



The Hon Michael McCormack MP
Deputy Prime Minister
Minister for Infrastructure, Transport and Regional
Development
Leader of The Nationals
Federal Member for Riverina



The Hon Jacinta Allan MP
VIC Minister for Transport Infrastructure
State Member for Bendigo East

The Hon Darren Chester MP
Federal Member for Gippsland

Jane Garrett MP
VIC Member for Eastern Victoria

MEDIA RELEASE

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NEW RAIL BRIDGE COMPLETE AHEAD OF SCHEDULE

Construction of the new Avon River rail bridge in Stratford has been completed three months ahead of schedule.

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Development Michael McCormack, Federal Member for Gippsland Darren Chester, Victorian Minister for Transport Infrastructure Jacinta Allan and Victorian Member for Eastern Victoria Jane Garrett today announced the first passenger trains have travelled over the new 504-metre-long Avon River rail bridge.

The Deputy Prime Minister said with the Australian Government's investment of more than \$79 million, the new bridge will provide more reliable services for passengers along the Gippsland Line with trains now able to cross at 90km/h.

"After years of having to cross the historic Avon River Bridge at just 10km/h, trains will now be able to travel much faster, ensuring a boost in reliability and efficiency for passengers catching trains on the line," the Deputy Prime Minister said.

"Safety has also been improved for road users and pedestrians of the nearby McAlister Street level crossing, which has been upgraded and now features boom gates and a pedestrian crossing."

Mr Chester said the new elegant and sleek rail bridge was one of the biggest infrastructure projects under way in the Gippsland region.

"With work on the structure finished ahead of schedule, you could say it's an early Christmas gift for train travellers," Mr Chester said.

"The last train passed over the old bridge around 10 days ago in what was a historic moment for Gippsland. Today is equally important as the new bridge is used for the first time."

The Hon Michael McCormack MP
Parliament House Canberra | (02) 6277 7520
Suite 2, 11-15 Fitzmaurice Street
Wagga Wagga NSW 2650
minister.mccormack@infrastructure.gov.au

The Hon Jacinta Allan MP
1 Spring St
East Melbourne VIC 3000

Crews worked approximately 7,000 hours during a nine-day construction blitz to connect the new bridge to the rail line, undertaking critical track and signalling works and upgrading the McAlister Street level crossing.

Victorian Minister for Transport Infrastructure Jacinta Allan welcomed the progress made on this important phase of the Gippsland Line Upgrade as Rail Projects Victoria selects a preferred contractor to deliver the Upgrade's major package of works between Pakenham and Traralgon.

"With the Avon River Bridge now rebuilt to provide people in East Gippsland with more reliable services, we're not wasting a second getting on with the Gippsland Line Upgrade's major works to give all Gippslanders more frequent access to train travel and create hundreds of jobs."

"This major package of works will have significant benefits for passengers, including 40-minute off-peak frequency for trains between Traralgon and Melbourne and more reliable services right along the Gippsland Line," she said.

VicConnect, a consortium comprising UGL Limited, Decmil and Arup, is the preferred contractor for these works – which include duplicating track, extending the Morwell crossing loop, upgrading level crossings and signalling, and adding second platforms at four stations along the line. The consortium will undertake early works on the project over the coming months, including site investigations, procurement, engineering and design.

The project also includes upgrades to drainage structures at Morwell River, upgrades to signalling and a Victorian-first trial of wireless solar-powered level crossing detection technology at Farrells Lane in Stratford.

The new wireless technology has the potential to reduce the costs and environmental impacts of upgrading level crossings – and could deliver huge benefits for future rail projects in more rural locations right across the state.

Victorian Member for Eastern Victoria Jane Garrett said that as Victorians return to the train network, they can look forward to better services as a result of crews' around-the-clock work to finish the project.

"Not only can Gippsland passengers return to the network with a smoother, faster journey across the Avon River Bridge – we've delivered it ahead of schedule, so people can spend more of this COVID Normal summer with loved ones, rather than stuck on the train," Ms Garrett said.

The new Avon River Bridge was jointly-funded with the Australian Government contributing \$79,447,866 and the Victorian Government committing the remaining \$7,552,134. The project is being delivered as part of the Regional Rail Revival program which is upgrading every regional passenger rail line in Victoria.

Ends.