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RAIL & TRAM NEWS

NATIONAL



Inland Rail

ABC News reports on the Inland Rail project.

With the country's population estimated to hit 50 million by the end of this century, freight demand is expected to double along the more populous east coast.

Construction only began in 2018 after the Nationals party secured over \$8 billion in funding as part of their Coalition agreement, and over a decade since the first official route was examined (2006).

Around Coonamble, located over 500 kilometres north-west from Sydney, flooding has been just one concern, with the relationship between some local farmers and Australian Rail Track Corporation (ARTC) becoming strained. "ARTC, who are being chartered to build this rail line, it's been an amateur hour, and unprofessional from the outset," farmer Adrian Lyons said. Not being an irrigation farming region, Mr Lyons also said that there are hydrology issues impacting the new rail corridor between Narromine and Narrabri, with flood data lacking in detail - "If you put an Inland Rail bank up like that in fragile soil, and don't do your hydrology and your risk mitigation properly, you could cause a real disaster."

The line will bypass Coonamble, with ARTC saying that would save freight travel time and \$497 million over a 20-30 year period. The ARTC chief executive, Rebecca Pickering, says Coonamble will benefit from the line, with the town already having an existing line which will connect to Inland Rail.

On flood risk, Ms Pickering said "I do understand the concerns of locals who are seeing behaviours in the flood plain right now, and how infrastructure can impede flood water," she said. We've certainly worked hard to make sure that we're not exacerbating those. Our designers have worked hard to make sure that we've got enough bridge structures, culverts that allow water to pass through that ensure that flood water is not exacerbated."

In southern Queensland, Millmerran farmers say ARTC plans to make their section of the line flood-proof by building a large embankment across their local floodplain. A cavernous washout along the old disused rail corridor that ARTC plans to rebuild along recently swallowed up heavy machinery used by rail subcontractors. However, the rail line itself will be placed higher than the ground - around three-and-a-half metres higher, with concerns that floodwaters will simply bank up against it, stopping it from

flowing away from the area and thereby causing local flooding.

An ARTC spokesperson said that modelling had included data from locals. In nearby Pampas, more than 50 historic flood markers and over 400 photos and videos had been included. On top, Ms Pickering said that there had "been a significant number of independent reviews of that modelling work to verify it's been done to world's best practice" as well as "an international panel of experts appointed to review our models, and they have been complimentary of the work done so far" along with recommendations to carry into further stages of the design work.

The former Nationals party leader, Barnaby Joyce, said "I think there were 71 scientists, experts, engineers, and there were two reviews that have been reviewed by a further two reviews. They've been reviewed, then again, by a further two reviews, [and they've] then been reviewed by an independent reviewer, and you know what they asked me for when I went to talk to them? They wanted another review." **ABC NEWS**

NEW SOUTH WALES



Proclamation & public holidays

Sunday 11 September was proclaimed as a fare free day (00:00-23:59 hours) across the state of New South Wales due to the proclamation of the ascension of King Charles III to the throne, following the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. The transport agency confirmed that readers would continue to charge fares as normal, with refunds to be provided, later in the week. On the day, the government held a special Proclamation Event at Macquarie Street in Sydney CBD.

Meanwhile, the federal government proclaimed Thursday 22 September as a national day of mourning for the Queen. The public holiday saw public transport services across the state continue to operate to the weekday timetable. It is not known if school bus services operated empty, or were cancelled for the day. **TRANSPORT FOR NSW**

Bankstown Spring holiday shutdown

Another school holiday fortnight sees much of the T3 Bankstown line replaced with buses to progress Metro-related works.

From Saturday 24 September until last service Friday 7 October, buses replace trains between Sydenham and Lidcombe, with trains operating between Liverpool and the City Circle via Strathfield. On each day between 26

September and 7 October (inclusive), shuttle trains also operate between Sydenham and City Circle stopping at all stations. Replacement bus routes are as follows:

- **8T3** - Lidcombe-Bankstown (all stops)
- **8AT3** - Lidcombe-Bankstown (express)
- **10T3** - Sydenham-Bankstown (all stops)
- **13T3** - Sydenham, Belmore, all to Bankstown
- **33T3** - Sydenham, Canterbury, and Campsie

The final weekend of the school holidays (8-9 October) sees an extended shutdown, with bus routes 14T3 (Bankstown-Cabramatta all stops) and 15T3 (Bankstown-Cabramatta express) operating. Works will include the decommissioning of a crossover at Regents Park as part of the ongoing asset rationalisation project, while crossovers at Campsie will be re-commissioned into use.

The map below provides a visual overview of the routes.

The following major closure has been scheduled for the Christmas/New Year period. **TRANSPORT FOR NSW, SYDNEY TRAINS**

Sydney Metro CBD & Southwest opening

On the Metro CBD and Southwest line, Sydney Metro chief executive Peter Regan confirmed in August's Budget Estimates that the plan was to now open the Chatswood-Bankstown line in two stages. Delays in the progress of Metro conversion works between Sydenham and Bankstown (largely attributed to impacts from protected industrial action), now sees stage one (Chatswood-Sydenham) planned to open in late 2024, while stage two (the converted section of the Bankstown line) would instead open sometime afterwards, depending on how long the industrial action continues to impact access, with Transport Minister David Elliott unwilling to provide guidance at this stage. **NSW GOVERNMENT**

Syd & NSW Trains: Industrial action

Continuing on from last month's item (pages 2-3), amongst some new industrial actions for September was to have staff disable the ticketing system interface for passengers at stations across the network. The thinking behind this is that without any way for passengers to tap on when entering, and tap off when exiting, the state

government, through the rail entities, would be unable to generate fare revenue from the suburban and intercity rail network, therefore impacting the government budget.

The action was due to commence from 21 September, however it was postponed prior to this date whilst the Rail Tram and Bus Union goes through the process of conducting a member ballot, which had not been done with this particular action. **RAIL TRAM & BUS UNION**

North Shore shutdown

Coinciding with the second week of school holidays and the above Bankstown line closure, the T1 North Shore and Metro Northwest lines will also be impacted by partial line closures between Monday 3 and Sunday 9 October.

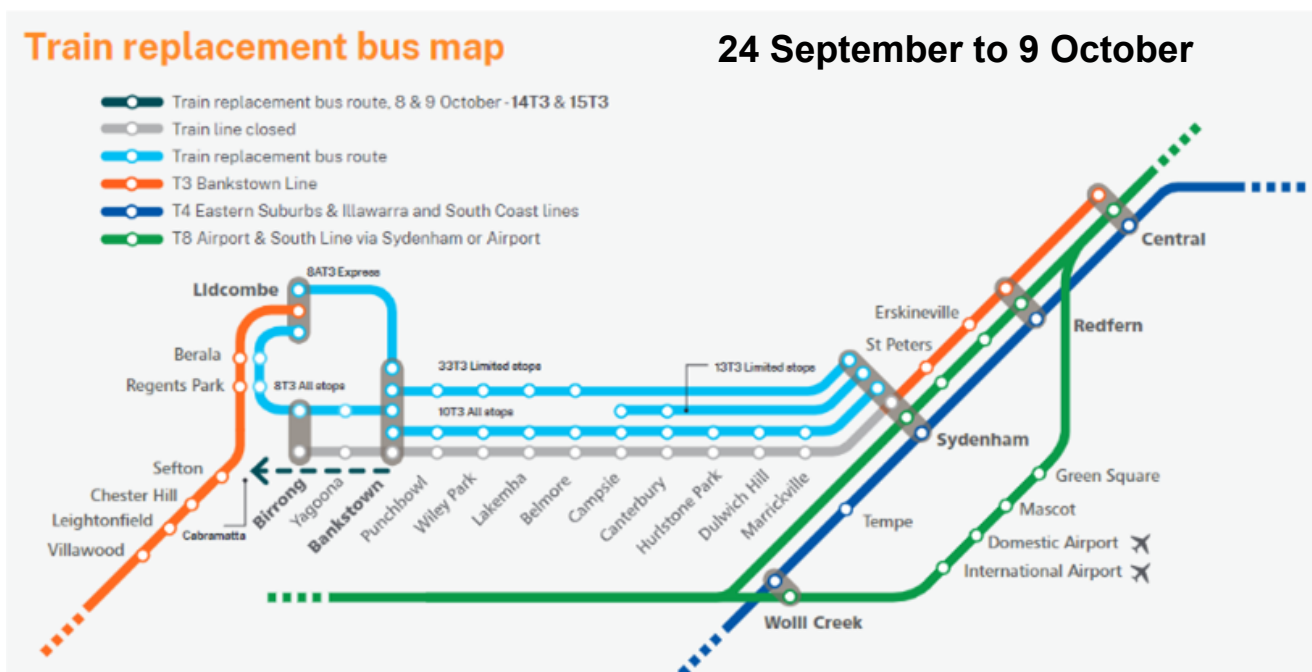
On the working week of **3-7 October**, buses replace trains between North Sydney and Gordon as well as replace metro trains between North Ryde and Chatswood. The replacement bus routes consist of:

- **48T1** - North Sydney, St Leonards, Chatswood, all to Lindfield, then Gordon
- **73T1** - North Sydney-Chatswood (all stops)
- **79T1** - North Sydney, Chatswood, then all to Gordon
- **73M** - Chatswood-Macquarie University (all stops)

On the weekend of **8-9 October**, the shutdown is extended to Wynyard-Hornsby and Tallawong-Chatswood respectively. The replacement bus routes consist of:

- **20T1** - Wynyard-Milsons Point shuttle service
- **21T1** - Wynyard-Chatswood (all stops)
- **22T1** - Wynyard, North Sydney, St Leonards, then all to Chatswood
- **23T1** - Wynyard, Chatswood, all to Lindfield, Gordon, Pymble, Warrabee, Waitara, then Hornsby
- **24T1** - Wynyard, Chatswood, then all to Hornsby
- **75T1** - Wynyard-Chatswood (express)
- **77T1** - Wynyard, Chatswood, all to Lindfield, then Gordon
- **11M** - Tallawong-Chatswood (all stops)
- **12M** - Tallawong, all to Epping, North Ryde, then Chatswood.

TRANSPORT FOR NSW



VICTORIA



V/Line: Extra Geelong Grand Final trains

With the AFL Grand Final held on Saturday 24 September between Sydney Swans and Geelong Cats, V/Line scheduled seven additional Geelong line services on the day to assist in transporting spectators to/from Melbourne, as follows:

- 10:35 ex Marshall to Southern Cross (SX)
- 11:10 ex Waurin Ponds to SX
- 11:55 ex Marshall to SX
- 18:10 SX to South Geelong
- 18:50 SX to Geelong
- 19:30 SX to South Geelong
- 20:10 SX to Marshall.

The three services into Southern Cross departed their origin stations eight minutes before the regular timetabled services to reduce crowding, while the four services after the game provided passengers with a service frequency around every 20 minutes between 17:50 and 20:30 to at least Geelong. **ROSS MORRISON, V/LINE**

Yarra Trams: Timetable changes

New timetables will come into effect from Sunday 16 October for routes **1, 3, 5, 16, 64, 67, 86** and **96** with trip times sped up by 'up to one and a half minutes' due to tram stop improvements, changes to traffic signals and other works.

Route **6** (Melbourne – University) will however see six outbound trips truncated, instead terminating at Malvern Town Hall in an attempt to reduce congestion in High Street. **STEVEN HABY, PTV, VICTORIAN PREMIER'S DEPARTMENT**

WESTERN AUSTRALIA



Transwa: Wi-fi trial

The state's regional rail operator, Transwa, commenced a 12-month trial of free wi-fi on-board its Prospector service (Perth-Kalgoorlie) on 1 September. Data will be capped at 1 gigabyte per trip. Terms and conditions are available on the operator's website. **TRANSWA**

NEW ZEALAND



Wellington: Further discounts

The Greater Wellington Regional Council and Metlink

announced on 26 August that they would permanently increase the weekend/public holiday fare discount from 25 per cent of the full or concession fare to 50 per cent across the various modes of travel. Meanwhile, children will ride for free during the same period.

However, the fare change will not be implemented until next year, when the Snapper smartcard system is fully rolled out across the rail network.

Council's chairperson, Daran Ponter, said "The intense demand for peak-time travel in Wellington has created a peakiness that our network is recognised for within Oceania. Encouraging more people to travel off-peak should help to relieve pressure on the network and reduce the need for drivers to perform split shifts, an impediment to attracting people to the profession. **METLINK**

Christchurch: Future transport plan

Christchurch City Council has released its draft transport plan, to cover the next 30 years of development. The previous transport plan was published in 2012. According to the country's 2018 census, 75 per cent of Christchurch people drove to work, as did 96 per cent of those commuting from outside the city.

University of Canterbury geography professor and Ministry of Transport adviser Simon Kingham, who peer-reviewed the council plan, says not everyone wants to drive, and making the alternatives more attractive would give people more choice.

The draft plan proposes transforming pockets of the city over the next 10 years as "a series of interconnected neighbourhoods, with the city centre as the social and economic hub". These streets will be redesigned to prioritise walking and cycling, with street trees, small parks, urban wetlands and playgrounds, the draft plan says.

In the spirit of not reinventing the wheel, the plan looks at what cities overseas are doing, citing the cycle-friendly policies of cities in the Netherlands, Denmark and Germany, and the traffic-reduction schemes of Milan, Singapore, Oregon and London.

The plan also suggests replacing fuel and vehicle registration taxes, as "there is currently no price signal for when roads are being overused and underused", to be replaced with initiatives such as congestion pricing in parts of the city and emissions charges depending on the type of vehicle being driven.

Slow speed zones, already trialled in some suburbs, would also be expanded across the city's local streets, to reduce road injuries and deaths.

After review and public consultation, the final plan will then be published. **THE PRESS**

INTERNATIONAL

Germany: Freight fuel trains first

The *International Rail Journal* reports that the German government has published an emergency law, Energy Security Transport Ordinance, that overrules existing track access agreements to prioritise freight transport of key commodities including oil and coal, although the article states that prioritisation powers can only be used in "exceptional circumstances" such as a refinery running out of crude oil, and it will only be in force for six months.

The ordinance calls for amicable amendments between parties in the first instance. The war in Ukraine is causing great strain on much of Europe due to their heavy reliance on Russian gas, although Germany has committed to eliminate Russian gas imports over the next two years. **INTERNATIONAL RAIL JOURNAL**

Eurostar rationalises network

Continental rail operator Eurostar announced in September that its services would no longer stop at Ebbsfleet and Ashford International stations in Britain until at least 2025, while services to Disneyland Paris would be withdrawn from 6 June 2023. Eurostar said that it needed to focus on profitable core routes to stabilise its operation in line with the “uncertain and fragile environment”. **INTERNATIONAL RAIL JOURNAL**

