

Trains North Newsletter

December 2023 Editor of this issue - Karin von Strokirch



Historic Armidale station 140 years!

The year 2023 marks Armidale station's 140th anniversary. It was restored to its former glory with the original colour scheme, silver roof and reinstallation of the dormers and wrought iron decorations that had mysteriously disappeared in the mid-20th century. At least 27 workers were killed during the 1880s construction of the Great Northern Railway (GNR). The youngest, William Spillane, was only 9 years old. Our once magnificent line was thus built with blood, sweat, tears and, for some, the ultimate sacrifice.

In Memory of the Workers Killed in the Construction of the Extension to the Great Northern Railway 1879-1885

Tamworth to Uralla - Contractor: Amos Bros				
Date	Name	Age	Accident Locality	
11 Oct 1879	Henry Mann	21	Moorang	
Jan 1880	Peter Chevanno	-	Tamworth	
9 Feb 1880	Michael Cunningham	-	Dungahm	
30 Jan 1880	Henry James Scott	37	Moonbi	
13 Oct 1880	William Brown	38	Moonbi	
24 Nov 1880	David Gooding	-	Dungahm	
Jan 1881	Michael O'Connor	27	Walcha Road	
Jan 1881	William Brydon	28	Dungahm	
24 Jan 1881	John Turey	45	Walcha Road	
Apr 1881	James McCallum	38	Walcha Road	
13 June 1881	William Ferguson	32	Walcha Road	
24 Jul 1881	George Dorrington	37	Walcha Road	
Uralla to Glen Innes - Contractor: Proudfoot				
Date	Name	Age	Accident Locality	
28 May 1881	James Tulloch	36	Dumaresq	
27 Jun 1881	Henry Worsell	33	Ben Lomond	
30 Jun 1881	John Burdell	37	Little Duval	
Apr 1882	Anderson	-	Dungahm	
June 1882	Michael O'Donnell	25	Duval	
May 1883	James King	-	Ben Lomond	
12 Jul 1883	William Patrick Spillane	9	Ben Lomond	
26 Sep 1883	John Urganov	55	Ben Lomond	
Glen Innes to Tenterfield - Contractor: Cobb & Co				
Date	Name	Age	Accident Locality	
30 May 1883	James Weightman	5	Bluff River	
Jan 1883	White	-	Bluff River	
Jan 1884	Whelan	12	Belyea	
May 1884	Michael Lasky	-	Tenterfield	
May 1884	Sherran	-	Tenterfield	
Jul 1885	Dougal Kerr	27	Belyea	
Nov 1885	John Burke	7	Sandy Flat	

Does not include deaths due to disease and accidents outside working hours.
Black Mountains Preservation Society, 2017.
Details of fatalities from research by Graham Irvine, Armidale

We should cherish this nation building achievement. Instead the track north of Armidale is under threat of being torn up for a recreational rail trail. Trains North aims to ward off that threat and revive the the entire GNR or Main North Line. 2023 marked 30 years since restoration of the train service to Armidale in 1993. This was celebrated with a bottle of champagne smashed on the train. It was the first time a regional line ever had its train service restored. In 2003 over 3,000 locals demonstrated and saved the train again.

Celebration & submission of petition for Passenger Trains North of Armidale

On 20th October Trains North supporters met at Armidale station to celebrate the collection of 10,746 signatures by NSW residents on the petition to restore the trains north of Armidale to Wallangarra on the QLD border. This highlights the demand in regional NSW for better public transport to meet the needs of vulnerable groups such as the elderly, sick, isolated, and unemployed and can also stimulate growth in regions like New England.

While the focus of this petition is on passenger trains to QLD, thus demonstrating tremendous community support for this vital public service, Trains North also strongly advocates for freight and heritage trains all the way to Brisbane.



Councillor Margaret O'Connor, Kerry Archibald Moran, Doug Scott & Billy Wood. Photo: Caroline Chapman

At the petition ceremony Kerry Archibald Moran performed her grandfather's songline, *Wanglar Gee*, commemorating construction of the Main North Line and the role of aboriginal people in that project. Regional TV and print media were in attendance as Trains North speakers from Armidale, Guyra, Glen Innes and Tenterfield explained the significance of this landmark petition. Later that day Trains North President Matthew Tierney and Guyra Local Area Vice President Rob Lenehan presented the petition of over 1,000 pages to Nationals MP Adam Marshall. He submitted it to the NSW Legislative Assembly.



Adam Marshall, Matthew Tierney & Rob Lenehan. Photo: Caroline Chapman

The next task for Trains North is to lobby MPs so that they are fully informed of arguments in favour of restoring the train line and service when the issue comes up for debate in the NSW Legislative Assembly in early 2024.

