

BAROSSA RAIL LINE RESTORATION: OPTION ONE

The first option is to return the line to accredited ‘heritage line’ standard, from Gawler to Tanunda (in the first instance, then later to Nuriootpa if/when the Kroemer’s Crossing track is restored).

Note that a certified rail engineer walked key sections of the track on July 2 this year, and produced a report that the line **could be brought up to ‘heritage’ standard by the replacement of 1 in 5 sleepers from Gawler to Tanunda for plus/minus \$1.5m.**

(While this was a very informed ‘guesstimate’, a final cost would depend on a more exacting examination of the track, but the engineer believes costs would not increase significantly.)

This work would allow a train to run at reduced speed (+ - 25kph) – which would be ideal as the BTT would be positioned as a ‘slow tourism’ offering.

Under the current Lease the State holds with One Rail Australia, ORA must be made responsible for completing (and funding) this work – at NO cost to the State.

BAROSSA RAIL LINE RESTORATION: OPTION TWO

The line be returned to full operational capacity, by a total rebuild of the line (ie: begin again with all-new sleepers, ballast screened, cleaned and topped up) and track re-laid.

This option would allow the return of train commuter services (without speed restrictions) to the Barossa.

IF a regular rail commuter service using the corridor ALREADY IN PLACE was to be made viable, past surveys show it would be highly patronised.

It should be noted that the ability to extend commuter services to Tanunda/Nuriootpa is currently very viable - and, under the ORA Lease, the reinstatement of the line can be achieved at no expense to the taxpayer.

A 'win-win' for South Australians.

BAROSSA TOURIST TRAIN ROLLING-STOCK ISSUES

The former Barossa Wine Train (three carriages of the old 'BlueBird' class) sits at the National Rail museum and is in very, very poor state. Its owner claims they can be restored to operational standard – *but at what cost?* Experts SARRA has consulted suggest that restoration would likely require substantial funding (well in excess of upper \$1m++/\$2m++) to restore them.

There are many attendant issues which would impact on the cost of restoring the Bluebirds to strict standards set by the **Office of the Rail Safety Regulator** (ORSR).

BLUEBIRD ACCREDITATION

Should the BlueBirds be restored to accredited 'mechanical' and 'body' standard – and that work being ultimately approved by ORSR - a still further impediment would be sourcing (or the new registration) of a properly ORSR-accredited rail operator to run the train, as an operating business (for profit or non-for-profit).

Further, ORSR-accredited train drivers would need to be employed to run the BlueBird set. SARRA understands that BlueBird-accredited drivers are, given the time that has elapsed since BlueBirds were part of the operating rail fleet, now in retirement/not available due to age.

Some of SteamRanger's volunteers are BlueBird-accredited and able to run a Bluebird BTT- and SteamRanger could be approached to play a role in running/crewing the BlueBirds on the Barossa line; however, SARRA has been told unofficially that SteamRanger has little appetite to do so.

THEREFORE IN SUMMARY with regard the potential return of a BTT, the following points must be considered:

1. By its action (or lack of action), the Marshall Government (advised by DIT) has made it clear that it has NO interest in facilitating the return of the train.
2. The Labor Opposition in the meantime (with the aid of a 'task force' being established the current Member for Light Tony Piccolo) has properly said it will investigate the matter - with the view that if a BTT has broad support in the Valley, an incoming Labor Government would facilitate a BTT post 2022.
3. The return of a BTT would give the Valley a tourism 'point of difference' which is increasingly needed as Barossa tourism is in danger of a significant downturn, challenged as it is by the COVID disaster. Traditionally the Barossa has been able to 'sit on its laurels' as a tourist destination, but this position is in danger as a result of lack-lustre tourism leadership, which continues today.

The old mantra of *'pour wine and they will come'* is yesterday's thinking.

A Tourist Train, providing visitors with a unique 'slow tourism' experience and as a 'feeder' service to other Valley tourism opportunities, would reinvigorate the region and spur regional job opportunities.

4. **The following timetable to return the current BTT to full operation must also be considered:**

At this point any physical work to restore the line, refurbish the BlueBird set (if that remains the preferred choice), obtaining ORSR accreditation and the establishment of an accredited operator-entity will not begin until 2022 at the earliest (assuming Labor wins the next election).

