Committee for Ballarat Submission: Regional Network Development Plan ("RNDP")

The Committee for Ballarat is a visionary membership body that provides progressive and innovative leadership, enabling long-term social and economic benefits for an improved quality of life throughout Ballarat and the greater region.

Our membership comprises leading companies and organisations from across the region including local government, manufacturing, health, education, construction, professional services and tourism / hospitality sectors.

We make this submission to the State Government following the conduct of a series of community consultation workshops to support delivery of an integrated Regional Network Development Plan ("RNDP") in an effort to provide a co-ordinated regional public transport network where train and bus services work together to get people where they need to go.

In accordance with the terms of reference, the "RNDP" will consider infrastructure upgrades, network extensions and rolling stock, including next generation high capacity regional trains to cater for peak demand. The "RNDP" will be finalised for consideration as part of the 2016-17 State Budget and we applaud this initiative by the State Government.

Our Vision.

We must plan today for delivery of high quality public rail transport services between Ballarat and Melbourne, with strong inter and intra connectivity that meets the needs of our growing population. Our objective is to plan today for major infrastructure funding that will see delivery of a 59 minute “Fast Rail” service to and from Ballarat to the major capital city of Melbourne.

Commuters and regular users have lost confidence in our rail and public transport service. We need to future-proof our transport services to match projected population growth through early planning and subsequent interventions by successive State Governments.

Improved frequency and reliability of V-Line train connections to Melbourne is needed to deliver a modern commuter rail service to support the Ballarat region. Some peak services are already at capacity and there is poor mobile phone and internet coverage on the journey to Melbourne. Our rail service and bus interchange must support an expanding network of local and regional connections.

Public rail travel between Ballarat and Melbourne must evolve into a modern service that will meet the forecast increased demand, and be at least as quick, reliable and at a level of service as experienced travelling by motor car, currently 1 hour to the Westgate Bridge (non-peak).

For this to occur, the “RNDP” must deliver:

- the necessary infrastructure to meet required service levels in reliability, passenger comfort and ICT connectivity;
- timetables that are integrated with various forms of public transport, flexible and put the needs of the community first, rather than generic, through speed and frequency.

The delivery of this service will have the positive effects for Ballarat and its residents:

- encourage employment, tourism and the use of services by residents in both Ballarat & Melbourne;
- boost efficiency, economic productivity and ultimately supports regional growth.
A series of representations have been made by the Committee for Ballarat to successive State Governments since 2006 to deliver improved rail services to our region. These representations included funding commitments to:

- provide comprehensive ICT connectivity on Victoria’s regional public rail transport system (without imposing operating cost-burdens for private downloads on taxpayers);
- construct a second platform at Bacchus Marsh to improve scheduling and recovery from disruptions;
- create a new passing loop at Gordon, duplicate the Warrenheip-Ballarat section and construct a train-holding facility at Wendouree;
- provide additional rolling stock that would enable 4 peak services per hour (2 new ones) to Ballarat and Wendouree, and 2 off peak services (one new service) per hour; and
- produce a strategic business case for the electrification / duplication of Melbourne-Melton lines, duplication of Melton to Wendouree lines and provision of additional rolling stock.

A strong economic case exists for the planning for duplication of lines between Ballarat and Melbourne to be undertaken. This has been heightened by the rapid population growth of Ballarat, increased use of rail, expansion of residential planning corridors to the west of Melbourne and Ballarat’s growing regional role as the Capital of Western Victoria.

(i) Population Growth

According to the latest available forecasts from Victoria in the Future (2014), Ballarat’s population growth will result in the estimated residential population exceeding 142,000 residents by 2031, an increase of around 40,000 residents over the next 16 years.

This equates to an average annual growth rate of 2.1% over this period, which is higher than most comparable regional cities, exceeding that of Victoria, which is forecast to achieve a rate of 1.6%. This growth underpins Ballarat’s growing importance as regional services centre in key sectors such as health and education.

(ii) Ballarat Strategy (Today, Tomorrow, Together)

The Ballarat Strategy (July 2015) outlines a plan for managing this forecast growth and change.

