

Rail Futures Institute

Inc No. A0059839B

Media release

December 7, 2017: for immediate release

Melbourne Airport rail plan promises direct links to regions

Passengers from many parts of regional Victoria would have rail access to Tullamarine without needing to change trains at Southern Cross under a Melbourne Airport rail link proposed by advocacy group Rail Futures Institute (RFI). An airport rail link built to this design also would free up badly-needed track capacity on the metropolitan rail network by separating suburban and V/Line trains in Melbourne's north and west.

In a recent speech to business group VCCI, Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews announced that his government would commit to having construction of a Melbourne Airport rail link well underway before the expected completion of the Melbourne Metro project in 2026.

Premier Andrews indicated the proposed airport rail link would be integrated with the regional V/Line network and would not "just be an expensive funnel for tourists and business people between the CBD and airport".

"Instead, it can transform the way people live, work, and travel across Victoria," Mr Andrews told VCCI. "In our view, the airport rail link has the potential to unlock western and northern Victoria."

Although not specifically adopted by the Victorian Government as its blueprint for the airport rail link, the RFI plan, contained in its [InterCity](#) report, satisfies these regional objectives for the airport link set out by Premier Andrews.

RFI's *AirTrain* proposal calls for a new rail corridor, partly underground and completely segregated from the metropolitan rail network. Passengers would ride in dedicated trains with large luggage spaces on the new corridor from Southern Cross to a new underground station at Sunshine before continuing on to the airport. The total journey time from Southern Cross to Tullamarine would be 15 minutes – half the journey time under an earlier government plan for an airport rail link. RFI envisages that *AirTrain* would run every 10 minutes, day and night, travelling at up to 160 km/h.

The *AirTrain* plan proposes diverting the Bendigo rail corridor (including the Echuca and Swan Hill lines), and the lines to Seymour, Shepparton and Albury/Wodonga, through the new airport corridor, with Tullamarine becoming a major rail hub, giving all towns on those lines direct airport access. Trains from Bendigo, Echuca and Swan Hill would divert from the present corridor at Clarkefield, while Seymour, Albury and Shepparton trains would divert from the present route at Wallan. These are essential steps to faster regional trains from all areas served by these lines.

Passengers travelling on the Ballarat and Geelong lines would also have quicker airport access via a convenient change at Sunshine for an 8-minute trip to the airport.

Sunshine also would form the interchange station for the new Melbourne Metro corridor, providing an easy connection with suburban trains running directly from the Sunbury line to Footscray, the new Melbourne Metro stations, Caulfield and the Dandenong/Pakenham line. Passengers bound for Gippsland and every other metropolitan line would change trains at Southern Cross.

The new line would be in-tunnel from Southern Cross to beyond Footscray and beneath Sunshine and North Sunshine. Elsewhere it would largely use existing rail corridors and involve minimal property acquisition. It should be built to standards compatible with a future High-Speed Rail service between Melbourne, Canberra and Sydney, RFI says.

As well as improving regional access to Melbourne Airport, these new rail corridors to Melbourne Airport would deliver the major benefit of freeing up essential track capacity on the suburban system, especially for passengers in Melbourne's western and northern suburbs where tracks are currently shared between suburban and regional trains.

In his speech to VCCI, Premier Andrews stated that "the jumbled network of regional and metropolitan lines in Melbourne's west" prevented the delivery of faster rail services on the Geelong and Ballarat lines. RFI strongly supports this view.

"But by separating metro lines from regional ones – and using the airport link to create capacity on the rest of the network – that dream becomes a reality," Premier Andrews said.

To further improve services on the Ballarat and Geelong lines, RFI's [InterCity](#) report also proposes the early electrification of the Ballarat line as far as Melton and the line to Tarneit and Wyndham Vale, with two extra tracks added on the Regional Rail Link beyond Sunshine for express Ballarat and Geelong services.

Premier Andrews also noted that the untangling of regional and metropolitan services would allow the government to "give Melbourne's booming west access to electrified metro services".

RFI as an independent group of experts says these improvements can and should be made before the expected completion of Melbourne Metro, given the burgeoning growth of Melbourne's western suburbs.

