Service Reorientation Project
Relocation of railway operational base to Castlemaine

Supported by Mount Alexander Shire Council.
Relocation of Railway Operational Base to Castlemaine

- Where we are now. Constraints on our current operation
- Why do we need to relocate?
- Opportunities
- Sustainable operation into the future
- Business Case
- Capital Works required:
  - Depot facilities at Castlemaine
  - Major track up grade
- The Vision
- Marketing rationale
- Historical and Preservation rationale
- Implementation including construction
- Funding including sponsorship
- Marketing and operational opportunities following the upgrade
- Vision for Maldon and Muckleford station precincts including broader community uses
2017 — An Established Success Story... With a Challenge

The Challenge

Our operational base is currently at the wrong end of the railway and our transit times are too great to meet the growth and increasing passenger demands

DEMAND
- Hero Destination — Booming
- Originating Patronage — Declining

LIMITATIONS
- Simple operational base with no secure undercover locomotive and carriage storage
- Poor facilities with no space to expand
- Limited car parking spaces/facilities

DEMAND
- Originating Patronage — Booming
- Destination Choice — Minimal

LIMITATIONS
- No facilities however plenty of space to re-establish the original Victorian Railways depot
The Sustainable Planned Operation

- **MALDON**
  - Heritage Victorian Railways (VR) terminus
  - Township is a major regional ‘hero’ tourist destination

- **MUCKLEFORD**
  - Major events site
  - Field days
  - Community use

- **CASTLEMAINE**
  - Frequent fast V/line train service — Melbourne to Bendigo for visitors
  - Major VGR operational base
  - Locomotive servicing depot for VGR and mainline steam operations
  - Carriage storage shed for VGR and mainline steam operations
  - Workshop facilities for VGR and mainline steam operations
  - New VGR depot integrated to the whole Castlemaine Railway Precinct & surrounding community
  - Major visitors access point
  - Major Park & Ride facility to Maldon
The Sustainable Business Case

THE SRP OUTCOME DELIVERED

- Passenger capacity more than doubled — *(up to 3 Castlemaine-Maldon-Castlemaine returns each running day)*
- Revenue more than doubled
- Few extra volunteers required to run the operation
- Minimal extra train mileage & maintenance cost
- Faster trains — Optimal journey time; Greater time at destination
- Expanded mainline operation to Bendigo, Echuca & Swan Hill
- Infrastructure maintenance greatly reduced — *(Undercover secure vehicle storage. Track maintenance slashed)*
- A SUSTAINABLE OPERATION

**CAPITAL WORKS REQUIRED**

- Rationalise existing basic facilities
- Restore back into a historic Victorian Railways terminus
- Integrate with the town centre
- Site developed via community partnerships (eg: MAVEC)
- Relocate civil department to new site at Maldon
- Construct operational base
- Locomotive Servicing Shed
- Carriage shed extension
- Workshop
- Secure site
- Sundry servicing facilities
- Renovate station refreshment room

**Funding Sources**

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**Total Project Capital Works for Stage 2**

- VGR + Partners Government: $2.10 Million
- Government: $1.85 Million
- **Total: $3.95 Million**
Service Reorientation Project

The opportunity to relocate the Victorian Goldfields Railway (VGR) operational base to Castlemaine opens up a whole range of opportunities for the VGR and is the catalyst for cementing the railway's position as the leading authentic heritage/tourist railway in the country. The VGR identified some time ago that a relocation of operational facilities and base to Castlemaine was essential for future development and sustainability. On 28 April 2017 local MP, Maree Edwards, announced funding for the preparation of a comprehensive strategy and business plan to evaluate and if feasible, show the way forward for this project. The VGR is delighted to announce that this plan culminating in Stage 1 of the Service Reorientation Project (SRP) is now completed. The SRP outlines a positive future for the Victorian Goldfields Railway and reinforces the VGR as a major tourism destination in Central Victoria. This prospectus is a brief overview of the project and the rationale behind its adoption.

The Proposal

To return the derelict rail yards at the north-west end of Castlemaine railway station into an operational railway facility that together with a significant upgrade track will:

- Cement the future viability and growth of the Victorian Goldfields Railway.
- Capitalise on significant underutilised extra passenger capacity by providing the necessary infrastructure to enable services to be based at Castlemaine. A feature of the SRP is the identification of the VGR's ability to expand capacity to carry many more passengers without a significant additional demand for operational staff, trains and resources.
- Ensure the railway's operations make the most efficient use of financial and volunteer resources.
- Create a base for the operation of regular steam hauled trains on the V/line network from Castlemaine to the iconic tourist destinations of Echuca and Swan Hill.
- Create and preserve the most authentic integrated railway precinct in Victoria by re-establishing the operational facilities in the rail yards. Linking Castlemaine's historic station, the remarkable 'Castlemaine A' signal box, along with the entire Maldon railway line, will provide Mount Alexander with an operational rail heritage site, unparalleled in Australia and indeed of world significance.
- Be a significant development in the preservation of not just artefacts but demonstrate the integration into the social and business fabric of the entire community the legacy of the once famous Victorian Railways.
- Integrate the exciting developments of the old railway goods shed, leased by the Castlemaine State Festival, with the successful rejuvenation of The Mill tourism site. This will enhance this new vibrant historic tourism precinct with elements that are complementary to one another.
- Recognises heritage considerations at the Maldon station precinct restrict the development of large facilities, like essential undercover carriage storage for the protection of historic assets. The relocation of maintenance and operational facilities to Castlemaine will enable the Maldon station site to be returned to an original example of a country branch line terminus.

