

The Heritage Rail Gazette

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\$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.

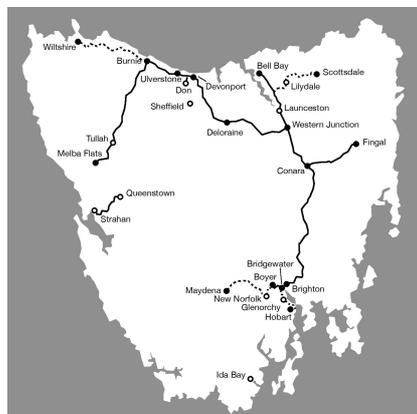
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Federal and State funding totalling \$119.6 Million is being invested in the four years ending June 2019, with further funds allocated in forward estimates. The aim is to upgrade the State's railway network to satisfy modern standards. New track is 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!