

Modern Rail in Tasmania

Thank you for the opportunity to submit some ideas into your inquiry "financial sustainability of Tasrail." I am a layman on this but a frequent road user over the years. I would like to comment on the 3 and 4th points in the inquiry.

Background

I live at Elizabeth Town and have been here since the mid 70's. I have worked for long periods of time in Launceston TCAE/TSIT/TASUni (Mid 70's to 84) and then for 20+ years at Devonport TAFE Campus early (90's -2010). So I have seen at close hand the changes and growth of commuter traffic on the Bass Highway. Despite highway upgrades the road has become choked with traffic. Near election times both parties talk about renewal of the Midlands Highway but the reality is that all highways are full.

When I began at Devonport it was unusual at 7.30am to be held up at the intersection of my street and the Bass Highway. Gradually, delays have grown into quite considerable delays as trucks and cars stream by.

I also began to notice that as I was moving west to work, there was a stream of traffic heading east. I'd see them every day and its obvious they are commuting, probably to Launceston. If someone loses control, it is much, much more likely that they will hit another vehicle.

At the same time Tasrail was driven down under privatisation to a nearly non functional freight network pushing more trucks onto the roads. Roads in the period of my travels were upgraded with millions spent (billion?) and quickly road traffic goes up to the roads capacity. It became obvious to me and others I talked to, that rail deserved a rethink, both for freight and fast passenger service.

It's now possible to see on a straight piece of road populated with nothing but trucks and a few cars jammed in amongst them. This is not safe and it's also non productive time driving to and from work

Think of the scale of this and it can be seen that commuting by car is unproductive and primitive really. Generally it took me 38 minutes in each journey to Devonport. Unproductive time.

Obviously roads are incredibly expensive to build and to constantly upgrade.

It's expensive to the government, the taxpayer, and the commuter. If we continue, then Tasmania will be burdened with an enormous expense forever or until oil become too expensive or runs out. That day will come, we know that.

Opportunities for Rail

Passenger rail must be re introduced.

Compared to road it will be cheaper, efficient, and more sustainable. Once modern infrastructure is in place then it becomes a tremendously powerful asset of State Development. Rail is a measure of modern civil society.

Light rail from the Hobart outer suburbs to the CBD.

There is a group working for this so I'm sure they will comment. My one comment would be that there should be the means of including MONA in that line. Ideally one could park on the outskirts say Bridgewater and proceed south by rail.

Light rail from Latrobe to Burnie.

This track is also very scenic and would make a world class scenic run as well as a commuter experience.

Both of these services can be done now as the track exists. It could be rail motor electric or hybrid.

Fast rail linking (in particular) Hobart Launceston and the North West.

My vision would be an all new track as straight as possible maybe a wider gauge and very fast. Its goal would be getting people to and from their homes and workplaces. It could a dual gauge

line. Electric. This would be expensive but a one off cost. Road costs just keep climbing and the demand for road rebuilds will never end.

Tourism Rail as a Tourist venture.

Rail and Tourism

A useful addition to rail would be a connection spur line link to the Spirit of Tasmania. For freight and scenic trains. East Devonport would benefit by having the opportunity to have an expanded tourist role.

Regarding connection of Don River rail line to the main line. there is a growing market for "retro rail" steam experiences, etc.

The road into the WHA at Cradle Mountain is a nightmare and accidents are frequent. Why not light rail to Dove Lake and exclude cars altogether except for Parks Service vehicles. What an amazing way to give people a unique experience of wilderness without the anxiety of navigating past tourists in hire cars. The Hungarians and the Czechs have used trams as a means of visiting national parks, for many years. Stops at all the walking track start / stop points. It reduces "wear" on the Park and is a means of controlling visitation.

Rail and Culture

Many Tasmanian citizens who grew up with passenger rail grew tired of the delays and slowness of the service. Now there is considerable antipathy to the idea of using rail to push Tasmania forward. I think successive governments and road lobby groups just don't want change.

A fresh approach to rail is needed and politicians and the public sector need to be leaders with vision. It should be possible to live in Burnie and work in Launceston or even Hobart.

Rail terminals can be retail centres and state services like service Tasmania could be located at local stations.

Trains should be comfortable air conditioned and fast. Trains could offer a full WiFi environment, eateries and bar, and work areas. Some social services could be located on board as well. We need to look at Europe and Japan and China and follow the lead. The expertise to rebuild rail is out there.

Annual car costs fuel etc. would and should be dramatically reduced. We need to remember that oil is finite and at some crisis point change will be imposed anyway.

Rail terminals can be community centres and should be built as such. Well light, comfortable, safe, and multi functional. Retail and social services could be located in such a place.

When a State has passenger rail it is a state, when it hasn't then its actually not a civil society that has reached modern statehood. Our forebears in the 19th and 20th century knew this and gave us rail, but it wasn't carried on. Now is the time for this project to be restarted.

There is to be a new state planning scheme If it includes no planning for rail - what then. Its just another document that doesn't address the future, and you would have to ask - why did they bother?.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate.

Dennis Wild

