

Rail Freight Alliance

POLICY STATEMENT





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The Rail Freight Alliance

The Rail Freight Alliance (RFA) is focused on increased rail mode share, providing improved rail connectivity within Victoria and into neighbouring states. The RFA aims to ensure increased investment in Victoria's rail freight system in the future to support the efficient movement of freight across Australia.

The Rail Freight Alliance comprises Victorian rural, regional and metropolitan Local Governments.

The Alliance was formed in 1997 due to growing frustration with the lack of rail connectivity both within Victoria and with the neighbouring States and the lack of investment in Victoria's antiquated 19th century rail freight system.

The Alliance's mission is to advocate for:

- Increasing rail freight transport.
- Upgrading and connecting to a National Rail Freight Network.
- A competitive, independent, and open access rail freight system.
- Seamless freight logistics that will facilitate efficient rail freight movement.

The RFA has a long history of advocating for improvements, efficiencies, and greater investment in the transportation of freight by rail both intrastate and interstate.

The policy positions outlined by the RFA in this report have been endorsed by the membership.

Foreward

Victoria is at a pivotal time.

By 2050, the freight task is predicted to triple, and by 2030, Melbourne is forecast to be the biggest city in Australia.

Congestion within Melbourne is now a major factor, and the cost of using Victoria's toll-road system continues to climb well above inflation. More than one in five vehicles on Melbourne's toll roads is now a heavy vehicle. This trend is not predicted to decrease.

The challenge of moving this freight throughout Victoria while keeping people safe, keeping within designated emissions targets, and providing a liveable state will be a challenge over the next decades.

Successive governments have focused on the immediate transport issues, rather than a holistic approach to moving both people and freight around Victoria and connecting states. The growth in the use of High Productive Freight Vehicles (HPFV) is evidence of this: a short-term solution to the longer-term issue of freight movements within Victoria and interstate.

Transport investments are often made to fix a current problem to justify that investment, rather than future modelling. Governments have the power to make strategic investments and set policy to direct investment and freight movements.

An efficient rail system with complementary infrastructure is vital for Victoria and Australia's economic prosperity.

A 'do nothing' approach will leave Victoria with a legacy that may never be rectified. To meet the growing freight task, we need to plan and take action now.

This document sets out clear recommendations for infrastructure and policy that will provide future generations of Victorians with a safe, clean, and liveable state.





Governance and Regulations



1.1

Freight Victoria

Issues

In 2018, the Victorian Government created Freight Victoria, a central point of contact for Victoria's freight industry to help grow our economy, create jobs and take more trucks off local roads.

On 1 January 2023, the Department of Transport and Planning (DTP) was created. DTP's functions now include planning and is comprised of one departmental secretary and six deputy secretaries. DTP is responsible to four ministers and one parliamentary secretary and oversees a number of entities delivering infrastructure projects and services across Victoria. Freight Victoria is part of DTP.

In Victoria, there are also four separate rail track access providers: VicTrack, V/Line, Metro Trains, and the Australian Rail Track Corporation (ARTC). There is a mix of broad, standard and dual-gauge lines.

A dedicated Minister for Freight and Ports allows a greater focus on logistics than previous governments, and Freight Victoria is also a step in the right direction. The challenge is that rail freight is complex and not given the priority it needs to assist in resolving the current and future Victorian freight task while meeting the Victorian and Australian Governments' emissions targets, optimising road longevity and keeping the wider community safe.

Rail freight operations in Victoria needs to be easier than it currently is.

Alliance Policy

The Alliance proposes that the Victorian Government place a greater focus on rail freight.

Mandate rail freight use where appropriate in government supply chains and major infrastructure projects.

Freight Victoria needs to be adequately resourced to focus on the entire rail freight task as part of freight planning in Victoria.

Recommendations

Freight Victoria is authorised to manage all rail freight and be appropriately resourced with expertise and funding.

Mandate government rail freight use where appropriate in government supply chains and major infrastructure projects.

Access Regime

Issues

The rail access regime in Victoria, except for the Australian Rail Track Corporation (ARTC), is controlled by the Essential Services Commission.

There are several different access providers including VicTrack, V/Line, Metro Trains, and the ARTC.

Access charges are designed to recover the economic cost of infrastructure from train operators.

However, road operators do not pay the full cost of their infrastructure, so the playing field is not level. Charges and subsidies should be aligned between road and rail freight.

Alliance Policy

The Alliance supports, in principle, the Victorian Rail Access Regime.

The Alliance considers it is appropriate to levy full access charges where lines have been rehabilitated to modern standards.

The Alliance considers access charges should be waived where lines are not in a suitable condition for normal freight operations.

Recommendations

Access charges should reflect track conditions and tonnage constraints and be waived on lines that are not in a suitable condition for normal freight operations.

1.3

Rail Freight Incentives

Issues

The majority of Victoria's annual freight task is achieved by road transport.

The bulk of the Victorian intrastate rail freight is bulk freight to Ports.

Rail freight is a viable option where the right infrastructure and government policy settings are in place.

High Productivity Freight Vehicles (HPFV), Victorian rail freight rail line speeds, train axle loads (TAL) and different rail gauges do not encourage private investment in Victoria's rail network.

Other states in Australia believe there is public value in reducing emissions and congestion, and making the road network safer, by incentivising freight to the rail network through payments to utilise rail freight.

Alliance Policy

The Alliance supports providing incentives to businesses to use rail.

Such a scheme could be targeted to individual lines or destinations.

Capital grants should be given consideration to encourage private investment that supports rail freight infrastructure.

Recommendations

Develop a scheme to incentivise the use of rail freight.

Capital grants be made available for strategic rail freight infrastructure.

Cooperation with Private Sector in Rail Investment

Issues

Between 1997 and 2007, the entire Victorian country rail freight network was privatised under a 45-year lease arrangement. During this period, maintenance of the network was neglected, with rolling stock and locomotives being sold or relocated to other states.

Since 2007, when the infrastructure lease was bought back by the state, more targeted relationships with specific private sector users have allowed co-investment, new rail traffic, and the re-opening of formerly closed lines.

Such cooperation can be extremely beneficial if the railway remains open access, where unsolicited bids for rail investment are received from the private sector, they should be transparently considered against public interest criteria.

Alliance Policy

The Alliance supports government ownership and regulation of the Victorian rail freight network and its infrastructure.

The Alliance also supports targeted co-investment by government and specific private sector firms for particular lines, providing the railway remains open to all and that such investment does not result in working arrangements or equipment incompatible with an open, competitive state railway system.

Recommendations

Continued development of Public-Private Partnerships.

Continued State ownership of Victoria's rail network.

Maintain open access to the Victorian Rail Network.

1.5

Consultation with Local Government in Rail Planning

Issues

In the past, consultation between the Victorian Government and Local Government in rail planning has been limited.

Local Government understand the importance of maintaining and developing rail freight facilities in their areas and how access to rail can best support new economic activity in their regions.

Alliance Policy

The Alliance considers that the Victorian Government must consult with Local Government in future rail planning.

Recommendations

The Victorian Government commits to greater consultation with Local Government around rail planning.

1.6

Freight Mode and Transport Policy

Issues

The Victorian Government has made multiple large transport infrastructure investments over many years.

Investment in the road network to support the High Productivity Freight Vehicle Network (HPFV) and the connectivity to the Port of Melbourne via road has been significant.

The Alliance acknowledges the investment made by the Victorian Government in the state rail network; however, comparatively, this investment is dwarfed by road investment over the same period.

Increased rail freight will improve air quality and public amenity. It will also increase road longevity and road safety, and reduce emissions and road congestion.

The challenge now facing the Victorian Government is the current condition of the road and rail networks in Victoria.

The Victorian Government can direct infrastructure and policy towards increased rail freight transport.

Alliance Policy

The Alliance considers that the Victorian Government should prioritise rail freight transport over road wherever and whenever possible.

Where freight can be transported by rail, this option should be supported by capital investment and government policy.

Recommendations

The Victorian Government set targets for freight and mode share.

Invest in incentives and capital grants to support increased freight transport to rail.

Standardise the Victorian Rail Freight Network.

Increase maintenance and enhancement of the Victorian Rail Network.

1.7

Victorian Ownership of the Intrastate Network Issues

Issues

The Victorian Rail Network is owned and controlled by the Victorian Government, with three exceptions. The Australian Rail Track Corporation (ARTC) controls or manages:

- The designated interstate rail network.
- The Maroona to Portland Line.
- The management of the Benalla to Oaklands Line (pursuant to a branch line management agreement with the Victorian Government).

Alliance Policy

The Alliance believes that all Victorian Intrastate lines should be owned and controlled by the Victorian Government. The Alliance considers it essential the Victorian Government has direct control over its intrastate assets to allow government investment and policy to control freight traffic within the state.

Recommendations

The Victorian Government take ownership and control of all its intrastate rail network.

The Australian Rail Track Corporation continues existing lease arrangements with the Victoria Government.

Strategic Planning



2.1

Regional Transport Plans

Issues

Most transport issues in Victoria, especially those involving rail freight and long-distance haulage of bulk commodities, cross many Local Government boundaries and often regional and state boundaries.

There is a need for statewide transport plans to be informed by regional issues, and for alignment between State and Regional Planning documents to allow for clear strategic direction and integration.

There is no coordinated approach to capture and prioritise regional transport needs.

Alliance Policy

The Alliance supports the requirement for Regional Integrated Transport Plans to further integrate with State transport planning, and for Local Government and the Victorian Government to work together to solve regional transport freight issues.

Recommendations

The Victorian Government establish a coordinated approach between State and Local Government to develop Regional Integrated Freight Transport Plans that identify priorities and funding.

These plans should inform the Victorian Transport Plan. They should involve appropriate Victorian Government departments and entities.

A Victorian Transport Plan

Issues

The purpose of a transport plan is to detail the Victorian Government's long-term strategy to improve freight efficiency, grow productivity, and better connect Victorian businesses with markets, whether local, national, or international.

The Transport Integration Act 2010 requires the Victorian Government to have a transport plan. Currently, the Victorian Government does not have a transport plan as required by the Act.

Alliance Policy

The Alliance calls on the government to endorse a Victorian Transport Plan with set targets and timelines for the following rail freight markets:

- Grain.
- Containers to and from Victorian Ports.
- Intrastate and Interstate intermodal traffic.
- Mineral sands.

