

BUMPER GRAIN HARVEST MAKES RAIL LINE REVIVAL ESSENTIAL

- Revised official forecasts predict an even bigger Victorian grain harvest.
- To handle the extra load and prevent a large spike in truck traffic, Rail Futures Institute advocates restoration of the 41-kilometre Inglewood-Eaglehawk line in time for the next harvest in November 2020.
- Each additional grain train avoids around 90 extra truck trips to and from ports.
- Rail Futures estimates this project will cost \$25 million at 'fit for purpose' standard and take about 10 weeks for completion.
- This project is compatible with subsequent completion of the Murray Basin Rail Project in western Victoria and is *not* a substitute for the MBRP.

Revised official forecasts for an even bigger grain harvest at the end of this year make it even more important that the Victorian rail freight network can handle the extra load to prevent a sharp increase in truck traffic, according to advocacy group Rail Futures Institute.

The Australian Bureau of Bureau of Agricultural and Resources Economics and Science (ABARES) revised its February 2020 forecast on June 9 and now predicts a Victorian winter harvest of 3831 kilotonnes of wheat, 2313 kilotonnes of barley, and 712 kilotonnes of canola. All forecasts are significantly above average and the wheat and canola forecasts have increased since the ABARES figures in February.

To cope with the extra load, Rail Futures is calling on the Andrews Government to restore the dormant Inglewood-Eaglehawk line as a vital cross-country link offering a second route option to the ports of Melbourne and Geelong for grain trains from the Sea Lake and Manangatang lines in north-west Victoria.

Trains on these broad gauge lines now travel to ports at Geelong and Melbourne via Maryborough and Ballarat but an expansion in train numbers will cause bottlenecks south of Dunolly and potentially interfere with V/Line passenger services. The proposed alternative route via Bendigo also has regular passenger services, but can accommodate additional freight trains, especially at night.

Another consequence of *not* reinstating this 41-kilometre line rendered inoperable by flood damage in 2007 and 2011 would be a sharp increase in the number of trucks carrying grain to port, Rail Futures warns.

"A big rise in the number of heavy trucks will have negative consequences for the wider community including accelerated damage to regional roads, dangerous driving conditions for motorists in rural and urban areas, increased air pollution and unnecessarily higher fuel consumption," Rail Futures Institute President John Hearsch said.

"By committing to a shovel-ready project that should take no more than 10 weeks to complete, there will be additional local jobs and business for regional Victorian suppliers hard-hit by the Coronavirus recession," Mr Hearsch added.

Rail Futures estimates that reinstating the Inglewood-Eaglehawk rail corridor to a basic “fit for purpose” standard would cost about \$25 million and create up to 50 jobs. Works include replacement of sleepers, restoration of flood damage, bridge repairs and reactivating level crossing protection and the rail junctions at Inglewood and Eaglehawk.

Existing major export container traffics from the Bridgewater area could also use rail direct to the Port of Melbourne, simply by attachment to an existing overnight train from and to Ultima.

“Restoration of the Inglewood–Eaglehawk line opens up other future options including extension of passenger train services to Marong, and establishment of an inter-modal freight terminal on the line,” Mr Hearsch added.

Rail Futures Institute endorses the completion of the currently stalled Murray Basin Rail Project (MBRP) that would see the Sea Lake and Manangatang lines and the direct route from Maryborough to Geelong via Ballarat, all converted to standard gauge. It perceives no conflict between MBRP and this smaller project to expand capacity in the Victorian rail freight network in the short term.

“The Murray Basin Rail Project and the Inglewood-Eaglehawk line restoration are both means to a single end – moving as much freight as possible by rail – and through sound planning can be integrated compatibly. The Inglewood-Eaglehawk restoration project is *not* a substitute for completion of the Murray Basin Rail Project,” Mr Hearsch concluded.

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