

Preserving our rail history — a blueprint for the future

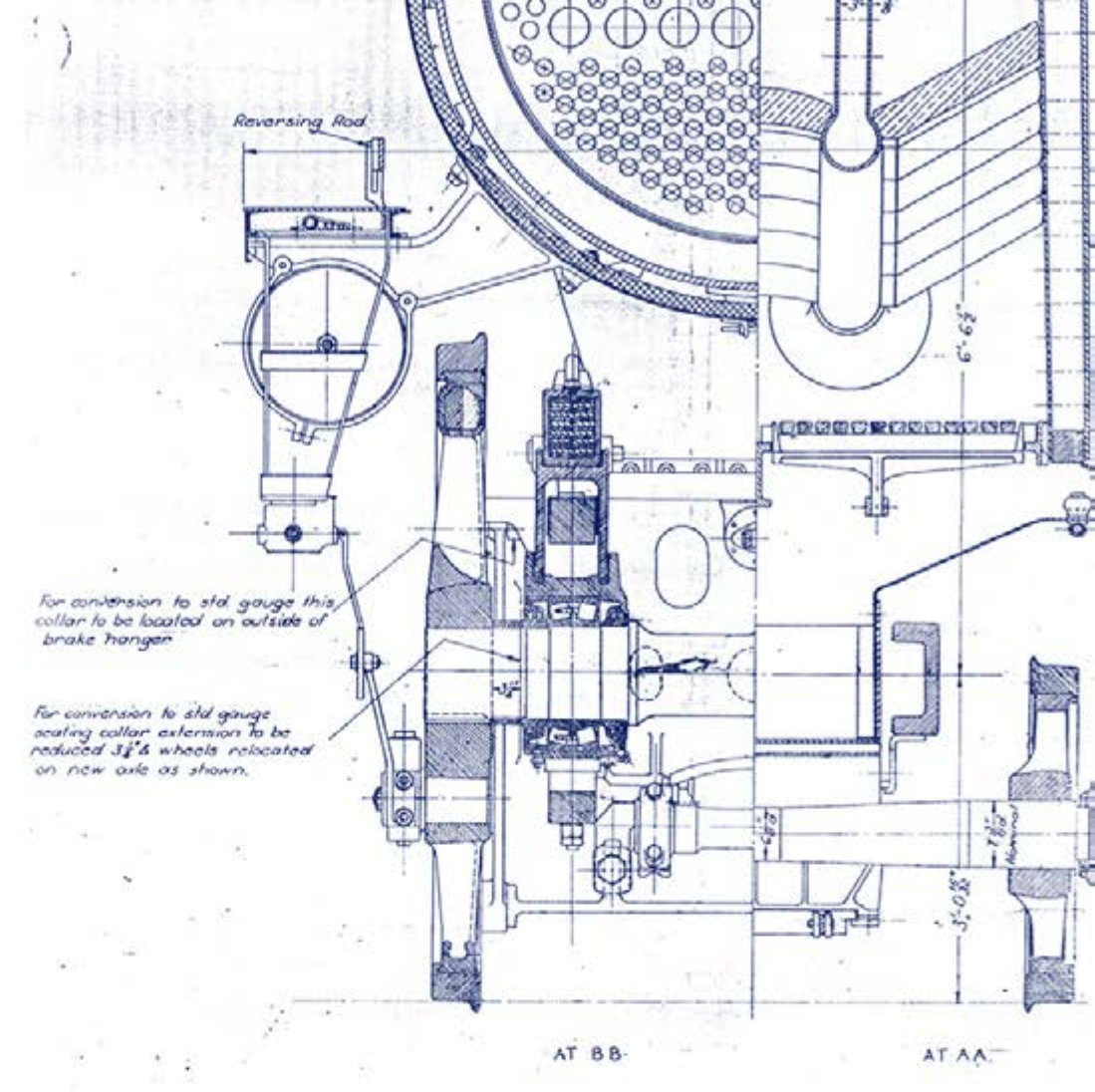
Victoria's Tourist and Heritage (T&H) tram and railway organisations work hard to safeguard our rich rail history. We want them to be able to continue their valuable work in preserving our rail heritage and giving tourists in Victoria the opportunity to experience these attractions.

Preserving our rail history – a blueprint for the future is the result of a year-long dialogue between the Victorian Government and the sector about the evolving challenges and opportunities presented by the expansion of Victoria's public transport network.

Now is the time to act and bring our collaborative efforts to life for future generations.



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Foreword



Victoria has a rich rail heritage. Our connection to railways began on 12 September 1854 when a train departed Flinders Street bound for Port Melbourne (then known as Sandridge), Australia’s first steam railway journey. Nothing remains of those first trains but we do have an extensive and valuable collection of historic rolling stock that illustrates other parts of our rail history.

Some of this history is preserved by the Tourist and Heritage (T&H) tram and railway sector through heritage train and tram rides, static displays or museums.

Victoria has the largest T&H tram and railway sector in Australia, all operated by not-for-profit organisations, supported by enthusiastic volunteers. These operators not only ensure the ongoing preservation of our rail history but also offer attractive tourism experiences for visitors.

