



TABLE TALK

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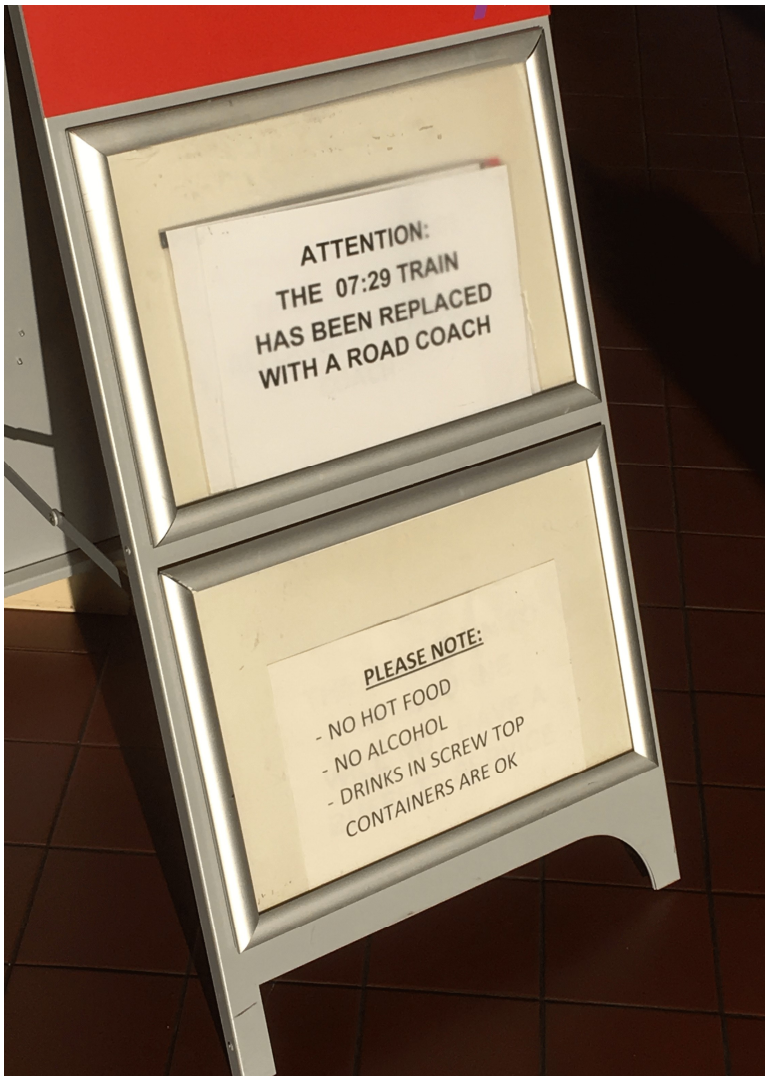
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TOP TABLE TALK – NOW IS THE SUMMER OF OUR DISCONTENT, CONTINUED

by Geoff Lambert



Here are some recent headlines from the

Albury-Wodonga **The Border Mail**

- 9 in 10 V/Line Trains Late
- Albury V/Line's most cancelled service
- An absolute disgrace
- BEYOND BAD
- Cathy McGowan extends invitation to Barnaby Joyce to update North-East railway upgrade
- Failing at the Highest Level
- Go slow on rail line continues as V/Line releases Albury statistics
- Snail Rail – Minister fires broadside
- V/Line admits 'unacceptable service' amid call for accountability
- V/Line bracing for horror December reliability result on North-East railway line
- V/Line cancels another eight train services ahead of weekend heatwave
- V/Line confirms 30 trains services cancelled on North-East line since Boxing Day
- V/Line mute on train delays
- Victorian Auditor-General tells V/Line to address 'high failure rate' of trains

In the January *Table Talk*, we looked at the issue of whether the new Sydney timetable was in any way responsible for the “meltdowns” of the Sydney Trains system during December and January. This month, we turn our attention to the question of what lies behind the never-ending problems with the standard gauge V/Line service between Southern Cross and Albury – the North East Standard Gauge (NESG).

The current timetable

The most recent V/Line Network Service Plan (NSP) was issued on [10-December-2017](#), replacing the August 2017 issue. The NESG service is run by two “diagrams” of VN car sets (four passenger carriages, plus a power-van and a loco) from a pool of four such sets. On a typical Monday, train service starts at 0340, when the train that has been stabled at Southern Cross overnight returns to South Dynon Loco for servicing before running the first Down train of the day. This is the first critical choke point—this is where the train may be “failed” for any one of a number of reasons. If this train does not run, the lunch-time return service from Albury will not run either. Should everything be okay, the car set returns to Southern Cross and runs the next Melbourne-Albury-Melbourne-Albury service and stables at Albury overnight. It thus becomes the first train out of Albury on Tuesday morning. The service out of Albury on Weekdays runs Albury-Melbourne-South Dynon Loco (loco only for refuelling)-Melbourne-Albury-Melbourne and stables at Southern Cross, from which it departs for Dynon at 0340 the next morning. On Thursdays, however, the entire train-set—instead of just the loco—returns to South Dynon, where the set is (or can be) swapped for one of the other sets. These visits to South Dynon are further choke points where a train can be “failed”. Should this happen the lunch-time service to Albury and its return service are both cancelled. This shuffle to and from South Dynon means that it is very unusual for the morning service out of Albury or the evening service out of SX to be cancelled *de novo*.

Why trains can be failed

Trains rarely “fail” *en route*, although it can happen. At South Dynon any problem—even a minor problem such as a broken window or graffiti—in the loco, power van or passenger cars usually leads to an immediate failure notice. This is an ultra-cautious approach and ought not to be of great concern, were it not for the fact that the two “spare” sets in Dynon can also be out of action for similar reasons. Although the N-class locos can (in theory) provide head-end power for the car sets, in practice V/Line relies upon a power van for this function. Although there are now four car-sets, there have been, until January 2018, only three power vans. A fourth has recently been delivered. Although power vans generally have two generator sets where only one is needed for a four-car train, even if only one fails, the whole train is “failed”.

On the day I sat down to write this article (22 January), V/Line cancelled two return services because three of the four locomotives were in for repairs. The next day was slightly better, with one locomotive returned to

service and thus only one return service was cancelled. The midday Down train, however, was 15 minutes late due to “speed restrictions”.

It has been quite common for V/Line to fail trains on the basis of its perception that the damage, especially to wheel sets, has arisen through rough riding on ARTC’s track, such as through the infamous “mud-holes”. In light of the “apparent fact” that the XPT does not suffer these problems contrasted with the “apparent fact” that the problem does not occur on non-ARTC track, this is certainly a debate that is hard to resolve.

Why trains can be cancelled

Apart from V/Line “failing” a train, services can be cancelled for other reasons, such as crew shortages, signalling failures (often caused by theft of copper wire from the signalling system), WOLO (hot weather) alerts, floods (or even predicted floods!), accident and ARTC closedowns.

