

**SUBMISSION TO PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION INQUIRY INTO
PROGRESS IN RAIL REFORM
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INTRODUCTION

The Friends of the Belair Line are a group of citizens concerned by the reduction in the Adelaide-Belair urban passenger rail service since the single broad-gauge track operation commenced in April 1995. Not only have three stations (Clapham, Hawthorn and Millswood) been closed, but also the service has become unreliable due to the limitations and inflexibility imposed by the inadequate number, poor location and shortness of the single track's passing loops.

Because of the current restriction of access to, and unreliability of the service, there is a risk that declining patronage could eventually lead to closure of the line. The Draft Report of the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Progress in Rail Reform (Chapter 10) acknowledges the importance of non-commercial objectives in rail transport, such as congestion levels, pollution and noise levels, and access for disadvantaged groups. Having an urban rail service become non-viable, with a resulting transport modal shift from rail to road, is an undesirable outcome for a process of rail reform.

THE INADEQUACY OF THE BELAIR LINE'S SINGLE TRACK

Although horizontally separating urban passenger services from freight operations may generally result in benefits to both types of rail operations, in the case of the Belair Line passenger service it has had a very damaging effect.

In 1996, the provider of the service, TransAdelaide, commissioned TMG International to investigate possible improvements to increase the reliability of the train service. The report was tabled in the State Parliament by the Minister for Transport in S.A., The Hon. Diana Laidlaw MLC. This report concluded that the "train headways allowed for during the peak and off-peak periods respectively are not compatible with sectional running times and the position of crossing loops". It recommended that Blackwood and Sleep's Hill loops should be extended, the Mitcham Loop should be extended up to and including Millswood, and that the fourth broad-gauge track through Goodwood be restored.

The TMG Report contains the statement that *"Little consideration appears to have been given to a variety of issues raised by TransAdelaide's engineering and operating personnel"*.

It states that "the same officers proposed that eight passing loops would be necessary to run an effective single line service" and also that "It is not fully clear why, but eventually negotiations between TransAdelaide & National Rail resulted in the acceptance of a single line four passing loop scenario. Table 2.1 compares the works that were originally considered by TransAdelaide to be the minimum necessary to run a reliable service based on four passing loops as compared to the work that was carried out". A copy of Table 2.1 is at the end of this submission.

It should be noted that none of the loops were located where the dual-track service trains often passed; i.e. between Unley Park and Millswood. This is despite the fact that this was a flat area in which the rail corridor was broad enough to accommodate a standard-gauge track plus two broad-gauge tracks! The then Public Transport Union secretary, Mr. John Crossing agreed with commuters' suggestions that a loop in this

location would have kept all the stations open, because the two-track timetable could then have been maintained.

It should also be noted that only two loops were newly constructed (at Sleep's Hill and Eden Hills). The Blackwood and Mitcham "loops" consisted of already existing track at those two stations.

IMPROVEMENTS TO THE TRACK

Since the release of the TMG Report, TransAdelaide has made "limited Infrastructure Upgrade" alterations to the track and signalling as suggested, and endeavoured to retrain drivers to be more aware of their role in on-time running. All their efforts have not been able to compensate for the drastic effects of the inadequate single-track operation that has been imposed on the Belair Line since April 1995.

SOCIAL IMPACT OF STATION CLOSURES AND SERVICE UNRELIABILITY

In October 1996 the Friends of the Belair Line made a Submission to SACOSS in the Field of Public Transport. That organisation requested contributions of human stories "which can illustrate to politicians the nitty-gritty of what people in their electorates are suffering because of bad policies, loss of services etc." As part of our submission, the Friends of the Belair Line included the results of a survey we conducted in 1995. Responses were gathered at several public meetings held as a result of the station closures. The forms had 15 questions to gauge consumer evaluation of the Belair Line service, with space provided for people to write their own problems, concerns, and suggestions. We received 172 responses.

It would be inappropriate to reproduce all of these in this submission, but we have been made very aware of the distress and inconvenience caused by station closures. The greatest effect has occurred to those people who are already disadvantaged in some way, such as the elderly or the disabled. The effect on the quality of life in some households was sufficient to cause them to move house.

Consistently unreliable services also have a social impact. Employers and teachers tire of the excuse "the train was late", and other means of commuting then must be found. People tend to stop using the train for getting to appointments. If they have a car, they will use it instead because it is more reliable. People without that option have to put up with frustration and the consequences of being unpunctual.

IN CONCLUSION

An article by Ian Hammond about how standardisation of the Adelaide-Melbourne line impacts suburban trains was published in "TRANSIT AUSTRALIA" July 1995 Vol. 50. No. 7. The section titled "In Retrospect" includes the following:

"Operationally, the standardisation will be of immense benefit to interstate rail freight efficiency, but totally at the expense of the Belair suburban train operation. The big losers in terms of reliability and punctuality have been the commuters, not only the 'average 307' who used the three now-closed stations, but all others who have to suffer the inevitable delays of a single track service - delays which could have been minimised by a couple of extra crossing loops.

While such losses may seem of little consequence to our political masters now, what of the longer term? In the light of overseas trends, environmental common sense and projections by such experts as Newman and Kenworthy that future leaps in fuel prices will force a return to a public-transport oriented society, any reductions in speed, efficiency and productivity of fixed track routes has to be viewed with concern. The Belair single-tracking has been the only backward step in Australian suburban main line rail infrastructure since the 1970s - all other capitals have made immense investment in improvement, electrification and expansion of their urban railways which will stand them in good stead should Newman and Kenworthy be proven correct.

The ongoing delays and inconvenience to passengers does not bode well for the future of this line".

Great care should be taken to ensure that the Rail Reform process does not affect any other urban rail services as badly as the Adelaide - Belair service has been.

With a reliable and accessible service, the Belair Line would be a great community asset. It has the potential to become much better utilised due to new housing development in its "catchment area". The long-term goal should be to provide more stations along it, not fewer. Not only should the closed stations be re-instated, but also a new station should be constructed at the site of the Eden Hills passing loop.

Some effort should be made during the process of Rail Reform to repair the damage done to our urban passenger rail service on the Belair Line. The provision of an extra passing loop between Unley Park and Millswood Stations, the extension of the loops at Blackwood and Mitcham, and the construction of a new station would compensate a great deal for the loss of one track, and hence increase the usefulness and viability of the service.

**TMG Report Table 2.1
Comparison of TransAdelaide’s requirements with National Rail’s Works**

TransAdelaide’s considered minimum requirements	Works as agreed to be provided by the National Rail
<p>Goodwood:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retain 4 mainline tracks through the station. • Demolish the island platform between the down South Suburban line and up South Suburban line. • Install double crossovers either side of Goodwood platforms. • Terminate double line (and start single line) at 5.740km Belair Line. 	<p>Goodwood:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three tracks only were retained through Goodwood. • The demolition of the island platform was not agreed. • A simplified configuration was installed on the Belair side only. • Double line was terminated at 5.476km.
<p>Mitcham:</p> <p>A crossing loop between 8.320km and 9.150km</p>	<p>Mitcham:</p> <p>A crossing loop between 8.403km and 8.843km</p>
<p>Sleeps Hill:</p> <p>A crossing loop between 10.850km and 11.922km</p>	<p>Sleeps Hill:</p> <p>A crossing loop between 11.299km and 11.577km</p>

Eden Hills: A crossing loop between 15.053km and 15.250km	Eden Hills: A crossing loop between 15.053km and 15.266km
Blackwood: A crossing loop between 17.970km and 18.235km	Blackwood: A crossing loop between 17.890km and 18.246km