

**MURRAY BASIN
RAIL PROJECT
POSITION PAPER**

MURRAY BASIN RAIL PROJECT

The Rail Freight Alliance (RFA) is focused on increased rail mode share, providing improved rail connectivity within Victoria (and into neighbouring states) and working 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 is made up of Victorian rural, and regional and metropolitan Local Government Councils. The Rail Freight Alliance represents the Local Government Sector in Victoria and adjoining States in freight logistics interests connecting Victoria nationally and internationally. The Alliance was first 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:

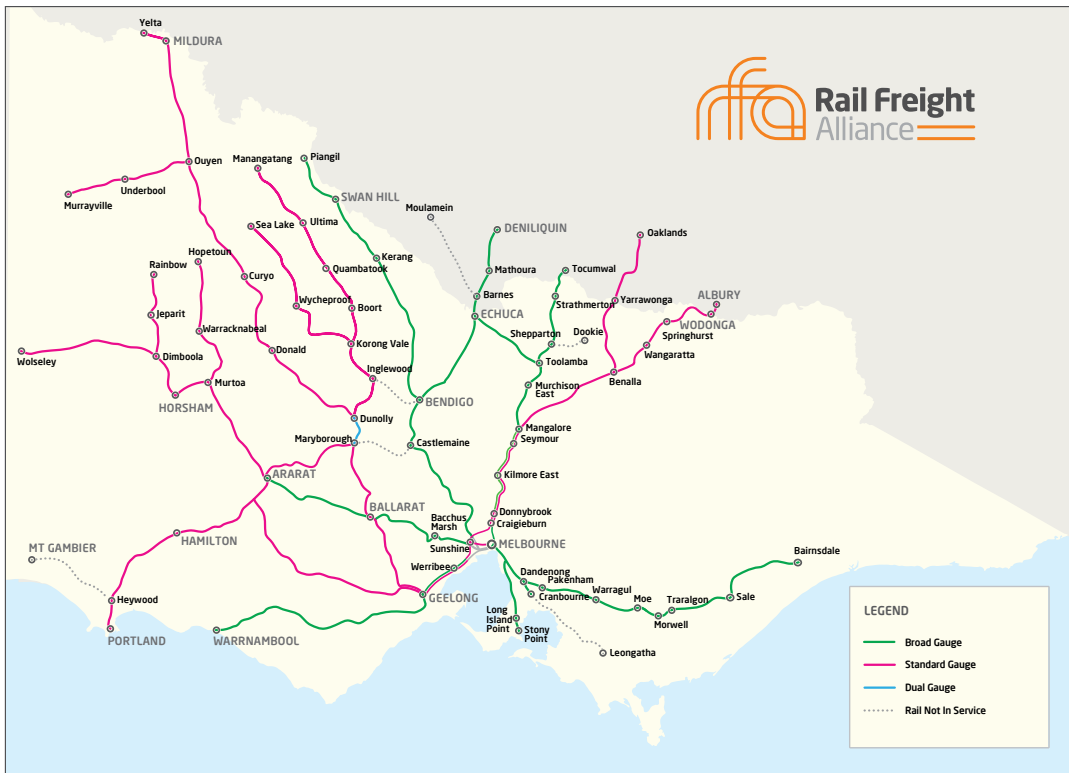
- **Rail standardisation of all key rail lines in Victoria.**
- **Upgrading and connecting to a National Rail Freight Network.**
- **Competitive, Independent, and Open access rail freight system.**
- **Seamless freight logistics that will facilitate efficient rail freight movement.**



CURRENT VICTORIA RAIL NETWORK



RECOMMENDED COMPLETED MURRAY BASIN RAIL PROJECT



MURRAY BASIN RAIL PROJECT

The Rail Freight Alliance (RFA) considers there are two clear objectives to ensure the success of the Murray Basin Rail Project (MBRP) and future freight movements in Victoria.

1. Ensure the completion of the Murray Basin Rail Project to deliver the Andrews Government's commitments.
2. Ensure the Victoria Rail Freight Network remain in State ownership and control.

BACKGROUND

The Andrews' Government announced their commitment to the Murray Basin Rail Project and development of a fully costed and scoped business case to achieve 80 kph & 21 TAL across the Network on the 17th of February 2015.

The MBRP was to

- **standardise 1,130 kilometres of the Western Victorian Rail Network;**
- **increase speeds to 80 kph;**
- **increase Train Axle Loading (TAL) to 21 tonne;**
- **increase efficiency by 15%; and**
- **increase the volume of grain transported by up to 500,000 tonnes per annum.**

The initial key pillars of the MBRP were to drive economic growth, create jobs and provide a major boost to the transport industry, agricultural sector and regional communities.