Why trains can run late

Late running of trains that start on time, can nearly always be sheeted home to ARTC management issues. All of the following have happened.

There have always been a large but variable number of permanent and temporary **speed restrictions** on the NESG. Currently the ARTC KPI documents for Melbourne-Sydney show 40 km of them, although it is not clear how much is on the NESG. The V/Line Weekly Notice #1 of 2018 lists 14 TSRs, with a total length of about 18 km. Most are short, but three of them total 16 km. Restrictions can sometime be to quite low speeds—to 40kph or less. A typical speed restriction notice reads “164/2017 193.3km to 200.2km 2/06/2017 80/80 Ballast - Condition (Mudhole) Comment— APPLIES TO NE VICTORIAN WEST LINE ONLY. Speed restriction extended due to mud holes and geometry defects. Estimated removal date: 31/03/2018 Benalla Junction and Glenrowan Loop. So this long-running speed restriction results in a delay of several minutes.

WOLO conditions also result in blanket speed restrictions. These are generally not “cancellable” once they have been made, even if the temperature predictions turn out to be wrong. The NESG is generally not too badly affected by this because of its high population of concrete sleepers.

Passenger illness is a moderately frequent cause of trains being stopped to allow a medical team to attend.

Train Control is a vexed issue. Train Control is at Mile End in Adelaide and decisions on routing and timing of the freight and passenger trains on the NESG are made there and often not communicated to V/Line. Passenger trains, in theory, have priority, but theory does not always translate into practice

History

It cannot be said that this service has ever been up to scratch and our companion journal, *The Times*, has spent some time in examining the goat entrails of this

service. Thus, while it is not a total surprise that the service continues to perform poorly, it WAS a surprise to see the depths to which it sunk during the Christmas Holidays and the weeks thereafter. This sufficiently riled so many Victorians that some of them, including the Border Mail newspaper, called for a Royal Commission.

Until mid-2017, one of the most common excuses advanced for the poor service was the unavailability of car sets. There were three available to run a service that required only two sets – the third was “spare”. But all too often the spare set was not available because it too had been failed. The solution adopted by V/Line was to create a FOURTH set out of the existing three. There are now, in theory, four 4-car sets, rather than three 5-car sets (another car was required of course, and one set still lacks a power car). There were also dark mutterings about the reliability of the three N-class locomotives and so, eventually, a fourth was transferred from Broad to Standard Gauge.

It didn't work. In fact, the situation got worse.

Replacement buses

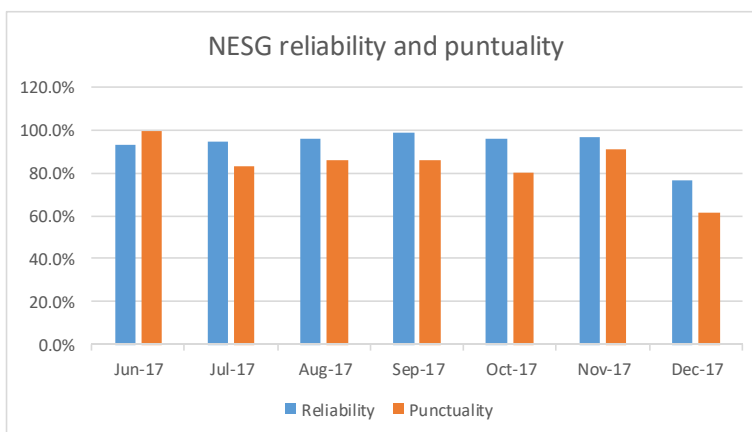
When a train is cancelled, replacement buses have to be arranged. This can usually be done at short notice because the bus operators seem to be getting very

used to the situation after eight years. There does not seem to be a bus timetable held in reserve for these situations or, if there be one, I have not come across it. A set of four N-class cars will need at least four buses—probably more—to replace the train. Services can be stratified inasmuch as they may leap-frog their way—or part of the way—to Albury. This would be liable to increase the number of buses needed. Prospective passengers are warned to allow extra time for their journey, sometimes an hour or more when the buses run. The buses, naturally, call at the railway stations, which are usually some distance off the Hume Freeway or even off the old Hume Highway. This lengthens the station-to-station time. Passengers hate the buses – or at least they hate the very notion of buses.

Christmas-New Year 2017/18.

The performance figures for the V/Line NESG services for June to December show a very marked deterioration in the latter month. The targets are “Reliability”: 96% of trains to run; Punctuality: 92% of trains to arrive no more than 11 minutes late.

Punctuality targets on the NESG are hardly ever met, but December was horrendously bad. The first part of January-figures not yet available-will be much worse.



The Blame Game

The undercurrent that roils beneath the surface has as its source the traditional Australian bugbear of “States Rights”. This particular manifestation is due to Victrack (the below-rail owner and, in theory under ACCC rules, the builder of the timetable) taking a particular dislike to the “sell-out” arranged by Victorian Premier Steve Bracks to get a poorly-performing broad-gauge service off his back. There was also a lot of pressure from the Feds to improve the NESG for freight traffic. At the time of the handover, the ARTC was planning to construct a number of 7-km long “Passing Lanes” between Somerton and Junee to make a “poor man’s double track railway”. This notion was discussed in an ATA Times article entitled *Field of Dreams* in [April 2010](#). REAL double track is clearly better than ersatz double-track.

Everybody jumped at the offer; everybody should have been happy. NOBODY was happy.

Constructed in haste and without proper attention to such things as sleepers, ballast and the mud-holes, the newly-regauged broad gauge line never worked – falling into ignominy almost from the first days, when a freight train fell off the Murray River viaduct. From there, things went downhill. Resentment by the Victorians sank in quickly and sank in deeply. A station Manager said to me just before the new regime started, “*We used to be the masters of our own destiny here – now we shall dance to ARTC’s tune.*” Another SM said “*We never know whether an Up Passenger [she was referring to either V/Line or Countrylink] is going to come in via the East line or the West Line... luckily the drivers give us time to scamper*”.

There has been a pronounced tendency for V/Line to blame the permanent way for its woes. There is definitely some truth in this. Ever since the deal was brokered between the Federal and State Governments, the NESG has taken on the condition of

a goat track. ARTC has spent gazillions of dollars trying to improve the track between 2010 and 2018. That was another thing that didn't work properly—although there has been some improvement.