UK: Dartmoor reopening sees strong demand

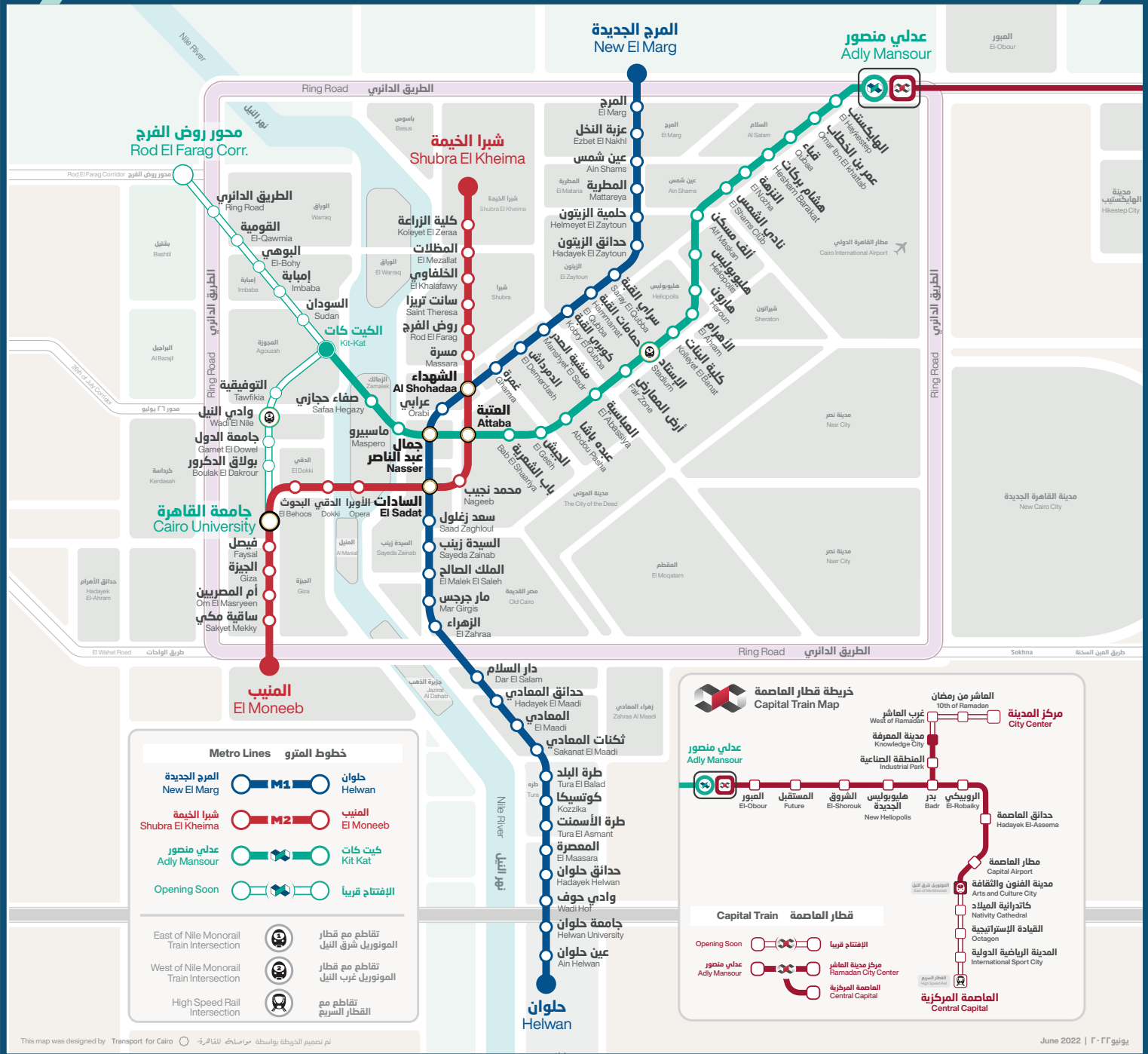
On 20 November 2021, the Dartmoor line between Okehampton and Exeter was reopened for full passenger traffic after 49 years. The line initially reopened in 1997 with services operating on Sundays through the Summer months, until last year’s full reopening.

Network Rail said significant work was completed to get the line back to full operation, including 18 kilometres of new track, 24,000 newly installed concrete sleepers, and 29,000 tonnes of ballast rock.

In good news, train operator GWR confirmed in late August that 120,000 trips had been made on the line in nine months, approximately double the pre-opening estimates, and after over 10,000 trips were counted within the first fortnight of full operation. **GORDON DUDMAN, BBC NEWS**

CAIRO METRO MAP

خريطة مترو القاهرة



This map was designed by Transport for Cairo. تم تصميم الخريطة بواسطة مواصلات القاهرة.

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US: Amtrak resumes Vancouver services

Amtrak announced on 31 August that it would resume its 'Amtrak Cascades' services to Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada from Monday, 26 September. The service was suspended in 2020 due to impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic. There are some additional entry requirements for travel between the United States and Canada, compared to pre-COVID normal.

Amtrak resumed its Toronto services back on 27 June.

As of 3 September, Amtrak had not updated their online PDF timetable, with the Amtrak Cascades timetable being dated 28 February. **PAUL BROWN, AMTRAK**

Egypt: Hyundai gains build contract

Not unlike arguments from some corners within Australia, the Egyptian government is also looking to have its own rollingstock manufacturing industry. The government recently signed a \$US656 million (\$AU959 million) contract with South Korea's Hyundai Rotem for the build and supply of 40x eight-carriage trains for the Cairo Metro network.

Last year's Memorandum of Understanding between the parties had specified that up to 75 per cent of content would be locally built after six years of the agreement.

The National news outlet reports that the contract will initially ensure at least 30 per cent local content is included in the build of the trains, with the nation's transport minister heralding it as a step to the country "realising the dream" to "open new horizons to increase national income through exporting to various countries", which the Prime Minister said had been part of the President's directives. The builder will open factory space within Egypt to manufacture carriages, as well as signalling systems and cabin equipment.

Hyundai Rotem has a pre-existing relationship with the government, having constructed earlier cars for the network.

The current Cairo Metro network map is provided on page 4, including the proposed line 3 extension. **THE NATIONAL, RAILWAY TECHNOLOGY, TRANSPORT FOR CAIRO**

ENDS

BUS & COACH NEWS

QUEENSLAND



New Rockhampton and Gympie networks

In line with the rebranding of local services from 'qconnect' to 'Translink', bringing new fares and fare zones, effective 26 September, bus routes were renumbered as follows:

Rockhampton City (Sunbus)

- 401-407, 410, 411 are unchanged.

Capricorn Coast (Young's Bus Service)

- **440** Rockhampton-Emu Park via Yeppoon (previously 20)
- **441** Rockhampton-Keppel Sands (previously 23)
- **442** Rockhampton-Emu Park via Cawarral (prev. 29)
- **444** Yeppoon-Taranganba (previously 24)
- **445** Yeppoon-Barlow's Hill (previously 25)
- **446** Yeppoon-Eden Park Estate (previously 26)
- **447** Yeppoon-Club Estate/Golf Links (previously 27)
- **448** Yeppoon-Hospital Shuttle (previously 28)

Gracemere & Mt Morgan (Young's Bus Service)

- **450** Rockhampton-Graceville (previously 21)
- **451** Rockhampton-Mt Morgan (previously 22)

Gympie (Polleys Coaches)

- **760** Rainbow Beach (previously 50)
- **761** Cooina (previously 1)
- **762** Stewart Tce (previously 2)
- **763** Rifle Range Rd (previously 3)
- **764** Ashford Hill (previously 4)
- **765** Monkland via Highway (previously 5)
- **766** Monkland via Tin Can Bay Rd (previously 6)
- **767** Southland (previously 7)
- **769** Golden Loop (combined 761-6, previously 9)

Report by **HILAIRE FRASER**, source **TRANSLINK**

NEW SOUTH WALES



New Orange network

Transport for NSW has revised the bus network for the central-western New South Wales city of Orange, effective from Monday 12 September. The routes are as follows:

- **516 Orange to Blayney via Millthorpe:** Now serving Spring Hill, Orange Hospital and Orange Railway Station.
- **530 Charles Sturt Uni (CSU) Orange to Bathurst via Orange CBD & Orange Hospital:** Previously Orange CBD to Bathurst. No longer serves Millthorpe.
- New route **530X CSU Orange to Bathurst via Orange CBD:** Previously 530 Orange CBD to Bathurst
- **531/581 Orange CBD to Glenroi Loop Services:** 531 clockwise, new 581 anti-clockwise. Previously 531 clockwise only. 531/581 combine to provide a 30-minute service weekdays and 60-minute service Saturdays.
- **532/582 Orange CBD to East Orange Loop Services:** 532 clockwise, new 582 anti-clockwise. Previously 532 clockwise only. 532/582 combine to provide a 30-minute service weekdays and 60-minute service Saturdays.

- **533 Orange CBD to North Orange:** No longer a loop service. Anson St now served by the new 540. Saturday service increased to hourly.
- **534/584 Orange to Warrendine Loop Services:** 534 am clockwise, new 584 pm anti-clockwise. Previously 534 clockwise only. Saturday service increased to hourly.
- New route **535 North Orange to Orange Hospital via Orange CBD:** Replaces 538 along Heatherbrae Parade and 537 to Orange Hospital. Hourly service Monday to Saturday.
- **536 Orange CBD to Molong:** Minor timetable changes.
- New route **537 Orange CBD to Ploughman's Hill via Calare:** Replaces 535 Calare & 535A Ploughman's Hill.
- New route **539 Orange CBD to Bel Air via North West Orange:** Replaces 535 North West Orange & 535A Bel Air.
- New route **540 Charles Sturt Uni Orange to Orange Hospital via Orange CBD:** Replaces 538 to Charles Sturt Uni, 533 along Anson St and 537 to Orange Hospital. Hourly service Monday to Saturday. 535 & 540 combine to provide a 30-minute service between North Orange, Orange CBD and Orange Hospital Monday to Saturday.