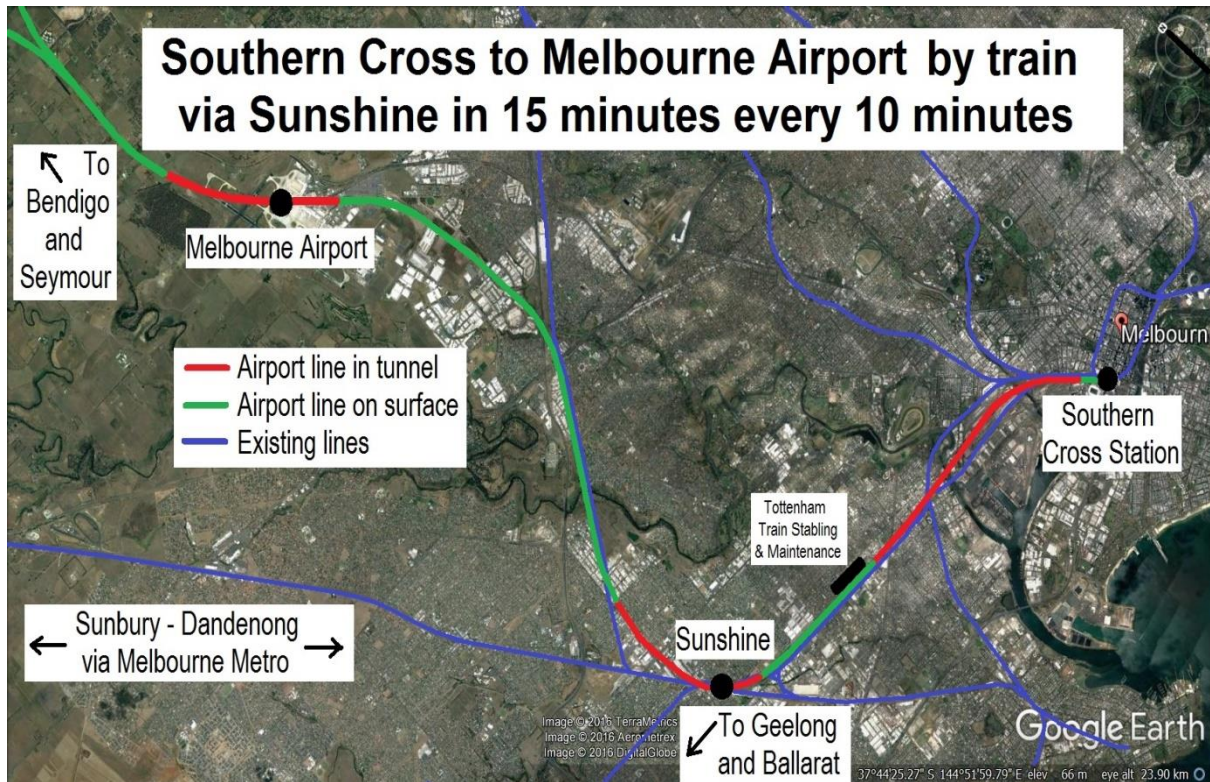
Dr Bill Russell, RFI Honorary Secretary, said a lead time of up to eight years was needed for planning, financing, procurement, construction and commissioning of the new line to Melbourne Airport as outlined by the Institute, with value capture one source of finance.

"Rail Futures contends that an airport rail link should be the next major rail project after Melbourne Metro with engineering and construction work underway as resources are progressively freed up from the Melbourne Metro project. Completion is needed well before 2030, by which time it will be critical for handling burgeoning numbers of airport users" Dr Russell said. "This is a project we are sure the public will strongly support. It will require collaboration between the State and Commonwealth governments, and the private sector".

"In the short-term, it is essential that detailed planning commence as soon as possible to determine and safeguard its final alignment, including reservation of a suitable rail corridor linking Melbourne Airport and Clarkefield. A proposed rail alignment within the Melbourne Airport boundaries should also be confirmed in the Airport's next 20-year masterplan, due for release in late 2018."

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About Rail Futures Institute

Rail Futures Institute Inc. is an independent non-partisan group formed to advocate cost effective rail and intermodal solutions for public transport and freight problems based on sound commercial, economic, environmental and social reasoning. Rail Futures members include experienced rail professionals, engineers, urban planners and economists.

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