

Report on VLocity Design Workshop, Wangaratta, 4th September 2019

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We received an invitation to attend this “by invitation only” Workshop, and accepted to “keep our end up”, although we were not particularly sanguine.

This was the brief:

Transport Projects (DEDJTR). Email: Transport.Projects@ecodev.vic.gov.au

“Earlier this year, the Victorian Government announced \$340 million for up to 18 VLocity trains for the regional rail network including the North East, Geelong and Ballarat lines. The new VLocity trains for the North East line will be the first with long-haul features and will be specifically designed to meet the needs of long-haul passengers. They will be delivered following the completion of the North East Line Upgrade<<http://regionalrailrevival.vic.gov.au/northeast>>.

We're seeking your advice to help the design team better understand the views of local passenger, stakeholder and community groups on what features are most important to them. We'd value your participation in a workshop on the new train designs.”

And an overview of the agenda:

- Your expectations
- Project status - new VLocity trains and North East Line upgrade
- Introduction to VLocity trains
- Activity 1 - Design your own train
- Report back and review designs
- Activity 2 - Feature brainstorm
- Questions and answers
- Project next steps

We drove up to Wangaratta on the 3rd of September and stayed overnight at the Quality Hotel, Wangaratta Gateway, Ryley St, where the Workshop was to be held from 10am – 1pm on the 4th. (So far our tentative suggestion of some reimbursement has not borne fruit!)

The Workshop was attended by approximately 30 people, including staff from various branches of the rail design “complex”, plus some with roles more directly involved with customer interaction; also two disability advocates. There were lay people representing various interest groups, some probably as “fragmentary” as ours, but these seemed to be

drawn almost entirely from the North East region. We were aware of none from Melbourne (apart from us), although I'm trying to get more information about those attending.

We were divided up into tables of about six or seven people, so that there would be four or more separate contributions. (Breta and I were separated.)

Presentation

Rob Carolane (Professional facilitator) was MC for the session, introducing the others.

Ben Phyland (Acting CEO Rolling Stock Development Division) – first speaker

Jonathan McKeown (V/Line Executive General Manager, Network Development and Integration. Formerly regional manager, NE) – second speaker

North East Line upgrade: this should be completed by 2020, with the first of “our” new NE VLocity trains to be hitting the tracks probably 2021? Perhaps even sooner. They want to get the new trains going as soon as possible after the line upgrade.

During the stages of presentation, numerous questions were asked and issues discussed. Also, during the “Design your own train” exercise, there was considerable discussion.

During “Design your own train”, little shapes were provided representing different items inside the carriages. We were to arrange the shapes in the optimum way; this was for a 3-carriage train. Incidentally, it was accepted that mostly trains would have six carriages. In each carriage there would be one bike rack, capable of holding three bikes – provided each bike was not too “fat”, meaning it would be advisable to remove panniers for storage elsewhere. But, if so, the total number of bikes that could be accommodated by a 6-carriage train would be 18. This does represent a considerable improvement in “stance”. We lobbied for possible additional areas where seats could be flip up/down, so that bikes could be held in non-peak (but won't hold our breath).

We have been arguing strenuously for the necessity for an “**efficient and effective booking system**”. Until we attended this Workshop, we had felt we were fighting a losing battle, being up against an inexorable push towards MYKI. However, at the Workshop it seemed that the tide was turning. We continued to argue for it, but we were not alone! A highlight for me (L) was a conversation with Jonathan McKeown, who was the most senior person there. He was very much in favour of a new and effective booking system. When Breta indicated our intention to meet with John Kennedy (Labor MLA), to lobby for money for a new and improved booking system, both Andrew Doery and Stuart Beardwell were supportive. Lack of money was seen as an issue. There were just so many points in the proceedings at which it was obvious that a booking system would be beneficial! (Alleluia!)

We have been somewhat preoccupied with the inability of bikes to share wheelchair spaces (on regional trains). We did have the opportunity to discuss this with a V/Line disability advocate, who joined us at the post-workshop lunch. He was a hardliner – “it's the law!” – but the conversation was instructive. He had talked of bad experiences with shared spaces on urban trains, which we can understand. He was strong on the legal right for disabled people to “roll up and roll on”, regardless of the circumstances. But he mentioned an experience he had had on a regional train where he had found about ten schoolchildren in wheelchairs occupying the train, so that he was unable to board. (I think his solution would be even more

chair spaces, but few are going to accept that as realistic.) We pointed out that a booking system would have told him about the clash with the schoolchildren, to his benefit. He wasn't very happy with us – but we are not the enemy. Our argument is that a proper booking system can be of overall benefit to ALL passengers.

Feedback will be provided to all who attended the Workshop, with details of the proposed train interior – taking into account the suggestions from the Workshop. Incidentally, Michael Ransome attended the Workshop. He works for Bombardier, as the actual designer of the interiors! There was talk of further meeting.