The Alliance supports an overall mode share for rail freight of 30% or more by 2030.

The Victorian Transport Plan should be informed by and align with Regional Freight Transport Plans.

Recommendations

The Victorian Government expedite the completion of a Victorian Transport Plan, which includes the Freight and Ports Strategy.

Victorian Government provide required expertise and funding to implement the Victorian Transport Plan.

Government publish an annual report on freight transported, and percentage of road and rail in Victoria.

Victorian Government commits to 30 % of all freight in Victoria to be transported by rail by 2030.

2.3

Integrated Planning

Issues

It is vital that there is integration between strategic transport planning and strategic land use planning.

Freight movements in the Melbourne metropolitan area are expected to grow strongly, so it is critical that planning occurs now for freight routes and corridors, including rail freight routes.

Alliance Policy

The Alliance acknowledge Plan Melbourne 2017–2050 and Addendum 2019.

Regional Growth Plans should be updated to integrate with Plan Melbourne.

Victoria's new freight plan must integrate with the Plan Melbourne and Regional Plans.

These plans must have a greater focus on rail freight. The current investment in the High Productivity Freight Vehicles (HPFV) and HPFV Network will not address the longer-term freight needs of Victoria.

Recommendations

The Victorian Government continues land-use planning and transport planning, with a greater focus on rail freight.

Regional Plans should be updated.

Targets for rail freight should be established.

High Productivity Freight Vehicles routes should not be supported where rail can be utilised.

2.4

Buffer Zones

Issues

Many rail freight operations require 24/7 site access for loading and unloading. Tasks include bulk loading of grain, mineral sands, and wood chips, as well as containerised freight. When a greenfield site is established, a buffer zone should be mandatory as part of the planning process. There have been examples where investments in community infrastructure are located close to bulk freight operations.

Alliance Policy

The Alliance supports investments in intermodal and bulk-loading sites, provided such operations have appropriate buffer zones.

Loading sites need a legislated buffer zone to prevent State or Local Government from locating any new or existing community infrastructure within the buffer zone.

The Alliance does not support community infrastructure sited within established freight traffic areas.

Recommendations

Establish a consistent, legislated framework to identify and protect freight precincts and corridors, including clear buffer-zone requirements in the Victorian Planning Provisions. This should include planning overlays and guidance for incompatible land use.

Require early consultation with freight industry stakeholders and councils when planning new intermodal or bulk freight facilities to ensure suitable buffers are embedded from the outset and local planning challenges are addressed collaboratively.

Create a Freight and Community Infrastructure Compatibility Fund to support Local Government to:

- Undertake land use and noise impact assessments
- Relocate or retrofit affected infrastructure where necessary
- Undertake community engagement and long-term precinct planning.
- Protect freight access and industrial viability through updated planning schemes.

The efficient movement of people and freight has a direct impact on the cost of living, amenity, congestion, road safety and air quality. Investment in rail is fundamental to planning for a low emission and affordable future.

3

Infrastructure developments



3.1

Investment in and Maintenance of the Rail Freight Network

Issues

Maintenance funding for regional rail networks should be given strong priority. These networks are vital for regional and rural agribusiness, farms and forest and mineral projects.

Excluding the Australian Rail Track Corporation, Victoria has approximately 2,500-kilometres of active rail track.

The Victorian Government 2025/26 State Budget provided one hundred and three million for the ongoing maintenance of the Victorian rail freight network.

Alliance Policy

The Alliance supports recent increases in funding for major periodic maintenance of the intrastate rail freight network and the preparation of a strategic framework for investment.

A rolling program of annual track maintenance across the network should be allocated.

Recommendations

The Victorian Government increases funding for major periodic maintenance of the intrastate rail freight network and the preparation of a strategic framework for investment.

The removal of temporary speed restrictions become a maintenance priority

Annual rail freight maintenance funding to continue.

3.2

Speed

Issues

The speed trains can travel along rail is critically important for the productivity of Rail Freight in Victoria.

The majority of state-owned rail track is managed by V/Line.

In October 2023, the Department of Transport and Planning released the Statement of Freight Network Capability (SFNC).

The SFNC shows that some sections of line are gazetted as low as 40 kilometres per hour.

Alliance Policy

All freight lines in Victoria should be regulated and maintained to a standard that allows for rail speeds of at least 100 kilometres per hour to maintain competitiveness with road transport.

Recommendations

The Victorian Government commission an independent review of V/Line speed standards.

The review should incorporate any track works to bring rail speed up to 100 kilometres per hour.

3.3

Rail Gauge Integration

Issues

Since its formation in 1997, the Alliance has advocated for standardisation of the Victorian Rail Freight Network as a key goal. Benefits include greater competition among rail service providers, access to a wider and more modern pool of rolling stock, and direct access to ports.

There have been many instances where rail maintenance used non gauge convertible sleepers. This makes any plans to standardise freight lines more expensive. For example, rail freight from Merbein is currently diverted via Ararat to access the Port of Melbourne due to gauge breaks. This creates inefficiencies through additional distance and journey time.

Alliance Policy

The Alliance has long advocated for rail standardisation on all Victorian rail freight lines. Standardisation will allow for greater competition and capacity of rail freight and increase road longevity and road safety.

Recommendations

The Victorian Government rail freight broad gauge line maintenance should use gauge convertible sleepers

Plan and resource the standardisation of identified rail freight lines

Create and resource a strategic financial plan for line maintenance and refurbishment.

3.4

Rail Freight Pathways

Issues

Freight cycle times are critical to the efficiency of rail freight operations. The rail freight network's current access regulation and infrastructure do not allow rail freight to efficiently access Victorian Ports.

The passenger network is prioritised over Rail Freight.

Increased passenger numbers and increased passenger train frequencies have reduced the available paths for freight trains on the V/Line core network.

The current proposal to remove the Sunshine Regional Link Crossovers as part of the redevelopment of the Sunshine Station will push more rail traffic between Geelong and Melbourne. This increased congestion will impact the broad and standard gauge networks and restrict access and pathways.

The Maryborough to Castlemaine Rail Trail Project is currently at Stage 2. The Alliance considers that this 55-kilometre corridor should be retained as a vital link to build resilience into the Victorian rail freight system.

Opportunities to develop freight routes that are independent of busy metropolitan passenger train routes exist in various locations.

Where it is not practicable to separate freight and passenger services, there must be measures to ensure efficient freight operations.

Alliance Policy

The Alliance supports initiatives to establish dedicated freight train routes separate from the metropolitan V/Line passenger network.

Recommendations

The Victorian Government establish dedicated freight train routes where it is operationally efficient.

Do not remove the Sunshine Regional Link Crossovers.

Do not remove any rail infrastructure between Maryborough to Castlemaine.

3.5

Mildura Line

Issues

The 384-kilometre Mildura Line connects Yelta to Dunolly. This line was standardised as stage 2 as part of the original 5 stage Murray Basin Rail Project (MBRP). This section of line was reopened in early 2018.

Currently except for the 9-kilometre section of track between Merbein and Yelta rated at 19 Track Axle Load (TAL), the line is rated at 21 TAL and has a line speed of 65 kilometres per hour.

In late 2018, the 108-kilometre section of standardised line between Murrayville and Ouyen was reopened. This section is currently rated at 19 TAL and a track speed of 40 kilometres per hour.

In early 2020, a revised MBRP business case was developed; further funding was received from the Federal Government and in early 2021. The new business case did not allow for any further standardisation of the MBRP. Track improvements and signalling upgrades identified in the revised business case have largely been completed.

The consequence of the revised business case and further works has reduced flexibility within the region. The revised MBRP means that all rail traffic is now diverted around Ararat, resulting in an additional 128-kilometres of travel to access Melbourne an additional 256-kilometres return for rail, restricting a 24-hour turnaround for Mildura rail freight.

Alliance Policy

The Alliance acknowledges that this section of line allows access to the Port of Portland. However, the revised MBRP business case has reduced interoperability and has added additional travel time and cost to rail freight from the region.

The Mildura Line needs a 24-hour train cycle, accessing Geelong through Ballarat.

Recommendations

- Standardise the Ballarat to Geelong Line.
- Standardise the Maryborough to Ballarat line
- Increase line speed to 100 kilometres per hour.
- Review level crossing signalling along this line.



3.6

Sea Lake Line

Issues

This 140-kilometre section of line connects Sea Lake to Korong Vale. A further 72-kilometre section connects to Dunolly. This line was scheduled for standardisation as part of the original Murray Basin Rail Project to be completed in 2018.

In early 2020, a revised business case was developed and further funding was received from the Commonwealth Government. In early 2021, works began to sleeper the section of line between Sea Lake and Korong Vale with non gauge convertible broad gauge concrete sleepers.

Currently, this line has a Track Axle Load (TAL) of 19 tonnes and a track speed of 55 kilometres per hour.

The consequence of the revised business case and further works have reduced flexibility of rolling stock and competition among service providers that a standardised line would have achieved. The use of non gauge convertible sleepers has made any future investment to standardise this line more expensive.

Alliance Policy

The Alliance believes that this section of line should be standardised, TAL increased, and line speeds increased.

Recommendations

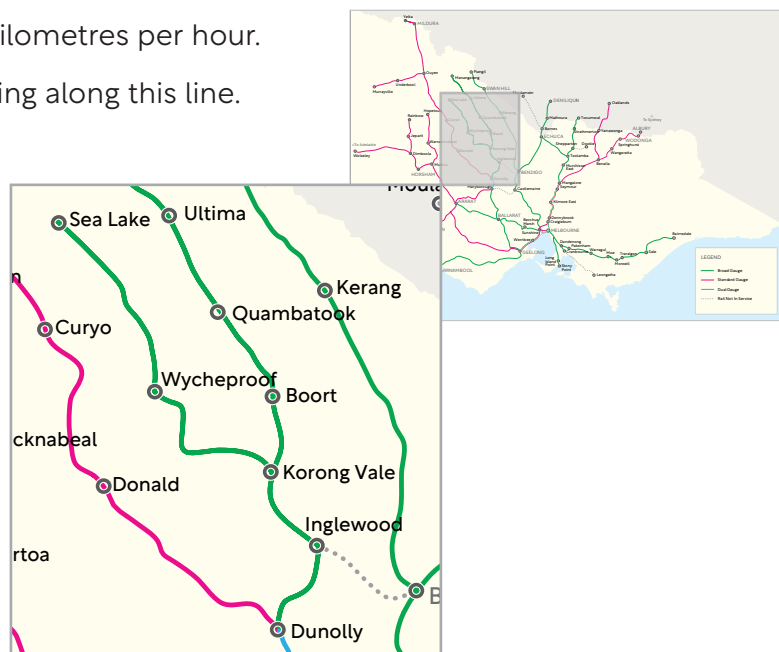
Standardise the Sea Lake to Korong Vale Line.

