

Rail Futures Institute

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STANDARD GAUGE THE ONLY FIX FOR REGIONAL RAIL FUTURE

Advocacy group Rail Futures Institute is concerned that Victorian Government plans to convert the Ballarat-Maryborough line to dual gauge will increase the journey time on that line, and add up to \$40 million in unnecessary costs.

Rail Futures instead advocates the bolder step of converting the line to standard gauge along with the conversion of one or more VLocity trains to standard gauge and introducing a standard gauge shuttle between Maryborough and Ballarat, with Melbourne-bound passengers changing trains at Ballarat. Over time, Rail Futures envisages a standardized regional rail network extending north, west and south from Ballarat.

The Andrews Government plan to convert the Ballarat-Maryborough line from broad gauge – on which V/Line passenger trains currently run – to dual gauge to also accommodate standard gauge freight trains means that train operating speeds are likely to be cut to a maximum 80 km/h, blowing out the already slow 53-minute journey from Ballarat to Maryborough.

Rail Futures Secretary Dr Bill Russell observes that the dual gauge proposal also postpones the possibility of extending passenger train services beyond the Government's proposed extension to Dunolly on the Mildura line, which has now been converted to standard gauge. Dr Russell notes that there is now a concerted push in the Mildura community for the return of passenger trains.

“Ballarat needs to become a major hub and servicing base for passenger trains, not just for standard gauge services to Maryborough, St Arnaud, Donald and perhaps later Mildura, but also to Hamilton, Horsham and Geelong, as well as for direct broad gauge services to Melbourne via Ballan.

“Ballarat is ideally located for such a facility which will generate jobs and additional economic activity in the Ballarat region. Standardising the Ballarat to Maryborough line is a key first step in the process. Wasting money on a compromise like dual gauge between Ballarat and Maryborough is the wrong solution”, Dr Russell said.

EXPLAINER

Railway Gauge is the distance between the inside surfaces of the rails on any railway. Victoria has two different gauges on parts of its network: Broad gauge – 1600mm or 5'3" as used on Melbourne metropolitan lines and on some regional lines. Broad Gauge is now largely unique to Victoria. Standard Gauge – 1435mm or 4'8½" as used on other regional lines, and on interstate lines linking Melbourne and all other Australian mainland capital cities. The current Murray Basin Rail Project is converting over 1000 km of Victorian regional lines from broad to standard gauge. This allows trains to move uninterrupted across state borders. When completed, nearly 60% of Victoria's regional line kilometres will be standard gauge. Rail Futures policy is that all regional lines should ultimately become standard gauge in conformity with much of the rest of Australia.

Media enquiries:

Dr Bill Russell
Rail Futures Institute Secretary
phone 0408 005 558