37 AUTUMN 2025

NEWS POST

RAIL FUTURES INSTITUTE INC - QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

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THE WAY IT USED TO BE



Veteran steam locomotive A-2 986 seen here on a day return charter train at Seddon in suburban Melbourne en route to Warncoort Loop (on the Warrnambool Line) - 31/10/2024.

Photo - Doug Spike

CONTRIBUTING TO RFI NEWSPOST

Members are invited to submit news articles, opinion pieces, letters to the editor plus reports of construction activities on transport projects. Submissions ideally should be no more than 800 words.

Members photos of current rail / tram activities are also welcome in jpeg or png format.

Contributions may be edited to fit the available space.

RFI reserves the right to edit / decline articles it considers not appropriate. Please forward all submissions to: secretary@railfutures.org.au

Opinions expressed in RFI Newspost are those of the individual authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Rail Futures Institute (Inc) . (RFI)

Editor - Val Sands *Publisher - David Hardy*

Picture of the Quarter:



A declining breed, locomotive hauled passenger trains. Seen here at Camperdown hauled by N – 473, a five car set operating a Warrnambool – Melbourne passenger service early in January, 2025. *Photo – Doug Spike*

From mid April, 2025 ALL Warrnambool Inter City services will be operated by V/locity trains offering downgraded standards of service WITHOUT on-train catering, and train sizes of reduced passenger capacity (only 222 seats.)

PRESIDENTS WORDS

Although public transport and rail issues are often overshadowed by other domestic and international events, three important recent developments on the Australian transit scene have been warmly welcomed. They are the opening of Stage 2 of Sydney Metro (Chatswood to Sydenham) last August, and in December 2024 the opening of Parramatta Light Rail (Stage 1) and the Morley - Ellenbrook line in Perth's eastern suburbs. Perth has been making spectacular progress with its Metronet rail extensions with the Ellenbrook line being the third of five lines to be completed since 2022. The new Perth Airport line opening in 2022, the Butler - Yanchep extension in July 2024 while the last two: Thornlie to Cockburn Central and extension from Armadale to Byford are both due to open later in 2025. Perth's rail and bus network is widely regarded as Australia's best transit system, the result of effective planning over several decades.

Meanwhile, here in Melbourne, we are still to see a Government Transport Plan, notwithstanding this has been mandated since 2010 in the Transport Integration Act. However, we do have a new document from Infrastructure Victoria (IV), the independent Victorian government advisory infrastructure body, in the form of its latest *30-year Draft Infrastructure Plan,* which is open for comment and submissions until 30 April 2025. The IV Plan will then be finalized and submitted to the State Government. Parts of the IV Plan dealing with Transport Infrastructure are naturally of greatest interest to RFI.

There's a lot to like about the Plan's contents notwithstanding that IV has resisted the inclusion of any new mega-projects in consideration of Victoria's somewhat current parlous fiscal position. Among the recommended actions which RFI will support are:

- **Making government infrastructure more accessible** – mainly referring to the tram network
- **Extending Melbourne's trams to encourage more new homes nearby** – especially two new routes proposed to Fishermans Bend, two new routes via the Arden precinct to Kensington and Flemington Bridge stations, and middle suburbs tram extensions including East Malvern to Hughesdale via Chadstone S.C., and West Coburg to Batman Station.
- **Building a new bus rapid transit network** – essentially Medium Capacity Transit (MCT) with dedicated lanes. Here IV propose an initial core five route network by 2030, growing to 10 plus routes.
- **Extending metropolitan trains and running more services in Melbourne's west** – extend and electrify to Melton, deliver new stations at Altona North (formerly Paisley), Mount Atkinson and Thornhill Park, quadruplication of track Sunshine to Caroline Springs, run more frequent services to Werribee, Melton and Wyndham Vale and on the Seymour line.
- **Provide more bus and coach services in regional Victoria** – delivering more bus services in regional cities starting in Shepparton, Wodonga, Mildura, Wangaratta, Horsham and Bairnsdale. Running more often and for longer hours. Run more V/Line coach services to better connect small towns to larger regional cities.
- **Make rail freight more competitive, reliable and efficient** – develop and publish a 30-year integrated Rail Freight Network Plan and fund a 10-year rail freight track maintenance program. Develop a freight network co-ordination policy to guide freight access including provision of sufficient reliable freight access in passenger rail franchise agreements.
- **Plan for more efficient and sustainable urban freight** – developing a network of urban freight consolidation centres in Melbourne to improve freight productivity and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- **Create and preserve opportunities for future major infrastructure projects including**:
    - City Loop Reconfiguration (undertake engineering and service planning work)
    - Extend and electrify metro lines to Melbourne's north (Kalkallo) and south-east (Clyde)
    - Melbourne Metro 2 (prepare business case to explore route alignment and potential train type technology)
    - Bay West port (short term action to secure transport connections to the future port)
    - Outer metropolitan road and rail corridor (OMR) and linked western intermodal freight terminal (WIFT) (identify which sections are of greatest benefit, staging and connectivity to WIFT, land reservation.)

The Government has also released its *Plan for Victoria* superseding both Plan Melbourne 2017 - 2050 and all Regional Growth Plans. *Plan for Victoria* is just part of a recent avalanche of new announcements and changes to planning scheme provisions and other policies to boost housing growth. It's nonetheless encouraging to see belated emphasis on the proposed development of activity centres around nominated railway stations and along specific tram routes. Years ago this might have helped curtail Melbourne's urban sprawl, but that horse has unfortunately long ago well and truly bolted leaving newer suburbs devoid of adequate, and in some cases any public transport at all.
More advocacy will be required here leading up to the November, 2026 State election.

