



PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA

TRANSCRIPT

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESSES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tasmanian Railways Pty Ltd

Thursday 5 December 2024

MEMBERS

Mr Street MP (Chair);
Mr Behrakis MP (Deputy Chair);
Mr O'Byrne MP;
Mr Willie MP;
Mr Winter MP; and
Dr Woodruff MP

OTHER PARTICIPATING MEMBERS

Ms Johnston MP;
Ms Burnet MP; and
Ms Brown MP

WITNESSES IN ATTENDANCE

Hon. Kerry Vincent MLC, Minister for Infrastructure, Minister for Local Government

Stephen Cantwell, Chair

Steven Dietrich, Chief Executive Officer

Josh Bradshaw, Corporate Affairs Manager

PUBLIC

The committee met at 12.00 p.m.

CHAIR - We now start the scrutiny of Tasmanian Railways, or TasRail. Minister, if you would like to introduce those at the table with you by name and position, and then make a very brief opening statement, seeing as we've only got an hour of scrutiny.

Mr VINCENT - Thank you, Chair. On my left I have my chief of staff, Tim Lovibond; on the right we have the chairman of TasRail, Stephen Cantwell; next to him the CEO, Steven Dietrich; and next to Steven is corporate affairs manager Josh Bradshaw.

I plan to keep it very short and just say that during the first few weeks as minister I've been fortunate to go along and have a look at TasRail on just the one occasion, and had a few meetings with them in the office as well, and been very impressed with their pride and ownership of this entity of TasRail. I've been amazed by the commitment shown by the staff right throughout the organisation towards an improved focus with a strong future for Tasmania, and that's been proven in the strong results in the annual report. With that, in the interests of time, Chair, I'd like to open up the floor for questions as you see fit.

CHAIR - Thanks, I appreciate it, minister.

Ms BROWN - Thank you, Chair, and thank you all for attending today. Minister, how many collisions or near-misses occurred on the network this year?

Mr VINCENT - There was an increase in near-misses, and I haven't got it in front of me but Tim's looking it up. I think it went from 37 last year to 68 this year or thereabouts, which was largely brought around by the increase in the reporting process and the fact that the locomotives have cameras in them now, so there's a lot more evidence of near-misses and things like that.

It is something that has shown up as an issue nationally, and the federal government and state government is working on several programs to do with level crossings. The different sorts of level crossings, which I found out yesterday, is quite complex about how they're handled to a national standard. We have also just received notification from the federal minister that over the next three years there will be a substantial amount - I believe it's \$8 million - going towards making a lot more of the crossings safer, which hopefully will eliminate some of these near-misses. With that, I'll hand over to the CEO, who might support and clarify some of those comments I've made.

Mr BRADSHAW - It's an excellent question. From our perspective the rise is quite disappointing. We've seen an increased number of people not obeying the road rules, because level crossings are road rules. There's only one person who has a choice at a level crossing and that's the person in the vehicle. Our trains weigh 3000 tonnes, are one kilometre long and can take a kilometre to stop, and obviously can't turn left or right. With a rise of 39 reported incidents to 68, we're definitely seeing some driver behaviour, but we also have increased the technology on our locomotives to capture more recognition of vehicles and people not doing the right thing.

We're continuing to invest in the level crossings as well, and I might just come back to that, but around level crossing safety and the impact to the business - because this impacts our people as well - we've got drivers who we want to make sure go home safe and well every night

to their families, or every day because a lot of them work at night, and these experiences are very traumatic for them as well. You would have seen, potentially, in the press that we had a significant incident at Westbury where a large log truck failed to stop at a very clear stop sign and collided with the train, which caused a significant derailment and was effectively a half-a-million-dollar incident.

We're continuing to try to educate the public. Through Rail Safety Week we launched a campaign called What's it going to take? Our frontline staff stepped up and did some videos - and that's not easy getting in front of a camera, as you can appreciate - and that really resonated with the team. We got that out, we got some great media, some great coverage. Even at the Tasmanian Transport Awards, we did a level crossing theme around safety, so we're trying to promote it but we still see a small percentage of the public not following the road rules.

We've got a big program of ongoing level crossing upgrades, but all our level crossings meet the Australian standards. We're continuing to look at opportunities such as boom gates and I'll be honest, the one set of boom gates we do have, two vehicles have crashed through them when they've come down, so even boom gates don't stop people from not stopping at level crossings. We'll continue to do what we can through Rail Safety Week. We had a great launch, we had the support of the Acting Police Commissioner, the president of the Road Safety Council, Scott Tilyard, in attendance and we got some good coverage with media through that, but we have to continue at it.

It's a bit like safety, it's what we refer to as an analogy. It's like sweeping water uphill - as soon as you stop sweeping it's all over you, so we've just got to keep at it. We definitely have seen a rise but we're working on it and we'll continue to invest in improving level crossings as well.

Ms BROWN - Have you identified the highest-risk level crossings?