In reality therefore the physical return of a Bluebird BTT, under current circumstances, would likely be a further 2-3 years from operational reality after the next State election – meaning that a properly funded, properly accredited (BlueBird run) BTT IS UNLIKELY before 2025.

THERE IS AN ALTERNATIVE HOWEVER

Given all consideration to the above, **SARRA believes there is a viable (non BlueBird based) BTT alternative** (and is based on the understanding that a Labor Government would use its good offices to ensure the track is restored at least to Heritage Standard by the current Lessee of the track, One Rail Australia).

This alternative:

1. would negate issues around ORSR certification.
2. would not rely on the expensive and time-consuming restoration of the BlueBird set.
3. would employ currently-accredited rail operators/staff.
4. would see the return of the BTT quicker than the BlueBird alternative.
5. would provide a service (accredited to run) **from Adelaide Railway Station to the Barossa** – a better alternative than a ‘heritage’ service from Gawler to the Valley (this based on the very real likelihood that a BlueBird service would not be certified to run from Adelaide).
6. would ‘lift’ a Barossa Tourist Train to modern-day standards with a far greater operating life and reliability than the ageing BlueBird set could provide. (It must be acknowledged here that ‘train buffs’ would prefer to see the BlueBirds providing this service, but reality, practicality and operational reliability realistically draws the conclusion that the BlueBirds be retired)

SO WHAT IS THIS ALTERNATIVE?

With the continued electrification of the metropolitan rail service, much of **the current diesel-driven 3000 Class rolling stock will become redundant from 2022 onwards.**

SARRA is reliably led to believe that some 24 or 25 of the 3000 Class units will be ‘retired’ once the electrification is complete.

SARRA further understands that these units would likely to be sent to scrap (the sale of the 3000 Class units to another rail operator is unlikely as they are configured for Broad Gauge – an historical oddity in today’s rail environment).

Thus SARRA proposes the following:

1. An incoming Labor Government ‘sells’ (for a token \$1) - or ‘gifts’ - a minimum of four 3000 Class trains to an entity established to run a BTT (three of these trains to be operational at any one time, the fourth held in reserve/undergoing maintenance). More could be provided to be reconfigured into ‘Club Class’ seating – see below).
2. The 3000 Class trains are already accredited to run on metropolitan lines, under the electrical catenary.
3. The 3000 Class trains can run into and out of Adelaide Railway Station.
4. The 3000 Class BTT would run ‘express’ to Gawler Central at regular commuter speed, after which it would travel into the Valley at 25kph to match the line’s heritage-accredited speed limits. Note also that the 3000 Class accommodates the disabled (wheelchairs and the like). The BlueBird Class does not.
5. Servicing the 3000 Class would be much easier as knowledge/facilities to do that work already exists – and with one 3000 Class unit in perpetual maintenance, reliability would be assured.

6. To enhance the tourism offering and visibility, the 3000 Class trains' livery be repurposed to identify them as the Barossa Tourist Train – see our example on our website.
7. As already noted, an incoming Labor government would prefer a Barossa train to be named the BAROSSA TOURIST TRAIN, not the 'Barossa Wine Train'. SARRA agrees with this as designating it as a *tourist train*, by removing the name 'wine', widens its appeal to families and those for whom 'wine' is not a priority.

This is also likely to broaden patronage and expand Barossa tourist potential beyond just 'wine related' businesses.

8. **A further option would be to provide additional 3000 Class carriages to be refurbished as 'Club Class'**, enabling 'food and beverages' to be served as the train proceeds. Service on the Cairns to Kuranda Heritage Train is an example.

In any event, it must be noted that a 3000 Class service in its current internal configuration could commence immediately the track is refurbished.

'Club Class' provision/enhancements could come later, and spur further tourism promotional opportunities.

This option would see a BTT running as soon as the Barossa track is restored – say with 6-9 months of a Labor Government forming office – anything up to 2 years earlier than a BlueBird-driven service.

A FINAL COMMENT

SARRA acknowledges that the 'task force' proposed by Member for Light, Tony Piccolo, will proceed to establish (and confirm) Barossa business support for a BTT, but we also ask policy makers to take into account past surveys conducted at community level (by The Angaston Leader newspaper and SARRA) – which have shown overwhelming support for a return of a train service to the Barossa.

This proposal by SARRA offers a ready-made opportunity for policy makers to show true leadership – and benefit one of SA's most important regions.