



Rails to Recovery for north-west Victoria

Reintroduction of regional passenger rail service between Melbourne and Mildura serving families, business and tourism in north-west Victoria

This proposal involves the introduction of a standard gauge locomotive-hauled passenger service. It would be based in Mildura, running to Maryborough and connecting with the broad gauge VLocity service through to Melbourne via Ballarat. There are strong arguments for the reintroduction of passenger rail services to Mildura, including:

- Large population unserved (60,000 Mildura-Wentworth; 75,000 in corridor; 130,000 in tri-state region). Mildura is steadily growing in population.
- Mildura is the only large Victorian population centre without a train service so there is an equity argument for its reinstatement.
- Most isolated major community in Victoria.
- Existing public transport services are inadequate.
- Coaches are unpopular - circuitous, slow, poor access; inadequate access for people with a disability, elderly.
- Air schedules limited, e.g. there is no plane that leaves the town for anywhere after 12 noon Saturday! ... and air tickets are expensive (Qantas starts at \$336 return to Melbourne for RediDeal or \$700 return for a flexible ticket; Mildura to Sydney is \$760 and \$1000 respectively; Adelaide \$766 and \$1300).
- Highway access poor (Murray Valley and Sunraysia Highways are rough, Calder heavily trafficked; NSW highways dangerous, no divided highways in the Sunraysia region).
- Large disadvantaged population; large senior population, significant group of people living with disability for whom trains means better mobility.
- Strong and undiminishing community demand (8500 signatures on petition).
- Opportunity to build on Murray Basin Rail Plan and Ballarat line investments.
- Benefits to 16 communities along the line.

In the time that will follow the recovery from the Coronavirus pandemic, there will be a huge demand for an economic stimulus to the rural economies. The North West has sought to have their passenger rail service reinstated as the alternatives provide an inferior service or, in the case of air travel, a significantly more expensive option. The train to Mildura will allow access to the region for tourists from Melbourne. It will also be important for families to access Melbourne for social, medical or recreational activities. In the various communities along the line there are many who cannot, or choose not to drive, or not to drive long distances.

The groups that cannot use the air services and who are condemned to second rate bus services include:

- Many **seniors** in an ageing population. In many towns, 20-30% of the population is aged over 65.
- Many **young people** including students, apprentices, trainees.
- **Disabled** people, including those with low vision.
- Those who have never held, or lost their licences.
- Many **seasonal workers** under 457 visas such as fruit pickers.
- **Indigenous** community members.
- **Tourists** and visitors not eligible to drive in Australia.
- Recently arrived **immigrants**.

In a diverse community, these groups should have access to effective public transport that is reliable, fast, affordable and provides good connectivity. This service will put Mildura and Melbourne within eight and a half hours travel time and represents a competitive timeframe compared to car or coach travel.

The significance of a passenger rail service to local tourism is important. Mildura and many of the communities have markets, festivals and events which would be highly supported by a reasonable passenger rail service.

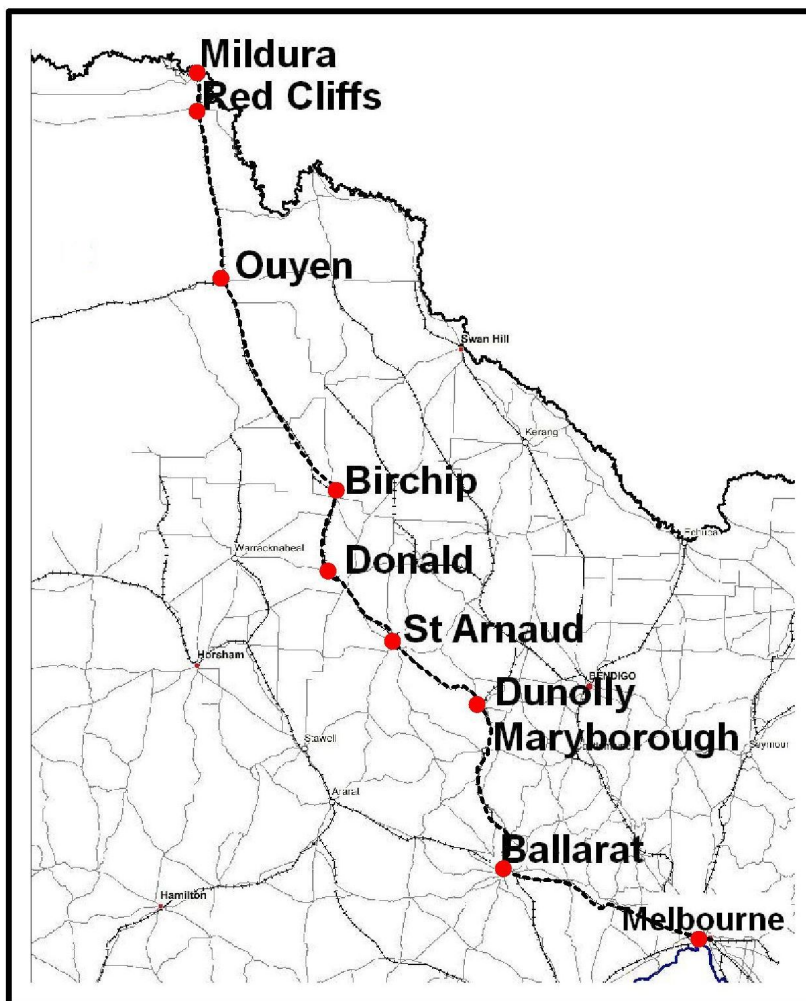
There are numerous opportunities. The draft timetable below contains stops at Lascelles and Hattah. The reason for the Lascelles stop is to connect with the significant tourism business that has seen thousands of Chinese tourists coming to Sea Lake. The Hattah stop relates to the growth in eco-tourism, with hiking, camping and cycling in the popular Hattah Kulkyne National Park. There will be many such opportunities such as this to develop and enhance the tourist industries following the Coronavirus pandemic which has done so much damage to many small regional communities and economies.