In Summary; not only are both the marketing and operational cases for relocating the operational base to Castlemaine compelling, implementation of the SRP will also play a significant role in the preservation of our Victorian Railway(s) heritage.
Marketing Rationale

When the VGR was first reopened by the preservation society in the 1980s it was based at Maldon and gradually restored the track toward Castlemaine, culminating in the final thrust from Muckleford into Castlemaine itself in 2004.

In the past few years the importance of Maldon as a destination has been recognised and it is actively marketed by the railway as the destination. The railway recognises the significance and unique opportunity of having a ‘hero’ destination; Australia’s first Notable Town, a lovely little village that can easily be explored on foot, plenty of eating options, as well as other shopping and curio opportunities. Adding the mystique and relics of gold mining cements Maldon as the ideal tourist destination: All within easy walking distance of the station. Why would any tourism initiatives want to take people away from here? A significant factor in helping to keep Maldon’s character and charm is the ability of the railway to bring significant numbers of tourists to the town, with not one extra motor car or bus to spoil the country feel of the main and surrounding streets.

A consequence of the VGR reopening commencing from Maldon meant all operational facilities were established there. However this is no longer economical as passenger numbers have reached the point where the flagship train, the midday service from Castlemaine to Maldon with 2 hours in Maldon for lunch, is very well patronised and indeed in holiday times is full. Unfortunately the trains to get the carriages to Castlemaine for this service and especially back to Maldon in the afternoon are nearly empty. This is unsustainable and a waste of financial and people resources. Under the SRP the full potential of the railway will be realised. Higher speeds resulting from the track upgrade will enable more trains to run, more travel options for passengers and trains running at times to suit visitors without the need for additional staff or rollingstock. From Castlemaine, visitors will have the opportunity for a full day out with plenty of time in Maldon for lunch and to explore the town and this is seen as the major growth area. There will be the option of three return trips from Castlemaine to Maldon and two return trips from Maldon to Castlemaine, for those wanting just a train ride. At present, increasing the number of public running days is not considered to be important. Certainly most Saturdays are already taken up with special trains and this is a vital part of the operation. Volunteer man-power is important and a feature of the relocation to Castlemaine and the track upgrade is the ability to carry significantly more passengers with a similar number of volunteers and other staff as currently required for the existing services.

Utilising more fully the V/line connection at Castlemaine creates the perfect tourist/heritage railway scenario. With steady improvements to the V/line services the possibilities of offering packages from Melbourne by train are significant and this is an area to be developed; catering to not only locals but especially to overseas tourists staying in city hotels. The offering of a different and relaxing day out to see an authentic, quaint little goldfields village, as well as travel on a steam train is a compelling tourism draw-card.

Whilst the VGR is totally committed to railway preservation, its focus is firmly on the general tourism market and apart from some special events does not specifically cater for railway enthusiasts. One of the features of the SRP is that by establishing operational facilities at Castlemaine, the railway can cater for larger, heavier and more modern mainline steam locomotives to operate the regular tourist trains to Echuca and Swan Hill, as well as service the regular steam specials from Melbourne. The mainline trains are operated by Steamrail with whom the VGR have a formal joint venture agreement for the sharing of resources and combined marketing. At present the Steamrail heavy overhaul workshop facilities at Newport in Melbourne are also available to the VGR, which is where our resident locomotive K160 is currently based while undergoing overhaul.
Historical and Preservation Rationale

As well as offering a range of rail based tourism experiences, perhaps best summed up in the successful ‘Ales on Rails’ and other themed trains, the VGR is totally committed to its preservation role, in an authentic operational setting, of our rich railway history. The Victorian Railways were pivotal in the development of Victoria and played a key role in the social and commercial life of Victorians, especially in rural areas. The profitable operation of regular tourist trains will enable the VGR to commit more fully to the preservation of our rail heritage.

No other rail operation in Victoria is able to draw on such valuable and authentic heritage infrastructure and equipment. The entire Castlemaine precinct, coupled with the rail corridor through Muckleford to Maldon, as well as the depot for mainline steam tours to places like Echuca and Swan Hill are of world significance; original and truly integrated historical facilities that preserves rail history in the social context of the last 150 years. This is not just about running steam trains. It is a much more comprehensive preservation and presentation commitment. The combination of historic rolling stock operations on the branch line to Maldon and higher speed mainline trains, especially to Echuca (with its iconic wharf and paddle steamers), is without parallel in the railway preservation field and is an enormous opportunity for tourism in Central and Northern Victoria.

The VGR has access to and can operate all the significant carriage types ranging from the wonderful and unique Victorian Colonial Express carriages, dating from the early 1880’s (to an even earlier design), through the various passengers cars including some still running on the Bendigo line in the 1980’s. This is living history and enables everyone to experience yesteryear as it really was, in an operational context rather than exploring static museums.