Mr BRADSHAW - Yes. Spreyton, Devonport and Ulverstone are our key hotspots. For the committee's information, and it's probably a bit of a public announcement, this weekend we're closing the Midland Highway at Conara to upgrade that level crossing and doing a surface renewal. That'll be a 12-hour program from late Saturday afternoon to Sunday morning. The teams will work basically 12 hours through the night. The Midland Highway will be physically closed from 11.00 p.m. to 11.30 to do urgent necessary pavement and upgrade works to that level crossing in that 110-kilometre zone. From a level crossing perspective, it's one of the few level crossings that is in a 110-kilometre zone that ultimately we'd like to talk to the road authority about how we may reduce the speed limit in that area, as we're seeing potentially more trains operating across the network.

CHAIR - Ms Burnet.

Ms BROWN - Don't I have one more on rotation?

CHAIR - Ms Brown, don't make me get out the list of numbers I've got that show how well the opposition has done on the rotation so far.

Ms BROWN - But this is a separate rotation.

PUBLIC

CHAIR - I don't care. Ms Burnet.

Ms BURNET - Don't waste time, Ms Brown. Minister, clearly this a very important issue about safety of drivers and train drivers. I understand there's a federal government regional level crossing upgrade fund and that pays 50 per cent of the cost of upgrades. Was that actually applied for? Did Tasmania put in an application?

Mr VINCENT - I might ask exactly about the process, but some are 50:50 and others are on an 80:20 basis. I will ask the CEO for clarification.

Mr DIETRICH - TasRail put a submission to the state government -

Ms BURNET - I am talking about federal government.

Mr DIETRICH - The state government, through Department of State Growth, then applied to the federal government on our behalf in terms of process. That didn't find its way through the last state budget process and my understanding is that was more around the 50:50 in terms of co-contribution. My understanding is that the federal government has just responded through Minister King's office around accepting 80:20, so we're now working with the government to acquire that funding, which is \$8 million over two years beginning next financial year and thereafter.

Ms BURNET - The upgrade of the rail crossings was a considerable Infrastructure Australia project. Is it disappointing that it takes so long to get to that point where an application is submitted?

Mr DIETRICH - It's really timing. We're not slowing down on continuing to improve level crossings. This is a very discrete package around technology and safety. We also have to have the contractor capacity to undertake this work. We've got a list of level crossings we're already working through on our existing capital programs. This is over and above, which is exciting and very good, it's just more around timing. The minister in his comments has effectively confirmed that will be coming our way and the timing of that works for our business as well.

Mr CANTWELL - It's also relevant to say that every level crossing in the TasRail network is assessed and reassessed according to the ALCAM, which is the nationally recognised standard for assessing the safety requirements of level crossings. Over the last four or five years - this package that we're currently talking about is a small amount of investment that's gone into improving level crossing safety. Over the last four or five years or longer, we've spent more than \$20 million improving the approaches to level crossings and the roadworks around level crossings throughout the network.

There's been another \$7 million spent in that same timeframe improving the protection of level crossings, so level crossings, throughout - it's not as if we've been waiting for this \$8-million program that the minister was asked about it. There's a continual process of looking at level crossings right across the network in a very systematic and standardised way, and investing on a prioritised basis to improve safety.

Mr VINCENT - I can confirm that the previous minister did correspond with the Honourable Catherine King, and it was changed from 50-50 to 80-20.

PUBLIC

Also, a little bit to Ms Brown's question - there have been quite a few places identified and we do have numbers, if they're required, on the regions, on the near misses and issues, and also down to which intersections it is and how many are at each intersection.

Ms BROWN - Will you table that?

Mr VINCENT - We certainly can table that.

Ms JOHNSTON - Minister, I'm sure you're aware that I'm a massive rail fan. I'm really hoping that we can have as much freight as possible on our rails, and I'm sure you'll join me with that sentiment. I was delighted to hear you on Tuesday in the TasPorts hearing say that the carbon footprint of rail is hugely less than having trucks on the road, so I'm sure you will join me in wanting to see more freight on our rail network. We can certainly make a big reduction in our emissions if we do that. Transport is one of the biggest ways we can reduce our net emissions.

Are you concerned at all with the opening of the new Bridgewater bridge and the removal of the old Bridgewater bridge that we would be cutting off access from rail to one of our southern ports, and that's a concern in the long term if we're trying to shift freight from trucks onto rail?

Mr VINCENT - After I visited the works out of Brighton, I was thoroughly convinced that it isn't an issue, and that's mainly because of the large amount of space that you need to handle 20-foot containers, logs and everything else that comes in and out. Their operation out there takes a fair chunk of land. There are a lot of movements, and to have it isolated in the area like that where you can actually configure your loads to maximise what's going on to each truck, to each area and minimise the amount of truck movements is quite essential. It's very hard to do that, say, back in at the old system where it used to run into the port, but I'd certainly seek more clarification from the CEO on that as well.

