



DEPARTMENT OF STATE GROWTH

Dept. Ref MIG25/1103
Critical Signing Date 3 September 2025

NOTED	
SIGNED	[Redacted Signature]
DATE:	02/09/25

**ISSUES BRIEFING NOTE FOR THE
MINISTER FOR INFRASTRUCTURE AND TRANSPORT**

**SUBJECT: WEST COAST WILDERNESS RAILWAY TO JOIN TOURISM
AUSTRALIA'S CULTURAL ATTRACTIONS OF AUSTRALIA**

Minister's notation:

Background:

The West Coast Wilderness Railway (the Railway) is to be officially accepted into Cultural Attractions of Australia, a national collective that showcases Australia's most significant cultural experiences through Tourism Australia's Signature Experiences Program.

The Signature Experiences of Australia program is a curated portfolio developed by Tourism Australia to showcase the country's most exceptional, immersive, and sustainable tourism offerings. It targets high-value travellers with niche interests, focusing on authentic experiences that reflect Australia's unique culture, landscapes, and lifestyle.

The Railway joins two fellow Tasmanian members with exclusive offerings under the program:

- MONA – Museum of Old and New Art, offering two signature experiences in art and dining.
- Port Arthur Historic Site, offering two signature experiences touring the site.

Acceptance and inclusion in the program recognise that these attractions offer exclusive, immersive experiences that reflect Tasmania's rich cultural heritage and artistic innovation, aligning with Tourism Australia's goal to attract high-value travellers seeking authentic and meaningful connections.

This achievement follows a record-breaking summer and shoulder season for the railway, highlighting its increasing appeal to domestic and international travellers.

Current Situation:

It is expected that Tourism Australia will announce the inclusion of the Railway as a Cultural Attraction of Australia by Friday, 5 September 2025.

As part of the program, the Railway has developed three bespoke experiences:

- **Beyond the Line** – premium rail journey and behind-the-scenes workshop tour
- **One on Each End** – a two-day hosted itinerary combining rail, storytelling and dining
- **Live Like the Railway GM** – a three-day hosted stay at Queenstown's Penghana, the heritage residence of former Mt Lyell Mining and Railway Company General Managers.

The announcement reinforces the Railway's importance to Tasmania's visitor economy and to the broader national offering. It will help:

- attract high-yield travellers to the West Coast
- extend stays and spending in regional communities
- support year-round visitation
- strengthen Tasmania's position as a destination for high-quality cultural experiences
- build pride in regional stories and local industry.

Communications Strategy:

It is expected that Tourism Australia will provide the Railway with a preview of its media release for review prior to the public release. The Railway will adapt a media release for coordinated publication to its stakeholders.

The department will work with the Railway and your office to coordinate the response to the announcement by Tourism Australia. The timing will be managed to ensure that Tourism Australia can present the experiences to its partners engaged in the collective prior to public announcements.

An embargoed draft media release is attached for your reference.

The Minister for Tourism is also expected to have a strong interest in the announcement and may wish to provide input to any media release or comment.

out of scope

Craig Timkin
Secretary

1 September 2025

Prepared by:	out of scope	Cleared by:	James Verrier
Position:		Position:	Acting General Manager, Transport Policy and Planning
Email:	out of scope@stategrowth.tas.gov.au	Email:	out of scope@stategrowth.tas.gov.au
Date:	26 August 2025	Date:	27 August 2025
Phone:	out of scope	Phone:	out of scope

Attachment: Draft Media Release for Minister Vincent - *Tasmania's iconic West Coast Wilderness Railway joins Tourism Australia's Cultural Attractions of Australia*

Dept. Ref MR25/228
Critical Noting Date _____

NOTED	
out of scope	
SIGNED:	
DATE:	13/4/25

ISSUES BRIEFING NOTE FOR THE MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT

SUBJECT: ABT RAILWAY MINISTERIAL CORPORATION - BUDGET SUBMISSION

Minister's notation:

section 27

Background:

This brief provides further analysis and context to support the Abt Railway Ministerial Corporation's (ARMC) 2025-26 budget proposal (copy attached).

