. In addition to unprecedented cleaning and disinfecting regimes, it is also hosting public vaccination hubs at its Grand Central and Penn stations.

While the numbers are still considerably down on the pre-pandemic average ridership of 5.5 million, recent numbers shows that the city is starting to open up again, and is well up on the pandemic low of just 300,000 passengers in April 2020. **INTELLIGENT TRANSPORT**

ENDS

BUS & COACH NEWS

QUEENSLAND



Extra Magic Round services

Between Friday 14 and Sunday 16 May, Brisbane's Suncorp Stadium hosted the National Rugby League competition's Magic Round, where all eight games of the round are played at the venue across three days.

For the event, Translink says it supplied regular shuttle buses to the venue from Brisbane CBD, Carindale,

Chermside, Eight Mile Plains and The Gap at least one hour before the start of the day's first match, with return shuttle buses departing the venue for around one hour after the conclusion of "the final game each day". On the Saturday and Sunday, return shuttle buses also operated "from the end of game one to the start of game three".

14 extra train services were also scheduled on "most lines after the last game each day". **TRANSLINK**

NEW SOUTH WALES



Bathurst network changes

From Monday, 28 June, a revised network for the central west NSW city of Bathurst was implemented by bus operator Bathurst Buslines.

Route changes follow:

- **520 Windradyne** A more direct route is provided with West Bathurst now served by route 526 clockwise and 528 anti-clockwise. Saturday services are increased to hourly, and Sunday services are now provided.
- **521 Laffing Waters** A more direct route is provided via Hereford Street.
- **522 Gormans Hill** A more direct route is provided with South Bathurst now served by route 526 clockwise and 528 anti-clockwise. Saturday services increased to hourly.
- **523 Eglinton** Route altered to operate via Llarnarth in both directions. Saturday service is increased to hourly, with a Sunday service now also provided.
- **523 Eglinton Express.** New peak hour service operating direct via Eglinton Road.
- **524 Raglan** Route altered to operate via Kelso in both directions. Saturday service is increased to hourly.
- **525 Kelso to University & TAFE via CBD** Kelso service extended to the University & TAFE, now direct via Hereford Street. Route 529 now services McBriens Drive and Hughes Street in Kelso instead. Saturday service increased to hourly, and a Sunday service now also provided.
- **526 West Bathurst via South Bathurst** Clockwise Loop. Now extended to West Bathurst.
- **527 Raglan to University via CBD** Combined 524/5 service extended to University, now direct via Hereford Street.

- **528 South Bathurst via West Bathurst** New anti-clockwise service in conjunction with route 526.
- **529 Kelso** New service via Hereford Street, also services McBriens Drive and Hughes Street.

Report by **HILAIRE FRASER**

NSW Budget 21/22

On 22 June, the state government delivered its budget address for the 2021/22 financial year.

Key bus funding commitments for this fiscal year include:

- \$188.2 million for "funding new buses, identifying new bus routes and continuing the transition to a low-emissions transport fleet"
- \$20 million to continue the Bus Priority Infrastructure Program (BPIP), including Bus Rapid Transit planning.
- \$10 million for Bus Electrification Program.
- \$6 million for Macquarie University station Transport Interchange upgrade.

Transport for NSW will also continue its work in transitioning State Transit's commuter bus operating contracts to private operation.

NSW GOVERNMENT

VICTORIA



Werribee timetable update

As first advertised in *Table Talk's* October 2020 edition (pg. 10), new Werribee routes **152** and **182**, connecting Tarneit, Truganina and Tarneit West, began operating from Sunday, 30 May. Route 182's route will be adjusted in early 2022 once the new Hogans Road bridge opens.

Public Transport Victoria says that both routes operate daily, with services running every 40 minutes in the inter-peak, and more frequently in peak periods.

Meanwhile, also from Sunday, 30 May, the routes for 439 and 443 buses were altered to use the newly opened road bridge, following the removal of Werribee's Cherry Street level crossing. There have been some minor timing changes as a result, while full trip journey times have increased by six and three minutes respectively. **PUBLIC TRANSPORT VICTORIA**

Frankston timetable adjustments

Public Transport Victoria advises that from Monday, 7 June, minor timetable changes were made to route 772, 775 and 779 timetables, as follows:

- **772** – Two weekday morning services depart Frankston 10 minutes earlier, improving reliability for school students at Frankston High School.
- **775** – Most services depart Frankston station up to seven minutes earlier. Passengers are also now able to travel the full route without changing buses at Mount Erin College/Golf Links Road.
- **779** – Late evening services depart five minutes earlier, while weekday morning and early afternoon services depart two minutes earlier. Passengers can travel the full route towards Frankston without changing buses, while bus congestion should now be avoided at Belvedere Primary School.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT VICTORIA

Night Bus network expansion

The state government confirmed in June that it plans to expand Melbourne's Night Bus network in September from 21 to 34 routes. In a statement, the government says that most routes will connect with hourly late night train services, "along with five routes operating from the CBD".

