

# The Heritage Rail Gazette

Issue No. 1

Tasmania

February 5, 2018

## BOOM STRAINS TOURISM HOTSPOTS

The much-touted tourism boom is concentrating visitor numbers in only a few key attractions around the State. Official statements claim success with recent promotions in China and elsewhere resulting in ever-increasing visitor numbers to Tasmania.

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The Hodgman Liberal Government claims that there is a nature-based tourism boom supporting thousands of jobs. Public monies to the tune of \$56 Million have been promised to further develop Cradle Mountain and \$10 Million has already been spent on bike riding facilities elsewhere. Yet infrastructure has failed to keep up with the demand and now that the tourists are here, they only have so many places to go. This puts strain on resources, infrastructure and the environment.

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Meanwhile, regional areas are missing out on the benefits tourism can bring and alternative development proposals are not even being considered. Tasmania risks killing the golden goose, the unspoiled nature, laid back lifestyle and our built heritage, the very things tourists come here to experience.

## HERITAGE RAIL OFFERS GREAT OPPORTUNITY

"Putting all the eggs into the bike riding basket is not the

answer. There needs to be diversity." Wendy McLennan, Community Engagement Officer of the Launceston & North East Railway project said yesterday. "Why should a \$40 Million asset be ripped up and replaced with a \$4 Million bike path at taxpayers expense? It's completely absurd!"

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According to expert advice from qualified and experienced people, the North East line could be up and running by Christmas this year, contributing to a diversified tourism palette in time for the tourist season.

"We have the railcar, we have the people and the commitment, now our 8,000+ members and supporters want their railway. The benefits for the region and the communities in the North East are enormous", McLennan said.

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Two independent studies, costing the taxpayer \$50,000, have already been conducted on the feasibility of the project. It was deemed viable but then a further report has disappeared in a Minister's desk drawer to be deliberately stalled until after the election.

"We are serving them up a solution on a platter, yet they refuse to take notice. I just can't understand it." said Stuart Bryce, Chairman of NERAF, the local residents and farmers' association. "The lion share of landholders along the line are in favour of the railway."

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The reintroduction of heritage passenger services in Tasmania has the potential to turn depressed regions around and add jewels to Tasmania's tourism crown. Heritage railways around the country are hugely popular attractions for locals and visitors alike.

Puffing Billy in Victoria has been a success for decades and the Yarra Valley Railway is setting a great example of what a community can do. 2017 saw 800,000 tourists travel on Victoria's heritage railways, albeit while enjoying funding boosts from State as well as Federal coffers.

## COMMUNITIES COME TOGETHER TO PUSH BACK

Being confronted with a "shovel ready" project to tear up the North East line to Scottsdale and turn it into yet another bike trail prompted the formation of NERAF in 2015. The community outrage and opposition grew from there and the Launceston & North East Railway was conceived. Numerous community information sessions, public rallies and the writing of dozens of letters to Government officials have all been part of a push to save the disused line. All of this has been achieved by passionate people giving up their time and effort to achieve a common goal.

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"We are getting no real love from the Liberal Government" Rudolf Ramseyer said. He has been working on raising the public profile for the project for several months now. "Things are coming to a head and we are waiting in anticipation for the major parties to take a stance on the issue. The election is less than a month away and the electorate needs to know what their representatives are going to do about the railway."

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Labor and Greens have already indicated in-principle support for passenger rail, but specifics are yet to be announced.

# The Heritage Rail Gazette

Issue No. 2

Tasmania

February 12, 2018

## \$119.6 MILLION INVESTMENT IN TASMANIAN RAIL INFRASTRUCTURE

In Tasmania, there is one freight operator, one single main line network and few trains. The railway system is woefully underused and compared to spending on roads, equally underfunded.

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The TasRail mainline stretches from Boyer in the South to Burnie and Bell Bay via Western Junction. The Fingal Valley line meets the main line at Conara and connection is also made between Melba Flats on the West Coast and Burnie. Overall, 611km of operational lines are used to carry freight. About a quarter of the network, a total of 232km lies dormant and receives only minimal maintenance, if any.

