

NEWSLETTER No 2/2003



Railway Technical Society of Australasia
SA Chapter
Engineering House, Bagot Street
NORTH ADELAIDE SA 5006

MARCH 2003

NEXT MEETING

**Dr FRED AFFLECK WILL GIVE US A DOUBLE
BARRELED PRESENTATION
A VIEW TO THE FUTURE, AND DETAIL OF THE
NEW DIRECTIONS BEING TAKEN BY ARA**

**On Thursday 3rd April 2003 at the IEAust
premises, Bagot St, North Adelaide.**

Starting at 17:30

This month we are pleased to be able to host Dr Fred Affleck, well known to quite a number of the local rail fraternity, to talk to us on two inter-related topics. Fred will give us his view of where rail will be going in the next decade or so, while at the same time providing detail of the new direction that is being taken by the Australasian Railway Association.

Fred has had an interesting involvement with rail, ranging from authoring a landmark book on the development and management of the Western Australian Railways post war (On Track, published by Westrail in 1978) to acting as the Executive Director of ARA at the present time. In between he held senior positions with AN and NR during the reform years that both those organizations were a significant part of.

Fred is a perceptive observer of the rail industry and is one of the relatively few people who can see developments in the industry in the context of both history and politics. Fred is also an accomplished speaker well able to present a point of view and at the same time is able to respond on a wide range of issues relating to rail.

This promises to be a most interesting evening.

FUTURE MEETINGS

The meeting following the presentation by Fred Affleck will be on Thursday 1st May, and promises to be something a little different. Mark the date in your diary now and we (with our usual timeliness!!) will let you know what treat you in for.

The June meeting (5th June) will be a joint meeting with PWI and will be on a topic that we have been anticipating for nearly a year. Stay tuned

THE EDITORS PLATFORM

There is an ebb and flow among the states in their real interest in rail. For a long time Queensland has been the envy of the rest of the country with substantial funds for track upgrading and re-alignment along with a rapid adoption of new technology. This little Vegemite can remember when Queensland had an upper limit of 650 tonnes on freight train loads due to draw gear constraints, so they built their early diesels without multiple unit facilities. It wasn't needed when the heaviest train was less than the more respectable early diesels could handle. Now the coal roads have trains in excess of 10,000 tonnes, with distributed power, running at better frequencies than Adelaide suburban railcars, while the main Brisbane – Cairns and Mt Isa lines can take 20 tonne axle loads with a loading outline similar to the traditional 'big' gauge railways, in many cases with one man operation. As with all things the direct political interest in QR seems to be waning (or at least become more questioning) so that QR are having to work a lot harder for their investment money.

NSW have always had what appears to be unlimited funds to pour into upgrading work, but the outcome in many cases has simply been to catch up on accrued maintenance. In fact arguably the capital funds in NSW have not been spent wisely and certainly not to provide a self sustaining system. Deterioration in the quality of the regional network can probably be linked to poor political decision making, coupled with an unwillingness to trade a reduced CSO (from

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increased productivity) against more to invest in upkeep and improvement.

Victoria has traditionally been under-funded from disinterested Governments, but in the last few years the wheel has turned. There are major projects to rebuild Spencer St (Southern Cross!!) station, a regional fast train (RFT) project to provide faster times (not just technically faster trains) between Melbourne and Geelong, Ballarat, Bendigo and Traralgon, and an ambitious plan to convert much of the regional freight network to standard gauge. A splendid set of interlocking projects you might say – and indeed you would more or less be right.

The 'less' is the plan to lay in something like half a million concrete sleepers as part of the RFT without any provision for eventual conversion to standard gauge. Right now the RFT routes are not planned to be part of the standardization project, but who know what might transpire in the future. Who fifty years ago would seriously have expected the spread of the standard gauge web as far as it has. Fifty years is the assumed life for concrete sleepers, so presumably the government, bureaucracy or contractors (or all three) are saying that the cost of gauge convertible sleepers (as adopted by the often maligned Trans Adelaide system) of a few million dollars (1% of the project cost) is higher than the probability of standardization of the RFT lines in the next fifty years. Indeed a brave forecast and one that is not supported by history. It is entirely possible that the Adelaide metro network will be standardized before the Victorian RFT concrete sleepers are even one third life expired, by which time our successors will be ruing the penny pinching and confused decision making that went on in the early part of the century. The grand concept for rail in Victoria deserves better than this when it gets down to detail. It is not so important how this gross oversight was made, so much to see that it is not perpetuated. The time has come for the government to stand up and show that an oversight will not be institutionalized as a consequence of indecision and obfuscation.