This finger-pointing reminded me of the cartoon about Boss Tweed and his Tammany Hall cronies who ran New York City. On the NESG, the “Tammany Ring” includes but is not limited to: Barnaby Joyce, Jacinta Allen, Cathy McGowan, V/Line, ARTC, VicTrack, Broken Windows, Train Faults, Bad Bogies, Countrylink, Mudholes, Ballast, Bombardier, the N-class, Vandals, Copper Thieves, Murphy, Uncle Tom Cobby and All

Pity the customers

Piggy in the Middle, of course, is the passenger. Most are resigned to their fate. For those who have cars, an escape route is to drive to Seymour and pick up a train there. The rest sit glumly in sun or rain outside the station, hanging out for the replacement bus to show up. There is an air of resignation about them – an air that one rarely sees in “go-getter” and socially conscious places like Wangaratta.

Political Campaigns in response to poor service

A Ginger Group, the [Border Rail Action Group](#), has been formed; and has had plenty of media exposure, but apparently no effect. The local Federal Member, Cathy McGowan, has also struggled vainly and sighs that improvements will not come until the warring sides bury the hatchet. A large letter-writing campaign—to politicians, rail management, newspapers—commenced after the Christmas debacle, but nothing much seems to have shifted yet.

You can help

ATA member **Max Michell** has made the following analysis, in which he targets V/Line's rolling stock management and urges wide dissemination of his analysis, to help letter-writers with their campaign.

One failure is unfortunate, two is careless, but a succession is surely incompetence.

Over the last year I have been dismayed by the consistent cancellation of standard gauge Albury trains by V/line. At times these were not overwhelming, although they were far from the promised level of service and even further from anything that could be called a service. But even then, poor as it was, there were times when the service got worse, far worse, and collapsed almost entirely - for instance for most of April 2017 virtually all the scheduled trains were cancelled.

Provision of a fourth locomotive and reconfiguration of three sets into four sets may have lulled the Minister into some sort of belief that things would be better, but in fact nothing improved in the slightest. Persistent failures to operate at all, or to operate on time when running, has continued unabated throughout the year.

A quick survey of the notified cancellations and delays during the last few months of 2017 indicated that at least 31 trains were cancelled (but taking train balancing into account the number was probably

around 40) while a similar number of operating trains were reported as being late (but far from all late running was reported). The first six days of 2018 saw another total service meltdown with no fewer than 18 out of 36



scheduled service notified as being cancelled – such is the state of affairs that V/line now offer “*all Albury line trains for [day] have been cancelled except the [00.00] from Southern Cross*”. So now we have just 50% of the scheduled service being provided and there is no comment nor (apparent) action on the part of V/line management nor, I suspect, any advice to the Minister. Has management paralysis become the performance standard or am I missing something about the ‘*new normal*’?

It is reported that the CEO of V/line has a Rolling Stock Depot Facility background, so he should have some idea about what the issues are and how to manage them. If results rather than words are the measure of success then clearly V/line management has dismally failed.

ARTC tracks have been brought back to a reasonable standard, which is certainly better than that of the parallel broad gauge track between Broadmeadows and Seymour (a route I travel frequently) but is still claimed to be a major issue for performance failure on the part of V/line. Given that identical trains run on the broad gauge network that has an observably poorer track quality I doubt if this claim would stand up in any objective assessment. The lie to this was revealed when V/line decided to break up its three 5 car SG train sets and make four 4 car train sets in order to have greater redundancy to cover failures.

At the same time three locomotives were increased to four, dedicated to the SG to provide additional loco redundancy. The normal Albury service requires two train sets in operation - so is now supported by 100% redundancy. Despite this extraordinary level of redundancy V/line is still incapable of running better than 50% of their scheduled services (four train sets to actually run one!!!). In fact, reading between the lines, the issue is primarily one of train maintenance (loco and cars) and dysfunctional lines of communication between that function and the front line operational group in V/line.

What is most frustrating about this affair is not just the dishonesty surrounding the issue but the fact that it is entirely within the ambit of a half-competent management to resolve. The core issue lies in

managing the assets, both above and below rail, so that out-of-course events are minimized, and the unavoidable incidents have some mitigation plan that contains any untoward impacts. A combination of active and appropriate engineering and operational strategies are required to achieve a reliable service, rather than the torpid approach that by implication now applies.

Maybe the problem lies in the fact that management does not see the customer (passenger) as the core of their system rather than the 'hardware'. The fact that there has been ongoing and very public frustration all along the Albury line for close on a decade seems to have simply passed through V/line management without causing a blip. If their attention to the 'hardware' had paid dividends then maybe the public disquiet would settle down a bit, but when the public are ignored and the 'hardware' continues as badly as ever there has to be a problem that requires substantial and decisive Ministerial intervention. Either a 'can do' management needs to be stood up (in military parlance), or perhaps the simplest solution might be to seek offers from elsewhere for management of V/line.

Although this issue is localized to the Albury line (albeit there are similar issues on all longer distance V/line routes) the reputational damage to V/line is far wider than just the Victorian North East. In fact, it is not just the reputation of V/line that gets trashed by this ongoing inability to do anything – it also involves reputational damage to the Government as owner of the railway.

The Government and Minister should be more than interested in anything that is likely to stain their record of governance – and hopefully they will be. This is even more an issue when you consider that the National Government has a real stake in this whole saga and has shown a willingness to beat up on the State Government on a range of issues.

The hardware! N class locomotives have been around for about 30 years, but come from a very robust pedigree and are basically maintainable *ad infinitum* into the future. There are thousands of technically similar locomotives across the world that are doing—and will continue to do—commercially useful work well into the future. The issue for older locomotives has to do with fuel consumption and environmental compliance but not maintainability. There are numerous freight locos of similar vintage or older across the country in service with Freight Operators which are able to be maintained to high standards of reliability. Four V/line locos to run two diagrams is more than adequate to allow for planned preventative maintenance, but of course if the system allows the South Dynon maintenance facility to be closed and skilled maintenance staff to be dissipated elsewhere without arranging any corresponding alternative capability, then the result is inevitable, regardless of

the number of locomotives allocated.

There is a somewhat similar situation with the car sets - 16 carriages (and a bunch of power vans to avoid dependency on the loco 'head end power' source) are provided to run an 8 carriage roster. In theory there should be eight spare cars, but even if one set is out for more substantial maintenance there are still four cars that should be available. It is unbelievable that a group of technically consistent cars, with 100% redundancy, cannot be adequately managed to achieve the scheduled service levels.

In NSW around eight operating XPT train sets have only a single spare car of various types to cover maintenance. The XPT's run a far more intensive operation than is run by V/line, yet they achieve reliability with 12% redundancy, while V/line fails with 100% redundancy. Where do you think that the problem might be?

An associated operational 'problem' seems to be that if an arriving train at Southern Cross has a fault it cannot be readily exchanged with a standby train at South Dynon within a reasonable time - surely a matter that a bit of simple communication and adequate crew resources would remedy. It is not rocket science.

In my travels to and fro to Seymour I have twice had a bus turn up pretending to be a train - in both cases I chose to wait for the next real train. Judging from the reaction of other people waiting, I am not alone in this. Buses are not as popular as trains under normal circumstances and continued use of them as *de facto* trains (as a cover for poor management) is simply a way of degrading the reputation of V/line as a reliable public transport enterprise.

