

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



Friday, 4 February 2022

FULL STEAM AHEAD FOR SITTING ON THE SILLS OF PUFFING BILLY

The time-honoured tradition of sitting on the sills of *Puffing Billy* will make its long-awaited return to the iconic heritage railway from today.

Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events Martin Pakula today joined Member for Monbulk James Merlino and Member for Eastern Victoria Harriet Shing to relaunch the experience, which returns for the first time since March 2018.

A drawcard for the Dandenong Ranges and broader Yarra Valley region, sitting on the sills will once again be allowed on trains running from Belgrave to Lakeside stations daily after operators implemented risk management processes to ensure its safe reintroduction.

The return of the iconic experience will deliver significant benefits to local businesses as visitors get back to enjoying the things they love with family and friends.

Managed by the *Emerald Tourist Railway Board*, the open-air steam train critically preserves Victoria's railway history and has provided countless memories over many generations.

It attracted around 500,000 visitors annually prior to the pandemic and was further strengthened as a tourist attraction via the recently opened state-of-the-art \$24.8 million *Lakeside Visitor Centre*.

The *Lakeside Visitor Centre* was backed by a \$12.7 million commitment from the Andrews Labor Government and boasts world-class facilities for tourists, day-trippers and school groups alike.

It includes a range of dining options, featuring seasonal produce from across the Yarra Valley, as well as a hi-tech function space to host workshops, conferences, events and school excursions.

For further information on the sitting on the sills experience and the railway's operations – including to book tickets – visit puffingbilly.com.au

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

"There's no other railway experience like sitting on an open-side carriage sill as Puffing Billy winds through the Dandenong Ranges. This is great for tourism and local businesses in the region."

Quote attributable to Member for Monbulk James Merlino

"Puffing Billy is a much-loved favourite for tourists, day-trippers and school groups, and the return of sitting on the sills will ensure more visitors come to our region to experience all we have on offer."

Quote attributable to Member for Eastern Victoria Harriet Shing

"Parents, grandparents, friends, and families with fond memories of sitting on the sills now have the chance to experience it again with a whole new generation."