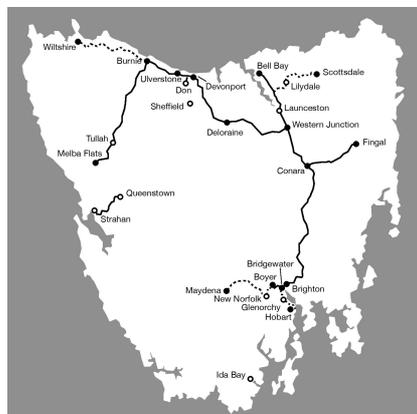
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Federal and State funding totalling \$119.6 Million is being invested in the four years ending June 2019, with further funds allocated in forward estimates. The aim is to upgrade the State's railway network to satisfy modern standards. New track is being laid on the main line to reduce the risk of derailments and to increase its carrying capacity.

## TASRAIL DENIES THIRD PARTIES ACCESS TO ITS MAIN LINES

Passenger operations are not within the scope of TasRail's business plan; they are deemed too cumbersome and unviable, a categorical NO.

Current legal structures prevent third party operators from accessing and sharing the infrastructure, leaving several heritage railways marooned in the sidings. Every other State Government encourages and facilitates third party operators, with special trains slotted into regular commuter timetables. Some Melbourne suburban lines carry 200 or more train movements per day. In Tasmania, there might be two on a good day.



*Tasmania's 3'6" railway network comprises 611km of operational main lines, 232km of dormant branches and a handful of isolated short lines.*

The disused lines are going to waste, while they are literally at the platform edge of several volunteer heritage railway organisations. Decades of promises and endless reviews and studies have stymied any attempts at progress. Clearly, an overarching body that is empowered to manage the network to allow multi-party operations is what is required.

## HOBART CITY DEAL CAUSES MINISTERIAL ABOUT-FACE

The recent signing of the Hobart City Deal came with a

catch. Infrastructure Minister Rene Hidding's previous stance that despite extensive studies suburban light rail was not feasible at this time, has suddenly changed.

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The City Deal has allocated \$2 Billion to redevelop the Macquarie Point waterfront and associated transport options. Community action groups have long been advocating for access to the line and the Federal Government funding windfall appears to have brought on unanimous support.

## WEST COAST LEADS WAY

The West Coast Wilderness Railway may well be heavily subsidised by taxpayer funds, yet it is the key attraction that ensures steady visitor numbers to the remote area. With the flippant nature of mining operations, the railway keeps the local economy ticking over.

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The State Government had little option other than to rescue WCWR after the Federal Group walked away from the contract. The significant maintenance costs associated with a rack-and-pinion railway and one in such inaccessible terrain are conveniently transposed and cited as reasons why other heritage rail operations could not possibly be successful. However, this flies in the face of experiences made in the 1990s and early 2000s, when mainline excursion were operated by the Don River Railway with great success.

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There is NO REASON why the status quo should continue to exist!

# The Heritage Rail Gazette

Issue No. 3

Tasmania

February 19, 2018

## BREAKTHROUGH AT LONG LAST: \$3 MILLION FOR HERITAGE RAIL REVITALISATION

On Saturday just gone, the Tasmanian Labor Party announced a comprehensive 'Tourism & Heritage Rail' policy. The announcement was made at the Derwent Valley Railway's facility at New Norfolk. The plan proposes the establishment of a new body, the Tasmanian Rail Access Co-ordinator (TRAC) and a stakeholder board to work with the sector on the way forward, to get passenger rail back on the network. Shadow Transport Minister Craig Farrell said, the funds would be available for infrastructure upgrades, rolling stock restoration, compliance and training.

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The policy has been embraced by the heritage rail community as a great step forward, following four decades of being overlooked by tourism advocacy groups and the political establishment. The final blow came in 2006, when TasRail management banned all heritage rail operators from their network, including access to all disused lines. The new TRAC would facilitate the allocation of track access for accredited operators.

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Building on existing projects, the policy would enable the immediate expansion of the heritage rail sector into a proper tourist product. Furthermore, the streamlining of accreditations, safety requirements and insurances across the State will ensure effective implementation of the plan. A stakeholder board, composed of industry representatives, would ensure the

needs of all operators are considered and met on a case-by-case basis. Staff training and up-skilling is to be integrated with the TAFE system as well.

