



AUSTRALIAN TIMETABLE
ASSOCIATION

TABLE TALK

AUSTRALASIAN TIMETABLE NEWS

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RAIL & TRAM NEWS

NATIONAL



Indian Pacific altered working

On Wednesday, 21 April, a trial was undertaken with the Indian Pacific having an extended consist of 35 carriages. Altered working was implemented in Sydney to facilitate the extended length of the train.

Special Train Notice 1255-2021 provided for this altered working, as summarised:

- Indian Pacific from Perth to arrive in Clyde Up Yard (shunters detach into two separate consists: Train (1) 1x Loco, 26x Carriages, 1x Loco in push-pull configuration; and Train (2) 1x Loco, 9x Cars).
- Train (1) departs 20 minutes after initial arrival from Clyde Up Yard to Sydney Terminal 1.
- Train (2) departs 26 mins after Train (1) from Clyde Up Yard to Sydney Terminal 3.

At Central, local shunters then detach 12 cars from Train (1) to shunt onto platform 2. This move is reversed prior to departure time.

- Train (1) departs Sydney Terminal 13:35 with 26 cars back to Clyde Up Yard.
- Train (2) departs Sydney Terminal 30 mins after Train (1), with its 9-carriage consist to Clyde Up Yard.
- Trains (1) and (2) re-attach in Clyde Up Yard to form the 35-carriage Indian Pacific train to depart 15:19 to Perth.

In practice, there was a delay for the return trips back out of Sydney Terminal. Flow-on consequences for commuter passengers included a minor delay to two suburban services operating towards Blacktown, while one T2 service terminated short at Homebush.

SYDNEY TRAINS

Table Talk – May 2021

QUEENSLAND



SEQ COVID lockdown

Due to a three-day COVID-19 lockdown across south-east Queensland (SEQ) caused by a small cluster of COVID-19 community transmission cases, from 17:00 Monday, 29 March, passengers were required to wear a fitted face mask on public transport.

From 12:00 Thursday, 1 April, the lockdown was lifted, however social restrictions remained in place for a further fortnight, with fitted face masks required on all public transport services across the state until at least Thursday, 15 April. *TRANSLINK, QUEENSLAND HEALTH*

\$335m for NGR toilet upgrades

The state government has revealed that it will spend \$335 million in taxpayer funds to upgrade toilet facilities in the almost-new Next Generation Rollingstock (NGR) fleet, with 75 trains requiring the upgrades to comply with the *Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002*. Also part of the scope for the train upgrades are extra priority seats and revised signage.

The NGR fleet commenced operating on the south-east Queensland rail network between 2017 and 2019. The upgrades are expected to be completed in 2024. *SKY NEWS, QUEENSLAND GOVERNMENT, COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT*

NEW SOUTH WALES



AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY



Byron COVID case

From 17:00 Wednesday 31 March, fitted face masks became mandatory on all public transport across the Ballina Shire, Byron Shire, Tweed Shire and Lismore City Council areas. The health order expired at 23:59 on Monday, 5 April. This was made in response to a new case of COVID-19 community transmission found in Byron Bay, which was linked to the corresponding Brisbane lockdown.

These council areas span the coastline from the Queensland state border down to south of Ballina.

As a result of the lockdown measures in south-east Queensland, NSW TrainLink interstate Sydney-Brisbane services were cut short at Casino. Coach services CLK 175 and 176 between Casino and Brisbane were also cancelled. **NSW GOVERNMENT, TRANSPORT FOR NSW**

Transport Plan 4.0

From Monday, 19 April, the state government increased COVID-safe capacity aboard public transport services in line with the improving outlook, largely a result of the ongoing vaccination program.

From this date, official public transport service capacity increased to 75 per cent of regular train, light rail and bus capacity. The seat behind the bus driver and the front Opal Card reader on buses continue to be out-of-use for driver protection, while the government also advises that green dots inside vehicles will continue to be provided “in case the health situation changes”.

However, NSW TrainLink services were bumped up back to 100 per cent with no restrictions. The NSW Health advice continues to “strongly recommend” the use of face masks on board services where physical distancing is not possible.

As previously reported, funding for additional COVID-19 services has been confirmed to continue until the end of the financial year. **TRANSPORT FOR NSW**

Light rail boosting use of public transport

The most recent Light Rail Customer Satisfaction Survey (with 1,279 respondents) has been trumpeted by the territory government for demonstrating a boost in the use of public transport in the capital, with 70 per cent of people surveyed as more likely to use public transport following the introduction of light rail. 42 per cent of respondents said that they were using the light rail line, a seven percentage point increase on last year's survey.

Transport Minister, Chris Steel, said it was encouraging that “more Canberrans choose public transport including a large group that never previously used [when it was just] the bus system”.

The survey counted anywhere between 93 and 98 per cent of respondents as either satisfied/very satisfied with:

- ease of using light rail (82/15%).
- cleanliness of vehicles and platforms (81/17%).
- reliability of the light rail (76/21%).
- safety and security using light rail (64/29%).
- staff customer service (63/32%).

Two-thirds of respondents also reported that they walk directly to a platform to use the light rail.

Meanwhile, the government also revealed that patronage on the light rail line had recently rebounded to 75 per cent of pre-COVID levels. **ACT GOVERNMENT**

VICTORIA



Segmented Suburban Rail Loop

Minister of Transport Infrastructure and the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Jacinta Allan, confirmed in early April that Suburban Rail Loop, the planned \$50 billion 12-station circuitous rail line running around Melbourne's suburban outskirts from Werribee through to Cheltenham via Melbourne Airport, would not be one continuous service once completed, but made of several independent sections of line which will require passengers to interchange at the locations between two sections.