Report by **HILAIRE FRASER** with **PAUL BROWN**, source **TRANSPORT FOR NSW**

New route 113

The State Member of Parliament for Willoughby, Tim James, confirmed in late September that a new bus route, 113, would commence operating from Monday 7 November. Operating between Chatswood railway station and Royal North Shore Hospital, an hourly service will be provided in the timetable, between 09:00 and 15:00 weekdays, following ongoing community feedback about recent local bus changes, particularly for people travelling to/from the hospital. **MP TIM JAMES**

Manly route 161 update

ATA member Geoff Lambert has confirmed to *Table Talk* that route 161 bus services have only recently resumed to operate through the full route, around the roundabout at North Fort.

From Sunday 28 August, the route was once again carrying passengers through the full route, following an extended period disrupted by road closure caused by bushfire dating back to the 2019/20 summer period.

On a local trip, Mr Lambert said "The interesting thing is that we all got over-carried on the outbound trip because everybody assumed that they didn't need to press the "Next Stop" button. So we all sailed round the loop, flew past the "outer" stop, and were headed back to Manly! Only about 70 per cent of the [passengers] scrambled down to the roadside. The others must have been just going for a ride on the Manly to Manly loop". **GEOFF LAMBERT**

17-25 Sept: Wollongong route alterations

Wollongong hosted the UCI Road World Cycling Championships between 17 and 25 September, necessitating changes to bus services in the area. According to the blurb from Transport for NSW, "the world's best cyclists will compete in 11 world-class races over eight days of formal competition around the streets

of Wollongong and surrounding suburbs". The first day of the nine-day period, was a designated 'training day'.

In the lead-up period (23 May to 16 September), two bus stops at WIN Entertainment Centre in Crown Street were closed, impacting numerous routes from Premier, Dions and Busabout.

For the event period itself, regular route services were advertised to be impacted as follows:

- **6 (Wollongong-Mt Pleasant loop) and 91 (Austinmer-UOW):** Services cancelled outright.
- **90 (Austinmer station-Wollongong Central):** Trips only operated Austinmer railway station-Fairy Meadow (Princes Highway) 07:00-19:00 daily. Wollongong was accessible by transferring to the Orange shuttle bus at Stockland Corrimal. When roads are open (no timelines provided, probably outside the above times), trips operate the full route. On 24/25 Sept, at the start of the Helensburgh Elite Road Race, trips only operated Bulli (Princes Hwy)-Fairy Meadow (Princes Hwy). On 25 Sept, services operated to the Saturday timetable to 21:00.
- **92:** Trips only operated Bulli-Stockland Corrimal. Wollongong was accessible by transferring to the Orange shuttle bus. On 24/25 Sept, at the start of the Helensburgh Elite Road Race, trips would not operate. Other trips on 25 Sept ran to the Saturday timetable.
- **93:** Trips only operated Bulli-Fairy Meadow (Princes Hwy). Wollongong was accessible by transferring to the Orange shuttle bus at Stockland Corrimal. On 25 Sept, route operated to the Saturday timetable.
- **2,3,7,8:** Services diverted via Memorial Drive, skipping Fairy Meadow. Fairy Meadow remained accessible by transferring to 90 or 93 bus at Stockland Corrimal.
- **2 and 15:** Services cancelled on 24 Sept 11:00-14:00 and 25 Sept 08:45-11:30.
- **10, 11, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 39, 51, 53, 57, 65:** Services instead terminated at either Church Street Bus Terminal or Wollongong railway station. Additional diversions 24 Sept 11:00-16:00 and 25 Sept 09:00-13:30.
- **887:** Services skipped North Wollongong and North Wollongong Beach.

For additional clarification, the Women's Elite Road Race (24 Sept) was scheduled to start 12:25, and the Men's race (25 Sept) scheduled to start 10:15.

Additionally, the free Wollongong shuttle bus (55A and 55C) was replaced by three separate shuttle services, as follows:

- **66 (Green shuttle):** Uni of Wollongong campus to Wollongong CBD loop service, every 10 mins, 07:00-22:00 daily. On 24-25 Sept, a Mt Keira Loop road closure impacted this route.
- **56 (Blue shuttle):** North Wollongong railway station to Gipps Street loop service via Innovation campus, every 15 mins, 07:00-22:00 daily. On 17 Sept, the service extended until 23:00 for a Beach Party event.
- **67 (Orange shuttle):** Corrimal to Wollongong railway station loop service via Memorial Drive, every 20 mins weekdays and half-hourly weekends, 07:00-19:00 daily. On 17 Sept, due to road closures, this service ended at 13:00.

HILAIRE FRASER, TRANSPORT FOR NSW

VICTORIA



Lancefield, Romsey bus upgrades

From 23 October 2022, there will be additional weekend, including Sunday, services between Sunbury, Gisborne & Kyneton and Lancefield & Romsey.

The **Sunbury – Lancefield** route will see five return trips on Sundays and four extra services on Saturdays.

Two return **Lancefield – Gisborne** and **Lancefield – Kyneton** trips will be available on Sundays, mirroring those already offered on Saturdays.

On Fridays, an additional trip per direction has been added - ex Lancefield at 19:45 and ex Sunbury at 20:40.

On weekends, the stop at Clarkefield will be omitted with Lancefield passengers presumably transferring to Metro Trains services at Sunbury.

Timetables will be available for the public from late September. *STEVEN HABY, PTV, VICTORIAN PREMIER'S DEPARTMENT*

CRUBS tender outcomes

The following is a complete list of the newly awarded tender contracts for Victorian country, regional and urban bus services (CRUBS), effective from 1 July 2022.

There were some surprising changes across the state, for example, some operators have been awarded services that they had lost in previous tender rounds.

Operators of urban bus routes in Geelong, Ballarat, Bendigo and Latrobe Valley all had their contracts renewed. Not all of the services listed below operate each day and in some cases only operate a few times each month.

Benalla Bus Lines (Mee Group)

- Wangaratta – Bright – Benalla – Mulwala

Swan Hill Bus Lines (BusBiz)

- Sea Lake – Ouyen – Mildura
- Donald – Horsham
- St Arnaud – Stawell via Ararat
- St Arnaud – Stawell via Marnoo
- Sea Lake – Swan Hill
- Peshurst – Hamilton
- Wycheproof – Swan Hill
- Woomelang – Bendigo

CDC Geelong

- Geelong – Bannockburn (one of the few Geelong bus routes that is not allocated a route number)

Christiansbus (Bacchus Marsh)

- Ballan - Mt Egerton
- Hepburn Springs – Daylesford – Ballan
- Ballarat – Mt Egerton

- Ballarat – Snake Valley
- Ballarat – Ararat – Ouyen

Christian's Bus Company

- Ararat – Maryborough
- Ararat – Ararat Prison
- Colac – Lorne (summer only)
- Ararat – Warrnambool
- Apollo Bay – Warrnambool

Cole's Coaches

- Warrnambool – Mortlake (operates Wednesdays and Fridays only with the Friday only service departing Mortlake at 17:00 and Warrnambool at 22:00).

L. C. Dyson's Bus Services

- Omeo – Bright
- Bairnsdale – Gelantipy
- Shepparton – Euroa (previously run by Benalla BL)
- Wangaratta – King Valley
- Wangaratta – Bright
- Echuca – Kerang
- Maffra town service
- Sale – Seaspray
- Melbourne – Leongatha - Yarram
- Shepparton – Griffith
- Seymour – Tocumwal – Cobram
- Albury – Wangaratta
- Moama – Murchison East
- Moama – Seymour via Shepparton
- Melbourne – Traralgon (night coach)
- Melbourne – Lara (night coach)

Fallon's Bus Service

- Alexandra – Marysville
- Alexandra – Seymour

Firefly Coaches

- Ballarat – Nhill

Hutchinson Buslines

- Colac – Apollo Bay
- Colac – Apollo Bay (summer service)
- Colac – Geelong

Latrobe Valley Bus Lines (Dineen Group)

- Traralgon – Yarram
- Traralgon – Sale via Maffra and Rosedale

McKenzie's Tourist Services (Dineen Group)

- Alexandra – Eildon

Mee's Bus Lines

- Melbourne – Mansfield

Organ's Bus Service (Donric Group)

- Kyneton town service (previously operated by Dyson)
- Bendigo – Boort
- Melbourne – Boort
- Melbourne – Bendigo (night coach)
- Woodend – Daylesford (previously run by Little's Coaches, Daylesford)

