

MP vows to fight for Wimmera rail

UPPER House MP Stuart Grimley has vowed to champion the return of passenger rail to the Wimmera after a meeting with stakeholders on Wednesday.

Mr Grimley, who is the Leader of Derryn Hinch's Justice Party and the Member for Western Victoria, met with council representatives and the Wimmera

Development Association to hear first hand their plea to introduce a shuttle rail service linking Nhill with the V/Locity train in Ararat.

The Wimmera has been without passenger rail for decades since the service was axed by the Kennett Government in the 1990s.

A shuttle service linking Nhill, Dimboola, Horsham and Stawell with the V/Locity in Ararat is seen as the most cost effective and likely option.

The Wimmera rail network is on a different gauge to Victoria's passenger network.

The freight rail tracks through Horsham are standard gauge, while the passenger line between Ararat and Melbourne via Beaufort and Ballarat is broad gauge meaning different types of trains are required for each section.

At the meeting, Horsham Mayor Robyn Gulline said many Wimmera residents were isolated because the only transport services to Ballarat and Melbourne were busses or the twice-weekly Overland.

"We know there is some retired rolling stock sitting in Melbourne which could be used. We don't care if they're old trains, any trains will do," she said.

"We have floated this with a couple of ministers this year and every opportunity we get we are talking about the need for passenger rail," she said.

"My daughter is at Monash and I used to drive her (to the train) in Ballarat. It was easier and safer to drive for four hours than put her on the bus," Cr Gulline said.

Horsham Rural City CEO Sunil Bhalla said initially, it was hoped there could be a track upgrade allowing passenger trains to run all

the way to Melbourne.

But he said the proposal was amended, with a shuttle service seen as more likely.

"As we know, there is a little nervousness about what sort of patronage a new service will get. So we said, lets look at a simple shuttle service between Horsham and Ararat connecting with the Melbourne service," he said.

Wimmera Development Association Executive Director, Chris Souness, said with job growth booming across the Wimmera, a good public transport network is needed to attract and retain workers.

"A lot of the people are going to come from a whole lot of different cultural backgrounds and having access to a car isn't always possible and that's where reliable public transport and being able to access services is really important for us to grow our community.

"Accessing busses for the elderly is much harder than trains and the demographics here show our population is aging. On a community level, to meet their needs, train access is important. It means being able to access specialist appointments in places like Ballarat of Melbourne," he said.

"Having to sit on a bus for three or four to get to Ballarat is a high burden to pay," Mr Souness said.

Mr Grimley vowed to take up the case when parliament returns in August.

"We will draft up something for the adjournment debate and the minister should get back to us within 14 days with a response. That at least will get the ball rolling," Mr Grimley said.

"We'll keep on the issue," he said.



Hindmarsh Councillor Wendy Bywaters, Horsham Mayor Cr Robyn Gulline, Stuart Grimley MP, Nhill resident Helen Woodhouse, Wimmera Development Association Executive Director Chris Souness and Horsham Rural City CEO Sunil Bhalla after Wednesday's meeting to discuss a shuttle rail service to the Wimmera.

STUART GRIMLEY MP

Member for Western Victoria
State Leader of Derryn Hinch's Justice Party

Demanding Justice!

Can I make representations to the State Government for you or an issue you care about? Please contact me via the below details.



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Funded by Parliamentary Budget

Power upgrade for Ararat Showgrounds



Ararat Agricultural Society President Gwenda Allgood and Administrator Donna Dunmore are delighted funding has been approved to replace the aging electrics at Ararat Showgrounds.

THE aging electrics at Ararat Showgrounds are to be updated with money from a federal grant.

Ararat Agricultural Society President, Gwenda Allgood, said she was delighted \$9,350 had been approved to upgrade the switchboards and wiring.

"We're delighted because it is something that had to be done. Last show day in 2019, the system couldn't cope and it blew out five times. It's a piece of infrastructure that's pretty important to us and needed an urgent upgrade so we're very happy," Mrs Allgood said.

"It isn't just the show using the site. It's used by police for their Bike-Ed program, the Woodies use it for their annual event, it's used as a staging area for the CFA and the harness racing club have used it in the past for markets so its great we got this grant which will ensure there will be enough power at the site for all of the activities that go on there," she said.

"This upgrade is needed for the future success of the show. You can't invite people

to come and have displays and the power blows half way through when you're cooking something,"

"I spoke with Barry Davidson (electrician) this morning and he said as soon as the paperwork is through he'll begin work," Mrs Allgood said.

Member for Wannon, Dan Tehan said he was delighted that the Ararat Agricultural Show Society had been successful under the Stronger Communities Program - Round 6.

"The funding of \$9,350 will allow the show society to replace two electrical switchboards in the Keith Clover Pavilion, providing the facility with a reliable and safe power source," Mr Tehan said.

"These investments have a significant impact in a local community such as Ararat, including encouraging greater community participation and social networks, improving local amenities, and of course providing lasting upgrades or equipment which supports our communities in future opportunities for growth," Mr Tehan said.

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