



TABLE TALK

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TOP TABLE TALK – HIGH SPEED RAIL

Land deals sealed for \$200bn high-speed east-coast rail link

by Sarah Martin, the *Australian* 14 July

Work on the 40-year nation-building infrastructure project, which would create eight new regional cities, could begin within five years if it wins support from three tiers of government and affected communities. The private company behind the ambitious plan, Consolidated Land and Rail Australia (CLARA), has met Malcolm Turnbull and the Victorian and NSW governments to seek support for the project, which it claims will not require any capital investment from taxpayers. If the world's fastest trains were used for the rail line, the travel time for the 915 km route would be as little as 110 minutes.

The multi-billion-dollar project is being heralded as one of the world's largest ever high-speed rail infrastructure projects, with the potential to ease pressure on Sydney and Melbourne as their populations grow over coming decades, CLARA co-founder and chairman Nick Cleary said the project could be funded through the "value capture" of land that would be transformed from mostly farming land to new city developments.

Under the value-capture model, land bought for \$1000 a lot could be sold for housing for up to \$150,000, allowing the profit margin to developers to fund the rail and civil infrastructure needed. "We are a decentralisation program," Mr Cleary said ahead of the project's official launch in Melbourne today. The train allows for the cities to be viable, and the cities make the train viable — they are symbiotic. We don't anticipate asking any level of government for a direct financial injection; what we really need is the assistance to plan out these communities to secure the corridors of the rail which state governments have to do. We are under no illusions as to how difficult it is, and we are buoyed by the fact that both commonwealth and state government are open to enter into co-ordinated discussions."

The new city sites will be greenfield developments that are at most 15 km away from existing regional towns, with land at each of the eight target sites already - secured. The company has been negotiating with

property owners for the past 12 months, and has - secured legal rights over 40 per cent of the land needed for the development, more than 16,000 hectares, through option agreements signed with about 70 land owners.

"They are contracts to purchase on condition that we pass the regulatory milestones that we need, which is basically having a mandate from the state government in return for us to provide the rail and civil infrastructure," Mr Cleary said. They (the new cities) will be stand-alone, sustainable, smart and designed from the internet up."

The company also intends to fund the acquisition of the rail corridor, estimated at \$1.2bn, but the legal apparatus to do so rests with the states and could be done through compulsory acquisition.

The project has established a high-profile advisory board that includes former NSW premier Barry O'Farrell and former Victorian premier Steve Bracks, along with recently retired federal trade minister Andrew Robb. American board members are also involved in guiding the project, including former US diplomat Niels Marquardt, former US secretary of transportation Ray LaHood, former White House fellow and City of Chicago chief financial officer Lois Scott, and former Clinton advisers David Wilhelm and Mark Doyle.

Mr Bracks said that while there was public scepticism about the project, given previous failed attempts at a high-speed rail link between the nation's two largest cities, he believed the funding model being promoted by CLARA was a key difference that made the project viable. "I understand the scepticism, but this is a different proposal," the former premier said. "It is as much about regional development, and if you like, uplift in land value capture as part of that. It is a regional development project as much as it is a rail project. I think it deserves consideration because the public benefit would be enormous."

Mr O'Farrell said that past proposals had failed because of unrealistic demands on the public purse. "What excites me is rather than it being a thought bubble from federal or state governments it is coming directly from the private sector, and the bald fact is that

only the private sector can deliver and pay for a project of this size," the former NSW premier said. "And secondly they are being upfront about how it will be paid for which essentially is about the development of regional cities."

Phase one of the project would be focused on the greater Shepparton area, north of Melbourne, with high-speed rail connecting the two to be operational in about a decade at a cost of about \$13bn.

The company is confident that if the plan is supported through the regulatory period by government at all levels, it could be "turning dirt" by 2021. A linked line from Sydney through to Melbourne could be operational by the 2040s, with the new cities being developed and populated through the 2020s and 2030s. But Mr Cleary said the government needed to help push the project before urban sprawl threatened to make the acquisition of the rail corridor too difficult. "One of the reasons we are acting now is so that the corridor doesn't get lost to further urban sprawl," he said. "Now is a very, very defined window of opportunity to get this off the ground. If we leave it now and come back in 10 years the opportunity could be lost."