Pope's Consolidated Bus Lines

- Timboon – Camperdown via Cobden

Seymour Passenger Services

- Wallan town service and Wallan school runs
- Kilmore town service
- Melbourne – Seymour (night coach)

South Coast Bus (Moreland Group)

- Coronet Bay – Grantville via Corinella

Stewarts Bus Company

- Mansfield – Woods Point

Sunbury Bus Service (Donric Group)

- Gisborne town service (including the demand-response town run)
- Melbourne – Mildura
- Melbourne – Wendouree (night coach)

Trotter's Coaches (McGinty Group)

- Hamilton town service
- Ballarat – Rokewood
- Ballarat – Geelong
- Ballarat – Donald – Bendigo
- Bendigo – Castlemaine – Mount Clear
- Horsham – Kaniva

Ventura Bus Lines

- Dandenong – Inverloch

Warragul Bus Lines

- Warragul – Poowong
- Moe – Pakenham

Warrnambool Bus Company

- Warrnambool – Heywood

Westernport Road Lines

- Pakenham – Koo Wee Rup

Whitmore Bus Group

- Maryborough town service
- Maryborough – Castlemaine

STEVEN HABY, PTV, AUSTRALIAN BUS PANORAMA, HAYDEN RAMSDALE

Poor western services push car reliance

Demonstrating the push for private car use in Melbourne's western suburbs, Hoppers Crossing local Iqbal Hossain lives next to a bus stop, but rarely uses it - "Most of the time if anyone needs the bus they have to wait 40 to 50 minutes. [The bus also] goes around and around all the little streets before it gets to the station, and then I often miss the connecting train."

If he does catch the bus, it is a four-kilometre ride to the train station, and takes four times longer than if he were to drive (20 minutes by bus, and five minutes by train). He says that is why most people in the outer west avoid the bus system if they need to get somewhere on time, and why the station's commuter car park is full by 07:00 most mornings. Only 1.3 per cent of work trips in the western suburbs include bus travel as part of their journey.

Dr John Stone, a senior lecturer in transport planning at University of Melbourne (UOM), said that a population the size of Canberra is expected to be added to the city's western suburbs over the next 15 years, with clear traffic implications. "At the moment, most people's bus service doesn't operate in the evening, it doesn't operate on Sundays, and even at peak hour might operate on 30- to 40-minute frequencies."

UOM researchers found the average length of a trip on public transport in Wyndham was 71.4 minutes — almost double the average 37-minute trip in inner Melbourne. Perhaps it should not come as a surprise then that more than double the proportion of households in Wyndham have three cars than in inner Melbourne — 18.3 per cent of households compared to 8.8 per cent.

Dr Stone's team wanted to see what would happen if they threw out the current bus system and started again — and they were surprised with the results. Using computer modelling, they removed the 80 bus routes, which aim to stop within 400 metres of every home (a Public Transport Victoria metric), snaking their way through suburban streets, and instead designed a grid-like system, with just 25 routes, operating along major roads, with stops within 800m of most homes. See side-by-side maps top page 4.

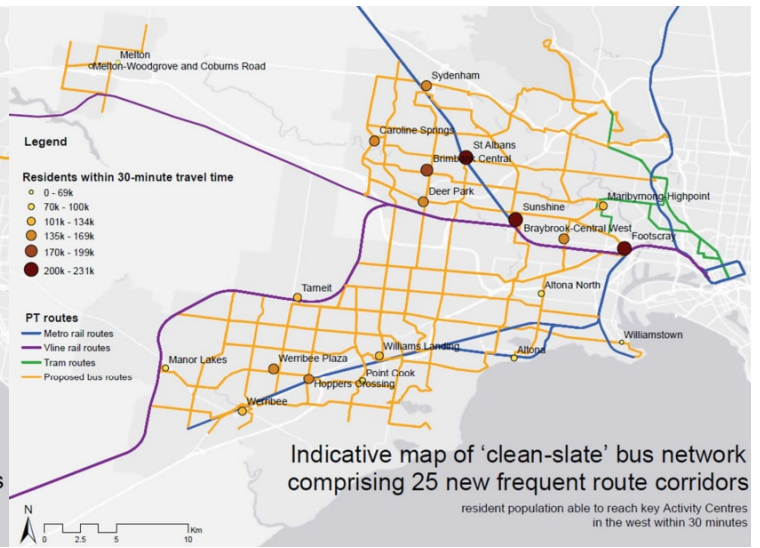
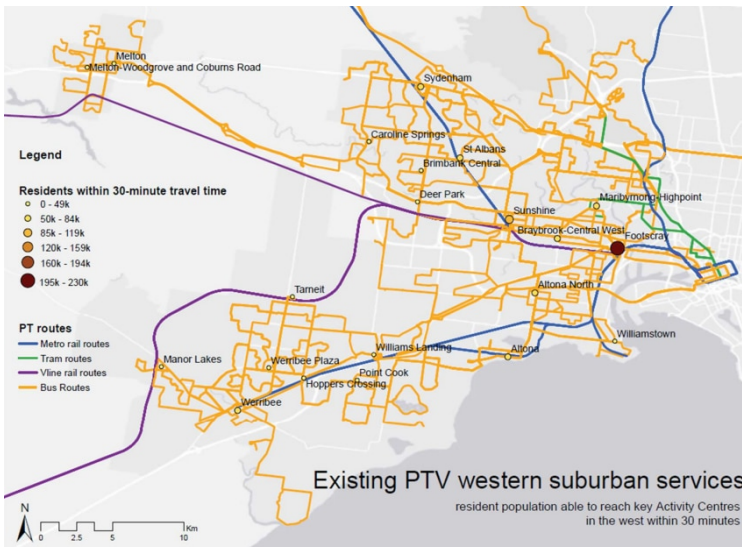
"For the same resources we could give people huge improvements in accessibility — they could have 10-minute services all day, seven days a week," he said. The usual trade-off is of course that people — like Iqbal Hossain — would possibly have to walk further to get to a bus stop. "But a bus stop without a bus is not much use to you," Dr Stone said. He said people were happy to walk up to 800m to catch trains, so the extra distance should not put them off. "But what they'll be walking to is a 10-minute service running direct to the local activity centre or the local station, and they can connect to their communities, connect to jobs much more effectively," he said. He said the plan includes a demand-driven community bus, for people with problems walking.

The computer modelling results show a big increase in the number of people who can catch the bus to where they need to go within 30 minutes. For Hoppers Crossing, the number of people who could get to the train station within 30 minutes would increase by 1,155 per cent.

On Sundays, the number of people who could get to Highpoint Shopping Centre would increase by 200 per cent, and for Werribee Plaza 400 per cent.

He said the plan would be cost-neutral over time, but would involve additional investment to start with, about \$30 to 40 million. "That cost is really modest, it would involve bringing the west up to the standard of service that's available across Melbourne, in line with population growth," he said.

Back in Hoppers Crossing, Mr Hossain would love to see



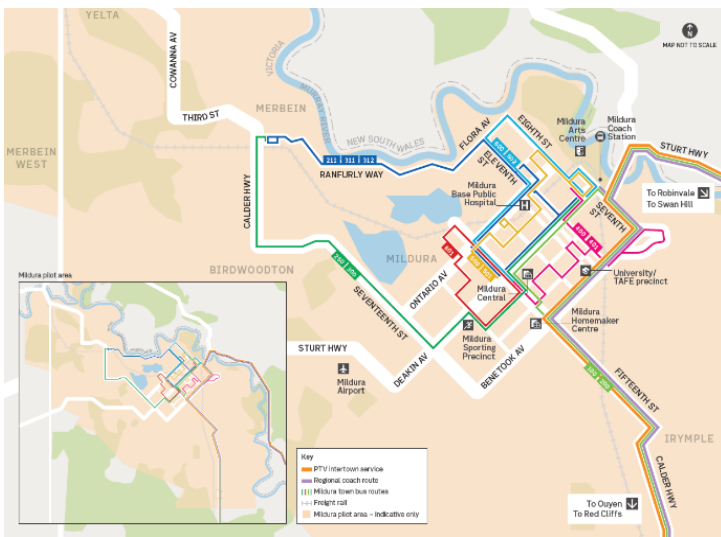
the plan put in place. He is a school teacher at a local high school and said students were often running late because they rely on the bus to get to school. **JIM WELLS, ABC NEWS**

Bus service reviews

Over the coming months, Transport for Victoria is seeking feedback from members of the community in regards to the following regions and the buses services provided:

Mildura: <https://engage.vic.gov.au/project/busreform/page/mildura-bus-reform-pilot>

The Mildura review has been identified as a pilot study.



