

**PUFFING BILLY RAILWAY**

# **STRATEGIC PLAN 2022-2025**



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## **OUR CHILD SAFE COMMITMENT**

Puffing Billy Railway's staff and volunteers are committed to providing positive experiences for children in an environment that is caring, nurturing and safe.

**OUR CHILDREN, OUR FOCUS, OUR FUTURE, SPEAK UP!**

**PUFFING BILLY IS MUCH MORE THAN A TRAIN RIDE – IT TRANSPORTS VISITORS ON A MAGICAL JOURNEY THAT BECOMES A CHERISHED LIFETIME MEMORY.**



In the spirit of reconciliation, Puffing Billy Railway acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional owners of this country and their connection to land, water, and community. We pay our respect to them, their cultures, and customs, and to elders both past and present.

# MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD CHAIR AND CEO

Puffing Billy Railway (PBR) is an iconic part of Melbourne cultural heritage, as well as a core visitor economy driver for the Dandenong Ranges.

It wouldn't be overstating the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic to say that Puffing Billy Railway has not been threatened in such a way since the railway was closed in the 1950's. These impacts will be felt for many years as we recover and return to a sustainable organisation.

The focus of our Strategic Plan reflects this change to the nature of Puffing Billy Railway's operations post-pandemic. The introduction of the wonderful Puffing Billy Railway Lakeside Visitor Centre provides the operational flexibility that is at the core of our investments in the PBR Master Plan.

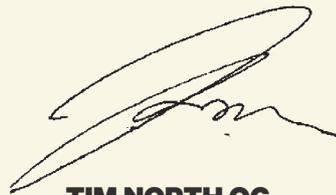
At the core of the 2022-2025 PBR Master Plan is sustainability in our workforce, business, environment, and infrastructure.

Puffing Billy Railway will shortly transition to the new Puffing Billy Railway Act 2022 – a modernised governance structure that builds on the sustainability theme.

We recognise our volunteers and staff are at the core of our operational sustainability. We will continue to enhance the attractiveness of working with Puffing Billy Railway to achieve our core aim of preserving the railway.

Annual Business Plans will continue to be developed and aligned to this Strategic Plan, and as funds become available we will invest further to achieve the aims of the PBR Master Plan.

We trust the Puffing Billy Railway 2022-2025 Strategic Plan will be of interest to all our stakeholders as we take this journey to see Puffing Billy Railway become a sustainable heritage railway.



**TIM NORTH QC**  
Board Chair



**PETER ABBOTT**  
Chief Executive Officer

# A TREASURED JOURNEY



Puffing Billy is much more than a train ride – it transports visitors on a magical journey that becomes a cherished lifetime memory. We are Australia’s foremost operating steam railway and one of the largest steam and heritage railways in the world. Our history spans a period of 122 years.

Remarkably, for more than half that span, it has operated every day except Christmas Day as a volunteer-based not-for-profit body, carrying millions of passengers from around the world.

The narrow-gauge line between Belgrave and Gembrook in Victoria survives as one of the most intact examples of pioneering railway infrastructure in Australia. Its steeply graded banks, trestle bridges, line-side telegraph, signalling and rolling stock are of an era elsewhere supplanted by more modern technology.

This railway takes its “era of significance”, dating from 1900 to 1930, seriously. This emphasis has held the Organisation in good stead over the years and is the key to understanding the philosophy which drives the Emerald Tourist Railway Board in achieving preservation goals.

The 2’6” gauge line to Gembrook opened in 1900, initially to carry produce, livestock and timber to Ferntree Gully, where the freight was transferred to broad gauge trains. However, it quickly became a great favourite of Melburnians, seeking a leisurely way of visiting “the hills”.

The Railway closed in 1954 after a major landslide near Menzies Creek, and a succession of “Young Sun” specials was organised by the Melbourne daily newspaper to farewell the Railway. The success of these specials brought about the formation of the Puffing Billy Preservation Society which quickly reopened the Railway for the public to enjoy.

