

Suburban travel

Flinders Street station, at the core of the suburban network for 150 years, has presented its ochre yellow frontage to Swanston and Elizabeth Streets since 1910. Until 1878, lines to southern and eastern suburbs were run by companies which amalgamated into the Melbourne and Hobson's Bay United Company. Princes Bridge station, its terminal from 1857, had a track link to Flinders Street through a bridged culvert under Swanston Street from 1890. Northern and western suburban services terminated at Spencer Street until the curving viaduct between the city stations opened in November 1891. It was duplicated to provide four tracks in 1915. A further two tracks became available in 1978.

Train and tram line extensions were integral to Melbourne's suburban expansion which rose to fever pitch during the 1880s. Trains had the advantage of carrying not only people but firewood, building material and other stock ordered by local retailers. The 1890s crash reduced travel across the network, and ended the Outer Circle Line's brief life.

Electrification

A decade of planning went into the decision to use electricity, the new power of the 20th century, on the suburban network. Work began in 1912 on power generation, substations, rolling stock and safety systems, all necessary before overhead wires supported on latticed steel masts and bridging were strung along the track. With progress slowed during World War I, the inauguration of electric train services came on 28 May 1919 on the Essendon to Sandringham line passing through the city.

Conversion of other lines took until 1923. Outer and middle suburbs underwent a new burst of commuter development, including a line extension to Glen Waverley in 1930. Not only were travel times cut by a third, but smuts in the eye and sooty dust were things of the past. Further extension after World War II was combined with upgrades, track duplication and new intermediate stations. Suburban extension beyond Dandenong was made easier after electrification of the Gippsland line as far as Traralgon in 1956.

One class fares were introduced in September 1958; smoking was banned in November 1976; station carparks were extended and developed from the late 1950s. From March 1956, blue Harris trains with fluorescent rather than globe lighting began a slow replacement of the Red Rattlers. Silver Hitachi trains were added from January 1971.

The City Loop, the long-anticipated underground system, opened progressively between January 1981 and 1985. The first of 95 stainless steel air-conditioned Comeng suburban trains entered service in 1981, the gold and green livery appearing in 1983.

In 1987, Melbourne's oldest lines to Port Melbourne and St Kilda were closed and replaced by light rail, giving passengers cross-city connections to Mont Albert and East Brunswick.

Ever-expanding Metropolis

Suburban electric rail services were extended through to Werribee in 1983 with most re-routed via Altona in 1985. The Dandenong to Cranbourne line joined the network in March 1995 and St.Albans to Sydenham (Watergardens) in January 2002. Craigieburn is due to be served by electric trains from 2006. More services and upgrading of 67 stations to 'premium' standard from 1996 were meant as drawcards to increase patronage. Despite a vastly expanded metropolitan network, passenger journeys have not yet reached the 1950s peaks of 162 million.