(Image source: PTV)

Melbourne's northern suburbs:
<https://engage.vic.gov.au/project/busreform/page/melbournes-northern-suburbs>

Melbourne's north eastern suburbs, including areas served by DART (Doncaster Area Rapid Transport) routes:

<https://engage.vic.gov.au/project/busreform/page/melbournes-north-eastern-suburbs>

STEVEN HABY, PTV, TRANSPORT FOR VICTORIA

WESTERN AUSTRALIA



Perth: Airport Link changes

Further information has been provided regarding the revised bus network coinciding with the opening of the new Airport Link railway line, as follows:

- New route **37 Oats St Station-Airport Central Station:** Monday-Friday interpeak frequency 30 minutes.
- **38 Perth-Cloverdale via Wright St:** Monday to Friday interpeak frequency increased from hourly to every 15 minutes to replace 288 Perth-Forrestfield along Wright St.
- **39 Perth-Redcliffe Station via Belmont:** Extended from Grand Parade to Redcliffe Station. (Monday-Friday interpeak frequency 30 minutes)
- New route **270 Perth-High Wycombe Station via Forrestfield:** Replaces 286/7/8 Perth-Forrestfield. (Interpeak Frequency 30 minutes)
- New route **271 High Wycombe Station-Forrestfield:** Replaces 286/7/8 through Forrestfield North. (Interpeak Frequency 30 mins)
- New route **273 Kalamunda Circular Service:** Replaces 282/3 through Kalamunda East. (Interpeak Frequency 60 minutes)
- **274 Kalamunda-Gooseberry Hill:** Previously 291. (2 trips in each direction)
- New route **275 High Wycombe Station-Walliston via Kalamunda Rd:** Replaces eastern section 295/9 Perth-Walliston. (Interpeak Frequency 30 minutes)
- New route **276 High Wycombe Station-Kalamunda via Gooseberry Hill Rd:** Replaces eastern section 296 Perth-Kalamunda. (Interpeak Frequency 30 minutes)
- New route **277 High Wycombe Station-Midland Station via Midland Rd:** Replaces northern sections 294 Midland-Westfield Carousel & 297 Midland-Kalamunda. (Interpeak Frequency 30 mins)
- New route **278 High Wycombe Station-Midland Station via Abernethy Rd:** Interpeak Frequency 30 minutes.

- **279 Maddington-Kalamunda:** Unchanged. (School service)
- New route **280 High Wycombe Station- Westfield Carousel via Forrestfield:** Replaces southern section 294 Midland-Westfield Carousel. (Interpeak Frequency 30 minutes)
- **281 Forrestfield-Lesmurdie:** Unchanged. (School service)
- **282 Perth-Kalamunda via Grove Rd:** Kalamunda East now served by 273. (Interpeak Frequency 60 minutes)
- **283 Perth-Kalamunda via Lesmurdie Rd:** Kalamunda East now served by 273. (Interpeak Frequency 60 minutes)
- **284 Belmont-Curtin University:** Unchanged. (Interpeak Frequency 120 minutes)
- **285 Oats St Station-Kewdale:** Unchanged. (Peak service)
- New route **290 Redcliffe Station-Midland Station via Guildford:** Replaces northern section 36 Perth-Midland. (Interpeak Frequency 60 minutes)
- New route **291 Redcliffe Station-Midland Station via South Guildford:** Replaces 304 Midland-South Guildford. (Interpeak Frequency 60 minutes)
- **292 Redcliffe Station Circular Route** via Perth Airport T3/T4 (Interpeak Frequency 15 minutes)
- **293 Redcliffe Station-High Wycombe Station via Abernethy Rd:** Previously Perth-Kewdale also replaces northern section 298 Perth-Maida Vale. (Interpeak service Redcliffe-Belmont short trips Frequency 120 minutes)
- **307 Midland Station-Kalamunda via Helena Valley:** Extended Helena Valley to Kalamunda, replaces 297 Midland-Kalamunda. (Interpeak Frequency 120 minutes)
- **935 Kings Park-Redcliffe Station:** Previously Kings Park-Perth Airport. (Interpeak Frequency 10 minutes)
- New route **940 Perth-Redcliffe Station via Great Eastern Hwy:** Replaces 36 Perth-Midland, 40/380 Perth-Airport, 295/9 Perth-Walliston, 296 Perth-Kalamunda along Great Eastern Highway. (Interpeak Frequency 10 minutes)

Report by HILAIRE FRASER, source TRANSPERTH

Perth: Routes withdrawn

Three routes have been withdrawn, effective from Monday 10 October 2022, as follows:

- **26 East Perth-Hollywood Private Hospital:** Route replaced by Purple CAT Elizabeth Quay Bus Station-UWA, 24 East Perth-QEII Medical Centre and 25 Shenton Park Station-Hollywood Private Hospital & Claremont.
- **330 Mundaring-Sawyers Valley:** Route replaced by a short trip each way 331 Mundaring-Mt Helena.
- **340 Bassendean-Caversham:** Route replaced by 353 Bassendean-Henley Brook now travelling via Caversham.

Report by HILAIRE FRASER, source TRANSPERTH

ENDS

FERRY NEWS

NEW SOUTH WALES



Sydney Ferries: Performance

Transdev Sydney Ferries' service performance has rebounded following an extended period beset by operational issues mostly resulting from either staffing or mechanical issues.

Over the months of July and (the first half of) August, the operator achieved over 99 per cent service delivery, according to Transport for NSW's Chief Operations Officer, Howard Collins. A monthly route-by-route on-time service scorecard is provided top of page 11 (courtesy TfNSW), showing that route F4 Pyrmont Bay has been the worst performing route this year, and continues to be as at July 2022. The month of July 2022 did show an improvement with nearly all routes compared to the previous month.

Mr Collins also said that the delivery of newer ferries had contributed to the improved performance - "One of the things we are benefiting from is having 10 new River class ferries out there. Some of the ferries they are replacing were, sort of, 1980s clunkers. They need to go. Certainly, the great thing about the experience for Manly services now is that fast commuters... get a fast service across in 20 minutes, with the opportunity of two choices of ferries. Or you can now take a slow but beautiful, historic ride on a Freshwater class." *TfNSW, NSW GOV'T*

Additional F1 Manly services

On 1 September, the state's transport agency finally announced that the additional services (see last month's item in *Table Talk*), would commence operation from Monday 5 September. *TRANSPORT FOR NSW*

VICTORIA



Spirit of Tasmania to sail from Geelong

Saturday 22 October will see an end of an era at Station Pier with the last *Spirit of Tasmania* ferry docking, with operations transferred to new facilities at Corio, commencing from 23 October.

The change has come as a result of increased port charges at Station Pier and concerns around increasing traffic congestion. Opinion from locals and businesses in Port Melbourne and Geelong are equally divided as to whether this is a good outcome.

Interestingly there is no real time savings sailing into Corio Bay as ships have to proceed up Port Phillip Bay before turning to port to head into Geelong. Furthermore, Corio channel is quite narrow and the tankers from Shell terminal have priority.

