

Media Release

The Hon Martin Pakula MP

Minister for Industry Support and Recovery

Minister for Trade

Minister for Business Precincts

Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events

Minister for Racing



Sunday, 16 May 2021

NEW SUPPORT PUTS PUFFING BILLY ON TRACK FOR BRIGHT FUTURE

Much-loved heritage railway Puffing Billy will continue to delight Victorians and visitors to the Dandenong Ranges, powered by a major new investment by the Andrews Labor Government.

The *Victorian Budget 2021/22* will provide \$11.2 million for the iconic tourist attraction to protect local jobs and support its operations as it recovers strongly and draws tourists and day-trippers by the thousands.

Managed by the Emerald Tourist Railway Board, the century-old, open-air steam train plays an important role in preserving Victoria's railway history, delivering a unique journey through scenic bushland.

More than 500,000 people took a trip back in time on Puffing Billy in 2019, encompassing family outings, school groups, premium first-class dining trips and even canine companion tours on the monthly *Dog Express* service.

Puffing Billy is one of the largest volunteer-supported tourism organisations in Victoria, with more than 400 people donating their time, expertise and enthusiasm to create an unforgettable experience.

The railway also employs more than 90 workers and two-thirds of its suppliers are Victorian companies. That's in addition to the local jobs the iconic railway helps to support – attracting tourists and customers to local businesses.

Victorians have embraced the opportunity to again ride Puffing Billy after the railway was closed due to the pandemic. The railway's COVIDSafe practices include online bookings, mandatory wearing of face masks in carriages, and cashless payments.

The Budget, to be delivered on Thursday, 20 May, will also provide \$55 million to Visit Victoria for crucial new campaigns to draw visitors to Melbourne and across the state. The campaigns will focus on the domestic market before shifting to the return of international arrivals when public health conditions permit.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events Martin Pakula

"Puffing Billy is one of Victoria's most-loved icons and we're backing it to recover stronger than ever."

"We're supporting our state's iconic tourist attractions and boosting our marketing investment so that all of Australia knows the special appeal of Victoria."

Quotes attributable to Member for Monbulk and Acting Premier James Merlino

"Puffing Billy is so much more than a train ride – it provides unforgettable memories for local families and visitors and is a major driver of the local economy."

"It's fantastic that Puffing Billy's dedicated volunteers and staff can plan confidently for a strong future."

Quotes attributable to Puffing Billy Chief Executive Peter Abbott

"Puffing Billy has become a precious lifetime memory for so many families, with grandparents and parents reliving their childhood memories and sharing them with the younger generation."

"We are pleased that the sound of the whistle will echo through the hills well into the future."

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