## POLICY A WIN FOR JOBS AND TRAINING, TAFE

An acute skills shortage in the State stands opposite widespread under- and unemployment. The Tasmanian jobs market consistently performs well below the national average. The focus remains on science and technology, while manual skills and trades are left behind.

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"It is time to stop the myopic concentration on university education being the prime way of landing a well-paying job" the construction magnate Royce Fairbrother stated back in January. Not everybody has the means, the smarts or even the desire to go down an academic path and there should be alternative careers for young people to pursue.

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Years of cuts to TAFE funding have gutted the once exemplary institution and has converted it into a system more in line with a university than anything else. Ever increasing fees actually prevent those who need it most from accessing the skills training they need to obtain meaningful, rewarding employment; those who do graduate have no industries to move into. This leads to an exodus of talent from the State that has invested money and effort into these people, yet misses out on the benefit.

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The opening up of the railway network to passenger- and heritage rail operators will

bring jobs and training opportunities in a myriad of industries. For instance, there will be a need for mechanics, heavy machinery operators, engineers, track gangers and maintenance crews, painters, carpenters, sign-writers, welders and boiler makers, sheet metal workers, electricians and gas fitters, engine drivers and firemen, signalling and train operating staff, cleaners, caterers and service personnel at stations and on trains, tour guides, interpreters and historians, graphic designers, accountants and clerical staff, booking agents and marketing people, gardeners, tree surgeons and horticulturalists.

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These are just some of the jobs on the railway alone. Outside of this circle, regional attractions will benefit from increased visitor numbers, driving investment in infrastructure and more jobs. Struggling rural communities get a chance to revive and be accessible. One is hard pressed to find a downside to the proposal.

## TOURISTS NOT BE- ALL AND END-ALL

Statistics show, that half the visitors to Tasmania are non-tourists and that they come here to see family and friends instead. The railways are not just for tourists, but for the locals as well. Gridlock traffic, particularly in Hobart, could be quickly and effectively alleviated with the reintroduction of suburban passenger services. Existing equipment could be brought out of museums, upgraded and put to use almost immediately.

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Tasmania needs to impress her visitors to make sure they return again and again.

# The Heritage Rail Gazette

Issue No. 4

Tasmania

February 27, 2018

## "BETTER THAN NOTHING" NOT GOOD ENOUGH

Infrastructure Minister Rene Hidding quietly announced the Liberal Party's 'Tourism and Heritage Rail' policy yesterday. Initial expressions of joy from rail proponents quickly died down upon closer inspection. What is really in it for tourist and heritage rail operators?

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Aside from access to disused lines and \$100,000 promised to heritage rail operators including TTMS, Don River and Derwent Valley Railways, the main feature of the policy is for TasRail to facilitate a 'rail weekend' once a year. This solitary event is supposed to "open up new and exciting tourism developments". Exactly how this effect is meant to be achieved or how the project is going to be funded remains a mystery.

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To put it bluntly, the policy is a cop out, something hurriedly cobbled together in response to Labor's most excellent plan. It is based on bad advice and a complete lack of consultation with stakeholders. The Liberals have had ample time to listen to all sides, yet they have failed. They have not done their homework and they have no vision; that much is clear.

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A once-per-year event will never encourage growth in the sector. While the policy may put a foot in the door of Government, it will mean a lot more hard work to get to where the industry needs to be in order to be viable.

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Furthermore, the fate of the North East line remains in limbo, with the continuing

threat of it being made into a bicycle trail; a proposal the rail community is vehemently opposed to.

## DORSET MAYOR SPROUTS OLD HAT ON ABC

The Mayor of Dorset, Greg Howard, is a staunch supporter of cycling tourism developments within his jurisdiction. Much energy and resources have been invested in the North East to achieve his goals. Like his mates in the State Government, he too has refused to consult with any representatives of the railway community, dismissing the proposal outright.

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On February 19, in an interview with Leon Compton on ABC Radio, Howard stated: "Even if we thought, even for a minute, that the train would deliver economic benefit better than cycling, we would be on board. We just can't make the numbers add up. Its as simple as that."