In 2024, TasRail completed a due diligence of the WCWR's physical assets. TasRail proposed a capital program over 10 years of:

section 27

This program would restore the WCWR to full operation, and provide a superior standard of infrastructure that would reduce the ongoing capital investment task. However, this model was not considered achievable in the current budget environment and to a higher standard than the requirements of WCWR's operations.

A critical consideration for the ARMC is the need to maintain a viable operating model that satisfies the requirements of the national rail safety law. The ARMC retains its national rail accreditation over the full length of the railway. However, the voluntary decision to close the section between Lynchford and Lower Landing was made by the ARMC, to forestall closure/withdrawal of accreditation action by the National Rail Regulator.

section 27

Current Situation:

Operating costs and losses

The ARMC's existing operating costs are approximately \$10 million. Extending or reducing the length of rail operations will not materially change this figure as the railway experiences high fixed costs associated with maintaining safe rail operations, regardless of the length of line in operation.

To this figure, the ARMC has proposed two new budget items, amounting to \$1.25 million a year, covering additional rail operations staff and improved governance. **section 27**

section 27

Against these operating costs, the ARMC generates income primarily from ticket revenue and food and beverage sales through the cafes. Ticket and food prices are reviewed regularly.

Based on an average ticket price of \$50, and 35,000 passengers a year, the ARMC can expect to generate approximately \$1.75 million a year in ticket revenue. The cafes are expected to generate approximately \$2.25 million in revenue annually.

The forecast operating loss in 2025-26 is, therefore, \$7.25 million.

Financial Information - operating costs

	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29
	\$'000	\$'000	\$'000	\$'000
Operating Costs	11,250	11,600	12,000	12,300
Less Existing Funding/Revenue	(4,000)	(4,200)	(4,300)	(4,500)
Net Cost	7,250	7,400	7,700	7,800

Capital investment options

section 27

section 27

Preferred option

section 27

Financial Implications:

The Premier wrote to the Australian Government Minister for Tourism, Hon Don Farrell MP, on 14 October 2024, seeking Australian Government investment in priority tourism projects, including the West Coast Wilderness Railway. In that letter, the Premier requested \$87.2 million from the Australian Government, based on an 80:20 share, with the Tasmanian Government contributing \$21.8 million over the 2024-25 budget and outyears (ie the current budget commitment).

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out of scope

Angela Conway
Acting Secretary

11 February 2025

Prepared by:	James Verrier	Cleared by:	Cynthia Heydon
Position:	Director	Position:	Deputy Secretary Transport
Email	out of scope@stategrowth.tas.gov.au	Email:	out of scope@stategrowth.tas.gov.au
Date	28 January 2025	Date:	3 February 2025
Phone:	out of scope	Phone:	

Attachments

1. ARMC 2025-26 Budget Submission

2025-26 BUDGET HIGH PRIORITY FUNDING REQUEST

Abt Railway Ministerial Corporation

The West Coast Wilderness Railway (WCWR) operates as a key tourist experience on the West Coast. The WCWR forecasts operating losses over the current and future financial years and requires ongoing capital funding to enable upgrade and maintenance of rail infrastructure to meet national rail safety requirements.

Ministerial Portfolio	Transport
Policy Objective	To support the West Coast visitor and general economies by maintaining operation of the WCWR.
Priority and Policy Links	High Priority. In the absence of long term funding, the WCWR will need to cease operations as it is not a commercially viable business
Other Government Entity Impacts	n/a
Identified through Community Consultation	The WCWR has very strong community support and is recognised as an anchor tourism attractor for the West Coast, attracting 35 000 passengers a year

Financial Information

	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29
	\$'000	\$'000	\$'000	\$'000
Cost				
Operating	11.25	11.60	12.00	12.30
Capital	8.00	15.50	12.70	8.70
Total Cost	19.25	27.10	24.70	21.00
Less Existing Funding/Revenue*	10.00	6.60	6.700	4.50
Net Cost	9.25	20.50	18.00	16.50

* includes funding committed under the 2024-25 budget

General Comments

The West Coast Wilderness Railway (WCWR) attracts around 30 000 passengers a year, though in 2024-25 it is on target to achieve a patronage of over 40,000 passengers a year. 75 per cent of passengers are from outside of Tasmania.

