



# **PUFFING BILLY RAILWAY**

**STRATEGIC PLAN  
2019 – 2023**





### ***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.***

## MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD CHAIR AND CEO

Puffing Billy is an icon for Victoria and the driver of happy memories for generations of visitors.

This forward-looking plan comes at a significant moment in our history where we are facing disruption, change and challenges – we see these as providing us with a unique opportunity.

With 650,000 visitors per annum projected by 2023 and significant population growth in our local catchment areas, we will undertake a transformation to create a total visitor experience model, recognising that we offer so much more than a train ride.

Our people are our product and we intend to invest in this significant asset through improving our processes and creating attractive, challenging and rewarding opportunities for our volunteers.

We will clarify and celebrate our identity and purpose through meaningful engagement with our key stakeholders and clear communications.

We are committed to working towards a sustainable future that meets the challenges of fuel supply and the growing community concern about emissions and caring for our environment.

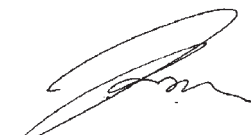
We will honour our corporate and social responsibilities to comply with relevant legislation and policies including:

- Office of the National Rail Safety Regulator
- WorkSafe
- Heritage conservation.

We are committed to completing our existing Master Plan and seeking new opportunities to ensure the full potential of Puffing Billy Railway is realised.

This Strategic Plan will be supported by Annual Business Plans that will outline our priorities and measure our success.

This plan outlines a new future for Puffing Billy and we commend it to you.



Tim North QC  
Board Chair



Steve O'Brien  
Chief Executive Officer

*We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land, the Wurundjeri people.  
We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and future.*

## 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 118 years. Remarkably, for more than half that span, it has operated as a volunteer-based not-for-profit body. It operates up to seven trains a day, every day except Christmas Day and it has carried 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 the 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.

Unprecedented visitation from people across the globe sees the Railway at close to full capacity on many days of the year. To enhance the visitor experience and ensure volunteers also enjoy their time on the Railway, the management team has secured key funding from the State and Federal Governments to commence the Discovery Centre development at Emerald Lake Park which will be delivered within the life of this Plan.

Puffing Billy offers a unique volunteer experience. It is recognised throughout the country for its quality, dedication and diversity of community minded people who operate this iconic railway through the scenic Dandenong Ranges.

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



## OPERATING ENVIRONMENT

### GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE AND KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

Under the *Emerald Tourist Railway Act 1977*, the Emerald Tourist Railway Board is responsible for the “preservation, development, promotion and maintenance of the narrow-gauge steam railway (known as Puffing Billy) and for the operation management and control of the service thereon for public recreational purposes.

Under the guidance of the Emerald Tourist Railway Board, Puffing Billy Railway is a statutory authority under the Act. The Authority currently has approximately 120 staff responsible for the operational management of the business. The business runs with the assistance of approximately 600 very valued volunteers who dedicate their personal time to providing over 22 volunteer services for the railway. Volunteer services range from administration, events and retail, to station masters, engine cleaners and drivers. There are five entry level roles suitable for new recruits, all of which offer the opportunity to contribute to an iconic Victorian attraction.

Emerald Tourist Railway Board acknowledge the Puffing Billy Preservation Society as pioneers that preserved the railway after its closure in the 1950s. Legally, the Preservation Society and the Emerald Tourist Railway Board are two separate entities. The Society is a private company limited by guarantee, whereas the Board direct a Statutory Authority. In accordance with good governance principles, since the release of the Ombudsman Report in 2018, we have transitioned from what was a complex, intertwined approach to separate organisations with measures in place to meet certain requirements, such as preventing conflict of interest, protection of confidential information and separation of duties. The Preservation Society's future is in a supporting role.



