



Upfield rail line: duplication and extension

The current Upfield rail line services the growing populations of the local government areas of Merri-bek and southern Hume and ends at Upfield Station. Yet beyond that station are Melbourne's booming northern suburbs, which stretch across Hume, Whittlesea and Mitchell.

Melbourne's north is a region that is growing fast and will ultimately be home to more than 1.5 million people. In fact, the Northern Growth Corridor is projected to accommodate 30 per cent of Melbourne's future growth over the coming decades.

Key rail investments are needed now to resolve critical constraints on train services in Merri-bek, Hume, Whittlesea and Mitchell to unlock the potential of Melbourne's north.

A visual demonstration of the project is available via this [link](#).

Initial ask

\$4million for a scoping report outlining the project plan and preliminary costings for the entire project.

Summary of priorities

Our priorities are:

- duplicate and upgrade the Upfield rail line between Gowrie and Upfield Stations to improve train frequency, accessibility, passenger experience and station amenity
- re-configure the City Loop to separate the Upfield and Craigieburn lines, removing ongoing constraints and improving capacity, frequency and reliability for passengers along both lines
- extend and electrify the Upfield line to Wallan with new stations, including at Beveridge and Cloverton, to support the rapidly occurring residential, commercial and industrial development in the region.

Priority actions

Duplicate the Upfield line between Gowrie and Upfield Stations by 2030

Duplicating the track between Gowrie and Upfield Stations will remove significant bottlenecks and constraints along the length of the Upfield line, allowing for improved capacity, frequency and reliability for passengers.



Reconfigure the City Loop to separate the Upfield and Craigieburn lines

Infrastructure Victoria identified that Upfield and Craigieburn trains sharing the same City Loop tracks is an ongoing constraint to improved capacity, frequency and reliability along both lines.

A coordinated and timely reconfiguration of the City Loop will also allow for the Upfield line to be extended further north to Wallan.

Completion of the Melbourne Metro 1 project will remove Sunbury line trains from the current loop, enabling more pathways for northern group trains to become available at North Melbourne Station.

Modernise Batman, Merlynston, Fawkner and Gowrie Stations as part of any duplication works, and create transport interchanges adjoining each Upfield line station that integrate public and active transport

Providing direct connectivity between bus, train and other forms of sustainable transport will enable more people to reach railway stations without using a car. And grade separation of railway stations will significantly improve accessibility.

Partner with the community around the design and delivery of an enhanced Upfield rail corridor

Increasing train services along the entire Upfield rail corridor will allow the community to access a wider range of services, using a rail system that provides a high quality, reliable alternative to driving a car.

The community will also benefit from improved urban environments, as there will be a reduction in commuter road traffic from growth suburbs to the north.

Extend, electrify and integrate the Upfield line with Melbourne's growing northern communities

Connecting the Upfield line to the Craigieburn line at Roxburgh Park will allow full utilisation of the Upfield tracks and become the major corridor for suburban services from Wallan. It will significantly improve public transport network benefits and enable residents in growth areas to easily access education, health, jobs and social connections in inner and middle Melbourne. In turn, this will reduce car ownership in the Northern Growth Corridor.

The extended, electrified line will also provide direct access to the Cloverton Metropolitan Activity Centre (MAC), which will become one of Melbourne's most significant retail, commercial, employment and service precincts.

Metropolitan passenger rail services currently extend only as far as Craigieburn on the electrified network. North of Craigieburn, emerging suburbs including Donnybrook, Kalkallo, Beveridge and Wallan rely on V/Line diesel services.



Typically, a V/Line train carries about 40 per cent of the passengers of a comparable electric metropolitan train. Without extension and electrification of rail lines in the north, there is little scope to increase the carrying capacity on V/Line services to cope with the higher-than-forecast growth in emerging suburbs and corresponding rise in passenger numbers.

Construct new train stations at Beveridge and Cloverton to support the rapidly growing communities

The significant residential, commercial and cultural development areas of Beveridge and Cloverton currently lack access to train stations. Construction of stations at Beveridge and Cloverton will provide public transport to these emerging communities.