"Planning is underway for new bus routes at Tarneit North, extending routes and improving coverage in Clyde and Clyde North, aligning services to demand in Yarra Valley and Broadmeadows, and increasing the frequency of two key bus routes that connect Fishermans Bend with the CBD. "

The government allocated \$74.3 million in the new budget for bus reform across the state. *VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT*

Benalla route 2 changes

Effective from Monday, 17 May, route 2 (operating between Benalla and Benalla East) has been extended from Witt Street to Enterprise Drive and return. Four new bus stops are now in use, including one at Benalla Tourist Park. Public Transport Victoria advises that the extension also provides for transport connections towards Yooralla Business Enterprise and other businesses east of the town centre. *PUBLIC TRANSPORT VICTORIA*

V/Line coach timetable adjustments

From Sunday, 11 July, V/Line coach services on the Warrnambool, Bendigo, Swan Hill/Mildura, and Ballarat/Ararat lines come into effect:

- **Warrnambool:** Coaches arrive/depart selected stops earlier "to better reflect journey times".
- **Bendigo:** Minor adjustments with Daylesford-Woodend and Maryborough-Castlemaine coaches to maintain connections with V/Line trains due to the adjusted train timetable.
- **Swan Hill/Mildura:** From Mildura, the Mon-Sat 10:15 Swan Hill coach now departs at 10:00 to maintain train connection. From Swan Hill, the Mon-Sat 13:15 Mildura service now departs at 13:02 for a shorter connection time from the train to "get passengers home earlier". From Mildura, the weekday 07:29 coach to Bendigo now departs at 07:14 to increase reliability to connect with the train into Melbourne.
- **Ballarat/Ararat:** The following routes have timing adjustments to maintain connections with V/Line trains due to the adjusted train timetable:
 - Dimboola-Ballarat,
 - Ballarat-Ararat,
 - Ararat-Horsham,
 - Horsham-Ararat,
 - Ararat-Dimboola, and
 - Halls Gap-Stawell.

Meanwhile, some weekend services between Ballarat and Ararat (in both directions) also have timing adjustments to "improve the spread of services and an improved range of travel options".

PUBLIC TRANSPORT VICTORIA

Day use of school buses

Wellington Shire Council, in the south-east of the state, has submitted to a state government inquiry into the use of school buses during the day in-between morning and afternoon school runs, under the premise that they are otherwise sitting idle, as a way of increasing mobility in regional Victoria.

The Council identified a number of usage gaps across its community, including vulnerable adults, disabled people, and post-secondary school students. Council also submitted that there was no adequate transport solution between the area's two major centres – Sale and Yarram, which Council said recent community engagement had identified as a hindrance to medical, community and social needs.

One of the Council's recommendations is to convert existing school routes into public routes:

- Woodside to Sale (and extended to Yarram),
- Briagolong to Sale via Maffra, and
- A yet-to-be-identified "coastal route".

Meanwhile, Greater Shepparton City Council said in its submission that a key priority for its area was to deal with a lack of a bus link between Shepparton and Tatura.

Both councils recognise that school buses "tend to be coaches that do not meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1992, which are enforced for public route services".

Northern Victoria's Indigo Shire Council says it supports the process to provide greater access to specialist services for vulnerable members of the community. Council proposes a limited loop service operating between 10:00 and 14:00 "from each of the 5 townships to the closest township", either Wangaratta or Wodonga, which it says would provide a significant improvement for many residents.

The state's bus operator representative, Bus Association Victoria, says that other funding for such a program would be required, including installation of GPS, CCTV, and fare collection systems, with the application of the regional bus fare structure for "non-students", specially allocated "non-student" seats, and prior application to the relevant school principal for approval to use the service.

The inquiry is due to hand down its final report by November. **WIN NEWS GIPPSLAND, VICTORIAN LEGISLATURE**

TASMANIA



Hobart City Deal

On 24 February 2019, the federal government, state government, and leaders of local councils (Clarence, Glenorchy, Hobart, and Kingborough) signed a 10-year agreement to work towards improving Hobart into an international gateway, establishing a cost-effective transport system, improving governance for city planning, and delivering diverse affordable housing options.