Mr CANTWELL - I think it's about using, from a carbon footprint perspective, the technologies to their best effect, and rail certainly, as you've said, lends itself to a four-in-one reduction in carbon footprint for every tonne of freight moved for long haul.

Rail best serves the freight task when big, heavy unit trains can run from a very efficient terminal at one end of the system to a terminal at the other end of the system where the distribution is in close proximity, and in the future - the technology is not there yet - that distribution will be undertaken by low carbon emission trucks. They are the best technology to distribute the freight to what we call in the rail industry 'the last mile'.

As the minister has said, rail is efficient where it can come into and terminate at a very large, modern distribution facility like we have at Brighton in the southern end of our network and Burnie at the northern end of our network.

Ms JOHNSTON - So you don't see an opportunity for that to happen or to occur at Hobart Port, for instance, in the future, and you're not concerned about the cutting?

CHAIR - I'm sorry, I need to move on to Mrs Beswick.

PUBLIC

Mrs BESWICK - Chair, I know there was some discussion in Leg Co around passenger train opportunities. I'm just wondering what investigations we have done and are ongoing in terms of possibly having some passenger trains on our tracks?

Mr CANTWELL - Sure. I assume you're referring to entry onto the corridor by the tourist and heritage rail operators?

Mrs BESWICK - Possibly, but no. I'm thinking more like transport. Like Ms Johnston said, getting cars off the road can reduce our carbon emissions.

Mr CANTWELL - There is an easy answer to that question from TasRail's perspective. Our charter is very much written to freight and the movement of freight, and we have not studied or proposed any movement outside of that remit. That is not to say that if we were asked by government to respond to some aspiration around passenger rail that we wouldn't do it. At this stage, the answer to your question is nothing. You asked what studies have been done? None.

Ms BROWN - On the back of that, have there been any conversations with either you or the Minister for Transport around light rail since you have been elected?

Mr VINCENT - No, I am stuck purely with dealing with what I need to learn about at the moment.

Ms BROWN - Is the government seeking any further support regarding level crossing safety?

Mr VINCENT - Yes, it is ongoing - the identification of, as we said previously, some of those problem areas, but you have to have a sensible, engineered safety mechanism for it. Rail is a lot bigger around Australia. The CEO is part of the National Safety Committee on that - I can't think of their proper full name but -

Mr CANTWELL - TrackSAFE.

Mr VINCENT - Something as technical as that, there you go. We are aware of what is best practice everywhere else, and we are looking at different ways of upgrading various intersections that will allow for a much safer - a lot of that is line of sight, signals and things like that. It is an ongoing basis. You can only do so many at a time. Sometimes, it is a major work; sometimes it is much simpler, such as the Conara work, this weekend, to rectify a few things there. It is a constant all the time.

Ms BROWN - Each year as local members, we receive representation about train sirens in residential areas. Can you update the committee on any changes to the sirens since last year?

Mr CANTWELL - Claxons.

Ms BROWN - Claxons, yes.

Mr CANTWELL - I should hand to the CEO to talk to that one.

PUBLIC

Mr DIETRICH - We basically follow the national protocol around train horn noise and the application of the train horn. As you've seen, with these statistics around level crossings, the train horn is used at level crossings. The procedure is to blow the horn once on approach to a level crossing and then once inside a level crossing. That is the procedure. We instituted a change to the procedure some years ago that used the low note from 10.00 p.m. through to 6.00 a.m.

We certainly understand what that means for the community with horn noise during the night. We are looking at other options, but our priority is safety. We are meeting the national standard. It is the rail regulator requirement and that is the application we have at the moment. We do use the low note during the night to support the community around the levels of horn noise.

Mr CANTWELL - The driver has two buttons in the cab. The driver can choose to press a button that sounds the horn loudly or less loudly, but we also leave our drivers with significant discretion as to how long they sound the horn for, because obviously if they are on the approach to a level crossing and they can see vehicles - and we can show you a lot of footage where vehicles seek to run the crossing ahead of the train. We allow our drivers the discretion to sound the horn long and loud as a warning to the motor vehicles, because we would much rather offend people's ears than see a sad incident happening at a level crossing.

Mr VINCENT - I might just add that in 2023-24 there were six horn complaints; 14 the previous year.

Ms BURNET - Minister, through you to whoever: is TasRail diversified enough to withstand a reduction in log volumes? This is a bit of wishful thinking on my behalf. I am just curious to know the business model.

Mr VINCENT - It is not something I am across. I will hand to the Chair and the CEO to answer that.

Mr CANTWELL - Thanks. I'll have a go at it and, if need be, hand it to the CEO. There are three commercial pillars within the TasRail business. There are bulk mineral products, forestry products and the intermodal products, the container products. So, if you like, it's a three-legged stool.