# OUR VISITORS

- DOMESTIC**
- o Melbourne, Regional Victoria, Interstate
  - o Families, Couples, Baby Boomers, Seniors, Education, Corporate, Community Groups, Special interest Groups
- INTERNATIONAL**
- o Tour Groups, Free Independent Travellers, Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR), Meetings, Incentive, Conference and Events (MICE), Education

**MARKET POTENTIAL**

REGION	VISITORS	DAY TRIPPERS	DOMESTIC OVERNIGHT	INTERNATIONAL OVERNIGHT
Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges	5.5mil	4.6mil	846k	48k
Gippsland	5.4mil	3.3mil	2mil	75k
Phillip Island	2.4mil	1.5mil	900k	50k



# WHO WE ARE

- OUR PURPOSE**
- To preserve 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 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 heritage rail or 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/you 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, assets





## OUR ASPIRATIONS

### **Preserve cultural and heritage rail significance**

We are preserving an Era of Significance, in harmony with current standards and practical requirements.

### **Provide an iconic heritage rail experience for visitors**

Our Heritage railway experience tells a story of the history of our railway and its importance to the community and the role it has played in the economy. We aim to deliver products and services associated with our railway, which create magical memories, which encourage our visitors to promote the experience through generations of local visitors, as well as our overseas visitors, being promoters of our attraction.

### **Achieve safety and operational excellence**

Safety is our number one priority and is fundamental to our ambition of operational excellence. Developing a reputation for an exemplar Child Safe Culture and leading partners in operational safety and compliance.

### **Commit to environmental sustainability**

Our heritage railway experience is complemented by a rail corridor which passes through the stunning Dandenong Ranges. We are committed to minimising our impact on the environment in which we operate and collaborating with the community and key stakeholders, in supporting the conservation of native wildlife and healthy ecosystems.

### **Engage with our community, business and tourism partners**

Strong, valuable relationships with our volunteers, local community, businesses and key stakeholders are fundamental for our success and dependent on genuine engagement and communications. We partner up with others in the tourist and heritage sector, playing a lead role in sharing information and resources.

### **Lead an inspired people and a responsive, resourceful organisation**

We harness and celebrate the passion and commitment of every one of our staff and volunteers. Nurturing and growing our valued volunteers and their experience that represents our brand on the journey, every day. Our organisation is resourceful, resilient and agile in responding to the inevitable challenges we face. We are transforming the culture, into an environment that harness people's passion, accept different views and work towards each other's success.

### **Sustainable future**

We embrace the resource opportunities we have with the Emerald Tourist Railway Board Directors to ensure good, effective governance for a sustainable business future. We will diversify our commercial activities to remain financially independent and reinvest in Puffing Billy's future and community. We will do this by continually evolving and developing unique experiences for the visitors, incorporating quality local products and produce.







**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 Bourke

# PRESERVING CULTURAL AND HERITAGE RAIL SIGNIFICANCE

We are preserving an Era of Significance, in harmony with current standards and practical requirements.

## PRESERVING CULTURAL & HERITAGE RAIL SIGNIFICANCE

**WE WILL CONTINUE TO FOCUS ON:**  
Practical preservation of our heritage assets in line with our sustainable long-term plan.

### FUTURE KEY INITIATIVES.

- WE WILL:**
- Preserve and share the knowledge, practices, technologies and art-form of our heritage railway.
  - Develop and share our interpretation of personal human stories of the railway through the experiences of its communities and its social contribution to the Dandenong Ranges region.
  - Improve our understanding, preservation & promotion of cultural & Indigenous heritage in the region.

***How we will measure our success:***

- Delivery of the annual capital program within our control
- Telling of powerful stories for the Puffing Billy Railway Interpretation Program
- Engagement with local Aboriginal/Wurundjeri representatives to capture and share their stories with our visitors





# PROVIDING AN ICONIC HERITAGE RAIL EXPERIENCE FOR VISITORS

**WE WILL CONTINUE TO FOCUS ON:**  
Developing and delivering heritage assets, experiences and products to improve visitor, volunteer and community engagement along the corridor.

- FUTURE KEY INITIATIVES.**
- WE WILL:**
- Deliver excellence in visitor experience.
  - Utilise untapped existing facilities and buildings to introduce new options for experiences along the journey.
  - Enhance the experience of going back to the Era Of Significance.

***How we will measure our success:***

- Improvement in our Net Promoter Score
- Menzies Creek Museum open to the public
- Introduce new experiences to meet priorities identified in the Customer Centric Survey







# SAFETY AND OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE

**WE WILL CONTINUE TO FOCUS ON:**

- Developing a reputation for an exemplar child safe culture.
- Ensuring all operations are geared towards achieving zero harm.
- Ensure best practice in compliance with National Rail Safety regulations, or advocate to change to relevant conditions.

