



Media release

From the Premier of Victoria and the
Federal Minister for Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Development

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FEDERAL-STATE CO-OPERATION DELIVERS MAJOR RAIL PROJECT

The Rudd and Brumby Governments will inject \$501.3 million to revitalise Victoria's north-east rail corridor in a historic agreement that will create an interstate rail freight super-highway and deliver major passenger rail service improvements in Victoria.

The North-East Rail Revitalisation Project will remove the rail line from the centre of Wodonga and convert 200-kilometres of broad gauge track to standard gauge, delivering a first-class passenger and rail freight link between Australia's economic hubs, Melbourne and Sydney and improved passenger rail services between Melbourne and Albury-Wodonga.

In Wodonga today, Victorian Premier John Brumby said that following months of negotiations the Commonwealth and State Governments had come to an agreement on nation-building projects to secure the future prosperity of the north-east, deliver the Wodonga Rail Bypass project and provide another boost to Victoria's rail freight network.

"We are taking action to ensure Victoria's communities are well-equipped to meet the challenges ahead and today's historic agreement will greatly improve the quality of passenger services for communities along the north-east rail corridor," Mr Brumby said.

"It is great news for people living and working in regional centres such as Seymour, Wangaratta, Benalla and Albury-Wodonga who will have access to both V/Line and interstate CountryLink services once a new standard gauge track is constructed – that's five return services each day along the north-east corridor that will be faster, more comfortable and more reliable.

"It will also generate major improvements for rail freight operations and comes on the back of our \$133.8 million buy-back of the regional freight network and \$43 million investment to upgrade priority major freight lines.

"This is cooperative federalism – State and Commonwealth Governments working together to deliver nation-building infrastructure."

Commonwealth Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government Minister, Anthony Albanese said the route between Melbourne and Sydney was Australia's busiest interstate freight corridor, with freight volumes forecast to increase by 70 per cent in the next 20 years.

"Across the corridor, the Australian Government is investing \$330 million, with \$45 million to the Wodonga Rail Bypass and \$285 million to the Australian Rail Track Corporation to manage Victoria's north-east line, upgrade it and convert it to standard gauge, providing a significant boost to the nation's rail freight network," Mr Albanese said.

“New rail freight infrastructure gets goods to markets more efficiently, helping to alleviate the capacity constraints on our economy – a legacy of significant underinvestment by the previous Commonwealth Government.

“By investing in nation-building infrastructure, our Government is taking action to remove capacity constraints on the economy, fight inflation and lock in prosperity.”

The North-East Rail Revitalisation Project will be delivered by the Australian Government-owned Australian Rail Track Corporation (ARTC) under the Southern Improvement Alliance, which is already undertaking a major upgrade of the Melbourne to Sydney rail corridor.

As part of the agreement, the ARTC will contribute \$285 million and will take-on responsibility for the ongoing operation of the new north-east standard gauge rail line under a 45-year lease agreement with Victoria. The Victorian Government is contributing \$171.3 million.

The North-East Rail Revitalisation Project will include:

- Construction of the Wodonga Rail Bypass to remove the rail line from the centre of the city and build a second single-track, five kilometre bypass of Wodonga;
- A major upgrade of the 200-kilometres broad gauge track between Seymour and Albury including conversion to standard gauge;
- Upgrades to the standard-gauge line between Melbourne and Seymour, including the construction of new passing loops as well as upgrade works already being undertaken by the ARTC;
- Three V/Line passenger locomotives and 15 passenger carriages will be refurbished and converted to standard gauge to operate on the newly-converted rail line; and
- New platforms along the north-east rail line to service the new standard-gauge locomotives.

Victorian Public Transport Minister, Lynne Kosky, said the North-East Rail Revitalisation Project would provide passenger rail services of similar quality to the successful Regional Fast Rail project.

“The track between Seymour and Albury will be upgraded, creating a track quality like our regional fast rail lines and dramatically improving the comfort and reliability for passengers along this corridor,” Ms Kosky said.

“Currently up to 30 per cent of the rail line between Seymour and Albury is subject to speed restrictions and the rail line is a single track which means services are often delayed. In recent times the quality of the track has meant we’ve used buses on some services to boost efficiency.

“Once the North-East Rail Revitalisation Project is complete, there will be parallel standard gauge tracks sharing the rail traffic, both operated by the ARTC, significantly improving capacity on the two rail lines.”

The V/Line locomotive passenger trains which run on the rail line will be converted to standard gauge and at the same time will be fitted out with new furnishings, including a buffet, upgraded toilets and washrooms and a new exterior colour scheme to bring them into line with the standard of V/Locity trains on other corridors.

The Wodonga Rail Bypass Project will also go ahead as part of the North-East Revitalisation Project with works commencing later this year.

The project will involve the conversion of the broad gauge track to standard gauge to the west of Wodonga as well as the construction of a new railway station in Wodonga. It will remove 11 level crossings from the city of Wodonga and deliver improvements to journey travel times for people travelling the Melbourne to Sydney rail corridor.

The North-East Rail Revitalisation Project will be jointly funded, with the Commonwealth’s AusLink program providing \$45 million, the Victorian Government, \$171.3 million and the ARTC, \$285 million.

Works on the project will commence later this year and be completed in 2010.