The consortium met the Prime Minister in March, who is understood to be encouraging of the proposal. It also met Victorian Treasurer Tim Pallas and NSW Premier Mike Baird in April. "We have been invited to provide more details and there has been an openness to carry on further discussions," Mr Cleary said. "There are challenges; we don't want to give the impression that we thought this was going to be easy. This is a big project and everybody needs to be hands on. "This is a national discussion, it is a national decision about the next 50 years of our nation and we can't allow sectional specific interest to play too large a role in any of this. There has to be balance reached, there has got to be compromise and we come to it with an open mind and good intentions."

More information at <http://www.clara.com.au/>

NSW: High Speed Rail to everywhere by Matt O'Sullivan, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 June

A rapidly growing list of large investors and property developers is in a high-stakes race to win state government backing for mega rail projects, including a Chinese-backed proposal for a fast-rail line between central Sydney and Wollongong. The plans are at various stages of development and come just weeks before a joint state and federal options paper on the viability of building an express rail link to the new airport at Badgerys Creek in western Sydney is due to be released. Most of the projects are predicated on funding a substantial part of them by placing levies on new homes and businesses built along the proposed lines and train stations.

Sydney property developer Centurion, the local partner for state-owned Chinese interests, is proposing a fast rail from Sydney to the Illawarra as part of a more ambitious high-speed train project for NSW. It boasts

that an enhanced link to the Illawarra will slash travel times between Redfern in inner Sydney and Wollongong by more than half to about 35 minutes. But Centurion's proposal is only one of the projects under development and lobbying for government support. They include:

- A metro-style line from Central Station to Westmead via Olympic Park and Parramatta, eventually linking to the planned Western Sydney Airport.
- North-south rail line linking Sydney's north-west to Western Line at St Marys, Bringelly, the South West Rail Link at Leppington and Campbelltown.

With a rapidly increasing population, Sydney and its satellite cities are proving to be a big drawcard for Australian and overseas investors eager to become involved in major rail projects. The proposals are in addition to the mammoth government projects under way such as Sydney's \$20 billion-plus metro railway, and new CBD and Parramatta light rail lines.

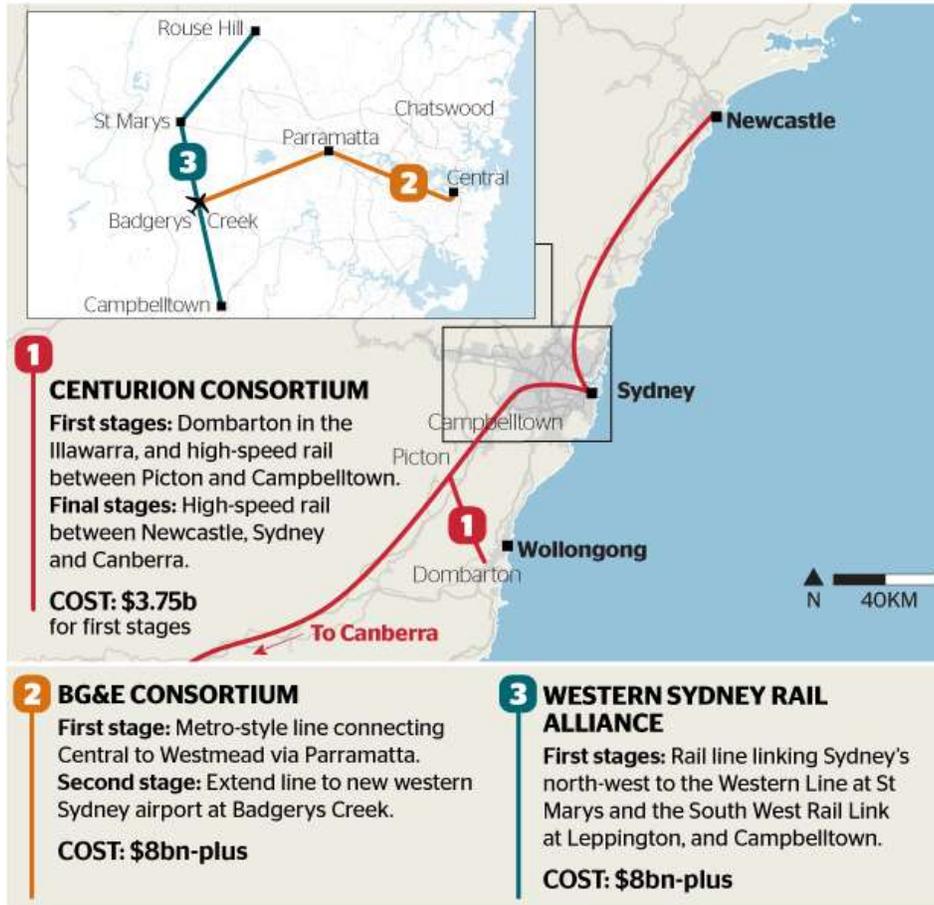
Critics say many of the private-sector proposals are pushed by property developers whose primary aim is to unlock housing development and enrich themselves, rather than build public transport where it is needed most. But Professor Peter Newman, of Curtin University in Western Australia and a former board member of federal advisory body Infrastructure Australia, said it was an inevitability that the private sector would play a bigger role in public transport projects. "It is absolutely critical to have consortia now. We have been through the era of Stalinist transport planning and it doesn't work – there is no money for it," he said.