The Victorian Government’s massive investment in the rail network, along with advances in rail telecommunications and signaling systems, and an improved safety and regulatory environment poses both challenges and opportunities for the T&H sector.

While we look forward to these future advancements in our rail services, we want to ensure we continue to respect and preserve our history.

That is why the Victorian Government has developed an overarching strategy for Victoria’s T&H tram and railway sector. *Preserving our rail history – a blueprint for the future* is the result of that work.

I look forward to seeing the T&H tram and railway sector in Victoria continue to thrive and provide opportunities for future generations to enjoy and experience our rail history.

Ben Carroll MP
Minister for Public Transport
Member for Niddrie

1. Introduction

Victoria's Tourist and Heritage tram and railway organisations have worked hard to preserve our railway history. At the same time they provide enjoyable attractions for visitors across the state.

Over the last 20 years, there have been a number of broad reviews of the sector as well as numerous studies and plans produced for individual groups. While these have been informative, none has combined an overarching strategy that outlines common goals along with a roadmap for achieving them.

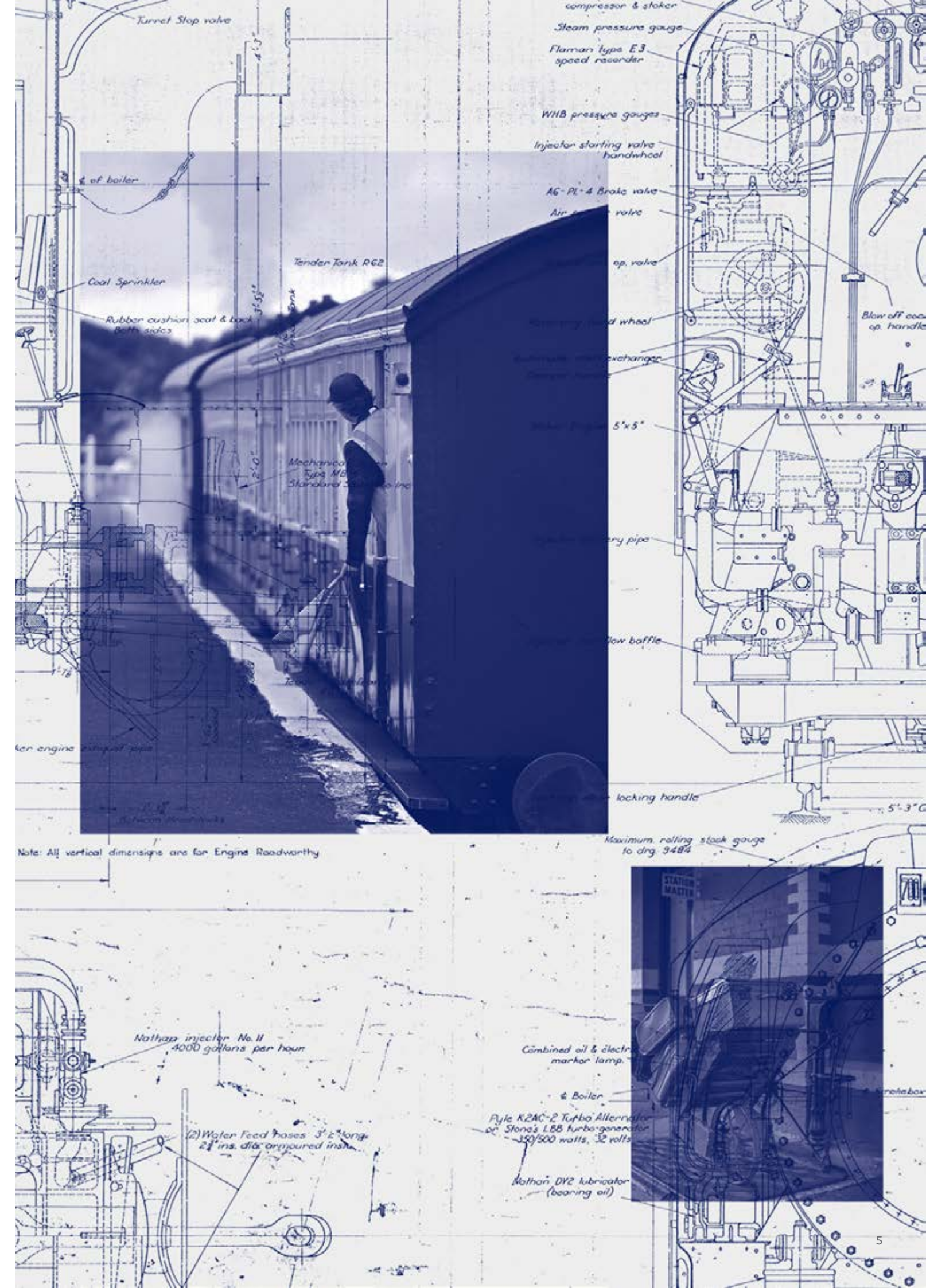
This blueprint has been developed with the aim of ensuring the T&H sector can flourish into the future.

