

# News from Steve Bracks and Labor

1 November, 2006

## **BRACKS TO BUY BACK COUNTRY RAIL**

The future of Victoria's country rail network will be secured and returned to state ownership if the Bracks Government is re-elected.

A re-elected Bracks Government would spend \$133.8 million to buy back the network and provide greater options for farming communities and export growth.

Last night Premier Steve Bracks successfully negotiated an in principle agreement to take control of the regional freight network from Pacific National.

"The 45-year lease arrangements put in place by the previous Government in 1999 were flawed, and have resulted in significant deterioration of the network," Mr Bracks said.

"The new arrangements will allow for better maintenance of the tracks by the Government and facilitate better access to the network for major rail projects.

"Taking the track back into public ownership will enable our Government, if re-elected, to provide greater certainty to our struggling farmers who are suffering the effects of one of the worst droughts on record, rising interest rates and spiralling fuel costs," he said.

"Upgrading the tracks will also help us to deliver better train services, giving farming communities better options for freight movement.

"We are committed to running this network with a community focus and will look for ways that users can get the most out of the tracks."

Mr Bracks said a more competitive rail environment was in the best interests of Victorian farmers, exporters and industry, and would be a major step towards reducing the number of heavy trucks on our roads.

But he warned that there was no guarantee the Liberals would take back the track by concluding final contracts if elected.

"The Liberals have still refused to commit to maintaining regional passenger rail if elected, let alone our important freight network.

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“In contrast, our Government is strongly committed to protecting the future of Victoria’s country rail network by also investing \$25 million over the next 12 months in track maintenance.

“We will undertake a comprehensive review and safety assessment of the rail network over the next year, as well as consulting with stakeholders and industry about the state of the network,” Mr Bracks said.

“This much-needed assessment and maintenance will improve the speed, efficiency, access and competition across the Victorian rail network.

“We are doing this because we want to ensure a sustainable future for the network.”

Mr Bracks said a subsidiary of VicTrack would manage the track under the new arrangements.

VicTrack would assume responsibility for operation and maintenance of the track, signalling and the provision of access arrangements.

Under the new arrangements, the Government would own the track while Pacific National will continue to operate their own rolling stock in Victoria.

Under the agreement all employees would be offered employment with the State on equivalent terms.

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