Maybe the Albury service is of little consequence to V/line, but its conspicuous inability to run a simple reliable regional passenger service sends a general message about the its competence to run what is a fairly basic passenger system. The similar but less conspicuous issue on broad gauge seems to suggest that the problem is far more deeply rooted than the basic data provided by V/line might suggest. As I indicated above, this does not look like the failure of individual lapses or services, but rather an endemic failure of V/line management to provide what the public purse is paying for - a reasonable quality of service achieving a reasonable level of reliability most of the time. Running only 50% of scheduled trains is not, by any measure, a success.

In the meantime we can only hope that somehow this issue becomes one that lights a spark of interest in Spring St such that V/line management are put on notice to perform or get out and make way for someone who can. The old truism 'wheels will roll or heads will roll' has a lot going for it.

It is not what they say but what they do by which they shall be judged - and judging by what V/line do (or rather don't do) it is far from good enough right now.

RAIL AND TRAM NEWS

Queensland Rail Citytrain: Timetable

From Monday 22 January Queensland Rail Citytrain replaced the restricted holiday period timetable with the less restricted 2017 reduced schedule timetable, that is the timetable of 23 Jan 2017 for Cleveland, Redcliffe, Shorncliffe, Springfield and Sunshine Coast, and 24 July 2017 for Airport, Beenleigh, Caboolture, Doomben, Ferny Grove, Gold Coast and Ipswich/Rosewood. There are still 400 fewer services than on a full timetable. QR is unable to say when it will return to a full timetable. A spokesman said the reduced timetable has 7828 services a week compared to a planned 8290. He could not say whether full services will return in time for the Commonwealth Games in April.

QR was forced to slash services after the opening of the Redcliffe Peninsula line on 4 October 2016. A significant driver shortage was blamed on a Rail Tram and Bus Union policy that restricted QR from hiring externally qualified drivers. A spokesman said QR plans to hire an extra 200 drivers and guards to add to its network via a "streamlined" recruitment process. He said that since October 2016, QR has selected 145 trainee drivers and 262 trainee guards, with 49 drivers and 157 guards now fully qualified and working on the SEQ network as at 10 January. A further 74 drivers and 42 guards are in training, and the next trainee driver and guard schools will commence in January and February respectively.

It might be mid-2020 before Queensland Rail's driver shortage is fixed, its own modelling reveals. This is partly due to a new union meal break cutting the time drivers spend behind the controls. Strict new anti-fatigue rules and an ageing driver workforce are also identified as factors. In January QR had just 19 extra qualified drivers compared to October 2016. It has hired 145 trainee drivers, of which 51 have finished training. But 31 drivers either changed roles or left QR in the same period.

Queensland Rail Working Timetables 1 February 2018

New graphical Working Timetables for the Main, Western and South Western lines dated 1 February and tabular WTT for the Mt Isa line dated 1 January are on QR's website at <http://www.queenslandrail.com.au/forbusiness/access/access-undertaking>

Brisbane-Sunshine Coast plan

A plan for fast rail between Brisbane and the Sunshine Coast in 45 minutes has been submitted to the Federal government for evaluation. North Coast Connect will create up to 200km of fast rail, saving passengers about an hour a trip, and link Brisbane to Maroochydore by rail. The project, submitted by Stockland, SMEC, Urbis and KPMG, has the backing of the Coalition's 26 Federal parliamentarians, who are demanding the Prime Minister give Queensland a

majority slice of \$10 billion set aside under its National Rail Program. The proposal is among 26 rail projects submitted by Queensland. The plan comprises:

- An upgrade of the existing North Coast line from Brisbane to Beerburrum, with curve easing, level crossing removals and system upgrades;
- Beerburrum to Nambour line upgrade; and
- A new passenger branch from the North Coast line at Beerwah 40km to Beerwah East, Aura, Caloundra, Birtinya, Mooloolaba and Maroochydore.

However, Queensland Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk said she had not seen any detailed proposals in relation to the project. She said everyone needed "to take a deep breath" and warned the proposed rail line could cost "billions and billions and billions of dollars. I think everybody would love to have a fast train but the reality is, fast trains cost billions and billions and billions of dollars and we have not seen any detailed proposal in relation to this project."

ARTC: WTT 18 February

A new (tabular) Working Timetable dated 18 February 2018 is on the Australian Rail Track Corporation's website – see <https://www.artc.com.au/customers/operations/mtp/2017-09-24/> (This web address seems wrong, but it does lead to the new WTT.)

There is no indication of a **Sydney Trains** WTT of this date, but it seems probable.

JHR NSW CRN WTT 18 February

John Holland Rail NSW Country Regional Network has not issued a new Working Timetable to coincide with the ARTC WTT of 18 February. However, they have issued a number of amendments to their existing WTT to apply from 18 February. The alterations are all to freight trains on the Western Region. See Country Train Notice 23-2018 at <http://www.jhrcrn.com.au/what-we-do/network-operations-access/standard-working-timetable-swtt/> The alterations are:

ADDITIONS:

1821 (Pacific National RB 629m) for Sunday will run as tabled by Sydney Trains, pass Hermitage 0041 *next day*, Coxs River 0054, arrive Wallerawang 0057, depart 0145, pass Tarana 0216, Raglan 0251, arrive Kelso 0256 – forms 8122

8122 (PNRB 629m) for Monday will depart Kelso 1720, arrive Bathurst 1730, depart 1815, pass Raglan 1836, Tarana 1917, Wallerawang 1950, Coxs River 1952, Hermitage 2007 thence as tabled by Sydney Trains **1821** (PNRB 629m) for Thursday will run as tabled by Sydney Trains, pass Hermitage 0627, Coxs River 0640, Wallerawang 0644, Tarana 0715, Raglan 0750, arrive Kelso 0755 – forms 8122

8122 (PNRB 629m) for Thursday will depart Kelso 1910, arrive Bathurst 1920, depart 2010, pass Raglan 2031, Tarana 2110, Wallerawang 2148, Coxs River

2150, Hermitage 2205 thence as tabled by Sydney Trains

1821 (PNRB 629m) for Saturday will run as tabled by Sydney Trains, pass Hermitage 0357, pass Coxs River 0410, arrive Wallerawang 0413, depart 0425, pass Tarana 0456, Raglan 0531, arrive Kelso 0536 – forms 8122

8122 (PNRB 629m) for Saturday will depart Kelso 1420, arrive Bathurst 1430, depart 1515, pass Raglan 1536, Tarana 1615, Wallerawang 1653, Coxs River 1655, Hermitage 1710 thence as tabled by Sydney Trains

