

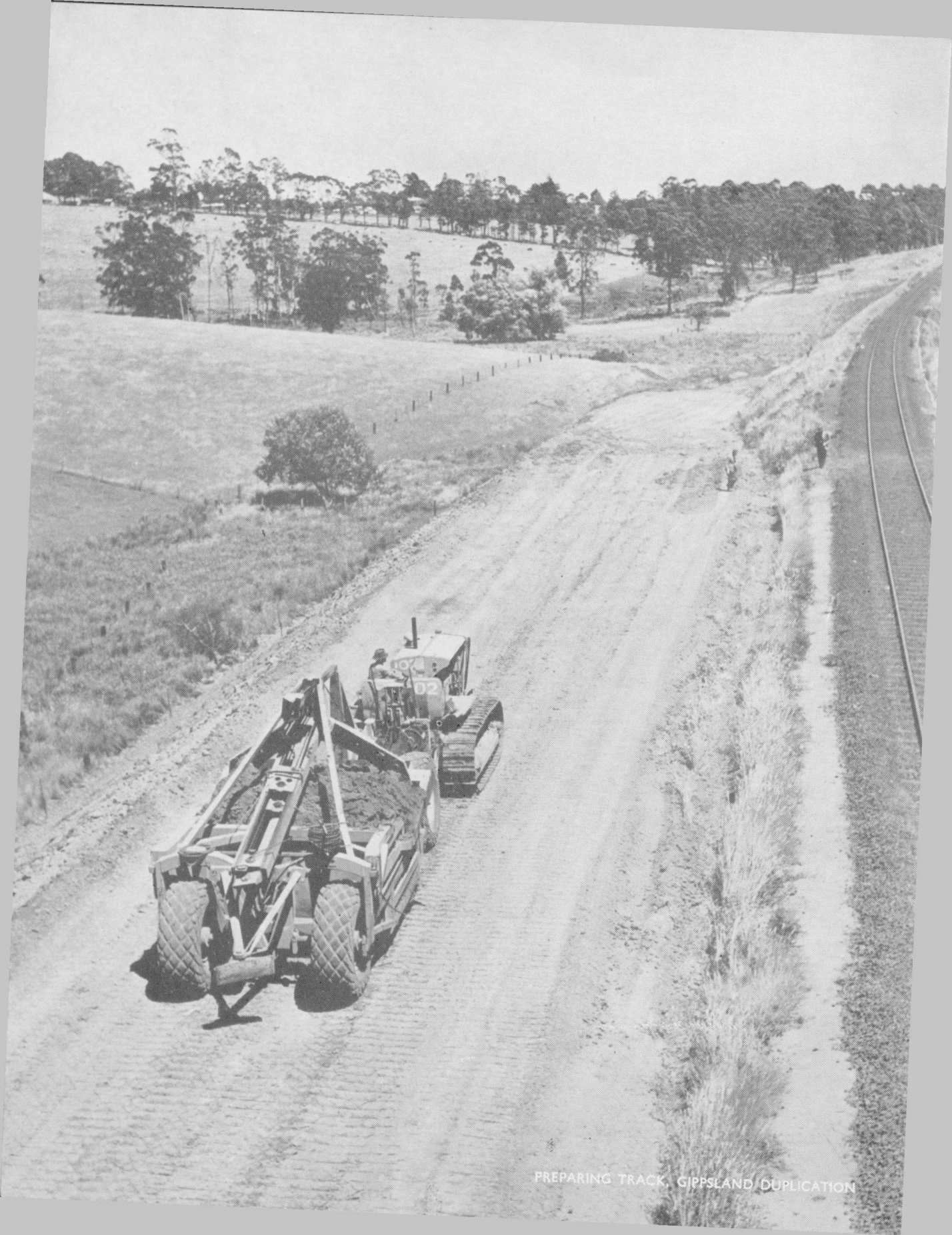
OPERATION PHOENIX

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PREPARING TRACK, GIPPSLAND DUPLICATION

