



Tasmanian Association  
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## **FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY OF TASRAIL ENQUIRY**

### **LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL Gov. Admin. Com. A**

This submission is produced by the Tasmanian Association of Tourist Railways and provides a brief viewpoint on some of the items in the Terms of Reference and probably an overall outlook of where the public and stakeholders perceive the bureaucratic process is steering a railway system that is not meant to prosper.

Tasrail's financial performance will depend on how it manages to increase revenue from all types of haulage and promote itself as a tourist and heritage transport infrastructure provider.

There are a number of factors to take into consideration:

- State and Federal funding is important to ensure that above and below assets are sound, reliable and fit for purpose. Essential and vital upgrades to those assets have been and are continuing to occur and the finished product will allow a railway that can be trusted to deliver consistently and as scheduled.
- The problem that seems to overhang is that there is inconsistency between road and rail funding as well as preferred carrier. Taxpayers are footing huge amounts into both forms of transport and only one of them is carrying the goods. That means that:
  - Money is being wasted on one of the systems. The ideal situation in Tasmania is, of course, to complete the railway upgrades and purchases of new rolling stock and then ensure that 90% of the freight that is currently on the roads is transferred to rail;
  - The so-called need to build a 4-lane highway between north and south will then become negligible and only maintenance funding on the whole will look after the roads that will be devoid of 90% of heavy vehicle traffic;
  - Roads are designed on the basis of subgrade stiffness and repetitions of the equivalent standard axle (ESA) where an ESA is a loaded truck axle of a nominated weight. Truck loading is the primary determinant for the design/thickness of road pavements. A significant reduction in trucks will see a significant reduction in maintenance and pavement refurbishment costs for the highway.
  - The road lobby groups would need to learn that the interests of the public (taxpayers) are more important than the loan interests of haulage

contractors' vehicles and that movement of freight to and from rail terminals will be more than enough compensation for long-haul trips;

- Tasrail's excuse that lengthy contractual arrangements that road contractors enter into can't be curtailed to allow long distance rail haulage to occur is not good enough. For example, coal, which has been a long-standing commodity favoured by rail, is carted in road vehicles from Fingal to Boyer and then unwashed coal from Hamilton is taken back to Fingal for washing. This ludicrous arrangement came about because Tasrail's predecessor and the coal company were not prepared to erect a loading screen in the south to allow empty coal wagons, having brought a load to Boyer, to cart the unwashed coal to Fingal. The consequence of that is several very heavy lorries and trailers continually running the round trip along the Midland Highway with subsequent damage to the road surface. Unless Tasrail is seen to do better in gaining business, it will never reach sustainability and be a constant drain on the public purse and that will eventually lead to closure. Millions of dollars will have then simply disappeared into the big hole!

Social, Economic and Environmental benefits of rail are potentially huge, compared with road transport modes. Most of them are obvious:

- Less heavy vehicle movements on highways, which lead to safer roads;
- Exhaust pollution is dramatically reduced;
- Economics in running one medium train of 20 wagons with two locomotives and one man (driver) against a dozen B-double rigs with a driver in each has to be a big cost saving on long hauls;
- In days gone by, the railways had large goods sheds that performed the same function that modern distribution depots for road vehicles do today. There are no such facilities within Tasrail's infrastructure, apart from those used by independent road haulage operators. Those operators utilise special side-curtained trailers for that purpose and there is nothing to stop Tasrail taking on this role as well. A daily count of heavy vehicles heading south in a two hour time period on any given day between Perth and Bridgewater will amount to an average of 35 container vehicles (all of which should be on rail), 15 log, fuel and miscellaneous vehicles and 50 line-haul vehicles carrying lots of odd crates and small containers for distribution centres. Enabling all of the latter to move to rail would make a large difference to main road traffic and surface damage and thus improved safety for general motor vehicle traffic and higher returns for Tasrail.

The tourist and heritage (T&H) rail operators in Tasmania have all been heavily trodden down by Tasrail, its predecessor and the State's bureaucracy for far too many years. There appears to be:

- An entrenched negativity towards tourist rail operations within the bureaucracy;
- Government is obstructed in tourist railway-related affairs because of the negativity;
- As a consequence, Tasrail carries out the bureaucracy's bidding in so far as supporting the progress of the T&H sector;
- Efforts of the T&H sector to gain access to Tasrail's network have been constantly blocked by all manners of unnecessary processes, or perhaps they should be called stalling tactics, and they have been occurring for years;
- Negotiations to operate T&H services on part or all of the recently closed Hobart suburban Line have amounted to nothing, despite much consultation, delivering of business plans and a tentative arrangement virtually agreed;
- As a stealthy method to undo that process, Tasrail removed trackwork at Hobart, pulled down level crossing warning lights and removed access to the closed Line from the rest of the network;

By contrast, this Association's President, Chris Martin, has just returned from a National Heritage Rail Conference at the Ipswich Railway Workshops – timed to correspond with steam passenger trains celebrating 150 years since Queensland Railways first commenced.

Queensland Rail (QR) maintains a large fleet of heritage locomotives and rolling stock which it makes available for leasing purposes and for their own special steam hauled trains. 24 tradesmen are employed year round on the fleet.

In conjunction with this occasion - earlier this year QR organised a steam locomotive with 7 coaches to travel over its extensive network as part of the Queensland Rail 150 years celebration. The trip was booked out well in advance.

This event generated a huge amount of publicity and good will from the Queensland public.

By contrast what does Tasmania do for Rail Heritage operators: –

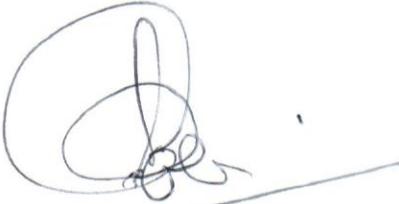
- Tasrail under Pacific National removed the Don Railways mainline connection points – even though they were paid for by the Don Railway.
- Bans passenger trains on the basis that the degraded infrastructure made insurance of passenger trains on the corridor impossible. Presumably with the significant funds expended on the corridor this is no longer an excuse.
- Shuts down the Bridgewater to Hobart line and makes no commitment to allow tourist train operation on the line. With the right management this line could become a major tourist attraction for Hobart.

On the 10<sup>th</sup> of February 2021 – 150 years after Tasmania's first railways commenced operation - will we be celebrating this major milestone in Tasmania's history with

steam passenger specials across our scenic state generating good will and great publicity similar to the 100 years of Rail Centenary in 1971 or will it go largely unnoticed?



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