- John Hearsch

ADELAIDE DIESEL HYBRID DEMU FLEET CONVERSION COMPLETED

With the completion of the final hybrid conversion and its entry into service, Adelaide Metro's non-electrified lines to Outer Harbor, Port Dock, Grange, and Belair are now serviced entirely by hybrid-diesel railcars. This distinctive DEMU green rail fleet is fitted with a hybrid system to reduce diesel emissions, and lower fuel consumption, and delivering vastly better air quality for travellers at Adelaide Central station.

The modified DEMU trains work by storing kinetic energy generated during braking in the train's on-board batteries and converting it into electrical energy to power normal operations, and reducing fuel consumption by more than 20 per cent. The system also powers auxiliary functions like lighting and air conditioning, allowing trains to operate on battery power within Adelaide Central station for up to 20 minutes – significantly reducing both noise and air pollution within the stations underground platforms.



Image – Courtesy : Mark399/Wirestock

Adelaide Metro will reduce CO_2 emissions by more than 2400 tonnes annually and realize diesel fuel consumption up to one million litres per annum. The final diesel-only Adelaide suburban train ran its last trip on 31 December 2024.

The Adelaide Metro rail system is currently operated by Keolis Downer. However the return of Adelaide Metro rail operations to State Government hands has reached an important milestone with the Office of the National Rail Safety Regulator (ONRSR) granting accreditation to the South Australian Rail Commissioner, allowing the SA Department of Infrastructure and Transport to operate the Adelaide Metro rail network. (See also article page – 8.)

BALLARAT STATION - ACCESSIBILITY UPDATE



Image: Victorian Government

Early works are underway at Ballarat station on a project to provide enhanced DDA compliant accessibility for disabled travellers on V/Line train and road coach services, following on from similar accessibility upgrading works at Geelong and Bendigo stations.

Crews began site establishment works in mid-January 2025 with actual works having commenced late January. Accessibility enhancements to be undertaken at Ballarat include installation of a DDA compliant pedestrian overbridge with passenger lifts and stairs linking both platforms, a new ramp and stairs to the station entrance on the northern side, supported by enhanced lighting, tactile upgrades, and landscaping. The new pedestrian overpass between platforms will open in early 2026.

During the works local buses have been moved to a temporary location on Lydiard Street.

Final designs for the new overpass, lifts and northern entrance were released in late 2024, following community consultation and now incorporate further design and architectural enhancements.

The updated designs reduce the visual impact of the new structure on the existing heritage station buildings without compromising the critical accessibility upgrades and were finalized in consultation with Heritage Victoria and the Victorian Government Architect.

This article was compiled by RFI from multiple sources

HSRA GETTING ON WITH INITIAL SYDNEY - NEWCASTLE WORKS

The High Speed Rail Authority (HRSA) has begun geo-technical investigations to determine the locations for the high-speed rail network that will connect cities and regional communities along the East Coast.

Nearly thirty boreholes are currently being drilled in New South Wales to support the Business Case being developed for the first high speed line to link Sydney and Newcastle.

Information obtained from drilling the boreholes will enable engineers to better understand geological conditions along the route. This information will assist in determining the final design of the HSR alignment in:

- Determining the depth of new rail tunnels
- Assessing geological and geo-technical conditions in crossing the Hawkesbury River
- Understanding the geological complexities of traversing the escarpment along the Central Coast and on to Newcastle

The business case for the Newcastle to Sydney stage is due to be delivered to the Federal Government by the end of 2024. The Sydney to Newcastle rail corridor is the busiest Intercity rail corridor in Australia, with over 14.9 million journeys made annually.



Image Courtesy – Highspeed Rail Shutterstock

MELTON LINE UPGRADING WORKS UNDERWAY

Work has commenced at Melton station to construct a new four platform station, and also at multiple locations between Deer Park and Melton to eliminate four level crossings and provide for new train stabling facilities.

At Melton station excavation has started on the new station to ultimately deliver four accessible platforms to cater for both through Ballarat train services and also dedicated local services originating and terminating at Melton, allowing for future electrification of Melton services.

More than 14,000 tonnes of soil is to be excavated in construction of the new Melton station expected to open late in 2026.

At Ferris Road in Melton, crews have relocated a pedestrian path and carried out track and signalling works whilst at Hopkins Road in Truganina, a piling rig is driving 48 piles up to 9 metres in depth to support a new road overbridge. On completion new rail overbridges will take trains over Coburns and Exford Roads and new road overbridges will takes vehicles over the rail line at both Ferris Road and Hopkins Roads – removing four level crossings by late 2026.

The combination of the above works will increase passenger capacity by 50 per cent by allowing nine-car VLocity trains to run on the line from 2028. To support the longer trains a new train stabling yard will be built at Cobblebank.



Concept new 4 platform elevated station Melton.

Image – Courtesy Bicycle Victoria

METRO – 1 WORKS UPDATE

Melbourne's Metro 1 Tunnel project has completed its biggest test to date, with multiple test trains running more than 2,600 trips over a ten day period. The test trains travelled between Hawksburn and West Footscray through the new parallel twin tunnels at frequencies up to 12 trains per hour. This frequency will increase further with the test trains in coming months as train operations refine the new signalling and operations at stations.

The recent ten-day blitz of operations were an opportunity for Metro Trains staff to become more familiar with the project, with another 46 train drivers being trained to operate the new High-Capacity Metro Trains – taking the total number of trained drivers to date to around 200. Trial operations will continue throughout 2025 with more than 100 'real life scenario' exercises to ensure the project's complex systems and technology are ready for passengers late in 2025.

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HCMT under testing in Metro 1 tunnel.