Within the forestry products business vertical, about 80 per cent of the volume that we accommodate is plantation timbers. Like each of the other product lines, there is a fluctuation in demand from our customer community, so there are rises and falls. To answer your question, it would be unfortunate if all of the forestry product line was lost, but to the extent that 80 per cent of the volume that we're currently handling is associated with the forestry timbers, then we don't see a loss of that business vertical as a significant risk.

Mr DIETRICH - That's the real strength of TasRail, that we're very much a multi-commodity business. We see some commodities up, some down, but the strength of the business is we've got a range of products and a range of customers within each of those portfolios, particularly the forestry industry where it was probably more proportionate to native in the early days. It's very much we've developed the supply chain and the equipment to safely handle the plantation side of the forestry industry and seen a real mode shift from road to rail to support that.

Ms BURNET - What about coal volumes? I think that makes up about 10 per cent of your total freight volume. Given there is likely a change at Railton with tire-derived fuel, what's likely to happen there?

Mr DIETRICH - Thank you for the question. It's an excellent question. The coal volumes we move at the moment have been those volumes that have been in existence for a long time, supporting large manufacturers on the island and, basically, internal consumption. As Cement Australia are looking at their energy requirements, they're talking to us around, as there's a transition from coal, and what that may look like for them is bio, and they see us as a key supply chain provider, a logistics provider to support them in bringing in the raw materials for their bio requirements, which is basically going to be -

Ms BURNET - Not whole logs, is it?

Mr DIETRICH - bark and timber and those type of things. That is where it may convert to. So, we see substitute, but coal is not a huge portion of our business in any event.

Ms JOHNSTON - What engagement has TasRail had, if any, in relation to the removal of rail infrastructure in three particular locations, the Bridgewater Bridge lifting span, in particular, but also the south line north of Granton to Bridgewater, and also the rail sleepers and ballast from Glenorchy south to Macquarie Point to accommodate a potential bus rapid transit (BRT)? Has TasRail made any representations to the government in relation to that or been engaged in that discussion?

Mr CANTWELL - I'm going to handball that directly to the CEO.

Mr DIETRICH - I think there's a couple of areas there to address. Certainly, the section of the Bridgewater bridge. We've worked very closely with the Bridgewater bridge project team. That section of track that was removed to facilitate that project, all those sleepers and rail have been preserved.

Ms JOHNSTON - On-site or near site?

Mr DIETRICH - Near site, yes. The areas beyond that, further south, there's coming into Macquarie Point. Is that what you're referring to?

Ms JOHNSTON - The government have suggested that they might be looking at BRT from Glenorchy to Macquarie Point, or thereabouts, so it will need to come through to the city. That would facilitate the removal of the ballast, the sleepers, the rail itself. Has TasRail engaged in any conversation on that or made any representations about the desirability or what might happen to that infrastructure from TasRail's perspective, or what the value of that infrastructure is?

Mr DIETRICH - No, not from TasRail's perspective.

Ms JOHNSTON - No engagement?

Mr DIETRICH - No.

PUBLIC

Mr CANTWELL - The value of the rail and sleepers, and ballast, from the perspective of any light rail solution would be zero because standard light rail is standard gauge. It's a wider gauge than the existing rail corridor.

Ms JOHNSTON - But we run light rail in Queensland and Western Australia, which is still 3 foot 6

Mr CANTWELL - No, the trams, light rail - there's narrow-gauge and there's light rail. Light rail is a passenger transport solution, and the light rail passenger transport solutions across the world are standard gauge, so they're 4 foot 8.

Ms JOHNSTON - I respectfully disagree with that.

Ms BROWN - The lost time injury (LTI) frequency rate and recordable injury frequency rates are much higher than your targets in the 2023-24 year, according to your annual report. What information can you provide to explain the circumstances of injury and illnesses occurring at TasRail?

Mr CANTWELL - We say that the safety and the wellbeing of our people are at the centre of everything that we do and think about. In that context, we don't apologise for setting very hard targets, particularly around lost time injury rates. By nominating a zero lost time injury frequency rate, what we are saying to ourselves and our people is that it's not acceptable for one single person to be injured inside of our business.

However, incidents do occur, notwithstanding the significant investment we make in improving the environment for safety. I'll ask the CEO to just give some context around those lost time injuries that did occur in the last 12 months, so that the committee can understand some of the background associated with them.

Mr DIETRICH - Last year in the reporting year, we had five lost time injuries. One injury is too many, so we don't apologise for having a zero target. We have proven as a business that we can go 1000 days without a lost time injury. And I'm pleased to say, as of today, we are up to 170 days lost time injury-free between all our contractors and all our employees. Our contractors are actually up to 302 and our previous best record was 1014 days. We can prove we can have no lost time injuries.

The ones we saw last year were not related to equipment or infrastructure, really human factors. Since, whether you can say it's COVID or not, but we are really trying to educate our workforce and our contractors about being present, turning up, managing fatigue levels and concentrating. The LTIs we had last year, I would suggest three were reasonably insignificant where there was very little lost time: a scratch, someone hurt their finger on a scissor lift.