The minister said the “90-kilometre loop,... will need to [have] key points on that loop. Interchanging is just part of a modern rail network. It hasn't necessarily been a feature of Melbourne's network because we haven't had the population that needs a different sort of rail network”.

Meanwhile, the state government is yet to release the business case for the project - the most expensive in the state's history. The minister claimed that the government was continuing to work through the details. **THE AGE**

Yarra Trams service disruption

Yarra Trams instigated some indefinite service cancellations on routes 58, 59, and 109 from mid-April. As of 13 April, chief executive Carla Purcell said 11 trams had been removed from service due to a wheels shortage caused by COVID-related supply disruption. The wheels are usually supplied from South Africa. The blockage is impacting A-, B- and Z-Class trams.

Ms Purcell said there had been a one minute increase in waiting time on these routes as a result of the “timetable change”.

However, as at 14 April, the PTV website had no mention of this change, nor updated timetables to reflect the circumstance, with timetables dated 8 November 2020 apparently still in force.

The operator said that they expected up to a dozen more trams to be gradually taken offline until their next shipment arrives, expected from Europe in May. **RADIO 3AW, YARRA TRAMS**

SOUTH AUSTRALIA



Gawler Line Closure

In order to complete the electrification of the Gawler Line by the end of the year, the line is completely closed from 1 April to 8 November. The following replacement bus services are now being provided:

- **GA1** (All Stop Services) operates from Gawler Central to Adelaide, servicing all substitute bus stops except Gawler Oval.
- **GA2** (Limited Stop Services) operates to limited stops: Gawler Central, Gawler, Smithfield, Elizabeth, Salisbury, Mawson Lakes, and Adelaide.
- **GA3** (Express Services) runs express from Smithfield to Elizabeth, then Adelaide.

- **GA4** (Peak Express Services) runs express from Gawler to Adelaide, during the weekday AM and PM peak travel periods.

Gawler Oval and North Adelaide railway stations are not being serviced by substitute buses.

GA1 and GA2 services operate at least half-hourly seven days a week. GA3 services operate at least half-hourly during the day Mondays to Fridays. GA4 is a weekday peak-only route. **HILAIRE FRASER**

Meanwhile, other lines also experienced April closures associated with the Gawler Electrification Project as follows:

- **Outer Harbour and Grange:** Full-line closure between 10-24 April, with following substitute bus routes:
 - **G1:** Adelaide-Grange (all stops, every 30 minutes until night, then hourly to end of service)
 - **H1:** Adelaide-Outer Harbour (all stops, every 30 mins till midnight)
 - **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)
- **Belair:** Nightly full-line closure from 10-24 April from 21:00 (18 April excluded due to AFL special event).
 - **B1:** Stopping all stations roughly every 30 minutes until end of service.
- **Seaford and Flinders:** Nightly closure between Adelaide and Brighton from 21:00 between 10-24 April (18 April excluded due to AFL special event).
 - **N4:** Adelaide-Brighton (all stops, every 30 mins till end of service)
 - **N7:** Woodlands Park-Flinders (all stops, every 30 mins)

On the Seaford and Flinders line, Adelaide Metro provided a five-minute changeover time at Woodlands Park and Brighton in the Down direction. In the Up direction the changeover time was also every 5 mins at Brighton and between 1-7 minutes at Woodlands Park. **ADELAIDE METRO**

WESTERN AUSTRALIA



Claremont closure extended

Claremont station closed on 5 February as part of infrastructure works, with new turnbacks being constructed to support the rail network. While Fremantle line services resumed operating from 6 April, Claremont station remained closed, with services not resuming there until 23 April. The delay in re-opening was reported as due to structural issues found during excavation activities at Perth's oldest railway station. **METRONET**

Perth lockdown

The Perth metropolitan area and Peel region were placed into a three-day lockdown, effective from 23:59 on Friday, 23 April. Earlier that night (from 18:00), face masks became mandatory onboard all public transport services. **TRANSPERTH, TRANSWA**

NEW ZEALAND



Te Huia service patronage

It has been reported the new Auckland-Hamilton rail service, Te Huia, had a slow start with patronage in its first week of operation.

The service started on Tuesday, 6 April after multiple delays due to the pandemic. Below is a supplied table of the first weeks' patronage. It has a seating capacity of 147.

Te Huia weekday services		Patronage					
		6-Apr	7-Apr	8-Apr	9-Apr	12-Apr	13-Apr
AM Departure from HLZ	5.46am	75	21	20	27	28	28
	6.28am	67	40	38	40	25	25
PM Departure from AKL	4.42pm	106	39	14	32	48	48
	6.25pm	21	24	43	13	12	12

First week patronage numbers, Te Huia, from Waikato Regional Council data.

While local media reported this as a slow start, a Waikato Regional Council spokesperson said they were in it for the long haul, pointing to the slow build-up experienced with the Capital Connection train (Wellington-Palmerston North), which now enjoys 250-300 passengers a day across a timetable with one daily service in each direction. Council chairperson Russ Rimmington told *stuff.co.nz* "we're giving this

train five years", also saying he believed success would be dependent on an extension of the service from Papakura, in Auckland's outskirts, into central Auckland.