At present our entire operational fleet is stored totally exposed to the harsh weather conditions at Maldon and the additional maintenance by our volunteer workforce simply to protect and remedy deterioration from the elements is not only frustrating and time consuming but is not assisting in the long term preservation of 100 year old relics. Even the steam locomotives suffer from the weather and should be stored under cover when not running.

It is vital that we are able to properly care for and conserve these priceless heritage carriages and locomotives and the most urgent need is to provide secure undercover storage to allow for their proper conservation. The wooden bodied carriages (some well over 100 years old) must have undercover storage and our enlarged carriage shed will provide for both our running fleet as well as the ‘heritage’ fleet. It’s to be noted that many of our historic carriages are in fact state assets and it’s groups like the VGR that have taken on the responsibility of preserving the state’s rail heritage. The enlarged carriage shed along with a locomotive shed to conserve the locomotives are the major items of Stage 2.

Summary

The Service Reorientation Plan will firmly place the Victorian Goldfields Railway at the forefront of successful, yet authentic, rail preservation and other tourism icons in Australia. It will provide:

- The necessary infrastructure and operational facilities to ensure profitable growth, by means of a sustainable and achievable economic model, for future tourist and heritage operations on branch and main line services.

- The facilities for the preservation of significant aspects of our railway history in authentic working environments.
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SRP
The Practical Aspects of the SRP Implementation

Why are we doing this?

Part of the responsibilities of the VGR board is to undertake strategic planning for the railway to ensure it remains viable, sustainable and is well placed to achieve the aims and objectives set down in our society’s charter. To remain viable we need to grow our revenue to provide for all the infrastructure fixed costs we need to incur. In order to remain sustainable we need to reduce our maintenance costs where possible and eliminate costs not producing revenue. Maintenance can be reduced by storing rollingstock and other assets in secure undercover storage and by reducing empty car or low patronage trains. There are two major components in our goal of becoming a sustainable and profitable major tourism and visitor experience. The establishment of the Castlemaine depot facilities and a major track upgrade. To reduce our maintenance and provide extensive secure undercover storage, we need space. This is very limited at Maldon and our strategy is to preserve Maldon as a typical VR branch line terminus. Maldon also has extensive heritage overlays restricting further development, so the natural solution is for us to bite the bullet now and build our long term operational infrastructure at Castlemaine.

In the future our branch line trains will depart from Castlemaine to enable us to take advantage of the growing visitor offering. Our locomotives and carriages must be securely stored undercover nearby. With operations based at Castlemaine, including most of our rollingstock, it is logical we build proper workshop facilities to integrate closely with and support the train operations depot. Another key element is the growing use of our connection to the mainline network. We intend to expand our operations onto the mainline north to Bendigo, Echuca and Swan Hill in conjunction with our mainline partners Steamrail. A depot at Castlemaine is perfectly placed to assist in the running of a range of mainline services. It is likely that some Stearain locos and/or carriages will also require storage within our new depot facilities. At Castlemaine we have far greater space than at Maldon. We have far more of a clean slate for designing the site layout. And of course we have a precedent - the site of the historic steam depot that served the Maldon line in its heyday. All of the above has led to the project being known in government circles as the VGR Service Reorientation Project (SRP)

The Castlemaine Railway Precinct Masterplan

The VGR project has also been a driver for the surrounding stakeholders to get together and develop The Castlemaine Railway Precinct Masterplan. This is being led by Mt Alexander Council who will develop a Masterplan for the entire Castlemaine Railway precinct (of which the VGR’s leased area is a major component). The participants include VGR, The Mill, The Gaol, The Castlemaine Festival (as new resident lessees of the railway goods shed), V/Line, Victrack, Transport for Victoria, RDV and the Council. It is anticipated that the Masterplan will be released in the first half of 2018.

Related Project (Aboriginal Training Opportunity)

An MoU has been signed between Bendigo & District Aboriginal Co-Operative (Recruitment of Aboriginal trainees), CERT Training (Facilitate training) and VGR (practical training opportunities) to progress rail maintenance skills training for Aboriginal people. This will equip trainees with the necessary qualifications and experience to partake in current massive rail infrastructure projects.
What are we planning to do with our site?

The VGR lease

The VGR lease site includes the buildings on platform 2/3 and the platform 3 half of the island platforms. The leased land continues along the mainline towards Bendigo through the rail yards to Walker Street and from the mainline right across to the Barkers Creek boundary. We share a border with the Mill complex at the Walker street end.