LS89 (PNC 850m) every day will run as tabled by Sydney Trains to pass Hermitage 0754, pass Coxs River 0806, arrive Lidsdale 0821 – forms LS90

LS90 (PNC 850m) every day will depart Lidsdale 1430, pass Coxs River 1442, Hermitage 1500 thence as tabled by Sydney Trains

8964 (QUBE 640m) for Monday, Wednesday, Friday will depart Sealink Siding 1755, pass Murrobo 1801, Newbridge 1818, Bathurst 1852, Kelso 1901, Raglan 1910, Tarana 1946, Wallerawang 2018, arrive Coxs River 2021, depart 2028, pass Hermitage 2046 thence as tabled by Sydney Trains

9865 (QUBE 640m) for Tuesday will run as tabled by Sydney Trains to pass Hermitage 0050 *next day*, arrive Coxs River 0104, depart 0117, arrive Wallerawang 0122, depart 0150, pass Tarana 0221, Raglan 0256, Kelso 0300, arrive Bathurst 0307, depart 0327, pass Newbridge 0412, Murrobo 0431, arrive Sealink Siding 0434 – forms 8964

9865 (QUBE 640m) for Thursday will run as tabled by Sydney Trains, pass Hermitage 0050 *next day*, pass Coxs River 0103, arrive Wallerawang 0106, depart 0200, pass Tarana 0231, Raglan 0306, Kelso 0310, Bathurst 0316, Newbridge 0405, Murrobo 0424, arrive Sealink Siding 0427 – forms 8964

9865 (QUBE 640m) for Saturday will as tabled by Sydney Trains to pass Hermitage 0045 *next day*, pass Coxs River 0058, arrive Wallerawang 0101, depart 0143, pass Tarana 0214, Raglan 0249, Kelso 0253, Bathurst 0259, Newbridge 0348, Murrobo 0407, arrive Sealink Siding 0410, forms 8964 Mon – stow

1845 (Southern Shorthaul Rail 900m) for Thursday will run as tabled by Sydney Trains, pass Hermitage 1626, pass Coxs River 1639, arrive Wallerawang 1642, depart 1702, pass Tarana 1733, Raglan 1808, arrive Kelso 1813 – forms 8146

8146 (SSR 900m) for Thursday will depart Kelso 2230, arrive Bathurst 2240, depart 0015, pass Raglan 0036, Tarana 0115, Wallerawang 0153, Coxs River 0155, pass Hermitage 0210 thence as tabled by Sydney Trains.

ALTERATIONS:

8146 (SSR 900m) for Wednesday will depart Kelso 2035, arrive Bathurst 2045, depart 2225, pass Raglan 2246, Tarana 2325, Wallerawang 0003, Coxs River 0005, Hermitage 0020 thence as tabled by Sydney Trains.

DELETIONS:

1837 (PNRB 600m) Monday

8138 (PNRB 600m) Tuesday

Coal:

AR71 (PNC 850m) Monday to Friday

AR85 (PNC 850m) Saturday and Sunday

AR86 (PNC 850m) Saturday and Sunday

LS97 (PNC 850m) every day

LS98 (PNC 850m) every day.

Some Approved Track Patrol Paths (which JHR CRN put in their WTT) have been altered:

DHR01 on Tuesday and Friday will depart Stuart Town 0800, pass Wellington 0911, arrive CRN/ARTC Boundary Main Line - Dubbo MW 1100

DHR03 on Thursday will depart Troy Junction 0800, pass CRN/ARTC Boundary Troy Junction 0806, Talbragar 0807, Mogriguy 0844, Eumungerie 0921, Balladoran 0947, Gilgandra AWB 1022, Gilgandra BWS 1024, arrive Gilgandra 1030

DHR05 on Thursday will depart Gilgandra 1030, pass Curban 1112, Armatree 1143, Gular 1213, Combara 1302, arrive Coonamble 1344

DHR07 on Wednesday will depart CRN/ARTC Boundary Main Line - Narromine 0700, pass Narromine West 0702, Mungeribar 0732, Trangie South (Tam Lee) 0759, Trangie 0806, arrive Nevertire 0915.

Sydney Trains: Timetable woes

Problems with train operations in Sydney continued in mid-January. On Monday 15 January 38 services were cancelled because of staff shortages, mainly on the Airport and Western lines. The Rail, Tram and Bus Union imposed overtime bans in pursuit of a long-standing pay claim. As a result on Thursday 25 January, an ordinary working day, Sydney trains operated to a Saturday timetable. According to calculations by Geoff Lambert, there 1856 trips which ran across Sydney, which was a decrease of 1,044 from the "normal" of 2,900. The *Daily Telegraph* estimated some of the reduction in train services as:

Line	AM peak normal	AM peak 25/1	PM peak normal	PM peak 25/1
Bondi	39	16	38	21
Gosford	18	6	9	6
Bankstown	25	12	19	12
Blacktown	35	17	28	6
Cronulla	18	9	17	13
Glenfield	20	12	20	12

Before the industrial action was called off, it had been planned that over the Australia Day long weekend 26-28 January:

- Trains would run to a significantly reduced timetable.
- T5 Cumberland line services were expected to be cancelled from Friday 26 January, with a shuttle train between Blacktown and Richmond.
- T6 Carlingford line services cancelled from Friday 26 January with bus replacements.

- Some additional services would have supplement Australia Day services and major events at Sydney Olympic Park after 1600.
- On Sunday 28 January, the last trains would have run earlier than normal.

The Union had also foreshadowed a 24 hour strike on Monday 29 January with no Sydney Trains or NSW TrainLink trains operating. However the Fair Work Commission issued an Order suspending any industrial action for six weeks.

Metro Trains Melbourne: 13 January storm

Storm damage to the overhead power supply caused trains on all lines, except Western and Northern lines, to be replaced by buses from 2200 on Saturday night, 13 January.

Metro Trains Melbourne: Dandenong line shutdown

One of Melbourne's busiest rail lines was closed from 30 January and 14 February between Westall and Dandenong for new sky rail tracks. Buses are replacing trains. The track is undergoing final works, including overhead wiring which will remove three sets of boom gates in Noble Park. Level Crossing Removal Authority chief executive Kevin Devlin said it would take three months' work after the new line is open to finish the station and landscape the area.

Metro Trains Melbourne: Website timetables

All Metro public timetables on the PTV website now show a date of 26 January.

V/Line: Warrnambool line speed-up

As per the item in January *Table Talk* of a speed-up on the Warrnambool line from 28 January, new Warrnambool Public timetables are now posted on the V/Line website - see

<https://www.vline.com.au/Warrnambool-timetables>

V/Line: Working Timetables

V/Line has posted on their website, <https://corporate.vline.com.au/Network-Access/Network-service-plan> a revised Working Timetable (Network Service Plan) dated 10 December, mainly reflecting altered carriage workings. V/Line may be issuing a new WTT dated 28 January in connection with the Warrnambool line alterations.