In better news for Council, the first Te Huia Saturday service on 17 April fared better, with anecdotal reports of over 200 passengers on board the first service from Hamilton. The next Saturday service is scheduled for 8 May. **STUFF.CO.NZ, NEWSHUB**

Wellington: Overhead tech trial

Transdev and Metlink have confirmed a trial of new technology that will enable them to live monitor the condition of overhead wiring across the Wellington rail network.

The solar- and battery-powered Pantograph Collision Detection System (PCDS) will be installed on top of a train that will operate across the Johnsonville, Melling, Kāpiti and Hutt Valley lines for six months. The equipment provides live data on the condition of overhead wiring, with a key benefit being the ability to replace laborious manual inspections which can only occur when trains are not operating and during good weather.

Transdev said, if implemented permanently, the technology would enable the saving of tens of thousands of dollars in labour and materials costs annually. The technology was initially developed by Australian Rail Technology using funds provided by the NSW Department of Trade and Investment in NSW, Australia. **TRANSDEV, AR-TECH**

INTERNATIONAL

UK services rebounding

With the end of the UK's mandated lockdown on 12 April, rail operators have been adding more services back onto their schedules, with an extra 1,000 daily services since February.

Transport for London has also confirmed its services are at "near normal" levels on the London Underground and Overground systems.

Trials are also being planned for a new mobile application, TravelSpace, that will provide passengers with live capacity data on timetabled services, to inform on which services have suitable capacity.

Fitted face masks or coverings remain mandatory on public transport. The UK government defines a face covering, as opposed to a face mask, as "a mouth and nose covering that is intended to protect others, but

not the wearer, against the spread of infection. They include bandanas and religious garments.

However, the UK government continues to encourage people to work from home where possible, and to minimise any general travel. *UK GOVERNMENT, RAILWAY TECHNOLOGY, METRO NEWS*

HK: Octopus plans mainland expansion

Octopus Holdings' chief executive, Angus Lee Chun-ming, has outlined plans for the contactless payment provider to expand its availability from Hong Kong into mainland China, saying that it has applied to join "China T-Union", a nationwide one-card initiative of the transportation ministry.

Acceptance would enable Octopus holders to use their cards on rail and ferry services across 300-plus cities on the mainland. However, it does warn that a new card will need to be issued to Octopus holders to take advantage of the increased footprint.

With advances in technology, Mr Lee acknowledged it needs to better compete with competitors such as AliPay, who (with MTR) launched their own 'QR Code Ticket' for use with digital wallet product AliPayHK and mobile application MTR Mobile across the Hong Kong transit network earlier in the year. Octopus has also previously announced plans to integrate Octopus with iPhone and Apple Watch products.

Octopus hopes to get the expansion operating within the next 12 months. *SOUTH CHINA MORNING POST*

Brazil: COVID-19 impact

The Brazilian National Association of Passenger Rail Operators' (ANPTrilhos) yearly report says that the country's combined patronage on metro, commuter, and light rail networks dropped to 1.7 billion passengers (from 3.3 billion in the previous year, a 47 per cent decline). Comparing the period of time that COVID impacted the country (March to December), the decline was 56 per cent on the previous corresponding period. This last decline delivered a \$US1.5 billion drop in revenue for operators.

The capital, Rio de Janeiro, recorded the largest declines with a 57 per cent decline (patronage of just 253 million passengers). Sao Paulo was not far away, with a 55 per cent decline (down to 1.3 billion passengers).

According to the ANPTrilhos President, Joubert Fortes Flores Filho, the new calendar year also started with a 4 per cent decline compared to the end of 2020 as the country continues to struggle to contain virus transmission. *INT'L RAIL JOURNAL, ANPTRILHOS*

BUS & COACH NEWS

NEW SOUTH WALES



Western Sydney bus changes

Busways and Transit Systems bus routes in western Sydney underwent changes, effective from Sunday, 18 April. There were also changes for some school buses,

Busways Service Changes - 18 April 2021

- Route **672** (Pitt Town – Windsor): Now has an hourly service Mondays to Saturdays and a new two-hourly Sunday service. Previously, the timetable had a two-hourly service on weekdays, three timetabled trips on Saturdays and no trips on Sundays.
- New route **740** (Box Hill – Rouse Hill): Provides an hourly service, seven days a week.
- Route **741** (Box Hill – Riverstone): Has an hourly service, seven days a week. Previously, the timetable only had a single trip in each direction only on weekdays.
- Route **746** (Riverstone – Rouse Hill via Box Hill): Has an hourly service, seven days a week. Previously, there was only a two-hourly service timetabled on weekdays.
- Route **747** (Mt Druitt – Rouse Hill via Plumpton, Marsden Park (Elara Estate) and Riverstone): Route extended from Marsden Park to Mt Druitt, replacing 757. Monday to Friday services half-hourly Rouse Hill-Elara Estate, with alternating trips extending to Mt Druitt.
Weekend services operate hourly Rouse Hill-Elara Estate, with alternating trips extending to Mt Druitt. Previously 747 operated hourly Rouse Hill-Elara Estate and 757 hourly Riverstone-Mt Druitt with Sunday 757 services two-hourly.
- New route **748** (Marsden Park – Rouse Hill via Schofields and Tallawong): Formed by a split from 751 (Blacktown-Rouse Hill via Colebee). 751 now only operates Blacktown-Marsden Park via Colebee.
- Routes **775** (St Marys – Mt Druitt via St Clair and Erskine Park) & **776** (St Marys – Mt Druitt via St Clair): Additional peak services providing a 15-minute frequency on both routes. St Marys-Penrith frequencies remain unchanged.

