

Coming and going

Passenger travel naturally concentrated around Melbourne. Suburban peaks were 160m passenger journeys in 1926-7 and nearly 174m in 1949-50. Four trains in and out of the Newport Workshops each day were needed for Workshop employees coming from all suburbs.

Regional cities, resort towns and interstate lines drew both work and pleasure traffic, especially in the 20 years after 1906. Railway employees using free passes during their annual leave cherished the privilege of 'going away' on holiday. Paying passengers were encouraged by Sunday excursion trains. The Railways' 1924 takeover of Mount Buffalo Chalet was part of its strong tourism push, both joining and competing with road travel.

Shoppers and school boarders took occasional trips to regional centres. Those using the Cobram-Shepparton train gave rise to its name, the *String Bag Express*. Farmers and businessmen used spur lines to country piers, factories and cattle yards; holiday crowds traveled the racecourse spurs to Flemington, Williamstown, Geelong, Ballarat, Bungaree, Burrumbeet and Lal Lal.

Country journeys peaked at about 10m in 1920-23 and over 11m in 1946-9. During the 1930s depression, paying journeys almost halved, but some 'lost' passengers were accounted for by men seeking work who 'jumped the rattler' hidden under wagon tarpaulins. Sympathetic railway workers turned a blind eye where they could.

Military overtook civilian traffic during both World Wars. Troop-filled trains ran to ships at Port Melbourne, to training camps at Broadmeadows, Puckapunyal near Seymour, and Bandiana near Albury. Prisoners of war were sent to Tatura and postwar immigrants to former military camps. Increasing car and air travel from the 1950s prompted a focus on longer routes provided with dining / buffet and sleeping cars, as in the *Southern Aurora* (1962-86), *Vinlander* to Mildura (1972), *Melbourne / Sydney Express* (1986) and *XPT* (1993). The *Overland* (1995) used a new standard gauge line to Adelaide.

Sandridge Pier on Sunday Afternoon, September 1874

The trains start very frequently from the Elizabeth-street station, they are often very long, and generally crowded with passengers. At Sandridge station the living mass moves onward, using the long broad railway pier as a marine promenade. Among the brightly dressed promenaders, proud parents bring their little ones to get a sniff of the sea and see the magnificent liners which lie by the side of the pier. The young lad who works in a store all the week, and the young girl who labours at a sewing machine, select this for their Sunday afternoon's trip, knowing they will meet their acquaintances. Towards evening the crowds become very dense, but soon the trains going townwards are crowded, the

numbers on the pier dwindle away, and by nightfall the busy, lively scene is silent and deserted.

Adapted from *The Australasian Sketcher* 5 Sept 1874 p134-5

An Express wedding, September 1897

My dear Mother, We are again in the thick of Federal Convention work, the Second or Sydney sitting. . . I accomplished rather a record last week. On Tuesday during the Sitting, I wrote a proposal of marriage to a girl I had spoken to once; had a telegram accepting on Wednesday; made what the audience considered a Great Speech on Thursday at 5.30pm; took the 7.15 Express to Melbourne same night, got married on Saturday & returned same day, arriving here on Sunday. You will think I am a little mad. From letter, Patrick McMahon Glynn, Federationist politician and lawyer, to his mother in Ireland. *Patrick McMahon Glynn: Letters to His Family 1874-1927*, ed. G.G. O'Collins, Melbourne 1974

Troop Train 1940

The troop train was so long that when we'd got through the checking barriers with our kit bags, tin helmets, gas masks and the rest of our gear we had to walk the length of ten carriages before we reached those set aside for nurses. . . . four hours later we were all aboard – soldiers, sailors, airmen, nursing sisters and us Voluntary Aid Detachments.

The Man in Grey's . . . voice resounded down the platform 'Train leaving Number One platform. Stand clear please, stand clear'. Then 'God bless you boys, and a safe return'.

Patsy Adam Smith, Preface to *Hear the Train Blow*, 1981 edition

Final Farewell

Rail hearses were in use from 1858 until 1953. Some metropolitan stations had mortuary platforms to convey caskets to the Fawkner and Springvale cemeteries. A spur from the Dandenong line to Springvale was in use 1904-51. In the 1930s a casket cost 12s.7d for a one-way journey from Flinders Street, while empty ones could be returned at half-price provided the lid was 'securely fastened'. Half price was charged for caskets of children under three.