It provides the framework for future land use planning, development and investment in Ballarat over the next 25-30 years.

It is important that the development of the “RNDP” with an integrated bus and rail service is cognisant of this planning strategy and not undertaken in isolation. In 2011, the Census indicated only 3% of Ballarat workers travel to work on public transport. Excluding commuters on the train, only 1.1% caught the bus, around 1% cycled and 3% walked. Almost 75% of people drove to work. Ballarat’s rates of car dependency are higher than the Victorian average.

A sustainable transport system for Ballarat is fundamentally about giving the community more convenient options for how they move. The Strategy provides alternative transport outcomes to support a growing population and addresses concerns related to increased congestion, rising fuel prices and environmental impacts. Key to achieving this includes:

- integration of various modes of transport into the structure and fabric of the city as it grows through strong and strategic integrated land use and transport planning
- making public transport more attractive
- planning for flexible and scalable transport networks that can develop over time as demand grows and technology changes
- protecting land for key infrastructure such as road upgrades and high frequency public transport corridors, such as the Western Link Road and Ballarat West Growth Zones.
The following are the key policy directions identified in the Ballarat Planning Strategy which must be considered as part of an integrated rail and bus service supporting development of the RNDP:

**Build a Less Car-dependent Community with a More Sustainable Transport System**
- Transition Ballarat towards a more sustainable transport system
- Benchmark travel behaviour measures against 2011 figures, to monitor progress towards a less car dependent future

**Ensure Land Use Supports the Viability of Frequent Public Transport**
- Work in partnership with Public Transport Victoria to shape the land use pattern of Ballarat so it can best support high frequency public transport
- Make better land use decisions around areas with the potential for transit oriented development

**Support a High Quality Walking and Cycling Network to Improve Local Accessibility**
- Partner with the community to develop a user focussed cycling network, as a game-changing enabler to growth in cycling
- Work with schools and local communities to improve walking and cycling connections within 10 Minutes of key destinations, as part of a Neighbourhood Links Program

**Plan for Future Transport Capacity and Demand**
- Complete the Western Link Road from the Western Freeway to the Midland Highway
- Investigate the need for new road connections as part of local area planning for townships and communities
- Investigate pilot opportunities to introduce a network of park and ride stations in Ballarat
- Focus on people rather than cars in managing supply and demand of car-parking

**Make Better Use of Existing Transport Infrastructure and Network Capacity**
- Partner with the State Government to better manage our transport networks and support greater efficiency and reduced costs of meeting demand

**Support Improved Connections within the Region and To Other Key Jobs and Business Markets**
- Advocate and collaborate to deliver key regional transport priorities
- Partner with State Government and other stakeholders to improve regional bus connections
- Monitor demand for direct air capacity and investigate long-term opportunities for a Ballarat Airport with passenger and freight services

**Improve the Efficiency of Moving Freight**
- Improve the efficiency of supply chains by delivering Ballarat’s developing regional transport gateway (Ballarat West freight hub)
- Encourage freight intensive developments to locate in areas appropriately serviced by identified strategic freight corridors

Committee has long been advocating for revitalisation of the CBD and together with the City of Ballarat, has identified the Ballarat Railway Station precinct as one of the key projects that will act as a catalyst for this.

We welcome the $25m in funding made by the State Government for development of a 3,000 sq mtr exhibition space in the existing bluestone sheds, which will support potential private investment in development of a 4.5 star hotel on adjoining vacant land.

The “RNDP” should further enhance transport connectivity to this major regional hub, making the Ballarat Station a key destination point for regional business, tourism and lifestyle / liveability activities.
In developing the “RNDP”, consideration must also be given to clearly identified transport routes and connections identified for development within the Ballarat Strategy.

(Refer Section 4 – Ballarat Strategy, Today, Tomorrow, Together, City of Ballarat, July 2015)
(iii) Ballarat’s Regional Role

Population is one of three drivers identified for Ballarat’s economic growth with the others being the rate of workforce participation of residents and productivity or utilisation improvements.