ENDS

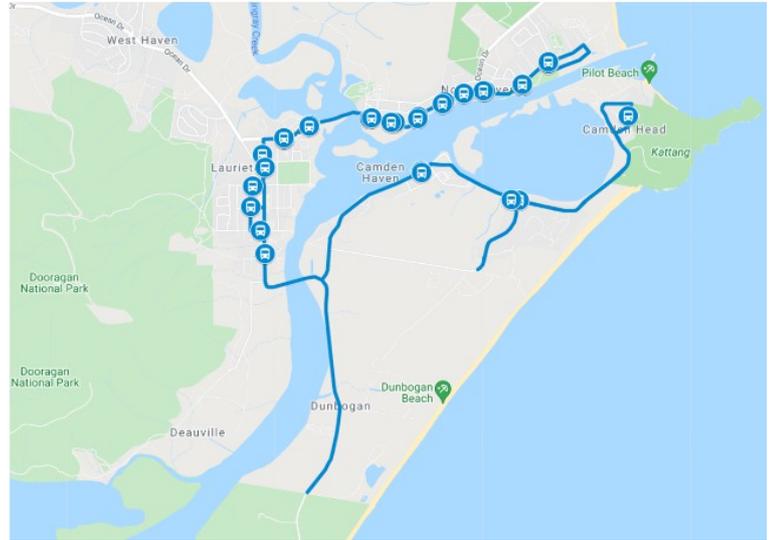
- Route **783** (Penrith – Werrington station via Jordan Springs): Has a longer service interval, with the route extended to Werrington station.

Transit Systems Service Changes - 18 April 2021

- Route **807** (Cabramatta – Cecil Hills): Re-routed in Bonnyrigg.
- Route **810X** (Pemulwuy – Parramatta via Great Western Hwy) & Route **811X** (Merrylands – Parramatta via Gt Western Hwy) replace routes 810 Pemulwuy - Parramatta via South Wentworthville and 811 Merrylands - Parramatta via South Wentworthville.
- Route **813** (Western Sydney Parklands – Fairfield via Prairiewood): Additional services added.
- New route **824** (Parramatta – Westmead via South Wentworthville) – replaces 810 & 811 through South Wentworthville.

HILAIRE FRASER

Editor's note: For those of you counting at home, the state government said that this lot of changes would deliver an extra 2,000 services every week. See pages 8 and 9 for the updated Busways region map.



Route map and timetable for 333 temporary service (source: Busways).

Editor's note: It is unclear which party initiated this idea, although as there were quotes provided by both Transport for NSW and the state's Deputy Premier, John Barilaro, it could be safe to assume that Transport for NSW paid Busways for providing these trips.

BUSWAYS

Busways temporary 333 loop service

From Wednesday, 31 March until Friday, 23 April, Busways operated a special extra loop service, designated as **Charter - 333**. The route was a fare-free loop operating between Camden Haven, Dunbogan and Laurieton as an initiative to assist flood-hit local communities to travel.

As can be seen from the timetable below, it appears that a solitary bus and driver could be provided to deliver this loop service, with five minutes layover time in-between trips in Laurieton, and a one-hour lunch break.

Timetable

The service will show Charter - 333 on the destination sign.

Suburb	Stop	AM	AM	PM	PM
Laurieton	Bold St outside Coles	9:30	10:30	12:30	13:30
North Haven	Bowling Club (The Parade)	9:36	10:36	12:36	13:36
North Haven	The Parade at Ocean St	9:38	10:38	12:38	13:38
North Haven	Opp. Bowling Club (The Parade)	9:40	10:40	12:40	13:40
Laurieton	Bold St outside Coles	9:49	10:49	12:49	13:49
Dunbogan	Store (The Boulevard)	9:54	10:54	12:54	13:54
Camden Head	Bergalia Cr at Idant St	9:59	10:59	12:59	13:59
Dunbogan	Scarborough Way at Alexander Cl	10:05	11:05	13:05	14:05
Dunbogan	Store (The Boulevard)	10:10	11:10	13:10	14:10
Dunbogan	Diamond Waters Caravan Park	10:17	11:17	13:17	14:17
Laurieton	Bold St outside Coles	10:25	11:25	13:25	14:25

TASMANIA



Mayoral call for better transport

In light of the upcoming state election scheduled for 1 May, Hobart's four mayors have sent a joint-message to the candidates of Lyons, Franklin, and Clark asking for a commitment to better public transport for Greater Hobart.

The three-point plan includes delivering a Transit Centre in Hobart, an increase in buses, allocating \$25 million from the Urban Congestion Fund into Northern Suburbs Transit Corridor light rail, and delivering a network of commuter cycleways.

Glenorchy's Bec Thomas said that light rail for the northern suburbs would be vital for urban renewal and improving housing supply/affordability. Kingborough's Jo Westwood said a coordinated plan was needed from better bus stops to more park & ride facilities and an integrated network of cycleways to encourage an interconnected active transport network. **THE TASMANIAN TIMES**

Kinetic acquires Redline

On 22 April, Kinetic announced it had acquired Tasmanian Redline - joining a growing list of recent acquisitions including Telford's, Love's Bus Service, GoBus, Campbell's Coaches, and Greyhound Resources.