Centurion and partners China Development Bank and China Railway Engineering Corporation want to complete the so-called missing link in the Illawarra between Maldon and Dombarton, and connect to Port Kembla. Under the consortium's proposal, the dual freight and passenger line would link to a new 12-km section of "high-speed track" between Picton and Campbelltown. It would allow services between Redfern and Wollongong to travel at speeds of up to 250km/h on sections of the line, meaning an express train could complete the journey in about 35 minutes. At present, a limited-stop service between Wollongong and Redfern takes about an hour and 20 minutes. The consortium says Baird government ministers have told it that the plan for the new rail links in the Illawarra will trigger the "Macarthur Plan", opening the way for the release of land for construction of about 100,000 homes. Using so-called value capture, the group wants to fund the proposed rail link by imposing a levy on new houses in the area of \$250 a square metre.

The consortium also has longer-term proposals to build a high-speed rail link between Canberra and Newcastle via Sydney's CBD. Under those highly ambitious plans, a 45-km tunnel would run under Sydney, and connect Hornsby, Circular Quay, Central and Western Sydney Airport to Campbelltown and the Hume corridor.

Mega tracks

A large number of consortiums are jostling to win support for big rail projects



Centurion has been pushing its plans for a high-speed line between Newcastle, Sydney and Canberra for a number of years. Its call early this year for the government to enlarge the planned tunnels under Sydney Harbour for the new metro line to make them suitable for bigger trains fell on deaf ears.

Another group backed by engineering group BG&E and design company Conybeare Morrison plans to submit an unsolicited proposal to the state government within the next two months for a link between central Sydney and Parramatta. The two-stage project known as the Sydney West Metro Link is aimed at complementing the NSW government's \$20 billion-plus metro rail project, which is under construction. The first stage of the private-sector proposal is for a 26-km line from Central Station, Darling Harbour, Bays Precinct, Canada Bay, Strathfield and Flemington, and on to Olympic Park, Camellia, Parramatta and Westmead. The consortium says it has the support of a "significant number" of large property owners in a development corridor between Olympic Park and Parramatta. One option for later stages is to extend the line west to the new airport at Badgerys Creek. Another is to extend the line east from Central to Kingsford, Maroubra, and La Perouse, where the government has said it is keen to sell Long Bay Jail. The consortium is also open to eventually extending the line to Leppington, where it would connect to the South West Rail Link.

In western Sydney, several councils and large property developers such as Roy Medich and Tony Perich are also pushing plans for a north-south rail line linking Sydney's north-west and Campbelltown via St Marys, Bringelly and Leppington.

Western Sydney Rail Alliance convener Christopher Brown said the plans for a north-south line would provide a much-needed missing link in Sydney's rail network. "It would unlock Sydney in a blink. It stops western Sydney having to be exclusively car dependent," he said.

