

ALL ABOARD, TICKETS PLEASE!

Mt Barker to city in 61 minutes



Mt Barker engineer Douglass McCarty says passenger rail to the Hills needs to be more seriously examined by the State Government.

By Elisa Rose

A local engineer believes an hour-long passenger train trip between Mt Barker and the city could be developed at a fraction of the cost of State Government estimates.

Mt Barker Residents Association member Douglas McCarty, who worked for a decade as a civil and structural engineer with Australian National Rail, has spent months developing a detailed proposal, which he says would cost up to \$317m to upgrade infrastructure along the existing freight rail line, paving the way for a 61 minute journey between Mt Barker and Adelaide train station.

Under the proposal a depot would be built at Wistow and new stations at Mt Barker's Heysen Boulevard and at Mt Barker south - between Wellington and Alexandrina roads.

The service would also stop at the existing Mt Barker station and at restored or new stations at Littlehampton, Balhannah, Bridgewater and Aldgate.



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- Mt Barker Residents Association member Douglas McCarty

It would then become an express service to the city, stopping only at Blackwood and Goodwood, where passengers could make connections to the Belair, Seaford and Flinders lines or the Glenelg tram.

Mr McCarty said a large Park 'n' Ride would be built at the Heysen Boulevard to capture new development in Mt Barker, while new carparks would also be developed on existing Government land at Littlehampton, Balhannah, Bridgewater and Aldgate.

The service would use the existing standard gauge freight line between Adelaide and Mt Barker Junction in Balhannah, with line upgrades to connect it with Mt Barker and the Adelaide Railway Station.

Several passing loops would allow trains, including freight trains, to pass each other on the single line.

State Transport Minister Corey Wingard has repeatedly ruled out passenger rail to the Hills, saying that a service from Mt Barker would take 80 minutes, with a faster option costing up to \$12 billion.

But Mr McCarty said his cost estimates - which include everything from platform tiles to new rail tracks and stations - were based on consultation with industry experts and the 2021 Rawlinsons Construction Cost Guide.

Based on calculations of average speeds, stopping times at stations and acceleration and deceleration times, as well as the timetables of the Belair service, the times achieved by the old Bluebird rail service to Mt Barker and the Overland passenger service between Melbourne and Adelaide, he is confident the service would be significantly more

efficient than the Minister's estimated 80 minutes.

Mr McCarty said his plans would likely need to go through "several iterations" if they were to go ahead.

But he said he wanted to demonstrate that passenger rail was worth exploring. "I've done detailed work, right down to how much do vandal resistant toilets cost and how much do the tiles along the edge of the platform cost and I've plugged that into my calculations and that gives me my initial numbers," he said.

"If (the Government) doesn't agree, what should (the number) be?"

"What I'm trying to do is shift the conversation.

"... This will have to go through several iterations, I think, before it finally happens and this is the first one just to get everything going and I've tried to be professional in what I've done.

"... How much does it cost to get passenger rail to Adelaide?"

"No-one knows, no-one's got a clue ... so the Minister can drop \$12 billion and there's nothing to challenge it."

Transport Minister hints he may be back on board

By Elisa Rose

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