By 2030, 25,000 people will call Beveridge home. Without construction of a train station, they will be required to use the Hume Freeway to access stations in neighbouring suburbs. Ultimately, Beveridge Station will support a catchment of 145,000 people, while a station at Cloverton will provide direct access to employment, services and community infrastructure at the Cloverton MAC.

Scoping study

The initial ask is for \$4million for a scoping report, including a project plan that will examine the project's impacts and requirements.

This report will potentially cover the timeline, project objectives, scope, stakeholder analysis, technical feasibility and requirements, environmental impact, high level economic impact, social impact, regulatory requirements, future patronage forecasts, travel patterns, land use assessment, risk assessment and financial viability, along with a high level cost estimation. The report would also identify appropriate next steps and provide a set of recommendations.

Early Council assessments estimated that development of this report would cost approximately \$2million. Recent analysis of the entire project, including further planning for the extension component, has identified the cost of the report at approximately \$4million.

Funding would be provided to a northern Council, who would auspice the project on behalf of the NCA. A contractor would be engaged to deliver the report in collaboration with identified stakeholders.



Staged approach

The following is a suggested approach for the project. It is anticipated that the scoping study would confirm this process.

Stage one

- Duplicate rail lines between Gowrie and Upfield Stations to remove constraints and improve train frequency, including:
 - rebuilding Campbellfield station near Camp Road
 - removing the Barry Road level crossing and new twin platform station at Upfield
- Build a new station at Beveridge
- Acquire land for a new station at Cloverton
- Other level crossing removals across the planned route.

Stage two

- Rebuild lines from Upfield to Craigieburn line as a double track electrified line, including:
 - double track electrified line from Upfield to Somerton Road
 - grade separated road crossing to access the Visy plant
 - grade separated junction at Roxburgh Park, including the double track electrified line under (or over) Somerton Road, the ARTC and metro lines
 - two additional electrified tracks on the west side of the existing railway through Roxburgh Park (no platform here) to Craigieburn, including an additional rail bridge over Aitken Creek
 - two additional platforms on the west side of the existing Craigieburn Station, including new station building
 - track crossing work and signalling at Craigieburn to provide train access to the main lines to/from Donnybrook and the train stabling and maintenance facility.
- Extend the Upfield Share Path.

Stage three

- Electrify rail provision from Craigieburn to Wallan (noting the change to a metropolitan station), including:
 - new station at Cloverton
 - rebuild of Wallan Station, including additional platforms
 - train stabling sidings at Wallan.



Key issues

Background

Areas of Merri-bek (particularly in the north), Hume, Whittlesea and Mitchell experience higher levels of socio-economic disadvantage, higher concentrations of low-income households and higher rates of unemployment than the Greater Melbourne average¹.

Mitchell also experiences family violence incidents at a rate twice the state average². Hume, Mitchell and Whittlesea municipalities rank as the top three LGAs for socio-economic disadvantage in the north³, and have the lowest education and occupational levels among northern municipalities⁴. Equitable access to frequent and reliable public transport services will ensure access to jobs, education and health services, which is critical for these communities.

Growth area communities experience a significant service deficit compared to established areas, particularly in public transport services. Analysis by the Interface Councils⁵ quantified this gap at \$170 million across Melbourne. This deficit is due to significantly poorer access to locally provided health, support and other community services.

Upfield line constraints

Despite the importance of this rail line to the growth of Melbourne and the people it serves, the Upfield line has one of the least frequent peak period services in Melbourne's rail network. Trains run every 15 to 20 minutes during peak periods, every 20 to 30 minutes outside the peak on weekdays and every 20 to 60 minutes on weekends.

Single track service between Gowrie and Upfield Stations, and the Upfield and Craigieburn train lines sharing City Loop tracks, create significant bottlenecks and constraints to improved capacity, frequency and reliability for passengers.

Upfield line stations Fawkner, Merlynston, Gowrie and Batman have the most infrequent train services in the state, with the four northern train services beyond Coburg among the lowest rated for commuter experiences. Batman is rated 4.45 out of 10, Merlynston is rated 4.05 out of 10 and Fawkner is rated 3.88 out of 10. At 3.64 out of 10, Gowrie ranks the lowest for train services in Victoria⁶.