Following extensive consultations, the sector has identified a number of common goals to support its growth. They are:

- improved marketing
- attracting and maintaining appropriately skilled and diverse volunteers
- fair access to equipment, resources and rolling stock
- better engagement between organisations and with government.

At the same time, the rapidly changing physical, technical and regulatory environment of the state's rail transport network is affecting the sector. Government actions and decisions are having varying impacts on individual T&H tram and railway organisations and the sector as a whole.

This blueprint lays the foundation required for the sector to evolve and adapt for the future and to identify and grasp opportunities as they arise.

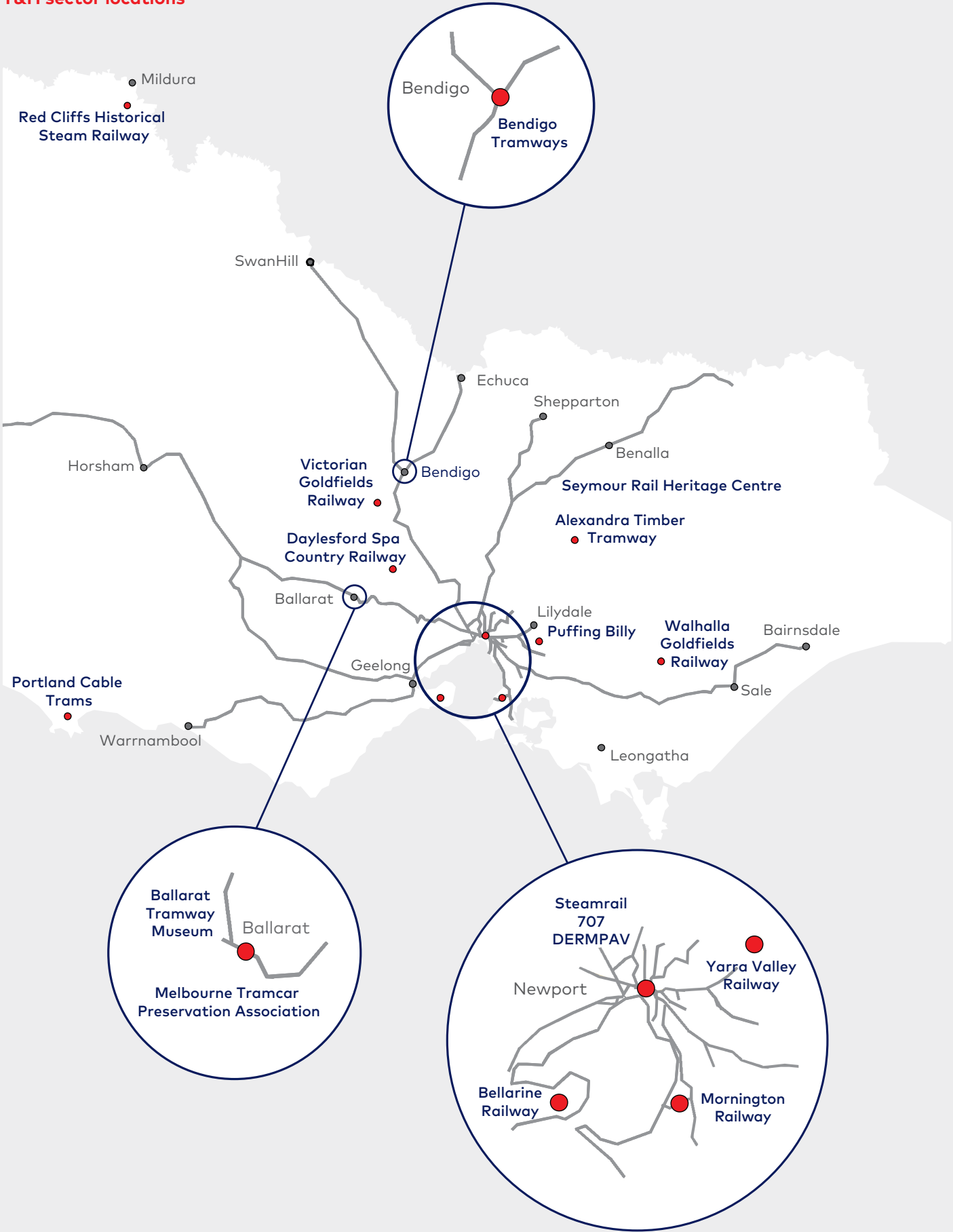


About the T&H sector:

- There are 17 T&H tram and railway operations in Victoria. They are dedicated to preserving Victoria's rich rail history and operating historic railway stock.
- These community-based, not-for-profit organisations consist of:
 - four organisations who predominantly operate services using the mainline (the same routes as regular public transport trains)
 - four organisations who operate broad gauge heritage railway services on former branch lines no longer required for regular public transport services
 - five organisations who operate on a variety of narrow gauge tracks along routes no longer required for their original purpose (this includes the iconic Puffing Billy Railway)
 - four organisations who operate heritage tram cars.
- Fourteen of these organisations are spread across regional Victoria and outer-metropolitan Melbourne.
- Three are currently based at the inner-metropolitan Newport Railway Workshops.
- A number of other organisations across the state maintain static displays and museums devoted to our transport history.
- Each of these organisations provides an important visitor attraction, supporting tourism and regional development outcomes across Victoria.