The future site configuration

The current plans are divided into a number of stages (currently 3 major ones) which we can build over time as funds become available. The finished site is designed to include:

- A 3 road x 8 car long carriage shed (160m - double the existing shed in length). An important requirement is to provide capability and ease of access to support the provisioning of the first class cars, however the rest will be purely secure dry storage.
- A 3 road, 2 locos long, locomotive servicing shed with side annexes, like at Maldon, on the original locomotive shed site and utilizing the remaining historic servicing pits.
- A 2 road 50m long mechanical workshop to enable much more effective maintenance and overhaul of our locomotives and rolling stock.
- Restoration of the historic shunter cabin adjacent to the turntable.
- A secure compound enclosing the various items above.
- Separate ash disposal pits, coal and oil storage, water tank and columns and various sheds for safe storage of lubricating oils and light-up fuel.
- And a myriad of smaller sundry items required to support train operations.
- Major connection of mains water, sewerage services and 3-phase power.
- An option for a 2 road, 50m long multi-purpose shed for both display and holding of functions.
- An option for a full length platform to service The Mill site.
- A pedestrian footbridge over the mainlines to access Kennedy Street.
- Various site viewing platforms for the public to get good easy access to see our operation.
- An upgrade of our facilities on Castlemaine platform 3 – mainly ticketing office & refreshment rooms.
SRP Stage 1 – Feasibility & Planning (completed)

This is all about the strategic planning, feasibility study, and design and planning works to make the project shovel ready. This stage has been funded by the VGR ($22,000) and a grant from RDV ($35,000)

VGR has engaged Linqage International to conduct the feasibility analysis and facilitate the strategic planning for the whole railway operation. The planning work involves developing suitable designs for the buildings and incorporating these within an overall site design that satisfies the various business, operational, regulatory and physical constraints. This is followed by formal quoting for delivery of the various components.

Developing Masterplans for Castlemaine also required the VGR to consider the usage of all our major sites, therefore Masterplans for Maldon and Muckleford are also being developed. The project has been broken down to several stages which it is hoped to carry out concurrently if funding permits. The VGR does have the resources for the Castlemaine building and other works to proceed concurrently with the track up grade.

SRP Stage 2 – Construction of Castlemaine Facilities

This is designed to enable basic train operations from Castlemaine and includes:

- A 4 car extension southwards of the existing 3 road carriage shed enabling us to store our 7 to 8 car long operational carriage set. This doubles the existing shed in length. An important requirement is to provide capability and ease of access to support the provisioning of the first class cars within the shed (this may not be fitted out in stage 1).
- A 3 road, 2 locos long, Locomotive Servicing shed with side annexes like at Maldon and utilizing the 2 existing pits. The 3 roads will each run off the turntable direct into the shed. The 2 roads nearest the creek will utilise the existing servicing pits which are currently being refurbished. The annexes will provide storage on one side – for operational consumables, and the other side is designed to provide staff amenities – kitchen/meal room, toilets, showers, lockers.
- Connection of mains water, sewerage and 3 phase power to the site.
- Construction of trade waste (spilt oils & chemicals) collection and processing facilities.
- Limited Site fencing to provide a secure compound.
- Upgraded road vehicle access to the depot from Walker Street.
- Security lighting and CCTV security.
- Construction of 3 access tracks on opposite side of the turntable for the 3 loco roads.
- Basic upgrade to the refreshment room on platform 3.

Note: all workshops, maintenance, coaling and oiling of locos still remains at Maldon after Stage 1.
Service Reorientation
Project Masterplan
Transfer of Workshop and Servicing Facilities from Maldon

• A 2 road 50m long workshop adjacent to the Bendigo mainline at the northern end of the carriage shed. These roads will only occupy one end of the building, with machinery and stores at the other.

Note: associated with this workshop move to Castlemaine is the move of the carriage maintenance team from the goods shed into the existing workshop at Maldon.

Major Track Upgrade to Victorian Railways Branch Line Standards

• Major track upgrade including re-sleepering, re-railing, ballasting and tamping our mainline to support the projected traffic growth. The resulting financial and manpower benefits of significantly reducing recurrent track maintenance costs and effort cannot be overstated.
• The ‘one-off’ cost to upgrade the track will additionally enable faster train speeds to fully capitalise on the potential to maximise the overall tourism and rail experience for visitors.

Future Tourism Projects to Develop as a Consequence of the SRP Project

• Leverage our site location and maximise engagement with the surrounding community. This could include:
• A 2 road 50m long multi-purpose facility which can be used both as a display facility telling the story of the railways in the Goldfields region (maybe a loco and a carriage) and as a large open space function centre for Castlemaine festival or Corporate events.
• A new 6 car platform and run round road adjacent to The Mill. This would not only connect us to a large new audience but also deliver our existing passengers to The Mill and adjacent Botanic Gardens. The concept is to depart trains from The Mill, pickup at Castlemaine and then continue on to Maldon. Allowance for a future “through line” has been designed into the site plan.
• A new footbridge to replace the one removed in the 80’s providing access over the Mainlines from Kennedy Street (adjacent to the new V/ Line carpark) into our site and The Mill, and continuing on to provide access to Gingell Street and up to the Goal. This could also connect with new footpaths/bicycle tracks proposed to run along Barkers creek.
• Elevated viewing platforms for the public to overlook the main depot/turntable area and accessed from the new over-bridge and connecting footpaths/bicycle tracks.
How do we fund it?

We have been successful in obtaining a grant from Regional Development Victoria (RDV) to help fund Stage 1. This is on a 2:1 basis with VGR contributing a cash component and some additional in kind contribution. Now that the feasibility and planning study has shown the positive operational, financial and enhanced visitor experiences to the region we are commencing funding applications. Funding to enable the entire project, ie, the Castlemaine development and the track upgrade to proceed is being sought from State and Federal Governments. This government funding is underpinned by cash and in kind contributions from the VGR, sponsors and donors.

