

Future Transport **Tasmania**

FOR BETTER PUBLIC AND RAIL TRANSPORT

Tasmania RAIL

A vision for Tasmania's railway future

Since 1978, Tasmania's rail services have been compromised by the competing ideals of running a profitable transport entity whilst avoiding significant investment and maintenance costs.

A series of ownership changes and a lack of political will, have almost destroyed what was once an economic strength for Tasmania.

It is time to look to the future, and consider carefully the rail system that Tasmania needs to have, and to plan and implement it.

HISTORICAL TIMELINE

1975: The State Government hands ownership of the railway to the Federal Government.

1978: The Federal Government's Australian National Railways Commission (AN) takes over operation control of the Tasmanian Government Railways (TGR). Dramatic changes are instituted by AN, including a dramatic reduction in staff and services, but also the construction of a new workshops facility in Launceston. But despite this and the purchase of large numbers of second hand locomotives, the railway remained slow and vulnerable. Many lines were closed, mostly due to insufficient freight customers.

1996: A study into the viability of Tasrail recommends its retention on net-cost benefit grounds, despite having never made a profit.

1997: The Howard Federal Government sold Tasrail to the US owned Australian Transport Network (ATN) for approximately \$22 million.

1998: ATN replaced a number of locomotives with rebuilt second-hand units, and also purchased the Emu Bay Railway company from Pasmenco.

2001: The majority shareholder in ATN, Wisconsin Central Group, was purchased outright by the Canadian National Railway company, who immediately ceased major investment in Tasrail.

2003: The line from Burnie to Wiltshire was closed.

2004: In February, Toll Holdings and Patrick Corporation, through their wholly owned subsidiary Pacific National (PN), purchase ATN, including Tasrail.

2004: The North-East line to Scottsdale was closed.

2005: The Derwent Valley railway line from Boyer to Maydena was closed, although it had only seen tourist trains (from the Derwent Valley Railway Society at New Norfolk) running on it for some years.

2005: In late September PN threatened to cease running trains if the government did not invest in the railway line. After much discussion Federal and State Government money was allocated to upgrade the tracks.

2008: Ownership of the tracks passed back the Tasmanian Government.

2009: In late May, a derailment destroys the track near Rhyndaston. The main north-south line is closed for over six weeks. It is the twentieth derailment in approximately 18 months.

2009: PN once again threatens to withdraw services on the Melba line (the Emu Bay Railway) after a dispute over the loader at the port of Burnie. After intense negotiations the State Government agrees to take full ownership of Pacific National Tasmania (PNT), effective November 30th, for approximately \$32 million.

PN has invested over five hundred million dollars to begin operations in Queensland, but did not make any significant investments in Tasmania.

BACKGROUND

Tasmania's railway network once stretched to St Mary's in the Fingal valley, Herrick in the North-East, Strahan on the West Coast and Marrawah in the North-West.

Tasmania's railway history since the State Government handed the TGR over to the Federal Government, has been that of a struggling business. With minimal commitment and low investment, there has been comparatively little success in gaining new traffic for each owner since.

With an antiquated fleet of locomotives and old rolling-stock, as well as a track that in many places has very tight corners, there is now much work to be done to put Tasmania's railway network on a stable footing for the 21st Century.

RATIONALE

Future Transport Tasmania (FTT) firmly believes that Tasmania's economy must have a strong infrastructure base in order to cope with any future expansion and minimize current energy waste and other environmental impacts.

For the last forty years or more, there has been a massively disproportionate level of funding allocated to roads in comparison to railways, by State and Federal Governments.

This has resulted in the perception that rail is somehow unviable or impractical. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Railways are not only cheaper to maintain, but rail is twenty times safer than road as well as around three times more energy efficient. Rail actually carries a larger volume of Australia's national freight task than road, but uses nearly six times less diesel fuel to do it than the road transport industry.