Public forum endorses Trains North aims

On 7th August Trains North held a major forum in Armidale with hundreds in attendance. Councillor Margaret O'Connor argued for the social benefits of passenger trains to New England communities. Angus Witherby presented an economic business case for restoring freight on the line. Rob Lenehan explained how the bicycle rail trail plan galvanized community support for the trains' return.

Jason Russell described the ongoing restoration of historic trains by New England Railway Inc. Matthew Tierney envisioned the revival of this crucial national line at the affordable cost of \$1 billion from Armidale to the border or \$2 billion all the way to Brisbane. Brian Flint made a passionate case for rail based on tackling climate change and slashing the traumatic road toll caused by trucks.



Armidale votes for Trains North aims. Photo: Caroline Chapman

With but a handful of dissenting voices, the audience endorsed resolutions calling for: protection of the railway track and corridor; opposition to the bicycle rail trail; restoration of the line and trains; and preventing strategic dependence on a

single national transport link. For a detailed report see the TN web site.

Public gatherings to disseminate information and receive community feedback were also held by local branches of Trains North in Guyra, Glen Innes and Tenterfield. All were well attended, widely supported and received favourable coverage in the local media.

Rail Trail update – Siri Gamage

In 2023 Armidale Regional Council and Glen Innes Severn Council worked with the Public Works Advisory Department of Regional NSW to update their respective rail trail business cases. Both councils are working with NSW government agencies to apply for funding as well as the rail corridor lease. GISC has been more open than ARC about negotiations. Glen Innes Council provides monthly updates of discussions with NSW agencies. Details are in the Annex to the Council Agenda.

Councils are negotiating to prepare a regulation for the Minister of Regional Transport and Roads to present to parliament. The minister is obliged to consult with six designated stakeholders during the rail trail approval process.

When councils apply to the minister for rail trail approvals they are required to present evidence of 1) a sound business case 2) community support, and 3) a security impact statement. Relevant documents for the New England Rail Trail (NERT) are on council websites. At year's end Tenterfield council voted *unanimously* for restoration of train services from Armidale to Wallangarra on QLD border.

Freight initiative for the Main North Line

Prominent businessman, David Peters, has put up a major investment proposal for

Llangothlin. He is keen to establish a factory to manufacture health foods drawing on local fresh produce. It would employ 135 staff. But he will only proceed if the railway line is reopened to freight. He has offered to pay for restoration of the line from Armidale to Llangothlin and build a freight loading facility.

Peters has set up six factories Australia wide as well as developed rail facilities. Recently Peters came to Armidale to speak with stakeholders including Trains North and Armidale Regional Council. He also canvassed primary producers in Guyra, including the Costa tomato farm.

Burning bridges north of Wallangarra

Our railway line is flood free but during extreme fires in Southern QLD in October and November 2023 the Great Northern Railway did not escape the inferno. From Wallangarra to Warwick several wooden railway bridges succumbed to the flames.



Trains North Local Area Vice President for Tenterfield, Allen Crossthwaite, says better management could protect the line from fire. He also says it is an opportune time to persuade QLD to switch rail tracks from narrow to standard gauge with support from the Federal government. He decried the millions of dollars allocated to rail trails when the money could be well spent on upgrades to lines and services that serve a broader public interest.

Heritage steam train ride

On 14th August there was a heritage steam train ride from Werris Creek to Armidale. On 19 and 20th August Transport Heritage NSW organised four daily steam train rides from Armidale to Uralla and back. It was a great hit with locals; all seats were sold out! This is further evidence of community enthusiasm for our railway line and train services including heritage trains.



Photo: Transport Heritage NSW

New England Heritage Festival

On 10 & 11 November Trains North hosted a stall at New England Heritage Festival. The festival showcases heritage machinery including steam-powered engines, heritage saw-mills, farm machinery, tractor pulls and draught horses. Trains North gained a sympathetic hearing from antique machinery enthusiasts.



Allen Crossthwaite and Brian Flint. Photo: Caroline Chapman

Trains North committee

- President – Matthew Tierney
- Vice President – Siri Gamage
- Secretary – Karin von Strokirch
- Treasurer – Alan McKenzie
- Local Area Vice President Guyra – Rob Lenehan
- LAVP Glen Innes – Steve Pearce (acting)
- LAVP Tenterfield – Allen Crossthwaite
- LAVP Silver City – Kerry Archibald Moran
- Ordinary member – Deni McKenzie
- Ordinary member – Caroline Chapman
- Ordinary member – Margaret O'Connor
- Ordinary member – Billy Wood

Thank you for the efforts of our committee members, longstanding helpers and 80 financial registered members all of whom this organisation would not function without.

For reports, photos & events see web site:

<https://www.trainsnorth.org.au/>