The WCWR significantly influences travel intentions by driving longer stays and higher spending in the region. Visitors who include the railway in their itinerary spend more time and money, which positively impacts the local economy.

WCWR passengers from outside Tasmania stay on the west longer (0.9 nights a passenger) and spend, on average, \$400 more than other west coast visitors. This is estimated to inject an additional \$9 million a year into the West Coast, based on 30 000 passengers a year.¹

The WCWR employs up to 108 people during peak periods, equating to 75 full-time equivalent positions. It directly puts around \$11 million a year in wages and operating expenditure into the West Coast Economy.

The line was re-built in 2000 on the original alignment with predominantly new bridges and second-hand rail and sleepers. Since that time, there has been systemic underfunding of capital to maintain the infrastructure for safe operation. The WCWR has received approximately \$79 million in combined Australian and Tasmanian Government funding since 2012-13, however, the majority of this funding has been provided to offset the on-going operational loss.

The resulting deficit in infrastructure maintenance and capital replacement led to the temporary closure of the railway in 2023.

Since partial re-opening in November 2023, the WCWR has experienced a period of strong growth in demand. The WCWR is on target in 2024-25 to achieve its highest ever patronage in a financial year. Based on current demand, the planned extension of operations to six days a week is expected to allow the WCWR to achieve a patronage of over 40 000 passengers a year.

The WCWR currently operates between Strahan and Lower Landing and between Queenstown and Rinadeena (see attached map). The middle 12 kilometres of line is currently non-operational.

Operating costs

The WCWR requires funding to meet operating costs. There is no scenario in which the WCWR can achieve break even with regard to operating costs in the short to medium term.

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¹ And 75 per cent of passengers coming from outside Tasmania

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Capital funding

Under the proposed funding model, passenger revenue services will operate from Strahan and Queenstown and the middle section (12 kilometres of line) would not have revenue services operating but would be maintained only to meet accreditation requirements, due to required rail infrastructure upgrades, including bridges and turn outs, needed to operate revenue services.

Capital funding will be prioritised to support upgrades or rolling stock and rail infrastructure to maintain existing services. However, basic maintenance will continue to be undertaken on the middle 12 kilometres of line, including rail and bridges. This will:

- allow continued use of the middle section for non-revenue rail operations, including transfer or rolling stock and evacuations and
- reduce the cost of a future decision to reactivate the middle section for revenue generating services.

This funding model will allow overhaul and deep maintenance to be undertaken on locomotives to restore the railway's capacity to operate six days a week. It will also ensure current operational rail infrastructure, including bridges, remain fit for purpose and meet national rail safety requirements.

Alternative options to address policy objective

Alternative Option 1-**section 27**

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	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29
	\$'000	\$'000	\$'000	\$'000
Cost				
Operating	11.50	11.80	12.20	12.60
Capital	8.00	8.20	12.70	8.70
Total Cost	19.50	20.00	24.90	21.30
Less Existing Funding/Revenue*	10.00	6.6	6.70	4.50
Net Cost	9.50	13.40	18.20	16.80

* includes funding committed under the 2024-25 budget

2025-26 BUDGET HIGH PRIORITY FUNDING REQUEST

Attachment I- WCWR route



The two blue lines denote the rack section of the WCWR

out of scope

From: Verrier, James
Sent: Wednesday, 26 March 2025 4:10 PM
To: Searle, Laura (DPaC)
Cc: Heydon, Cynthia
Subject: ARMC capital program

Hi Laura

Some additional points for the Minister's consideration ahead of budget committee:

- The WCWR has made considerable progress in improving operating standards, and reliability, over the last two years. However, the WCWR is now entering a period where higher value/cost assets are reaching end of life or require deep maintenance/refurbishment. **section 27**
- A critical concern for the National Rail Regulator is the absence of a funded capital program for the railway. This prevents the rail management team delivering a staged program of works. The resulting backlog of periodic maintenance and capital replacement then increases the scale of the future task to be delivered, making it less likely it can be delivered with the available human resources and increasing risks of intervention by the regulator.
- The body of infrastructure work required to maintain safe rail operations is now well understood, and involves progressive replacement of rail and sleepers, bridge maintenance, geotechnical risk management and rolling stock refurbishment. The specialised nature of the work, and remote location, reduces the potential field of suitable suppliers and contractors. Infrequently contracting out small parcels of work increase risks to the WCWR, in terms of availability of contractors and their competence to complete work to the required standard in challenging conditions.
- The WCWR has now operated under short-term funding commitments for an extended period- the lack of certainty makes it even more difficult to attract suitable staff, particularly in professional roles. **section 27**
- Postponing a decision on long-term funding increases the risk that the future cost of restoring the middle section of the line to full operation will be prohibitive.

Regards
 James

James Verrier | Director
 Transport Systems Policy | Department of State Growth
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Budget Estimates 2025-26

Minister for Infrastructure and Transport

Output Group: Administered Expenses
(Grants and Subsidies)

Output: Grants and Subsidies

ABT Railway Ministerial Corporation (West Coast Wilderness Railway)

Talking Points

- The West Coast Wilderness Railway (the Railway) is an iconic Tasmanian tourism experience and the only operating Abt rack and pinion railway in the southern hemisphere.
- The Railway operates between Strahan and Lower Landing, and from Queenstown to Rinadeena – the highest point and top of the iconic ‘rack’ section.
- The central section remains closed for essential bridge reconstruction and geotechnical risk mitigation, critical for long-term safety and reliability.
- The reopening of the central section will be subject to future consideration of Government.
- Through 2024-25, the Railway consistently achieved record passenger numbers, which have continued through a busy winter season.
- Over 38,000 passengers travelled on the Railway in the past year, up 155 per cent on the previous 12 months.
- In September 2025, the Railway was officially accepted into Tourism Australia’s *Cultural Attractions of Australia* signature collective, elevating its status nationally and internationally as a must-visit attraction.
- The Railway is a major employer for Queenstown and the West Coast, offering jobs in trades and hospitality. It also supports local students through a pathways program with Mountain Heights School.

Capital Program

- The Tasmanian Government and Railway management take safe operation of the Railway extremely seriously and continue to invest in opportunities to improve the rail operation and experience.
- The Tasmanian Government has invested \$47.45 million in the Railway from 2019-20 to 2024-25 and committed a further \$23.675 million over the Budget year and forward estimates.
- Asset maintenance and refurbishment is challenging due to the remote, rugged terrain and unpredictable weather.
- Significant progress has been made at key sites, with substantial work still ahead. Activities funded and scheduled for delivery during 2025-26 include:
 - re-railing works between Regatta Point and Lettes Bay
 - strengthening works and welding on bridges 35 and 36
 - coastal erosion repair
 - minor bridge defect removal and spot coating
 - two level crossing renewals
 - further re-railing and re-sleeping (quantity to be determined).
- On 16 October 2025, following a routine audit of the Railway's infrastructure and operations, the Office of the National Rail Safety Regulator (ONRSR) issued an improvement notice to the Railway, in relation to timing of the delivery of works on Bridge 35 and Bridge 36.
- At the time of the audit, the required works were funded and programmed to be completed before March 2026, consistent with recommendations made by structural engineers. However, as no contract was in place for the works, the regulator was concerned of potential slippage of timeframes beyond those specified in the engineering reports.
- The Tasmanian Government takes this very seriously and has sought and received assurances with regard to rail safety and delivery of the required works.

- Structural engineers have confirmed that the bridges remain safe for rail operations.
- Contractors have been appointed to complete recommended structural works on the bridges. 90 per cent of works are complete on Bridge 36, with works scheduled to begin on Bridge 35 in mid-November 2025.
- The government and the Railway remain committed to completing the package of works by March 2026, consistent with the recommendations made by structural engineers.