Some studies undertaken in recent years have suggested that road transport (in Tasmania) is more profitable, and that only long distance bulk haulage is a viable traffic for rail. Yet in Tasmania, one of the shortest haul routes in operation, that of the bulk cement traffic between Railton and Devonport, is in fact extremely viable. This indicates that under the right conditions, rail is viable in a vast number of transport circumstances across Tasmania.

Furthermore, FTT does not believe that profitability should be the sole arbiter of whether or not investment in rail occurs. The full net-cost benefits of rail have not been adequately investigated by government. When exterior costs such as road crashes, emissions, energy efficiency and safety are considered, rail is far superior.

FTT recommends no further significant bypasses, duplications or major upgrades are constructed for Tasmania's highway and major road network. Future transport infrastructure spending should be altered to give rail priority, to get heavy freight off the roads. If there are further delays in upgrading this vital element of the state's economic infrastructure, it will cost the state exponentially more in years to come.

There is also no legitimate reason why passenger services, tailored to the business and tourist market, cannot be sustainable and viable on a properly managed and upgraded railway network. However significant improvements must be made to the railway alignments before this can become a reality.

Tasmania RAIL

PLAN SUMMARY:

The Tasmanian railway system should be operated as a Government Business Enterprise, similar to TT Line and Metro Tasmania.

New locomotives would be ordered immediately.

Tasmania RAIL will urgently require new locomotives. The current average age of the locomotive fleet is 39 years old. This has extremely deleterious effects on maintenance, availability and energy efficiency, and thereby in ongoing costs. Rebuilding old locomotives has already been done to a certain extent by the previous operators; it is not sustainable. Various options such as leasing and a gradual purchase program could be considered, to mitigate the effects of the high capital cost of new locomotives.

New rolling-stock could be mostly constructed in Tasmania, for increases in forestry traffic, and potential new tourist and passenger services.

Infrastructure improvements are required to maximise **Tasmania RAIL's** competitiveness. Track deviations and possible new freight

yards at Devonport and Hobart need to be investigated and implemented if their potential proves viable.

Disused railway lines could be improved or re-laid and reopened, thus gaining further freight traffic for rail.

Some long since closed lines could also be rebuilt to modern standards, and increase tourism and economic activity in those areas.

Passenger services could be re-introduced (if analysis supports their potential) to various parts of the state and allow connections with the Spirit of Tasmania ferries.

ACTIONS

Future Transport Tasmania (FTT) suggests the following actions:

- A new company, **Tasmania RAIL** (Tasmania Rail Transport Corporation -TRTC) be created as a Government business enterprise.
- The initial aim of **Tasmania RAIL** would be to expand rail freight in Tasmania and to reopen currently closed railway lines. The primary intention would be to transferring road freight back to rail, particularly bulk freight products wherever possible.
- **Tasmania RAIL** would remain a publicly owned (State Government) owned business enterprise. FTT does not want history to be repeated again, and strongly believes that this is the only way for the railway system to have certainty into the future. For this to happen, the State Government must commit to retaining ownership and control of the railway and its operations.
- A long-term investment strategy should be developed. Comprehensive studies examining the full net-cost benefits for all proposals, and allowing public submissions would be undertaken.
- **Tasmania RAIL** should still allow third-party access to the railway network, should a private operator wish to commence operations in competition with the State owned business. However FTT does not believe this is viable under current commercial conditions.

- **Tasmania RAIL** should make it as easy as possible to allow tourism and heritage trains to run.
- **Tasmania RAIL** would seek to re-establish connections with tourist and major regional destinations, with the view to creating a worthwhile and sustainable passenger rail service. Whilst this would obviously be a longer-term goal, an effectively promoted, fast, efficient, comfortable and competitively priced regular passenger service could be successful.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION:

LOCOMOTIVES

New diesel locomotives would be ordered immediately.

Up to ten locomotives, weighing not more than 90 tonnes, and capable of not less than 1490 kilowatts of traction, would be purchased.

These would be used for the lighter lines and for shunting operations.

These locomotives could be hybrid battery/diesel locomotives (offered by United Group Rail) which offer much reduced emissions.