To enhance the visitor experience and ensure volunteers also enjoy their time on the railway, Puffing Billy continues to evolve in the experiences it provides, and the facilities that are managed. The recently opened Lakeside Visitor Centre is the centrepiece of recent upgrades to secure the longer-term future of the railway; providing the visitor experience that is expected at a world class heritage experience.

The Puffing Billy Railway heritage experience relies on the skills and passion of volunteers and staff that work diligently behind the scenes, as well as in public facing roles, to develop and support the ongoing celebration of our beautiful heritage railway. As the community evolves, the people that operate Puffing Billy Railway will also evolve, welcoming more community minded and resourceful people to our team.

We honour our proud history and are committed to continuing to deliver memorable journeys for our visitors, volunteers, and staff well into the future.

# GOVERNANCE AND OPERATING ENVIRONMENT



In 2022, the Victorian Parliament passed the new Puffing Billy Railway Act 2022, that aims to modernise the act that governs the Railway's operations. It also responds to the findings of the 2018 Victorian Ombudsman Report, confirms Puffing Billy Railway as a volunteer-based organisation and develops the future framework for its ongoing success.

Under the new Puffing Billy Railway Act 2022, Puffing Billy Railway remains a statutory authority. The Authority currently has approximately 100 staff responsible for the operational management of the railway and its services.

The organisation operates through the efforts of valued volunteers who dedicate their personal time to providing volunteer services across the railway that include but is not limited to administration, events, station masters, conductors and passenger guides, engine cleaners, firemen, drivers, track patrollers, guards and a range of workshop, museum, and restoration projects.

The Puffing Billy Railway Board, formerly referred to as the Emerald Tourist Railway Board, acknowledge the Puffing Billy Preservation Society as pioneers that preserved the railway after its closure in the 1950s and thank them for their efforts to support the railway over many years.

The Puffing Billy Railway Board continues to look for ways to continue this legacy through the development of a documented Memorandum of Understanding between two separate legal entities. We look forward to their ongoing support to the railway's success in the future.

The Puffing Billy Railway operating environment has dramatically changed since the release of the 2019 – 2023 PBR Strategic Plan. The effects of COVID-19 on travel markets, plus workforce issues across all tourism and hospitality organisations have also been felt by Puffing Billy Railway.

The opening of the Puffing Billy Railway Lakeside Visitor Centre is a significant achievement that will provide the Railway with the opportunity to maximise the potential of the whole corridor and is pivotal to the future of the longer-term sustainability of Puffing Billy Railway.

The 2022 – 2025 Puffing Billy Railway Strategic Plan aims to consolidate the new Puffing Billy Railway Act, adapt the Railway's operations to the immediate impacts of COVID-19, and establish the future direction of the Railway's pathway to sustainability.



# WHO ARE WE

## OUR PURPOSE

To preserve, celebrate, and share Puffing Billy Railway, its stories, community, and environment.

## OUR VISION

To preserve and share a world renowned, community-based heritage rail experience, which captures both natural beauty and the rich social history of Victoria's Dandenong Ranges.

## OUR MISSION

We provide a unique opportunity for visitors to immerse themselves in our rich local history, environment, and communities; foster and harness the passion our volunteers and staff have for our heritage rail whilst building community interaction.

# OUR VALUES AND BEHAVIOURS

## SAFETY

We care for the safety and wellbeing of our visitors, our people, and the community.

## ONE TEAM

Working towards each other's success.

## RESPECT

Treat others how we want to be treated, recognise, and celebrate the input of all.

## EXCELLENCE

We harness the drive, dedication, embrace change, and strive to continuously improve our work.

## FUN

Enjoy what we do.

## INTEGRITY

Act with honesty and open, transparent communication and engagement

## LEGACY

As custodians, we take pride in preserving a valuable legacy for current and future generations: history, culture, memories, environment, knowledge, and assets.