Image - Courtesy Victorian Government

At the same time construction crews are progressing completion of the two stations at Town Hall and State Library, both of which sit directly beneath Swanston Street in the CBD. State Library will be linked to Melbourne Central, and Town Hall linked to Flinders Street by underground pedestrian links.

GIPPSLAND SIGNALLING WORKS

Road coaches replace trains on Gippsland line for ten (10) days from 21/03/2025 to allow for signalling works.

GEELONG / WARRNAMBOOL LINE

From late March, 2025 for two weeks partial coach replacement of Geelong & Warrnambool trains will allow for level crossing works, and work on provision of enhanced train stabling for Vlocity trains at Warrnambool.

STAGE – 1 PARAMATTA LIGHT RAIL OPENS

Services officially commenced on the new L4 Westmead & Carlingford Light Rail Line on Friday the 20th of December, 2024 with first passenger services departing Carlingford and Westmead light rail termini at 0500 and 0502 respectively.

It has been more than 140 years since the first steam powered tram chugged through Parramatta in 1883. It was an historic moment for the people of Western Sydney when they were able to travel recently on-board the sleek, modern red and white light rail vehicles of 2024..

Some 55 drivers have been on-boarded, trained and are now carrying passengers on the new line. The drivers have completed an extensive training program, with more than 6,000 hours of on-track training carried out, to gain familiarization of the new alignment and areas the light rail will travel through.

The new line will make it easier for thousands of residents and visitors to move around, and connect to current heavy rail, buses, and ferry services in the Paramatta area.

Services on the new L-4 light rail line run every nine minutes in the peak between 0700 and 1900, and every 14 minutes at Off Peak times on Weekdays, and every 12 minutes between 0700 and 1900 on Weekends, and 16 minutes at other times on Weekends.

Parramatta Light Rail Stage 1 connects Westmead to Carlingford via the Parramatta CBD and Camellia, with a twin track spanning 12 kilometres including 16 light rail stops.



Paramatta Light Rail Vehicle. *Image: Mark Sotheran*

PERTH – NEW CROSSLINK UPDATE

Perth's new 17.5 km METRONET Thornlie - Cockburn rail link has seen the recent arrival of its first test train, allowing the commencement of an extensive testing and pre-commissioning program.

The new East – West connection includes two new stations, at Nicholson Road and Ranford Road, and upgrading of two existing stations at Thornlie and Cockburn Central. The new rail link connects the Mandurah and Armadale lines supporting growth and accessibility across Perth's south - eastern suburbs, and providing a new direct line for Mandurah Line passengers to the Perth Stadium station.

Public services are expected to commence later in 2025, with commuters enjoying a 26 minute journey to Perth from the Nicholson Road station and 29 minutes from the Ranford Road station.



Photo - Metronet Perth

PERTH – ARMADALE LINE UPDATE

Construction continues apace on the new elevated Armadale line with works well advanced on seven new stations and delivery of the new seven kilometre-long elevated section of line, expected to open in mid 2025.

At early 2025 trains are operating between Perth and Victoria Park stations, and replacement coach services between Victoria Park and Armadale / Thornlie stations to allow for line upgrading works to progress.

Multiple METRONET projects are reshaping Perth's, rail transport infrastructure to keep the booming city moving and growing.

ADDITIONAL V/LINE WEEKEND RAIL PASSENGER SERVICES

The following services are now permanently included in the V/LINE public timetables from 01/12/2024:

WAURN PONDS LINE: Sat & Sun
20 min frequency in both directions
0700 to 2100

WARRNAMBOOL LINE: Sat & Sun
Down: 1012 Up: 1510

BACCHUS MARSH LINE: Sat & Sun
Up: 1035

BENDIGO LINE: Sat & Sun
Up: 0944

ALBURY / WODONGA LINE:

Down:	**1356 Train / Coach**	**Saturday**
	1433 Through Train	**Sunday**
	1636 Train / Coach	**Sunday**
Up:	**0755 Through Tain**	**Saturday**
	0912 Coach / Train	**Sunday**

RFI AGM 2023 / 2024

In accordance with the RFI Constitution the RFI Annual General Meeting for 2023 – 2024 was held at the Royal Historical Society of Victoria (RHSV) on Friday 29/11/2024.

Changes in make-up of the RFI Committee of Management:

Committee Members Retiring:
Ross Lowrey and Jackie Fristacky.

Office Bearers for Year 2024 / 2025:
President – John Hearsch
Vice-President – Peter Don
Secretary – David Hardy
Treasurer – Peter Doughty
Ordinary Committee Members (5) –
Marianne Richards, Peter Tesdorpf, Fergus Moffat, Mark Williams and Bernard Shepherd.

In accordance with the requirements of the ANCC the relevant papers for year 2023 / 2024 were lodged by the Treasurer early in December, 2024.

QUEENSLAND's TILT TRAINS

Queensland is the only state in Australia to operate 'tilt trains' – trains that lean to the inside of curves, like a motorcycle. Also like motorbikes, tilt trains are fast !

Queensland Rail issued a tender for electric tilt trains back in 1993 and the contract was awarded to Walkers Limited (now Downer via Evans Deakin Industries), of Maryborough, Qld. The electric propulsion and tilting technology was supplied by Hitachi and tilt trains entered service on the overhead-electric north coast line from Brisbane to Rockhampton in 1998. Queensland Rail marketed the service simply as the *Tilt Train*.

Engineers have been experimenting with tilt train technology since the 1930s. One of the challenges was that passengers on tilt trains sometimes became nauseous, like seasick cruise passengers. Limiting the degree of tilt seems to have overcome the problem. Hitachi seems to have come closest to perfecting the model, at least in Queensland Rail's estimation.