(City of Ballarat’s Draft Economic Development Strategy, August 2015)

Therefore, the forecast level of population growth presents significant economic opportunity. Accommodating these high growth levels will be a major driver of economic growth across a range of sectors including health, education, general support services and especially construction.

As the Capital of Western Victoria, Ballarat’s growth in the services sector reflects the important role and function Ballarat provides as a major services hub for the region. This includes secondary / tertiary education and higher order health services, such as the Ballarat Cancer Centre. In addition, Ballarat is the regional epicentre for major sports and entertainment with the North Ballarat Sports precinct identified for major investment and upgrade. This includes AFL football games from 2017 with the Western Bulldogs, which could see the Maryborough line used and a station developed adjacent to Selkirk’s for match day commuters, similar to that used at Flemington on race days and the Royal Melbourne Showgrounds during September. Under this plan, the Ballarat Agricultural and Pastoral Society will relocate to the South West corner of Victoria Park incorporating the former Ballarat Saleyards upon relocation to Miners Rest.

It is therefore important, that the “RNDP” considers Ballarat’s key catchments and the relationship it enjoys with other settlements and townships in the region in the development and ratification on these respective master plans. It is reasonable to estimate that this residential catchment currently exceeds 250,000 (extending west to Horsham, south towards Meredith, north towards Maryborough and east to Bacchus Marsh) and up to 400,000.

(Ballarat Regional Capital Plan, City of Ballarat, December 2014)

The map below shows Ballarat’s key catchments and key relationships with other settlements in the region and the connectivity from these areas to Ballarat as a hub will be critical to support Ballarat’s future growth in the service economy and regional service sectors such as health, education, retail and business services.
The State Government recently announced on 17 August 2015, a $416m funding commitment to the Murray Basin Rail Project to upgrade and standardise lines from Geelong to Mildura, Manangatang, Sea Lake and Murrayville, and re-opening the existing unused standard gauge connection between Maryborough and Ararat.

Whilst Committee welcomes this funding commitment, the “RNDP” must also consider leveraging further opportunities and efficiencies that can be gained from the investment being made in the Murray Basin Rail Project.

This includes not only delivering missing links in our freight network to key ports and markets by supporting future development of an intermodal facility (road, rail & air) at the proposed Freight and Logistics hub at the Ballarat West Employment Zone (“BWEZ”); but provide the opportunity to improve our overall regional connectivity through rail.

Map: Murray Basin Rail Project, the Transport Initiative, Business Case – August 2015 (State Government)

BWEZ is a project that will drive employment and transform the economic landscape in Ballarat and the broader region. It is strongly supported by Committee for Ballarat and the City of Ballarat.

BWEZ has been identified as the best, most logical location for the region’s next generation of well-serviced industrial land. “BWEZ” is ideally positioned in central Victoria and next to the Ballarat West (residential) Growth Zone (circa 14,000 home sites over the next 30 year period).

Committee has successfully worked in collaboration with key stakeholders including the three tiers of government, local, state and Federal, to secure priority support for the activation and completion of BWEZ. This includes complementary infrastructure – notably, $35.5m allocated for construction of Stage 1 of the Western Link Road.

Major funding commitments have also been made by the State Government ($30.2m) and Major Projects Victoria have been appointed to develop stage 1 (60 ha & 10 lot subdivision) of the BWEZ Precinct. No tenancy announcements have been made to date, however, the City of Ballarat and the Victorian Centre of Advanced Material Manufacturing (VCAMM) are well progressed in establishing a Bio-Economy Innovation Centre at BWEZ.

Construction of the freight and logistics hub would facilitate the development of at least 134 hectares of adjacent industrial land, generating direct output of $2.3bn and 3,900 new jobs.

(Ballarat Western Link Road Business Case for Stage 1 - prepared by AECOM Australia Pty Ltd, September 2010)
The State Government’s objectives for the Murray Basin Rail Project were to:

- enhance competition between the ports of Portland, Geelong and Melbourne for Victorian exports;
- improve transport efficiency through gauge standardisation and axle load upgrade;
- unlock private investment in the region’s supply chains; and
- minimise conflict between passenger and freight related services.