The project was heralded as supporting freight mode shift from road to rail, removing around 20,000 truck trips from our roads to the ports annually and improving safety for Victorian communities.

The Victorian Government submitted their project to the Commonwealth Government in April 2016 and was granted \$220 million to fund 50% of the project.

The MBRP was to be completed by the end of 2018.

In February 2020, the Victorian Auditor General completed an investigation into the MBRP; a copy of the report can be accessed here:

www.audit.vic.gov.au/report/freight-outcomes-regional-rail-upgrades

In February 2021 the Federal Government committed a further \$195.2 million and offered \$5 million for planning for full standardisation (to be matched by Victoria). The Victorian contribution to the project is \$48.8 million. Works Identified:

- **Re-rail Maryborough to Ararat**
- **Reinstate sidings removed during Stage 2**
- **Sleeper maintenance within the MBRP catchment**
- **Replace select passing loops removed some years ago**

In March 2021 Minister Allan stated that any further works on this project will be a matter for another government.

PROJECT

MBRP STAGES

- Stage 1** Sleeper replacement on the Hopeton and Mildura Lines (Complete).
- Stage 2** Standardise the Mildura to Dunolly & Murrayville to Ouyen Lines, including upgrade works. Recommission the Maryborough to Ararat Line (Incomplete).
- Stage 3** Dual Gauge the Maryborough to Ballarat Line (Not commenced).
- Stage 4** Standardise the Ballarat to Geelong Line (Not commenced).
- Stage 5** Standardise the Sea Lake & Manangatang Lines (Not commenced).

CURRENT STATUS

- Stage 2 of the project is incomplete with 21 TAL and 80 kph capability not achieved..
- Freight Trains from Merbein are travelling an additional 130 km via Ararat to get to Geelong/Melbourne.
- In June 2019, Minister Allan announced that the MBRP was out of funds and that she would negotiate further funding with the Federal Government.
- As part of these negotiations, it is rumoured that the standard gauge freight network in Victoria could be leased to the Federal Government.
- Some sections of Stage 2 line upgrade only allow trains to run at 25 kph and 40 kph.
- Ararat to Maryborough have been re-railed with substandard track from the 1900s, resulting in track speed and 21 TAL not able to be achieved.

TRAVEL TIMES

Location	Trucks	Pre MBRP-Trains	Current Trains
Manangatang to Geelong and on to Melbourne	6 Hours and 30 minutes	10 Hours	15 Hours
Sea Lake to Geelong and on to Melbourne	5 hours and 50 minutes	9 Hours and 30 minutes	12 Hours and 30 minutes
Merbein (near Mildura) to Geelong	7 Hours and 30 minutes	11 hours and 10 minutes	15 Hours
Merbein to Appleton Dock (Port of Melbourne)	8 Hours and 30 minutes	12 Hours and 30 minutes	16 Hours and 30 minutes

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS TO TRAIN TRAVEL TIMES

- Travel times on the Manangatang Line can vary greatly due to two freight operators and the lack of passing loops and staging areas.
- Many Temporary Speed Restrictions (TSR), some sections as slow as 10 kph, are in place on several lines, severely impacting on travel times.
- Crewing a freight train is now becoming increasingly difficult as a crew can “time out” due to line speed and lack of passing loops and staging.

SOLUTION

WHAT IS NEEDED TO FIX THE MBRP

- Complete the MBRP as per the Andrews' Government commitments (by necessity this will include some remediation of completed works).
- Standardise the Maryborough to Ballarat Line (Stage 3) and run a dedicated standardised passenger service.
- Reinstate stabling areas.
- Reinstate crossing loops.
- Upgrade the Maroona to Portland Line to 23 TAL.
- Install a 1,300m crossing loop between Maryborough to Ararat to allow longer trains to cross.
- Dual Gauge and standardise small sections of track near the Ballarat Station.