In November 2019, an Implementation Plan was released, with actions including developing Hobart Airport, "activating" the Northern Suburbs Transit Corridor, delivering a new Bridgewater Bridge, smart technology solutions to tackle road congestion, and establishing the *Greater Hobart Act*.

Hobart International Airport

Scheduled to be completed this year, airport facilities are being developed with funds from federal and state governments to enable Hobart Airport to host international flights (see *Table Talk*, December 2020, pg. 16-17). Whilst many of the works have been completed, some delays have been experienced due to impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic. Upon completion, Hobart is expected to host several flights every week to/from New Zealand.

Northern Suburbs Transit Corridor

Local, state and federal governments to work on finding, then delivering an effective transport solution along the existing rail corridor over the next 5-10 years. This is tied to urban renewal and an activation/growth strategy around the transit corridor.

In 2020, the independent assessment reviewed three potential solution – light rail, bus rapid transit, and trackless tram – with only the first two options recommended for further examination.

The federal government allocated \$25 million in funding through its Urban Congestion Fund, which will be used in projects to deliver the program. Currently, the program is studying the various transport options.

Greater Hobart Transport Vision

Initiatives include establishment of the Derwent River Ferry Service trial, the South East Traffic Solution - including Hobart Airport Interchange and Midway Point intersection projects, \$20.8 million Kingston Congestion Package with road upgrades and park & ride and bus interchange upgrades, new Bridgewater Bridge, development of a Hobart Transit Centre for buses, bus prioritisation between Glenorchy and Hobart, and a statewide ticketing platform.

A trial of additional bus services is planned for the Kingborough area later in the year, to take advantage of the new park & ride facilities. **FEDERAL GOVT – INFRASTRUCTURE, HOBART CITY DEAL PROJECT**

SOUTH AUSTRALIA



School bus expansion

In the recent budget address for 2021/22, the state government confirmed an allocation of \$17.3 million to expand school bus services across the state. The funding includes leasing buses to service new schools – Aldinga Payinthe College and Riverbanks College B-12 at an average of around \$550,000 a year. \$12 million will be used to purchase 20 new school buses to be commissioned by the start of the new 2022 school year. **ABC MAGAZINE**



Transperth service changes

From Sunday, 18 July, a new route, 995, begins operating, and there will be changes to routes 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 66, 67, 68, 96, 97, 102, 103, 107, 390 and 950. Details follow:

New High Frequency Route 995

This service will operate a high frequency service between Claremont Station and Elizabeth Quay Bus Station via Stirling Highway.

- Route 995 will operate approximately every 10 minutes in peak, every 15 mins during the day (including weekends), and every 30-60 mins at night.
- Route 995 will work in conjunction with Route 950 to provide high levels of service to the University of Western Australia (UWA) and improve the service frequency along Stirling Highway. The route will also serve the Mount Hospital.
- With the introduction of this new service, routes 102 and 107 will no longer operate between Claremont and Perth. However they will have improved timetable connections with trains at Claremont station.
- The majority of route 107 trips and all 102 trips operating to Claremont station will then continue as Route 995 to Perth CBD.
- From Perth CBD, passengers may need to transfer at Claremont station to use route 102 or 107 services.

Routes 23, 24, 25, 26, 28 and 97

- Will undergo time changes.

Route 27

- Will undergo a time change.

Route 66

- Will undergo time changes, while fewer trips will be timetabled (only six morning and six afternoon services, operating at the busiest times along Beaufort Street).

Route 67

- Will undergo time changes, while a small number of full trips will be withdrawn.

- Deviations to Cottonwood Cr and April Rd will be withdrawn due to poor patronage.

Route 68

- Will undergo time changes.
- Fewer deviations to Dianella Plaza will be timetabled due to poor patronage.

Route 96

- Will operate two additional morning peak trips between Leederville Station and QEII Medical Centre departing at 7.35am and 8.05am.

Route 102

- Will undergo a route change to instead operate between Cottesloe and Claremont stations.
- Transperth bus trips between Claremont station and Perth CBD will now be covered by new Route 995. However, all Route 102 trips operating to Claremont station will then continue as a Route 995 service into Perth CBD via Stirling Highway.
- Will undergo time changes to offer more convenient transfers to/from train services at Claremont station.

Route 103

- The existing trip on school days departing Iona Primary School at 3.30pm to East Perth is withdrawn, instead replaced with a Route 107 service from Fremantle, deviating via the school at 3.30pm, to Claremont station, then continuing as a Route 995 service to Elizabeth Quay Bus Station.

