

Bridgetown “the key” to tourist railway

A group of Balingup rail enthusiasts keen to develop a tourist railway see Bridgetown as a vital element in their plan and want Bridgetown people to join them.

The chair of the Balingup Rail Group, Malcolm Lee, thinks the expansion of the Greenbushes Lithium mine has opened an opportunity for tourist rail on the disused line to Manjimup because of the push to get the mine’s lithium off the roads and onto rail.

A feasibility study conducted by the South West Development Commission, Talison Lithium and Arc Infrastructure is currently examining the viability of the rail line for transporting lithium.

Traffic Problems

The alternative to rail is that an extra 140 trucks a day will trundle down the road between Greenbushes and Bunbury all year round, bringing traffic concerns and safety worries.

Getting the line reopened to Greenbushes to transport lithium may require some funding from the State Government with a contribution from the Commonwealth.

Should the line eventually reopen it would be comparatively straight forward to prepare the line the last leg of the journey from Greenbushes to Bridgetown, because Mr Lee thinks the line is in reasonable shape.

“Once you’re talking about the money to be spent, restoring that part would be a mere bagatelle,” Mr Lee said.



Malcolm Lee thinks there’s a great opportunity for tourist rail.

However, that may be the easiest part, because a previous attempt to start a “boutique” rail restaurant and touring business that included the line, Leisure Rail WA Ltd, failed in the early 2000s.

Southwest scenery

Mr Lee thinks trains could travel at a sedate pace through some of the southwest’s best scenery, making it an attractive tourist drawcard with huge potential for the rest of the region.

“This project, the southwest line, is something that concerns the whole of the southwest as a tourist development.

“Between the two demands, lithium and tourism rail, there really is a very powerful case, but it’s very important that Bridgetown be recognised as the key to it, because the line has deviated to Bridgetown as the ultimate destination,” Mr Lee said.

Mr Lee believes it could create tour packages with bed and breakfasts and coaches running to other tourist attractions from train stations.

Councillor Julia Boyle represents the Shire of Bridgetown-Greenbushes on the Balingup Railway Group.



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