T&H sector locations



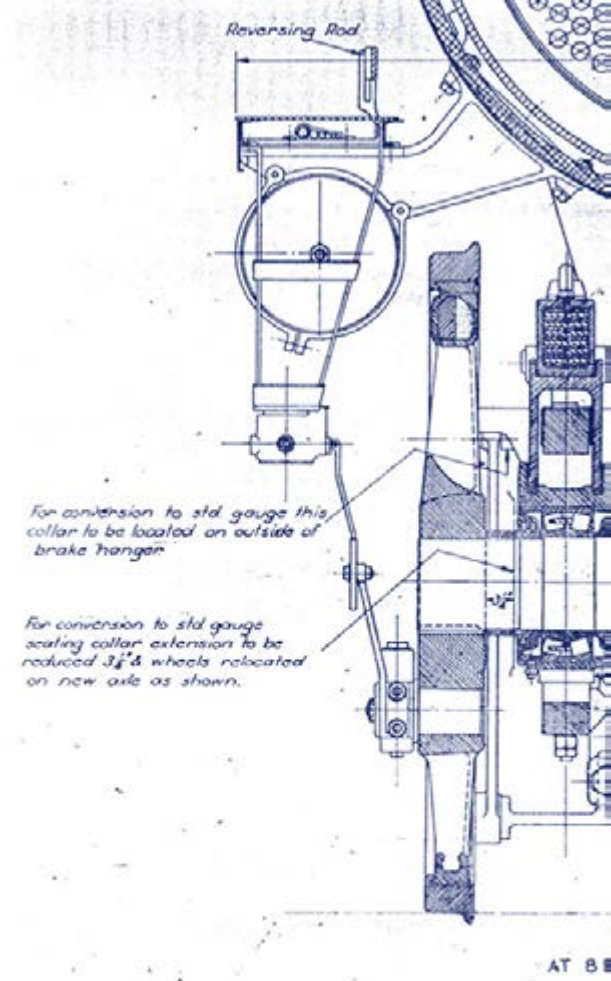
2. Principles and values



The principles applied in developing this blueprint are to:

- maintain and preserve Victoria's important rail history
- set the heritage rail sector on a financially and operationally secure path
- continue to provide safe and reliable heritage and tourist rail services for the benefit of all Victorians
- seek and support regional development opportunities, especially for the tourist economy
- ensure that there continues to be ongoing volunteering opportunities for current and future rail enthusiasts.

Overall, the major goal has been to ensure that T&H tram and railway organisations become masters of their own destinies.



3. Where do we want to get to?



A vision for Tourist and Heritage railways and tramways

The aim of the recommendations outlined in this blueprint is to create a flourishing T&H tram and railway sector for the future, taking into account the changes occurring in the sector today and the challenges and opportunities they bring. The following is a vision of where the sector will ideally be placed 10 years from now.

The T&H tram and railway sector has a very bright future. Industrial heritage tourism continues to attract visitors from near and far.

Individually and as a whole, organisations have significant potential for growth, offering different products and experiences across the state.

While all forms of transport continue to evolve thanks to technological developments, the allure of heritage carriages pulled by steam or diesel locomotives remains and continues to enchant railway enthusiasts of all ages.

Tram and branch line railway operators are growing in both days of operation and in track length. This not only creates more opportunities for visitors attending these attractions but also provides extended trips to enjoy scenic landscapes and experience how previous generations used to travel. Where Puffing Billy set the example of an industrial heritage visitor attraction, other T&H branch line operations are now all working towards this benchmark.

The continued advancement in the technology used to manage passenger rail services and the growth in passengers mean T&H services running on the mainline are now quite rare, but offer a more premium service.

In addition to heritage rail operations, these T&H tram and railway groups have strong connections with other tourism operators in their region, creating win-win situations. Visitors can arrange a package of events, such as food and wine, historical town tours and other experiences along with the opportunity to enjoy a heritage rail journey.

Major events also open up opportunities for T&H tram and railway operators to ensure visitors have improved choices about what to see and do.

Importantly, those who love and care for these old railways and vehicles have the support they need from government and their local community. Many new volunteers are attracted, improving their community connections and adding a more diverse set of people and skills. Those who (literally) wish to get their hands dirty working on the preservation and restoration of the railway and rolling stock have that opportunity while the T&H tram and railway businesses flourish with increasing numbers of volunteers and visitors.

Puffing Billy



Puffing Billy is an example of the value that industrial heritage tourism can bring to communities and the broader Victorian economy.