Public Transport Victoria has projected that the Upfield line will experience the largest yearly rise in passengers of all city trains between 2021 and 2031, with patronage set to grow by 5.3 per cent each year over the decade⁷.

¹ id community demographic resources (2016): Moreland, Hume, Mitchell and Whittlesea

² Crime Statistics Agency (2023)

³ SEIFA, Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage, 2021

⁴ Index of Education and Occupation, 2021

⁵ Interface Council Group – Human Services Gap Analysis 2017

⁶ RACV (2020), On Track Survey Results – November 2019 to March 2020

⁷ The Age (6 November 2018), 'Sluggish Upfield upgrades still years away'



Future constraints

In Melbourne's booming northern region, rates of growth in Hume, Whittlesea and Mitchell are substantially higher than Victorian Government projections.

In Mitchell alone, there were 1,400 lots created over 2022–2023. It is projected that Mitchell's population will double almost every five years for at least the next 20 years. Mitchell's growth areas alone will be home to approximately 80,000 people within 10 years (up from approximately 28,000 currently) and ultimately will support a population of over 230,000⁸.

In Hume, the population was 246,850 in 2021, an increase of almost 80,000 or 50 per cent of its 2011 population, which was 167,562⁹. The Hume and Whittlesea communities are expected to grow to 394,760 and 360,692 respectively by 2041¹⁰. Population growth in the area will be even higher if the Victorian Government's housing targets are met.

Growth communities in Mitchell, Whittlesea and Hume (including Wallan, Beveridge, Lockyerbie, Donnybrook and the future Cloverton MAC) are currently serviced by diesel V/Line services only, with a total of five services in the morning peak. The electric line and metropolitan train services terminate at Craigieburn. This cuts passenger capacity by more than half, as a V/Line train carries about 40 per cent of the passengers of a comparable electric metropolitan train.

Extension to Wallan

Extension and electrification of the Upfield line to Wallan will support desperately needed increased capacity at the existing Wallan and Donnybrook Stations, along with future stations at Beveridge and Cloverton.

It has been advised that the V/Line services were expected to reach capacity by 2030. But higher than forecast growth accelerated by the impacts of the COVID pandemic, coupled with the Precinct Structure Plan areas developing faster than anticipated, mean that capacity is likely to be reached in 2025–2026.

Many services, particularly at peak times and on weekends, are already running at or over capacity, with passengers regularly required to stand on journeys that can last over 80 minutes.

⁸ id community demographic resources (2024): Mitchell

⁹ Source: ABS 2021 Census

¹⁰ Source: ABS Estimated Resident Population



Impact on road congestion

Without an electrified Upfield line extension to Wallan, the communities of Melbourne's rapidly growing north will become increasingly reliant on the Hume Freeway.

The Hume Freeway is already one of Australia's most important and heavily used routes. Substantially increased residential and commuter use of the Hume Freeway will have significant adverse impacts on freight movements, bringing Melbourne's principal freight route to a standstill and impacting freight movements to and from the Beveridge Intermodal Precinct.

Opening up access to jobs

Infrastructure Victoria's modelling shows that upgrading the Upfield corridor, including duplicating and electrifying the line so that it can run through to the Roxburgh Park and Craigieburn areas, will 'encourage greater development and investment along the corridor, attracting more suburban jobs closer to people's homes'¹¹.

Merri-bek is home to over 49,000 jobs,¹² with the majority of these jobs located either side of the Upfield line and Sydney Road. A total of 18 per cent of Merri-bek workers live in Hume, Whittlesea and Mitchell and most of them (around 64 per cent) drive to work¹³.

Sydney Road, from Brunswick right up to Coburg, is known as Melbourne's longest continuous shopping strip. Yet it is challenged by high vacancy rates, extensive areas of underdeveloped properties and a lack of investor interest and regeneration activity.