SeaRoad and Toll Shipping will continue to use Webb Dock for their operations. *STEVEN HABY, THE AGE newspaper*

ENDS

Route	Jul-21	Aug-21	Sep-21	Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22
F1 Manly	100.3%	99.9%	99.7%	99.3%	98.7%	95.7%	96.3%	98.7%	99.3%	98.4%	99.2%	98.1%	99.0%
F2 Taronga Zoo	99.8%	99.6%	98.3%	99.8%	99.4%	98.0%	99.4%	99.7%	98.0%	98.4%	98.8%	98.4%	99.8%
F3 Parramatta River	98.4%	98.2%	98.0%	98.2%	98.3%	96.6%	98.9%	97.1%	90.6%	96.6%	96.4%	95.6%	97.5%
F4 Pyrmont Bay (Cross Harbour until Sep-20)	98.5%	97.6%	95.5%	97.6%	96.2%	90.8%	93.5%	93.5%	96.6%	89.9%	89.9%	86.1%	90.6%
F5 Neutral Bay	98.4%	98.8%	98.0%	98.0%	98.2%	96.7%	98.6%	98.5%	96.9%	97.4%	98.6%	96.8%	97.5%
F6 Mosman	98.5%	99.4%	99.8%	98.6%	98.3%	97.8%	98.7%	98.8%	96.9%	97.9%	98.7%	97.2%	99.1%
F7 Double Bay	98.4%	98.1%	98.8%	98.0%	97.3%	96.4%	98.0%	96.9%	99.3%	96.6%	96.4%	96.4%	96.1%
F8 Cockatoo Island	95.2%	98.4%	97.9%	97.3%	97.5%	96.2%	96.6%	95.0%	95.3%	95.0%	96.5%	96.0%	97.7%
F9 Watsons Bay	99.1%	97.9%	98.5%	99.7%	99.3%	97.5%	99.0%	98.6%	94.6%	95.9%	98.4%	97.5%	98.4%
F10 Blackwattle Bay					100.0%	99.7%	101.0%	101.0%	100.1%	99.3%	99.5%	100.1%	99.7%
Overall On Time Running Performance	98.6%	98.6%	98.3%	98.5%	98.2%	95.9%	96.6%	97.4%	96.8%	95.4%	96.9%	95.6%	97.3%

Transdev Sydney Ferries commenced operating Sydney Ferries services on 28 July 2019. In the first 6 months from the service commencement date, the On-Time Running target was : Aug 2019 : 87.5%; Sep 2019 : 87.5%; Oct 2019 : 90.0%; Nov 2019 : 91.5%; Dec 2019 : 93.0%; Jan 2020 : 94.0%. The eventual target of 95% was implemented in Feb 2020. From 25 October 2020, the F4 Cross Harbour route was divided into two new routes, the F4 Pyrmont Bay and F9 Watsons Bay routes. From 29 November 2021, the F10 Blackwattle Bay route commenced.

AIR NEWS

INTERNATIONAL



Added Australia-Malaysia flights

Batik Air Malaysia, previously known as Malindo Air, has added a second daily flight between Melbourne and Kuala Lumpur to operate during Summer peak demand (6 Dec-6 Feb). The new flight will be non-stop and the world's longest non-stop using Boeing MAX8 aircraft. The pre-existing flight makes a stop at Denpasar, Bali.

According to Batik Air's online engine, the flight schedule is as follows:

Kuala Lumpur to Melbourne

- **OD173**, 09:10-20:05, 4x weekly nonstop (7h 55m block time) *(new)*
- **OD177**, 16:55-06:40+1 1x daily via Denpasar Bali (10h 45m) *(existing)*
- **OD175**, 19:25-06:20+1, 3x weekly nonstop (7h 55m) *(new)*

Melbourne to Kuala Lumpur:

- **OD176**, 07:20-12:55, 3x wky nonstop (8h 35m) *(new)*
- **OD178**, 08:00-15:30 1x daily via Denpasar Bali (10h 45m) *(existing)*
- **OD174**, 21:05-02:40+1, 4x weekly nonstop (8h 35m) *(new)*

ROSS MORRISON, SIMPLY FLYING, BATIK AIR MALAYSIA

Lufthansa strike action

Australian and British airlines are not the only ones caught up with industrial action, as German airline Lufthansa negotiates its schedule around action by ground staff. On 27 July, they undertook a one-day strike which forced a total of 1,023 flights to be cancelled at Frankfurt and Munich airports, impacting around 134,000 passengers. SAMCHUI.COM

United/Emirates partnership

International airlines **United** and **Emirates** announced they had inked a new codeshare agreement on 14 September. The deal sees new flights and connections becoming available to each others' customers.

From November, Emirates' passengers flying into Chicago, San Francisco and Houston will have access to United's network of nearly 200 cities, with interline arrangements at a further eight cities served by Emirates.

In March next year, United will launch new direct flights between Newark Liberty International Airport, New York and Dubai. Emirates flies to over 100 cities out of Dubai.

Meanwhile, Emirates will finish its pre-existing codeshare arrangement with fellow airline **JetBlue** on 30 October, with JetBlue now expected to enhance its partnership with **Etihad**.

The arrangement follows a more frosty relationship between the airlines pre-COVID when United lobbied against allowing Gulf carriers to expand through the United States.

Emirates already has a joint venture with Australian airline **Qantas**. SAMCHUI.COM, CNBC

ENDS

ODD SPOT

(Almost) a flying kangaroo in Brunswick

On Monday morning [19 Sept], a most unusual *Metro Trains Melbourne* Twitter post alerted Upfield line passengers to delays of around 15 minutes due to a kangaroo delaying trains in the Brunswick area. Trains were held at stations until Parks Victoria officers could assist the kangaroo to more appropriate territory. **STEVEN HABY, PUBLIC TRANSPORT VICTORIA**

VERY ODD SPOT

On Wednesday 31 August, Sydney Trains operated to significantly reduced service levels as a result of industrial action, with a ban on the operation of privately-maintained trains across the network.

Unlike previous occasions of skeleton-running, where all sector three services were operated using Tangara rollingstock, this time, it appears there were not enough of these sets. As a result, one suburban train roster full of Hornsby-City Circle-Hornsby trips was instead operated by a 4-carriage Intercity V set, and this was in the timetable.

A very odd spot indeed!

TALKING IN-DEPTH

Hamilton: Will passengers return?

The following is an edited article from *The Waikato Times*' Richard Walker on whether Hamilton's authorities can attract people back to buses post-COVID.

Hamilton bus use numbers tumbled in the last year. Apart from the Comet and Orbiter runs, which were unchanged, patronage dropped 25 per cent across the rest of the city's routes, comparing the June quarter this year with the same period last year. That is also 40 per cent down on the same quarter pre-Covid and it's been a bucketing ride ever since.

Angela Strange, Waikato Regional Council's regional connections committee chairperson, says there could be a combination of factors affecting bus use: people not wanting to wear masks, concern about getting ill, and more people working from home. Rising petrol prices perhaps not so much, although pain at the pump may be increasing regional use of buses, and similarly contributing to an upswing in patronage of the Te Huia train service to Auckland.

On Hamilton buses, the government's half-price fares may be making a difference, with signs of a recovery beginning. But it's a struggle to get people out of their cars, and reduced services due to bus driver shortages couldn't have come at a worse time, Strange says. "That driver pool is just getting smaller and smaller." Absences because of Covid have been exacerbated by restricted migration.

Introducing "the living wage" at the end of last year hasn't done the trick, "We were hoping that that would help the bus driver shortages. It hasn't made the impact we wanted it to." Council, which is responsible for public transport, points out that reduced bus services as a result of Covid will be affecting patronage figures. But transport connections director Mark Tamura says recruitment and retention had been an issue even before Covid, as had patronage. Per capita, in particular, bus use was not performing strongly, and they were struggling to grow patronage other than on some core high frequency routes.

Outside Hamilton the picture is more positive, with patronage typically up on pre-Covid numbers, apart from the Northern Connector to Huntly. All up, bus patronage was 649,000 in the June quarter this year, down 13 per cent from 745,000 a year earlier. The monthly trend, however, is upwards after a big drop in August and September last year during the Delta outbreak. It's a similar picture elsewhere in the country, with New Zealand Transport Agency (NZTA) figures showing that the **Waikato** customer number trend is not too different from **Auckland**, **Wellington** and **Christchurch**. Weekday patronage in places such as **Tauranga** and **Dunedin** also follow similar lines to Waikato.

It all adds up to a knotty set of challenges for those wanting to boost public transport use while facing a 19 per cent driver shortfall in a tight labour market.

"People in Hamilton just love their cars," Strange says.

One who has resolutely stayed driving buses, rather than switching to trucks, is Steve Beran, who is on a break at the Transport Centre before starting his run to Hillcrest. He has clocked 32 years in his chosen career, part time and full time, in Hamilton and before that Palmerston North. In those early years, he even caught a bus when on leave – the classic busman's holiday. "You'd think I'd be sick of buses, but not really," he recalls. He loves the opportunity to mix with people, both passengers and fellow drivers. Some of the passengers, he gets to know. They'll perch themselves on the front left seat and have a chat, sometimes confiding personal stuff they may not tell anyone else. Beran listens and drives.

Not all passengers are easy; he's also had to deal with people who are drunk or on drugs. He doesn't want to leave anyone behind, and usually there's a way of safely getting them on the bus and to their destination. It helps a driver to

have a sense of humour. He's been known to pull into a stop, open the doors and then close them again, with no one getting on or off. A young schoolgirl sitting on the front passenger seat said: "what were you stopping for here, driver?" He said he had to stop to let Casper the ghost out. The bus cracked up laughing, he says.