This is the most efficient use of the train and sees the lowest capital cost of investment. North of Maryborough, this train will run on the newly-converted standard gauge rail line to Mildura. The line conversion and upgrade was part of the Murray Basin Rail Project. The first phase of the project has been completed.

It has involved:

- the standardisation and upgrade of the track between Maryborough and Mildura to 80 km/h speed limits over the whole of the track, including continuous welding of the track, the installation of new sleepers, ballast and where necessary rail fittings
- the rationalisation of track infrastructure at disused locations
- withdrawal of speed restrictions on almost all level crossings.

The introduction of passenger services on this line allows the community to reap the benefit of the significant capital invested in the Murray Basin Rail Plan. It neatly integrates with existing freight services on the line and ensures that the facilities are maintained to passenger-standard which ensures higher speeds, ongoing maintenance commitments from government and consistent monitoring of track quality.



The advantages of this proposal:

- Efficient use of one standard gauge N Set. They are described as the VLine Classic fleet and are currently being modernised and upgraded.
- Use of refurbished N Class rolling stock, thus less capital investment.
- Faster connection in and out of Melbourne using existing VLocity service for part of the journey between Melbourne and Maryborough.
- This proposal services the student populations at Ballarat as well as Melbourne.
- It would also allow passengers to spend time in the intermediate towns along the line as well as Mildura.
- Part of this proposal provided for six services per week serving Dunolly. This would fulfil the promises made by the Minister in 2018 regarding the return of passenger trains to Dunolly.
- The proposal uses Maryborough as the interface between the VLine VLocity service and the proposed Mildura passenger extension. It works well operationally as the Maryborough platform is sufficiently long to allow the VLocity set and the N Set to both occupy the platform and easily allow the transfer of passengers from one service to another.

The following is a sample schedule to provide for a country passenger service serving all of the major destinations on the Mildura line north of Maryborough.

It is based on a standard gauge service that would run on the existing standard gauge network between Maryborough and Mildura. The existing direct VLine service would meet this train at Maryborough.

This schedule has been based on the following data:

- the existing Overland train which is a locomotive-hauled service and travels from Melbourne to Adelaide via Ararat. This provides data for a medium weight diesel-hauled passenger train on similar topography.
- time, speed and distance comparisons with existing VLine N Class passenger trains on such lines as Swan Hill and Warrnambool.
- calculated line speeds from current VLine requirements on the track between Maryborough and Mildura. This figure is 80 km/h and the times have been based on 75 km/h.

There is a minimum of capital works needed for this proposal with Dunolly Station requiring restoration works to allow safe passenger access to trains. The standard gauge track will need to be reconnected to the Dunolly platform. The rails, sleepers and rail bed have all been recently replaced and upgraded.

A proposed timetable for this service is shown:

	Km from Melbourne	Proposed Timetable		Km from Melbourne	Proposed Timetable
		Mon Wed Fri			Sun Tue Thur
		VLocity			N Set
Melbourne		9.16	Mildura	573	8.50
Ballarat	119	10.46	Red Cliffs	558	9.04
Maryborough (arr)	187	11.41	Ouyen	471	10.22
change		N Set	Birchip	353	12.07
Maryborough (dep)	187	12.01	Donald	301	12.54
Dunolly	209	12.21	St Arnaud	262	13.29
St Arnaud	262	13.08	Dunolly	209	14.07
			Maryborough (arr)	187	14.27
Donald	301	13.43	change		VLocity
Birchip	353	14.29	Maryborough (dep)	187	14.50
Ouyen	471	16.14	Ballarat	119	15.39
Red Cliffs	558	17.31	Melbourne	0	17.22
Mildura	573	17.44			
		8 Hours 28 Mins			8 hrs 32 mins

Some level crossings will require upgrades and some operational matters will require some additional capital expenditure.