V/Line: Wolo horror day

Extreme heat across south east Australia resulted, as usual, in heat restrictions (called Wolo) on V/Line. On the worst day, Friday 19 January, the following cancellations and alterations occurred:

1216 and 1416 Southern Cross to Ararat ran as a train to Wendouree, then buses to Ararat
 1237, 1337 and 1437 SX to Bacchus Marsh were trains to Melton, then buses to Bacchus Marsh
 1516 and 1633 SX to Wendouree were trains to Bacchus Marsh, then buses to Wendouree
 1537 SX to Melton did not run due to staff sickness

1635 SX to Melton was replaced by buses for the entire journey
 1950 SX to Wendouree ran to Ballarat, then buses to Wendouree
 1329, 1529 and 1830 Bacchus Marsh to SX were replaced by buses between Bacchus Marsh and Melton
 1429 Bacchus Marsh to SX was replaced by buses
 1449 Ararat to Ballarat was replaced by buses
 1649 Ararat to Ballarat was replaced by buses between Ararat and Ballarat
 1739 Melton to SX was replaced by buses
 1850 Wendouree to SX was replaced by buses between Wendouree and Bacchus Marsh
 2002 and 2125 Wendouree to SX were replaced by buses between Wendouree and Ballarat
 1825 SX to Swan Hill ran as a train to Bendigo, then buses to Swan Hill
 1220 and 1625 SX to Epsom were trains to Bendigo, then buses to Epsom
 1320 SX to Eaglehawk was a train to Bendigo, then buses to Eaglehawk
 1420 SX to Epsom was a train to Kyneton, then buses to Epsom
 1657 from SX to Eaglehawk was a train to Kyneton, then buses to Eaglehawk
 1844 SX to Kyneton did not run due to driver sickness
 1518 and 1847 Bendigo to SX were replaced by buses
 1254 Swan Hill to SX was replaced by buses for the entire journey. A train ran from Bendigo to SX at 1520
 1428 and 1835 Epsom to SX were replaced by buses between Epsom and Bendigo
 1550 Eaglehawk to SX was replaced by buses between Eaglehawk and Bendigo
 1634 and 1726 Epsom/Bendigo to SX were replaced by buses between Bendigo and Kyneton
 1847 Bendigo to SX did not run due to staff sickness
 1110, 1150, 1230, 1350, 1430, 1707 and 1835 SX to South Geelong ran to Geelong, then buses to South Geelong
 1130, 1210, 1250, 1410 and 1643 SX to Waurn Ponds were trains to Marshall, then buses to Waurn Ponds
 1530 SX to Marshall was a train to South Geelong, then buses to Waurn Ponds
 1713 SX to Warrnambool was replaced by coaches for the entire journey
 1913 SX to Warrnambool did not run. The 1925 SX to South Geelong connect with buses at Geelong
 1305 SX to Warrnambool ran as a train to Geelong, then buses
 1204 South Geelong to SX, 1430 SX to South Geelong, 1450 SX to Marshall, 1604 South Geelong to SX and 1609 Geelong to SX did not run due to staff sickness
 1244, 1324, 1404, 1524, 1604 and 1851 South Geelong to SX were replaced by buses South Geelong to Geelong

1255 Waurn Ponds to SX was replaced by buses from Waurn Ponds to Geelong
 1335 and 1535 Waurn Ponds to SX was replaced by buses from Waurn Ponds to Marshall
 1621 Marshall to SX did not run due to a train fault
 1656 Marshall to SX was replaced by buses between Marshall and South Geelong
 2050 Waurn Ponds to SX was replaced by buses from Waurn Ponds to South Geelong
 0918 and 1735 Warrnambool to SX were replaced by coaches
 1200 Warrnambool to SX originated as a VLocity at Marshall. Buses operated from Warrnambool to Geelong
 1609 Geelong to SX did not run due to staff sickness
 1332 SX to Seymour and 1541 Seymour to SX did not run due to staff sickness
 1613 Seymour to SX was replaced by buses due to a train fault
 1432 and 1737 SX to Seymour did not run due to a train fault
 1252 and 1908 SX to Shepparton ran as trains to Seymour, then buses to Shepparton
 1249 and 165 Shepparton to SX were replaced by buses from Shepparton to Seymour.
 1520 and 1733 SX to Traralgon ran as trains to Morwell, then buses to Traralgon
 1750 and 2021 Traralgon to SX were replaced by buses from Traralgon to Morwell
 1715 Traralgon to SX was replaced by buses for the entire journey due to staff sickness
 1616 SX to Traralgon and 1848 Traralgon to SX did not run due to driver sickness.

Adelaide Metro: Gawler line electrification

On 18 January the SA government announced a \$615 million contract with Lendlease to electrify the Gawler line as far as Salisbury, 20 km. With the Stage 1 deal signed, SA Transport and Infrastructure Minister

Stephen Mullighan said SA needs a funding commitment from the Federal government to proceed with the second stage of the project to Gawler.

Rio Tinto: Driverless trains

Rio Tinto's long-awaited plan to run its giant WA iron ore rail network entirely with robot trains, delivering a potential \$1 billion annual profit bonanza, is gathering pace. Rio's head of growth and innovation, Stephen McIntosh, says the AutoHaul project team is ironing out some final software issues as it rolls out across its 200-locomotive train fleet, but that everything is set for it to be running without drivers by the end of the year. This would mean Rio can export an extra 20 million tonnes of iron ore a year.

The main reason the autonomous trains will be able to provide so many more tonnes is that they avoid the need for mid-journey driver swaps on trains that can be 2km long and take 20 minutes to stop. They will allow more trains on the system, with Rio to look at reducing the minimum distance between the front of trains from 16km to less than 10km. And the trains will run 6% faster.

In 2017, more than 60% of Rio's iron ore trains ran in autonomous mode, with a monitoring driver on board, and the company made its first fully driverless trip in September. Mr McIntosh said Rio was comfortable with what he said was well-proven technology that governs the trains as they go through level crossings and interact with the broader community.

Thanks to Tony Bailey, Alan Gray, Victor Isaacs, Geoff Lambert, Dennis McLean, Len Regan, www.railexpress.com.au, www.railpage.com.au, *Transit Australia*, *Australian*, *Courier-Mail*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Herald Sun*, and *Sydney Morning Herald* for Rail news.

BUS NEWS

New South Wales

A MORNING ON THE BUS

by Michael Parris, *Newcastle Herald*

Abridged and adapted with comments by Geoff Hassall

Reporter Michael Parris spent a morning two days after the introduction of the new timetable putting Keolis Downer's new bus routes and timetables to the test.

