



SteamRanger's Heritage - an insight into our past

BACKGROUND

Three articles from the ARHS (SA Division) *Recorder* magazine discussing various moves in the 1970s to close the Victor Harbor line

THE VICTOR HARBOUR LINE – CLOSURE REJECTED

ARHS Recorder Vol 7 No 7 April 1970 pages 1, 2

The Transport Control Board's recommendation to close the Strathalbyn to Victor Harbour line was rejected by the Parliamentary Standing Committee of Public Works in a statement released on 10/4/70. However, the Sandergrove to Milang branch will be closed.

This decision followed an inspection of the lines on the 1st and 2nd April using Railcar No. 46. Departure from Adelaide was at 1.10 p.m. on 1A for Milang, the only scheduled stops being at Bridgewater to cross 514 Jet and Sandergrove for a train order. 46 was turned at Milang and returned to Strathalbyn to be again turned for an express run to Victor Harbour. The next day the Committee returned from Victor Harbour at 10.00 a.m. with stops at Port Elliot, Goolwa and Strathalbyn, arriving back in Adelaide at 4.30 p.m.

The tourist potential of this scenic line would have had a strong bearing on the Committee's decision. An example of this is the Saturday following the inspection when the 9.00 a.m. Victor Harbour was worked with Blue Birds 100, 252, 260. Unfavourable weather resulted in only one car, 260, being scheduled, however, interest aroused through the possible impending closure of the line necessitated the last minute inclusion of extra cars and resulted in a 15 minute late departure. The 12.55 p.m. train the same day was worked with Blue Birds 256, 280.

TIME RUNNING OUT FOR THE VICTOR HARBOUR LINE - 1971

Editorial Comment

ARHS Recorder Vol 8 No 12 September 1971 page 2

If the recent comments by the Member for Heysen, Mr. McAnaney regarding the failure of the S.A.R. to secure additional freight traffic on the Victor Harbour line (see below) can be taken as correct, the line will probably be recommended for closure soon. It was in May 1968 that closure was recommended as part of the plan of the then Minister of Roads and Transport (Mr. Hill) to rationalise rail services, and is the only major recommendation of that plan to have not been carried out.

Closure was investigated by the Transport Control Board, which found that total freight earnings for the line had dropped by 60% from 1956-57 to 1968-69, and that the number of Up passengers for the year 1963-69 was 8,800, which averaged about 10 passengers per train. In December 1969, the Board recommended that the section from Strathalbyn to Victor Harbour be closed, but that it would not be economically justifiable at that stage to close the section from Mount Barker Junction to Strathalbyn. The Board indicated that it intended to re-study that latter section after a period of two years.

Following on the recommendation of the Transport Control Board, the Standing Committee on Public Works assessed the line, and recommended against closure, but urged that the department endeavour to recapture freight traffic that had been lost over the last 15 years, and at the same time, make people in the area aware that if they did not use the facilities then closure would have to be reconsidered.

Figures for the year 1969-1970 show that the fall in freight tonnages has continued, and would indicate that even under the threat of closure, the people at Victor Harbour, who agitated to keep the line open, still prefer to send their goods by road.

The figures for 1970-1971 will soon be available, and the Transport Control Board will no doubt reassess the situation, a situation which has certainly not improved.

FROM PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES - 1971

Mr. McAnaney, member for Heysen, and through whose electorate the Victor Harbour line runs, claimed that the decision not to close the line was costing \$200,000 per year.

After this decision was made, the Railways Department canvassed business people in Strathalbyn, and offered a substantial reduction in freight rates to a figure below the cost of the road transport.

A month later, because the department could not obtain anyone willing to use the railway service, it withdrew the concessional offer and the old rates have remained.

VICTOR HARBOR LINE CLOSURE PROPOSED AGAIN - 1975

ARHS Recorder" Jan 1975 pages 14,15

For the second time since 1968, the Minister of Transport (Mr. G. Virgo), announced on Friday 3/1/75 that the Mount Barker Junction-Victor Harbour line would be closed to all traffic as considerable expenditure was needed to keep the line in safe working order.

Later, this statement was amended, he said the matter would be discussed by Cabinet and the unions would be able to make a submission to retain the railway.

At its monthly meeting the following week, the Victor Harbour Corporation decided to "protest very strongly to the Member for Alexandra (Mr. Chapman) and to Mr. Virgo against the proposal to eliminate the branch railway from Mt. Barker (sic) to Victor Harbour". The Mayor said the council regarded the line as essential to the well-being of Victor Harbour and the convenience of a large number of people.

Although Mr. Virgo stated that the Kingston passenger service, Glanville -Semaphore line and the local Adelaide to Tailem Bend passenger trains would be withdrawn as well, most of the protests made to the press etc., have been about the withdrawal of the Victor line trains, in fact, very little has been voiced about the other three proposals.



Due to a shortage of powered Bluebird passenger cars on Saturday 28/12 a rare consist of power baggage-two trailers-power baggage worked the 12.55pm service. Consist was 281-103-105-280.

Photo: Hugh Williams.

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