## PUFFING BILLY RAILWAY – A SUSTAINABLE HERITAGE RAILWAY

For our railway to continue to be Australia's most loved steam heritage railway, our strategic plans are focused on being Australia's most sustainable heritage railway. This focus on sustainability will influence the style of operations that are prioritised, the way the railway develops its workforce, the systems used to make good organisational decisions, our financial outcomes, and how the railway treats the beautiful Dandenong Ranges environment. To achieve our purpose – we need to focus on Puffing Billy Railway - a sustainable heritage railway.

# OUR ASPIRATIONS



## PUFFING BILLY RAILWAY – A SUSTAINABLE HERITAGE RAILWAY

STRATEGIC ASPIRATIONS	WHAT DOES THIS MEAN
 <p><b>1. PRESERVE, CELEBRATE, AND SHARE OUR HERITAGE ‘RAIL’ EXPERIENCE FOR VISITORS, COMMUNITY, AND STAKEHOLDERS</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visitor Experience – rail, events, commercial, education, interpretation, and community.</li> <li>• Heritage experience – brand enhanced and protected.</li> <li>• Stakeholder Engagement - Puffing Billy Railway is a strong member of the Dandenong Ranges and Victorian community.</li> <li>• Museum accreditation to support our reputation as a living museum with strong heritage values.</li> </ul>
 <p><b>2. ACHIEVE SAFETY AND OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE IN THE CONTEXT OF STEAM HERITAGE RAILWAY</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meeting our compliance and regulatory requirements across the railway.</li> <li>• Safety - continue to achieve safety excellence.</li> <li>• Operational – operating an efficient heritage railway with supporting systems and processes that allow our operational crew to deliver great experiences..</li> </ul>



STRATEGIC ASPIRATIONS	WHAT DOES THIS MEAN
 <p><b>3. COMMIT TO AND DELIVER A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finances – self-sustaining for future development and heritage preservation.</li> <li>• Workforce – having sustainable skills and capacity across both volunteers and staff to support the opportunities to sustain the railway.</li> <li>• Infrastructure and Rolling Stock – suitable maintenance and preservation of our core operational fleet as well as infrastructure to sustain the railway’s operations.</li> <li>• Community Support – be a strong and positive tourism destination that participates in the local community.</li> <li>• Environment Impact and Outcome - measured and highlighted to communicate the benefits to the Dandenong Ranges and Victorian community.</li> </ul>
 <p><b>4. LEAD AN INSPIRED TEAM ALIGNED TO A COMMON PURPOSE OF PRESERVING THE “PUFFING BILLY RAILWAY EXPERIENCE”</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Harness and celebrate the unique heritage and nature of Puffing Billy Railway.</li> <li>• Recognise the volunteer nature of Puffing Billy Railway, its heritage, as well as its future.</li> <li>• Train and develop skills that builds support, recruitment, retention, and recognition of the Puffing Billy Railway crew.</li> <li>• Develop the wellbeing aspect of involvement in our organisation to recognise we are a sustainable workforce.</li> </ul>

# OUR STRATEGIC APPROACH





**“IF THE LINE HAD BEEN  
OFFICIALLY CLOSED AND THE  
GATES LOCKED, THEN IT WOULD  
TAKE HEAVEN’S OWN MOVEMENT  
TO REOPEN THE RAILWAY.”**

**– DAVID BURKE OAM**

*Saving Puffing Billy,  
The First Decade 1955 - 1965.*



# **PRESERVE, CELEBRATE, AND SHARE OUR HERITAGE 'RAIL' EXPERIENCE FOR VISITORS, COMMUNITY AND STAKEHOLDERS.**

## **CONTINUE TO FOCUS ON:**

- Maintaining our heritage experience linked to our era of significance.
- Continue to celebrate and promote the return of 'sitting on the sills' as a key part of this heritage – with the experience to be expanded to return to Gembrook.
- Build on the story telling of Puffing Billy Railway and its links to the Dandenong Ranges – finalising the Puffing Billy Railway Reconciliation Action Plan will form part of this deeper Dandenong Ranges story link.