Standardise the Korong Vale to Dunolly Line.

Increase Track Axle Load to 21 tonnes.

Increase line speed to 100 kilometres per hour.

Review level crossing signalling along this line.



3.7

Manangatang Line

Issues

This 175-kilometre section connects to Korong Vale. A further 72-kilometre section connects to Dunolly.

This line was scheduled for standardisation as part of the original Murray Basin Rail Project and to be completed in 2018.

Urgent works were undertaken in 2019 to keep this line open. Twenty-three million dollars was invested, replacing 50,000 sleepers and resurfacing the track between the Manangatang and Lalbert.

In early 2025, the Minister approved the Environmental Effects Statement for the Goschen Mineral Sands and Rare Earths Project. The project area is 1,479 hectares and is scheduled to be operational in 2026. The mine has an estimated lifespan of 20 to 25 years.

The intermodal facility at Ultima has the capacity to manage the freight task for rare earth and local exports. This would require at least 5 trains per week.

Currently this line has a Track Axle Load (TAL) of 19 tonnes and a track speed of 40 kilometres per hour for 146-kilometre section of line between Manangatang and Boort.

Alliance Policy

The Alliance believes that this section of line should be standardised, TAL increased, line speeds increased, and signalling assessed.

Recommendations

Standardise the Manangatang to Korong Vale Line.

Standardise the Korong Vale to Dunolly Line.

Increase Track Axle Load to 21 tonnes.

Increase line speed to 100 kilometres per hour.

Review level crossing signalling along this line.



3.8

Swan Hill Line

Issues

This 227-kilometre section of broad gauge line comprises the 183-kilometre Bendigo to Swan Hill section of track, and a Track Axle Load (TAL) of 20 tonnes and gazetted at 65 kilometres per hour for freight. The 44-kilometre Paingil to Swan Hill section has a 20 TAL and line speed of 40 kilometres per hour.

Approximately 100 tonnes of grain is transported by rail on this line annually.

Alliance Policy

The Alliance believes that this section of line should remain broad gauge in the medium term. TAL and line speeds should be increased, and its signalling should be assessed.

Recommendations

Maintain Paingil to Swan Hill section at 40 kilometres per hour.

Increase Track Axle Load to 21 tonnes.

Increase line speed to 100 kilometres per hour.

Review level crossing signalling along this line.



3.9

Maryborough to Ararat Line

Issues

This 88-kilometre section of standardised line has a Track Axle Load (TAL) of 21 tonnes and a freight line speed of 65 kilometres per hour. The line connects the Mildura Line to Ararat and allows access to the ARTC network.

The Maryborough to Ararat Line was the second part of the original Murray Basin Rail Project (MBRP) and the rescoped MBRP.

The line reopened in early 2018, however the works were not completed to the contracted specifications and targets for TAL and line speeds were not achieved.

In early 2020, a revised business case was developed, and further funding was received from the Commonwealth Government. In early 2021, further track upgrades, including additional ballast and re-railing, were completed in late 2022. In 2024, a 900-metre passing loop was completed at Elmhurst.

This line also serves to divert rail freight away from the Ballarat Line, disadvantaging rail freight by adding an additional 128-kilometres of travel, meaning an additional 256-kilometres return for rail, restricting a 24-hour turnaround for Mildura rail freight.

Some track works and signalling were completed at Ararat. However, the system is not fully automated, creating further inefficiencies in an extended designated freight pathway.

Alliance Policy

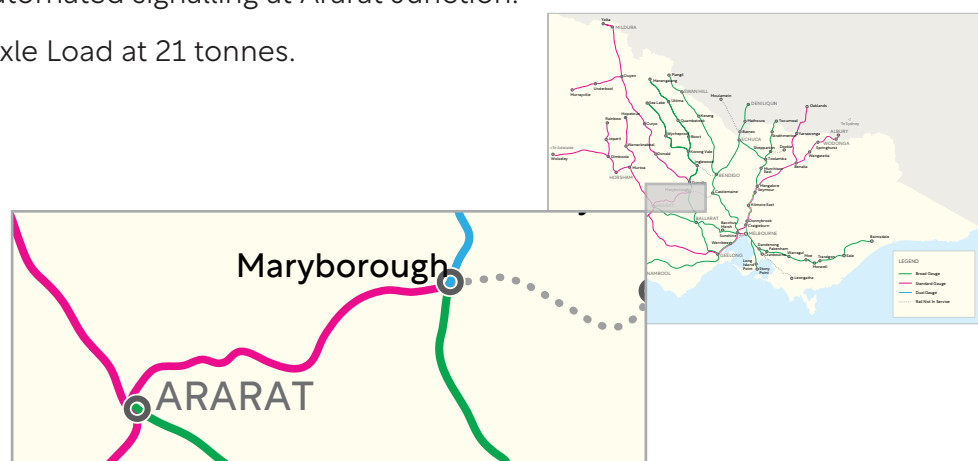
The Alliance believes this section of track is an important section of line connecting the Port of Portland and providing a stopgap measure for access from the Mildura Line to access Melbourne.

Ararat is a critical junction of broad gauge and standard gauge connection. While acknowledging the improvements made at the Ararat Junction, this project needs to be completed.

Recommendations

Complete the automated signalling at Ararat Junction.

Maintain Track Axle Load at 21 tonnes.



3.10

Ballarat to Geelong Line

Issues

This line is 68 -kilometre section of broad-gauge track has a Track Axle Load (TAL) of 20 tonnes and gazetted at 80 kilometres per hour for freight.

In 2022, an 800-metre passing loop was installed, improving rail operations.

This is an important section of line. The Alliance considers this line is underutilised and has the potential to improve rail freight deliveries to the Ports of Geelong and Melbourne via Ballarat.

This section of track was to be dual-gauged within the scope of the original Murray Basin Rail Project (MBRP), but it was not included in the 2020 revised MBRP.

While access through Ballarat is granted via the broad gauge network, adding a small section of dual-gauge track within the Ballarat Station would build flexibility into the network.

Accessing the Ports of Melbourne and Geelong via Ararat adds additional distance, time and cost to rail freight from the northwest Region.

Alliance Policy

The Alliance believes that this section of track should be standardised and accessed through Ballarat via a dual-gauge line.

Recommendations

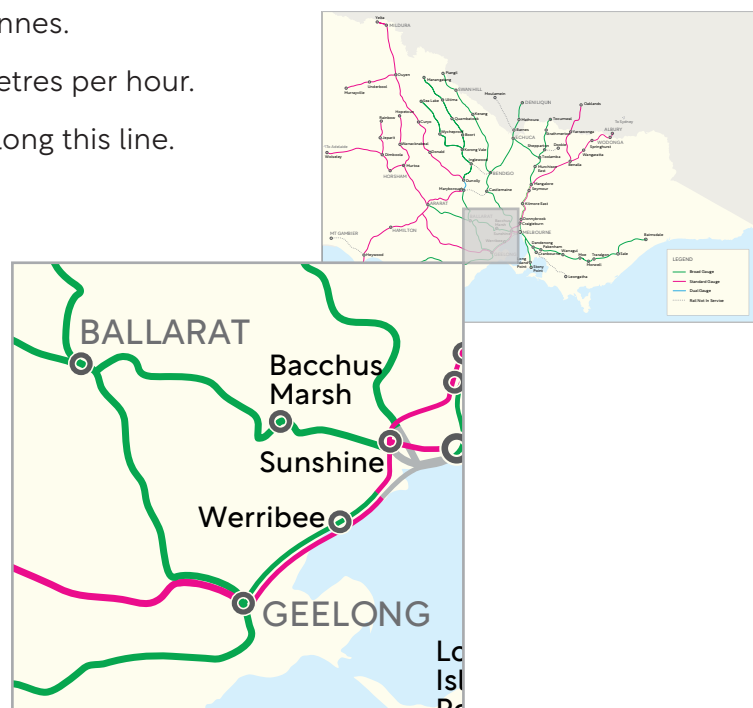
Standardise the Ballarat to Geelong Line.

Investigate dual-gauge access for rail freight through Ballarat.

Increase Track Axle Load to 21 tonnes.

Increase line speed to 100 kilometres per hour.

Review level crossing signalling along this line.



3.11

Maryborough to Ballarat Line

Issues

This 68-kilometre section of broad gauge line has a Track Axle Load (TAL) of 21 tonnes, a freight speed of 65 kilometres per hour and operates 3 passenger services per day.

This section of track was identified as part of the original Murray Basin Rail Project (MBRP Stage 3). The detail of this stage was announced in 2017 as the Passenger Freight Separation Project, with one hundred and thirty million allocated to dual-gauge this section of line.

The revised 2020 MBRP did not support dual-gauging this section of line, citing a bottle neck of rail traffic in Ballarat.

Since 2020, a 920-metre passing loop was installed at Tourello.

Alliance Policy

The Alliance believes that this section of track should be converted to standard gauge and a dedicated standardised passenger service operate between Maryborough and Ballarat.

The standardisation of this section of track would complement the Sea Lake, Manangatang, and Ballarat to Geelong Line standardisation.

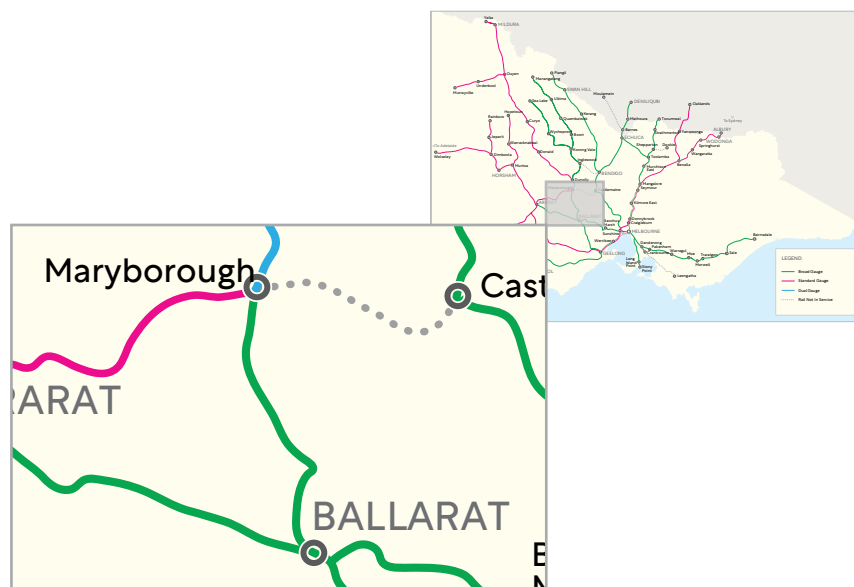
Recommendations

Standardise the Maryborough to Ballarat Line.