We do need more help! Can you assist?

The VGR, thanks to the enormous input from our volunteers, operates a financially sustainable business and we generate modest amounts for capital improvements. We are very efficient with our spending and certainly know how to make every dollar count. However, major capital works especially the Castlemaine Redevelopment, do need substantial outside funding. We are most grateful to all levels of Government for their support in this area. The completed Stage 1 resulted in a full business study of the relocation proposal along with an analyses of our entire business, especially marketing, with financial and patronage projections. We’re appealing to the corporate sector as well as individuals to consider becoming a major corporate sponsor or donor in the knowledge that we can seriously leverage off your generosity to at least double or triple the funds by way of government funding. The full report (the Service Reorientation Plan) is available for viewing by contacting our Special Projects Manager; Steve Strangward (steve.strangward@vgr.com.au)

How can I benefit from sponsorship?

Sponsors receive wonderful benefits. Sponsorship may be annual, in which case benefits accrue each year or ‘one-off’ with single year benefits. Packages commence at $2,000 and for just $50,000 you or your business can become a patron of the VGR. Sponsorship can also be ‘in kind’ and still receive benefits. Our sponsorship packages offer a range of benefits, some of which include:

- A strong commitment from our railway in promoting your business through print material and online via our website and through our social media pages.
- Opportunity for promotion in special events held at the railway.
- Offer special trains or ‘drive a steam train’ packages for prizes or incentives.
- Special trips featuring exclusive use of our fully licensed first class lounge and observation cars.
- Pride in knowing that you are contributing to a unique piece of living history of state and national significance.

Our detailed sponsorship booklet can be viewed on line at vgr.com.au or contact info@vgr.com.au and a hard copy will be posted to you. Sponsorship may to be directed to a specific project or to the Castlemaine precinct development as the new centre for railway operations and tourism hub. Within that project there is opportunity to fund specific items like staff amenities, locomotive facilities, interpretive museum, refreshment facility, and even naming rights to some facilities. You receive positive recognition by supporting a specific component or aspect.

We invite you to join us on our journey by becoming sponsor as the railway grows into a national treasure and an international tourist icon. Our special projects team are available anytime to more fully explain our plans, financial projections and explore the mutual benefits of sponsorship of the VGR.
Summary of Marketing & Operational Opportunities & Operational Cost Impacts Associated with the SRP

Three Train Option

During the past 12 months the VGR has had a major marketing drive mainly focusing on various online opportunities. This has been remarkably successful. Despite no extra spending in the marketing budget, passenger numbers have increased by 35%.

- Passenger growth in 2017 UP by 35%. Revenue up by 28%.
- Most Sunday train services at maximum capacity. Ie: 2 locomotives on 9 carriages. There is simply no room at stations to accommodate longer trains.
- Current timetable limitations mean no scope to increase either services or capacity.
- The VGR is effectively unable to efficiently expand capacity despite obvious further passenger growth potential — we have even started to turn passengers away on peak days.

What is the solution?

The implementation of the SRP will enable the VGR to effectively double patronage with virtually no extra financial or manpower resources. The VGR firmly believes the momentum of the significant increased passenger growth figures on the branch line to Maldon will continue into the foreseeable future especially when coupled with proposed marketing initiatives.

- To run a passenger orientated timetable and achieve optimum volunteer and asset utilisation, train services MUST be based at and originate from Castlemaine.
- We must upgrade the track to VR branchline operational standard to enable faster speeds and shorter journey times. This allows for an additional 3rd return service to run utilising the same staffing levels and the already running locomotive and carriages. Result, 50% more travel options for passengers at minimal extra cost base.
- As with any business we must use manpower effectively. Although volunteers operate all services we do not have unlimited volunteer resources.
- The SRP will enable the VRG to offer a far more customer orientated product, a greater range of services and travel options, whilst more than doubling capacity. ALL THIS without a significant increase in the cost base.
- The VGR business is largely fixed costs driven and variable costs are small compared to fixed costs. Thus a doubling of patronage increases the cost base only marginally both in manpower and $ terms.
- With the associated SRP track refurbishment, the VGR becomes a far more sustainable operation and a business that will NOT be reliant on future Government operational assistance.

Future marketing potential

The VGR is in a rapid growth phase that shows no sign of easing. There are still major opportunities for growth that will be unrealised if current constraints on operations are not addressed. These include:

- Major promotion to city hotel visitor market to offer attractive day trips by V/line to an iconic gold mining and typical Aussie country town (Maldon). By using V/line services the increasingly independent Asian day tourist can easily spend one day seeing ‘the bush’. Puffing Billy have achieved outstanding success with the Asian tourist market and the VGR can offer equally attractive packages. Maldon attractions include not only the main street and town but also Mt Tarrengower lookout, Carmen's tunnel (possibly the most accessible and authentic gold mine experience available) and the totally under recognised gold dredges.
- Development of the Castlemaine Park n Ride concept to bring visitors to Maldon while not adversely impacting the townscape with coaches and additional motor cars. The VGR has the ability to bring over 700 visitors to Maldon per day without the need to find parking in Maldon for any additional cars and buses.
• Integration and joint marketing initiatives with Echuca paddle steamers. This is already under development in conjunction with RACV travel.