Route 107

- Will undergo a route change, instead operating between Fremantle and Claremont stations.
- The majority of trips operating to Claremont station will continue thereafter as Route 995 into Perth CBD via Stirling Highway.
- Trips will undergo timing changes in an effort to provide more convenient transfers to/from train services at Claremont station.

Route 390

- Will undergo a permanent route change in Banksia Grove, with services now extending to a new terminus on Forever Boulevard - travelling via Elderiana Link and Grandis Bvd.

- Services will no longer operate along Viridian Drive. However five trips in each direction will deviate via Viridian Dr on weekdays, including a deviation in the morning and afternoon to Banksia Grove Primary School.

Route 950

- The number of short trips between Elizabeth Quay Bus Station and UWA will be reduced, with a number of these services instead replaced with new high frequency Route 995.
- New trips will operate between Morley and QEII Medical Centre as follows:
 - One weekday morning peak trip departing Morley at 7.59am;
 - One Saturday morning trip departing Morley at 8.05am; and
 - One early Sunday morning trip departing Morley at 5.41am (which is 30 minutes prior to the first current trip at 6.11am).

Report provided by HILAIRE FRASER, source TRANSPERTH

NEW ZEALAND



Auckland: timetable adjustments

From Sunday, 27 June, Wellesley Street becomes “the main east-west bus corridor through the **City Centre** and many bus routes will move from Victoria Street”. Routes affected are Inner Link, Outer Link, NX2, 18, 101, 110, 125X, 129, 195, 22A, 22R, 22N, 24B, 24R, 24W, 209, 75, 82, 802, 923, and 924. Auckland Transport said route “journey times may vary by a few minutes” due to this change. This major change is due to City Rail Link construction works. New timetables have been published for affected services.

Also from Sunday, 27 June, route **985** enjoys a service increase, with route operating hours extended to 22:00 daily with a bus every 30 minutes in the evening (previously was 19:00). Also, daily, an additional trip operates 30 minutes before the (pre-existing) first service of the day. On weekends and public holidays, service frequency increases from hourly to every 30 mins across the day.

From Monday, 28 June, some **774** and **775** morning trips have timing adjustments with the hope of better spreading bus services along Tamaki Drive.

From Saturday, 3 July, route **25B**'s 00:00 weekend service from City Centre to Blockhouse Bay will operate 15 minutes earlier (i.e.: departing at 23:45). Auckland Transport says it “will create better spacing with the 25L bus along Dominion Road”.

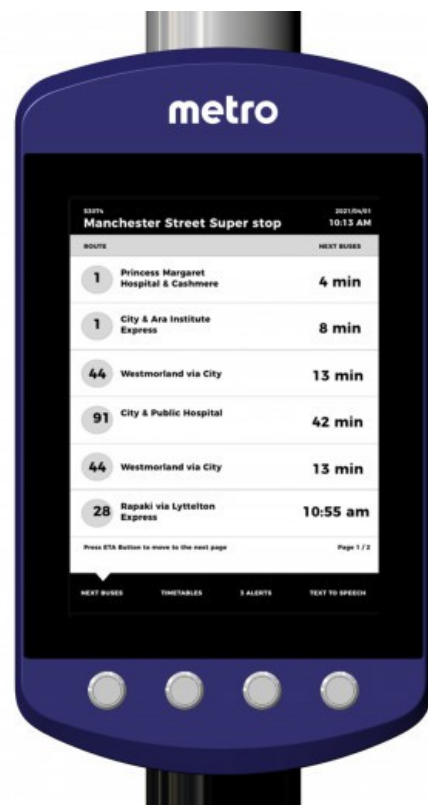
Wellington: Bus cancellations continue

Stuff Online reports that service cancellations continue to dog the network, with May reaching a new high of 3,412 services cancelled. Wellington has struggled to reach optimum driver numbers since the network changes several years ago.

The Tramways Union is in ongoing negotiations with one of the operators, NZ Bus, over a new driver enterprise agreement, with some short-term strike action occurring in recent months. On Wednesday, 23 June, the union held another stop-work meeting, forcing the cancellation of NZ Bus services between 09:00 and 15:00.

One anonymous driver told *Stuff Online* that stress levels had risen, with “more newer drivers” being lost, leaving the longer serving drivers to carry an increased load. Union secretary Kevin O’Sullivan said “the whole industry is in crisis... because of the staff shortage they are driving everyone to death trying to do the work”.

