

Rail Futures Institute

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RAIL FUTURES APPLAUDS GOVERNMENT AIRPORT RAIL LINK ANNOUNCEMENTS

Rail Futures Institute congratulates the Commonwealth and State Governments on their decision to collaborate and jointly fund construction of the proposed Melbourne Airport Rail Link.

We have long advocated that the Airport route should be from Southern Cross Station via a single stop at Sunshine where a major rail interchange would provide easy connections with the Melbourne Metro corridor and the regional lines that pass through Sunshine. We therefore strongly endorse the Premier's announcement that the preferred route will include a new Sunshine Super-Hub and pave the way for fast trains to Geelong and Ballarat.

The major infrastructure needed to provide the Airport Rail Link is likely to include long tunnels and be designed for a useful life of 100 years or more. It is therefore of critical importance that the detail of the new corridor design and operation is right in the first instance.

This must include active future proofing to ensure that the proposed rail link will have capacity and redundancy to service a city with a population of 8 to 10 million, expected soon after mid-Century, and an airport already being planned for an ultimate yearly throughput of 100 million passengers.

Operational precision and reliability at much higher levels than previously seen in Australia is achievable using rail technology and systems, similarly to those now operating in many Asian and European cities. Nothing less should be acceptable for a brand new purpose-built railway. In practice, this can only occur if its infrastructure is fully secured and the entire operation is independent of Melbourne's existing Metro lines. This includes dedicated rolling stock, specifically designed to meet the needs of airline travellers.

Rail Futures Secretary Dr Bill Russell said, "Travel time to the Airport will be a critical factor in its success. It must be faster than any private car, taxi or bus alternative. Rail Futures is confident that a suitably designed and operated rail corridor can readily achieve travel times in the range of 15 to 20 minutes, inclusive of the Sunshine stop."

"To minimise waiting time, trains must operate very frequently, at least every 10 minutes, day and night, only stretching to perhaps 20 minutes in the very early morning hours", Dr Russell said.

Rail Futures expects that existing planned development will dictate that the new Airport station must be underground. This should provide a degree of flexibility as to its chosen location, and the obvious need to minimise walking time between station entrances and the various airline terminals, both present and future.

Experience at other airports dictates that access to the station must be highly visible and easily negotiated. For regional Victoria, the Melbourne Airport Rail Link provides a wonderful opportunity to enable much easier and faster access to the airport from all regional lines. This not only applies to fast trains from Geelong and Ballarat, but also to the Bendigo and Seymour lines which should, as a subsequent stage, be diverted to run directly via the airport to Southern Cross via new Metro Trains interchanges at Clarkefield and Wallan, respectively. This will provide significant travel time savings and eliminate the present delays and unreliability caused by the need for metropolitan and regional trains to share common tracks. Longer term, similar improvements can be made to the Gippsland line.

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