• The concept of the SRP to provide a base for train services not only on the branchline to Maldon but ALSO the mainline to Echuca is seen as a wonderful and unique opportunity to tap into and fully maximise the investment into the Castlemaine depot. Various trials of these Echuca services have been run in 2016/17 and have demonstrated high market demand.

• Development of regular heritage steam train operations on V/line's track north from Castlemaine to Bendigo, Echuca and Swan Hill based at a fully equipped maintenance and operational depot at Castlemaine.

• The marketing opportunities to build a sustainable business for visitors and tourists travelling from Melbourne to Castlemaine by V/line, then catching a steam train to Echuca and a ride on the iconic and world renowned paddle-steamers and port visit will further justify the recent very substantial investment in Echuca port facilities.

• The VGR sees the operation of steam trains on the branchline to Maldon and the main line to Echuca to be mutually complementary tourism activities with the advantage of common (shared VGR and mainline) maintenance and depot facilities.

The SRP is the springboard to create and preserve the most authentic integrated railway centre in Australia. The SRP project delivers far more than re-establishing the VGR operational facilities in the Castlemaine rail yards. It is the key component in rebuilding a huge Castlemaine railway precinct linking the surrounding community — The fast growing Mill complex, the Gaol, the Botanic Gardens to Castlemaine's historic station, the remarkable 'Castlemaine A' signal box and restored goods shed along with the entire 1880's Maldon railway line. All this, coupled with an operational base for mainline heritage trains to Echuca, will create in Mount Alexander an operational rail heritage site unparalleled in Australia and indeed of world significance.

**The Current Timetable Limitations**

Currently all round trips are over 2 hours if passengers return immediately — 50+ min travel and ½ hour at destination while loco is turned. Trains run Wednesdays, Sundays and holiday Saturdays. At present first class capacity is fixed at 60 passengers and although an additional first class car with a capacity of 30 will be in traffic in 2018, this is not factored into these passenger loading predictions. Because of the practical operational restrictions of keeping to the OH&S working hours of just one shift for all staff and the need to be based at Maldon, the maximum EFFECTIVE daily passenger capacity for a train hauled by one loco is 250. Despite expanding capacity by adding another locomotive and more carriages we have effectively reached full capacity NOW. On peak days we turn away some walk-up customers. Building to absolute maximum capacity of 9 cars and 2 locos (requiring an extra crew of one or two persons) is 350 passengers per day and most Sundays currently require the extra loco and carriages.

For the above logistical reasons train times are not able to be significantly changed so the 2.45pm return journey from Maldon to Castlemaine and back, which is not attractive to passengers and books very poorly, cannot be altered. This train effectively just returns flagship passengers to Castlemaine and then is virtually empty back to Maldon.

*Currently two daily return trip departures from Maldon.* 10.30 and 2.45. The 2.45 books very poorly and even on really busy days will rarely achieve 10-20 ticket sales 10.30 books relatively well but problem is those passengers choose to return on the flagship 12.00 service from Castlemaine thus adding to the capacity problem of that service. The alternative requirement to stay in Castlemaine for 4½ hours is just too long for those doing a day trip out of Maldon and is not marketable.

*Currently only one daily return trip departure from Castlemaine.* 12.00: Our flagship service is often full and yet the late afternoon (4pm) working to return the train to Maldon is generally virtually empty. This service gives only 2 hours in Maldon which is too long for those wanting just a train ride and too short to eat and explore the town. If it's extended to say 3 hours then those short of time or who want just a train ride are not catered for. With locomotive and train based at Maldon, coupled with the existing reduced track speeds, no other timetable options are possible to efficiently utilise just one loco, one train set and one volunteer crew.
**Current Timetable**

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<th>To Castlemaine</th>
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<tr>
<td>Maldon dep.</td>
<td>10.30am</td>
<td>Castlemaine arr. 11.15am</td>
<td>This train books to generally only ¼ or less capacity but those bookings reduce capacity on the popular 12.00pm flagship service ex-Castlemaine so there is no value in further promoting this service. Return working of flagship service. Very few extra bookings from Maldon.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maldon dep.</td>
<td>2.45pm</td>
<td>Castlemaine arr. 3.30pm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To Maldon</th>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Castlemaine dep.</td>
<td>12.00pm</td>
<td>Maldon arr. 12.45pm</td>
<td>Flagship service generally close to or completely 'full'.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Castlemaine dep.</td>
<td>4.00pm*</td>
<td>Maldon arr. 4.45pm</td>
<td>*one way only and generally virtually empty.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SRP Infrastructure Upgrade PROPOSED Timetable**

With operations relocated to a new Castlemaine base and higher train speeds achieved from the track upgrade we are able to offer an additional return service each operating day. This gives even more flexibility for passengers, making the Maldon visit either 4 hours, 2:15 hours or just ½ hour. Each return journey on the VGR will be a minimum of 1½ hours. Half an hour travel each way with ½ hour at the destination while the locomotive is turned and shunted. This means the VGR operation will become even more attractive in offering a day out in itself or be another activity as part of a full day in Castlemaine or Maldon. It also opens up the ability of visitors who have travelled independently to Maldon to be able to have a ride on the iconic steam train as part of their Maldon experience without taking away from their overall town visit. It would now be possible to visit Castlemaine for lunch and visit nearby attractions like the Mill complex, the Gaol and the renowned Botanic Gardens without taking away from the Maldon visit.