Fairfax Media is also aware of other private-sector proposals in early stages of development. Sydney Business Chamber's western Sydney director, David Borger, said extending the South West Rail Link from Leppington to the new airport at Badgerys Creek was the best plan to pursue in the short term. "As the first step, that makes eminent sense because the cost of doing it is by far the cheaper option," he said. "Once we have done that, we need to pause and think about the next step." The political climate is conducive to private transport proposals. Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull has declared his enthusiasm for "City Deals" that could include developers. Bill Shorten has also said a Labor government would set up a \$10 billion finance facility to be accessed through "innovative" infrastructure finance schemes.

Grattan Institute transport director Marion Terrill said rail lines were better suited than roads for applying value capture as a means of funding projects. "Rail is just much more promising because you can identify the beneficiaries much better than you can for roads," she said. "You can more clearly say that the people who live within 500 metres of a railway station will benefit."

The plans for the new lines and upgrades to existing rail infrastructure in Sydney and its hinterland come on top of an audacious proposal for high-speed rail from Sydney to Melbourne via Canberra and Wagga Wagga. The proposal is spearheaded by Melbourne group Consolidated Land and Railway Australia. A 2013 feasibility study by the federal government put the cost of a high-speed rail link between Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne at an eye-watering \$114 billion.

RAIL AND TRAM NEWS

Population projections

Projections of population by the Australian Bureau of Statistics – vital for transport planning - are:

	Sydney	Melbourne	Brisbane	Perth	Adelaide	Australia
1901	0.5m	0.5m	0.1m	0.1m	0.2m	3.8m
2001	3.9m	3.3m	1.6m	1.3m	1.1m	19.3m
2015	4.9m	4.5m	2.3m	2.0m	1.3m	24.0m
2061	8.5m	8.6m	4.8m	5.5m	1.9m	41.5m
2101	11.0m	11.1m	6.2m	7.0m	2.5m	53.6m

Queensland Rail CityTrain: Kippa-Ring line

There is reported to have been "good progress" on remedying the signaling system problems on the Kippa-Ring line, but it is still unclear when it will open. On 15 July a QR spokeswoman rather diplomatically said they were "urgently working to resolve the signalling issues. QR is taking the lead in finalising the commercial and technical arrangements required to get the signalling system up to standard, online and tested." She said QR was working with the Department of Transport and Main Roads, and the contractor, to ensure "an efficient, safe and reliable service was delivered. We have made good progress, but the task is complex and safety must be paramount ... we hope to have a clearer picture in the coming weeks about the timeline for opening the line."

Pacific National

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission approved on 21 July the acquisition of Asciano, including rail freight operator Pacific National, by a consortium of Qube, Brookfield and a group of global investment funds. "After careful consideration, the ACCC has concluded there is not likely to be a substantial lessening of competition in any market," ACCC chairman Rod Sims said.

Australian Rail Track Corporation WTT 8 August

A new Working Timetable for ARTC will be introduced from 8 August. It is on their website at <http://www.artc.com.au/customers/operations/mtp/2016-08-07/> This coincides (nearly) with Sydney Trains WTT of 6 August (see below) and John Holland Rail's new Working Timetable of 6 August (recorded in July *Table Talk*, pages 2-3). Those alterations in ARTC's WTT that have been detected are:

- to GSR's eastbound and westbound Indian Pacific and to GSR's southbound Ghan, as mentioned in the next news item, and

- a second Pacific National freight train daily conveying Sydney rubbish from Clyde to Tarago and empty return, as mentioned in the July *Table Talk* report on John Holland Rail's new WTT.

If normal practice is followed a new Transport for NSW WTT – at least for freight trains – will also be introduced on the same weekend for the Sydney area.

Great Southern Rail: Indian Pacific and Ghan alterations

From next winter, 1 April, the start of GSR's main tourist season, both transcontinental trains will be slowed – again – and made even more touristy.

The **eastbound** departure of the **Indian Pacific** from Perth, once weekly on Sundays, will be brought forward one hour to 0900. It will apparently, however, arrive Kalgoorlie at the same time as now (2050). There will be a "new and improved" tourist excursion at Kalgoorlie and a new "morning outback experience" at Rawlinna. The Indian Pacific will depart Kalgoorlie 79 minutes later than formerly (at 0120 on Mondays), run correspondingly later, have a lengthy stop at Rawlinna for the "outback experience" (0600 to 0805 compared to 0439 non-stop formerly), but due to the elimination of the former very lengthy stop at Port Augusta (0040-0315), it will run virtually as now from then onwards to Adelaide and Broken Hill. It will depart Broken Hill 35 minutes later (at 2000 on Tuesdays), but due to the elimination of a lengthy cross at Menindee, arrive Parkes at the same time as formerly. It is said to arrive Sydney 23 minutes later than now on Wednesdays at 1130, however this may just be a new advertised time, as there appears to be no change in the Working Timetable.

