

Queensland Rail Goes Green

"The first 'green' train station on South East Queensland's urban rail network was unveiled by Acting Premier and Minister for Infrastructure and Planning Paul Lucas today. Mr Lucas said the \$26.5 million revamp of Indooroopilly station included solar panels, a rainwater tank and a redesign to make public transport even more eco-friendly. He said the revamp of the busiest station outside the Brisbane CBD – with an average of 1700 passengers passing through the station each peak hour – set the standard for future infrastructure projects. 'Trains are already an environmentally friendly way to get around and now our stations are becoming greener too', Mr Lucas said. 'Indooroopilly is the first station on the urban rail network to use solar panels which feed back into the power grid and features a rainwater tank providing water for toilets as part of its design. The design maximises use of natural lighting & improves ventilation to reduce air-conditioning usage in the station building'.

"The revamped station also includes a new concourse level and ramp from Coonan Street, three lifts and sets of stairs, a new 'kiss 'n' ride' zone and access to Coonan Street and Railway Avenue via a refurbished subway. Other features include improved lighting, CCTV technology and customer signage, new waiting shelters and seats, and platform upgrades. 'It's hard to remember what the station looked like before the upgrade – it is now much safer and easier to access for all passengers', Mr Lucas said. Mr Lucas said together with local schools, QR also planted 280 plants around the station to enhance its appearance and benefit the environment. The station also features a mural, spanning 250 metres, that was the artistic collaboration of more than 200 students from local schools ... 'Across the board we are looking at ways to help manage environmental impacts more effectively and we take this responsibility very seriously', Mr Lucas said. 'Simply by using the rail network, people are showing their commitment to the environment'. A short section of subway owned and controlled by Brisbane City Council is expected to be upgraded later this year."

Ref: Qld Government Media Release, 11/1/09

Spin in Victoria

"The Government is spending \$2 million on a campaign to promote its latest transport statement." **Ref: Clay Lucas, The Age, 28/1/09**

Comment: The public can easily differentiate between say, important 'work safe' advertisements and blatant spin. This is not just a waste of money, but also counterproductive.

Melbourne Rail Goes Red

"On another day of extreme temperatures, the rail operator says it is still battling the knock-on effects of days of heat-related delays. ... It's been another horror week for Connex, with almost 200 trains cancelled on Wednesday and over 300 services scrapped yesterday."

Ref: Dan Salmon, The Age, 30/1/09

"The city's crumbling rail system failed as tracks buckled and trains broke down amid baking temperatures for the second consecutive day. ... Connex staff worked throughout the night to straighten buckled tracks, he said. City-bound services on the Frankston line were halted for about half an hour this morning after a train collided with a car at level crossing near McKinnon station. ...

Melbourne recorded a blistering 43.4 degrees at 6.15pm, its highest maximum temperature since January 20, 2003."

Ref: Larrisa Ham, The Age, 29/1/09

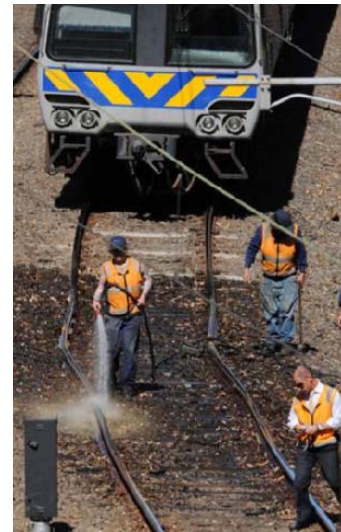


Photo: Joe Armao
The Age, 29/1/09

Comment:

Such disruptions yet again highlight the need for integrated alternative transit services such as the use of high-speed ferries on Port Phillip Bay.

"In a bid to take some political heat out of the issue, the Government announced free travel across Victoria today on trains, trams and buses."

Ref: Clay Lucas, The Age, 30/1/09

Comment: The Minister's gesture was welcome even though it immediately discriminated against regular travellers with periodical tickets. However Connex has agreed to provide compensation in the form of one day's free travel (and in this instance) even for weekly ticket holders. They will need to apply online at: www.connexmelbourne.com.au/news.php?newsid=491 V/Line, bus and tram patrons with periodical tickets will presumably miss out. To be fair it would have been nice to extend the validity of weekly, monthly and yearly tickets by one day. It may also have been preferable to offer the free travel on a day in the future when the system is operating normally.