Meanwhile, Greater Wellington Regional Council has also recently lobbied the national government to take back control of the area’s bus services. Chairperson Daran Ponter said while council could tender themselves, it was not realistic as the tender system was designed to encourage competition. Mr Ponter also said the idea would not necessarily push private operators out, but instead operate the tender itself, buying the buses, setting the wages then letting a private operator do the day-to-day running. Wellington City Council Mayor Andy Foster said he was “very wary” of the council directly employing drivers, especially given the chances of industrial action. Mr Ponter also said the regional council was better placed than the city council to take the buses back, as it already controls the trains. *THE DOMINION POST (2) (3)*



Christchurch bus stop information

Metro Christchurch announced on 24 June it is in the process of upgrading its radio-based data system with a cellular-based satellite-fed data system, which it said would improve the reliability of data because the older system suffered from black spots.

As part of this project, 100 new bus locators will be installed at selected bus stops across the city (photo, bottom-right of page 11), with “soft-touch buttons”, “clear visuals, and audio announcements”.

As part of the upgrade, the online journey planner will be refreshed, and a new, free MetroGo mobile application will also be available by the end of the year.

According to Metro Christchurch, the older “bus finders” at bus stops are in the process of being removed by Christchurch City Council as they are at “end-of-life”. **METRO CHRISTCHURCH**

Invercargill network changes

Invercargill City Council introduced a new bus network across the city on Monday, 24 May, which the council said was in response to commuter feedback.

The six new (colour-coded) loop routes are:

- 1 – **Clifton** (Southern, green): BusSmart Hub to Avon Road and return.
- 2 – **Kingswell** (Southern, blue): BusSmart Hub to McQuarrie Street and return.
- 3 – **Newfield** (Southern, magenta): BusSmart Hub to Lauder Crescent and return.
- 4 – **Hargest** (Northern, green): BusSmart Hub to Racecourse Road and return.
- 5 - **Waverley** (Northern, blue): BusSmart Hub to George Street and return.
- 6 – **Waikiwi** (Northern, magenta): BusSmart Hub to West Plains Road and return.

The new route map is provided right.

The BusSmart Hub is located on Tay Street near the Civic Theatre. All six routes have fifteen trips timetabled each weekday with service frequency of every 30 minutes in the morning and afternoon peaks, and hourly in the intra-peak period. On Saturdays, routes 1-3 have seven hourly trips each, while routes 4-6 have six hourly trips each. Buses do not operate on Sundays and Public Holidays.

To ensure connections between buses at the BusSmart Hub, passengers can inform the driver at the start of their trip, where it will be arranged for the other bus to await the connection.

Fares are collected using Bee Card, with a free transfer between services applied within 60 minutes between a Tag-off and subsequent Tag-on.



Bee Card terms and conditions:
www.beecard.co.nz

As part of the network restructure, the afternoon school “Hargest Express” service was withdrawn, with other BusSmart school services still operating.

On 7 June, *Stuff Online* reported on some passengers unhappy with the new network and timetables. Commuters told *Stuff* that the timetables were a bit of a misfire for workers, because the previous timetable's first service departed at 06:45 and the last at 18:00, whereas now the first bus departs at 07:20, with the last bus departing the Hub at 17:20. Commuter Jemma Bennett said, finishing work at 17:30, she now had to rely on her flatmate or taxis to get home after work. In a statement, Council's roading manager said, “We have received a wide range of feedback thus far, including positive and constructive feedback. As with

any change, in some cases it has been a matter of taking the time to communicate and educate the changes to users who were accustomed to the old routes." *INVERCARGILL CITY COUNCIL, SOUTHLAND TIMES*

Go Bus secures expanded school contract

Kinetic's Go Bus has won a tender with the Ministry of Transport to operate 679 school bus routes across the country starting next January for a period of 12 years. Go Bus expands its school bus reach to include Manawatu, Wairarapa and Marlborough. The contract adds 379 buses to Go Bus' fleet. *ABC MAGAZINE*

INTERNATIONAL

US: Los Angeles BRT line approved

A new 29-kilometre \$US267 million (\$AU350m) Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) line will connect five jurisdictions in Los Angeles between North Hollywood with Pasadena from 2024, according to plans approved by the city's Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro).

A study by Metro in 2013 found this corridor to be the most used in the city without an existing 'premium' bus service.

Operating through Burbank, Glendale and Eagle Rock, the BRT is planned to operate from 04:00 to 01:00 daily (03:00 on Friday and Saturday nights), with a bus every 10 minutes on weekdays, every 15-20 minutes at night, and every half-hour late on weekends.