Tilt trains are particularly suitable for Queensland's railways because of its combination of long distances and the state's cost-driven decision in the 19th century to build its railway network in narrow gauge (3 ft, 6 inches, 1067 mm). Without a significant speed reduction, a regular train on narrow gauge would tend to become unstable on curves and centrifugal forces would throw passengers and items around inside the train. The carriage dimensions are similar to trains on wider gauges, meaning that carriages on narrow gauge trains have significant overhang on each side outside the rails.



Rockhampton tilt train at Roma St. Station - Brisbane

To overcome the loss of stability presented by narrow gauge track and curves, tilt trains employ a suspension technology that allows the train to lean slightly. Under Hitachi's *active* tilt technology, a computer-controlled pneumatic ram raises the side of the train on the outside of a curve as the train begins turning. But the tilt is only 5 degrees from vertical and barely noticeable.

The 'tilt' can be turned off as Queensland Rail drivers do when the *Rockhampton Tilt Train* or *Spirit of Queensland* reaches Caboolture for the final run home through Greater Brisbane to Roma Street Station. (A *passive* tilt train has a unique suspension system that allows inertial force to tilt the train but the tilt can't be turned off.)

The greater stability offered by tilt technology allowed the *Rockhampton Tilt Train* to set an Australian train speed record in May 1999 - 210 km/h, operating between Bundaberg and Rockhampton.

That record still stands and also makes it the fastest narrow gauge train in the world. In regular service, the train operates at 160 km/h as a six-car consist with a driving cab at each end.

While that's the same operating speed as Victoria's VLocity trains, Queensland's tilt trains can actually travel at that speed for more of their network than most Victorian VLocity journeys permit. Plus, at least you can get a meal at any Queensland tilt train's Café Car ... unlike on Victoria's longer distance Inter City trips.



View of Glass House Mountains taken en-route from Queensland's Brisbane – Rockhampton *TILT train.*

- *John Galt*

SA SUBURBAN STATION UPGRADES UNDERWAY

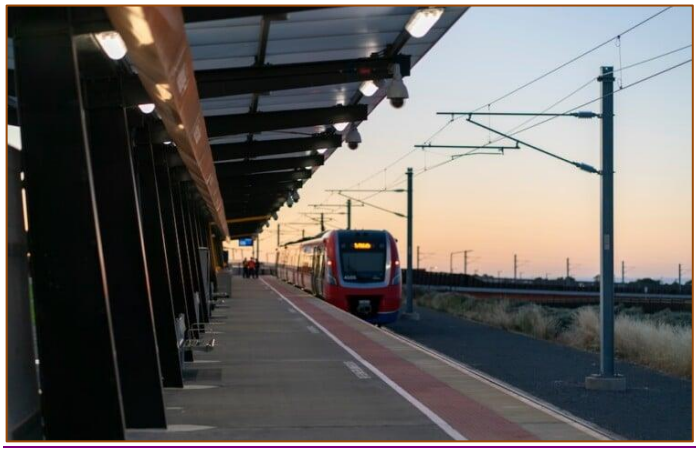


Image: jixiang/stock.adobe.com

Works have begun to upgrade Marino Railway Station in Adelaide to improve passenger safety and comfort.

The $2 million upgrade project includes installation of enhanced passenger shelter, CCTV and a digital information kiosk including a 24-hour emergency help phone for enhanced passenger security.

Interactive platform screens will provide live timetable updates and visual and audio announcements to assist help passengers with visual or hearing impairments. New tactile paving will guide passengers safely along the train platform providing enhanced accessibility.

A new curved passenger shelter will include seating, and weather screens, enhancing comfort for Adelaide Metro passengers who undertake more than 32,000 trips from Marino Station each year.

Other Adelaide Metro rail projects currently underway include upgrading at Ethelton station on the Outer Harbor line, with $10 million being spent.

In the North a $ 15 million station re-furbishment is underway at Ovingham station on the Gawler line.

Additionally a $4.5 million facelift is underway at Woodlands Park station on the Seaford Line.

- **Compiled by RFI from multiple sources**

SA TRAIN OPERATIONS RETURN TO GOVERNMENT

South Australian passenger train operations have returned to government control, with trams expected to follow mid-2025.

The return of train services to public hands realizes a major State Government election commitment. The SA State Government will not pay any break fees and a trained and skilled workforce will deliver a smooth transition for train travellers.

Train commuters will not experience any changes to their current travel arrangements or timetables, with the State Government funding 31 additional Passenger Service Assistants (PSA) to enhance the presence of PSA's on Adelaide suburban train services, particularly after 7pm.



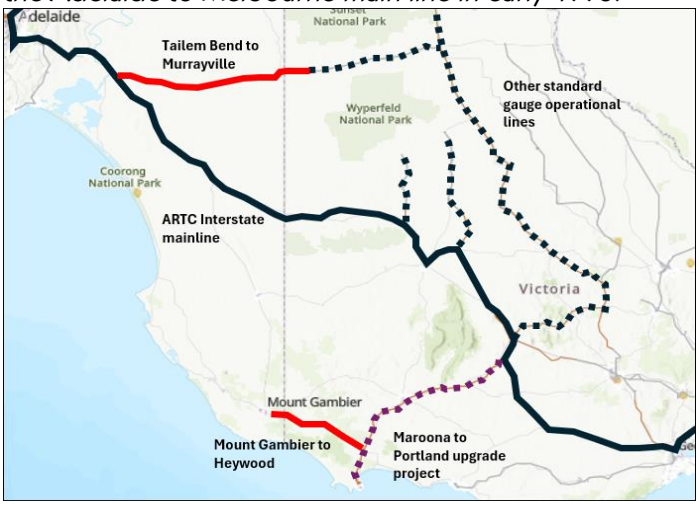
Adelaide Suburban EMU above, and DEMU below.