Would the Premier and the Minister please stand up

YOUR BIAS IS SHOWING

The Transport SA web site had a copy of the Vince Graham report into the Salisbury level crossing collision late last year. This was put on the site around February under the heading 'Salisbury Train Crash'. This has since been changed and Vince's report replaced by the ATSB report, but it would appear that TransportSA has been HighwaysSA for far too long. Only a peculiar form of misogyny could conceive this tragedy as a 'train crash' when it has always been obvious it is just another (rather dramatic) road crash – road crashes are crashes 'caused' by road users; I don't recall the train being 'responsible' for anything in this case except running perfectly normally up to the point of obstruction. It would serve us all well if Transport SA could get their terminology right.

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CORE 2004

Hardly has one conference ended than the next one is on the horizon. Well not quite, but planning for CORE 2004 is well under way. The call for papers is scheduled to close at the end of this month, but fear not – this little editor will personally guarantee that the Technical Committee will give your abstract (that is all you need to submit at this stage – just 400 words or so) their full attention even if it is a few days late.

This CORE should be something rather different – at the end of one of the planets newest major railways just a few months after it has started operating, at a place that has a very wide range of novel tourist activities, in the best season for the top end. What better way to justify your presence in Darwin than to be an author – so get those 400 words down and off to the Technical Review Committee. Either visit the web site www.core2004.on.net or call Mark Carter on 08 8261 2292 to find out how to do this in the easiest possible way.

CORE 2004 will present opportunities to travel on the Ghan on the new line with a number of interesting possibilities opening up. For instance the Darwin line Ghan timetable will allow a two day stop over in the Alice either way if desired, while even the 'straight through' journey will incorporate worthwhile side tours at Alice and Katherine. For those who are extraordinarily well heeled there is a chance that the Great South Pacific Express will make its one and only entry to Darwin in 2004 just three days prior to the start of CORE 2004.

So out with the quills right now.

DARWIN PROGRESS

The Darwin rail project is rushing forward at a remarkable rate, and is now well and truly on target to be open well before CORE 2004. Clearing works at the end of February were within 43 km of completion, while embankment was only 100 km from completion and the capping layer (track foundation) had just over 200 km to go. Rail laying had extended to 800 km by the same date leaving 620 km to go. The northern tracklayer at Katherine, which has had time off for the wet season, is due to get back to work about now, which will accelerate the rate the remaining track is finished.

Draft timetables have been developed with five weekly trains initially being the likely number (provision has been made for a sixth when necessary) plus the weekly Ghan to Darwin and a second to Alice. Great Southern passenger train timetables will be altered next Monday (30th March) to more or less reflect the post Darwin operation – except that both Ghan's will terminate at Alice for the time being.

Of the four crossing loops north of Alice, three are likely to see regular meetings of trains. The announcement that 4/4000 hp locos and 30 five packs (likely to be increased in number) will be built at Port Augusta came as no surprise, although the intended speed of delivery was. These are expected to be available when the line opens in less than a year.

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Articles or editorial comment for Newsletter is always welcome.

Send copy to the Editor, Max Michell at samrom@bigpond.com or fax to 08 8390 3772

CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Those of you who are members of I of E (i.e. are professional engineers) should be aware that attendance at RTSA meetings can be counted toward your CPD requirements. The most convenient way to record this will be in your professional diary or similar form. A short paper covering CPD in some detail is available from Malcolm Menadue or Max Michell.

NEWSLETTER DESPATCH

The majority of SA RTSA Chapter members receive their newsletter by e-mail. Every so often the e-mail will bounce (in effect the electronic equivalent of 'address unknown'). In these cases the member will automatically revert to hard copy mailing until a new e-mail address is advised. The main issue here is to let Malcolm Menadue know IN ADVANCE of any e-mail address change so that you don't fall on hard (copy) times. Please also advise if you would rather receive via e-mail instead of hardcopy post.

In all cases let Malcolm Menadue know at mmenadue@ozemail.com.au