Maintain Track Axle Load at 21 tonnes.

Increase line speed to 100 kilometres per hour.

Review level crossing signalling along this line.



3.12

Dunolly to Maryborough Line

Issues

This 22-kilometre section of dual-gauge track has a Track Axle Load (TAL) of 21 tonnes and gazetted at 65 kilometres per hour.

This section of line was included in the Murray Basin Rail Project and was not identified to be converted to standard gauge as part of the project.

Historically, this section of line allowed both broad and standard access to Victoria's Ports, including the Port of Portland for bulk grain through standard gauge access via the Maryborough to Ararat Line and the Maroona to Portland Line, and broad gauge access to the Ports of Geelong and Melbourne via the Maryborough to Ballarat Line.

Dual-gauge Line is more expensive to maintain than a single gauge and restricts line speed.

Alliance Policy

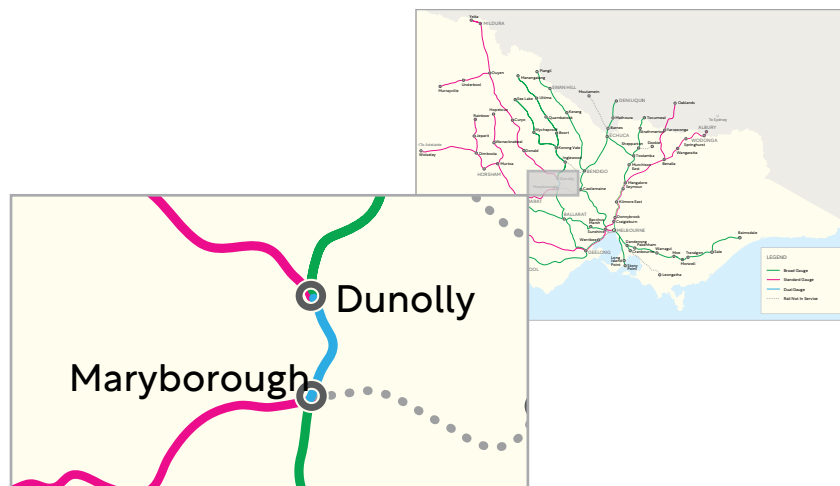
The Alliance considers this a critical section of line to manage the gauge breaks in the northern region of Victoria. Once the Sea Lake and Manangatang Lines are standardised, this section of track should be standardised.

Recommendations

Maintain Track Axle Load to 21 tonnes

Increase line speed to 100 kilometres per hour

Review level crossing signalling along this line.



3.13

Maroona to Portland Line

Issues

This 172-kilometre stretch of standard gauge line links the western half of Victoria to the National Grid and the Port of Portland, creating a pathway to export from some of Australia's most productive farmland and mining commodities.

The Maroona to Portland Line is part of the Australian Rail Track Corporation (ARTC) Network and is critical to Australia's economy.

This deep-water Port is considered the best in Regional Victoria.

The Maroona to Portland Line currently has a Track Axle Load (TAL) of 19 tonnes.

In 2022, two million was allocated to assess upgrading the Maroona to Portland Line. In 2024, the Commonwealth Government committed one hundred and fifty million to upgrading this section of track to 23 TAL a 65 kilometres an hour, and 21 TAL at 80 kilometres per hour. The project is scheduled for completion in late 2026.

Two large, rare earth projects have been given ministerial approval and would utilise this line. The full utilisation of this line will be dependent on the supporting infrastructure to ensure rail is used in transporting rare earth products.

Alliance Policy

The Alliance supports upgrading this line to 23 TAL, bringing it up to the same TAL as adjoining ARTC Track.

This upgrade would enhance the Murray Basin Rail Project (MBRP) and allow competition across the ports of Geelong, Melbourne, and Portland.

There is a role for the Victorian Government to ensure this section of track is used and maintained to its built standard, supporting enabling infrastructure and private sector investment.

Recommendations

The Victorian Government oversee the upgrading and maintenance of the Maroona to Portland Line.

The Victorian Government work with industry and the Commonwealth Government to facilitate supporting infrastructure for this investment.

The Victorian Government and the Commonwealth Government invest in enhancements along this line such as passing loops and level crossing upgrades.



3.14

Rainbow to Dimboola and Hopetoun to Murtoa Lines

Issues

The 76-kilometre Rainbow to Dimboola, and the 112-kilometre Hopetoun to Murtoa, sections of standard gauge track have a track axle loading (TAL) of 19 tonnes and are gazetted at 50 kilometres per hour.

Two significant rare earth mines within this region have been given ministerial approval and are likely to commence extraction in early 2026. The freight task will be supported by the Maroona to Portland investment.

These two lines connect to the Australian Rail Track Corporation (ARTC) standardised freight network, and the region would benefit by upgrading these lines to 21 TAL. This would increase freight productivity and enhance the investments made in grain accumulation in these regions, support the rare earth freight task, and support Victorian Ports and the ARTC and state rail networks.

Alliance Policy

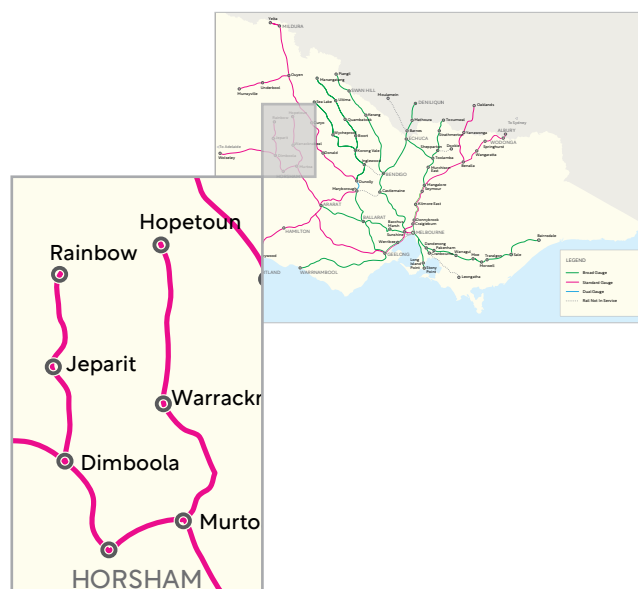
The Alliance believes that these two lines should be upgraded to 21 TAL to allow greater efficiencies in rail freight on these lines. The upgrading of these lines would enhance a future upgrade of the Sea Lake and Manangatang Lines, reducing road transport and freight costs from these regions.

Recommendations

The Rainbow and Hopetoun Lines be upgraded to 21 tonne Track Axle Load.

Increase line speed to 100 kilometres per hour.

Review level crossing signalling along this line.



3.15

Ballarat to Ararat Line

Issues

This section of broad gauge track is currently utilised for passenger services.

There are currently two potential projects along this line being the Ballarat West Employment Zone and the Western Rail Project.

The Ballarat West Employment Zone (BWEZ) is a 438-hectare site located on the western side of the City of Ballarat. The site has been identified to access broad gauge rail.

The Western Rail Project made up of a consortium of Councils in Western Victoria have developed a feasibility study for the return of passenger rail to Horsham and Hamilton. The return of passenger rail remains a priority for these councils.

Both projects can be accommodated with a mix of dual-gauge and standardised line.

Alliance Policy

Standardisation of the Ballarat to Ararat Line would allow access to Western Victoria, not only for passenger services to access Melbourne via Ballarat, but allow rail freight access to the Australian Rail Track Corporation (ARTC) rail network.

If the section of track between the BWEZ to Armstrong Street through the centre of Ballarat Station through to Gheringhap were dual-gauge, freight from the BWEZ could access both the broad and standard gauge networks.

Recommendations

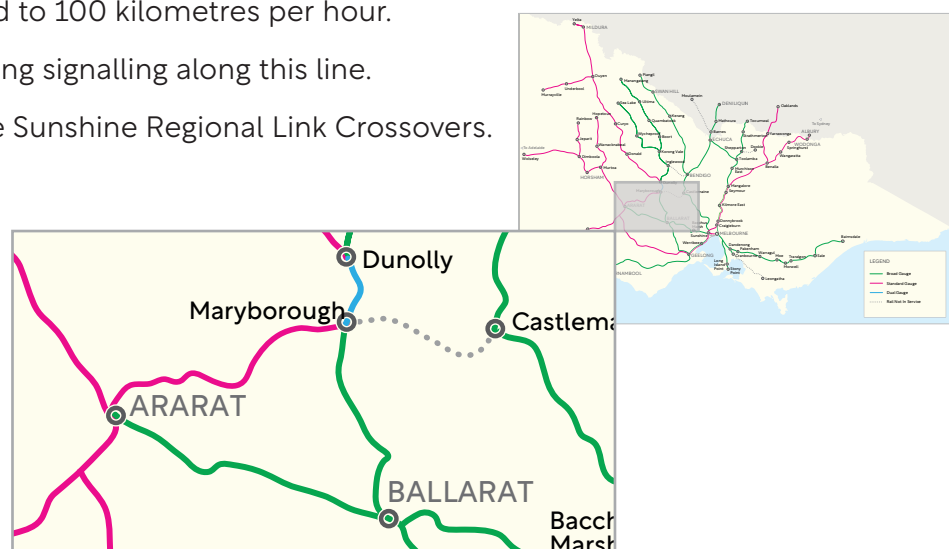
Convert the broad gauge line to dual-gauge from the Ballarat West Employment Zone to Armstrong Street through the centre of Ballarat Station through to Gheringhap.

Standardise the line between West Ballarat and Ararat and investigate the return of passenger and freight rail services.

Increase line speed to 100 kilometres per hour.