Connecting the 90,000 residents¹⁴ from Roxburgh Park and Craigieburn to the Upfield corridor, along with residents from the burgeoning suburbs of Kalkallo, Donnybrook, Beveridge and Wallan, could create a vibrant and job-rich Sydney Road corridor. It would provide direct (and more sustainable) access for residents to jobs and education in Melbourne's north, a greater pool of workers for businesses in Brunswick and Coburg to access, and potential for a significant uplift in retail and hospitality demand along the strip.

Greater connectivity through Melbourne's northern corridor will also support improved access to other major commercial and industrial precincts, including the State Significant Industrial Precincts in Merrifield, Craigieburn, Somerton and Campbellfield, as well as the future Beveridge Intermodal Precinct and Cloverton MAC.

The residential development occurring in Mitchell, Hume and Whittlesea is unlikely to provide sufficient local jobs for the size of the community. Efficient, accessible commuter rail services are vital to ensure that residents of these communities have equitable access to employment opportunities.

¹¹ Infrastructure Victoria (2021), *Victoria's Infrastructure Strategy 2021–2051*

¹² id community demographic resources (2022): *City of Merri-bek: economic profile*

¹³ id community demographic resources (2021): *City of Merri-bek: economic profile*

¹⁴ Source: Home | Hume City | Community profile (id.com.au)



Connecting the Cloverton MAC

The Cloverton MAC, located 30 kilometres north of Melbourne, will be the major activity, employment and service precinct for a catchment of more than 380,000 people, equal to the population of Canberra. It will include local and regional employment, health, education and government services and become a key retail, cultural and recreation destination for Melbourne's north.

While the Cloverton MAC is only 57 hectares, it is as significant to Melbourne's north as Box Hill and Dandenong are to Melbourne's east. The Cloverton MAC's smaller footprint means that it will need to work harder, with greater intensification in its use of land. Electrified rail is essential to achieving this required intensity.

Connecting the Cloverton MAC to both the Sydney Road corridor and the Broadmeadows activity centre and further into the CBD will help to support a symbiotic relationship between retail, commercial and employment precincts. It will support the movement of commuters, shoppers and those seeking to access specific services.

Importantly, connecting the Cloverton MAC to the Upfield rail line will be one of the most influential and powerful drivers to realising its potential.

Investment and action are needed now

The Victorian Government's Metro Tunnel project (due for completion in 2026) and removal of level crossings at Glenroy and Coburg will enable new services along the Upfield line that will carry 45,000 passengers every week. This represents 71 per cent capacity during peak periods for passengers, saving around five minutes on the journey to the CBD¹⁵. Yet Infrastructure Victoria's report indicates services 'will reach capacity by the mid-2030s, particularly in the absence of a coordinated and timely reconfiguration of the City Loop...'¹⁶.

Far more investment and action is required now to urgently address a range of longstanding and ongoing challenges and constraints along the Upfield rail corridor.