The Sunday service from Mildura is proposed to connect with an afternoon VLocity to Melbourne. This currently is not time tabled but has long been promised as part of the weekend return service between Melbourne and Maryborough. This would see train leaving Melbourne on both Saturday and Sunday mornings and the service returning to Melbourne later on those days. It would be this Sunday afternoon service returning to Melbourne that would be used as part of the Mildura connection. Any proposal to timetable this weekend afternoon service from Maryborough leaving later than 1540 could easily be integrated into these timetables with the train leaving Mildura roughly five hours prior to the departure time of the VLocity from Maryborough.

Should the train require major servicing or repairs, it can run via Ararat and Geelong to Melbourne with a changeover provided the same way. If the crews resided in Maryborough, the broad gauge Melbourne service could be run by provision of extra crews being stationed at Maryborough and the current arrangement of Ballarat crews running the Maryborough service could be removed. With extra crews at Maryborough, the rostering is more flexible to cover crews on sick/annual leave. There would be a maximum number of shifts worked each fortnight along with the benefit of making the job more interesting by providing variety in work.

An indicative costing of the proposal:

There are three different aspects to the costing of this proposal. They are the capital costs, the station costs and the operating costs. Existing infrastructure and improvements such as rail, value of the stations, carriages, locomotive etc. are not costed in this proposal as they do not involve additional expenditure for this proposal to go ahead. It must be stated that these costs are indicative and would require a full engineering assessment of the individual proposals. The first lot of capital cost involves the actual changes, improvements or alternations to the existing infrastructure which will be required to have this passenger service operational. The stations and the work that may be required to be undertaken is contained in the second table.

As can be seen from the following table, the costs can be seen as the immediate cost of the proposal and to this should be added a longer-term capital cost which may provide a more sustainable and more efficient solution to various operational issues.

Required Capital Item	Immediate	Five year solution	Units@cost	Cost
Crossing loops	Use existing facilities	Convert to Central Traffic control	8@\$2M	\$16M
Level crossings	Keep existing speed restriction	Protect crossings	6@\$1M	\$6M
Locomotive run around Mildura	Use of current loop at Merbein	Reinstate No. 2 road at Mildura station	1@\$5M	\$5M
Overnight stabling Mildura	Use existing cement siding	Reinstate No. 2 road at Mildura station	See Above	See above
Locomotive run around Maryborough	Use current loop at Maryborough yard	No change	0	0
Overnight stabling Maryborough	Use No 4 Road Maryborough Yard	Construct additional stabling siding next to the existing Velocity stable	1@\$2M	\$2M
Fueling of locomotives	Use road hauled tanker.	Re-establish fuel point at Maryborough	1@\$1M	\$1M
Removal of waste water and sewerage from train	Use of independent contractor	Establish waste disposal point	1@\$1M	\$1M
Total				\$31M

The summary of the work required and provisional costing on the stations is shown below.

Station	General condition	Summary or works required	-Cost-
Maryborough	Excellent	Move platform fencing to enable two trains to dock at the station	\$ 50,000
Dunolly	Poor	Reconnect Standard Gauge line to platform, resurfacing platform, improve access, seating, lighting and waiting facilities, DDA compliant by 2022	\$ 3,000,000
St Arnaud	Good	Recently restored, Ensure DDA compliance by 2022	\$ 300,000
Donald	Good	Recently restored, Ensure DDA compliance by 2022	\$ 300,000
Birchip	Good	Recently restored, Ensure DDA compliance by 2022	\$ 300,000
Ouyen	Still in use but very dilapidated in parts.	Building to be made safe, All weather waiting and seating should be provided, Platform needs resurfacing Ensure DDA compliance by 2022	\$ 750,000
Red Cliffs	No buildings, only platform and car park	All weather waiting, lighting and seating should be provided, Platform needs resurfacing Ensure DDA compliance by 2022	\$ 2,500,000
Mildura	Average	Platform seating and lighting needs to be repaired. Platform needs resurfacing. Ensure DDA compliance by 2022	\$ 300,000
Total			\$ 7,500,000



The running costs and overall details of the proposal are as follows:

6 services per week	312 per annum
Distance	400 km per trip on the N Set 124,800 km/pa on the N Set
Weekly hours inc. downtown	40 hours on the N Set

Driver	2	\$150,000	\$300,000
Conductor	4	\$80,000	\$320,000
Accommodation	1000	\$150	\$150,000
Meals	1000	\$40	\$40,000
		<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>\$810,000</u>
Fuel	125000k m @ \$3 /km		\$375,000
Loco Maintenance	125000k m @ \$4 /km		\$500,000
Carriage maintenance	125000k X m 5units@\$4/km		\$750,000
Station Staff	4 @	\$80,000.00	\$320,000
Maintenance	52 @	\$10,000	\$520,000
		<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>\$3,275,000</u>
	Dollars per km		\$26.24
	Dollars per trip		\$12,100

These figures represent costs associated with operating the train north of Maryborough.



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