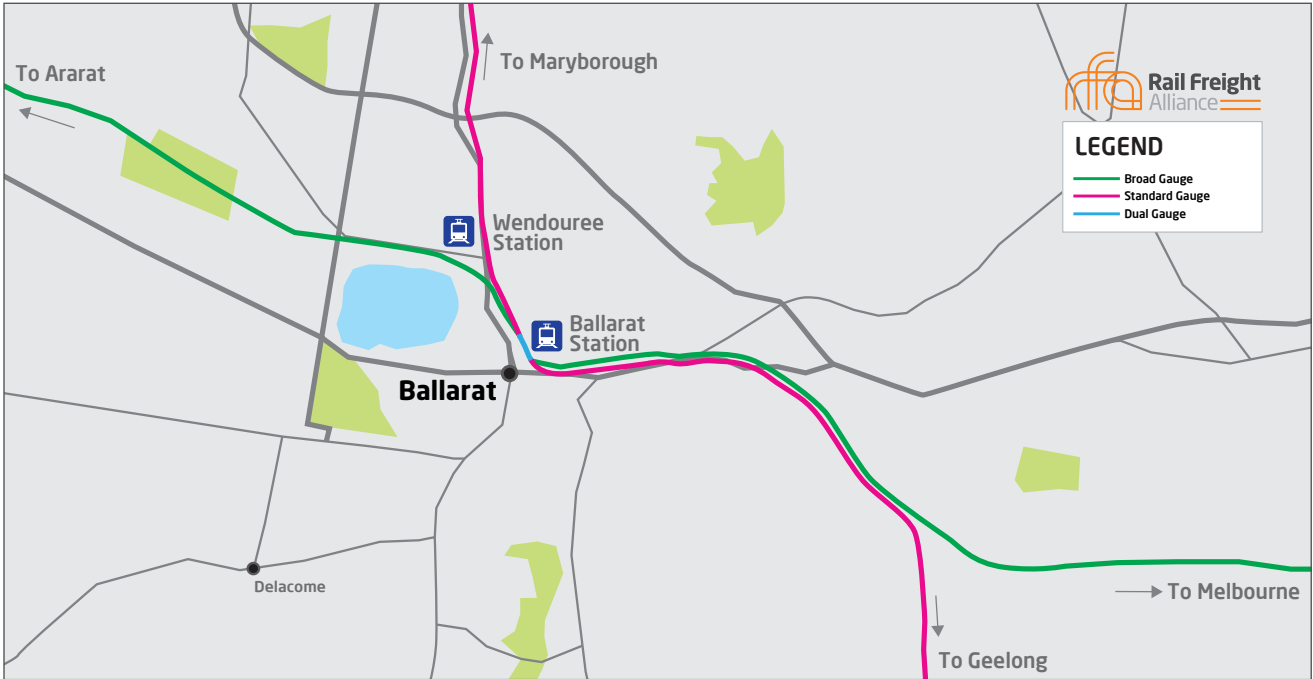
MAROONA TO PORTLAND

The Maroona to Portland section of line, whilst not part of the MBRP, is a crucial component of the Victorian Rail Freight Network linking Portland as a critical deep-sea Port in Victoria.

The Port of Portland is now able to connect to part of the MBRP, however is not efficiently supported with its current 19 TAL.

To achieve the original project outcomes, some parts of the completed works will need to be remedied.

ACCESS THROUGH BALLARAT



Convert the Broad-Gauge line to standard gauge from Armstrong Street through the centre of the Ballarat Station through to Gheringhap.

- Dual Gauge the sections of line, servicing the two platforms, from Doveton Street to Humphrey Street.
- Modify platforms at the Ballarat Station to service Standard and Broad-Gauge trains.

WHAT WILL NOT FIX THE MBRP

DUAL GAUGING STAGE 3 MARYBOROUGH TO BALLARAT

- Dual gauging is a substandard result for both freight and passenger rail, as speeds will be reduced to less than 80 kph.
- Dual gauging is more expensive to build and maintain.

LEAVING SOME STAGES AS BROAD GAUGE

Sections not standardised will create locations isolated within the catchment.

The current broad-gauge rolling stock is aging, and operators are reluctant to upgrade in a smaller market. The result is freight moving from rail to road and users of this system paying a premium for a lessor service.

AUSTRALIAN RAIL TRACK CORPORATION (ARTC) LEASING THE MBRP NETWORK

The RFA believes that the Victorian Government must retain ownership and control of the State Rail Freight Network. State ownership will ensure the Victorian Government will be able to effectively, efficiently and responsively manage its freight task.

The RFA believes that the ARTC play an important role on interstate lines, however rail lines within Victoria must remain in State ownership. Rail Freight will play a greater role as Victoria's freight task continues to grow and will be a vital part of an integrated Victorian Freight Network.

ISSUES

Currently the MBRP project has decreased freight capacity from this region. Our RFA Industry forum continually informs us more of the freight task is being delivered by road and that freight costs from the region are increasing due to the current state of the MBRP.

The Federal Government commitment of a further \$195.2 million to undertake works requested by the Victorian Government (to remedy earlier works undertaken at the start of this project) will only improve transit times from Mildura to Melbourne by 30 minutes. The RFA is confident these funds would be better utilised completing the original objectives of the project.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Upgrade all sections of line to achieve speeds of 80 kph and 21 TAL.
- Standardise the Maryborough to Ballarat Line.
- Convert sections of the line within the Ballarat Precinct to dual gauge.
- Standardise the Sea Lake & Manangatang lines.
- Standardise the Ballarat to Geelong line.
- Upgrade the Maroona to Portland line.

WWW.RAILFREIGHTALLIANCE.COM