A further twelve to fifteen locomotives, weighing not more than 110 tonnes, and capable of not less than 2230 kilowatts of traction would be required. These would be to replace the majority of the current mainline fleet.

ESTIMATED COST: Approx \$100 million

Some of the current fleet of locomotives would be retained whilst new locomotives are being introduced and lines are being upgraded and re-laid.

A subsequent increase in freight traffic and services will obviously require more locomotives as it occurs.

Tasmania RAIL would investigate new technologies to determine whether or not more environmentally friendly and fuel-efficient locomotives are suitable for Tasmania.

These could include;

- Battery powered locomotives
- Bio-diesel powered locomotives
- Hybrid diesel/battery locomotives
- Hydrogen powered locomotives
- Gas-Turbine locomotives

-Electric locomotives (note that a very significant increase in the overall freight task would be required to justify electrification)

As new locomotives enter service those locomotives currently in service and experiencing the lowest serviceability would as a consequence be retired. Some of these could be offered to heritage and preservation societies within Tasmania, it may also be appropriate to offer some to general sale.

ROLLINGSTOCK

Returning forestry traffic will require new log wagons, as many have been converted to carry container traffic or scrapped.

Depending on traffic requirements, at least fifty new wagons may need to be constructed. Ideally these should be constructed within the East Tamar Workshops, with as limited interstate outsourcing as possible for common components.

COST NOT ESTIMATED

MAIN LINE DEVIATION

A significant deviation or series of smaller deviations is required on the main line, particularly between **Campania** and **Rhyndaston**. Its aim is to significantly improve transit times through that section, decrease wear and tear on locomotives, and reduce the risk of derailments on sharp corners. A study should immediately be carried out to investigate the best possible cost benefit options for improving the alignment of the main line. Federal Government assistance could be sought to meet the funding required.

ESTIMATED COST: From \$50 million to \$250 million.

BRIGHTON RAIL HUB

The new rail-road intermodal exchange yard at Brighton should proceed, however FTT believes that other infrastructure upgrades are far more urgent. Additionally, all rail freight traffic into Hobart should not cease. Instead, an intermodal shuttle service could operate between Brighton and the Hobart rail yard, to ensure that there is no additional heavy vehicle use on the Brooker Highway into the city.

SECONDARY LINE RE-ACTIVATIONS

Significant forestry product is currently transported by road from the Maydena district to other regions. The **Derwent Valley railway line** will be upgraded and re-activated to enable the transfer of this traffic to rail freight. This would also enable the return of tourist train operations to Mt Field National Park.

ESTIMATED COST: Approx. \$40 million

Similarly, facilities in the Herrick and North-East area are idle due to the transport of forestry products by road.

The **North-East railway line** to Herrick should be upgraded and re-activated to enable the return of this traffic to rail.

ESTIMATED COST: Approx. \$40 million

The line from **Burnie** to **Wiltshire** should be re-opened as soon as funding permits. Consideration should also be given to re-building the line to **Smithton** on a new alignment. Whilst this project requires serious consideration, it should occur only after the main line deviation and other projects are approaching completion.

ESTIMATED COST: Approx \$110 to \$150 million (\$30 million for Wiltshire)

ZINIFEX ZINC WORKS RAIL LINK

Negotiations with Zinifex would commence with the view to reconnecting the direct rail link to the zinc works and ensure this traffic is not carried by road.

ESTIMATED COST: Approx \$15 million

EAST DEVONPORT RAIL LINK

The potential cost benefits of a connection with East Devonport's container wharf facilities should be investigated, taking into account all environmental and potential tourism benefits, such as a passenger rail service connection with the Spirit Of Tasmania ferries. Potentially affected parties (such as the East Tamar Yacht Club) would be consulted and suitable alternative facilities arranged and compensated for.

PASSENGER AND TOURIST RAIL SERVICES

There is much popular support for a return of passenger train services to Tasmania, however it is clear that this will not occur without first a significant increase in freight carried on rail.

Tasmania RAIL will conduct a comprehensive study into potential passenger services.