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It is fair to assume he never even looked at his own figures, let alone either of the official reports commissioned for the railway. The bike proposal hinges on \$1.47 Million of Federal funding, which is to be matched by money from Council coffers. Where is that money going to come from? Mayor Howard is quoting figures that are by now several years out of date and the plan is so full of holes, unanswered questions and misconceptions, it is a miracle it ever was considered for a grant in the first place.

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It is evident, he is not seeing the potential of diversification and of integrating multiple

attractions. He has blinkered tunnel vision and does not want the railway. "...we [Dorset Council] don't think there is a snowflake's chance in hell of the train ever getting here..." he said on air; and with that, the case is closed.

## TOURISM COUNCIL PURSUES A MISGUIDED AGENDA

In their own words, the Tourism Industry Council of Tasmania is the peak body for Tasmania's tourism industry. Their website states: "We are a not-for-profit organisation providing leadership for the industry and a strong voice for Tasmanian tourism operators."

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The sad fact is, the Council represents but a few ventures and has a heavy focus on cycling tourism. \$6 Million has been allocated to establish the Cycle Tourism Fund on its advice, however there is not one mention of tourist and heritage railways.

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Part of the brief of the T21 agenda is to enhance the visitor experience and to encourage travel to and within regional areas, yet no effort has been exerted to fulfil this requirement. Tasmania's tourism figures are at an all-time high; meanwhile, facilities and infrastructure to cope with the influx of visitors are years behind schedule. Other than the weaving of red tape, very little appears to actually be achieved.

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Heritage rail societies must no longer accept piecemeal offerings and inadequate promises at every election. Countless examples interstate and overseas are testament to what is possible. The time for big-picture thinking is now... or never.

# The Heritage Rail Gazette

Issue No. 5

Tasmania

March 05, 2018

## \$100,000 WILL GET THE BALL ROLLING

Heritage rail operators are set to receive a total of \$100,000 from the newly re-elected Hodgman Liberal Government. The funds are earmarked to assist in achieving compliance with rail safety requirements and for the reinstatement of rail/road crossing equipment on a part of the Hobart suburban line.

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The Tasmanian Transport Museum Society (TTMS) will be granted access to 5km of the disused line between its headquarters at Glenorchy and Chigwell. A possible future extension is subject to the project meeting with success. The Derwent Valley Railway will be allowed to commence repair work on a part of the line adjacent to their New Norfolk yard and the Don River Railway is set to have its connection to the TasRail main line at Coles Beach reinstated.

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These works are in preparation of the planned 'Rail Weekend', an event that would see the return of heritage excursion trains to Tasmania's main lines after a twelve year hiatus. The operational TasRail network is currently off limits to third party operators. A date for this annual event is yet to be announced.

## HOBART ON TRACK FOR PASSENGER RAIL

Ever since the closure of Hobart's suburban line in July 2014, there have been moves to run tourist & heritage rail services on certain sections, as

well as to develop it into a commuter light rail system to ease chronic traffic congestion.

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The recent Hobart City Deal, in conjunction with the Strategic Infrastructure Corridors Act have paved the way towards this end, starting with the TTMS being given access to the line. "The heritage passenger rail experience will not preclude any future light rail operation on the corridor. The TTMS operations would be conducted under a lease agreement facilitated by the Act, which contains a number of provisions to enable the corridor to be reserved for future strategic uses." former Infrastructure Minister Rene Hidding has said.

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Meanwhile, the Hobart Tram Restoration and Museum Society (H-TRAMS) has been working with the Hobart City Council to develop a proposal to operate some of the city's restored historic trams on a section between the Regatta Grounds and Cornelian Bay. This scenic route skirts the River Derwent foreshore and passes by the picturesque Botanical Gardens. A new facility parallel to the line, to showcase and maintain the trams is included in the proposal. H-TRAMS Vice President John Kelly told the Hobart Mercury "Tourists would love this. The business case is solid because the initial capital cost would be modest as many of the main ingredients are ready to go". The City Council has engaged an independent consultancy to assess the business case.

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The Hobart Northern Suburbs Rail Action Group, proponents of a light rail service between Hobart and Brighton, are in favour of the line being used for tourist & heritage rail

services, but not everything is working out as planned.