Speed and Safety

"A rise in pedestrian deaths has sparked calls for speed limits in built-up areas to be lowered by 20 km/h, a move a leading international road-safety expert says could help cut the Victorian road toll by 30 per cent. The calls follow a year in which 59 pedestrians died on Victorian roads — a jump of more than 40 per cent from 2007 despite the state recording its overall lowest road toll on record. ... VicRoads says it is not considering blanket reductions of urban speed limits, but this reluctance to bring them in line with many European countries is putting Victoria's international reputation as a road-safety pioneer in jeopardy, according to Sweden's director of road safety, Claes Tingvall.

"Victoria was the first jurisdiction in the world to introduce mandatory seat belts and random breath-testing, but Professor Tingvall, who spent nearly three years in Melbourne as director of the Monash University Accident Research Centre, said the state urgently needed to rethink speed limits. Since introducing its Vision Zero policy in 1997, Sweden has reduced speed limits on local roads to 30 km/h. It is now cutting its 50 km/h limit on arterial roads to 40 km/h. The move has resulted in Sweden's road toll dropping by almost 25 per cent to about 4.4 deaths per 100,000 people last year, compared with Victoria's 2008 toll of 304, or 5.7 per 100,000. Professor Tingvall said it was expected Sweden's toll would continue to drop and if Victoria implemented similar reductions ...it could cut the road toll by a third. ... '(But) we get horrified when we see your speed-limit philosophy ... In some respects, Victoria is the leading jurisdiction in the world, but if you go to urban design and urban safety relating to infrastructure and speed limits, it's definitely not in the lead. It's very much behind'.

"His comments follow revelations that the surge in pedestrian deaths has prompted the Monash University Accident Research Centre to undertake a three-year investigation to enable it to put forward recommendations for reducing Victoria's pedestrian toll to 10 a year. Bruce Corben, of the centre, backed Professor Tingvall's call but said 10 km/h reductions may be a more realistic starting point. Dr Corben said pedestrians were four times more likely to be killed if struck by a driver travelling at 50 km/h than at 40 km/h, but most Victorian roads are set at 50 km/h and 60 km/h because optimal impact speeds have not been taken into account. Dr Corben pointed to Holland, where the road toll has fallen by more than 30 per cent since it adopted Sweden's approach in the late 1990s,

as another example of how effective a small speed reduction can be. He said the Government should not fear a public backlash, as the introductions of compulsory seat belts and random breath-testing faced community opposition at the time but their benefits led to an eventual acceptance by motorists. 'In Europe we have seen this huge shift in thinking and we need that here'."

Ref: Reid Sexton, The Age, 11/1/09

More on Bike Lending

"Errand Bikes are new, safe, ready-to-roll bikes that local businesses can use for employees to run errands or make deliveries. The program is free of charge and is fully supported [in the US] by GetAbout Columbia staff members who:

- help set up the program at the workplace
- provide bike education and training for employees
- arrange a bike maintenance program



"All business owners and employees are eligible to take part. There is an optional one hour bike safety course that everyone using the Errand Bikes can participate in. That class is taught by League of American Bicyclists certified instructors. Errand Bikes can be used for personal or work-related errands, deliveries, or off-site meetings. They can even be used by employees who want to try using them to commute to work. Employers can keep the bikes for 30 to 60 days depending on how much the bikes are used and if there is a waiting list.

Errand Bikes save:

- Money — The cost of operating a bike is one-tenth that of a car.
- Time — You don't have to look for a parking space or walk a few blocks after parking to reach your destination.
- The Environment — No exhaust fumes or oil leaks to muck up the world.