Billed as the state's largest private bus operator and owned by the Larissey family since 1929, Tasmanian Redline operates intercity, school and charter services connecting Devonport, Launceston, and Hobart.
KINETIC

WESTERN AUSTRALIA



Perth lockdown

The Perth metropolitan area and Peel region were placed into a three-day lockdown, effective from 23:59 on Friday, 23 April. Earlier that night (from 18:00), face masks became mandatory onboard all public transport services.

Regarding cash handling with bus drivers, Transperth advised:

*Buses have been fitted with a cash box near the driver, so if you wish to continue using cash you should drop your money into the box before the driver issues a ticket or adds value to your SmartRider. **No change will be given for cash transactions.***

TransWA advised that the front seats on their coaches would be "temporarily closed off", and asked passengers to keep driver interaction to a minimum.

Meanwhile, all Transperth car parks were also declared free of charge until further notice. The *COVID-19 Response and Economic Recovery Fee Waiver (Parking Charges) Order (No. 2) 2021* stated that charges have been officially waived until 30 June. Any other parking requirements remain in force.
TRANSPERTH, TRANSWA

NEW ZEALAND



Wellington: Bus strikes near

Wellington bus drivers overwhelmingly voted to strike, with 99 per cent in favour of proceeding in their battle for a better deal from NZ Bus. The Tramways Union

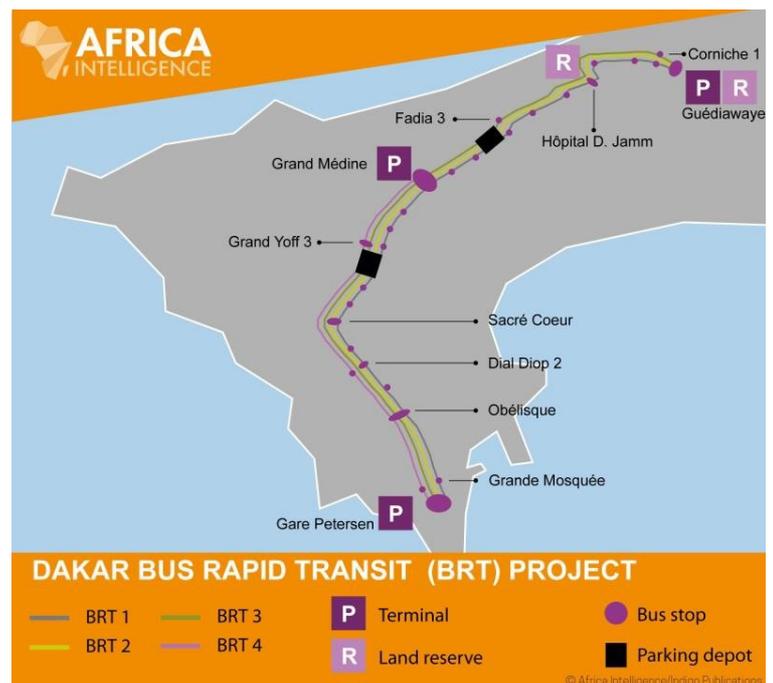
said strikes could be implemented with as little as 24 hours notice to the city, which would leave commuter route and school bus services across much of the city cancelled.

Despite concerns from the union over the loss of some penalty money and a week's annual leave in the offer, NZ Bus countered by suggesting the existing agreement was unfair for newer drivers because "recruits cannot be offered full-time work" and longer-serving drivers get the best shifts. **THE DOMINION POST**

INTERNATIONAL

Senegal: Dakar BRT

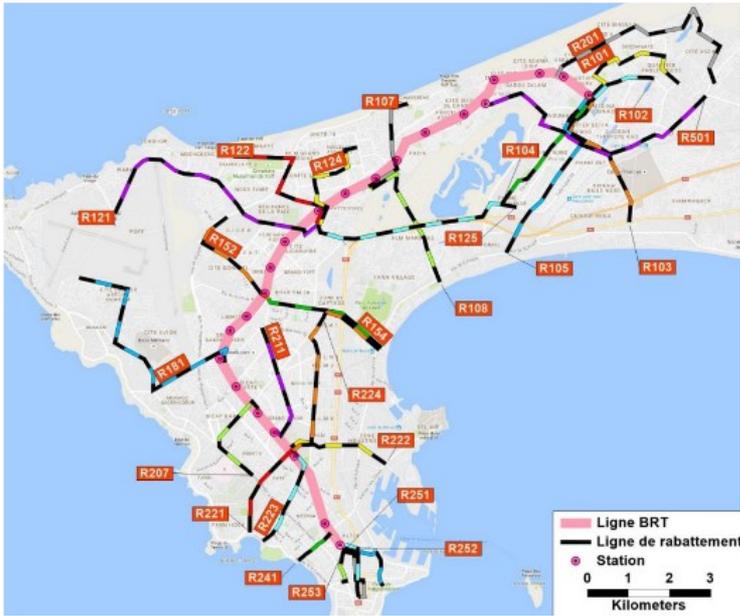
With the conclusion of court proceedings, French-owned engineering and consulting group Systra is moving forward with its technical assistance contract for the planned Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project for Dakar, Senegal.



Upon completion, the \$AU690 million (present dollars) public-private partnership will have 18 kilometres of exclusive rapid bus transit with four specific stopping patterns, 23 bus stations (including three major interchanges) and a fleet of 144 articulated buses. Daily patronage is expected to pass 300,000, with buses running every two minutes in the peak.

