

# Victorian Railway Maps 1860 -2000

The inspiration for this atlas came from my own historical research. So much of the history of the Victorian Railways is best expressed geographically, but producing maps for various dates by photocopying and liquid paper was not successful. The acquisition of suitable software made the production of a set of maps feasible though not easy. The goal was to draw an accurate map of Victoria for the 1 July of each decade from 1860 to 2000. Each map was to show, on a single A3 sheet, each station, stopping place, and significant private sidings. Due to limitations of scale, private sidings within three quarters of a mile of a station are not generally shown, nor are all private sidings at very complex locations.

## Geographical Sources

The goal was to produce reasonably accurate maps of the Victorian Railways. The small scale worked to meant that extreme accuracy was unnecessary. This is fortunate due to the paucity of available information. Production of the maps required combining information from a wide variety of sources. The core of the work was from the Australian topographical maps. A wide selection was examined to obtain the basic information: 1:63,630 (inch to the mile), 1:100,000, 1:253,440 (four inches to the mile), and 1:250,000. These maps were sufficient to show the location of most lines. Station locations were mainly added from copies of Broadbent's eastern, western, and central 'official' road and railway maps of Victoria dating from the early 1950s. Odds and ends were filled in from a variety of other sources, including copies of Morgan's Melbourne Street Directory (especially useful for the Black Rock extension of the Sandringham street railway), Melways, the ESMAP Outer Melbourne Directory, and the VicRoads Country Directory. Final holes were filled in from published railway histories. Particularly useful were Norman Haughton's 'The Beechy', Stamford, Stuckey, & Maynard's 'Powelltown', and Chris Wurr's recent article on the remnants of the Robinvale - Lette line. When all else failed, the mileages were looked up in the grades book and the locations identified from adjacent road crossings, river courses, or significant curves.

## Historical Sources

Determining the period during which a station or siding was open was the other half of the puzzle. Basic lists were compiled from the annual Commissioner's reports, but the information in them had to be treated with a certain amount of caution. Ignoring simple errors, these reports do not show all stations and sidings (particularly those which did not generate any revenue for that year), but would show stations only open for part of the year. Opening and closing dates of lines and stations between 1894 and 1994 were checked against Jungwirth & Lambert's invaluable 'Weekly Notice Extracts'. Dates prior to 1894 were checked in the Chronological Index held in the ARHS Archives at Windsor. Each map was then checked against the working time-

table closest to the nominal date I had access to; normally this was within one to two years of the decade. Stations on the very early network were checked against Harrigan's venerable 'Victorian Railways to '62'. A particular problem occurred with attempting to plot the 1990 and 2000 maps: sidings, stations and whole lines simply disappeared with no formal notification of closure; or a notification that was very much post hoc.

## Historical Overview

**1860.** This map captures the railway network of Victoria at an interesting date. The first sections of the Victorian Railways had opened, but the mileage of the privately owned railways exceeded that of the government lines. This changed rapidly, of course, with the extension of the public lines to Sandhurst, Echuca, and Ballarat, and the purchase of the Geelong and Melbourne Railway.

**1870.** By 1 July 1870, construction of the lines to Ballarat, Sandhurst, and Echuca had been completed and the Victorian Railways was firmly established. In the city, the suburban lines to the south and east were still privately owned, although the separate companies had amalgamated into one.

**1880.** After pausing to recover after the massive expenditures of the initial main lines, construction resumed in the late 1870s with lower and cheaper standards. Trunk lines had been pushed to Wodonga, Sale, Portland and Colac. Construction was continuing west towards the South Australian border. A number of branch lines had been opened to serve the populous gold mining districts, particularly around Maryborough, Inglewood, and Beechworth, and the first purely agricultural branch lines had been constructed.

**1890.** The late 1880's was marked by a frenzy of railway construction as branch lines were constructed to serve new agricultural communities (and to support suburban land speculation). By the 1 July 1890 the construction of lines passed in the massive 1884 'Octopus' act had largely been completed. One subtle change from earlier years was that stations were now spaced much closer together. Compare the number of stations on the NE line in 1890 with that in 1880, for example.

**1900.** The early 1890s was marked by a massive depression as the speculative bubble of the late 1880s burst. Most of the 'new' lines shown on this map were the final lines of the 1884 Octopus Act and were completed in the early 1890s. By the turn of the century construction of new lines had resumed, however, particularly in the north west of the state to open up the Mallee. A notable new line in the north east was the first trial narrow gauge line to Whitfield.