The **westbound Indian Pacific** runs unchanged from Sydney to Adelaide. It is then altered to leave Adelaide 80 minutes later than formerly (at 2245 instead of 2125 on Thursdays). However, the elimination of lengthy crosses at Bolivar (100 minutes) and Two Wells (34

minutes) means it runs earlier from Two Wells onwards. For example, westbound passengers will have their “outback experience” at Rawlinna from 1755 to 2035 instead of the former 1840 to 2110. Therefore arrival at Parkeston will be 36 minutes earlier than formerly (at 0030 instead of the former 0106). A longer wait here until 0255 means that arrival into Kalgoorlie remains unchanged at 0305.

From November the **southbound Ghan** in the off-peak season will arrive Adelaide 85 minutes later than now at 1255 on Fridays. (It will have a 65 minute cross at Two Wells – 1045 to 1150.)

The season for the ultra touristy southbound Ghan will be extended. This is the train that replaces the ordinary Ghan during the peak winter tourist season. It has an all-day stay at Alice Springs and an all day stay at Manguri (for Coober Pedy), for excursions, and it takes 25 hours longer than the ordinary southbound Ghan. This year it had 13 departures and ran from 3 August to 26 October. Next year it will have 26 departures and it will operate from 3 May until 25 October. GSR states that there has been “high demand” for this train.

These changes follow the withdrawal of Red (economy) class travel from both trains.

Sydney Trains WTT 6 August

A new Working Timetable for Sydney Trains/Transport for NSW, edition 5.25, will commence from Saturday 6 August. The main alteration relates to Hamilton-Wickham resignalling. The next WTT will be issued in October for the introduction of a turn-back at Parramatta.

North-South line: Freight Hubs

Construction of a \$39 million freight hub at **Barnawatha**, south of Wodonga, for SCT Logistics is advancing rapidly.

The City of Wagga Wagga has secured \$13.2 million in NSW government funding for the proposed Riverina Intermodal Freight and Logistics (RiFL) Hub (Stage Two) at **Bomen**. This includes an underpass and a 5.8km master rail siding. About \$70M of works will be required. A \$14.5M grant from the Federal government is also available. The next step of the proposed RiFL Hub project is finalising commercial terms with Council’s private sector partner, Genesee & Wyoming Australia (GWA). These negotiations are progressing well and it is envisaged that terms will be finalised over the next six months, but are still subject to several commercial decisions.

Loading of shipping containers with radiata pine and eucalypt logs at **Goulburn** for transport to Port Botany commenced on 13 July. Initially there is one train of 25 containers per week, but this will increase to trains thrice weekly.

Construction of a \$30 million intermodal freight terminal at **Bromelton** for SCT Logistics has commenced. It is expected to open on 15 January 2017.

NSW TrainLink: Bus alterations

From 4 July minor alterations took effect for TrainLink buses in northern NSW / southern Queensland. The 1910 from Casino (connect with 1841 arrival train from Sydney) now departs ten minutes later at 1920, and runs ten minutes later throughout to Robina. The 1510 from Brisbane (a popular service) now departs ten minutes earlier at 1500 and is also ten minutes earlier at Beenleigh, but arrives at Casino, for the train connection to Sydney, at the same time as formerly (1832). The 1615 from Robina now departs 15 minutes earlier at 1600 and arrives Casino 17 minutes earlier at 1855.

Sydney Trains: ETCS signalling

Alstom has supplied, installed and tested Australia’s first ETCS (European Train Control System) Level 2 signalling in NSW as a pilot trial as part of the Automatic Train Protection Project for Transport for New South Wales (TfNSW). The installation of on-board and trackside equipment covers four test trains and a distance of 11 km between Arncliffe and Oatley on the Illawarra line. The pilot project allows TfNSW and operator, Sydney Trains, to test the functionalities of the ETCS system which will support the further roll-out across critical sections of Sydney network. Deployment of the ETCS technology will enhance the safety and improve the capacity of the rail corridors.