CETUD (the Dakar Executive Council of Urban Transport) determines public transport routes, contracts, and fares across the capital. CETUD is currently in negotiations with a consortium led by investment bank Meridiam to operate the BRT. CETUD also plans to re-configure its existing bus

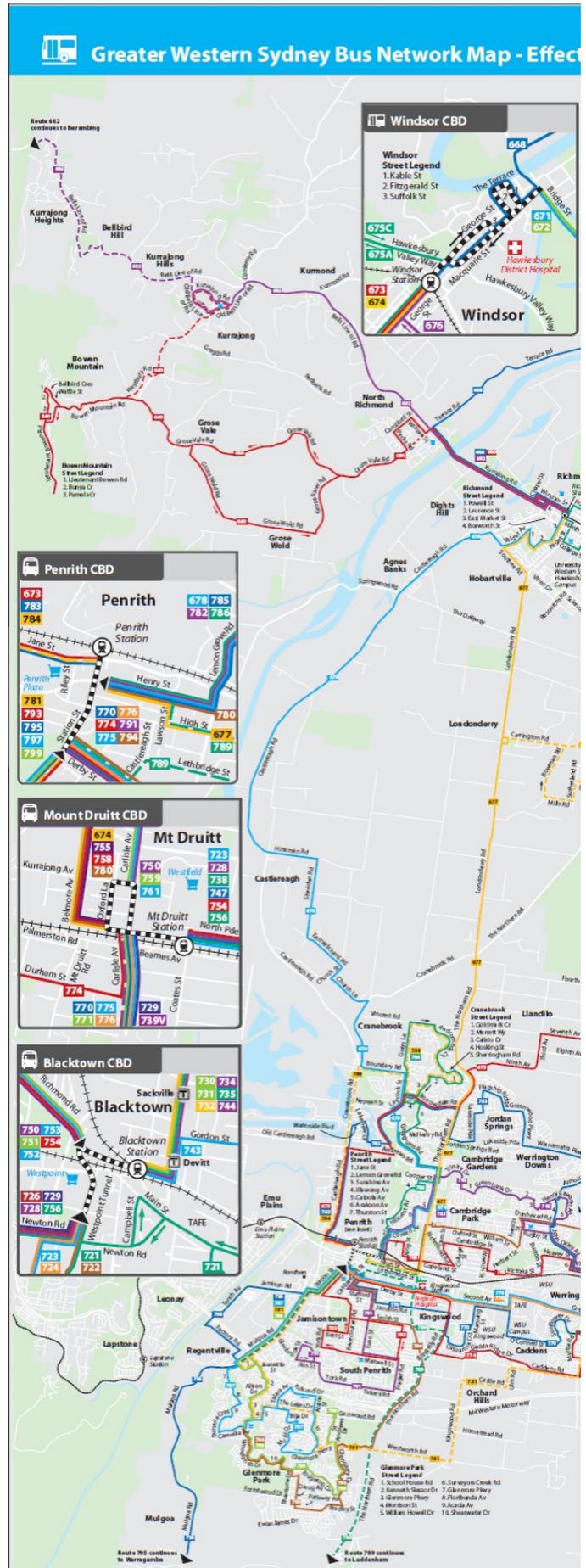
services into feeder lines for the BRT. It estimates 60 per cent of the BRT's patronage will be generated from these feeders. A mapped overview of the proposed feeder lines is provided below (the dotted lines):