Photos Courtesy - Top Trans Adelaide, Lower Wikipedia.

SOUTH AUSTRALIAN and VICTORIAN CROSS BORDER RAILWAYS

Two railway lines across the border between South Australia and Victoria near Pinnaroo and Murrayville, and between Mount Gambier and Heywood, have both not carried any rail freight and remained broad gauge since the conversion from broad gauge to standard gauge of the Adelaide to Melbourne main line in early 1995.



Cross Border Rail Lines *(Map - National Freight data Hub)*

Prior to 1995 there were cross border rail freight flows and during the conversion of the rail line between Tailem Bend and Victoria as part of the gauge standardisation project, Adelaide to Melbourne intermodal freight trains were diverted via this corridor. With the 1997 sale of Australian National, the assets on the rail line from Tailem Bend to the Victorian Border near Pinnaroo were sold to the private sector, now Aurizon, with the rail corridor transferred to the South Australian Government and leased to the rail asset owner under a 50 +15 year lease expiring in in 2062. All the other corridors and assets are owned by the respective State Governments.

In the late 1990's the rail line from Tailem Bend to Pinnaroo was converted to standard gauge with funding provided by the South Australian Government but freight train operations ceased in 2015.
In 2020 the railway from Ouyen to Murrayville was converted to standard gauge and upgraded as part of the Victorian and Commonwealth Government's Murray Basin rail standardisation project[1].

In 2024 the Australian Government announced federal funding for the upgrading of the standard gauge rail freight rail line between Maroona and Portland in Victoria, to realize 80 kmh train speeds at 21 tonne axle loads, and 60 km/h at 23 tonne axle loads.

Greater rail mode share has been highlighted by the Federal Government in meeting zero emissions by 2050. Completion of the standardization and upgrading of these two cross border railways would enable the resumption of rail freight services linking again to the ARTC interstate rail network.
A request has been made to Infrastructure South Australia to include these projects on South Australia's 20 Year Infrastructure Plan. This would be a catalyst for further consideration of the proposal by industry and all three levels of government on both sides of the border.
These projects would involve investment from the private sector, South Australian, Victorian and Federal Governments and consequently will require cross border negotiations. The recent appointment of separate Cross Border Commissioners by the South Australian and Victorian Government's will facilitate these negotiations.

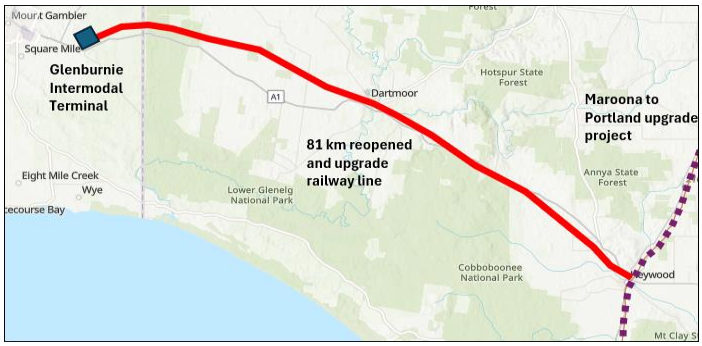
Glenburnie (SA) to Heywood (Vic)

Following rail gauge standardization between Adelaide and Melbourne in 1995 three events have occurred which indicate that reinstatement of rail freight access has become more economically viable:-

- In 2020 the CSIRO in a report commissioned by Regional Development Australia Limestone Coast[2] (using the CSIRO's TraNSIT dashboard) identified that an intermodal terminal at Glenburnie and re-instatement of and standardization of the 81 kilometre rail line to Heywood in Victoria appeared to have the highest potential freight cost savings of the options considered, one of which was re-instating and standardization of the rail line between Wolseley and Mount Gambier.
- The Green Triangle Forest Industries Hub[3] identified significant opportunities to increase the value of the wood product produced in the Green Triangle Region. The impact of this would be many more tonne kilometres of freight being generated to supply value-adding end users in Australia than had been the case with export of relatively low-value woodchips and logs from the Port of Portland to overseas buyers.
- The District Council of Grant is undertaking a review of land use planning policies across the council including a proposal to establish an industrial estate at the Glenburnie saleyards, which could logically be complemented by the proposed adjacent intermodal terminal.

The proposal is for the rebuilding of and standardization of 81 kilometres of rail track and the establishment of an intermodal terminal at Glenburnie, five kilometres east of Mount Gambier.

[1] Premier of Victoria, Progressing With The Murray Basin Rail Project, July 2022
[2] Rail corridor and freight analysis for the Limestone Coast and South West Victoria
[3] Building the Nation: Growing the Green Triangle's Contribution to Australia's Future



Heywood to Glenburnie *(Map - National Freight data Hub)*

Use of rail will result in lower transport resource costs for industry, plus significant community benefits, in terms of enhanced road safety, reduced road damage and maintenance issues. There are also significant reductions in GHG emissions, air pollution and noise nuisance with re-activation of the railway.

For the transport industry, reducing damage to trucks and addressing a critical shortage of qualified truck drivers are added advantages of moving a much greater proportion of freight to rail.

There is a significant volume of freight to and from Mount Gambier that the region both consumes and generates. These flows are shown as two way flows of equivalent 40 foot equivalent units (a B Double carries 1.5) crossing two cordon lines to the east and west compared to the road and rail freight crossing the state border near Bordertown. This includes log trucks and empty return heavy vehicle movements.

There are around 200,000 40 foot equivalent units per annum to and from Adelaide, 25% of the total freight on the Dukes Highway and the ARTC's Adelaide to Melbourne corridor. The opportunities regarding any rail potential for the rail line between Mount Gambier and Wolseley will be the subject of a separate analysis.