Review level crossing signalling along this line.

Do not remove the Sunshine Regional Link Crossovers.



3.16

Access through Ballarat

Issues

Access through Ballarat was an important factor in the original Murray Basin Rail Project (MBRP), however this was never achieved.

Traditionally rail freight from the northwest of Victoria could access this small section of track and access Melbourne or Geelong. As part of the revised MBRP, access through Ballarat was considered too congested and rail freight has been diverted via Ararat. Freight from the Sea Lake and Manangatang Lines is still able to access the Geelong Port through Ballarat.

The Alliance believes that standardising and dual-gauging a small section of track within the Ballarat Station’s precincts and the correct train scheduling will not disrupt passenger train services while allowing the efficient movement of rail freight.

Alliance Policy

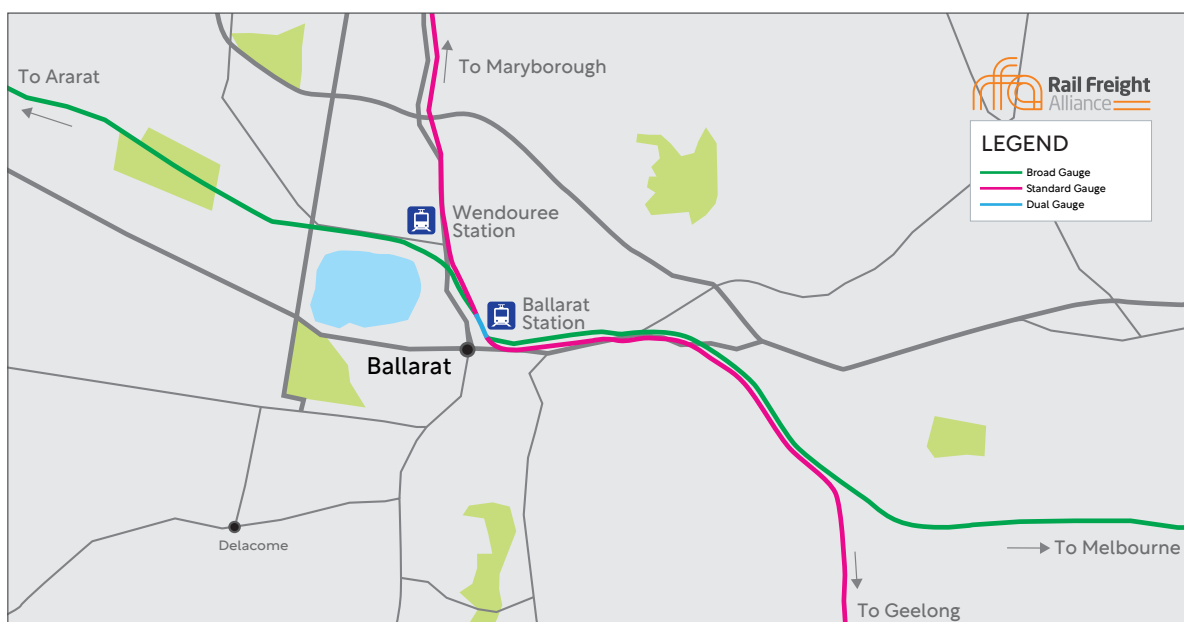
The Alliance believes that track modification and train scheduling will ensure freight access through Ballarat without disrupting passenger services.

Recommendations

Convert the broad gauge line to standard gauge from Armstrong Street through the centre of Ballarat Station and then through to Gheringhap.

Dual-gauge the sections of line servicing the two platforms, from Doveton Street to Humphrey Street.

Modify platforms at Ballarat Station to service standard and broad gauge trains.



3.17

Warrnambool Line

Issues

This 194-kilometre section of broad gauge track has a Track Axle Loading (TAL) of 20 tonnes and gazetted at 80 kilometres per hour for rail freight. A further 3-kilometres of track listed at 20 TAL and freight line speed of 15 kilometres per hour. This is used to access the intermodal facility at Dennington.

This section of track accesses Melbourne via the Geelong Line.

The intermodal facility at Warrnambool has supported the Warrnambool economy for many years, allowing approximately 200,000 tonnes of produce and machinery annually to access the Port of Melbourne.

There are improvements that will assist freight and passenger services along this line.

Alliance Policy

The Alliance considers this section of line vitally important for both freight and passenger services, and demonstrates that both can coexist along this line. However, there are improvements that can be achieved for both services.

Currently, the rail tunnel at Geelong needs to be upgraded due to safety and container height concerns, as low deck wagons are needed to accommodate modern containers.

There is also an opportunity to increase passenger services via an increase in the platform length at Warrnambool Station.

Recommendations

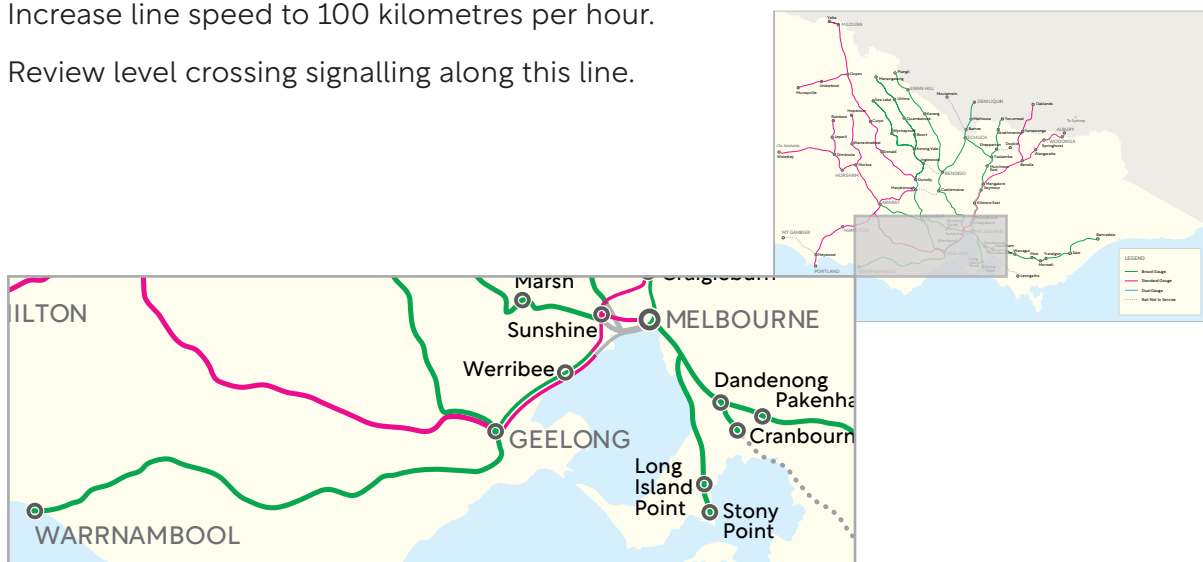
Complete the Geelong rail tunnel upgrade.

Increase the platform length at the Warrnambool Station.

Increase Track axle load to 21 tonnes.

Increase line speed to 100 kilometres per hour.

Review level crossing signalling along this line.



3.18

Bairnsdale Line

Issues

The Pakenham to Bairnsdale Line is 217-kilometres of broad gauge line, with a Track Axle Loading (TAL) of 19 tonnes and a mix of line speeds.

Rail Freight services to Gippsland are currently operating, however there are opportunities to increase rail freight from this region.

The new rail bridge at Stratford was completed in 2020 and is certified to 19 TAL. Additionally, in 2021 the Maryvale siding was upgraded.

In late 2024, the Victorian Resources Regulator renewed two retention licences in the Gippsland region. As part of the renewal, the company is required to reshape the original proposal and seek a determination by the Victorian Government via an Environmental Effect Statement.

The Dandenong corridor is an extremely busy passenger corridor, and paths for freight trains are limited. Sections of the line beyond Pakenham are not duplicated.

Alliance Policy

The Alliance supports infrastructure improvements for freight trains on the Gippsland line, including improving bridges to allow 25 TAL and some duplication.

The Alliance supports the Maryvale and Bairnsdale intermodal sites.

The Alliance supports the provision of a Gippsland connection via the Caulfield to Dandenong Line.

The Alliance considers that Gippsland rail freight should have additional pathways scheduled as required.

Recommendations

Provide additional rail freight pathways for Gippsland Freight as required.

Certify the Stratford Von Avon Bridge and Kilmany Bridge to 25 TAL.

Strengthen culverts from Traralgon to Bairnsdale to increase Track Axle Load.

Support the enhancement of the Maryvale and establishment of the Bairnsdale intermodal sites.

Plan to allow access to the Intermodal terminal at Dandenong.



3.19

Grain Logistics

Issues

There has been considerable investment by Victorian Governments in grain line rehabilitation. While there are many issues with speed restrictions, inadequate axle load capacity, track damaged by subsidence, as well as insufficient passing loops, port stabling and automatic controls, there have been some improvements.

While the status of the Victorian Rail Freight network has improved, there is still more to do. Some temporary speed restrictions remain in place with some sections of track gazetted to 40 kilometres per hour.

The original scope of the Murray Basin Rail Project not being realised is a missed opportunity, denying access to the national rail system for a large area of northwest Victoria.

The use of non gauge convertible concrete sleepers on the Sea Lake and Manangatang Lines make any future opportunity to standardise these lines more expensive.

Alliance Policy

The Alliance considers the annual freight task from grain production regions will continue to grow, and enhancements, such as passing loops, improved signalling, and increased train axle loads (TAL) and line speeds, will shift more of this freight task to rail.

Recommendations

Plan and resource the standardisation of identified rail freight lines.

Increase Track Axle Load to maximum line capacity on rail freight lines.

Continue to upgrade level crossings.

Create and resource a strategic financial plan for grain line maintenance and refurbishment.

3.20

Infrastructure for Mineral Sands

Issues

The deposits in Victoria are estimated to be two hundred and sixty million tonnes, including eight million tonnes of rutile and six million tonnes of zircon. With an estimated 50 year reserve, a significant and ongoing freight operation will be required. This is large bulk freight most suited to long distance rail transport.

The location of mineral sands infrastructure is important to country communities as it affects employment, local roads, and local economies.

In early 2024, ministerial approval was granted for the Avonbank and Rare Earths Project, while the Donald Mineral Sands and Goschen Mineral Sands workplans have been approved. These are all large projects with decades long lifespans that are likely to be operational in 2026. The annual freight task from these projects will be one million tonnes.