The project is expected to be completed in 2024.
METRO

ENDS

FERRY & SHIP NEWS

NEW SOUTH WALES



NSW Budget 21/22

On 22 June, the state government delivered its budget address for the 2021/22 financial year. Key ferry funding commitments for this fiscal year include \$124.9 million for various maritime infrastructure upgrades (including commuter wharves at Darling Point, Double Bay and Greenwich Point), and \$6.8 million for Kamay ferry wharves (see *Table Talk's* March 2021 edition (pg. 13) for further information). *NSW GOVERNMENT*

ENDS

AIR NEWS

DOMESTIC



Newcastle-Cairns flights

On 23 June, Jetstar began providing three flights a week between Newcastle and Cairns. The airline will use an Airbus A320. Jetstar Group chief executive officer Gareth Evans said "Newcastle has become one of New South Wales' most sought after holiday destinations, with its beautiful coastline and reputation as a lively culinary and artistic hub. Cairns is consistently one of the most popular destinations in our network, so we expect this to be a very popular route in both directions". *WIN NEWS FAR NORTH QUEENSLAND, JETSTAR*

INTERNATIONAL



France and Spain allow more tourists

The French government announced that from Wednesday, 9 June, it would allow vaccinated tourists from outside the European Union bloc. However, the country still applies a traffic light classification system, with Green countries including Australia, Japan, Singapore and Lebanon. Reported red countries include India, Argentina, Turkey and South Africa, where only essential travel is allowed, COVID test must be done, and a quarantine period of 7-10 days is mandatory.

The Spanish government opened likewise on Monday, 7 June to travellers from outside the European Union, provided they have been vaccinated for at least 14 days. *SAMCHUI.COM*

Air France expands flight network

Following the United States' recent inclusion on the European Union's 'safe' country list, Air France announced in mid-June that it would operate Summer (temporary) flights between Charles de Gaulle Airport in Paris and 12 American cities, from 2 July, as follows:

- Atlanta – 12 flights a week.
- Boston – daily flight.
- Chicago – five flights a week.
- Denver – three flights a week.
- Detroit – five flights a week.

- Houston – five flights a week.
- Los Angeles – two flights per day.
- Miami – daily flight.
- Minneapolis – three flights a week.
- New York – three flights per day.
- San Francisco - daily flight.
- Washington, D.C. - daily flight.

Across July and August, Air France will operate the equivalent of 65 per cent of the total capacity that it offered back in the same period in 2019 (pre-pandemic). To achieve this, the airline is bringing 22 aircraft out of long-term storage. **SAMCHUI.COM**

United Airlines invests in supersonic

United Airlines confirmed in June it would purchase 15 supersonic aircraft from Boom Supersonic, named Overture, with an option for another 35 aircraft. The most well-known supersonic aircraft – the Concorde – flew between 1976 and 2003.

Boom is yet to build its first commercial supersonic jet, although expects the first passenger flight to run in 2029, saying the technology would enable a flight between New York and London to take roughly 3.5 hours – half what it does now. **SAMCHUI.COM**

Emirates books loss

Emirates Group booked a \$AED20.3 billion (\$AU7.3 billion) loss in its financial year ended 31 March 2021, marking the group's first financial loss in three decades. The loss was attributed to the near death of the international air travel market from COVID-19 impacts, with passenger revenues down 85 per cent.

The Group recorded a 67 per cent year-on-year drop in revenue to \$AU12.8 billion. The pandemic has stressed many international airlines' cash reserves, with the airline saying that its prioritisation of preserving cash, controlling costs, and ensuring that the safe and sustainable reopening of operations, ensured that its cash reserves were down by only 23 per cent to \$AU7.1 billion.

The airline revealed just 36 per cent of its Group revenue came from its core passenger business. As with other global airlines, its cargo flight division delivered a rare highlight, with revenue skyrocketing up 53 per cent year-on-year, contributing a hefty 57 per cent of total Group revenue. **EMIRATES**

ENDS

TALKING IN-DEPTH

Creation, operation and intent behind NSW's *Transport Asset Holding Entity*

*The following is a condensed version of a **Sydney Morning Herald** reports on the creation, purpose and intentions of the state government's Transport Asset Holding Entity, and potential risks and safety impacts when government separates public transport operating and maintenance functions where purpose and methodology differs, by **Adele Ferguson** and **Matt O'Sullivan**.*

The state government's 2021/22 budget papers say: "On 1 July 2020, Rail Corporation NSW (RailCorp) was renamed Transport Asset Holding Entity of NSW (TAHE) and converted to a statutory SOC [state-owned corporation]. TAHE has a majority independent board, which also includes the Secretary of Transport for NSW. TAHE owns heavy-rail property assets, rolling stock and rail infrastructure across the Sydney metropolitan area, the country rail network and other regional locations. In implementing its operating model, TAHE will enter into agreements with Transport for NSW agencies covering rail access, project delivery and licensing for non-regulated assets."

