

# 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.

-oOo-

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.

-oOo-

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!"

-oOo-

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.

-oOo-

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."

-oOo-

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.

-oOo-

"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."

-oOo-

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