Alliance Policy

The Alliance supports the development of routes to railheads from mineral sands mines, designed to maximise the use of rail in the haulage of mine products. This will support local employment, the regional economy, and the maintenance of a safe local road network. The Alliance also supports costs being fairly and appropriately allocated across mine operators and the Victorian Government.

The Alliance considers that the Victorian Government has a role to play in facilitating mining infrastructure investment.

Recommendations

Increase Track Axle Load to allowable rail weight on rare earth rail routes.

Facilitate complementary investment to support mining rail freight.

Identify rail crossings that need to be upgraded due to increased rail movements.

Upgrade the Wimmera Intermodal Freight Terminal for bulk loading of mineral sands and track extension.



3.21

Level Crossings

Issues

Level crossings are a significant statewide issue with respect to safety, the cost of improving or removing them, and the impact they have on train speeds and cycle times.

The Alliance acknowledges the Victorian Government's investment in the Level Crossing Removal Program.

The freight task on rail will grow as rare earth extraction begins in 2026, rising to more than one million tonnes by 2027. Freight on rail will require additional investments in rail crossing safety.

The Alliance acknowledges the current safety measures at level crossings, however there are many dangerous rail crossings across Victoria that have poor line-of-sight.

As freight on rail increases, continued assessment and adequate funding of level crossings must occur.

Alliance Policy

The Alliance supports safety upgrades according to priorities as defined in the Australian Level Crossing Assessment Model (ALCAM).

The Alliance supports the continued assessment and funding to improve level crossings in Victoria.

Pedestrian crossings are important and must be considered as part of the rail crossing network.

The Alliance considers that as a measure of supporting all Victorians, at the very least for every level crossing removed as part of the Victorians Level Crossing Removal Program, a boom gate level crossing should be installed in regional and rural Victoria.

Recommendations

Upgrading of level crossings in consultation with Local Government.

Continued assessment of level crossing suitability across Victoria.

Adopt a one-for-one automated boom -gate level crossing installation for every level crossing removed as part of the Level Crossing Removal Program.

The Alliance recommends the following Level Crossings for works identified.

CROSSING	ISSUE
Aerodrome Road, Dooen	Short stacking
Gatehouse Road, Dooen	Short stacking
Rasmussen Road, Horsham	Short stacking
Edith Street, Horsham	Short stacking
Hazel Street, Horsham	Short stacking
Geodetic / Riley Road, Horsham	Short stacking
Plowrights Road (Moore's Road), Vectis	Short stacking
Jenkinsons Road, Pimpinio	Short stacking
O'Connors Road, Pimpinio	Short stacking
Rules West Road, Pimpinio	Short stacking
Banyena Road, Pimpinio	Short stacking
Beddisons Road, Wail	Short stacking
Reynolds Road, Wail	Short stacking
Power Station Road	Install Boom Gates
Stawell / Warracknabeal Road, Minyip	Install Active site lights and rumble strips
Thomas Road, Murtoa	Install Active site lights and rumble strips
Coorong Swamp Road	Install rumble strips
Patchewollock-Sea Lake Road, Speed	Short stacking, install rumble strips
Lascelles West Road, Lascelles	Install rumble strips and clear vegetation
Hopetoun-Yaapeet Road, Hopetoun	Install Active site lights and rumble strips
Birchip-Rainbow Road, Beulah	Install Active site lights and rumble strips
Lah East Road	Road realignment and install rumble strips
SheepHills Warracknabeal Road	Install Active site lights and rumble strips
Sheep Hills – Minyip Road near Silo Art	Install Active site lights and rumble strips
Loyd Street, Moe	Widen and improve pavement approaches, install new pedestrian crossing
Bank Street, Traralgon	Install traffic lights signalled pedestrian crossing pavement realignment
Monash Avenue, Nyah	Realignment
Pira Chillingollah Road, Pira	Install lighting and realignment
McCallum Street, Swan Hill	Install pedestrian overpass
Mitchell Street, Swan Hill	Install pedestrian crossing
Rutherford Street, Swan Hill	Install pedestrian crossing/overpass (currently, no ability to cross)
King Street, Swan Hill	Install pedestrian crossing
Naretha Street, Swan Hill	Install pedestrian crossing
Marraboor Street, Swan Hill	Install pedestrian crossing
Pental Island Road, Swan Hill	Install pedestrian crossing

CROSSING	ISSUE
Sea Lake/Swan Hill Road, Ultima	Install Boom Gates
Springfield Road, Turoar	Realignment and vegetation clearance
Lalbert Road, Lake Boga	Install pedestrian crossing and Boom gates
Kunat Street, Lake Boga	Install pedestrian crossing and boom gates
Swan Hill/Donald Road, north of Lalbert	Install boom gates
Millewa Road, Calder Highway Red Cliffs	Short stacking
Nardoo Street, Calder Highway Red Cliffs	Short stacking
Belar Avenue, Calder Highway Irymple	Short stacking
Banks Street level crossing	Install warning lights
Wallan Whittlesea Road, Wallan	Grade separation
Minton Street, Beveridge	Grade separation
High Street / Tarcombe Road, Seymour	Improved crossing access and additional northern crossing point
Epping–Kilmore Road / Rail Street	Short stacking
Leakes Road, Rockbank	Grade separation
Troups Road North, Rockbank	Close and use upgraded crossing at Leakes Road
Paynes Road, Rockbank	Grade separation
Mount Cottrell Road, Rockbank	Grade separation
Grauers Road, Cudgee	Pavement improvement
Hallowells Road, Cudgee	Install pedestrian crossing
Pavement improvement and widening	
Dwarroon Road, Cudgee	Widen pedestrian crossing
Station Street, Panmure	Pavement improvement
Panmure Laang Road, Panmure	Pavement improvement
Improved signage and line marking	
Vickers Road, Panmure	Pavement improvement
Improve batter	
Sampson Ford, Garvoc	Pavement improvement
Line marking	
Recreation Reserve Road, Garvoc	Line marking to single lane
Davis Avenue, Nhill	Install boom gates and upgrade pedestrian crossing
High Street, Dimboola	Upgrade crossing to a disability crossing
Roy Street, Jeparit	Upgrade pedestrian crossing
Lake Street, Rainbow	Install a pedestrian crossing

3.22

High Productivity Freight Vehicles

Issues

High Productivity Freight Vehicles (HPFV) offer cost savings and benefits compared with conventional trucks. However, these vehicles require identified routes that are both safe and provide the necessary bridge and pavement strength for their operation.

There remain many local roads and bridges that are neither adequate nor appropriate for the operation of these vehicles.

Alliance Policy

The Alliance supports the creation of a freight network that includes the transfer of bulk merchandise and containers from road to rail, rather than one that supports only long-distance road freight.

Local Governments and road agencies should cooperate to develop freight routes that are safe, minimise road damage, meet amenity requirements, and complement the role of rail freight infrastructure.

The Alliance believes that a focused investment in rail freight as opposed a HPFV investment in major highways is a sensible and cost-effective outcome for Victoria.

The Alliance does not support HPFVs where they compete with the rail freight network.

Recommendations

The Victorian Government remove High Productivity Freight Vehicles from the network where Rail Freight is available and invest in an integrated and resourced freight plan that includes road and rail.

3.23

Metropolitan Intermodal Terminal Networks and Regional Intermodal Terminals

Issues

A strong and effective metropolitan and regional intermodal terminal network is required for the efficient development of Victoria's freight network.

Port Rail Shuttles (PRS) from ports to metropolitan intermodal terminals are used successfully at many major ports overseas, as well as Sydney and Perth.

The Port Rail Shuttle Project is progressing, with Altona complete, the Somerton terminal to open late 2025, and the Lyndhurst facility not yet operational.

The first stage of the Beveridge Interstate Freight Intermodal (BIFT) is scheduled to be operational in 2026. The Alliance considers the Beveridge site an important first step in supporting the efficiencies of the Melbourne to Brisbane Inland Rail Project (MBIRP). The Alliance acknowledges both the National Intermodal and Victorian Government recommendation regarding further planning for the Western Intermodal Freight Terminal (WIFT) at Truganina.

The Alliance considers further planning to be urgent for the WIFT. This should include access to the Truganina site via the Outer Metropolitan Road, access to the Port of Melbourne and access to a future freight terminal. Once identified, these pathways must be protected.

Regional intermodal terminals provide a regional focus for the receipt and dispatch of containers by rail. Regional intermodal terminals such as those at Ballarat, Donald, Dooen, Bairnsdale, Maryvale, Merbein, and Warrnambool play an important regional role. Intermodal freight from Bairnsdale is being developed and must be supported.

Alliance Policy

The Alliance supports the port rail shuttle network and the Port of Melbourne's Port Rail Transformation Project.

The new terminal must support the MBIRP and must have access to the port rail shuttle network.

The Alliance supports the network of regional intermodal terminals, such as Ballarat, Donald, Dooen, Maryvale, Merbein, Ultima, and Warrnambool, having inland port powers to clear cargo where appropriate.

Recommendations

The Victorian Government assist, plan and support metropolitan and regional intermodal facilities.

The Victorian Government support the current Beveridge site and plan for the new Intrastate Freight Terminal, assessing the utilisation of the Outer Metro Ring.

The Melbourne to Brisbane Inland Rail Project terminal must have connectivity to the port rail shuttle network.

3.20

Rail Access to Ports

Issues

Efficient access to Victorian ports is a critical part of an effective freight network, for both bulk commodities and containers.

The Port of Melbourne's Port Rail Transformation Project is now operational. The port rail shuttle is not yet operational, with parts of the project yet to be completed.

At Geelong and Portland, there is scope for more investment to improve train cycle times through those ports.

The Melbourne to Brisbane Inland Rail Project (MBIRP) will need to be supported by the Beveridge Interstate Freight Terminal (BIFT) and the Western Intrastate Freight Terminal (WIFT) located as close to the Port of Melbourne as feasibly possible. Truganina is an important site to support the movement of freight through the Port of Melbourne.

Planning and land acquisition for a standard gauge link to Victoria's planned second container port has been slow in its delivery.

Alliance Policy

Rail corridor protection is vital to Victoria's future prosperity, liveability and safety.

The Alliance considers that it is incumbent on successive Victorian Governments to plan for rail access to ports.