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The Macquarie Point Development Corporation was in the spotlight late last year in connection with its re-development of the former Hobart railway yards. Despite public commitments to retain railway tracks for future use, a significant section of track was ripped-up and sold off as scrap. Minister Hidding told Parliament at the time that the track was still in place, when this was not the case.

## L&NER CONTINUE WORK ON DP14 RESTORATION

Volunteers of the Launceston & North East Railway group are continuing their work on restoring railcar DP14. The former TGR vehicle and a matching trailer were purchased from Burnie City Council last year. The railcar was transported by road to a property at Karoola in September 2017 and placed on a 40m piece of track specially built for the purpose.

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Preliminary work has included a thorough clean up and an assessment of the railcar's condition. Worn out wheels are due to be replaced once the body is lifted off and the bogies removed. Auxillary buildings to serve as a workshop space have been erected nearby.

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The Liberals' Tourist & Heritage Rail policy notes that the L&NER's business case for their proposal to reinstate passenger services between Launceston and the North East has a solid base. However, it and the competing rail trail (cycling) project are currently undergoing thorough examination by Treasury.

# The Heritage Rail Gazette

Issue No. 6

Tasmania

July 29, 2018

## BEHOLD KING SOLOMON!

Peter Gutwein, Treasurer of Tasmania, also Minister for Forestry and Minister for Planning and Local Government, has handed down his decision on the future of the North East railway corridor. Opting for a compromise solution, it offers less than satisfactory outcomes to either party.

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King Solomon is that story where two women quarrelled over a baby, each claiming the child was hers. The king drew his sword and proposed to cut the baby in half, so as to satisfy both mothers, but more about that later...

Upon reviewing Treasury's report on the future of the North East Railway Corridor, one must wonder, did you read said document at all, Mr Gutwein? If you did, then you clearly have failed to comprehend its contents and subsequently made a fallacious decision.

Careful examination of the report reveals a plethora of obfuscations, fuzzy words and vague assumptions. In the section supposed to analyse the rail trail's merits, for instance, we find a revised proposal that goes from Scottsdale only as far West as Lilydale Falls.

The original proposal for the Commonwealth grant funding was to reach Coldwater Creek, a 33% truncation of the distance for the same grant money, how is that supposed to work?

There is no plan or commitment from anyone to fulfil the original scope of the grant, which was to complete the trail to Coldwater Creek, as originally intended, let alone all the way to Launceston, preferring to leave that up to LCC to deal with. Furthermore, the unspecified cost of the link to Lilydale village is not even included in the cost estimates.

In essence, what we would end up with is a bike trail from Nowhere to Nowhere; a rail trail that will rely on unquantified volunteer labour and, to quote the paper: "It is estimated that ongoing maintenance costs, including two weed-control sprays per year, will total around \$25 000 per year."

Other tasty quotes include "Dorset Council has provided updated project cost estimates that have been provided to the Treasurer on a confidential basis." and "...half the costs, up to a total of \$2.94 million, will be borne by the Australian Government." Please feel free to actually read the entire report for full context.

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Put two and two together and you see that Dorset Council seem to care only about a bag of money teasing and tantalisingly close and yet so far! They will stop at nothing to get their way. Shame, too, on Treasury for failing to pick up on this.

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Moving on down the pages, the "second proposal" is played down as being amateur, fuddy duddy and not to be taken seriously. Conflicting reports that

compare apples with oranges make it look like a pipe dream that will cost too much and will never work. Every possible obstacle is put in the way of success.

The reality by any measure is, the L&NER heritage railway proposal is far superior and a visionary concept. It has public support, an active volunteer base and its own funds. We are 'mend-and-make-do' kind of people and we have common sense. The benefits it will bring to the region and the State cannot all be measured in dollars and statistics, but in happiness, wellbeing and community spirit.

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Your decision to graciously give to the railway proponents what is essentially the bit of the corridor that Dorset didn't want any more is abominable and insulting. It will be a railway from Nowhere to Nowhere, whose continued existence is contingent on measureable success and impossible targets. Its potential, however, is handicapped from the start and the venture apparently set up to fail.

Meanwhile, you conveniently get away looking innocent of any wrongdoing and the community gets lumped with two half babies, which brings us back to the beginning. What good is half a baby each? In the story, the real mother gave up her child, exposing her opponent as an impostor.

Do you know what the king did next?