

BIM's BATTY BAROSSA BUS - OR RAIL REALITY?



The Barossa Mayor's musings on re-purposing the Barossa Rail corridor must not put the corridor at risk as the critical 'backbone' of passenger and tourist rail services into the Barossa into the future, the State's peak regional rail-lobby group says.

The South Australian Regional Rail Alliance (SARRA) says that while the contribution to the rail-corridor debate by Barossa Mayor Bim Lange is welcome, Mr Lange's proposal for a part-rail, part 'autonomous vehicle' solution goes against proven public-transport solutions which have stood the test of time.

"Mr Lange, his Council - and the Barossa Regional Development Authority - need to be reminded of the absolute gem they have in a rail corridor which is in place, is a publicly-held asset, and only needs moderate investment to re-introduce much-needed rail passenger and tourist services to the Barossa Valley," SARRA's Convenor, Mr Henley said.

"Other SA regional communities would die for the opportunity the rail corridor presents, for regional development and tourism."

Mr Henley said Mr Lange's reported view that extending the rail-service from Gawler Central to the Concordia area - and then presumably feeding that rail-head by so-called 'autonomous bus services' - shows a deep lack of public transport understanding and reality.

"The Barossa needs a reliable public-transport service today, not tomorrow," Mr Henley said.

“As Barossa Mayor, Mr Lange would have a deep understanding of the residential growth occurring in his Council area - growth his Council welcomes - but which needs fast, reliable and human-friendly public transport services into and out of his Council area.

“The ‘backbone’ of that need is already in place. Re-invigorating the existing rail corridor to the Valley is the most effective and quickest solution.

“Mr Lange’s ‘driverless’ bus solution is pie-in-the-sky and is decades away from becoming reality - and even longer to be proven as a reliable alternative to existing modes of public transport. Viewers of television news in the past few days would have been startled to see a so-called ‘autonomous’ vehicle driving at 100kph with its driver asleep at the wheel. This technology won’t be ‘bullet proof’ for many, many years - and the Barossa just can’t wait for it to become so.

“Mr Lange and his Council would be far better advised to seriously stand up against this anti-rail State government - led in this instance by his local MP and Transport Minister Stephan Knoll - and demand that the Barossa line be kept *for rail purposes* - and no other. At the same time, Mr Lange should be insisting that the Marshall Government provide those services as part of its ‘social contract’ with SA taxpayers.

“Clearly though, it appears that Mr Knoll wants to remove this embarrassment from his electorate - but we remind him and Mayor Lange that the Barossa Line is not ‘defunct’: it is only (and temporarily) ‘dormant’. Both of them need to heed their constituents which have made it abundantly clear in polls over recent months that the majority want rail to return to the Valley.

“If they do nothing - or worse, encourage the removal of the rail line for some ‘wacky tracky Artoo-Deetoo Star Wars’ robot solution - their electorates will remove them at the very first opportunity,” Mr Henley said.