We have begun serious negotiations with Murray River Paddle-steamers to incorporate a ride on the VGR as part of a day trip coach package from Melbourne visiting Maldon, riding on the VGR and then moving on to the Echuca port precinct. An important consideration is to reduce the journey time on the train and a ½ hour one way trip would be ideal. Puffing Billy have many thousands of overseas tourists travel as part of a day coach tour and virtually all of those travel for only a 20 minute section. We can offer a similar journey time... By adding the additional return service not only do we spread the load efficiently, we offer more options and allow visitors more opportunity visit other attractions.

Our daily capacity can be increased by a conservative 250 people per day. This enables us to carry 700 passengers per day or 1400 one way trips with exactly the SAME RESOURCES at present —just one locomotive, carriage set and crew. On really busy days, like holidays and event days, by adding an extra locomotive and carriages we build up our capacity to an impressive 900 passengers per day. An additional service would allow for 2 return trips from Maldon and 3 return trips from Castlemaine. Journey times after the track upgrade are reduced from the current 50+ minutes to 30 minutes.
Proposed Train Services

Two daily return trips from Maldon

11.30am 1½ hour return trip to Castlemaine. With options of ½ hour or 2½ hours at Castlemaine
1.30pm 1½ hour return trip to Castlemaine with ½ hour at Castlemaine

Three daily return trips from Castlemaine

10.30am with option of ½ hour in Maldon or stay to explore Maldon for either 4 hours (*Flagship service*) or 2½ hours
12.30pm with option of ½ hour in Maldon or 2½ hours enough to for lunch and a quick town visit
2.30pm with option of ½ hour in Maldon. This suits those wanting just a relaxing train ride at the end of a day’s sightseeing

Proposed Timetable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To Maldon</th>
<th>From Maldon</th>
<th>To Castlemaine</th>
<th>Notes</th>
<th>From Castlemaine</th>
<th>To Maldon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Castlemaine dep.</td>
<td>10.30am</td>
<td>Maldon. 11.00am</td>
<td>This is the flagship service Options of 4 hours or 2½ hours to have lunch and fully explore Maldon OR Train ride experience with only½ hour in Maldon</td>
<td>Maldon. 11.00am</td>
<td>Castlemaine dep. 10.30am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Castlemaine dep.</td>
<td>12.30pm</td>
<td>Maldon. 1.00pm</td>
<td>Train ride experience with option of immediate return or 2½ hours to explore Maldon.</td>
<td>Maldon. 1.00pm</td>
<td>Castlemaine dep. 12.30pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Castlemaine dep.</td>
<td>2.30pm</td>
<td>Maldon. 3.00pm</td>
<td>Castlemaine arr. 3.30pm Train ride experience with ½ hour in Maldon.</td>
<td>Maldon. 3.00pm</td>
<td>Castlemaine dep. 2.30pm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<th>To Castlemaine</th>
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<tr>
<td>Maldon dep.</td>
<td>11.30am</td>
<td>Castlemaine arr. 12.00pm</td>
<td>Train ride experience with option of immediate return or 2½ hours in Castlemaine to visit nearby attractions, The Mill complex, the Gaol and the Botanic Gardens.</td>
<td>Castlemaine arr. 12.00pm</td>
<td>Maldon dep. 11.30am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maldon dep.</td>
<td>1.30pm</td>
<td>Castlemaine arr. 2.00pm</td>
<td>Train ride Experience with ½ hour in Castlemaine.</td>
<td>Castlemaine arr. 2.00pm</td>
<td>Maldon dep. 1.30pm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Why do we need to increase train speeds via a track upgrade?**

We are always striving to get best utilisation of our resources; manpower, carriages and locomotives. At present our trains are scheduled to take 45 minutes each way. Because of speed restrictions due to essential remedial track work this is often over 50 minutes each way. Our track needs significant investment to upgrade it to a state where higher speeds can be cost effectively maintained. Our tourist railway is currently accredited to a maximum speed limit of 40km/hr. At present due to the condition of our track, we also have a self-imposed limit of 25km/hr with further restriction in some places.

For a sustainable future it's imperative that we restore the track to a very maintainable branchline standard which in Victorian Railways days had a speed limit of 65km/hr. If we could restore our track to the Victorian Railways branch line standard of 65km/h maximum speed we could safely introduce average 40km/hr timetabled speeds to achieve ½ hour running times for each one way trip. We see this as an optimum journey time for our regular trains as it's within attention span of children and enables the train ride to be experienced without it becoming the major or only activity for the day. This is significant as we would then have the ability to ADD a 3rd extra service during the day which would increase capacity significantly AND give more travel options to passengers with the only cost being fuel and maintenance for the extra running. This would be achieved with very few, if any, extra staff. Apart from the smoother ride the track upgrade is the key in our quest to run the VGR as efficiently as possible.