40 foot container equivalents crossing three cordon lines

(*Map – Courtesy of National Freight data Hub)*

Initial assessments of the South Eastern freight to and from Victoria and its potential to support a viable rail freight service indicates that the benefits exceed the total costs but are dependent on the volume of rail freight to Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and the Port of Portland. This analysis is currently ongoing. The current investment by the Australian Government in upgrading the existing Maroona to Portland rail line in Victoria will enhance the business case for the re-activation and standardizing of the dormant Glenburnie to Heywood line.

There is still a need to refine the business case, determine industry's willingness for rail to be part of their logistics solution and to determine how such a project would be funded and delivered.

Further information will be provided in time for consideration by the South Australian Governments Limestone Coast Area Plan (Transport Study) that is understood to commence in the second half of 2025.

During consultation in 2022 there was cross-border support for this project from Regional Development Australia Limestone Coast, the City of Mount Gambier, District Council of Grant, Regional Development Australia Barwon South West, the Glenelg Shire and Port of Portland Authority.

Tailem Bend (SA) to Murrayville (Vic)

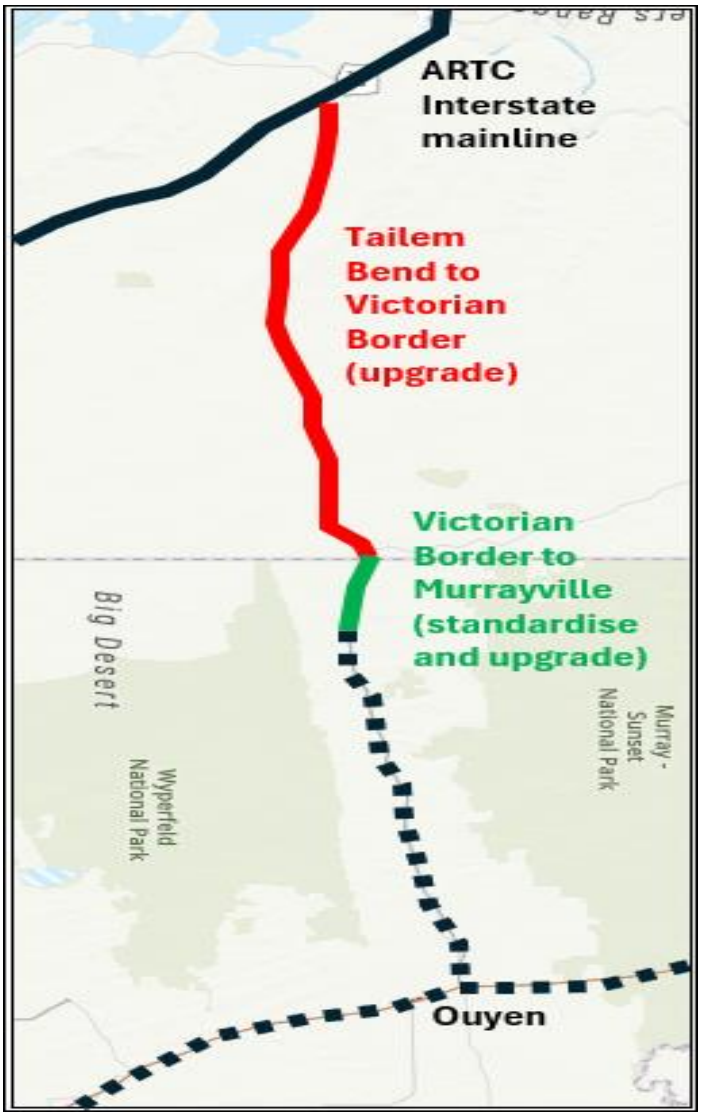
Prior to 1995 Tailem Bend and the Murray Basin in Victoria were connected by a broad gauge rail link through Lameroo and Pinnaroo to Ouyen in Victoria.

Twenty (20) kilometres of the rail line in Victoria between the GrainFlow bulk grain receival site on the South Australian side of the border and Murrayville in Victoria still requires conversion to standard gauge.

With the entire Tailem Bend to Murrayville line standardized freight trains could again operate between Tailem Bend in South Australia and Ouyen on the Victorian Murray Basin standard gauge network.

Upgrading of the rail line between Tailem Bend and the Victorian Border is also required to enable rail freight to flow between the ARTC Interstate network at Tailem Bend and the Victorian Mallee region, and match the track standard between Murrayville and Ouyen (Victoria).

- ***Mark Williams***



Tailem Bend to Ouyen *(Map National Freight data hub)*

HIGH SPEED RAIL AUTHORITY REGISTRATIONS OF INTEREST

The High Speed Rail Authority (HSRA) has opened Registrations of Interest (ROI's) for industry stakeholders to get involved in shaping a high-speed rail network along Australia's East coast.

Australian and International experts and businesses will have the opportunity to provide feedback, insights and recommendations on key themes.

The Federal Government has already committed $500 million for planning and corridor protection of the Sydney to Newcastle section and has established the High Speed Rail Authority (HSRA) to oversee the planning and development of the future high-speed rail network. The HSRA is tasked with developing a detailed business case determining key elements including proposed corridor alignments, potential stations locations, rolling stock types, project costs and prospective delivery timeframes.

Following a recent competitive open tender process, the HSRA recently awarded eight work packages to world-leading expert advisors. The HSRA will work closely with State, Territory, Local governments, industry and other key stake holders on development of project business cases. The business case is expected to be presented to Government by the end of this year.

Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government Minister, Catherine King, said, "High Speed Rail is central to our Government's vision for how we want to see Australia develop – not just next year or next decade but decades from now."