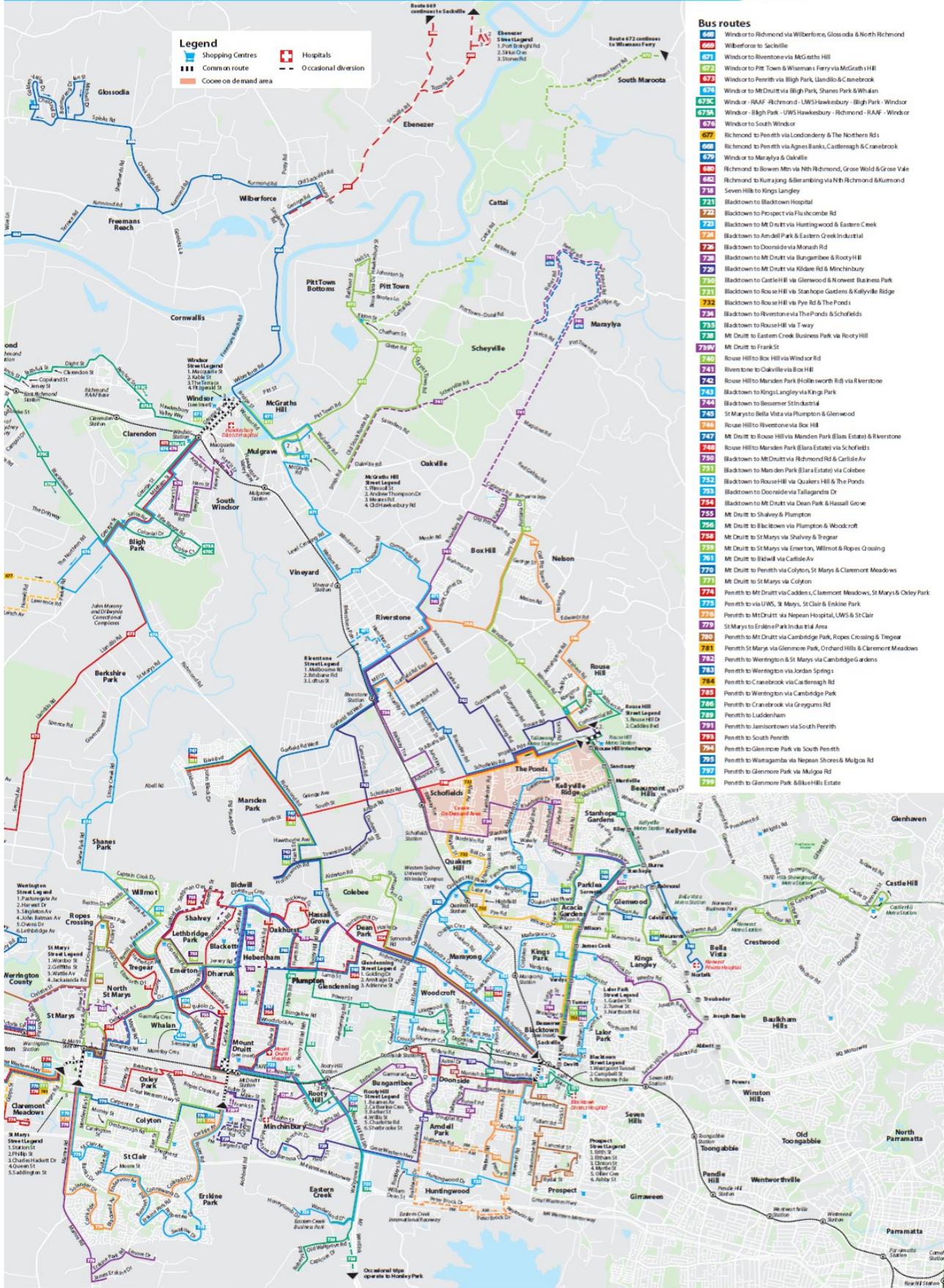


A study conducted for the project showed key benefits would include reduced congestion, reduced greenhouse emissions, improved mobility (including almost halving the end-to-end journey time from 90 to 50 minutes, residents of low socio-economic background having access to thousands of additional jobs, and a 20 per cent increase in the number of people that will be able to reach the city's centre inside an hour), and an internal rate of return of around 15 per cent. The success of trade in the capital city is also critical to the ongoing success of the country's economy.

According to a presentation by CETUD's director general in 2018, funding for the project comes from World Bank and European Investment Bank loans (\$AU400 million and \$AU115 million respectively), Green Climate Fund (\$AU45 million), and a \$AU70 million contribution from the future operator, with the government providing the remainder (\$AU15 million). **AFRICAN INTELLIGENCE, DAKAR BRT PROJECT SITE, ALG, GLOBAL LABOUR INSTITUTE**

ENDS





FERRY & SHIP NEWS

TASMANIA



Derwent River Ferry Service trial

The state government confirmed on 25 March that Roche Brothers has won the tender to operate the 12-month trial of a Derwent cross-river service between Bellerive and Sullivans Cove. The trial is expected to start by the end of June, operate during peak periods, and have a one-way journey time of 20-25 minutes.

No fare will be charged to holders of a Metro Tasmania Greencard.

Roche Brothers already operate existing ferry services in the state for Museum of Old and New Art (MONA) in Hobart, and at Port Arthur. The service forms part of the *Greater Hobart Transport Vision*. **THE MERCURY, FEDERAL GOVERNMENT - INFRASTRUCTURE**

ENDS

Queensland Tourism Industry Council chief executive, Daniel Gschwind, said on the initiative's early success, combined with the early end to the state's latest lockdown: "I think it's restored my faith in the Easter bunny".

Interest was so great, sales on other routes not included in the initiative also saw spikes in demand, including Melbourne-Perth, Perth-Sydney and Melbourne-Sydney.

Meanwhile, hotels have also experienced flow-on interest, with many fully booked for the first three weeks of the month. One Sunshine Coast hotel, Caloundra Holiday Centre, said that prices had risen by 10 per cent on the back of the increased demand, with no vacancies for the entire school holiday period, and following weeks being snapped up. *Traveller.com* also reported that many Gold Coast hotels also said they only had a small number of vacancies left. Kangaroo Island's Aurora Ozone Apartments also said they "had so many emails making bookings online since the airfare sale started, it's incredible".

The start of the initiative also coincided with the April school holidays in most of the country's states and territories (Queensland, New South Wales, Australian Capital Territory, Victoria, Tasmania and Western Australia). **SEVEN NEWS, THE GUARDIAN, TRAVELLER.COM**

INTERNATIONAL



AIR NEWS

DOMESTIC



Ticket sales surge

The federal government's \$1.2 billion 'half-price flights' initiative launched from midnight on the morning of Thursday, 1 April. A total of 800,000 economy-class tickets have been made available under the initiative for travel by 30 September.

On opening, demand was so great that around one-quarter of the program's 800,000 subsidised tickets were snapped up in under a day. Virgin Australia said it had its highest day of domestic sales in 20 years, selling over 71,000 of these tickets - a 600 per cent increase in flight searches and bookings compared to the previous week. The airline also revealed that nine of the top ten booked routes involved a Queensland airport.

Australian travel bubbles

Following on from last month's *Table Talk* article, Australians became able to resume travel across the Tasman into New Zealand without two weeks of quarantine, with the establishment of a two-way 'travel bubble', commencing from 23:59 on Sunday, 18 April.