Canberra Metro

Planning of the Canberra Civic to Gungahlin tramway is complete. Actual construction on the ground commenced in July – just a few metres from the editorial address of *Table Talk*. On 21 July The ACT government released four possible extensions for the tramline, and said it will announce its preferred route before the ACT election:

- City to the airport along Constitution Avenue then Parkes Way,
- City to the Belconnen town centre along Barry Drive and past Calvary Hospital and the University of Canberra,
- City to the Parliamentary Triangle along either Commonwealth Avenue or Kings Avenue bridge, and
- City to Mawson via Woden.

This project is still subject to the outcome of the ACT election on 15 October in which it will be a major campaign issue. The ACT Liberals have promised to scrap the project, in a similar manner to Victorian Labor scrapping the East-West expressway.

V/Line: NW freight lines standardisation

Conversion of the Mildura line from broad to standard gauge is expected to commence around June 2017. The section Gheringhap-Ballarat-Maryborough-Dunolly will be dual gauged. Conversion of the Korong Vale group of lines will commence about a year later.

V/Line: Warrnambool line blocked

The 1321 Melbourne-Warrnambool passenger train smashed into a semi-trailer blocking an unprotected level crossing at Pirron Yallock, 163.9 km, on the down side of Colac, at about 1540 on Wednesday 13 July. Nineteen people were injured and the locomotive and

carriages were damaged. The line was closed for the rest of the day and until Sunday 17 July. A recovery train, to retrieve rolling stock of the train, operated from Melbourne (via the Regional Rail Link) to the site on Saturday 16 July. It was scheduled to return as far as North Geelong that evening, and then to Newport Workshops (direct via Werribee) late on Sunday evening. A special empty car train was scheduled from Melbourne to Warrnambool on Sunday evening for "rail conditioning" and to place a train for Monday morning's up service.

V/Line: Alterations 18 July

From Monday 18 July the 0803 Traralgon-Melbourne and 1737 Melbourne-Traralgon were altered to be operated by VLocity DMUs instead of by an N locomotive and FN carriage set, because of the carriages damaged in the Warrnambool line accident.

Also from 18 July there were alterations to platform working at Southern Cross "to improve passage of trains through Franklin St interlocking".

Transport for Victoria

On 27 June Victorian Minister for Public Transport Jacinta Allan and Minister for Roads Luke Donnellan announced the establishment of Transport for Victoria (TFV) as a new central transport agency to coordinate and plan Victoria's transport system. It will bring together agencies such as VicRoads and Public Transport Victoria (PTV). Transport for Victoria will come into operation by the end of the year.

TasRail storm repair

TasRail's Melba Line between Burnie and the West Coast re-opened on 28 June, three weeks after it was closed on 6 June by a major landslide. TasRail chief executive Damien White said it had been a difficult task repairing it. He said trains would run twice a day to make up for lost mineral freight volumes from the MMG zinc and lead mine. The Western mainline, specifically the repaired Kimberley Rail Bridge, re-opened on 21 July. This enables a resumption of container, coal and paper services between the NW ports and Hobart. The heavily damaged bridge was the biggest task of 65 flood repairs across the system. The cost of repairs was about \$8-10 million.

Adelaide Metro: Gawler line

On 7 July trains on the Gawler line were replaced with buses so train drivers could attend the funeral of a long-serving colleague. Services were replaced by buses from 1030 until 1430. A Transport Department spokeswoman said the passing of a "well-respected long-serving train driver has considerably impacted rail employees". "This (solution) will ensure rail service levels are maintained for peak travel times and the Adelaide Oval football match (tonight) as well as allowing many staff to attend the funeral service of a much-loved colleague," she said.

South Australian Budget

The SA Budget, presented on 7 July, included the following new public transport funding:

- \$50 million for a one km extension of the Adelaide tramline to the city's East End as the first stage of an expanded network. Three

stops will service universities along the route as well as the old Royal Adelaide Hospital site, which is marked for future development. This is the first stage in a planned city loop around the CBD and marks the beginning of EastLINK, which will eventually connect to Kent Town in the eastern suburbs. SA Premier Jay Weatherill said the extension would provide an economic boost to North Terrace and Adelaide's east end. Adelaide City Council will contribute another \$5 million to help "fast-track the project". The government hopes work will begin towards the end of 2016.