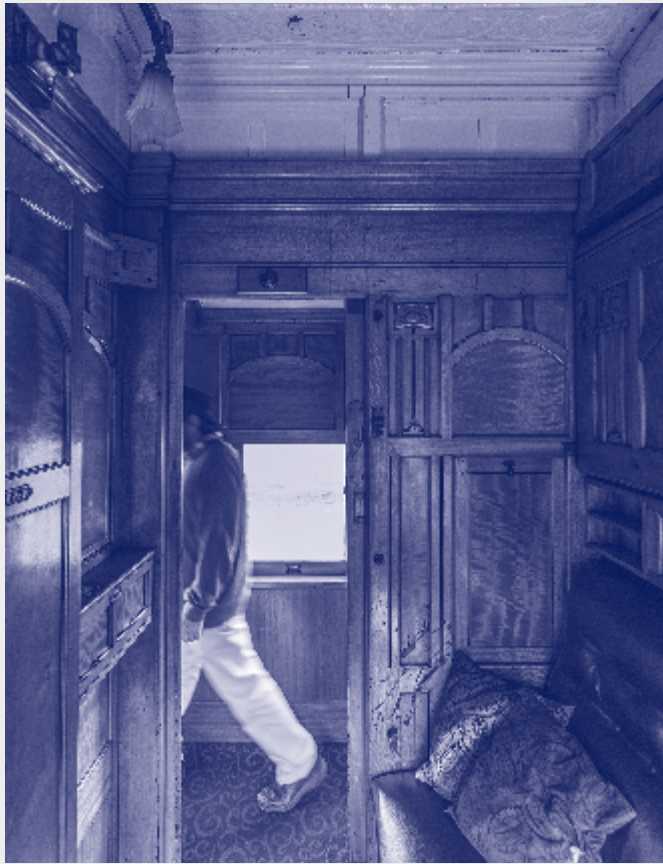
Prior to COVID-19, it attracted over 500,000 visitors per year, making it Australia's most prominent tourist railway. With changes to its governance, and with further support from the State and Federal Government's it will offer a world class visitor experience with the completion of the Discovery Centre at Emerald Lake Park.

It is also a key part of the Dandenong Ranges community, employing 60 people and many more during peak times and providing volunteer opportunities to many.

Puffing Billy is a real life example of what other T&H operators in Victoria can achieve if a strategic and co-ordinated approach is taken to developing the sector.

4. How do we get there?

In developing this blueprint we sought to identify and anticipate the issues approaching T&H tram and railway organisations and work with them to help shape their future.



We started by listening to the T&H tram and railway organisations who outlined a number of areas of concern and opportunity.

Within government we looked at the changes already planned and those that will potentially occur to help us understand how these changes to our public transport system will help or hinder the T&H sector.

This analysis resulted in the following three priorities.





4.1 All change please! Responding to rapid change

Victoria's transport network is changing rapidly.

Demand for public transport services in Victoria, especially metropolitan and regional rail, is growing dramatically. This growth in demand is expected to continue over coming years.

The Victorian Government's unprecedented investment into new transport infrastructure and services, along with the changes occurring within the regulatory, signalling and communication standards, will require changes within the T&H tram and railway sector.

Mainline operations already face delays and access issues as a result of increased metropolitan and regional rail services. This is on top of the costs and impacts from crewing, communications, safety requirements and other items required to operate on the same line as public transport services.

Branch line operations are looking for ways to meet changing visitor demands while also working on meeting safety and other regulatory requirements.

To help manage these changes there is a need for a strong sector voice to government. Improved connections between government and the sector will help mitigate the negatives while ensuring that opportunities are seized.

Operators would also benefit from certainty in access to land, assets and rolling stock to enable long term planning and investment.



4.2 All aboard! Improving the volunteer experience

Volunteers are at the heart of the T&H sector and the each group help builds the social capital of the communities they service. The value of volunteering cannot be underestimated, with improved health, wellbeing outcomes for individuals and broader social and economic benefits for communities.

It emerged from our consultations that common to all of the T&H tram and railway organisations was a need to attract an increasing number of diverse and skilled volunteers.

Generally speaking, the active volunteer base in T&H tram and railway organisations is ageing and male, with a large number of them currently or formerly involved in the railway sector.

There is a need for T+H organisations to actively diversify there volunteer bases, and ensure they provide welcoming, safe and inclusive environments to attract new volunteers from a diversity of backgrounds.

In addition to attracting new volunteers, there is a need to ensure that existing skills and knowledge within the current volunteer pool are passed down to ensure that some of these unique attributes are not lost.

With volunteer labour central to the viability of the sector, it is important to ensure that major equipment and investments are not duplicated across organisations. A key way to help reduce costs and improve volunteer skills is to centralise types of major maintenance or restoration.

Where the appropriate equipment, skills and willing volunteers can be coalesced, centres of excellence that specialise in a type of major maintenance or restoration will improve the efficiency and safety in the sector and provide improved outcomes for volunteers to be trained appropriately.



4.3 Tickets please! Attracting more visitors

The T&H tram and railway sector provides important tourist attractions, with visitor revenue a significant part of the finances that help restore, maintain and operate these historic vehicles.

It is the volunteers and paying visitors that keep these organisations operating. Without either of these two groups, none of these organisations would be viable.

Apart from the Puffing Billy Railway (and possibly Bendigo Tramways), the awareness of the sector is generally limited to local areas and interested enthusiasts.

T&H tram and railway organisations have often operated separately with no single organisation that represents them all and can provide a sector-wide education and awareness campaign.