**1910.** The first decade of the twentieth century saw surprisingly little construction. The other two trial narrow gauge lines (to Beech Forest and Gembrook were opened) as were two additional narrow gauge lines: to the gold mining town of Walhalla deep in the Victorian Alps, and the tiny horse

worked tram to Port Welshpool in the southeast of the state. On the broad gauge the major extension was to the Chaffey brothers irrigation settlement at Mildura.

**1920.** Despite the Great War, the teens saw significant extensions of rail service, particularly in the wheat growing areas in the north west and west. The new lengthy parallel lines were considered to be cheaper to operate than the numerous short 'cockspurs' built in the late 1880s; compare the railway network in the north west with that of the Golburn Valley. Other line constructed during this decade were 'infill' lines, particularly in the Cressy plains west of Geelong, and lines to Cohuna, Colbinabbin, and Girgarre. In the northeast and east lines were being pushed through heavy country towards Cudgewa and Orbost.

**1930.** By 1930 the railway map of Victoria was largely complete. A number of minor extensions had been completed during the twenties within Victoria (Carpolac, Bolangum, Patchewillock, Meringur, Robinvale, Yungera, Alvie, Red Hill, Strezlecki, and Woodside) but the best land had long been settled and the remaining land was very marginal for agriculture.. Victoria was, in fact, looking to the underpopulated Riverina in NSW and had obtained agreement to build several lines north of the border and to purchase the Deniliquin line. The lines to Balranald and Stony Crossing had been opened, and the lines to Oaklands and Lette were under construction. The last named line was never completed.

**1940.** The thirties was the great depression and the Victorian government had little money to spend on new railway construction, even if there had been places left to build lines to. While the line to Oaklands opened in this decade, the line from Topiram to Strezlecki had closed after less than a decade of use; the harbinger of later cuts.

**1950.** The Second World War gave a respite to the railways and only a few insignificant sections of line were closed during the forties. These were spread out over the state: the Stony Crossing line beyond the border in the northwest, the Grampians line in the west, the Tatong line in the north east, the Wensleydale line in the south west, a further section of the Strezlecki line in the east, and the East Kew line in the metropolitan area.

**1960.** The fifties saw the loss of a number of short branch lines, particularly in mountainous or hilly country where the only traffic had been timber or livestock. Many of the lines closed had been unprofitable for years, and the growth of the trucking industry (particularly in the unrestricted zone around Melbourne) meant that there was little prospect for traffic. By 1960 the Eastern district, the South Western district around Colac, and the Central Highlands between Ararat and Seymour were virtually denuded of branch lines.

**1970.** The news of the sixties was the construction of the NE Standard Gauge to Albury, opened in 1962, the reopening of the Avoca - Ararat line in 1966, and the reopening of Puffing Billy (to Menzies Creek in 1962). The remainder of

the network was relatively stable with only a few lines closing, including the lines to Heathcote, Waubra, Weeaprounah, and Murrabit.

**1980.** The late seventies saw the replacement of the roadside goods and country railmotor services by road transport from regional hubs. The result was the virtual elimination of branch lines outside the grain producing areas. A more subtle effect was the closure of many of the wayside stations on the 'main' lines that remained; in fact many of the 'stations' that remained south of the divide had no traffic but only remained as safeworking locations.

**1990.** Many of the smaller silos, serving marginal grain country, were closed to rail traffic in the eighties in favour of road haulage to larger centralised silos. This caused the closure of a number of grain branch lines, particularly the shorter lines, and the elimination of many smaller 'stations' on those lines that remained open. The remaining branch lines outside the grain area were eliminated, and in the eastern part of the state even the main lines were beginning to be cut back. Replacement of traditional safeworking systems by systems that required no local staff saw safeworking locations rationalised and relocated, particularly in the south of the state.

**2000.** The final map shows the current rail network. The major change in the nineties has been the conversion of the Western line to Adelaide to Standard Gauge. This required provision of Standard Gauge to Yaapect, Hopetoun, Portland, and Dunolly (the last provides access to the major grain terminal at Dunolly), but the former main line between Ballarat and Ararat, and the Mt Gambier line were not converted and were mothballed. Today, the state essentially consists of four networks: the electrified metropolitan public transport system which has hardly changed since electrification in the twenties; the country passenger network to Warrnambool, Ballarat, Bendigo, Swan Hill, Shepparton, Albury, and Sale; the standard gauge interstate lines to Adelaide and Albury; and the grain network, principally west of Murtoa, north of Maryborough and north of Seymour, with its main line connections to the ports at Geelong and Portland.

## Copying Permission

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## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Michael Guiney for his careful checking of the maps, but any remaining errors remain the author's. I would be pleased to receive corrections so that the maps can be corrected if a future edition is ever required. Corrections may be sent to the author at 25 Grieve St, West Macleod, Vic, 3085.

Andrew Waugh, August 2000.