- \$58 million over three years to modernise and upgrade the existing diesel railcar fleet.

Wellington Metlink

On 3 July a joint venture of Transdev and Hyundai Rotem took over operation of Metlink, the Wellington suburban rail network from government railway, KiwiRail. The consortium has a contract with Greater Wellington Regional Council to operate the service for nine years, with two three-year extensions, subject to meeting performance and customer satisfaction targets. The company has about 450 staff and operates 2,189 trains per week. A new service control centre at Wellington station, due for completion before the end of the year, will bring together operational controllers and customer communications functions in a single facility.

The consortium has promised to work with GWRC to ensure that the rail network is fully integrated with other public transport operations, including better integrated timetabling between trains and buses, and introduction of a single ticketing system

Britain's Rail Times changes format

Rail Times, the British hard copy timetable book published by Middleton Press, has changed format. Hitherto, it consisted of a printed compilation of the PDF timetables of all British lines produced by Network Rail, the infrastructure owner, and placed on Network Rail's website (see <http://www.networkrail.co.uk/aspx/3828.aspx>). These covered every station on every line, including suburban. The result was a huge book of about 1400 pages in very small print and thin paper. It cost £26. From the Summer 2016 edition it comprises an extract of the British pages from the *European Rail Timetable* (the successor to the *Thomas Cook Timetable*). Hence, it now covers only principal stations and does not include every line. However, it does include all services of interest to tourist and business travellers. The result is a much smaller book of 88 pages. But it is now has larger print, thicker paper and it claims, improved accuracy. The cost is now £9.95. See <https://www.middletonpress.co.uk/railtimes/britains-rail-times.html>

A Summer 2016 edition of *Rail Times* was also produced in the old format, but with numbers printed strictly limited to the number of pre-orders.

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Australian, Daily Telegraph, Semaphore (Signalling Record Society Victoria), and *Sydney Morning Herald* for Rail news.

RECOMMENDED READING & VIEWING

Sydney Trains: Running on time

Recently prepared by Sydney Trains' oral history program, this report and associated video traces the evolution and introduction of railway time and its influence on the standardisation of time in NSW and Australia. It includes the physical manifestation of the system via the clocks, watches, and time-keeping and recording devices that connected railways across the state. The report also documents the history of collecting railway clocks and their wider interest as collectable antiques. See

http://www.sydneytrains.info/about/heritage/oral_history

On the same website, is Sydney Train's oral history program's equally excellent 2015 report and associated video "End of the Line: The Electric Train Staff System", a history of the Electric Staff system of train control in NSW.

Metro Trains Melbourne: Level crossing removal

For a remarkable view of level crossing removal on the Frankston line see

<http://www.premier.vic.gov.au/the-level-crossing-removal-authority-presents-game-of-drones/>

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Albert Isaacs writes: On page 4 of *Table Talk* (July 2016), the following is said: "The Victorian Government launched a Regional Network Development Plan on 30 May – the first-ever long term plan to improve public transport in regional Victoria." The last part of that sentence was taken directly from a Media Release by the Victorian Minister for Transport and has also been repeated in other sources. C'mon! I can't recall such unashamed and easily disproved spin! *The first-ever long term plan to improve public transport in Victoria?* Just who does the Minister think she's kidding? Here are some of the earlier predecessor schemes:

VICTORIAN TRANSPORT PLAN – 2008 The Minister must have a very short memory if she can't recall this recent Plan by a government of which she was actually a Minister. (Whilst mainly centring on metropolitan Melbourne, this Plan certainly also included strategies for regional Victoria.)

REGIONAL FAST RAIL PROJECT – 2000-2006. Surely most current regional commuters would well remember that scheme and in many cases, it would have been the major influence in their decision to commute by rail rather than by other means;

NEW DEAL FOR COUNTRY PASSENGERS – 1981. This plan was the railways' answer to the Lonie Report

which, if implemented, would have seen the closure of virtually all regional Victorian passenger rail, as well as many Melbourne rail and tram lines and a number of rural freight lines. The *New Deal* was meticulously planned through thorough consultation with passengers, rural communities and even rail enthusiasts;

OPERATION PHOENIX - 1950-1956. This ambitious plan was designed not only to catch up on work that had not been done during World War II, but to also to make up for the problems that the railways suffered on account of the 1929 Depression.