Another unscheduled stop, however, was far from fun. It was a pitch black evening, heavy with rain, lightning, a couple of passengers on board. And a waterlogged tree came crashing down, demolishing the front of the bus. It took out the windscreen and the whole of the front, leaving him with open air in front of him, luckily unhurt. The cop who turned up told him he needed to buy a Lotto ticket. He did, and he won a small prize, he recalls.

This guy could front a recruitment drive. "I do say that any new bus driver that comes along are very welcome into the fold," he says. "It's a good career to take on."

Who uses the buses? People with no choice, schoolkids, older people including Super Gold card users, Strange says.

"I talked to my friends who are from overseas, and they're like, well, PT [public transport] is just what you do. It's not just for poor people. And I think within Hamilton it's changing that perception around who uses it." Mind you, those same friends have dropped public transport in Hamilton and started driving. "We've made it too convenient," Strange says, channelling her public transport role. Seemingly, people just like driving. "But they don't want to drive our buses," she exclaims, good-humouredly. "They could get paid to drive!"

On Tuesday, three young friends have met at the Transport Centre – schoolkids like those Strange mentions. It's a teacher-only day at Hamilton Girls' High School, and the trio have caught their usual buses so they can hang out together in town. Shae Bonham is poor today, so she may not be able to splash out as much as her friends. Hannah Holdsworth is looking to buy a book from a series she can't remember the name of. She'll recognise it when she sees it. So she can read it on the bus going home? "Yeah, actually." Tanya Davidse often reads on the bus if she's tired; she's onto the second book in the Court of Thorns and Roses series. Other than that, when they're on the bus, they listen to music, stare out the window or talk to schoolmates in the well-worn daily ritual. For Tanya, it's an hour-long trip from Huntly. It's also an hour-long trip for Hannah on the Rototuna Circular – it may not be as far but it's a "swervy" route. Shae is the lucky one; the No 3 bus takes 15 or 20 minutes to bring her from Dinsdale. Like spokes on a wheel, they meet in the middle. On Hannah's bus, there's plenty of talking. Some school groups are noisier than others, and year nines tend to be flat-out disrespectful. That said, Hannah thinks her friend group on the bus may be pretty annoying for the bus driver. "I would not want to be one when my friends are on the bus." She doesn't blame drivers for not wanting those jobs any more. The trio are noticing the reduction in service. Hannah says with fewer buses coming into town from her stop, each bus is more crowded.

With it proving difficult to retain drivers, Strange has bus operator Go Bus in her sights, questioning its workplace culture. She wonders whether drivers don't feel valued and says she has asked staff to look into driver retention, and says she will also talk to Go Bus herself. There are a number of reasons for the driver shortfall, and therefore a similar cut in services, but the length of time it has gone on means more questions need to be asked, she says. "To me there just has to be something they can do, really. Sure, I recognise it's a nationwide shortage. But are they doing enough to fulfil our contracts?" She says she is yet to see "strong evidence" that they are.

Go Bus business development director Russell Turnbull is initially agreeable to giving an interview later in the afternoon on the day *The Waikato Times* calls him about Strange's concerns. "In the meantime, what I would probably suggest is that a wider view be taken and that the actual bus driver shortage is a nationwide, if not a worldwide problem," he says. "Anything suggesting that it's a Go Bus problem limited to the Waikato is a very, very - what would you politely call it? - shuttered view." And then the shutters come down. As requested, *The Waikato Times* emails specific questions, as the basis for an interview, not an emailed response, but what comes back is an email, saying Go Bus will only respond in writing.

It says before Covid-19 hit, there were no staffing issues. It goes on to say its drivers and operations teams are doing an "incredible" job keeping buses running in challenging times and that, like others, Go Bus has experienced above average absenteeism because of flu and Covid, as well as difficulty attracting and retaining people in the current labour market. It has always offered above average pay rates for the sector, the email says, and has recently run extensive recruitment campaigns.

The Sustainable Public Transport Framework, announced by the government in mid-August, gives councils the opportunity to own and operate bus services themselves. That's a discussion for the next council, Strange says. Australian-owned Go Bus has most of the public transport contracts in Hamilton and they are due to start coming up for renewal in the next three years. "The issue with Go Bus is that within New Zealand, we almost have a duopoly." The council, with transport connections including the buses accounting for quarter of its annual expenditure, is up against it.

On Tuesday morning, Tara Yim is waiting beneath the distinctive curving Transport Centre roof cover for the No 1 to Pukete. It will take half an hour to get to work at Maui St, where she is a casual admin worker, a full hour taking into account the connecting bus she has already caught. She noticed the reduction in services, particularly given she has to make the connection. Miss this bus and she misses work. Driving wouldn't work – there's not enough parking at her workplace. Yim has always used Hamilton's buses, since she was a student. Others will join her on the morning trip, particularly at The Base, but as she heads off from the Transport Centre, she is the only one aboard. Given its direction of travel, away from the city centre, that may not be unexpected but those near-empty buses occasionally attract comment.

This month, Council held hearings into its 10-year public transport plan. The plan drew 200 submissions, some extraordinarily detailed, and many focused on regional services, including rail. One submitter commented on empty buses - "Funding empty buses travelling around 90% plus empty the majority of time is not carbon neutral." Another, who wouldn't use buses even if more are added, said there are too many empty buses on the roads, especially at night. "Track users on bus trips, cut those that don't get the numbers. Ratepayers rule!"

It's worth noting such attitudes were very small among the welter of submissions. Far more common were people seeking improved services - "Right now, the problem is that not enough people use public transport because it's unreliable, it only runs once an hour and doesn't run at night (so it's extremely inconvenient to those who have to work till about 10pm at night)," said one. Another submitter took Council to task for doing too little too late, and wanted "A wide range of CHEAP transport operates at times that people work and live during, not twice a day".

Strange has a response to those critics who point to empty buses rattling around during off-peak times and who suggest putting on smaller buses during the day. Operating costs, including more split shifts, work against that. "You've already got your bus driver, you already got your bus."

She also has a response for those querying paying through their rates. "There's these direct benefits and there's indirect benefits as well," she says. "You're already paying for it, you might as well use it. You also have those people who have no choice but to use it. Also, the more people who do use it means that there's less congestion on the road for those people who do need to use their cars." If the reduced service accounts in part for reduced patronage, would increasing the service drive numbers up? If you build it, will they come?

If it's fast and frequent, maybe they will. The runaway success in Hamilton is the Comet, introduced in 2019 and running every quarter hour between north and south from The Base to Glenview, via the city centre and hospital. There's further evidence for fast and frequent; Strange says Orbiter numbers tumbled about six years ago when the service was reduced from quarter-hourly to one every 20 minutes, and rebounded when the higher frequency was reinstated.

Further change is coming in the form of "on-demand" services. **Flex**, as it is known, is already operating on weekend nights in Hamilton, with strong demand, Strange says. A year-long trial from the Transport Centre to the airport has so far proved less successful. A Flex "corner to corner" service will start in Rototuna and Flagstaff in the new year, with half of its minibuses wheelchair accessible. Using an app, residents will be able to book the service to get anywhere in the two suburbs, including Chartwell, a hub for further, conventional bus services into the central city. It's a trial that coincides with reducing some existing services, making it cost neutral for the council. Long term, the ideal would be to roll it out elsewhere in Hamilton and in towns like Cambridge and Te Awamutu, Strange says.

Tamura points to the success of regional services where services designed with the local community in mind have performed "really well". That has seen Cambridge with patronage of 17,000 in the June quarter this year, compared with 15,000 in the same quarter pre-Covid, and Tokoroa at 5,000, up from 4,000. In Tokoroa, Tamura says, a small, local service providing access mainly to the town centre has been "surprisingly" well patronised.

Electric buses are set to be the next big change, and Strange says the Government has sent clear signals around the transition, and the lead-in time is good for upcoming Hamilton contracts. The market itself is also shifting. "You won't even be able to buy a diesel bus after next year, a brand new one." She says she has been talking to Tauranga-based Kiwi Bus Builders who have pitched to councils there about a different-sized bus and a different shape that would be more accessible for wheelchairs, bikes, and pushchairs. **THE WAIKATO TIMES**

The full article is available at <https://www.stuff.co.nz/waikato-times/business/129676432/bus-or-bust-can-hamilton-bring-back-the-passengers>.

About *Table Talk*

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