The SMH's full version can be viewed through the link provided at the end of the article.

A trove of highly confidential documents and testimony of whistleblowers reveals NSW Treasury pressured accounting giant KPMG to delete or amend aspects of a report commissioned by Transport for NSW that found the government's plan, to artificially inflate state's budgets by tens of billions of dollars after it shifted the rail network's costs onto a corporation, that still hasn't been able to properly operate six years after it was launched, could end up costing the state's coffers more than it saved. Whistleblowers fear the new structure will fragment accountability and could eventually lead to train disasters on the scale of Waterfall or Glenbrook.

Transport Asset Holding Entity (TAHE), was part of a plan hatched in 2014 to set up a shell corporation to shift billions of dollars of expenses off the state budget and into a new rail body. NSW Treasury was able to use the corporation, with the approval of the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), to inflate the budget to help mask the government slipping into deficit in 2018. The KPMG report last year caused a deep rift between Treasury and Transport for NSW.

Former NSW auditor-general Tony Harris estimates the entity's reclassification from a government body to a commercial entity meant the government's operating result has been bolstered by more than \$30 billion over the last six years. "It's a financial mirage because you are seeing something that isn't there," Mr Harris said. "It was designed to avert the prospect of the state losing its AAA credit rating by creating an apparent surplus through an accounting gimmick."

The ABS, which sets the rules on classifying government entities, agreed to allow the government to gain the benefits upfront on the proviso the new entity would meet key milestones in the “transition” to a commercial government-owned corporation by July 2018, according to a document marked “Cabinet in confidence” in 2016. Until then, it would be classified as a commercial entity in name only as it didn’t have a board or CEO and was not booking any revenue. That revenue would eventually come from requiring Sydney Trains and NSW Trains to pay access fees for the use of tracks and other assets it owned, which would be charged to the state budget. The highly confidential analysis by KPMG for Transport last November found... the costs to the budget would far outweigh the benefits.

Despite multiple warnings about the long-term safety and financial implications, including in cabinet papers dating back to 2016, Treasury pushed ahead to preserve what a whistleblower describes as a “public sector Enron”. “Enron was all about using accounting profits to mask cash losses and TAHE is the same, the only difference is it is owned by taxpayers who will pick up the costs when it’s wound up,” said another whistleblower who had expertise in finance and who sought anonymity due to the sensitivity of the matter.

Former counsel assisting the Independent Commission Against Corruption Geoffrey Watson, SC, who is a director of the Centre for Public Integrity, said the watchdog needed to investigate the attempted cover-up and the [November 2020] dismissal of Rod Staples as Transport secretary. “This is disturbing on so many levels. This is a crude accounting technique to pretend that billions of dollars don’t get reported into the budget,” he said. “This needs to go to ICAC. It is a bad practice to obtain an opinion from an external consultancy then try to get them to alter it.”

Labor MP, and former opposition leader, Michael Daley, [said] TAHE is the most dishonest budgetary fraud ever concocted by a NSW state government and it goes all the way to the top” he said. Mr Daley said the budget that would be handed down [June 22] would be based on lies.

The Herald can also reveal senior transport officials feared the new structure could repeat the 1990s carve-up of the state’s railways and the resulting gaps in safety and investment accountabilities – key factors in the 1999 Glenbrook and 2003 Waterfall rail disasters, which claimed 14 lives. “It creates an environment of competing priorities and a lack of clarity of who is truly accountable, and in doing so it seeds the possibility of poor decisions that will lead to safety incidents unnecessarily,” a whistleblower who worked inside the state bureaucracy said.

The NSW Treasury department said measures would be put in place to mitigate the safety risks including an operating licence, ministerial power of direction and providing Transport with a seat on the TAHE board. But former NSW rail executive Dick Day said those safeguards could prove not enough. “Divided responsibility can often compromise safety. There will be risks in terms of diverging views on the level of maintenance done,” he said. “They are putting an artificial divide right through the core of railway management.”

Fears about the for-profit rail corporation reached a flashpoint for the NSW government last year when NSW Auditor-General Margaret Crawford grew concerned TAHE had earlier missed a key deadline in its transition to a fully fledged commercial entity. With a new deadline looming to appoint a board and chief executive, Transport and Treasury scrambled to agree on an operating model for TAHE, which would control \$40 billion of the state’s rail assets, including trains, tracks and stations after they were shifted from the transport agency. The government had already missed multiple deadlines to gain classification by the ABS.