**FUTURE KEY INITIATIVES.**

**WE WILL:**

- Ensure all key assets are secured, appropriately structured and effectively managed to enable efficient provision of services and delivery of the masterplan.
- Establish best practice policies systems, process and structures for effective operation and management of the organisation and services.
- Engage, develop and implement a fit for purpose Safety Management System, accessible for all.
- Adopt an enterprise wide approach to risk management.

***How we will measure our success:***

- Implementation of the Child Safe Standard and measure base level appreciation for child safe 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

# ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

**WE WILL CONTINUE TO FOCUS ON:**

Preserving, managing and enhancing the natural environment along the rail corridor.

**FUTURE KEY INITIATIVES.**

**WE WILL:**

- Appropriately balance our conservation programs and bushfire preparedness.
- Improve the environmental sustainability of our current and future operations, reduce waste and emissions.

***How we will measure our success:***

- Trackside Management Plan implemented
- Bushfire Management Plan adopted.
- Waste reduction achieved.



# COMMUNITY, BUSINESS, TOURISM AND HERITAGE SECTOR ENGAGEMENT

**WE WILL CONTINUE TO FOCUS ON:**  
Recognising and increasing our contribution to the local and regional economy.

**FUTURE KEY INITIATIVES.**

- WE WILL:**
- Develop a collaborative working partnership approach to enhancing and promoting tourism in the region and Tourist & Heritage railway sector.
  - Enhance relationships with key stakeholders to develop mutually beneficial arrangements in line with the new governance arrangements.

- How we will measure our success:***
- Development of major commercial partnerships that align with PBR long term objectives
  - Implementation of a Community and Stakeholder Engagement Plan, including our local Aboriginal/Wurundjeri Community.

***“... Over 80% of those engaged in the railway are volunteers who give up their precious time to something they feel passionate about and have great pride in ...”***





# INSPIRED PEOPLE AND A RESPONSIVE, RESOURCEFUL ORGANISATION

**WE WILL CONTINUE TO FOCUS ON:**  
Ensuring we have diverse, solid and significant volunteer base.  
Making our volunteers feel valued, engaged, supported and are having fun.

- FUTURE KEY INITIATIVES.**
- WE WILL:**
- Create an organisation of choice and improved value proposition.
  - Ensure recruitment in line with our values and cultural directions.
  - Work with Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (DJPR) to develop a succession plan for the Board (Emerald Tourist Railway Board Responsibility).

**How we will measure our success:**

- Increased volunteer and staff engagement and satisfaction.

# SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

We embrace the resource opportunities we have with the Emerald Tourist Railway Board Directors to ensure good, effective governance for a sustainable business future. We will diversify our commercial activities to remain financially independent and reinvest in Puffing Billy's future and community. We will do this by continually evolving and developing unique experiences for the visitors, incorporating quality local products and produce.

**WE WILL CONTINUE TO FOCUS ON:**  
Engaging with Emerald Tourist Railway Board to understand and deliver on expectations and support effective governance.  
Continuing to operate at a profit and reinvesting in improved amenities.

- FUTURE KEY INITIATIVES**
- Implement our plan to shift from pure growth in numbers to improved visitor experience and valued complementary services.
  - Increase reasons to build upon our domestic market and repeat visitation through more frequent events, rail and ride options and suggested itineraries.

**How we will measure our success:**

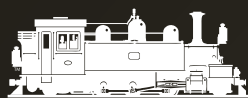
- 650,000 patrons by 2023.
- Return profit as per four year budget.
- Growth in domestic market.





Puffing Billy Railway  
1 Old Monbulk Road  
P.O. Box 451  
Belgrave, VIC 3160

Phone: + 61 3 9757 0700  
Fax: + 61 3 9757 0705  
Email: [info@pbr.org.au](mailto:info@pbr.org.au)  
[www.puffingbilly.com.au](http://www.puffingbilly.com.au)



**EMERALD TOURIST  
RAILWAY BOARD**