Melton Council submits major demands for new train stations, electrification by 2030

Commuters in Melbourne's west liken fighting it out to get a carpark at overcrowded train stations to the "Hunger Games" — and with the population booming, they are demanding the state government take urgent action.

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Fed-up commuters from a Melbourne municipality home to more people than Hobart say they are forced to cram onto old-fashioned diesel trains and scrap it out to get a carpark before 7am with the population expected to boom.

Melton City Council — home to 241,000 residents — is urging the state government to commit to delivering significant rail projects — which involve three new railway stations — by 2030 in a desperate bid to get ahead of a major population boom.

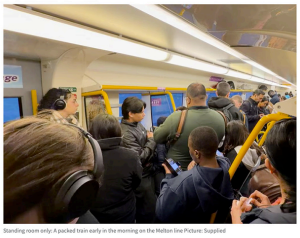
The municipality's population is expected to surpass 455,000 by 2046, increasing at a rate of nearly 7 per cent per year — making it the state's fastest growing LGA.

Chief among the council's demands ahead of the November election is a commitment towards electrifying and duplicating the train line from Sunshine to Melton, which would allow for more metro trains to service Melton — as promised in the 2018 Western Rail Plan.

As a result, Melton commuters are forced to hop on packed city-bound regional trains from Ballarat.

Girish Khara, of the Mt Atkinson Advocacy Forum, said electrification was the "only long term solution" to get the area's transport out of the "Dark Ages".

"It's difficult to understand why Melbourne's outer west is still relying on infrequent diesel services ... the feeling of neglect in the west is real."



Standing room only: A packed train early in the morning on the Melton line Picture: Supplied

Earlier this year the state and federal government allocated $152.7m towards early planning works — which have started — towards electrification, although a timeline was yet to be released.

However, Melton mayor Lara Carli demanded a "commitment to its delivery" by 2030.

"Our residents face the daily challenge of infrequent transport services and inadequate roads," she said.

"Electrification of the Melton rail line is one of the most important transport projects for our City.

"Over the next 25 years, our modelling tells us that our residents won't be able to get on a train."

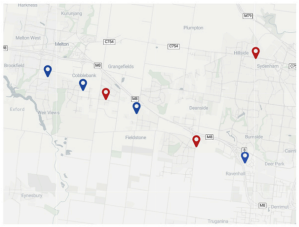
According to council data, electrification of the line would take 12,000 cars off the road and increase public transport usage by 27 per cent in Melton.

Two of the four platforms at the new Melton station — set to open on September 1 — have been built with eventual electrification in mind.

A state government spokesman said electrification of the line was "on the way" with "site investigations to finalise the project design underway".

The future of Melton's train network

INTERACTIVE MAP
Select icons to see existing stations and proposed stations



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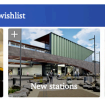
The council also demanded the delivery of new railway stations at Hillside, Mt Atkinson and Thornhill Park by 2030.

The Hillside station would be on the Sunbury line and fill the 10km "gap" between Diggers Rest and Watergardens station, which is home to more than 92,000 people.

Melton's state election wishlist

Electrifying Rail


New stations

Roads

The proposed Mt Atkinson and Thornhill Park stations would service the Ballarat line, which is expected to be used by more than 300,000 people by 2050.

Mr Khara said the new stations would help ease pressure on existing stations whose carparks are "full by 7am".

"Young families who have to drop children at schools or shift workers are having to choose between parking fines or already infrequent train services," he said.

Ali Mohsan, Gaurav Sharma, Reeshu Thalor and Santosh Mohan point to where the Mt Atkinson train station is supposed to go Picture: Athos Sirianos

Mt Atkinson was identified as the home of a "potential" new station on the Ballarat line in a 2017 precinct structure plan.

Fellow Mt Atkinson resident Manish Baisoya said finding a park at nearby stations was "like the Hunger Games".

Which of these projects should be prioritised most?

- Sunshine-Melton line electrification
- New train stations
- Western and Melton Highway upgrades

Cast your vote

The land for a proposed Mt Atkinson station — located in the middle of an 8km stretch between Caroline Springs and Rockbank — is opposite a site earmarked for a new Stockland shopping centre on corner of Clara Ave and Grieggs Rd.

The council also called for commitments to duplicating the Melton Highway and upgrade the Western Highway with "new and upgraded interchanges".

It has also urged the government to duplicate Hopkins Rd, which carries about 28,000 vehicles a day and the scene of 82 collisions between 2020 and 2025.

The council said duplication would result in a 45 per cent drop in collisions.

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