But we did have two incidents with a rail operator shunter on the way back from a shift at the Fingal Valley roll a ute. That was a rollover of a vehicle, a road accident, effectively, a road incident. The other one was a person not following procedure around strapping down a log wagon. When they were using the bar, the ratchet let go and the bar clipped them back on the side of the face and they hadn't removed their body from the danger zone. That person's made a full recovery. Our shunter, she's made a full recovery from the rollover and she's actually now one of our health and safety representatives and a very big advocate around road safety. We obviously had to have a discussion with the rail shunter and she didn't drive any

company vehicles for a few months. But she's rehabilitated and she's one of our biggest advocates for safety in the business now, which is great.

Very much human factors. We've got a human factor specialist in the business who's been adopted by Worksafe Tasmania and been presenting at all the workshops. We are really focused on a human factor side within the business, but we have seen that little tick up around people making sure they're present, concentrating and managing fatigue levels. And not fatigue from a work perspective, but when they turn up, they're not fatigued and they're fit for duty.

Ms BROWN - Of those instances, how many have been involved in the leave that's taken over a month to come back from?

Mr DIETRICH - There would be no instance of over a month.

Ms BROWN - Have you identified any trends that are coming out of this little tick up?

Mr DIETRICH - No, just those human factors and being present and concentrating. There's a lot going on in the world and we're not immune here in Tasmania to the cost of living, busy times, different things, social media, technology, so we're just really asking people to do the right thing and when they come to work they present totally focused and fit for duty.

Ms BURNET - Minister, does TasRail intend to extend its Fingal rail line and establish a coal-loading facility to accommodate a possible opening of the Hard Rock Coal Mine?

Mr VINCENT - I will pass that to the CEO if that's okay.

Mr DIETRICH - I'm happy to answer that. There was some minor discussion going back probably three or four years ago around a coal mine - I think they changed their name but it was Hard Rock at the time - to look at the opportunity of mining coal from that region, but we haven't had any engagement or discussion for at least the last three or four years.

Ms BURNET - Okay. This is more about reducing greenhouse gas emissions and transport emissions being one of the largest emitters. Is there a desire to have a greater share of the freight transport market for TasRail?

Mr VINCENT - Certainly what I've witnessed on my visit out there is a quite ingenious design of rail carriages or 'logtainers' - a nice little play on words - where they can be collapsed so that freight can come back, which lessens their kilometres travelled empty. They're maximising the trips up and back. The \$15 million that's refurbishing a lot of the engines that are operating now to extend their life gives an opportunity for the whole network to look at alternative fuel sources for the future to minimise their carbon footprint. The whole operation that I saw was based around efficiency and minimising their impact but increasing their volume so that it lessens the pressure on the road network for the state. Chair, would you like to add to that?

Mr CANTWELL - You've got it perfectly, minister.

Ms JOHNSTON - I'll go back to the northern suburbs rail corridor. I'm aware that you have a lease arrangement with the Tasmanian Transport Museum and they lease a section of that track and also maintain it. What are the arrangements you have for the remaining part of

that northern suburbs rail corridor from Granton through to the city that's not leased by the Tasmanian Transport Museum?

Mr DIETRICH - My understanding is that the section the Tasmanian Transport Museum leases is now part of the *Strategic Infrastructure Corridors Act*, so they're responsible for that section of track in their own right. They don't actually lease it from us. They're now responsible, effectively, as the rail infrastructure operator. The rest of the non-operative line is our responsibility and we just do care and maintenance for it.

Ms JOHNSTON - What does care and maintenance mean?

Mr DIETRICH - Vegetation control, mostly.

Ms JOHNSTON - So, no track work or drainage?

Mr DIETRICH - Vegetation, drainage, ensuring appropriate signage at non-use level crossings - those types of things, and that's all.

Ms BROWN - In relation to gender equality at TasRail, I was interested to see that of the six executive team positions, only one is held by a woman and overall, only one in five roles are held by women. What are the barriers you have to increasing female participation and what incentives do you offer targeted at your female workers?

Mr CANTWELL - We are pleased but not satisfied that we've been able to move the female participation rate from 10 per cent to 20 per cent over the last few years, as you've identified. We've done that by systematically working through all of the job classifications we have to assure ourselves that we have no structural impediments to diverse participation in the work that we do.

One of the challenges we have, which is a challenge that's shared right across the rail industry, certainly in Australia and probably around the world is that we have a male dominated workforce in the operational areas. The train operations area, the train drivers, the rail operators and the infrastructure maintenance areas where there has been little churn, little workforce turnover - the small turnover, it slows the opportunity to renew with a more diverse employee base. It is really in those areas where the opportunity to move the dial is in terms of the percentage of female participation across the whole of the organisation.