Planned November shut down

- The railway will close for a planned two-week maintenance window from 17 November to 29 November 2025. During this time, the Railway will complete the required structural works on bridge 35 and 36s, as well as other rail maintenance tasks.
- It had been planned to also re-paint Bridge 36 during the closure.
- However, this work has been delayed and is expected to be retendered in early 2026.
- The painting is important to maintain and protect the bridge fabric, but is not a structural safety concern.

Budget

- The Tasmanian Government has committed a further \$15.25 million in 2025-26.
- This is the highest amount committed to the Railway in a single year, since it re-commenced operations in 2014.
- The Tasmanian Government has also committed further funding of \$8.425 million over the forward estimates.
- This funding will allow continued investment in upgrading the Railway, including bridges and rail line, as well as rolling stock.
- It is evident that the Railway requires ongoing investment to maintain infrastructure and offset operating losses. It is critical that funding is invested in the right locations to build for future market growth.

Governance

- The Railway continues to be owned and operated by a ministerial corporation - the Abt Railway Ministerial Corporation (ARMC).
- In June 2025, governance had been strengthened through the introduction of improved oversight measures and the addition of rail technology expertise within the organisation.
- Alternative governance models, including a larger role for TasRail, were considered but found unsuitable due to significant operational differences. TasRail, however, continues to provide valuable operational support to the ARMC, and a Memorandum of Understanding is currently being developed to formalise this support
- Maintaining strong governance and safety assurance remains a priority for the government.

Released under RTI

Background

- The Railway is operated by the Abt Railway Ministerial Corporation. The Minister's delegate for the Railway is the Deputy Secretary, Transport in the Department of State Growth.
- The Railway is an anchor attraction for the West Coast. The Railway supports other product development and economic benefits on the West Coast, as visitors will stay overnight. A goal of the 2030 Visitor Economy Strategy is to increase visitor nights to grow flow on benefits to accommodation and hospitality.
- On average, 27 per cent of interstate holiday visitors who visit the West Coast region go on the Railway. This dropped to 22 per cent in 2023, due to the rail closure.
- In 2023, interstate holiday visitors who went on the Railway stayed, on average, 0.9 nights longer in the west coast region than holiday visitors to the west coast region who did not catch the train.

Employment

- There are currently 80 people employed on the Railway and 108 positions in total in the organisation (equating to 75 FTE). In summer season employees swell to over 100 staff.
- Since the closure of the Mt Lyell Copper Mine, the Railway has been the largest employer in Queenstown, with more staff than the council in the peak season.
- The map below shows the rail route and key locations.



- The section of 'rack railway' is located between Halls Creek and Dubbil Barril, shown by the blue lines on the map.
- The Railway operates steam services from Queenstown and diesel-hauled services from Strahan.

- The Railway operates five days a week in the peak season, with services departing Queenstown and Strahan.
- Steam locomotive Abt locomotive No 2 was restored and re-entered service in 2024. Abt No 3 recently underwent firebox repairs and re-entered service to run trains while Abt No 2 underwent an annual boiler service. Abt No 5 has had a major overhaul and is being rebuilt so that it may enter service.
- From 2019-20 to 2024-25, the Tasmanian Government provided a total of \$47.45 million to the ARMC, consisting of:
 - \$28.35 million in capital funding; and
 - \$19.1 million to offset operating losses.
- The Tasmanian Government has allocated the following funds in the 2025-26 State Budget:
 - 2025-26 – \$15.25 million
 - 2026-27 – \$6.025 million
 - 2027-28 – \$2.4 million
 - 2028-29 – \$0

Rail regulator and audit findings (improvement notice and non-conformances)

Improvement notice (capital works)

