

They say: We can't afford to upgrade the whole lot. The metropolitan upgrade will come later

We say: It's all about regional votes and the government being seen to do something in regional electorates. They know there is more value for money in upgrading the metropolitan section, which would help both country and suburban passengers, but fear that the country voters will not say thank you.

10 How come, when there seems to be virtually universal opposition to singling the line and to laying non-convertible sleepers, that the government does not vary the contract?

They say: Critics are a disgruntled minority, bunch of 18th century (sic) rail enthusiasts, in cahoots with the National Party and opposed to the fast rail.

We say: Opposition is coming from experts and citizens who are pro rail and in many cases pro-Labor. The real problem is that the government is afraid of losing face.

BETTER RAIL ACTION GROUP

The Better Rail Action Group (BRAG) was established at a public meeting organized by Mount Alexander Shire Council on October 3, 2002. It represents a broad range of community groups including rail commuters, Latrobe University (Bendigo) Students Association, Castlemaine Business Association, Maldon Inc and the University of the Third Age.

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)

Getting up to speed on the Bendigo line 'fast rail'

1 Why is the government ripping up one of our high standard, heritage tracks between Kyneton and Bendigo?

They say: Because the 'fast' train cannot safely fit through the heritage bridges

We say: This is nonsense. Trains could easily be designed to fit. It's because (as they admit in private) they think they will save money in maintenance.

Also, Ballarat desperately needs a double track, and it would be political dynamite to provide two upgraded tracks to Bendigo and only one to Ballarat

2 Why does the loss of one track matter?

They say: It doesn't matter. There will be adequate capacity for the foreseeable future.

We say: It matters because with the smallest glitch services in both directions are disrupted. Ask the people who use the Ballarat line. Without the second line the project will not deliver what is promised—a more reliable, more frequent and faster services.

3 Is it possible to run a fast rail service on a single line?

They say: Yes, but it will require more 'discipline'. The reduction in reliability has been assessed and is acceptable.

We say: Greater 'discipline' will not deal with a fraction

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of the problems which cause trains to be delayed. We predict that the reliability of the services will prove unacceptable, and will get worse with increasing traffic. In a year or so we will know who is right.

4 Why haven't they published a timetable yet?

They say: We're undertaking community consultations. (June 2004)

We say: This only proves that they have not been listening. They've had two years of 'consultations'.

The timetables/service concepts should be developed before determining changes to the tracks;

We reckon that they won't publish a timetable until they've ripped up the track, and by then it will be too late to provide the service we want.

5 Why will the Bendigo line not become part of the standard gauge network which is being developed in Victoria and Australia-wide?

They say: Only freight lines are to be converted to standard gauge, and the Bendigo line is a passenger line.

We say: The idea of having separate country lines for freight and passenger is lunatic. A once-in-a-century chance to re-integrate the network is being thrown away.

6 Can the double track be reinstated when everybody recognises the mistake that was made in 2004?

They say: The second track can be restored in future if traffic increases warrant it.

We say: The chance of restoration is remote. In Britain, where similar mistakes were made, restoration proved very

costly. There is no technical justification for realigning the track other than to prevent reduplication

7 Can the broad gauge track be converted to standard gauge later when the regional social, environmental and economic disadvantage of trucking freight by road down the Calder to Melbourne is recognised?

They say: this is not contemplated. It would cost an extra \$25 million to use gauge-convertible sleepers (that is, sleepers which can be easily converted to support either broad gauge (1600mm) or standard gauge (1485mm) trains).

We say: Not when an unprecedented \$200 million has been spent on an 'upgrade' which includes concrete broad gauge only sleepers which would have to be replaced.

The government is deliberately exaggerating the increased cost of ordering gauge-convertible sleepers: it would have been less than \$1 million.

8 How come the Calder Highway is to be duplicated yet the rail track is to be singled?

They say: Doubling the road makes it safer and faster whereas singling the rail makes it faster and safer.

We say: the bureaucracy/government is not committed to a quality rail service: there is a freeway bias rather than an integrated land transport approach; if they were serious about a better service, they would not single the line to save a trifling amount in long-term maintenance costs

9 Why is all the money being spent on the regional section of the line, when the major delays are in the metropolitan section between Sydenham (Watergardens) and Spencer Street?