

Rail Futures Inc.

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THE STATE GOVERNMENT'S PROPOSED MELBOURNE AIRPORT RAIL LINK IS BAD NEWS FOR MELBOURNE'S WEST

Melton and Wyndham Vale line communities should reject the Government's current Airport Rail proposal to access the city via Melbourne Metro and insist on the additional rail capacity between the CBD and Sunshine that is essential to meet both their short and longer-term needs, advocacy group Rail Futures Institute urges.

Without additional tracks between the CBD and Sunshine (including the 7km West Footscray tunnel), both the Melton and Wyndham Vale lines, even after electrification, will be unable to support the level of service required for their communities, Rail Futures adds.

The \$11 billion Melbourne Metro project (MM) is a massive undertaking including twin 9km tunnels extending from South Kensington to Hawksburn, and five new underground stations serving the CBD and adjacent suburbs. MM will add many more train services through the heart of Melbourne, linking massive growth areas in the west and north-west with its equally burgeoning south-east.

When completed in 2025, MM will see trains travelling almost 100km from Sunbury and Melton (once this line is electrified) through the new tunnels to Dandenong, Pakenham and Cranbourne. Parts of this corridor are shared with V/Line trains to Bendigo and Gippsland.

MM is designed for up to 24 trains per hour in each direction, but around 90 per cent of this capacity will be required to service these lines during weekday peak periods very soon after it opens, with population pressures on the Sunbury and Melton lines in particular such that 100 per cent of capacity will be utilised by the early 2030s.

“Notwithstanding this, the State Government appears intent on allocating 25 per cent of MM track capacity between the CBD and Sunshine to Melbourne Airport trains,” Rail Futures President John Hearsch explains. “This can be achieved only by reducing the number of trains that could otherwise run at peak times on the Sunbury/Watergardens and Melton lines.”

“Once added to the metropolitan network, the Airport line will remain part of it for a very long time. This is bad news for these communities, long denied adequate train services but promised major service improvements once MM is completed.”

The alternative, long promoted by Rail Futures, is an additional track pair between Southern Cross and Sunshine to supplement both the new MM and Regional Rail Link track pair opened in 2015, already operating at near its designed capacity.

The additional track pair would be designed for fast express trains and include twin 7km tunnels between Southern Cross and West Footscray, thus avoiding large-scale property

acquisition. Airport trains would use these new tracks, reducing City to Sunshine travel time to just 8 minutes.

“However, the Government now seems to think the additional tracks are unnecessary, even though the Premier emphasised the need for additional track capacity between the CBD and Sunshine when announcing the go-ahead for Airport Rail in November 2017. But there’s worse,” Mr Hearsch warns.

“The Regional Rail Link tracks carry trains to Geelong, Ballarat and Bendigo as well as peak period trains to Wyndham Vale. Melton/Bacchus Marsh trains also use these tracks pending Melton electrification when they will move to the MM corridor.”

Tarneit and Wyndham Vale are also served by Geelong trains, many of which are now overwhelmed by passengers from these stations, with patronage having grown by 131 per cent since 2015 and continuing to increase at around 17 per cent per annum. The City of Wyndham will be home to almost half a million people by 2036. The line to Wyndham Vale is to be electrified as part of the Government’s Western Rail Plan although the timing of these works is yet to be announced.

“Our plan initially transfers Geelong trains to the new track pair, enabling Wyndham Vale to have a full metro electric service with peak period trains every five minutes to and from Southern Cross. Unless the additional track pair is constructed to Sunshine, Wyndham Vale and Tarneit will suffer from a much less frequent service, as no more trains could be accommodated between the city and Sunshine,” Mr Hearsch concludes.

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Media enquiries:

John Hearsch
President, Rail Futures Institute
0419 736 816

The Rail Futures Institute (RFI) is an independent non-partisan organisation. RFI was formed in 2013 to advocate cost-effective rail and intermodal solutions for public transport and freight problems based on sound commercial, economic and social reasoning. The RFI Executive Committee and its membership includes experienced rail professionals, urban planners, engineers and economists.

PO Box 1257
Carlton VIC 3053
www.railfutures.org.au