- In December 2024, the ARMC commissioned a level 3 assessment of two of its largest bridges, Bridge 35 (the Bailey Bridge) and Bridge 36 (the Iron Bridge). The Iron Bridge is the only original structure on the rail line, dating to the late 1890s. The report from that assessment, received in March 2025, identified required works on both bridges. These were recommended to be completed within 12 months (i.e. by March 2026).
- On 16 October 2025, following a routine audit of the Railway's infrastructure and operations, the Office of the National Rail Safety Regulator (ONRSR) issued the Railway with Improvement Notice #39370, in relation to timing of the delivery of works on Bridge 35 and Bridge 36
- At the time of the audit, the required works were funded and programmed to be completed before March 2026, consistent with recommendations made by structural engineers. However, due to there being no contracts in place for the works at the time of the audit, and a delay in receiving structural/load assessments of both bridges, the regulator was concerned that insufficient action is being undertaken by the Railway to ensure that repair and maintenance works will be complete within the timeframes recommended by specialist engineers.
- An improvement notice requires the rail operator to complete the actions specified in the notice within the time specified in the notice.
- ONRSR has instructed the ARMC to obtain a complete structural and load rating assessment of bridges 35 and 36 and to confirm, in writing, the ARMC's position on operating rail traffic over each bridge and any conditions attached. This advice is to be provided by 18 December 2025.

- The ARMC had commissioned the structural and condition assessment of Bridge 35 and Bridge 36 prior to the ONRSR notice. The ARMC has now received the relevant engineers report recommending works and coatings to be completed on bridges 35 and 36 within two years. A loading report has also been sought for both bridges. It is understood that the draft loading report will recommend the complete replacement of Bridge 35 within two to three years.
- ONRSR has also directed that, by 31 March 2026, the ARMC is to complete all recommended repairs as detailed in the *WCWR Structure 35 and 36 Level 3 Condition Inspection Report* dated 24 March 2025.
- The required works are funded and programmed to be completed prior to 31 March 2026. As at 7 November 2025, 90 per cent of the works on Bridge 36 are complete, with the remaining works to be completed following the receipt and approval of final designs. Works on Bridge 35 are scheduled to commence in mid-November.

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Eric Abetz MP
Minister for Transport

QUESTION TIME BRIEF

SUBJECT: West Coast Wilderness Railway

Updated: 28/04/2025

KEY MESSAGES

- The West Coast Wilderness Railway (the Railway) is an iconic tourism experience showcasing the West Coast of Tasmania.
- The Railway has celebrated its most successful January to March quarter since re-opening in 2012, with 15,696 passengers.
- The Railway also recorded its best calendar year in eight years, with 34,240 passengers carried in 2024.
- The Railway will continue to require Tasmanian Government financial support.

Talking Points:

- The middle section of the Railway, between Rinadeena and Lower Landing stations, remains closed.
- The Railway is undertaking further investigation of the major bridges on this section of the line, as well as continuing to work to resolve ongoing management of geo-technical risks along that section of the line, to inform a decision by Government on the cost and value of reopening this section to passenger services.

- The Tasmanian Government and the Railway management take safe operation of the railway extremely seriously and continue to invest in opportunities to improve the rail operation and experience.
- The Tasmanian Government has committed \$21 million to the Railway over the forward estimates. It has invested \$33.5 million since 2019-20.
- This investment has supported the restoration of services to Rinadeena, the highest point on the line and top of the famous 'rack' section.
- Further funding will be required to upgrade and maintain the line as a safe and fit for purpose into the future.

Governance Project

- The Department of State Growth is developing options to further strengthen the governance and technical capability of the Railway.
- The focus is to ensure that the Railway is appropriately resourced to manage and deliver its future capital program, while maintaining its high safety standards for day to day operations.
- I would like to thank the Railway staff for their assistance with this process to date.

Political Lines:

- For Minister's Office to insert

Background and Facts

- The Railway is operated by the Abt Railway Ministerial Corporation. The Minister's delegate for the Railway is the Deputy Secretary, Transport in the Department of State Growth.
- The Railway carried 23,117 passengers on the reduced services provided in 2023-24.
- The Railway is an anchor attraction for the West Coast. The Railway supports other product development and economic benefits on the West Coast, as visitors will stay overnight. A goal of the *2030 Visitor Economy Strategy* is to increase visitor nights to grow flow on benefits to accommodation and hospitality.
- On average, 27 per cent of interstate holiday visitors who visit the West Coast region go on the Railway. This dropped to 22 per cent in 2023, due to the rail closure.
- In 2023, interstate holiday visitors who went on the Railway stayed, on average, 0.9 nights longer in the west coast region than holiday visitors to the west coast region who did not catch the train.