WA TO TAKE BACK REGIONAL RAIL FREIGHT NETWORK

The Western Australian Government intends to bring the state's Freight Rail network back into Government ownership. The rail freight network was privatized by a former State Government in 2000, but with key Western Australian industries growing significantly in recent years, particularly with record grain harvests, demands on the network are currently at record highs.

Under the existing lease agreement, the Western Australian Government has little ability to directly support key industries making use of the rail freight network.
The proposed return to State Government ownership is expected to realize increased usage, delivering benefits including:

- Improved safety for road users, by reducing the number of road trucks
- Cost savings for industry through the more efficient movement of grain and commodities.
- The ability to improve the frequency and journey times for regional rail passenger services, like the "Australind", with access to upgraded tracks, & additional passing loops.

The WA State Government has written to the current rail Operator (Arc Infrastructure) to advise of its intention to enter negotiations to return the rail freight network back to Government control.

Western Australian Premier, Roger Cook, said, "The demands on the State's rail freight network have grown significantly and we want to make sure we're moving as much freight by rail to and from our ports as possible; and with greater control, we can ensure government investment promotes better use of the rail network."

TRAVEL BY TRUS – A DAY OUT OFF THE RAILS

On Friday December 6, 2024 Rail Futures had a Christmas outing for its members. Around 30 took part. The plan was to travel by train to Shepparton, then lunch at the Goulburn Valley Hotel bistro close to the station, then a charter coach to Echuca station and returning back to Melbourne by 1515 train from Echuca. Quite an appealing day out.

Unfortunate aspect 1: The day was rather warm to say the least so the possibility of WOLO speed restrictions loomed, albeit only after midday.

Unfortunate aspect 2: Some undefined work between Seymour yard and Shepparton meant that our Shepparton train had morphed into a Seymour train with a bus connection to Sheppartion. Unfortunate aspect 3: Level crossing removal work between Sunbury and Watercloset meant that section would be an MTM bus connecting with a suburban train to Southern Cross.

So we gathered at Southern Cross on platform 8B (the Siberia of Southern Cross) to board our train due to depart at 0926. A train did arrive but kept going through to platform 8A. Not us we thinks. Mistake !. A couple of minutes before departure time V/Line made a garbled announcement (I use the word "garbled" lightly) that in fact the train on 8A was indeed the Shepparton train to Seymour. In fact the lame and infirm among us barely made it to the train in time. (It might have been easier to have it stopped at 8B on departure and picked up passengers there - but we forget, this is a strictly formula operated railway) .

So off we go only to arrive Broadmeadows (pick up only) five minutes early - therefore waiting time at that salubrious place. Once again off we go to arrive Donnybrook six minutes early so once again we wait. It turned out the preceding Craigieburn "spark" had been cancelled, so in fact we ran how Seymour trains should run through the suburbs rather than the follow me trickle along stuff that normally applies.

All then went according to the good book through to Seymour for an on time arrival at 1059. Here we all alighted and found our private charter bus lurking out on the shopping centre side. (Our experienced Organizer not willing to chance the reliability of the V/Line provided bustitution to Shepparton.).

A reasonably straight forward run got us to Shepparton as intended to the Goulburn Valley Hotel bistro as expected by 1220.

The day had warmed up somewhat by this stage, but not enough to be alarmed.

After a pleasant Christmas lunch and suitable liquid refreshments our charter coach returned at 1345 to follow the usual somewhat convoluted route to Echuca station where we pulled up at around 14.50 - 25 minutes before VL 26, standing at the platform, was due to depart with us for Sunbury.

But wait - this is where the knitting started to seriously unravel. At around 15.00 the Rail Motor (they are one class, free of any service apart from drinking water and a toilet or two - virtually the definition of a suburban vehicle) took off empty to Bendigo with 'NOT IN SERVICE" displayed as the destination. It seems that it had an air conditioning failure, but given that the air conditioning is quite independent in each car did all three cars fail simultaneously (improbable) or was something else afoot ? Any way there was justice looking after the greater good - somewhere along the way it was reported that the empty train had been stopped by a fallen tree brought down by a sudden weather change that had swept through the area.

The bad news was that we were going to be given the joy of a bus ride back to Melbourne and the badder news was that buses could only be obtained from Kerang so it would be some time (as in hours) before they turned up at Echuca. That proved to indeed be the case. At a time when we should have been around Kyneton we departed Echuca at 1700 approaching 2 hours late. The bus ran express to Bendigo then direct to Southern Cross such that our planned 1830 arrival finished up being a 2010 arrival.

In many respects it was a good day out, but it certainly highlighted how fragile the actual V/Line train service is these days - two planned shutdowns which mucked up our original itinerary and a stuff-up that wiped out the major rail component. Around 430 kilometres of planned rail travel in the end amounted to just 99 kilometres by train. If it wasn't for the bargain basement fares we would have been demanding our money back.

Trust in the ability of V/Line to do what they say they will do must surely be at something of a low ebb at the present time.