8.40am: I needed to get from Merewether to Lambton for an appointment. The TfNSW online trip planner gives two options, one involving an 8-minute walk and a change of buses, the other a 13-minute walk and a direct bus. I chose the latter. I walked to Union St, The Junction, in 7 minutes. I checked that the 6-digit stop number on the trip planner matches the actual stop number. The stop shows no route numbers, timetables or maps. Until the timetable change I had a stop 100m

from the house. The longer distance is a hike for the elderly or anyone carrying shopping bags.

8.55am: The bus (presumably a route 12 Merewether-Maryland- a 15-minute frequency service as far as Wallsend) arrives on time, with a friendly "good morning" from the driver (of the presumably empty bus). It picks up another woman at Marketown (Newcastle West). Due to being ahead of time the bus waits both here and opposite the old Store building, Hunter St (close to the new Newcastle Interchange) where the load swells to five passengers. For most of the 32-minute trip the bus is nearly empty. It arrives on

time, but again the walk from Newcastle Road down to the Lambton shops would be a challenge for some.

10.15am: Appointment over, I have chosen Lindeman Close, Eleebana, at random, as my next destination. The trip planner says it will take about an hour and a half, about four times longer than by car, and involves 3 or 4 buses. Lambton- Charlestown requires a 5-minute walk to Croudace St then a straightforward trip via the hospital. The route 11 bus (Queens Wharf-Mayfield- Jesmond- Charlestown) is about 5 minutes late but gets to Charlestown in time to connect with the route 14 (Queens Wharf-Kotara-Charlestown-Belmont), which is also 5 minutes late, although the trip planner says it is running on time. Most of the seats on the 11 are full, and the 14 has about 20 people on board as it leaves Charlestown.

11am: Conversation with fellow passengers mostly gives a vibe of confusion and bitterness. One Mayfield passenger is a fan because her modus operandi is to simply turn up and wait. Others are less happy: a Jesmond woman with no car and no smart phone finds her regular trip to Kotara more complicated and longer (route 225 used to serve this need). One elderly couple seem to be stranded at Charlestown because their regular bus no longer exists. I'll have to change at Belmont and double back to Eleebana.

11.30am: "It's terrible because old people can't read the timetable. It is very stressful"-part of a conversation overheard on route 41 from Belmont to Eleebana (then to Lake Macquarie Fair, Mt Hutton-a very circuitous route). The elderly are not the only ones struggling. Without my phone I'd be lost. There are no route maps at stops, and the timetables are small and tough to read, even for someone with reasonable vision. Still the 41 arrives on time close to Lindeman Close, an hour and 35 minutes after leaving Lambton. This might have been a difficult journey even under the old network.

11.55am: Now I've hailed Keolis-Downer's new on-demand service trialling in this part of lake Macquarie. I've used the service's app., which is linked to my credit card. It tells me a bus will arrive in six minutes right where I'm standing, which is not at a bus stop. In fact, it arrives in just five minutes for my return journey to Charlestown. The regular bus took 60 minutes, via Belmont. This one takes 11 minutes and costs \$3 (during the trial). I'm the only one using it. It's a no-brainer. Concession fares are available and you can order it by phone and pay cash to the driver if you don't have a smartphone.

12.20pm: After the veritable triumph of the on-demand bus, its back to the trip planner. It doesn't seem to think that Marketown or Hunter St are closer to Honeysuckle (*Herald* HQs) than the Art Gallery in Laman St Doesn't it know that the rail line has been

cut! Anyway, I take its advice and get the route 14 (via Darby St) and walk. (The alternatives, routes 22 or 28, only run hourly in the middle of the day, while 14 runs every 15 minutes from Charlestown).

1pm: I step off the 14 at a fancy new blue sign in King St. It clearly states the route numbers for that stop, but still no map. I arrive at work 50 minutes after setting off from Charlestown.

So what to take from a morning on the buses? I didn't see any Keolis Downer service staff anywhere, even at the busy interchanges at Charlestown and Belmont-surprising given the network is only days old and lots of passengers are confused.

The on-demand trial gets a big tick of approval. Three of these 22-seaters are cruising around Dudley, Whitebridge, Mt Hutton, Windale, Tingira Heights, Eleebana, Warners Bay, Gateshead and bits of Charlestown. I'd use them to go to Charlestown Square and to connect with regular buses. I would be great to see the service rolled out across the city if it's viable.

Many people are confused about the new routes, and the lack of timetables and maps at bus stops aren't helping. Keolis Downer says it is busy updating them, but why not before the network began?

The walking distance to some stops is too much for many people, especially the elderly (who, together with schoolchildren, are unfortunately the main users of buses in Newcastle). It is difficult to quantify this change of distance, but anecdotally (and from letters to the *Herald*) it is a significant barrier to people using buses.

Many commuters have complained about once-direct routes from places such as Swansea now requiring one or more changes. Keolis has said transfers between buses will be smooth, and they seem to work quite well on this occasion, but if travel times have stretched too far, that's another reason to stick with the car (if you have one). For people who don't drive, longer travel times can have a serious impact.

Geoff Hassall writes: *All opinions are of course the author's alone. Comments in brackets are mine. Much more can and will be written on this new network, but for now I wonder if the author's enthusiasm for on-demand buses would remain if demand became heavier and thus waiting and journey times became longer?*

Blanch's have introduced new express routes 640X and 641X between Byron Bay and Lismore from 4 December 2017 for a six month trial – see [https://blanchs.com.au/wp-content/uploa ... 1X_rfs.pdf](https://blanchs.com.au/wp-content/uploa... 1X_rfs.pdf) They are to be trialled for six months. One service travels via Lennox Head and Ballina, whilst the second

service is via Bexhill and Bangalow. There is one journey both ways on each route Mondays to Fridays.

Busways Grafton issued revised timetables on 31 December, adding additional wheelchair journeys.

Rover Coaches Cessnock introduced new timetables for routes 164/1661 on 14 January. Services have been extended from Maitland station to East Maitland Greenhills SC.

Port Stephens Coaches issued new timetables on 30 January featuring additional journeys on route 130. Their website contains a full booklet for routes 130/135.

Hunter Valley introduced new timetables on 30 January for routes 179, 262, 269, 270 and 275 featuring additional journeys.

Sydney Forest Coach Lines introduced new timetables commencing on 15 January featuring additional journeys daily on routes 270 and 280; and additional journeys and later evening times on routes 195/6/7.

Further to the item on **Sydney Buses'** route 170 Manly-Wynyard in the January *Table Talk*, a timetable has been available for this route since at least July 2017 on the Transport Info website at <https://transportnsw.info/routes/details#/sydney-buses-network/170/28170>

New Zealand

Auckland: On 7 January some minor adjustments were made to the new West Auckland network that commenced in June 2017. New timetables were introduced for Westgate, New Lynn, Henderson, New North Road and Sandringham Road. Also on 7 January minor changes were made to some Metrolink services which included extra trips on routes 020X, 255, 267X and 299. There are altered departure times on routes 302, 321 and 322. New timetables were reissued for C01, C03, C07 and C09.