Queenstown mayor, Jim Boulton, said the move was a "saviour for businesses. This is the lifeline we needed". Both Qantas and Air New Zealand sought to ramp up their flights in the wake of thousands of tickets being sold following the announcement on 6 April. **SAMCHUI.COM, INT'NAL BUSINESS TIMES**

US: Southwest orders more Boeings

Southwest Airlines has announced an order for 100 new 737MAX aircraft from Boeing.

The self-anointed "world's largest operator" of an all-Boeing fleet, said, through its chief executive officer, Gary Kelly, that the order would ensure increased comfort for passengers and crew. "Operating the Boeing 737 series for nearly 50 years... has made significant contributions to our unparalleled success".

The order adds onto other pre-existing orders with Boeing, including 200 737-7s and 180 737-8s which are in the process of being built and delivered to Southwest over the coming decade.

Meanwhile, a total of 67 Boeing 737 MAXs were grounded in April due to a possible issue with a

component of the electrical power system, affecting Southwest, American Airlines, United, and Alaska Airlines. SAMCHUI.COM (2)

ENDS

ODD SPOT - Clarification

Due to an editorial oversight, in Geoff Lambert's Odd Spot printed in the April 2021 edition, the 'rear' and 'front' principles of the Odd Spot were supposed to be the reverse of what was printed. The editor apologises for any confusion.

TALKING IN-DEPTH

Cross-country riders go red

Changes to the operation of some long-distance buses in northern Tasmania (effective from 17 January) have seen some commuters confounded with buses that don't always link up and confusion in switching back-and-forth between services operated by different bus companies. The Department of State Growth recently began a new cross-country bus contract for services between Burnie and Devonport, with MerseyLink replacing previous operator Redline.

ABC News provides the following recount of the situation:

Midge Gray has been using the bus from Smithton to Tasmania's other regional centres on and off for decades — but she may not any more. The 61-year-old from Mella, near Smithton, said she was one of many frustrated people from the area who now had a more complicated commute. "I'm about to start a part-time job, and some days I'll be working in Burnie, other days I'll be in Launceston, and there will be the odd occasion where I'll be working in Hobart. I'd like to be able to rely on the bus, but I'm feeling nervous because it's just so complicated," she said.

For passengers from Smithton, that means a Redline bus to Burnie, a MerseyLink bus from Burnie to Devonport, and back on Redline to get from Devonport to Launceston or Hobart.

Ms Gray recently experienced the new system and said the buses don't always link up, therefore adding time to already long journeys and leaving some feeling cut-off from the rest of the state. "Smithton gets forgotten, and it's being disadvantaged and we're an important part of the Tasmanian community. Decision-makers in Hobart should come up to Smithton and try the bus system themselves."

Redline Coaches are contracted by the Department of State Growth to run intercity bus services, but a recent change in the contracts given out for specific routes means the company no longer operates the buses between Burnie and Devonport.

Redline ran from Smithton to Hobart via Burnie, Devonport, and Launceston for decades, but that stopped on January 17.

"There's now a break in that long-haul route ... it's been thrown into chaos," said Redline Coaches Manager Stuart Harris. He said about 15,000 people a year went between Hobart and Burnie, but the consequences would be felt by many more. "It's not just about the people who are travelling — it's their carers, it's their families, and we have a lot of unaccompanied children."

The Devonport Transit Centre in Providore Place has also been closed in favour of using the Rooke Street bus mall, which has been built as part of the multi-million-dollar Living City Urban Renewal project. "People now have to



disembark in Devonport, so there's going to be a lot more kids, and the elderly who have to wait up to an hour before they can get on the next bus. The bus mall is okay for local travel in and around Devonport but it's not okay for long-haul travellers with lots of baggage who need toilet facilities and good shelter in the winter," said Mr Harris.

Mr Harris urged the Department to keep the transit centre open while it engaged in community consultation.

Manager of the Stanley Tourist Information Centre, Kim Bailey helps tourists to the area book buses around the state. She said it was now very complicated to get people from Circular Head to other centres. "I had a gentleman who needed to get to Launceston Airport, and that involved a Redline bus from Stanley to Burnie, wait for an hour and 20 minutes, then MerseyLink to Devonport, wait for half an hour, then Redline to Launceston, then a shuttle bus from Launceston CBD to the airport. "It makes it very difficult," Ms Bailey said.

Ms Bailey said while it was good news that the bus review had resulted in the commencement of weekend journeys from Smithton to Burnie, she agreed that the break-up of the long-haul route will make the region suffer.

Disability advocate Jane Wardlaw said people with disabilities might miss out too, with changes to transport felt even more acutely. "Transport is absolutely vital for people, particularly in Tasmania where we do have quite a small public transport system and there aren't a lot of choices. "People with disabilities need to be included as key stakeholders," Ms Wardlaw said.

Ms Wardlaw said the decisions around both the route changes and the closure of the transit centre will have "unintended consequences" for people with disabilities, making transport a serious barrier. "I fear that people will become more isolated in their rural communities."

A spokesperson for the Department said in a statement it conducted a bus services review and found the Burnie to Devonport route needed improving and MerseyLink was best placed to offer the fastest and most direct option with their North West Express service. "This service has been extremely popular with passengers, and overall feedback has been extremely positive and that these changes were long overdue," they said.

They also said MerseyLink has a five-year plus five-year contract to operate the service until 2030. With regard to the closure of the transit centre, the spokesperson said it was clearly stipulated in Redline's contract that the centre would only be funded until the new bus network started. "The new north-west network commenced on 17 January 2021, and Redline was fully aware of this well before the changes came into effect." **ABC NEWS**

About *Table Talk*

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