## **FUTURE KEY INITIATIVES**

- Continue to design new experiences that celebrate Puffing Billy Railway's heritage and its links to the local community.
- Seek to capitalise on the Puffing Billy Museum Project and formalise the living museum reputation by completing Museum Accreditation.
- Enhance visitor facilities at our key visitor points to provide enhanced and inclusive experiences.

## **HOW WILL WE MEASURE OUR SUCCESS**



- Delivery of the annual capital program within our control.
- Customer satisfaction benchmark developed.
- Engagement with the traditional owners of the land to share their stories.
- Sitting on Sills returns to Gembrook.
- Key Area Precinct Plans developed.



# **ACHIEVE SAFETY AND OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE IN THE CONTEXT OF STEAM HERITAGE RAILWAY.**

## **CONTINUE TO FOCUS ON:**

- Maintaining our reputation for operational safety across rail, child, environment, and general workplace safety.
- To develop our training and development of the Puffing Billy Railway workforce through modern delivery and learning methods.
- Enhance our communications around the organisation to build organisational efficiency.

## **FUTURE KEY INITIATIVES**

- Review key aspects of the Puffing Billy Railway Master Plan 2017 to build on operational flexibility to link to the dynamic visitor economy.
- Develop our facilities and systems to further enhance safety and operational excellence.
- Build stronger links to the wider Tourist and Heritage Sector so that we can share and learn from joint experiences in heritage safety.
- Implement updated finance and reporting systems to support operational decisions.

## **HOW WILL WE MEASURE OUR SUCCESS**



- Maintain and enhance a child safety culture.
- Compliance with Rail Safety Non-Conformance Reports within designated timeframe and Zero Prohibition Notices, WorkCover or insurance claims.
- Proactive safety, compliance and housekeeping audits.







# COMMIT TO AND DELIVER A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE.

## CONTINUE TO FOCUS ON:

- Build improvements into our systems that support operational workforce to deliver high levels of service whilst maintaining suitable accountability.
- Build financial sustainability by shifting volume based KPIs to an operating model that focuses on the experience of visitors, volunteers, staff, and community.
- Formalising a Puffing Billy Railway Corridor Management Plan.

## FUTURE KEY INITIATIVES

- Develop Community Consultative Committee and Puffing Billy Railway Youth Engagement Group to build our links to stakeholders.
- Further develop Puffing Billy Railway Carbon Plan and tell the wider story of the Railway's environmental management of the railway corridor.
- Continue to build links to national, state, and regional tourism organisations that link Puffing Billy Railway development to the Dandenong Ranges visitor economy.

## HOW WILL WE MEASURE OUR SUCCESS



- Return profit as per four year Corporate Plan.
- Growth in domestic market and an increase in the average ticket paid.
- Record and report on Puffing Billy Railway's carbon emissions to begin an Offset Plan.



# **LEAD AN INSPIRED TEAM ALIGNED TO A COMMON PURPOSE OF PRESERVING THE “PUFFING BILLY EXPERIENCE”.**

## **CONTINUE TO FOCUS ON:**

- Build our workforce through recruitment, retention, and recognition programs to deliver enhanced heritage and operational outcomes.
- Maintain the governance and systems improvement that have occurred in recent years for the long-term benefit of Puffing Billy Railway.

## **FUTURE KEY INITIATIVES**

- Review all Puffing Billy Railway training programs.
- Build a reputation to be an organisation of choice for paid and volunteer positions.
- Create more opportunities for education and social opportunities for the Puffing Billy Railway crew.
- Create greater opportunities for heritage celebrations that build on the awareness and support of preserving the Puffing Billy Experience.

## **HOW WILL WE MEASURE OUR SUCCESS**



- Increased volunteer and staff engagement and satisfaction measured through a biannual survey.
- Development and delivery of Puffing Billy Railway Training and Development Plan.