But we do have a workforce that, from an age perspective, is skewed towards the higher end. So, we will be seeing in the sort of near-to-medium term greater churn in those frontline areas. We've done a lot of things to, you know - making a lot of things to improve the attractiveness of our business for a diverse workforce. They are simple things like making sure that there are clean and safe spaces for women, that there are spaces out along the track. One of the things that's particularly impressive is the mobile loo that TasRail has invested in, a 20-foot container which we can position at a sensible location along the corridor so women who drive trains know that they have a clean, safe and provided for facility in terms of hygiene provisions and so forth to use along the way. So, we've done a lot of things to set us up. We've moved from 10 per cent to 20 per cent. The ARA (Australian Rail Association) target is 27 per cent. We're a little bit away from that - our percentage of female participation, notwithstanding the observation that you shared in relation to the executive level is quite high. I'll turn to the CEO, the white-collar area of the organisation would be 40-ish per cent female

participation.

Mr DIETRICH - Thank you. This is an area I'm really focused and proud to talk about in terms of the growth of diversity and inclusivity within the business and within TasRail. When I came to TasRail, I think we were probably 5 per cent female participation in the business and, very proudly, can now say we've got 20 per cent. Not just 20 per cent in corporate services or back office, we have got women now driving trains. These are \$30-40 million assets that we've homegrown, developed our own female staff who are now driving these trains.

We've got 16 females in operations between driving trains and shunting trains. We've also got female participation in our network control centre, so that's a 24/7, 365 facility and generally, was always males on the radio speaking to the trains and all the infrastructure workers. Well, we've now got 2 females working within that area of the business. So, out of the 280 employees in TasRail, we're up to 61, which is basically triple where we were years ago.

It's still always the right job for the right person and the best person, but we're looking at ways and means that we get to the community around how we attract more female participation when applying for positions, and we go to the schools, and what a career looks like in TasRail for not just, you know, all young folk, but particularly from a female perspective.

Some of the initiatives we've introduced over the last few years is 12 weeks parental leave, flexible working arrangements, family and domestic violence leave, those type of things. So, they're all in place, as the chairman said, coming from, you know, what has been traditionally a male dominated environment, whether we should have expected some of our male people to, you know, pull up a train and go in the bush. Well, now we're putting in proper facilities so everyone can have a proper comfort stop and create that expectation.

You know, we've got three engineers that are female within the business to track and civil. If you look at our recent Facebook post, you'll see a couple of them out on track - and a mechanical engineer and she's been leading the project around our road rail vehicle project, replacing all those. Very proud. We also sponsor the Diversity and Inclusivity award at the Tasmania Transport Awards night and we have done that for probably 10 years as well, so we're very focused and passionate about the diversity within the business and also inclusivity.

Mr CANTWELL - The other thing to say is to get to the top of the triangle, you have to invest in the bottom of the triangle. It's truly impressive to see some of these young professional women coming through the organisation. We specifically invite the CEO and management to bring our young and up-and-comers into the boardroom so they have the opportunity to present and see what happens at that level. We also have the opportunity to demonstrate back to the organisation the extent to which we care about the TasRail of the future.

Ms BROWN - How do you identify those up-and-comers?

Mr CANTWELL - They kind of identify themselves. I'm thinking of Corrie and others. We've just had a number of young professional women associated with the ship loader project. The quality of the work that they do allows them to be noticed. We don't have to do much at all.

PUBLIC

Ms BURNET - I'm interested to hear all of those things. I'm just curious to know whether the skills that are required for TasRail are available in Tasmania for your staff?

Mr CANTWELL - Are you talking at board level or right across?

Ms BURNET - Right across the business.

Mr CANTWELL - The answer to your question is the pool probably isn't as deep as you would hope for, right from board level through to professional level. I think the pool is fine in terms of bringing through people to train up as train drivers and infrastructure maintainers and so forth, but we find ourselves fairly often having to look to the mainland for the specific signalling and engineering skills and the like, which are a little hard to come by. Also, within the organisation we have a disciplined approach to succession planning and identifying business critical skills and doing the things we need to do to develop our local talent. We don't sit on our laurels, we put quite a considerable amount of effort into developing the local capability.

Ms BURNET - Those TAFE or VET skills, presumably you have those. Are they accessible within Tasmania?

Mr CANTWELL - Yes, and I'll get the CEO to share with the committee the work we've done and are doing to establish ourselves as a registered training organisation so that we can deliver the training ourselves.

Mr DIETRICH - We're investing heavily in our training department to make sure we can upskill our people but also bring them on. While I think about attracting personnel to TasRail, every year we've been doing an intake of rail operators who ultimately then become train drivers with all the opportunities that presents in terms of our business. We advertised for about two or three rail operators in Burnie and had over 450 applications from people wanting to come and work at TasRail.