The Alliance considers that the Victorian Government should encourage rail access to shipside at Swanson Dock and investment in rail connectivity at Webb Dock.

Continued investment in rail facilities at the Port of Portland and the Port of Geelong should be directed at reducing train cycle times and increasing efficient throughput. Planning for the WIFT and supporting infrastructure should be completed as soon as feasibly possible.

Recommendations

Assess opportunities to improve access to the ports of Geelong, Melbourne, and Portland.

Complete the Port Rail Shuttle Project.

The MBIRP should be served by a WIFT, the Alliance considers Truganina a suitable site.

Create a corridor access plan with acquisition and timelines to futureproof port access.

Invest in rail access to shipside at Swanson and Webb Docks

Set a Rail Freight mode share target for all Victorian Ports.

3.25

Port Rail Shuttle

Issues

Funding has been allocated to the Port Rail Shuttle project since 2014. The funding allocation was made up of thirty eight million from the Commonwealth Government and twenty million from the Victorian Government.

In late 2018, the Victorian Government committed twenty five point seven million to the Somerton and Altona facilities, leveraging a further forty five million in private sector investment towards the projects. In mid-2020, the Victorian Government committed twenty eight million to the Dandenong facility, leveraging a further fifty million of private sector investment.

These upgrades will connect to the Port of Melbourne’s one hundred and twenty five million on-dock rail project, allowing shuttles to run directly into the Port of Melbourne.

These investments will reduce the volume of trucks on the road network.

The interoperability of the current port rail shuttle system is challenged by differing rail gauges, operators, access agreements, and shared passenger and freight paths.

Alliance Policy

The Port of Melbourne is a vital part of Victoria’s freight infrastructure, freight through this port is predicted to treble by 2050.

The Alliance considers the port rail shuttle a vital part of meeting increased demand through the Port of Melbourne and contributing to the liveability of Melbourne.

Utilising the passenger broad-gauge network will continue to have limitations as both passenger and freight services increase, particularly on the Caulfield to Dandenong corridor.

Recommendations

Complete the Port Rail Shuttle project.

Create an entity within Freight Victoria to facilitate rail scheduling in consultation with the different track access providers.



4

Rail Freight Operations



4.1

Scheduling

Issues

Utilisation of Victoria's rail assets can be increased if scheduling is improved. This includes both passenger and freight services that operate on the broad and standardised lines.

The Port Rail Shuttle is one example where a greater level of focus will be to be given to scheduling to support passenger and freight movements.

Alliance Policy

The Alliance considers that not all rail assets are fully utilised and that passenger and freight rail can share one corridor if scheduling is improved. The standard gauge northeast line is an example where passenger and freight services can share the track.

The Alliance supports a closer scheduling regime and investment in passing loops to maximise rail efficiency and scheduling.

Recommendations

Create an entity within Freight Victoria to facilitate rail scheduling in consultation with the different track access providers.

Invest in strategic passing loops to facilitate the efficient movement of rail passengers and freight.

Investigate duplication of key interstate and port access routes.

4.2

Competition Among Rail Service Providers

Issues

The basic model of railway freight organisations in Victoria is that the State provides infrastructure and regulates the system, while private firms such as Pacific National and Qube operate trains, paying a fee for access to the track infrastructure.

Where there is a multiplicity of operators on the national standard gauge rail system, the remaining broad gauge network has limited competition.

Competition may be around price, but can also include type and frequency of service, the type of contracts offered, and innovation in locomotives and rolling stock, in the interests of users.

The Alliance has long advocated for standardisation of the remaining broad-gauge freight network on the basis of improved competition.

Alliance Policy

The Alliance considers that competition within the Victorian rail freight market is an important goal -and that competition in the sector is likely to be enhanced as more of the rail freight system is standardised.

Recommendations

Plan and resource the standardisation of identified rail freight lines.

Increase Track Axle Load to maximum line capacity on rail freight lines.

4.3

Axle Loadings and Rail Productivity

Issues

Higher axle loads are an important factor in improving rail freight productivity. In the past, a 19 tonne axle load was common on Victorian lines; it is no longer adequate.

Improvement in train axle loads (TAL) requires investment in track, bridges, and rolling stock.

The Alliance considers that all freight lines should be increased to maximum rail weight.

Alliance Policy

All freight lines TAL should be increased to their maximum rail weight.

Recommendations

Plan and resource increased track axle load to match rail weight on rail freight lines.

4.4

Train Cycle Times

Issues

Rail efficiency for intermodal, grain and mineral sands traffic requires cycle time between the point of origin and the port to be managed efficiently. Typically, the objective is set in terms of the time taken to port (or processing centre) and return.

Cycle time improvement can involve track upgrades, providing passing loops, signalling improvements and managing rail congestion around ports.

Alliance Policy

The Alliance supports investment designed to ensure effective cycle times for intermodal, grain and mineral sands trains to ensure efficient utilisation of track and equipment while maintaining rail as a competitive mode.

Recommendations

Assess and invest in infrastructure that will increase efficiencies in train cycle times.

4.5

Temporary Speed Restrictions

Issues

Temporary Speed Restrictions (TSR) and designated speeds gazetted for several level crossings across the Victorian Rail Network are detrimental to train cycle times and reliability.

As the rail task increases, the Alliance believes that level crossings should be continually assessed and adequately upgraded and resourced.

Alliance Policy

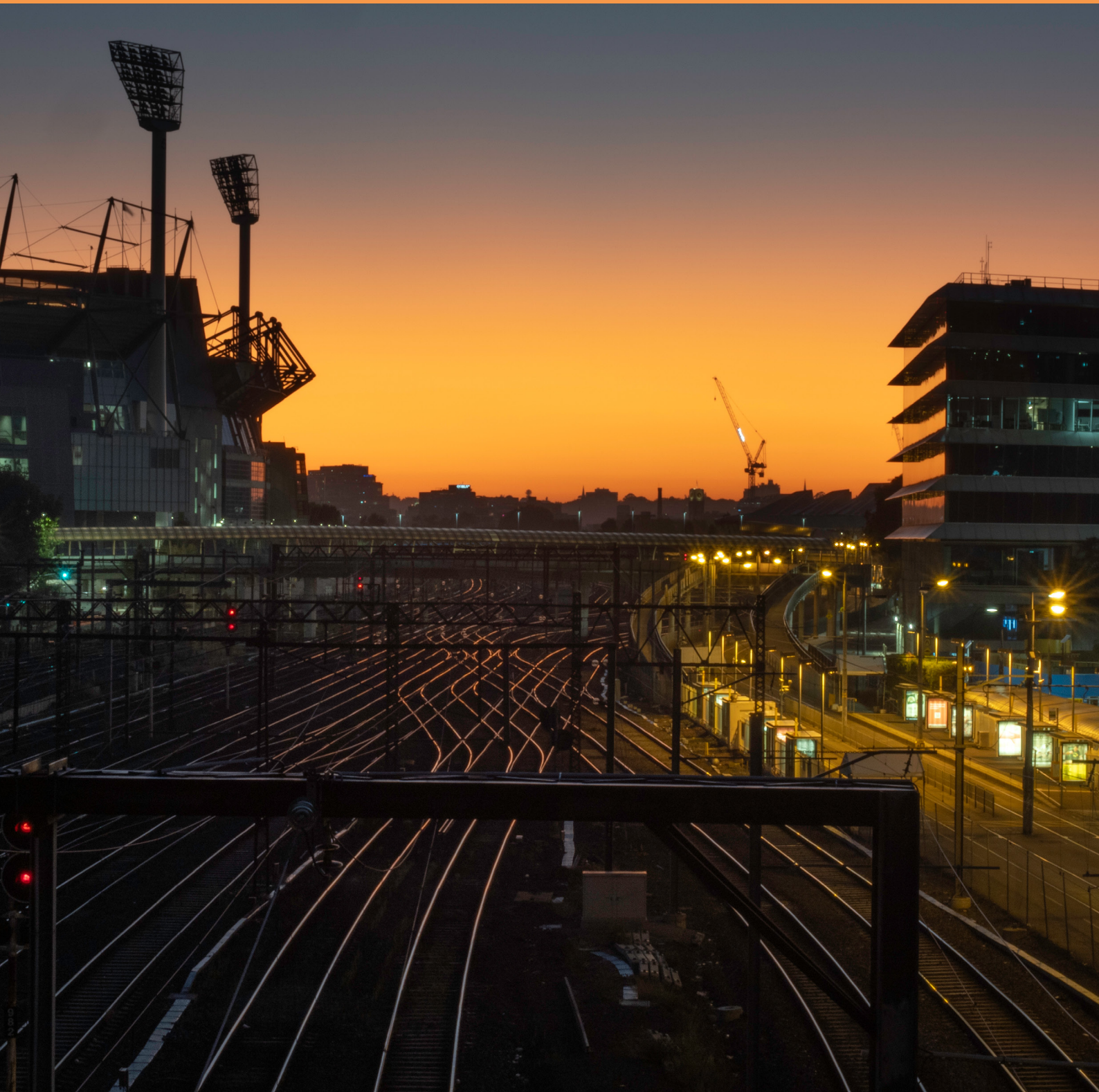
The Alliance believes an accelerated program is needed to overcome TSRs and upgrade crossings across the Victorian network according to priorities derived via the Australian Level Crossing Assessment Model (ALCAM).

Recommendations

Targeted investment in rail freight maintenance to remove all Temporary Speed Restrictions.

Continued monitoring and adequate funding to level crossing improvements.

National Rail Freight Issues



5.1

Melbourne to Brisbane Inland Rail Project

Issues

The Melbourne to Brisbane Inland Rail Project (MBIRP) is a 1,771-kilometre route from Melbourne to Brisbane via Albury, Junee, Parkes, Moree and Toowoomba. This route will serve many highly productive agricultural regions, including the Lachlan Valley and the Toowoomba area.

Estimates show that the cost of handling freight on this railway when completed will be 48% of the cost of road transport, with a rail market share of 80% by 2060.

Originally, the MBIRP was expected to be operational by 2024–25 and was costed at approximately ten billion.

In late 2022, the Commonwealth Government announced the appointment of Dr Kerry Schott AO to conduct a review of the MBIRP. This was completed in early 2023. The review supported the project, however costed it at more than thirty billion and recommended that the Parkes to Melbourne section be operational by 2027. The review supported both the Beveridge and Truganina intermodal terminals.