OPERATION PHOENIX

THE Victorian Railways are planning to spend eighty million pounds in the next ten years. They plan to catch up with the years that depression, war, shortages and the locust of wear and tear have eaten. They plan to restore the State's greatest asset and make it comparable in modernity, comfort and capacity for service with the world's best railway systems. They plan in the same spirit of progress that, little more than a decade ago, gave Victoria, ahead of its time, a train that is still and indisputably known as one of the world's "crack" trains. Eighteen months have been spent on the plan; and its first-fruits are already evident in "Operation Phoenix."



THE obvious question arises: what has happened to make all this planning necessary? Why has the railway asset depreciated so much?

Any prudent business man knows that, if his revenue-producing assets tend to wear out or become obsolete, he must put aside a proportion of his yearly revenue for replacement when their useful life ends. Otherwise he goes out of business.

In the early years of a railway, when its equipment is fairly new and modern, and replacements are a long way off, there is great temptation to forget about future needs. And if temptation is still unresisted when the locust has done its work and the scrap heap can no longer be denied, neither new trains nor the money to buy them exist.

That, broadly, and despite Commissioners' repeated warnings and appeals for help, is what has happened to the Victorian Railways. So, they have had to go on patching here and painting there, expensively repairing old equipment it would have been far cheaper to scrap and replace. It is precisely this situation, or the result of it, that prompts thoughtless people to say railways are outmoded, and why bother about modernizing them.



26 JUN 2001

SOURCE

"OVERLAND" ROOMETTE CAR

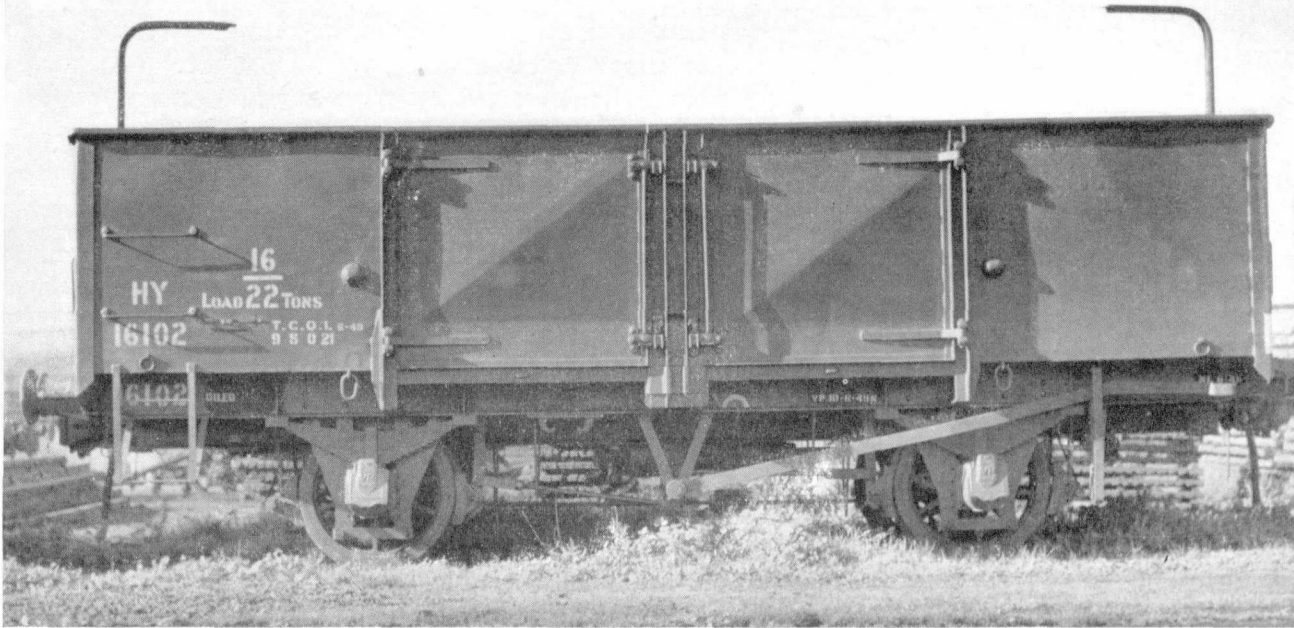
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DETERIORATION was evident even before the impact of modern road competition ; and it was accentuated by the years of unparalleled depression that followed. Any prosperous railway of comparable size would have been building at least twenty-five locomotives, thirty or forty carriages and five hundred trucks, each year, besides relaying sixty miles of track, to keep itself in healthy physical trim. But the Victorian Railways, reflecting the leanness of the years, were anything but prosperous. Their average yearly output of new rolling stock was less than four engines and only four carriages and two hundred trucks. And these were neutralized in advance by overdue scrappings.