We will attract even more patronage by being able to offer an enhanced range of travel options. The train times are ALL at convenient times and offer a choice of experiences. It should be possible to have even loading on every train unlike only on half the trains as currently.

**The track upgrade is a vital component of our vision for the VGR to become the major tourism feature of not just central Victoria but the entire state. This is a sustainable goal and is not reliant on further funding for routine operations.**

**How do we manage train bookings?**

Our sophisticated on line booking system is now used by most of our passengers to pre book and there has been massive take up of this facility in the 12 months it been in operation and now averages 60% of all excursion passenger bookings. This is even higher for First Class services. We will have the ability to regulate and mange bookings on line to ensure maximum utilisation of capacity by offering different options and using the booking system to 'encourage' bookings onto underutilised alternative trains. To book on-line passengers will go via our website where all travel options are clearly explained.

We can market journeys to Maldon to suit those who wish to explore the town or want just the train ride. We can further market the Park and Ride concept in conjunction with Maldon based organisations to provide local connections – a minibus or a vintage bus into town and to other local Maldon tourist destinations. For people starting from Maldon we offer only the train ride but at a convenient time. In addition there is now time (2½ hours) in Castlemaine to visit the nearby attractions, The Mill, the Gaol and the Botanic Gardens.
Why not run more days to spread the load?

Running more regular trains on Saturdays is not an option. We already run regular services on school holiday and long weekend Saturdays. Every other Saturday is utilised for a variety of profitable special trains; weddings, Ales on Rails private charters etc. Also our rolling stock is also used on the (Saturday) main line tours to Echuca run by Steamrail. A significant plank in our long term strategy. Extra weekday running is inevitable. As we move more into the overseas and especially Asian tour market, we will have to run on more days. This will require more manpower resources however we are confident of addressing that. At present this is not achievable as we need at least 2 full days per week where we need 'total occupation' of the line as we slowly upgrade the track ourselves using our own limited cash resources.

Ongoing Benefit of the SRP

- More services and options at times to suit visitors from both Castlemaine and Maldon.
- Faster transit times to enable visitors to do more with their time and enables up to 50,000 excursion passengers to be carried (104,000 one way journeys) with NO EXTRA RESOURCES.
- More attractive options for passengers by incorporating other local tourist attractions.
- Sustainable operation.
- Ongoing track maintenance requirements slashed.
- Proper preservation/conservation of our railway heritage in an authentic working environment.
- Operational costs per passenger slashed.
- No significant extra manpower required to more than double patronage.
- Efficient use of equipment and manpower.
- Close ties and links with other tourist and retail businesses.
- Achieves a level of profitability and sustainability including the ability to internally fund some capital works.

Preservation of the State’s historic rail heritage by combining with a viable major tourist attraction.
The Victorian Goldfields Railway has identified that we must plan for the entire corridor. Each station must link in with and complement the others. The SRP is just the major element of our vision for the entire railway. Our terminus station (Maldon) and intermediate station (Muckleford) are key pieces of our overall plan.

Maldon Station

The precinct is a significant example of a typical Victorian Railways country branch line terminus. It is largely authentic and is simply a station, small goods shed and basic locomotive servicing facilities including a one-loco engine shed. This arrangement served us well in the start-up phases of the railway as the reopening commenced in stages from Maldon to Castlemaine.

Our operation now has greatly exceeded the capacity of our facilities at Maldon.

Apart from the heritage and planning considerations, we do not want to change the character of the picturesque and authentic Maldon station precinct. After all, we are preserving not just the trains but the infrastructure as well. That's what makes the VGR unique.

It's simply not possible to provide the level of service and run the number of trains to make the operation financially successful and self-sustaining using the facilities at Maldon. We must provide more infrastructure, especially a carriage storage facility, and apart from the economic rationale for locating at Castlemaine (better spread of passenger loadings) discussed fully in the SRP, it is a cornerstone of our vision that the Maldon precinct remain relatively untouched.

In due course our carriage rebuilding activities will be relocated from the timber goods shed to the existing engine shed and that will make the historic and recently restored goods shed available for possible community uses. Our vision for Maldon station is to preserve the look and feel of a typical Victorian Railways branch line terminus.
Muckleford Station

The precinct is a perfect example of a rural wayside halt. A simple station building, a goods shed (of quite different design to Maldon's) and several sidings make Muckleford an important link in the story of the Victorian Railways branchline and demonstrates how the railways enabled closer settlement in rural Victoria. Muckleford station was the only link for local farmers to send out produce and receive supplies and machinery.

We propose it be used entirely for community purposes, as such we have established a sub-lease with the Mount Alexander Engine Club for it to be their base for vintage machinery rallies including the popular Mucklefest. The lovely grounds on the south side adjacent to the creek make it perfect area for functions and we hold a number of weddings and birthday events here in conjunction with train travel from Maldon or Castlemaine. Muckleford, along with the other stations, has also proved popular with television & film companies and over the years films such as *The Dress Maker* and TV shows such as *Miss Fisher’s Murder Mysteries* have been filmed at this location. Our vision for Muckleford is to retain its unspoilt rural character and to be used for various community events.
For More Information

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