We've got lots of aspiring train drivers out there, which is very exciting, but it does take time. It takes 12 months for someone to become a rail operator and then another two years thereafter to become a fully qualified train driver, so it does take some time. That means we need to have very good workforce planning. We've seen quite a rotation in retirements. We have had a lot of people with 40-50 years' service retiring and we've got a new cohort coming through and we've been building up to support that. Just quickly, we are moving towards an enterprise RTO. That way we're in control of our training and can get it signed off.

Ms JOHNSTON - Minister, the Tasmanian Association of Tourist Railways, led by Tony Coen, who coincidentally was the leader behind the listing of the Goods Shed, an important heritage piece of rail infrastructure, has been trying to engage the government for a number of years now regarding the removal or decommissioning of TasRail infrastructure, whether it be the Bridgewater Bridge, parts of the Derwent Valley line or the northern suburbs corridor. They are getting little traction, if you'll excuse the pun, when it comes to getting any kind of engagement with the government around that. Will you meet with TasRail to understand their concerns about the removal of rail infrastructure across the state and the importance of tourism and heritage rail and to hopefully bolster the picture for rail across the state?

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Mr VINCENT - Certainly, I'm sure we'd all be interested in having a discussion there. The government's been fairly supportive of TasRail as it is with a lot of assistance over the next several years towards the public liability insurance and everything like that. It is something in my short time that I haven't had time to look at yet, but more than willing to in the new year.

Ms JOHNSTON - Yes, absolutely. Insurance is very important but it's no good if they haven't got rail to run on, so they need the rail to run on. So, if you can meet with them as a matter of urgency, could you meet with them perhaps as soon as possible in the new year?

Mr VINCENT - Certainly, as soon as possible in the new year will not be an issue.

Mr DIETRICH - Can I just add to that, minister? I just want to respond. In terms of the last three years, we've donated:

- 13 locomotives to various tourist and heritage enterprises;
- six spare engines;
- various wagons;
- over thousands of sleepers;
- traction motors;
- guard vans;
- generators;
- air compressors;
- batteries;
- redundant machinery and tools;
- Thornleys;
- radiator assemblies;
- seven containers of legacy spare parts; and
- a Ballast Plough.

so, we've certainly been providing lot of stuff.

Ms JOHNSTON - There are lots of synergies there, and they are telling the story about how great rail is in Tasmania. I don't deny that at all.

Mr DIETRICH - And we are very conscious of preserving the history of rail, so we also have still a significant supply of second-hand sleepers up at Conara available to any of the tourist and heritage steel sleepers. So, we've certainly been providing all the equipment that's been available that is safe to be able to donate to all the organisations. And I know Don River Railway has been a beneficiary, but so have all of them.

Ms BROWN - I just want to quickly put on the record my appreciation that you have family violence leave. That's very important, so thank you for that.

Just heading back to my previous questioning, do you collect the data of applicants versus hires and do you have that broken down by gender?

Mr DIETRICH - We do collect that information and we certainly through every recruitment process know every single person who's applied and the break up and the percentage between male and female. Do I have that information here? No, but we certainly get on every job that is advertised. We know how many people have applied and whether it's female or male.

Ms BROWN - Can I take that on notice? You mentioned just then that you have had a little bit of a turnover in staff due to retirement, et cetera. Are you able to table the data of what the turnover is?

Mr DIETRICH - In the last year it was 12 per cent.

Ms BROWN - With that 12 per cent of turnover, what are your strategies in making sure there are no holes? You just said it takes up to three years for a driver to be fully qualified, so you can understand the worry that there would be then holes in the industry.

Mr DIETRICH - Absolutely; we're very conscious of that. Thank you. It's an excellent question and an excellent observation which really reinforces the work our people and capability department do and about our workforce planning and the systems we have in place. We forecast out at least five years on what our workforce looks like and predict retirements and people who are going to leave.

We work very much in an environment where I think the younger cohort will still be doing 40 or 50 years of service, I'm not sure, but we factor in that there will be some natural people who leave the business, that's healthy. We have a very, very strong workforce planning tool that manages this from all levels of the organisation, plus we've really developed capability within the business succession planning.

We did have only one track engineer who could sign off track. We now have basically three track engineers who can sign off track now, and we've been providing a bit of that support to West Coast Wilderness Railway as well. We've developed capability, but we've also made sure we have a succession plan and resilience within key roles within the business.

Mr CANTWELL - It's seen as so important at the organisational level that it's oversighted by a committee of the board, so we have people and safety committee of the board and all of the data to which you're referring is presented to the board quarterly and the board opines over that and gives strategic direction back to management. The purpose there is just to ensure that it gets the focus that it requires so that we do have an ongoing operation.

Ms BURNET - Minister, do you have an indication of how many staff hours are lost to workplace-related psychological injury?

Mr VINCENT - I'll just ask the CEO for that, because we had discussed briefly about some policy in that area.