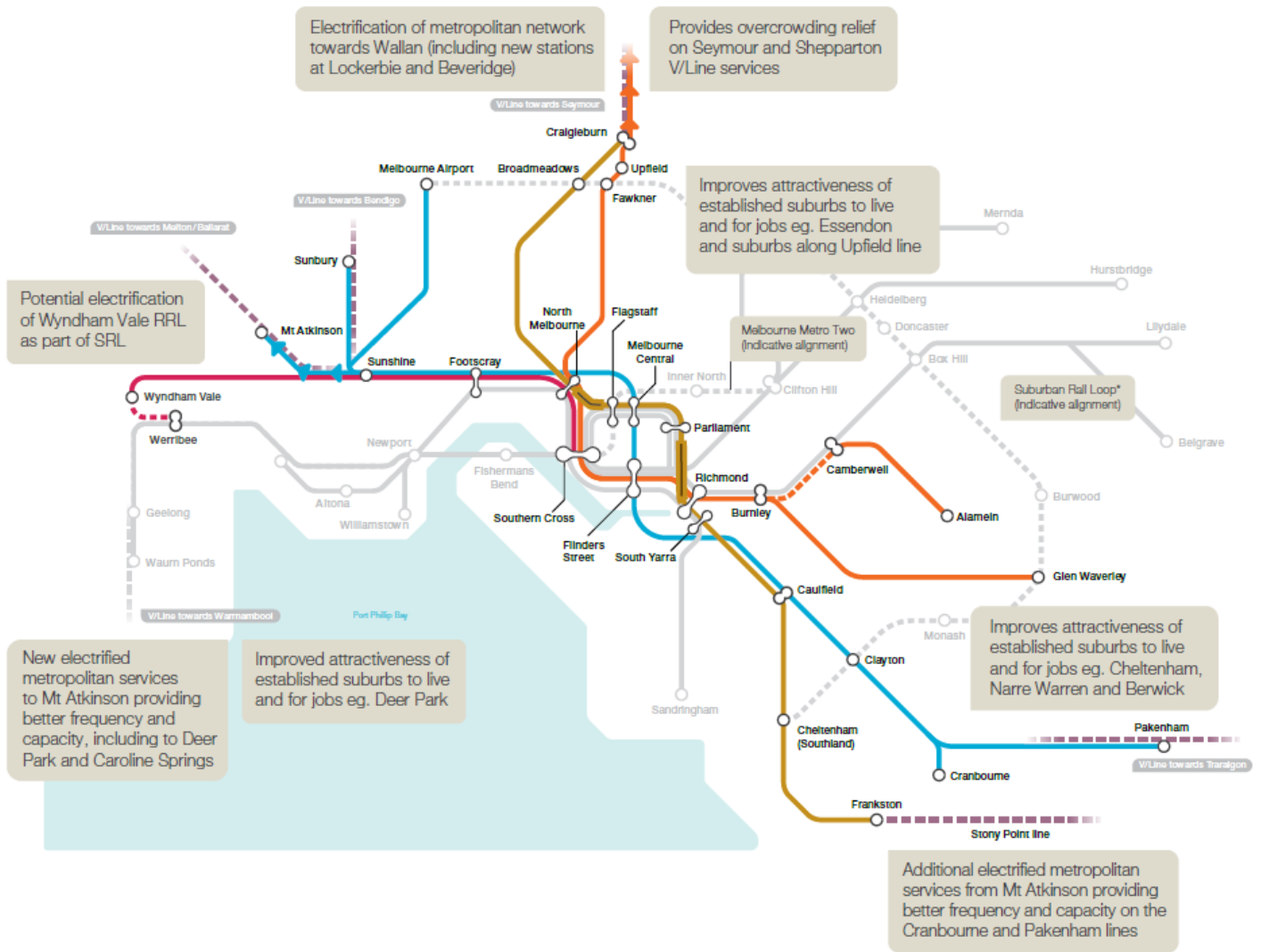
¹⁵ Victorian Government (2021), *Victoria's Big Build: Metro Tunnel Project Overview – Benefits for your train line (Upfield)*

¹⁶ Infrastructure Victoria (2021), *Victoria's Infrastructure Strategy 2021–2051*



Victoria's Infrastructure Strategy 2021–2051 (page 207)

Figure 29: Growth area rail extensions — Potential concept
Specific upgrades and benefits related to growth area rail extensions





Policy context/strategic guidance

- Rail Future's Melbourne Rail Plan
- Infrastructure Victoria's Infrastructure Strategy 2021–2051
- Infrastructure Australia 2050
- Victorian Planning Authority
 - Lockerbie PSP
 - Lockerbie North PSP
 - Craigieburn North Employment Area PSP
 - Donnybrook–Woodstock PSP
 - English Street PSP
 - Shenstone Park PSP
 - Beveridge Central PSP
 - Beveridge North West PSP (in development)
 - **Beveridge North East PSP (future)**
 - Wallan South PSP (in development)
 - Wallan East PSP (in development)
 - Beveridge North East PSP (future)
 - Beveridge South West PSP (future)
 - Northern Freight PSP (future)
 - Northern Quarries PSP (future)
 - Craigieburn South Employment Area PSP (future)
- Northern Growth Corridor Plan
- Northern Metropolitan Land Use Framework Plan
- Northern Horizons 2020: Evidence Report
- Plan Melbourne 2017-2050
- Wallan Structure Plan.