Considerations should be towards (but not limited to) the following potential services:

NORTHERN SUBURBS LIGHT RAIL

FTT is aware that there are studies underway around the potential use of the line from Hobart to Bridgewater for light rail.

FTT also strongly supports the rationale as used in Ben Johnston's Northern Suburbs Railway proposal. This demonstrates the strong argument for such a service, but shows how the Brooker Highway is the most congested of all main arterial routes into the Hobart CBD.

Whether such a service would use battery powered vehicles as Ben Johnston suggests or train-trams depends upon what level of funding commitment is available, although FTT supports light rail as it has greater scope for future expansion.

HOBART TO LAUNCESTON RAIL LINK

A significant improvement in travelling times could be gained with the re-alignment of the southern section of the main line, and relevant deviations elsewhere (eg. **Andover** and **Vincents Hill**).

This would be necessary before any potential passenger rail services are considered.

Currently a significant amount of Government and business activity between Hobart and Launceston involves regular travel in private vehicles. The possibility of a fast and regular railcar service should be investigated. It would be essential for such a service to be much faster than it currently takes to travel by road between Hobart and Launceston.

As an example, a service operating four times per day, each way, would enable people to travel from Hobart to Launceston and return the same day. The train would have an on-board café, and business seats with internet and telephone connections.

A new railway station would obviously be required in both Hobart and Launceston.

Fully integrated bus connections would be established to various critical centres throughout Hobart and Launceston, including airports.

The railcars should be constructed to a similar standard as that of the Queensland Rail diesel tilt train (investigation into the viability of Tilt technology should also take place), and be able to travel at speeds of up to 140-160 km/h or more in regular service.

The principle advantage of the new service would therefore be its ability to be faster from Hobart to Launceston than travel by bus or car. Secondly, business people would be able to continue to conduct business whilst travelling.

Business could be encouraged to establish a convention centre in towns where the trains from Hobart and Launceston crossed. This would have the added benefit of cutting travelling times to meetings, and increasing the available time for such meetings.

It would also have the added benefit of promoting business activity in these towns.

SAFETY

With an increase in trains running throughout the state, a much greater awareness of the dangers at level crossings and being in the vicinity of railway lines will be essential for the public. A new safety awareness advertising campaign would be required. FTT recommends that a campaign similar to the one currently underway in Victoria and South Australia be created.

COST NOT ESTIMATED

WEST COAST RAILWAY LINK

As a long-term project FTT suggests a study into re-building the railway line between Melba Flats and Strahan (via Zeehan) on the West Coast. Support from tourism operators at Strahan and other parts of the West Coast could be critical. A passenger service aimed at the more luxurious end of the market could go from Hobart to Strahan possibly via a connection to the Devonport Ferry Terminal.

Provision could be made for a car-transporter or roll-on-roll-off service. Further assistance could be made available to subsidise local residents of the West Coast region (ie. Residents pay a concession fare), to ensure that local businesses and citizens benefit from the new rail link.

CONCLUSION

Future Transport Tasmania believes that Tasmania needs a modern railway system. This means that we have a lot of work to do. The infrastructure and investment required is extensive. However, it will still be much cheaper than constructing a four lane highway from Hobart to Launceston, and certainly much cheaper to maintain.

By removing heavy freight vehicles from the roads the government will then save further maintenance money, not to mention improve road safety.

If Governments are prepared to spend taxpayer's money on a transport system, then that system should be controlled by the Government. Only then can we improve the railways so that all businesses and people can use it effectively.

An increase in rail services will also mean an increase in jobs in the railway industry, not to mention the jobs that will be created for the upgrading of the lines.

There is no reason, other than that of funding, that precludes the state's railway network from being able to compete on a level playing field with the road network.

Furthermore, once upgraded, the railway network will be a reliable and active assistant in Tasmania's further economic development.

On behalf of **Future Transport Tasmania**

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Sources: Australasian Railway Association www.ara.net.au

Tasmanian Rail News (various issues)

www.railtasmania.com/arhs/trn.php

Hobart Northern Suburbs Railway (by Ben Johnston)

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