ITEM	EXPLANATION	ESTIMATED \$
<b>ADDITIONAL CARRIAGE STORAGE SIDINGS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased vandalism and graffiti are being experienced across the railway, with Belgrave seeing the largest increase.</li> <li>• Essentially the carriages (and some locos) are unsecured overnight.</li> <li>• Yards need to have suitable gradient to allow for gravitational shunting – less stress on engines and safer for personnel.</li> <li>• Need for security compounds at Belgrave, Emerald, and Gembrook to be developed.</li> </ul>	<b>\$1.5M</b>
<b>MUSEUM EXTENSION MENZIES CREEK</b>	<p>Stage 1 - Completed Stage 2 - Plans developed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review the visitor experience and develop to sustain the future experience.</li> <li>• Explore formalised parking option north side of railway line.</li> <li>• Volunteer Workshops and entrance building enhancements.</li> <li>• Formalise the facilities to meet Australian Museums and Galleries ‘Museum Accreditation’ standards.</li> </ul>	<b>\$500K</b>  <b>\$500K</b>
<b>GEMBROOK STATION PRECINCT</b>	<p>Aim to develop this as an operating base for future linkages to the Lakeside Visitor Centre.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Heritage Platform upgrade to toilets – Funded June 30th 2022.</li> </ul> <p>Next Steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Goods Shed – Special Events space development. Replace existing temporary marquee with goods shed themed special event space. Opposite the heritage platform.</li> <li>• Facilities for events crew to set up for future operations.</li> <li>• Security of Rolling Stock – secure area to store carriages for service.</li> </ul>	<b>\$900K</b>
<b>BELGRAVE SIGNAL BOX DEVELOPED</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhanced visitor experience and efficiency at Belgrave Station.</li> <li>• Funded in partnership with Puffing Billy Preservation Society.</li> <li>• Shovel Ready</li> </ul>	<b>\$600K</b>
<b>COCKATOO STATION</b>	<p><b>STATION BUILDING</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community support for a partnership to activate the Station precinct, which has been a long standing project.</li> <li>• Increases heritage rebuilding of the railway – station was destroyed in Ash Wednesday fires 1983.</li> </ul> <p>Shovel Ready – Permits and Plans</p>	<b>\$500K</b>
<b>LAKESIDE STATION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Further works to settle the operational base planned for Lakeside.</li> <li>• Signal Box fit out and commissioning.</li> <li>• Possible Extension of Platform 3 to match the other two platforms at Lakeside and increase ability of the Lakeside Visitor Centre to cater for special events.</li> </ul>	<b>\$250K</b>  <b>\$200K</b>

ITEM	EXPLANATION	ESTIMATED \$
<b>RAILWAYS ROLLING STOCK</b>	Rolling Stock, Loco Fleet. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review needs for future fleet and links to visitor projections and sustainability aims.</li> <li>• Links to possible new loco requirements to obtain future service level projections.</li> <li>• Tamper equipment for track works.</li> <li>• Existing tamper machine - OH&amp;S safety issue and staff inefficiency.</li> <li>• Possible lease options to be explored.</li> </ul>	<b>\$1.2M</b>
<b>EMERALD STATION PRECINCT PLANNING</b>	<p><b>LOCATED ADJACENT TO EMERALD VILLAGE PRECINCT</b></p> <p>Priority</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emerald Platform extension to make consistent with other PBR primary platforms.</li> <li>• Toilet enhancements at Station.</li> </ul> <p><b>PRECINCT PLANNING</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reorganised to allow for more public activity – to turn the Emerald Station precinct to be an active part of Emerald Village               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– expansion of Puffing Billy Park (Cardina Shire licenced area).</li> <li>– exploring use of precinct for tenancy (Nursery/Café) linked to the heritage of the railway in the existing Carriage Workshops.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>CARRIAGE AND S&amp;T WORKSHOPS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Possible relocation to turntable area.</li> </ul>	<p><b>\$200K</b></p> <p><b>PLANNING \$250K</b></p> <p><b>WORKS - \$2M</b></p>





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