

MEDIA RELEASE



Full steam ahead for Puffing Billy's new state-of-the-art \$20m Lakeside Visitor Centre in Emerald.

The Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events Martin Pakula and Member for Eastern Victoria Harriet Shing were at Emerald Lake Park recently to see early works on the \$20 million, state-of-the-art centre which is due to open in December 2020.

The centre, adjacent to Puffing Billy's Lakeside Station, will feature educational and volunteer facilities, a café and space to host events and meetings.

The development of a new visitor centre was one of the key projects identified in The Puffing Billy Railway Master Plan 2017 which was developed to guide the railway into the future, following extensive community consultation.

Kane Constructions have been appointed to lead the charge in this exciting milestone for Puffing Billy Railway, in conjunction with world-acclaimed architects – Terroir.

As part of the masterplan, the Andrews Labor Government announced \$8.2 million towards a number of key projects designed to improve the overall visitor experience and allow the railway to accommodate growing visitor demand.

Puffing Billy Railway has experienced unprecedented growth in patronage over the past five years, driven largely by the expanding international tourist market in Victoria.

The railway boasts the highest patronage of any narrow-gauge steam heritage railway in the world that is a volunteer-based, not-for-profit operation. More than 487,000 people flocked to Puffing Billy last financial year, with 64 per cent of patrons coming from overseas.

Tourism is serious business in the Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges – creating around 7,200 jobs and attracting 6.6 million domestic and international overnight visitors, who spent upwards of \$871 million a year.

“Puffing Billy is one of Victoria's favourite tourist attractions and this new visitor centre will ensure that it has the facilities it needs to attract and support even more visitors,” said Minister Pakula.

“Puffing Billy is a major driver of the local economy, generating around \$16 million in direct benefits and supporting over 100 jobs. We're making sure that these jobs continue and in fact can be expanded.”



“That’s great news for the railway, its hundreds of volunteers and the many people employed directly and indirectly due to its operations.”

Quote attributable to Member for Eastern Victoria Harriet Shing

“For more than 100 years, families from around the world have made life-long memories here, and this new centre will help ensure that continues well into the future,” said Harriet Shing.

“This project is a game-changer for Puffing Billy Railway. With our first locomotive expected to roll into the new Visitor Centre by Christmas 2020, the new site will become the new focal point of the railway and shall be instrumental in opening up the Lakeside to Gembrook section of the train line for use all year round,” said CEO of Puffing Billy, Steve O’Brien.

“The new Visitor Centre will also enhance the Puffing Billy experience by featuring a café, function spaces, significantly upgraded toilet facilities, retail, food and beverage options and interpretation spaces for school groups and families.”

The Visitor Centre is co-funded with an \$8.2M investment from the Victorian State Government, \$5.5M from the Australian Government and \$6.3M from Puffing Billy Railway.

Learn more about the new Visitor Centre at <https://puffingbilly.com.au/news/discovery-centre/>