



# Frustrated but not derailed

Supporters of a Doncaster train line kept the faith at a forum last week. By Melissa Heagney

**D**oncaster residents hoping for a long-awaited rail line to their suburb are likely to be disappointed when the State Government's Victorian Transport Plan is released next month, a transport expert has predicted.

Melbourne University professor Bill Russell, co-director of the Australasian Centre for the Governance and Management of Urban Transport, told a forum in Doncaster last Thursday he expected no commitment on the project from the Government.

The forum, held at the Manningham Council offices, brought together transport, planning and design experts, and councillors to discuss the transportation problems facing the municipality – the only one in Melbourne without a train service.

Mr Russell, who recommended a Doncaster rail line be built in 1991 in a report to then transport minister Peter Spyker, made a heartfelt plea for action.

He said buses were the preferred transport option in developing countries.

"We are not a Third World country, and we do deserve a rail system," Mr Russell said. "Let the design studies (for Doncaster rail) start now."

He said the rail line to Doncaster was competing with other much-needed projects, including proposed rail lines to South Morang and Melton and urged councils to keep the pressure on the Government.

Curtin University sustainability expert Peter Newman spoke via DVD about his experiences as a councillor in Freemantle, Perth.

Professor Newman talked about the public campaign for the rail line in his home city and the impact it has had since it was built. Perth's train patronage has doubled over the past decade.

The DVD will be handed to state and federal ministers to put forward the case for the Doncaster rail line.

Professor Newman also had some advice for Melburnians: "If you build it, they will come. They will use it, and it will help to change your city."

Celebrity weatherman and environmentalist Rob Gell was unable to attend the forum, but he sent a statement of support.

"We simply must design for mass transit in the Doncaster corridor to begin the change in culture of the hundreds of thousands of sole commuters in vehicles each day. But we must make the opportunity to change easy, not equally as hard. Rail is the key to the transition," Mr Gell's statement read.

Other ideas were put forward for dealing with congestion problems between Doncaster and the city.

A publicly funded, underground rail system between Manningham and Whitehorse and bigger residential developments closer to the city were among the suggestions at the forum. ●