A confidential cabinet document in February 2020 reveals Treasury was warning cabinet that “unwinding” TAHE would cost the budget \$2.5 billion in 2019-2020 and almost \$5 billion over four years. These figures didn’t include the cost to the budget of TAHE eventually charging access fees for use of its rail assets.

In May 2020, weeks out from a cabinet meeting, Transport commissioned KPMG to urgently assess different models and “resolve key organisational and operational challenges” facing TAHE as part of a joint submission with Treasury to cabinet. Despite the misgivings, on June 1 last year cabinet endorsed the next stage of TAHE as a state-owned corporation, on the proviso Transport and Treasury returned to cabinet later that year with a proposed long-term operating model for TAHE.

But by last September, KPMG released a preliminary report that concluded a fully operational TAHE didn’t work financially. KPMG flagged for the first time the likely costs to the budget once TAHE became operational and started collecting revenue. This included charging the government access fees at a commercial rate for the use of the rail network now under its control if it was to continue to be classified as a commercial entity. It calculated TAHE would cost the budget \$5.3 billion over 10 years, which was vastly different from Treasury forecasts of a \$4.7 billion budget benefit over a similar period.

Despite KPMG’s modest assumptions, a government whistleblower said everything changed suddenly - “There was now a set of numbers telling us that what had been booked in the future budget was inappropriate”. Internal documents reveal Treasury instructed KPMG to urgently change the numbers and assumptions to clarify the hole in the budget [by assuming] access fees would not be ramped up to commercial levels until after 2025 - or as the report says, “beyond the next election” to push “most of TAHE’s budget costs beyond the forward estimates”.

The author of the report, KPMG partner Brendan Lyon, elected not to accept some requests, instead identifying key areas of difference from Treasury. It was then that Treasury engaged Heather Watson, another partner within KPMG, for different advice based on different assumptions that would contradict the work done by KPMG for Transport.

Her 95-page confidential report is filled with disclaimers and assumptions but backs Treasury's numbers of "zero budget costs" because "NSW Treasury has to use its judgement when developing its accounting estimates in relation to access fees and in determining its assumption that existing provisions are sufficient".

Treasury wrote to Mr Staples on November 11 last year, in an attempt to kill Mr Lyon's report for Transport in favour of the report Treasury had commissioned. Treasury said his report could not be taken as fiscal advice, as it "does not address accounting considerations" and contained "persistent errors". "In the absence of Mr Lyon amending his report and deleting all references to Treasury and fiscal advice (and we have requested him to do so) we will provide advice to accompany the submission that supports our forward estimates," Treasury wrote.

KPMG's national managing partner, David Heathcote, wrote to Mr Staples on November 15 supporting the numbers and conclusions in Mr Lyon's report, saying the firm "stands by the modelled results in the operating and financial model report, which provide the most detailed estimates of TAHE's impacts". He made it clear the Watson report for Treasury didn't include a "longer-term consideration as to TAHE's operating model and commerciality". Two days later, Mr Staples was sacked as Transport secretary without cause. In a statement, Mr Staples said TAHE was a policy developed solely by Treasury. "My role was the leadership of Transport for NSW, which was tasked with NSW Treasury in implementing that policy," he said.

In response to detailed questions, Treasury said it was confident it had "always accurately reflected the impacts of TAHE in its financial statements", adding that government financial statements were audited on an annual basis. "It is the responsibility of NSW Treasury to provide fiscal and economic advice to the government. It stands by the advice in this matter," it said.

A spokesperson for Treasurer Dominic Perrottet said the complexities of setting up TAHE had taken longer than originally forecast, but the expectation was that a final operating model would "deliver both a safe and cost effective result". A spokesperson for Transport Minister Andrew Constance said "safety has and always will remain the minister's top priority", and maintenance budgets would remain set centrally through Transport for NSW, in conjunction with Treasury.

The Auditor-General said TAHE would be an area of audit focus in 2020-21, and referred to concerns it raised in Parliament that TAHE's operating model and corporate intent had not been created. The ABS said it provided a final determination to NSW Treasury in May 2015 that TAHE would be classified as a public non-financial corporation. It said it had "not been made aware of any changes that would require a review". In March, cabinet ratified TAHE's new operating model, months out from the state budget on June 22. **SYDNEY MORNING HERALD**

(<https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/the-cover-up-of-a-financial-mirage-that-has-inflated-the-nsw-budget-and-may-put-rail-safety-at-risk-20210528-p57vy0.html>)

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