Through collaboration and joint marketing of the sector, awareness and tourism return could be increased for all T&H tram and railway organisations.

While the state needs to maintain ownership of truly historic rolling stock under a statewide collection policy, having many examples of heritage rolling stock owned by the state and sitting in storage is not useful to the government or to the sector.

T&H railways, especially the broad gauge branch lines, are seeking to expand their operational days and therefore need more rolling stock.

T&H organisations should have an opportunity to ask for items from the state government's stored fleet.

Any pieces of rolling stock not required for the growing sector or to be retained under the collections policy can be disposed of to interested community groups and organisations.

The *Retired Tram Strategy* has already started to do this with our W class trams and this can be replicated for the heavy rail rolling stock. Similarly, the vast amount of railway assets - such as boom gates and station signage - being replaced as part of major projects such as the Level Crossing Removal Project and the Regional Rail Revival should be made available where possible to T+H groups.



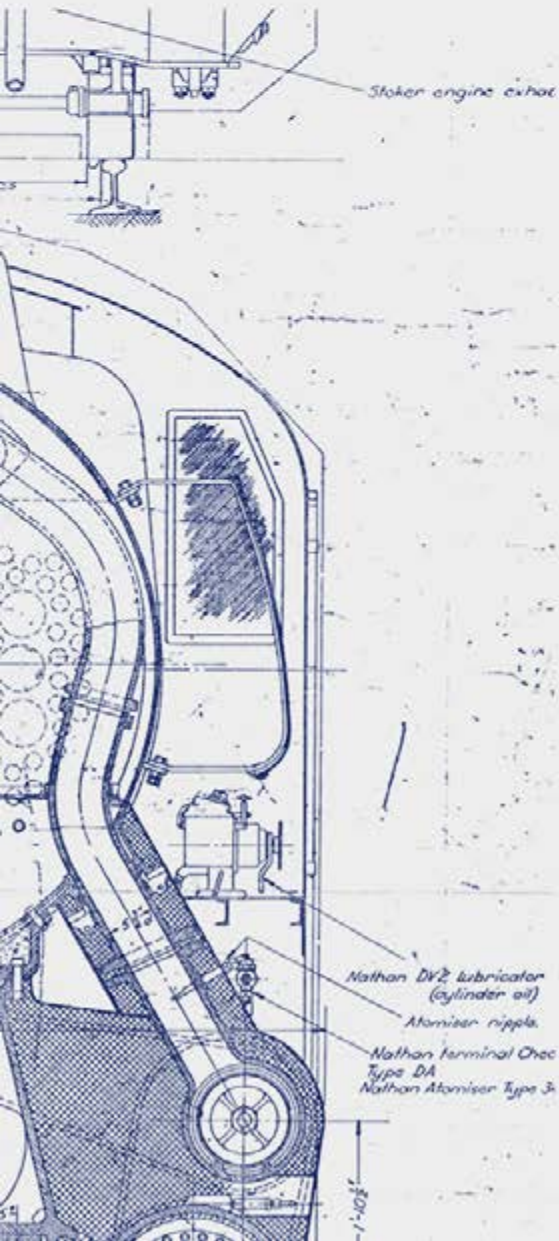
5. Recommendations

1. Together, everyone achieves more

An effective Tourist and Heritage Sector Coordinating Board (SCB) is key to successfully delivering the recommendations in this report and securing the future for the industry.

The SCB would:

- be independent of government
- have membership open to any T&H organisation in Victoria (notably, Puffing Billy is not represented on the Tourist and Heritage Advisory Committee)
- in effect replace the current, but limited, Tourist and Heritage Advisory Committee (subject to changes in legislation)
- be a fully skilled based board with an understanding of tourism, heritage, governance and corporate responsibilities
- initially be supported by government, but would eventually be operationally and financially self-sufficient.



1.1 Victorian Government support for the SCB

The Victorian Government will support the creation of the SCB by:

- providing advice and legal expertise to ensure fair and equitable governance arrangements are put in place
- supporting the SCB through its initial establishment
- acknowledging the SCB as the voice of the sector and working with this body in order to deliver the recommendations in this blueprint.

On an ongoing basis, the Victorian Government will work directly with the SCB including:

- retaining the role of the Tourist and Heritage Railway Registrar as a key point of contact between the sector and the Victorian Government
- assisting groups to meet regulatory requirements as they emerge.
- co-hosting a number of functions and events with the SCB each year to ensure the sector is kept informed on:
 - the delivery of this blueprint's recommendations
 - any other changes occurring in the sector, how they are likely to impact the sector and what is being done to manage the impacts
 - any other matters of interest to the sector.

Jointly, the Victorian Government and the SCB will develop a work plan, prioritising actions from this report and the other work required to deliver positive outcomes for the sector.



2. The heritage trains are the star of the show

The SCB and the Victorian Government will work together to develop a Heritage Rolling Stock Collection Policy.