"Errand Bike users acknowledge responsibility to return the bikes to their place of employment. Locks are provided on all Errand Bikes, but businesses are ultimately responsible for any lost or stolen bikes. All businesses must provide the PedNet Coalition with a certificate of insurance for general liability and worker compensation. This certificate can be obtained from your insurance company." **Ref: Pedestrian & Pedaling Network, (PedNet) Columbia, Missouri**

www.pednet.org/newsroom/2008/errand-bikes.asp

Making a Bolt for the Toilet Door

"Public transport transports people [and] part of that essential infrastructure is toilets. People need toilets and the disabled, young, old and tourists need them urgently! The deal is currently that [train system operator] Connex maintain them, open till last train at Premium stations. In the face of hard core vandalism this often means conditions that demean all who use them. On my way home from a public meeting recently, the throne at Footscray station sat in a pool of faeces and urine, the door was ununlockable and in any case cut down (and up!) to allow easy viewing of occupants; the seat was unusable. ..."

"It is probably not the government's intention to deliberately deny public transport users any last bit of dignity they may have, but crikey, this is a tough way of not doing it. I have experienced similar conditions at various Premium stations: Clayton, Clifton Hill, Caulfield, Frankston ... even Flinders St. And then there are the locked toilets! ... Vandalism and the need for toilets have to be dealt with separately. No one wants the social monitoring that would totally inhibit vandalism. But, maintenance of essential facilities in the face of vandalism can still be expected. Anything less, demeans everyone sometimes and some of us (like me) all the time. Must this sizable group, often with no options to public transport be forced to carry the added burden of looking for a toilet when they're desperate?"

"One station that consistently overcomes the problem is Richmond. Kindly and considerate staff and a dedicated long-term (and apparently in-house) cleaner, manage as a shining - if downmarket - example of what could be. Like so much railway infrastructure, Richmond station soldiers on with ancient but adequate facilities. It may not be marvellous Melbourne but I for one am grateful. I've been a gutless commuter for the past 45 years. Crohn's Disease, has taken 85% of my small intestine which means being malnourished, dehydrated and incontinent. Without access to public toilets I'm immobile and invalid – a drain on the community!"

"To function as citizens, access to public toilets is as essential as access to fresh air (if not quite as urgent). Consistent with this has been my 25 year effort to liberate and maintain accessible public toilets for all. The National Public Toilet

Map is one success and cities such as Yarra and Melbourne have done a great job keeping some of their toilets open all hours. Sure, my luck sometimes does run out, but a city has alternatives, provided one can state one's case – not easy for many! Most can't talk about it. Admitting they have to plan their travel with Connex's facilities in mind is nigh impossible. So, governments can maintain toilet infrastructure to permit citizens to live mobile and constructive lives with dignity intact. The public participation enabled, repays the expense many times over and in many ways. ... If fast food chains and service stations can do it, surely railway stations can."

Frank Fisher. Honorary Member, Continence Foundation of Australia & Professor, Swinburne University, 15/1/09

And Also ...

"The Greens Candidate for Kiama, Ben van der Wijngaart, expressed his solidarity and concern today with South Coast rail travellers at Kiama Station. He and other members of the Greens dispensed adult nappies (understood to be recycled NASA stock!) to rail travellers. 'Yesterday', he said, '28 passengers boarded this train to Sydney, and there was no toilet available. These are not even 19th century rail travel standards, let alone 21st century ones' he asserted. 'While we are making a point with a little Aussie humour, we don't mean to disguise the seriously poor state of rail travel in NSW. Nor do we in any way wish this to reflect on NSW Rail staff who generally do their best with the little that Government provides'."

Ref: Ben van der Wijngaart, Media Release, 21/2/07



'Hey, sexy budgie smugglers! You winning a few hearts?'

Virgin Complaint

"A Virgin airline passenger whose hilarious complaint letter became a viral internet phenomenon has been invited to select food and wine on future flights. The identity of the letter's author was revealed to be Oliver Beale, 29, a high-flying advertising executive, according to London's Daily Telegraph. Mr Beale's addressed his letter directly to Virgin boss Richard Branson to complain about the quality of his in-flight meal during a flight from Mumbai to Heathrow in December last year. He attached photographs of the meal as evidence. ... '[Richard] was incredibly nice about the whole thing but I haven't received any compensation since talking to him', Mr Beale said."