Employment

- There are currently 88 people employed on the railway and 108 positions in total in the organisation (equating to 75 FTE). In summer season employees swell to over 100 staff.
- Since the closure of the Mt Lyell Copper Mine, the Railway has been the largest employer in Queenstown, with more staff than the council in the peak season.
- The map below shows the rail route and key locations.



- The section of 'rack railway' is located between Halls Creek and Dubbil Barril, shown by the blue lines on the map.
- The railway operates steam services from Queenstown and diesel-hauled services from Strahan.
- The railway operates five days a week in the peak season, with services departing Queenstown and Strahan.
- The steam locomotive Abt No 2 has been recently restored and is undergoing trial at the railway before commencing service.

Cleared by: Cynthia Heydon
Deputy Secretary, Transport

Contact Officer: James Verrier
Mobile: out of scope

Released under RTI

Eric Abetz MP
Minister for Transport

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Updated: 28/04/2025

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- The Railway will continue to require Tasmanian Government financial support.

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- This investment has supported the restoration of services to Rinadeena, the highest point on the line and top of the famous 'rack' section.
- Further funding will be required to upgrade and maintain the line as a safe and fit for purpose into the future.

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Cleared by: Cynthia Heydon
Deputy Secretary, Transport

Contact Officer: James Verrier
Mobile: out of scope

Released under RTI

Dept. Ref MR25/1272
Critical Signing Date 21 May 2025

NOTED
SIGNED:
DATE:

ISSUES BRIEFING NOTE FOR THE MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT

SUBJECT: WEST COAST WILDERNESS RAILWAY- FUNDING AND BRIDGE MAINTENANCE

Minister's notation:

Background:

The West Coast Wilderness Railway (the Railway) is operated by the Abt Railway Ministerial Corporation, since being returned to the Tasmanian Government in 2012. The Minister for Transport is the responsible Minister for the Railway.

The Railway operates a unique heritage rack and pinion system called Abt and runs over isolated terrain in the wilderness, which creates special challenges for its operations.

out of scope has written to you raising concerns about the operations and funding of the Railway and the impact on local businesses in the region if the Railway is not adequately funded.

The Railway has celebrated its most successful January to March quarter since re-opening in 2012, with 15,696 passengers. The Railway also recorded its best calendar year in eight years, with 34,240 passengers carried in 2024.

Current Situation:

The Tasmanian Government has committed \$21 million to the Railway over the 2024-25 budget and forward estimates. It has invested \$33.5 million since 2019-20.

The Railway is currently only operating on the line between Regatta Point and Lower Landing and between Queenstown and Rinadeena. The remaining section of the line remains closed, pending resolution of identified geotechnical concerns and bridgeworks, including replacement of transoms (that support the rail on top of the bridge), and painting of bridges.

There are 40 bridges on the Railway. Most of these are steel, with 4 timber trestle bridges. 26 of these bridges are on the non-operational section of line. Of the three largest bridges, two are on the currently non-operational section of the line.

Historically, securing contractors to paint bridges has been difficult due to the remoteness, inaccessibility and weather. These factors make the relatively simple task of painting a structure complex, and expensive.

The Railway is currently undertaking routine maintenance, including cleaning and painting of bridges. In doing so, it is working with contractors to test alternative methods of access, to reduce costs. There are seven bridges on the operational section to be treated. This work commenced in March 2025 and will be completed in the second half of 2025.

The work program will need to extend to bridges in the area closed to passenger operations between Rinadeena and Lower Landing. The Railway is waiting to evaluate the methodology being used on the bridges in the area which is currently open before issuing a scope of works and inviting tenders for the remaining bridges.

out of scope

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