This policy will define and nominate existing heritage rolling stock as:

- a) Premium - meaning rolling stock that is of truly historical importance that must be preserved and retained for future generations
- b) Non-Premium – heritage rolling stock of less import that can still be utilised for various purposes

The collections policy will also outline how examples of Victoria's current and future train and tram fleet will be collected as elements of our rail history.

2.1. Using Victoria's heritage rolling stock

Protecting our rail history is not enough. Where possible these pieces of history need to be made available to the public through heritage tram and railway operations, museums and other sites.

Subject to the collections policy the Victorian Government will seek to lease all operational and serviceable premium rolling stock to Victorian T&H tram and railway organisations.

These leases will require any T&H tram or railway organisation to:

- respect and care for the vehicle (stewardship)
- have a plan for the restoration and maintenance of the vehicle (preservation)
- outline how they will use the vehicle to allow visitors to ride and/or view the vehicle (business).

2.2. Allocating heritage rolling stock

To help the sector grow it is time to release the many pieces of unused heritage rolling stock stored by the state.

As mentioned in 2.1 only T&H organisations will be able to initially apply for Premium rolling stock.

It is anticipated that the procedure will run in this order:

- EOI for premium rolling stock
 - for T&H tram and railway organisations only who, in making any application, need to explain their stewardship, preservation and business plans, including how they would use their entire fleet.
- EOI for non-premium rolling stock
 - for T&H tram and railway organisations who, in making any application, need to explain their stewardship, preservation and business plans, including how they would use their entire fleet
 - offer to local government, community groups and other organisations for static use, subject to appropriate stewardship and preservation plans.

In making decisions around the allocation of rolling stock, every attempt will be made to ensure that the state-owned assets currently allocated to T&H organisations will be leased to them. However, this cannot be guaranteed and will be subject to each organisation's business, stewardship and preservation plans for the assets in their control.

Remaining unallocated non-premium rolling stock not necessary for retention under the Collection Policy will be stripped of useful parts and the remainder of the vehicle scrapped.

2.3. Maintain heritage operations through making available parts and equipment

It is not just about the use of heritage rolling stock, we need to ensure that the parts and equipment central to keeping them moving are available.

- A fulsome parts audit will be completed using the resources of VicTrack and the skills and experience of the T&H sector.
- State-owned parts will be made available to organisations, subject to need and available storage.
- A formal Release of Surplus Material policy should be endorsed by the SCB and the Victorian Government to allow the fair and equitable transfer of state-owned parts, equipment and resources (including rail, ballast, sleepers and turn-outs) as they become available.



3. A place to call home

A site with a secure lease, with the necessary infrastructure and independent of any other restrictions that may curtail operations is necessary for the long-term success of any T&H tram or railway.

The changes occurring at Newport as a result of the increasing number of people catching public transport means that the site is becoming problematic for long-term T&H leases.

3.1. On VicTrack land, organisations will be offered new standard Tourist and Heritage land leases

By providing new standard leases, with clauses specifically tailored for T&H tram and railway organisations, organisations will be able to have greater certainty over the land they use to run their businesses on.

VicTrack will also work with these organisations to ensure consideration is undertaken for any possible expansion plans onto VicTrack land.

Internal government consultation will be undertaken to see if those groups who lease land from other government organisations can have their leases include similar clauses for certainty and the ability to expand if possible.

3.2. VicTrack will work one-to-one with the three heritage train operators and the Newport Railway Museum to manage the land use issues at Newport

The Newport Railway Museum will remain at its current site at Newport, with work to continue to provide coverage and protection of the exhibits.

The Victorian Government will work with the three mainline heritage rail operators based at Newport on a planned timeline to shift the majority of other railway heritage operations from Newport, subject to available funding.

The Victorian Government will consider a location for a permanent, open-access T&H metropolitan staging point. This may be at Newport, but other areas will also be considered.

4. Volunteers, the engine room of the sector

The development of a Volunteer Strategy for the entire sector can:

- identify any disincentives in the sector to attracting a more diverse volunteer base and then generate responses to them
- target segments of the community who may be unaware of the opportunities available with T&H tram and railway organisations
- prioritise the skills missing or limited in the sector.

This work can be carried out by the Tourist and Heritage Sector Coordinating Board working with the Victorian Government.

5. Establish centres of excellence

To reduce duplication and provide the best possible sites for volunteers to work, centres of excellence in specific areas of major maintenance and restoration work will be supported.

These will be identified by the sector through the Sector Coordinating Board and will help support the retention and development of volunteers as they get the best available training and equipment to work on.

6. More visitors = more money

While individual groups each have a unique aspect to their attractions, there is a lot of commonality about what attracts visitors to the sector.

Using the expertise within the Victorian Government and the knowledge of the Sector Coordinating Board, a coordinated and overall marketing strategy will help increase the number of visitors to the sector as a whole.

6.1. Individualised marketing plans

With the uniqueness of each individual operator, the Victorian Government will also work with operators to help them deliver their own strategic marketing and visitor plans, capitalising on their assets. This may be completed in partnership with relevant regional tourism boards in order to capitalise on the broader attractions and events regions.

7. Ongoing government support

Government currently supports the T&H tram and railway sector with heavily discounted rent for government land and buildings, including the maintenance of buildings, and permanent support from the T&H Railway Registrar and staff.

