

Rail and Tram Priorities for the 2014 Victorian State Election

All parties are promising rail projects —but where is the strategic plan, which projects are best, and what will really be delivered?

Strategic Background

After many years in which state governments have neglected rail and public transport investment, the tide could be changing.

Successful rail projects such as the Regional Rail Link; obvious metro network shortcomings in reliability and service, and the inability of successive freeway projects to dint traffic congestion, have led to a strong demand among voters for action on public transport.

The past term of government has seen some significant improvements in service reliability in the suburban network, and has also seen the Regional Rail Link project being delivered ahead of schedule and below budget.

But other key projects that the public wants have yet to be delivered. Neither the Melbourne Metro nor the Melbourne Rail Link is certain; the Doncaster and Rowville lines are still mirages whose timing recedes as we approach them, and there is an enormous need for more new trams and tram extensions. Regional and rural communities are crying out for more and better connected V/Line services, while critical intrastate rail freight investments such as the Mildura line upgrade and standardization hang in the balance.

Liberal, Labor and Green parties have all promised significant investments. Rail Futures sees merit in some of the projects that have been proposed; in other cases urgent needs have been overlooked. Rail Futures offers this paper as a contribution to thinking as to what the priorities should be.

Regrettably, the major parties are still very much in project driven mode. Rail Futures believes projects should arise from strategy— short, medium and long -term. With Victoria's rapid population growth and uneven development, an ever widening gap is the absence of an integrated multi-modal transport plan that has all party backing—a plan that can endure beyond a term or change of government, and provide the certainty that communities and businesses need. This gap is still, unfortunately, wide open.

“In this election political parties must be held to account— they must deliver the rail investment they promise.”

Key Points

- Melbourne Metro or Melbourne Rail Link remains a critical choice
- All parties have promised significant new feeder buses in growth areas
- The tram system needs new vehicles and extensions
- Better V/Line services are being sought by many communities

Major political parties are proposing transport projects worth tens of billions this election. But where is the underlying strategy that should drive the projects?

<p>1. Build Melbourne Metro Now!</p> <p><u>Melbourne Metro Rail tunnel (original version via Arden, Parkville, CBD North and Domain),</u></p> <p>Including 43 additional and replacement suburban train sets (over and above the proposed Dandenong line trains) and associated maintenance and stabling facilities.</p> <p>Sub-surface station at South Yarra should be included.</p>	<p><i>Why?</i></p> <p>Essential to increase capacity of overall suburban rail network.</p> <p>Extend rail services to key strategic locations. Including Parkville and CBD.</p> <p>Superior land use and employment access benefits compared to Melbourne Rail Link (<i>Read our comparison papers on the Rail Futures website to see why</i>).</p> <p>Current train fleet inadequate for current and future patronage; and older trains nearing end of economic life.</p>
<p>2. Upgrade Dandenong Rail Corridor</p> <p><u>Dandenong line upgrade,</u></p> <p>Including 25 new generation train sets, new high capacity signalling, traction power upgrade, four level crossing removals, three rebuilt stations and new Pakenham East stabling/maintenance depot.</p> <p>Design should provide for future quadruplication and South Eastern Rail Link (SERL) to Hastings and Gippsland.</p>	<p><i>Why?</i></p> <p>Most poorly performing rail corridor under greatest pressure.</p> <p>Supports rapid growth in outer south-eastern suburbs..</p> <p>Level Crossing conflict between rail and road most severe in this corridor.</p> <p>Important to retain option for future quadruplication, for urban growth areas, Port of Hastings development and freight connections and passenger services to Gippsland.</p>
<p>3. Invest in Metro Tracks and Infrastructure</p> <p>Suburban rail lines asset renewal and upgrade (sleepers, track, ballast, signals, overhead, traction sub-stations and station amenities).</p> <p>Increase spending by at least 25% pa over current levels.</p>	<p><i>Why?</i></p> <p>Condition of Melbourne suburban rail infrastructure is poor compared with other States and contributes to chronic unreliability problems. Also potential safety issues.</p> <p>Lack of adequate facilities (weather protection, toilets, etc.) on stations contributes to poor perceptions and public health problems.</p>
<p>4. Upgrade and standardise the Mildura Line</p> <p>Following the completion of the Murray Basin Infrastructure Study, there is a rare opportunity to greatly upgrade our country rail freight network,</p> <p>Including increased axle loads and potential gauge standardisation of lines Gheringhap, Maryborough and/or Donald to Yelta, Murrayville, Sea Lake and Manangatang and possible re-opening of Maryborough-Ararat line via Avoca and/or construction of new link Litchfield to Minyip.</p>	<p><i>Why?</i></p> <p>Most strategic north-south rail corridor in western Victoria, linking growing agricultural and mineral industries with ports, but current line condition poor relative to strategic importance</p> <p>Potential future extension to transcontinental line via Menindee / Broken Hill and alternative to Adelaide Hills route.</p> <p>Provides foundation for eventual restoration of Mildura rail passenger service.</p>
<p>5. Port-Rail Infrastructure</p> <p>Puts metropolitan port traffic on to rail by introducing efficient Port-rail container shuttle trains serving a new Swanson Dock Rail Terminal and intermodal freight hubs north, west and south east of Melbourne.</p> <p>Plan rail connection to new container terminal at Webb Dock.</p>	<p><i>Why?</i></p> <p>Maintain Port of Melbourne and Victoria's competitive edge as freight hub and Australia's No 1 container port.</p> <p>Reduce trucks on Melbourne roads by using available off-peak rail network capacity.</p>