(TRUS – Train/Bus) ***- Max Michell***

V/LINE - TRAIN SERVICE STATISTICS - January 2025

Inter – Urban – Commuter Services

	Geelong South Geelong Waurn Ponds	Bacchus Marsh Ballarat Wendouree	Kyneton Bendigo Eaglehawk/Epsom	Seymour	Traralgon
Reliability	95.7 %	96.8 %	97.3 %	99.2 %	93.4 %
Puntuality	89.8 %	81.5 %	80.7 %	85.6 %	82.6 %

Reliability – Measured as 96 % of scheduled services to run
Punctuality - 92 % of services to arrive at terminal station within 6 minutes of schedule

Inter – City - Long Distance Services

	Warrnambool	Ararat & Maryborough	Swan Hill & Echuca	Shepparton	Albury / Wodonga	Bairnsdale
Reliability	99.3 %	99.5 %	98.6 %	98.0 %	98.0 %	100.0 %
Punctuality	94.7 %	85.9 %	81.0 %	95.9 %	84.9 %	88.3 %

Reliability – Measured as 96 % of scheduled services to run
Punctuality - 92 % of services to arrive at terminal station within 11 minutes of schedule
Information Source: V/LINE Corporate website

NOTES:

1. *Services are counted as having operated when run by train or when substituted by bus.*
2. *Services are counted as having operated to the scheduled public timetable, including when services are terminated short of, or originate short of the timetabled station of destination / origin.*
3. *Train services counted as having run even if the train runs as a reduced number of cars*

WESTERN LINE AM - PEAK THURSDAY 20/02/2025 WHAT GIVES ?

0518	Up Wendouree	Scheduled Consist 6 cars	Run as 6 cars
0556	Up Wendouree	Scheduled Consist 6 cars	Run as 3 cars
0613	Up Ararat	Scheduled Consist 3 cars	CANCELLED
0614	Up Wendouree	Scheduled Consist 6 cars	Run as 6 cars
0637	Up Wendouree	Scheduled Consist 6 cars	Run as 3 cars
0655	Up Wendouree	Scheduled Consist 6 cars	Run as 6 cars
0718	Up Wendouree	Scheduled Consist 6 cars	Run as 3 cars
0739	Up Wendouree	Scheduled Consist 6 cars	Run as 3 cars
0801	Up Wendouree	Scheduled Consist 6 cars	Run as 6 cars

Of 8 scheduled trains from Wendouree 4 operated at half capacity 888 seats SHORT !!!
With 2 successive trains (0718 & 0739 Up) BOTH operating at 50 % of scheduled capacity.
Information sourced from V/Line app Ballarat Line 20/02/2025.

V/LINE - COMMITMENTS V. ACTUAL DELIVERY

	GOVERNMENT COMMITMENT			DELIVERY STATUS at 03/25	
1	GEELONG 20 minute Off Peak frequency on Weekdays		1		DELIVERED
2	BALLARAT 40 minute Off Peak frequency on Weekdays		2		DELIVERED
3	BENDIGO 40 minute Off Peak frequency on Weekdays		3	NOT DELIVERED	
4	SHEPPARTON 9 return services on Weekdays		4	NOT DELIVERED	FIVE return trips since 2020
5	TRARALGON 40 minute Off Peak frequency on Weekdays		5	NOT DELIVERED	
6	WARRNAMBOOL 5 return services on Weekdays		6		DELIVERED
7	ARARAT 5 return services on Weekdays		7		DELIVERED
8	ECHUCA 5 return servicers on Weekdays		8	NOT DELIVERED	THREE return trips from 12/2023.
9	ALBURY/WODONGA 5 return V/LINE services on Weekdays		9	NOT DELIVERED	
10	ALBURY fourth Weekend return Train over Saturday / Sunday	By 12/24	10		DELIVERED
11	WAURN PONDS 20 minute Off Peak frequency on Weekdays	By 06/24	11	NOT DELIVERED	Half O/P trains still terminate STH GLG
12	WAURN PONDS 20 minute Weekend frequency 0700 - 2100	By 07/24	12		DELIVERED
13	WENDOUREE 40 minute Weekend frequency 0800 – 2100	By 07/25	13	To commence from mid April - 2025 Timetable	
14	BENDIGO – Additional Evening Trains Saturdays & Sundays	By 07/25	14	To commence from mid April - 2025 Timetable	
15	SEYMOUR 60 minute frequency on Saturdays & Sundays	By 07/25	15		
16	SHEPPARTON 5 return services on Weekends	By 07/25	16		
17	TRARALGON – 40 minute Weekend frequency 0800 – 2100	By 07/25	17		
18	ARARAT 5 return services on Weekends	By 07/25	18	To commence from mid April - 2025 Timetable	
19	WARRNAMBOOL 5 return services on Weekends	By 07/25	19	FIFTH Weekend Return Trip April 2025 Timetable	FOURTH trip from December, 2024
20	ECHUCA 3 return services on Weekends	By 07/25	20		
21	BAIRNSDALE – Existing Velocity SALE trips extended to B'dale.	By 07/25	21		
22	Class – 2M track allowing 130 km/h Warrnambool, Ararat, Shepparton, Albury, Sale.		22	OUTSTANDING : Warrnambool, Shepparton, Sale.	COMPLETE: Ararat, Albury.

NEWS PICTURES AROUND THE TRACKS



B-2 Class tram 2025 seen here city bound within the central tram reservation of Dandenong Road. *Photo – Rod Watson*



C-506 leads an Up SSR grain train with three locos at Mc Intyre *Photo – Doug Spike*

NEWS PICTURES AROUND THE TRACKS



CLP-9 leads an Up Grain train with four locos headed for the Port of Melbourne. *Photo – Doug Spike*



February, 2025 looking from Wangaratta station in an Up direction at the new Green Street road overbridge. *Photo - David Hardy*

NEWS PICTURES AROUND THE TRACKS



February, 2025, re-configured pedestrian footbridge at the Down end of the Wangaratta platforms. *Photo – David Hardy*



February, 2025 - New Down Western side platform at Wangaratta *Photo – David Hardy*

NEWS PICTURES AROUND THE TRACKS



Looking in a Down direction at the 1962 standard gauge single track subway filled in and landscaped (Feb, 2025) *Photo - David Hardy*



Wangaratta showing original (East) and new (West) platform looking in an Up direction. (Feb, 2025.) *Photo – David Hardy*