Productivity improvements will result in the agricultural sector within the Murray Basin Region being more internationally competitive as land transport costs for grain producers currently represents ~35% of the total supply chain cost. Ballarat has the potential to capitalise on driving improved productivity through added value manufacturing and further R&D as product moves to export markets through the BWEZ freight and logistics hub. It is envisaged the Murray Basin Rail Project will deliver a number of social benefits by improving job prospects for people in local areas and improving the amenity of regional areas by reducing heavy vehicle truck movements.

(The Murray Basin Rail Project, the Transport Initiative, Final Business Case, August 2015 – State Government)

(v) Regional Rail Link (“RRL”)

The introduction of the $4.2 bn Regional Rail Link (“RRL”) will deliver improved reliability and frequency of services to the Regional Cities of Geelong, Ballarat and Bendigo. The works undertaken includes:

- dedicated regional tracks from West Werribee Junction to Deer Park and through the suburban system from Sunshine to Southern Cross Station,
- new stations at West Footscray, Wyndham Vale and Tarneit,
- major upgrades to Footscray and Sunshine stations,
- 2 new platforms at Southern Cross Station,
- 15 grade separations, including the removal of two level crossings in Sunshine, and
- new rail bridges across Maribyrnong River, Werribee River, Lollypop Creek, Davis Creek and Skeleton Creek

Presentations made to Committee by V-Line personnel in September 2011 identified the importance of on-going rolling stock purchases to co-incide with delivery of the introduction of the “RRL” project, ie:

- phase 1 of RRL 2014: 34 carriages committed – 58 requested
- phase 2 of RRL 2018: 45 high capacity carriages required to meet demand plus a further 81 carriages to replace the existing loco fleet

The Napthine State Government made a $14.3m commitment in the May 2014 budget for the Rowsley loop, west of Bacchus Marsh and the Andrew’s State Government has committed $257m in the May 2015 budget for the purchase of 21 new VLocity carriages to be built in Dandenong. These funding commitments are acknowledged, with the “RNDP” making further provision for the timely delivery of additional rolling stock, increased passing loops and platform extensions to improve frequency to cater for the projected increased demand for services on the Ballarat / Wendouree – Ararat and Maryborough lines.

A review of patronage rates and trends on the Ballarat / Wendouree line in recent years indicates a lack of confidence in the current service with anecdotal feedback from our members indicating that road continues to be the most reliable and timely form of travel to Melbourne. With increasing growth in the Western corridor of Melbourne, access from our region for business, freight movement and recreational / tourism purposes will continue to be restricted by not having a rail service that meets these needs of our growing population.
Committee for Ballarat has been long advocating for a faster, more frequent and reliable train service through its Fast Track Ballarat task team.

Passenger rail use Melbourne-Ballarat is outstripping the capability of the system for some important travel times and route segments. Investments to provide for greater use have been slow to eventuate. Passenger rail continues provides systemic efficiencies and economies of scale compared with road transport.

Reliable, well-serviced and efficient rail connectivity with Melbourne is essential for workforce supply and productivity during travel, and to relieve pressure on increasingly compromised road connectivity. Deloitte/Access Economics in its report “The Journey to a Better Australia: The True Value of Rail” identifies the value of rail transport in terms of reduction in congestion, reduction in carbon emissions, reduced accident costs and the freeing up of road infrastructure.

**Scorecard … Progress Report as at September 2015**

- **$40 million** was committed in the May 2014 State Budget to deliver wi-fi connectivity on regional rail services.
- **$340 million** announced in June 2015 for Mobile Black Spot funding in regional and rural Australia, with $165 million from Telstra, $94.8 million from the Federal Government and tens of millions in targeted additional funding from State and Local Governments over the next 3 years.
We welcome the Black Spot funding announcements made and the townships targeted. However, it is not clear whether this funding will address the needs along the rail corridor to provide free wi-fi on regional Vline services including Ballarat. We are maintaining pressure on and representations to the State Government with project linked to $100m Blackspot funding from Federal Government.