Mr DIETRICH - We've done a lot of work in the psychosocial area and making sure that that's clear within our business. We have zero tolerance for bullying, victimisation, discrimination, sexual harassment or harassment. I can say in the last year we had zero lost time, or zero days away, of any personnel due to those circumstances.

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Ms BURNET - You'd have a staff engagement survey?

Mr DIETRICH - Yes.

Ms BURNET - Can that be either tabled or provided to the committee, please?

Mr DIETRICH - Yes. The staff survey, which we had 80 per cent participation, we ended up with an engagement result based on our benchmarking of 61 per cent - the industry average is 60 per cent. The biggest item that we rated and scored highly on was 'the business and my leader cares for me'.

Ms BURNET - Do you think there's more work to be done in that area for the business?

Mr DIETRICH - We got a very high score in that area. There are certainly some areas that we've got opportunity, as you do with any engagement survey - particularly improving comms, one-on-one, those type of things - but we do have a lot of people on shift work. We're looking at those opportunities, but our survey clearly demonstrated loud and clear that the organisation cares for its people. I'm very happy to give you those high-level results.

Ms BURNET - Thank you.

Mr CANTWELL - That's not a one-off; we do that survey every two years. We ask our staff to give us their feedback - well, we invite them to give us any feedback all the time, but we conduct a formal climate survey every two years.

CHAIR - Just to be clear, are you putting that question on notice, Ms Burnet?

Ms BURNET - Yes.

Ms JOHNSTON - Back to the northern suburbs rail corridor again - my favourite topic - does TasRail have a value that it registers that asset as - I'm talking from, let's say, this side of the Bridgewater bridge through to where the rail corridor ends, wherever that might be. Is there a formal value on the books?

Mr DIETRICH - No, not really. We value the operational lines, but we don't have an exact value of what the rail and sleepers are throughout that part of the non-op line.

Ms JOHNSTON - If that disappeared tomorrow, what would be the impact on the books for TasRail?

Mr DIETRICH - There'd be no write-off.

Ms JOHNSTON - Nothing? There'd be no write-off required?

Mr DIETRICH - We effectively lease the whole corridor from the Crown, so the Crown -

Ms JOHNSTON - That lease as a value?

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Mr DIETRICH - Yes. So, the Crown leases the corridor to TasRail, and then, obviously, the track has value to TasRail, but all our track is [inaudible] so it has zero value on the balance sheet.

Ms JOHNSTON - And the lease value on the books?

Mr DIETRICH - It's \$1 a year.

Ms BROWN - Are you regularly comparing pay and conditions with the market rates and the mainland? How do you compare?

Mr DIETRICH - It's a very topical question and a very good question. Obviously to attract personnel and retain them, we need to be market competitive. We actually saw a large mainland operator come to Tasmania and try and attract personnel from this business and do a recruitment drive for train drivers, and I'm pleased to say we didn't lose a train driver to that recruitment process.

Mr CANTWELL - They were offering sign-on bonuses and the like.

Mr DIETRICH - Yes. It's not an apples for apples comparison, because all our personnel get to go home every night. If you're operating trains on the mainland, you're away for three, four days. When you're operating a train from Sydney to Perth, you don't get home for a week. All our personnel get home. Our base rates are comparable, so we don't have too much of a difference. There's some ups and downs across different classifications, but a lot of them have what we call allowances built into the rate. It isn't an apples for apples comparison, but we are not that different, and there's some that we pay better and some that are probably just baseline.

Ms BROWN - Okay. Thank you for that. The Bell Bay line is 52 kilometres of track and the transit time is over two hours. This is due to multiple temporary speed restrictions due to poor track conditions caused by lack of maintenance. How does management intend to address this?

Mr CANTWELL - How do we manage it?

Ms BROWN - Or how do you intend to manage it?

Mr CANTWELL - Thank you. A couple of observations. We wouldn't characterise the situation as 'lack of maintenance'. We would characterise it as prioritisation of maintenance that's required across the whole of the network. We look forward and we make decisions about where our resources are most appropriately applied. That corridor carries about 15 per cent of our volume, but the volume that we carry across the corridor, albeit impacted by 38 per cent of the corridor having a temporary speed restriction in position, we are still able to maintain our 97 per cent on-time delivery of product to our customers.

That's our key driver, and it's a key differentiator of TasRail relative to any rail operator in Australia. There is no other rail operator in Australia that can maintain a DIFOT delivered in time on full of that level. We have consciously deferred - might be the best way to describe it - maintenance that we plan to do on that corridor because it's more important to keep the Brighton to Burnie corridor in better condition. Just by way of comparison, the average percentage of temporary speed restriction imposed across the whole of the network is about

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8.6 per cent, so yes, we are consciously absorbing a greater level of track under speed restriction on that corridor. Coming into this new year, we've got a couple of million dollars -

CHAIR - The time for scrutiny has expired. I am sorry, Chair. I'm happy for you to have a conversation outside.

The witnesses withdrew.

The Committee suspended at 1.00 p.m.