

Natasha Exel

From: Brett Whelan <brett.whelan@yvr.com.au>
Sent: Friday, 2 November 2018 3:59 PM
To: ner
Subject: Launceston & North East Railway's proposal for a tourist/heritage rail service on the North East Rail Line

Dear Members of the Tasmanian Legislative Council Committee,

I'm writing to inform you about the Victorian tourist and Heritage rail sector and more particularly of the Yarra Valley Railway experience as there are very strong resemblances between the Launceston & North East Railway's proposal and the Yarra Valley Railway.

Although it needs to be highlighted that the infrastructure of the Launceston & North East Railway's proposal for a tourist/heritage rail service on the North East Rail Line is in a far better position than what the Yarra Valley Railway had in the beginning. As I have personally witnessed the infrastructure along the proposed route and found it in surprisingly good condition. So good that I believe that it is very near to being fit for purpose as an operating tourist railway.

Regarding the proposed costings to make repairs to the minor faults and install new crossing protection highlighted in various reports, my overwhelming experience is that "infrastructure experts" are unable to estimate the costs regarding the re-building and the running costs of the Tourism and Heritage rail sector as they have little or no experience within the sector or community based projects and are more used to working with large commercial entity or government agencies. Thus, their costings are mostly not close to being correct as they are unable to value community and volunteer input and as such are well over the real costs that Tourist and Heritage railways completed the works for.

For example, the Yarra Valley Railway over the past 4 years is being rebuilt to heavy railway standards to allow the running of heritage steam trains, with the railway being entirely built by local community volunteers and a small input from specialised contractors. In the past 12 months alone this has involved over 500 individual volunteers from 10 different community organisations contributing over 70,000 volunteer hours. Over 100 local businesses have provided pro bono professional services, free materials and services to the project.

This has resulted in this project over the past 4 years of completing the following at about ¼ of the estimated costs produced by others;

- Reconstruction of Yarra Glen Railway Station.
- New build of Tarrawarra Station.
- New builds of 16 Railway Bridges.
- Removal of 1000's of mature pine trees.
- Removal of all track and rail over a 9 km section.
- The beginning of formation works and drainage.

The below comments about the Yarra Valley Railway project would also apply to proposed LNER project due to the strong parallels between the two.

Overview of the benefits of the Yarra Valley Railway project.

The Yarra Valley Railway project has a strong link with local businesses, the community and tourists, creating a unique tourist product. It will increase overnight stays, ensuring it remains a platform to access more experiences in the region and beyond. The increased visitation will result in economic spinoffs for local businesses in the region and surrounding areas such as accommodation, retail, food and transport. It will provide opportunities and places along the railway to connect with the land and its history. The project will/is already drawing local, intrastate, interstate and international visitors to the region.

The Yarra Valley Railway will create a historical and tourism experience through the development of a rail connection between Yarra Glen and Healesville. This volunteer based project offers numerous benefits to residents and the tourists who visit the region each year.

It will connect and support existing and future tourist products within the Yarra Valley as connection and history are key components of the new railway. The railway experience will also express and celebrate the Yarra Valley landscape – rolling hills dotted with vineyards and farmland. It is a story of significance that will be realised through the rebuilding of the existing track and bridges. The completion of this infrastructure will enable steam / high capacity train operations from Yarra Glen to Healesville. Using heritage interpretation and the restoration of railway stations, rolling stock and work sheds, the renewed railway connection will explore the landscape and recreate experiences from the 1940s.

The historical component of the railway will express and celebrate the Yarra Valley's rich heritage, but the railway will also be dynamic and relevant making connections between then, now and tomorrow. It will provide opportunities and places along the railway to connect with the land and its history. The project will draw local, intrastate, interstate and international visitors to the region.

The project has received extraordinary community attention and support, and has been identified by community organisations and business interest groups as the project with the highest priority for the region.

The railway will have a strong link with local businesses, the community and tourists, creating a unique tourist product. It will increase overnight stays in the Yarra Valley, ensuring it remains a platform to access more experiences in the region and beyond. The increased visitation will result in economic spinoffs for local businesses in the region and surrounding areas such as accommodation, retail, food and transport.

Once completed, the project will result in an influx of local income that equates to the equivalent of 126 jobs and \$30M economic benefit (Remplan 2017). Local traders and accommodation providers will benefit the most from more residents and tourists visiting the railway. New jobs will be created through the purchase of goods and services by the users of the railway.

There is a clear imperative for governments of all levels to develop and implement integrated tourism infrastructure that will improve access for communities and significantly add to their economic prosperity.

In Victoria, the tourist and heritage rail sector is one of the few tourism products that cover the above statement including the below broader dot points;

- Economic – Local & broad reaching benefits
- Community – Volunteering, space, venue & wellbeing
- Visual – Restoration, beautification, landmark
- Infrastructure – Self funding after capital funding
- Arts & Culture – History, Heritage and built form

In Victoria there are about 20 Tourist and Heritage rail operators that are mostly completely voluntary. Importantly, none of these operators require ongoing operating funding support once completed.

The Tourist and Heritage passenger profile is more diverse than most tourism products and is perfectly aligned to meet the unprecedented growth in international tourists particularly from China – with a 1.4 billion population, this will only grow!

In Victoria, the sector carried over 1,000,000 passengers last year and has been continually growing each year over the past 8 years.

I believe that Tasmania is in a truly unique position to develop a broader Tourist and Heritage rail sector and the Launceston & North East Railway's proposal for a tourist/heritage rail service on the North East Rail Line would be an important step forward for tourism in Tasmania at very little real cost.

Yours truly,

Brett Whelan

President

Yarra Valley Railway