THE RAILWAY CONSTRUCTION ACT 1884, commonly known as "THE OCTOPUS ACT" – 1884-1890. There were 59 tentacles or new lines planned by this Act, most of which were built and many of which still survive today.

So, despite what the current Minister, The Hon. Jacinta Allan, would have us believe, her recent Regional Railway Plan is just one of at least six; there may also be others not mentioned. That being said, my hope is that the 2016 **REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN** will turn out to be as successful as most of its successors in revitalising the network and in helping many people decide to commute by rail in the future.

BUS NEWS

Interstate

NSW TrainLink: Minor changes to bus timetables are noted in the Train news above.

Australian Capital Territory

ACTION: A new weekday timetable will be introduced on 29 August. A key feature will be significantly improved services for Weston Creek and the rapidly growing Molonglo region. This will include the introduction of the Weston Line – an all day service linking Woden, Cooleman Court and Civic via the

Cotter Road, an all day service via the North Weston Park & Ride/Bike & Ride, as well new services into Coombs. Some of the changes are:

- The extension of Blue Rapid 300 services to Kippax (West Belconnen) along Southern Cross Drive.
- Introduction of the Weston Line, an all day service linking Woden, Cooleman Court and Civic via Cotter Road.

- Extension of services to Coombs with Route 83 to Woden and Xpresso 783 to the City during peak times.
- All day services for the North Weston Park & Ride/Bike & Ride, providing a 15 minute journey to the City.
- New direct peak services from Crace to the City and Parliamentary Zone during peak times.
- New direct peak services from Florey and Latham to the City, Woden and Tuggeranong during peak times.
- Additional Xpresso services on Route 743 and 744 to cater for growing demand from West Belconnen and on Belconnen Way.
- Minor changes to school services.
- Tourist route 81 will now service the new Tourist Information Centre at Regatta Point and Westside Acton Village.
- Adjustments to Route 88 to align with new prison visiting hours.
- Increased service from City West in the evenings.
- Route changes to School Route 613 to service Belconnen for Orana School.
- Introduction of new school services for John Paul College.
- Minor school bus timing changes.

There is a new website for ACTION at <http://www.transport.act.gov.au/home>

QCity Transit will provide three additional weekday services to Oaks Estate, an isolated part of the ACT, closer to Queanbeyan than to Canberra. This adds to the present three services.

Queensland

Sunshine Coast: Three new bus routes will be introduced on the Sunshine Coast to cater for growing

demand following the opening of Sunshine Coast University Hospital (SCUH) at Kawana and growth of demand in Nambour.

New route 611 (Maroochydore to the SCUH) will operate generally every 30 minutes on weekdays and hourly on weekends, including major stops at Mooloolaba and Kawana. Existing route 607 (Caloundra to USC via Kawana) will also be upgraded to run generally every half hour between 0500 and 2100, and will also stop at the SCUH, servicing the hospital during core operating hours. Maroochydore, Caloundra and Sippy Downs passengers will also have access to weekend bus travel to the hospital from 0600 to 2100. These will provide greater access for developing residential areas such as Woombye, western Nambour, eastern Burnside and Palmwoods.

The infrequent loop route 639 (Nambour area local service) is replaced with two new hail 'n' ride routes: 637 (Nambour local loop) and 638 (Nambour to Palmwoods loop). Route 637 will operate generally every 60 minutes seven days a week, providing weekend buses for the first time to western Nambour and eastern Burnside. Route 638 will replace the Palmwoods loop of route 639, with greater coverage in Woombye and Palmwoods. There are more direct routes, more regular services including on weekends and an increase in the number of bus connections with trains at Nambour station.

Mackay TransLink: Draft timetables for the introduction of a new network in late 2016 are at https://haveyoursay.translink.com.au/mackay-bus-service-improvement-project/news_feed/proposed-timetables

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About Table Talk

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The **deadline for Table Talk** is the last weekend of the month, but contributions are welcome at all times.

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