

The Mildura Story

The Battle of the Routes

In 1888, agitation for the crucial railway link in Mildura began in earnest to support the growing irrigation settlement and fruit colony.

A "grand Mallee railway scheme" was unveiled in 1892, featuring four lines reaching north to the Murray River. But the severe economic depression from 1893 brought public works to a standstill. A battle over the routes for the railway to Mildura followed. Finally, in 1898, Parliament recommended the extension of the Ultima line to Mildura but this was eventually overturned and the line was extended from Woomelang to Mildura.

The Mildura Shire Council, held a "turning of the sod" function on 6 November 1901 at the site of the proposed Mildura station. Rail laying rapidly progressed and by early October 1903, rails had been laid up to Mildura station.

The Official Opening

On Friday 13 November 1903, Mildura officially celebrated the opening of the railway connection with Melbourne. Two special trains were arranged by the Victorian Railways. 135 visitors, including members of Federal and State legislatures, arrived by train for the occasion. The Governor addressed the crowd of several thousand people and asserting that "there was no line in Victoria which has been so much needed". Free train rides to Yatpool and back were provided by the Railway Commissioners and a banquet was held in the Shire Hall.

Freight

The first consignments of freight from 1903 were conveyed in "mixed" trains - freight wagons with passenger carriages attached to the rear. Fast daily goods train services to Mildura were introduced with the rostering of B Class diesel-electric locomotives on freight and passenger services from 1953.

The "Fruit Flier" - an express goods service running at passenger train speeds directly from Sunraysia to Melbourne with minimum stops, commenced in 1958. It soon had two new refrigerated wagons for carrying perishable goods and new LP sheep vans.

The 1960/61 wheat harvest was a record with 65 million bushels. With such a big task, steam locomotives were returned to service on the Mildura line north of Woomelang.

In the 1970s, flat-top container wagons replaced the ubiquitous U and B vans and bogie V and VF wagons almost overnight, forever changing the appearance of freight trains on the Mildura line.

From 1985 a new freight service called "Sunraysia Fresh" replaced the "Fruit Flier", unofficially referred to by Railwaymen as "The Fruity"! In 1997, "The Fruity" was cancelled and Locomotive P19 ran the last "Fruit Flier" from Mildura. In 1999, V/Line was purchased by Freight Victoria, becoming Freight Australia in 2000.

Passenger Services

In September 1957 a trial daylight service between Melbourne and Mildura commenced, named the "Mildura Sunlight". Night trains replaced this from 1967, and the Motorail service was added in 1968.

In 1972, the Victorian Railways decided to hold a competition to name the upgraded train service. "The Vineland" was chosen and the service began on Tuesday 8 August 1972.

In 1984 V/Line commenced road coach operations between Melbourne and Mildura. The "Sunraysia" ceased to operate in 1990 and a night-only service was provided. In 1993 "The Vineland" was replaced by a road coach service. Mildura became the largest inland centre in Australia without a passenger rail service.

In 2001, the Premier of Victoria Mr. Steve Bracks announced that Mildura would get its train back! A return of passenger services is scheduled to commence soon.

Special trains (perhaps in separate side table with small photos?)

Some of the special trains to visit Mildura have included:

- "The Weedex". From 1955, it made an annual visit to Mallee lines, to control weed eradication along the State's railway lines.
- The first Development Resources Train (known as the "Reso" train) on Monday 28 August 1922. It arrived with more than sixty leading Melbourne businessmen, educationalists and publicists.
- A Royal Train brought the Duke of Gloucester to Mildura on 31 October 1934.
- The "Centenary - Jubilee Train", visiting Mildura on 23 May 1951. It celebrated the anniversaries of the centenary of the establishment of the colony of Victoria, and the jubilee of the Commonwealth of Australia.
- The Queen's "Silver Jubilee Exhibition Train" in 1978. Mildura was one of 17 country centres in Australia selected for the four-carriage train carrying the biggest collection of British Royalty pieces ever assembled in Australia.

Edited text from "Mildura Railway History Version 1. 2003" by Bruce McLean