Alliance Policy

The Alliance supports the Melbourne to Brisbane Inland Rail Project. This project will allow Victorian producers to access northern markets, and it will reduce truck numbers and cost inefficiencies.

The Alliance believes that planning for the corridors from Beveridge to the Port of Melbourne and Truganina should commence immediately.

This planning should include both the Port Rail Shuttle connection and corridor protection for a future container port.

Recommendations

Continue support for the Beveridge Intermodal Freight Terminal and plan for a Western Intermodal Freight Facility and connectivity to the port rail shuttle to service the Melbourne to Brisbane Inland Rail Project.

Identify and acquire future corridors to connect Victoria's second container port.

5.2

Mildura to Menindee Transcontinental Rail Project

Issues

A proposal to build a transcontinental rail connection from Mildura to Menindee has existed for a number of years. Menindee is on the Sydney to Perth Transcontinental railway.

Consideration should be given to a Track Axle Load (TAL) of 23 tonnes to potentially permit cost-effective double stacked containers to reach Melbourne.

The Murray Basin Infrastructure Study examined the viability of this proposal and noted that this project could become viable in the decade 2020-2030.

The proposal would need to be supported by a viable business case.

Alliance Policy

The Alliance believes this issue should remain as a possible future development following standardisation of the Mildura line.

A viable business case would be required for the project to proceed.

Recommendations

This project should be assessed now that the Murray Basin Project is completed.

5.3

Mount Gambier Connection

Issues

The Limestone Coast and southwest Victoria have diverse agriculture and forestry-based activities, including dairy, grains, cattle, sheep, horticulture, and viticulture. Currently these commodities are transported by road between South Australia and Victoria.

The Commonwealth Scientific Industrial and Research Organisation (CSIRO) has assessed the current supply chains to estimate road and rail transport costs for each commodity in this catchment.

The study found an overall cost reduction of fifteen point six million annually if the Heywood Line was reinstated. The study estimated the reinstatement cost between one hundred and twenty and one hundred and fifty million, and would divert 254,413 tonnes of freight annually from the road network to rail.

Alliance Policy

The Alliance considers the CSIRO Transit Report should be assessed and the Heywood Line considered for State and Commonwealth funding.

Recommendations

Investigate the reopening of the Heywood Line, and funding options between the Victorian, South Australian and Commonwealth Governments.

5.4

Equity between Road and Rail

Issues

Current Government tax and expenditure arrangements are not conducive to a level playing field between heavy road freight and rail freight.

Heavy road freight does not pay its way in terms of the full cost of infrastructure investment and maintenance, nor the external costs it imposes in respect of accidents, pollution, and greenhouse gas emissions.

This issue was investigated, resulting in a recommendation that Council of Australian Governments (COAG) accelerate the development of mass distance location pricing for heavy vehicles, as well as an additional charge to be applied to heavy vehicles on routes where road freight is in direct competition with rail. Rail is required to recover its infrastructure and other capital costs.

Alliance Policy

The Alliance believes that rail freight operators are significantly disadvantaged over road freight.

Rail is currently paying a price per tonne per kilometre, whereas road is paying a set charge regardless of kilometres and tonnage carried (including road tolls if applicable). This system is not reflective of the true costs of road and rail freight.

Recommendations

On routes where road freight is in direct competition with rail, rail freight operators should receive an equivalent subsidy on a comparable basis to heavy vehicles.

Assess possible methods of implementation.

5.5

Rail Harmonisation

Issues

Australia's rail system is made up of 18 separate rail networks, 11 different signalling systems, and countless different rules.

In early 2023, a Memorandum of Cooperation was signed by the Commonwealth and Victorian Governments and the Australasian Railways Association. The intent of the agreement was to make rail freight more interoperable and increase efficiencies in rail freight.

The immediate issues identified are differing rail gauges, signalling systems, rolling stock and working conditions.

The Memorandum of Cooperation commits rail operators, builders, manufacturers and transport ministers to work together to make rail more interoperable, particularly for any future major rail investments.

Alliance Policy

The Alliance supports the Memorandum of Cooperation and considers this an important step forward to connecting Victoria to adjoining states.

Recommendations

The Alliance supports the Memorandum of Cooperation, through successive Commonwealth and State Governments.

Net Zero Emissions

Issues

Governments across the world have acknowledged that climate change is occurring and there is an urgent need to reduce carbon emissions. Australia, along with nearly 200 other countries, has joined the Paris Agreement, committing to the global goal of holding temperatures below 2 degrees Celsius of warming.

The Commonwealth Government has adopted the Net Zero Plan, legislating a net zero emissions target by 2050. The Commonwealth Government is currently determining a 2035 emissions target.

The Victorian Government has set an emission reduction target of between 75% and 80% by 2035.

Road Freight contributes to more than 80% of transport emissions in Australia.

Alliance Policy

The Alliance believes that the Commonwealth and Victorian Governments must target freight emissions as an early opportunity to reduce emissions.

Rail Freight produces 16 times less emissions than road freight for every tonne/kilometre travelled. (Ref 1).

Recommendations

The Commonwealth and Victorian Governments commit to increasing freight to rail to assist in meeting emissions targets.

5.7

Air Quality

Issues

Australia, like many countries around the world, is experiencing a surge in population growth. Currently, Australia's population is more than 27 million, up from 22 million at the turn of the century. Australia's population is forecast to reach 36 million by 2050.

Much of this growth will occur in Australia's major cities. As the population grows, so too will the demand for groceries and household goods, which all include a direct freight component.

Air quality is a major concern. In mid-2023, the Maribyrnong City Council declared a health emergency in its municipality, citing air quality and noise pollution from heavy truck movements.

Currently, the West Gate Tunnel ventilation stacks do not have a filtration system.

The challenge for servicing a growing population and maintaining air quality within acceptable levels will be a challenge for all governments as Australia's population continues to grow.

Alliance Policy

The Alliance considers that air quality in the west of Melbourne needs to be improved.

Heavy vehicle movements and activity around the Port of Melbourne have a direct impact on the air quality of neighbouring municipalities.

Increasing the freight task to rail will improve air quality.

Recommendations

Victorian Government set targets for rail freight.

Commit to 30% of all freight in Victoria to be transported by rail by 2030.

Install a filtration system on the West Gate Tunnel Ventilation Stacks.

Future Proofing



6.1

Corridor Retention

Issues

Several rail corridors within the Regional Rail Freight Network are currently closed but have not been dismantled or abandoned.

In Regional Victoria, farming practices are evolving and adapting to climate change, investment in intensive agriculture has expanded, and extractive industries are commencing. It is difficult to predict what the future freight requirements will be for these regions.

The reopening of the Maryborough to Ararat Line is an excellent example of a section of line that is now utilised by the rail freight network.

There is a proposal to create a rail trail between Maryborough and Castlemaine. The Alliance does not support the removal of any rail between Maryborough and the Bendigo Line. A future reinstatement of this section of track would build flexibility into the rail freight system, allowing access to the ports of Melbourne and Geelong.

Alliance Policy

The Alliance believes key disused rail corridors should be protected to permit their future use as rail corridors should circumstances change.

Recommendations

Protect key disused rail corridors.

Protect the Maryborough to Castlemaine corridor.

6.2

Access Planning

Issues

Melbourne is experiencing unprecedented growth. Many potential pathways for access to a second container port and connection to the Port Rail Shuttle Project (PRS) will quickly become urbanised if no action is taken.

The Melbourne to Brisbane Inland Rail Project (MBIRP) will need to be supported by two terminals, being the Beveridge Intermodal Freight Terminal (BIFT) and the Western Intrastate Freight Terminal (WIFT).

The BIFT site has commenced construction, while the Victorian Government has announced that it will continue planning for the WIFT.

The Alliance considers Truganina an important site for the WIFT to support the movement of freight through the Port of Melbourne.

The Alliance acknowledges the Victorian Government's announcement regarding the WIFT. However, the predicted freight volumes require action to plan and acquire access to service the new terminals and a new port once the Port of Melbourne reaches capacity.

The PRS will be important for the Port of Melbourne to increase throughput and will become increasingly dependent on rail transport. The Alliance considers the identified Outer Metropolitan Road (OMR) is a suitable pathway.

Alliance Policy

Access to the Port of Melbourne is vital for the future success of the port, public amenity, safety and Victoria's prosperity.

The necessary terminal site and its connections to Victorian Ports need to be identified and acquired immediately.

Recommendations

Terminal, Western Intermodal Freight Terminal, and Port Rail Shuttle.

The Port Rail Shuttle and Melbourne to Brisbane Inland Rail Intrastate Terminals must have rail links and corridors for the second container port identified and acquired.

The Outer Metropolitan Road should be used to access the Beveridge Intermodal Freight Terminal and the Western Intrastate Freight Terminal.

6.3

Gauge Convertible Sleepers

Issues

The Alliance considers the entire Victorian freight network should be standardised.

There has been a significant resurgence in regional passenger services on the V/Line network. Network patronage and train frequencies have grown significantly, which has predominantly been reconstructed with non-gauge convertible sleepers.

A standardised network would allow greater utilisation of passenger and freight rolling stock, as well as facilitate interstate connectedness.

Currently, new track is being laid, and sleeper replacements are being implemented on the broad gauge network.

Alliance Policy

The Alliance believes that continuing to upgrade, repair and construct lines on the broad-gauge network will only serve to make standardisation of the Victorian Rail Network unachievable.

If all future works were to utilise gauge convertible sleepers, the cost of standardising the Victorian Network would be greatly reduced.

Recommendations

Investigate the long-term benefits and cost-savings in using gauge convertible sleepers.

6.4

Rail and Military Resources

Issues

The completion of the Melbourne to Brisbane Inland Rail Project (MBIRP) allows the opportunity for military use of this network.

There are several active military sites located along the MBIRP Line that could utilise this network to transport large equipment throughout Australia.

In 2019, military equipment was transported by rail to and from Darwin to Cultana in South Australia.

Alliance Policy

The Alliance believes that the MBIRP will allow greater connectivity throughout Australia and should be utilised wherever possible. Large equipment is ideally suited to rail transport, and the advantages of rail should be considered.

Recommendations

Investigate the advantages of rail freight for transportation of military equipment and personnel.







Victoria and Australia are facing an unprecedented rise in imports and exports. The future freight task cannot be met by road transport alone; rail must gain a greater mode share in the future. Governments must invest in rail and road linkages to support a greater shift from road to rail.



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