In addition, there have been a number of recent significant grants provided to major Tourist and Heritage tram and railway organisations including:

- Victorian Goldfields Railway – Regional Development Victoria grant for train stabling and shedding in Castlemaine
- Walhalla Goldfields Railway – Regional Development Victoria grant to restore a rail motor
- Yarra Valley Railway – Victorian Government 2019–20 Budget allocation to expand the railway
- Bendigo Tramways – Victorian Government support from Regional Development Victoria and VicTrack to expand the Tramways' depot and workshops
- Newport Railway Museum – VicTrack support to provide weather protection to more assets, including Heavy Harry.

As outlined in 1.1 the Victorian Government will continue to do these things and more to assist the development and tourism potential of the T&H tram and railway sector in Victoria.

6. Conclusion

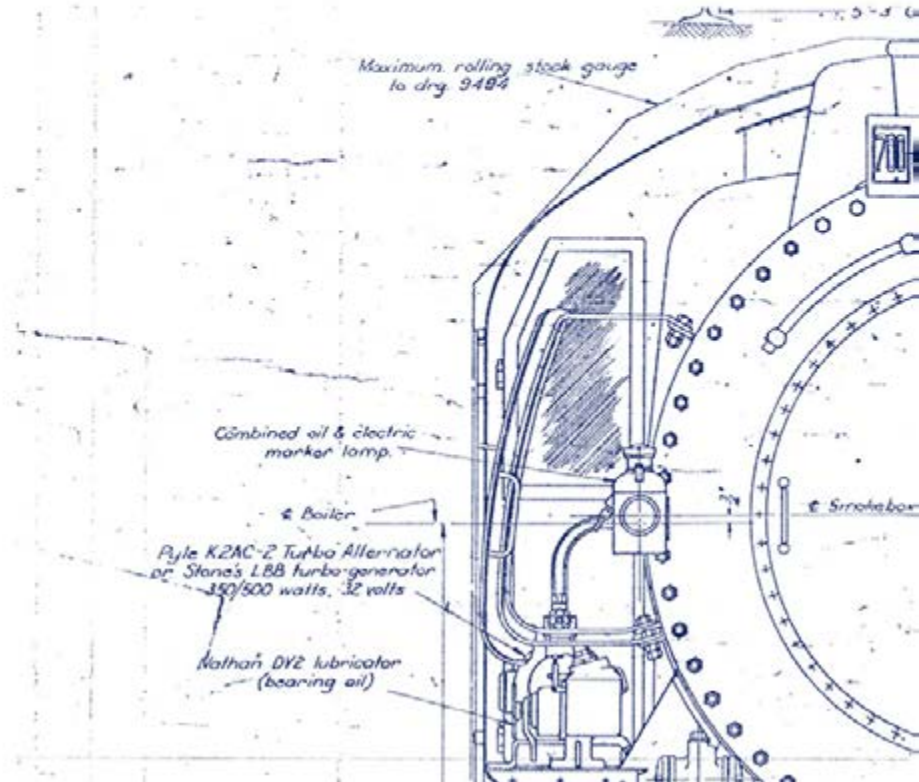


The existing T&H tram and railway sector is a quiet, but successful, driver of the conservation of our history and our visitor economy.

With the changes occurring in the transport system as a whole, we have an opportunity to secure the future of the sector.

The actions and recommendations outlined in this blueprint are just the beginning.

Through the government and the sector working collaboratively, we can all ensure that these organisations thrive so that future generations can continue to experience our rich rail history.



Appendix A:

Tourist & Heritage tram and railway organisations

Organisation	Location
Alexandra Timber Tramway	Alexandra
Association of Tourist and Heritage Rail Australia	Australia
Ballarat Tramway Museum	Ballarat
Bellarine Railway	Queenscliff
Bendigo Tramways	Bendigo
Castlemaine and Maldon Railway Preservation Society (Victorian Goldfields Railway)	Castlemaine
Central Highlands Tourist Railway (Daylesford and Spa Country Railway)	Daylesford
Council of Tramway Museums of Australasia	Australia and New Zealand
DERM Preservation Association	Newport
Melbourne Tram Museum	Hawthorn
Melbourne Tramcar Preservation Association	Haddon
Mornington Railway Preservation Society	Mornington
Newport Railway Museum	Newport/Nth Williamstown
Portland Cable Trams	Portland
Puffing Billy Railway* #	Belgrave
Red Cliffs Historical Steam Railway	Red Cliffs
Seven O Seven Operations	Newport
Seymour Railway Heritage Centre	Seymour
Steamrail Victoria	Newport
Tramway Heritage Centre	Bylands
Walhalla Goldfields Railway	Walhalla
Yarra Valley Railway	Healesville

*Puffing Billy Railway is managed under the *Emerald Tourist Railway Act*. The other operators fall under the *Tourist and Heritage Railway Act 2010*.

#Puffing Billy Railway is operated by the Emerald Tourist Railway Board (ETRB). In addition to the ETRB, the Puffing Billy Preservation Society is a membership based organisation that supports the operation of the railway.