Auckland Eastern saw a new network introduced on 10 December. Only two timetable books were issued, one for the Howick area and one for Botany area. A new network map was also produced. Full details can be found on www.at.govt.nz/nus

Queensland

New timetables were introduced in December 2017 for the **Redland Bay** area. Timetables are 272-275, 270, 276, 277 and 279.

Gold Coast: Translink reissued all Surfside bus timetables from 8 January. Revisions were to services on the northern end of the coast to accommodate the

extension of the tram line to Helensvale. The most notable changes were deletion of TX1, TX2 and TX3 services and the creation of a new route TX7. Other changes include increased frequencies on routes 700 and 765, longer operating hours on routes 713 and 719, one additional trip for routes 746 and 749, and deletion of routes 709 and 720.

South Australia

New timetables were introduced for routes 100 101 115 17 118 140 142 144 147 150 155 157 163 167 168 170 171 172 173 174 176 178 190 195 196 197X 200 202 206 208 222 224 225 228 228F 229 230 232 235 238 239 251 252 253 254 271 273 281 286 287 288 320 333 350 361 371 372 376 491 492A/C 493 494 500 501 502 503 506 507 528 543 544 546 548 556 559 579 591A/C 601 605 640 645 646 737 743 745 747 820 821 822 823 830F 834 835 837 838 838H 839 840X T840 841X T842 T843 860F 861 T863 863 864 865 B10 B12 C1 C2 G10 G20 G21 G22X G40 H20 H21 H22 H23 H24 H30 H32 H33 Ji J3 J7 J8 W90 W91 97A [New] 98A/C 99A/C. These changes were for the opening of the O Bahn access tunnel, works for the tram extension and the building of the new Adelaide Hospital.

In **Gawler**, changes were made by replacing fixed stops to become Hail and Ride. New route 495 was introduced.

Riverland: Services previously operated by Townsend are now operated by Swan Hill Bus Lines.

Tasmania

Hobart: Revised timetables were introduced on 10 December to all Eastern Shore services. This is to accommodate bus stand changes in the City Interchange. Hobart bus network guides were reissued from the same date.

Victoria

PTV Victoria have new website timetables for Tullamarine Bus Lines commencing 27 January, Kastoria commencing 30 January, Transdev commencing 29 January and Moonee Valley 15 January. Other timetables include CDC 601 and 630 and Ventura 201, 631, 705, 708, 786, 788, 821/5, 828, 900 and 970.

Western Australia

Transperth introduced new timetables for routes 94, 108 and 109 due to bus stand changes at Kalamunda bus station.

Thanks to Tony Bailey, Alan Gray, Geoff Hassall, Lourie Smit and *Transit Australia* for Bus news.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Brendan Whyte writes about the article in January *Table Talk* about the **busiest air routes** in the world in 2017 which placed Sydney-Melbourne second with 54,519 flights a year:

"This can't be right. It means there are 149 flights per day between Sydney and Melbourne, one every 10 mins, on a 24 hour period. And Seoul-Cheju apparently has 178 flights, 7.5 per hour on a 24 hour day."

(Editor's note: This data first appeared in the *Age*).

TABLE TALK NEWSWIRE

Table Talk Newswire, the interim email newsletter which is sent on request, was not issued this month because of the short interval between the January and February issues of *Table Talk*. It will resume with a newsletter issued between the February and March editions of *Table Talk*.

ODD SPOT

At Hillgrove, on the Nilgiri Hill Railway in southern India, the local monkeys have learnt the train timetable. They congregate at the station before the trains are due in the expectation that they will be fed by the passengers.

AIR NEWS

International

On 20 January **United Airlines** commenced non-stop flights from Sydney to Houston. Flights are 13,834 km and take 16 hours.

On 30 January **Tianjin Airlines** commenced flights from Tianjin (near Beijing) to Zenghou to Sydney. At the end of January **Hainan Airlines** increased its twice weekly Haikou (Hainan Island) - Sydney route to operate year round.

From 1 May, **Singapore Airlines** will cancel flights between Canberra and Wellington, 18 months after their introduction. After lacklustre passenger numbers in early months, and a review of the route, the airline has removed the Wellington leg of the trip. On the other hand, it will increase its present four times a week service from Singapore to Canberra to daily. However, the southbound flight will now be via Sydney. The flight will triangulate Singapore-Sydney-Canberra-Singapore. Singapore Airlines will instead fly to Wellington through Melbourne four times a week. It is the first time the airline has flown that route and will mean it operates six flights a day into Melbourne.

Singapore Airlines regional vice-president Philip Goh said, "With this change, Sydney will be serviced five times a day on a year-round basis, introducing for the first time as well a late night departure from Sydney to Singapore via Canberra," Mr Goh said. "I think it's a creative solution to give us two very good solutions in the market - number one giving us a late night departure [out] of Sydney and providing Canberra with a daily service. Most Canberra passengers are

heading to Southeast Asia and by arriving at Singapore early in the morning it really opens a huge window of connections to all those markets, huge."

Flight SQ 247 will depart Singapore at 1945 on Mondays, Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays, arriving Melbourne next morning at 0510, departing Melbourne at 0700, arriving Wellington at 1220.

SQ 248 will depart Wellington at 1345 on Tuesdays, Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays, arriving Melbourne at 1530, departing at 1650, arriving Singapore at 2245.

SQ288 will depart Singapore daily at 1030, arriving Sydney at 2010, departing at 2120, arriving Canberra at 2220, departing at 2315, and arriving Singapore next morning at 0515.

Passengers travelling from Singapore to Canberra will not have to clear customs, immigration or quarantine in Sydney. However travelers will have to get out of the aircraft, taking their belongings with them and passing through security.

The change comes as Middle Eastern carrier **Qatar Airways** prepares to start flying daily into Canberra on 12 February. Unlike Singapore, which has an open skies agreement with Australia, Qatar Airways will fly via Sydney to circumvent the country's Air Services Agreement with Australia, which restricts it to 21 flight frequencies per week into Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Perth airports.

Thanks to Victor Isaacs, the *Australian, Canberra Times, Daily Telegraph* and ABC News for Air news.

About Table Talk

Table Talk is published monthly by the Australian Timetable Association Inc. (Registration No. A0043673H) as a journal of record covering recent timetable news items. The ATA also publishes the **Times** covering timetable history and analysis. Contributions are invited and are very welcome. Please send these to the appropriate Editor. ABN 74248483468.

The **deadline for Table Talk** is the last weekend of the month, but contributions are welcome at all times.

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Back issues of **Table Talk** are available on the Australian Timetable Association's website, [Austta.org.au](http:// Austta.org.au), after two months.

Table Talk Newswire is an advance monthly email of Rail news. To obtain this, contact the Rail Editor.