- **$14.2 million** was committed in the May 2014 State Budget for a passing loop to be constructed at Rowsley (near Bacchus Marsh)
  
  Tenders have been called and construction will commence in September / October 2015 with completion set for 2016.
  
  - No funding has been announced for a second platform at Bacchus Marsh.

- New holding yards are being considered as part of the BWEZ freight / logistics hub development.
  
  Continued focus is required to ensure scheduling of services via RRL completion – a new timetable has commenced, as announced by the Minister for Public Transport, Hon Jacinta Allan in May 2015.

- **$237 million** was committed in the May 2015 State Budget for 21 new VLocity train carriages (built in Dandenong).
  
  In September 2011, Vline identified the importance of rolling stock purchases to coincide with delivery of the introduction of the “RRL” project which included
  
  - phase 1 of RRL 2014: 34 carriages committed – 58 requested
  - phase 2 of RRL 2018: 45 high capacity carriages required to meet demand plus a further 81 carriages to replace the existing loco fleet

  Whilst acknowledging the recent order and funding commitments by the State Government, it is important that rolling stock is ordered and manufactured to meet projected demand making provision for production timelines. An interim measure would be to investigate options for transferring / lease rolling stock from alternate locations, which might be surplus to requirements, to address shortfalls.

- **$416 million** is being commitment to the Murray Basin Rail Project to upgrade and standardise lines from Geelong to Mildura, Manangatang, Sea Lake and Murrayville, and re-opening the existing unused standard gauge connection between Maryborough and Ararat.

  The State Government as part of developing the Regional Network Development Plan need to identify opportunities to improve connectivity from townships and communities that are using regional cities such as Ballarat as a hub for services such as education and health.

- While RRL makes future provision for the electrification of a dedicated line to Melton, this is approximately 10-15 years away.

  Recent announcements made by the State Government regarding Planning approvals for new urban growth areas in Rockbank and to the West of Melbourne, combined with projected population growth in the Regional Cities of Geelong, Ballarat and Bendigo, combine to place increased pressure on the need for extension of Metro Rail Services through the electrification and duplication of specific lines. We continue to advocate to the Minister of Public Transport, the Hon Jacinta Allan, and the State Government to conduct a feasibility study into duplication of the line between Ballarat and Melbourne.
Recommendations

Therefore, the objectives and recommendations in previous representations to the State Government by our FastTrack Ballarat task team remain unaltered and are restated with this submission, ie:

1. provide comprehensive ICT connectivity on Victoria’s regional public rail transport system.
2. construct a second platform at Bacchus Marsh to improve scheduling and recovery from disruptions.
3. create a new passing loop at Gordon, duplicate the Warrenheip-Ballarat section, construct a train-holding facility at Wendouree and provide additional rolling stock. This would provide 4 peak services per hour (2 new ones) to Ballarat and Wendouree, and 2 off peak services (one new service) per hour.
4. produce a strategic/business case for the electrification (duplication) of Melbourne-Melton lines, duplication of Melton to Wendouree lines and provision of further additional rolling stock. This will provide the case for duplication of lines between Ballarat and Melbourne and achievement of modestly rapid, frequent and reliable services, after which implementation timelines can be established.

Key benefits upon implementation of these recommendations are:

1. resident commuters will experience more reliable and frequent services on better equipped rolling stock with shorter travel times. Working commuters will have opportunities for higher productivity.
2. improved connections with Melbourne and with gateways to the world enhance the abilities of Ballarat residents to achieve economic, lifestyle and environmental benefits. This also applies to residents across the wider region.
3. reduced reliance on road travel to Melbourne with the consequent benefits of freeing up of capacity on Westgate Bridge and Ring Road.
4. regional communities, together with urban and peri-urban growth centres to the west of Melbourne, will be able to travel to Ballarat for work, recreation, tourism, education and health services.

John Kilgour
10 September 2015