

# NEWS RELEASE

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**South Australia's 'railway' towns are being urged to look at and learn from efforts being made in Balaklava where locals are attempting to have the town's railway station precinct cleaned up and restored to help rejuvenate their town.**

The 'heads up' comes from the South Australian Regional Rail Alliance, a community-based group attempting to bring back accountability to the management of SA's regional rail network leading to the restoration and revitalisation of SA's rural rail freight and rural public transport capability.

SARRA's Convenor, Paul Henley, of Burra, says there's a lot to learn from the Balaklava example which could potentially aid other rural towns located on the former South Australian Railways network.

He said that the Wakefield Regional Council (WRC) wanted to take control of and clean up the rail precinct in Balaklava – but central to the issue is: Who pays for it?

"Whose responsibility (both financial and moral) is it to 'take ownership'?" Mr Henley said.

"On the surface it could be argued that because the rail corridors and infrastructure are owned by the State, restoration should be paid for by the State.

"But that is not so," Mr Henley said.

He said all Councils and ratepayers needed to know that SA's regional railway lines and infrastructure are under the control of the private company Genesee Wyoming Australia – and under its Lease with the State Government, it is solely responsible for any clean-up and restoration work, which must be done at its expense.

"GWA is contractually required to carry out that work – the State and/or councils need not pay a cent," Mr Henley said.

"This matter not only affects Balaklava but all country towns where railway stations are located as well as towns where rail sidings are located, or towns where rail lines pass through," Mr Henley said.

"It also affects rural property owners whose properties abut rural-rail corridors where weeds and trees growing alongside (and often through) railway tracks make the corridors positive fire hazards and vermin corridors.

“So how did this come about?” Mr Henley asked.

“Due to a series of bad decisions by both Federal and State governments over the past 40 years, it is a sad fact that control over and responsibility for SA’s rural-rail spur lines were effectively given away to GWA.

“Rural South Australians will be horrified to know that the non-metropolitan rail network was ceded to GWA for just one lousy dollar in the 1980’s under a Lease agreement which remains in force today.

“That Contract demands that the lines must be kept in a state of operability such that trains could run on the tracks again within a fortnight of being required to do so.

“That legal obligation is clear, unequivocal, and is in black and white.

“GWA remains, today, responsible for the maintenance of rural rail corridors and attendant infrastructure.

“This includes the Balaklava precinct - AND all other regional rail corridors, including the lines and rail infrastructure servicing the lines to the Barossa, to Burra, to Pinnaroo, to the Riverland, to the South East and to other regions.

“GWA has clearly failed to meet its contractual obligation, and more importantly, successive State Governments have failed in their duty to hold GWA accountable to that Contract,” Mr Henley said.

**At the same time, Mr Henley has cautioned rural communities wishing to take control over rail precincts that rail right-of-way must be maintained so that rural freight and passenger services can access rail stations, sidings and corridors for use as they were intended.**

“Digging up the rail lines and developing the stations and facilities for purposes other than rail accessibility is NOT an option,” Mr Henley said.

“Bike trails and redeveloping station infrastructure for trendy coffee shops and the like might on the surface appear attractive, but underlying those initiatives must be the retention of the rail corridors and infrastructure for their original purpose -- that is, servicing rural regions by rail.

“This is non-negotiable, particularly at a time when the current State Government is promoting regional population growth and employment attraction to regional SA.

“That ideal will not be met without adequate regional rail services which will not only service regional growth by providing reliable rail transport services for all including the frail and disabled - but also improve road safety by taking heavy road-transport rigs off regional road networks, and lessening road maintenance costs,” Mr Henley said.

SARRA campaigned during the recent State election to bring this to the attention of political parties, but got no response from the Labor Party, middling responses of support from the Liberal Party - but secured an agreement from SABEST to investigate the matter should it hold influence after the State Election. History records that with no real interest from the major parties and the failure of SABEST to break through the major parties' stranglehold, the rural rail issue has yet again gone on the 'back-burner'.

"While it is early days in the reign of the Liberal Government, SARRA does not see any real interest from the current Transport Minister Stephan Knoll to pick up this issue and force an investigation into GWA's contractual failure, which he should do in the interest of regional South Australians.

"But SARRA is not for turning. We know the current government has been asked to investigate the Contract issue by its own party members, and we are hopeful that this will result in a full and frank investigation - which needs to be made public in the interests of transparency.

"In the event that these efforts fail and the current responsible Minister follows his predecessors in attempting to sweep this issue 'under the carpet', SARRA is planning other administrative means to force an investigation - and is looking at broader public campaigns to force the rejuvenation of regional SA, based on a 'backbone' of regional freight and passenger services.

"Governments can no longer 'hide behind their hands' over this issue.

"If nothing else, the State Government must cancel GWA's Lease forthwith and seek, in partnership with the private sector, the restoration of regional rail services in SA.

"GWA has had its chance; now is the time for the State to say 'Get out of the way, GWA' - let someone else have a go - but not before GWA meets its decades-old obligation to clean-up and return the tracks and infrastructure for ready use - and that includes restoring Heritage-listed structures.

"If GWA is unwilling to meet its commitments, then the State must take legal action against it to recover the cost of clean-up and restoration.

"We ask that all South Australians living in regional areas get behind our efforts.

"Wherever you live, be it in the Mid North, the Barossa, the Riverland, the Pinnaroo region, or the South East, this matter does affect you, your children, and the revitalisation of your town and region.

"From SARRA'S point of view, will not give up," Mr Henley said.

Further details are available on the SARRA website: [www.saregionaltrainscampaign.com](http://www.saregionaltrainscampaign.com) - where a link to its popular Facebook page is available.