



Train buff Richard Elliott went south by Seniors

I ATTENDED SOLAR 2013, a conference organised by the Aust Solar Council held in Melbourne at the end of May this year.

There is a report of the conference in this issue of *BWD*, but first the 'getting there' part. I asked around if anyone uses the train — this produced very polarised views. A small number said they loved it and many looked at me if I had lost my marbles.

Always being game to try something once, I looked on the web and found that the XPT service runs each way everyday, Sydney to Melbourne. Using my Seniors Card for a discount I booked First Class to go to Melbourne on a Wednesday, leaving Goulburn at 1030 in the morning, returning Saturday leaving Melbourne at 0830. Total \$150.

I used the Country Link on-line booking service and found it fairly painless. There is no fee for leaving a vehicle parked at Goulburn for a few days. At Goulburn I admitted I was a newbie and received helpful advice about where to board (quickly) and that the train was running on time.

A pleasant surprise — the carriage was laid out with airline style adjustable seats — spaced widely, air vents, overhead reading lights but no oxygen mask. Like a plane there was an 'inflight' magazine called XPtraveller and an emergency procedures card on the back of the seat in front.

Similar to an airline magazine there was a page showing the XPT layout, buffet car location as well as toilet, showers!, wheel chair access toilet and baby change area. (I guess that's for people who don't like the baby they have!).

As well there was a pay phone, rubbish bin, wheel chair parking space and chilled water dispenser. Both sides of the carriage have large tinted

windows. The tinting seemed to block GPS reception but mobile phones worked quite well. The staff all looked happy, with one ticket checker exclaiming that he loved trains. To make it even more like an aircraft there is even a backlit 'Toilet Engaged' sign, so everyone knows why you got out of your seat.

Departing Melbourne was unhurried as I boarded around fifteen minutes early. It brought home to me how civilised it was with non-travellers coming on board for their farewells and then being politely asked to leave over the public address system five minutes before departure.

The views are glorious. I think I could watch a movie shot from a train window. Near Melbourne the trackside was a fascinating world of acres of post industrial concrete and rusting steel with the graffiti of thousands of dollars worth of spray paint cans. The countryside varies from drought-hit



undulating dust near Yass to rich green paddocks in Victoria. The contents of some of the backyards of Melbourne displaying the many inspirations for 'The Castle'. Near Glenrowan the crew pointed out the snow covered top of Mt Hotham.

The buffet car had a good range of soft drinks, juices and alcohol. The coffee was served using Robert Timms coffee bags and UHT milk. There is a refrigerated display with pre-made sandwiches, rolls and wraps and a pie warmer with pies, pasties and sausage rolls. For the more health conscious there are green and fruit salads. For the less health conscious the cream left over from the scones went well in the coffee. Interestingly, unlike the airlines, the unsold hot food is offered at half price near the end of the journey.

About forty minutes before meal times buffet staff come through and take orders for hot food. On the way down I had a roast chicken and vegetables and later a fair Roganjosch lamb. These are served in foil packages and not knowing anything about this magazine's libel insurance I would rate the hot food as comparable with Jetstar's. Orders were taken for Devonshire tea of hot scones and beverage around 10 am. The PA was used to tell you when to come and get it and to please reuse your cardboard tray.

The ride varies with speed and track condition. At times there is a gentle rocking and occasionally a bit of a tummy massage. Never bad enough to spill the drinks. At times there was squeaking of the couplings and buffers but mostly pretty quiet. The tracks must now be welded as there is no longer any 'clickety-clack'. I had no difficulty conducting 'planning sessions' (snoozing), reading or using a computer. Both ways the train of eight carriages was about half full. However I travelled to Melbourne (from Majors Creek), it was going to take a fair bit of time. Missing Canberra airport was good for my stress levels with the demonstrably pointless confiscation of pocket knives and the rest of the security theatre. Here's a plug for domestic flights in New Zealand — they have none of that nonsense, and it makes me feel safer.

The XPT was such a good experience that now I'm thinking of taking the train to Broken Hill for a few days.

[The author received no kickbacks, discounts nor luxury gifts from the NSW Railways — but would be happy to consider any offers.]



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THE EDITOR REGURGITATES ON OLDIE

WHO SAID *BWD* was going to be a monthly? All right, maybe I gave that impression by producing November and December issues last year.

Boy, hasn't the time just flown by since then? Well, I think I'll settle for seasonal issues and even then I'm running a bit late following on from the Autumn issue. As I write this the election date is still up in the air.

Please Kevin, can we have a date in October?

I should be right to produce an election special in mid Spring and I'm aiming to hit each of the candidates with a list of questions. If you, loyal readers, have any particular issues you'd like to see addressed by the aspiring pollies, email them to *BWD* before September (or as soon as the election is called if I'm caught on the hop).

The pedestrian crossing in the Duncan to Lascelles Streets block continues to be missing. There is a real issue of community consultation at stake here. Wallace Street has a clear uncluttered vista, in keeping with its horse and buggy roots and many people think it's worth preserving.

Maybe one day Braidwood will have a bypass and a central carpark. Then we could have a mall with all the cars gone and an historical streetscape that tourists would come to see and locals could sit and enjoy.

Keep your eye on the new planning provisions in NSW too. Community consultation in the 'strategic direction' of future planning is intended to replace case-by-case scrutiny and opportunity for comment or objection.

It sounds OK in a 'White Paper' but if you never actually go to any meetings, or if no-one ever asks what you think, where is the community consultation?

When the government says the current planning system is 'hopelessly broken' it is not because our natural environment or quality of life has been under threat. This is a developer-led reform and we should ask the Planning Minister to demonstrate the extent of community engagement before going gung-ho.

'Til whenever ...

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