Ref: Craig Platt, WA Today, 30/1/09

Drive Slowly and Prosper (Part 1)

“Peter Mares: *Why are the Heart Foundation and the Arthritis Foundation worried about how fast you drive? There's no evidence that putting your foot down clogs the arteries or makes the joints ache, but both health groups have backed a local government campaign to reduce the speed limit in inner Melbourne suburbs to a blanket 40 kilometres per hour. The logic of their position is that slower traffic will encourage more people to walk and cycle, and that this will result in a healthier society: less heart disease, less arthritis. One of the world's leading authorities on sustainable transport has been brought to Australia to support the argument. Professor John Whitelegg is from the Stockholm Environment Institute at the University of York, in the U.K. ...*

“Peter Mares: *How strong is the evidence that a general reduction in speed will get more people walking and cycling?*

“John Whitelegg: *I argue that it's very, very strong indeed, and that's on the basis of actual case studies, actual places where anyone can visit, anyone can have a look and by observation and by looking at the data, can actually inspect the evidence and arrive at their own view. ... The city of Graz, in Austria ... has been totally 30 kilometre per hour for at least ten years and some of the highest levels of walking and cycling in Europe. And there's a lot of anecdotal evidence as well as scientific evidence that once people are convinced that the roads are safer, crossing the road is safer, getting on your bicycle and not doing the tango with a large lorry or truck is safer, the evidence is there that people will actually get on their bikes and walk a lot more than they will when they fear that they're actually going to be in conflict with heavy volumes of often aggressively driven - but certainly vehicles driven too fast. And they react accordingly and they switch from the car to walking and cycling.*

“Peter Mares: *But I was talking about 40 kpm. You're talking about 30 kilometres an hour. ...*

“John Whitelegg: *I think in the Australian context I would certainly say 'Well, let's give it a go at 40 kilometres per hour. Let's see what happens. Let's see whether we do get higher levels of walking and cycling. Let's see whether people do move out of their cars and respond to the messages about obesity, for example'. The thing that I think in Australian cities especially people have to relate to is that there's a very steep curve - by which I mean at traffic speeds or above, let's say 50 kilometres per hour, you're looking at 90 per cent chance*

of death in a vehicle-pedestrian collision, or vehicle-cyclist collision.

“Peter Mares: *That is death for the pedestrian or the cyclist.*

“John Whitelegg: *Yes, exactly, thank you for that clarification. We're very good all over the world at protecting the motorist - the person inside the vehicle - but we're very bad all over the world at protecting the pedestrian, or protecting the cyclist. And one of the most amazing things about the work I do, which is global, is that the scientific evidence which shows that the 30 kilometres per hour is the really scientific - what shall we call it? - tipping point. You know, below 30, you have a 95 per cent chance of surviving. A pedestrian or cyclist has a 95 per cent chance of surviving if hit by a car and above 30 kilometres it rapidly goes in the other direction. But with Australian sensitivities, I think 40 [kilometres per hour] is absolutely right... See how it goes, see if it works and then we can look at it again in two or three years time. And it may well work and we may not need to go down to 30. ... But one thing I'm absolutely sure about is you will never get the reductions in child obesity in Australian cities that are desperately needed if we don't bring down speed limits, give people a feeling that they're very safe and very secure when walking and cycling. And what have we got to lose? You know, give it a go!*

“Peter Mares: *Well what have we got to lose? I guess a lot of car drivers would say it's going to take them longer to get to work. It's going to take them longer to get anywhere. I mean, that's what they've got to lose. And they like driving their cars, I'm sorry!*

“John Whitelegg: *Well, yes. It is not the purpose of government policy anywhere in the world to pander to what people like. It is the purpose of government policy to protect children.*

“Peter Mares: *But it's the purpose of government policy to get yourself re-elected and that means accepting what people want and what people will vote for!” {To be continued}*

Ref: The National Interest, ABC Radio National, 12/12/08 See the full transcript at:

www.abc.net.au/rn/nationalinterest/stories/2008/2445020.htm#transcript



Picture: www.saskatoon.ca/org/municipal_engineering/trails