<p>6. Tram priority measures and tram route extensions</p> <p>Deliver further tram priority measures as demonstration projects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete remainder of Route 109 works throughout. • Route 8 new demonstration project (Toorak Road from Punt to Glenferrie Roads) <p>Priorities for suggested tram extensions:</p> <div style="border: 2px solid red; padding: 5px;"> <p>Extend Route 48 to Doncaster Shoppingtown.</p> <p>Extend Route 86 to Footscray Station.</p> <p>Extend Route 6 to Glen Iris Station.</p> <p>Extend Route 3 to Chadstone Shopping Centre.</p> <p>Extend Route 11 to Reservoir Station.</p> </div>	<p>Why ?</p> <p>Slow tram speeds and trams delayed by traffic are the greatest problems facing Melbourne's tram system and result in poor utilisation of expensive assets (e.g. new trams).</p> <p>Many Melbourne tram routes finish at illogical locations reflecting historical context; and need extending to major destinations to properly integrate transport and land use. Most of these extensions would be of relatively modest cost.</p>
<p>7. Freight Rail Network Maintenance</p> <p>Including infrastructure improvements to eliminate level crossing speed restrictions and enhance efficiency of grain freight on rail.</p> <p>Increase annual spending on major periodic maintenance by \$40 million pa over current levels.</p>	<p>Why ?</p> <p>Tracks are in declining condition due to inadequate maintenance spending over many years</p> <p>Important for underpinning economic development of Victoria's regions.</p> <p>Considerable additional freight could be won to rail if tracks upgraded.</p>
<p>8. South Morang to Mernda rail line extension.</p> <p>Including new stations at South Morang and Mernda (assuming present South Morang station is correctly renamed as Mill Park), rail/road grade separations, stabling sidings and major park and ride facility at Mernda.</p>	<p>Why?</p> <p>The highest priority suburban line extension in Melbourne, due to rapid growth in Plenty corridor.</p> <p>Relatively easy to achieve due to existence of former Whittlesea rail reserve.</p> <p>Capacity exists in Clifton Hill City Loop allowing additional services to meet patronage growth.</p>
<p>9. Additional new trams for fleet expansion and replacement</p> <p>Increase current E Class order from 50 to 125 (i.e. increase current order by 75).</p> <p>Including power supply upgrades and depot/maintenance facility upgrades.</p>	<p>Why?</p> <p>Current tram fleet not coping with booming current and future patronage.</p> <p>Many older trams have reached end of economic life, are too small and are not accessible to disabled citizens.</p> <p>Important step towards Disability Discrimination Act compliance and improved mobility for disabled citizens.</p>
<p>10. Doncaster rail – either light or heavy rail option.</p> <p>Light rail option would be partly on elevated structure and partly on Eastern Freeway and Alexandra Parade medians then merging with upgraded Route 96 in Nicholson St.</p> <p>Heavy rail option high cost and involves substantial tunnelling</p>	<p>Why?</p> <p>Light rail option would deliver more benefits at substantially lower cost than heavy rail, is more politically achievable; and integrates with Tram Route 48 extension to Shoppingtown (see Priority 6).</p> <p>Will reduce car congestion by providing an attractive public transport option in the corridor.</p>

11. Regional Passenger Rail Upgrades

Melton line duplication and electrification.

Duplication first, electrification later.

Increase service frequency on interurban (RFR) lines (Ballarat, Bendigo, Geelong, Seymour, Traralgon).

Increase intercity (longer distance) rail service frequencies (Albury, Ararat, Bairnsdale, Echuca, Maryborough, Shepparton, Swan Hill, Warrnambool) toward a standard of 4 or 5 daily return services.

Additional V/line carriages (over and above current order for 43 cars) for both interurban and long-distance services. First priority: new Geelong line rolling stock.

Line capacity and reliability improvement works including:

- Geelong line: Geelong to Waurn Ponds line capacity upgrade and new Waurn Ponds depot.
- Ballarat line: New Rowsley crossing loop and restore dual track operation Warrenheip to Ballarat.
- Gippsland line: Duplicate single-track sections Bunyip-Longwarry and Moe-Hernes Oak.
- Bendigo line: Reinstate double track Castlemaine to Harcourt

Why?

Melton has the poorest rail service of all suburban lines but is the most rapidly growing urban corridor. Duplication will allow significant increases in service frequency pending later electrification.

Growth of patronage on interurban (RFR) rail services outstripping capacity, as Geelong, Ballarat, Bendigo and Latrobe Valley become more integrated (economically and socially) with the capital city.

More frequent intercity (long distance) services support state-wide regional development and decentralisation; and are important for socio-economic equity.

New Geelong line carriages would provide much needed additional capacity on this corridor and allow cascade of V/LOCITY trains to increase service capacity/frequency on other lines. Would also facilitate first stage implementation of a Geelong-Ballarat-Bendigo passenger rail service with an initial Geelong-Ballarat service at very modest cost.

Line capacity and reliability improvements works are required to support 20-minute frequency services on the Geelong line (extended to Waurn Ponds) and 30-minute frequency services on the Ballarat, Bendigo and Traralgon lines .

Key Principles Rail Futures supports:-

- ⇒ A pipeline of rail and public transport projects extending at least 2 terms forward;
- ⇒ Projects should arise from strategy, not be substituted for strategy;
- ⇒ An integrated multi-modal Victorian Transport Plan informed by consultation, and prepared by an independent body;
- ⇒ Transport projects to comply with the Transport Integration Act principles; and
- ⇒ Transparent business cases and benefit cost

This paper has been prepared by Rail Futures Incorporated in the public interest. Rail Futures Inc is an independent non-partisan group formed to advocate cost effective rail and intermodal solutions for public transport and freight problems based on sound commercial, economic and social reasoning. Rail Futures members include very experienced rail professionals, engineers, planners and economists.

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