Economically, things were indeed grim. Wheat, wool and butter were difficult to sell on what looked like an almost bottomless market. Living standards were at their lowest. Railway deficits mounted rapidly, and there was no money, except for pick and shovel work. Railway equipment grew older and progressively more costly to keep going : it began to look and feel its age.



THREE bright spots shone through the murk of depression. First, at no time were any standards of safety lowered ; on the contrary, they were progressively raised. In this respect, Victoria's railway record has been second to none in any field of transport, anywhere.



GENERAL PURPOSES TRUCK

Second, money and labour available for such primary material as sleepers and ballast enabled the Railways to recondition a good deal of track : and third, the modernization in design of more than two hundred old engines, at low cost, increased both horse-power and fuel economy, and got more and better work out of them than ever before.

These things, subsequently, were of very great value in coping successfully with the tremendous tasks of military transport set by war. It has been argued that, in war, road transport can do everything that is expected of railways ; some say even better. But army transport and ordnance staffs have had no such illusion. How could they, or anyone else of intelligence, ignore the obvious advantage railways have over road transport in economy of mechanical and human power and of basic imports ? One train, driven by a crew of three and functioning with locally produced coal and steel, can carry as much war equipment as thirty or forty road trucks, each needing at least one driver, plus men to service it, and each demanding petrol and rubber imported under grave war risk. Powerful allies, in complete command of the sea, will be more than ever essential in any future war, if railways are allowed to run down again.



WORLD War II gave the Victorian system no opportunity to rebuild or replace. Little beyond essential maintenance could be done. And afterwards, shortages of manpower and of practically everything that matters in the way of material were an all too effective brake on the spirit of progress. Passenger services were restricted, first by wartime Federal direction and later by lack of fuel.



PLAN OF MELBOURNE'S
PROPOSED UNDERGROUND
RAILWAY

Fewer trains inevitably meant heavier loads and slower speeds, longer stops at stations and—worst reproach of all—late arrivals. Heavier trains limit the use of the more modern and more comfortable carriages the Railways possess, and still hinder the full restoration of buffet cars. Almost everything, one might think, has contrived to discourage rail travel.



YET in 1948-49, country passenger business was seventy-six per cent. more than in 1938-39, the best of the pre-war years. Suburban traffic was up by twenty-two per cent. ; and goods traffic, despite shortages and a national coal strike, was fifty-three per cent. greater and more efficiently handled. More goods were, in fact, carried than in any of the war years. Whatever a record deficit might suggest to the contrary, 1948-49 was the busiest year for traffic in Victorian railway history.

And, in spite of shortages and shortcomings, a heavy programme of maintenance has been carried out. To-day's proportion of engines in service is the highest for seven years. Also, a limited quantity of new and urgently needed rolling stock

has emerged from the railway workshops. Additional all-steel, air-conditioned, main line passenger carriages have been built, and are running. Fourteen more are under way. They challenge comparison with any in the world to-day. Two new types of sleeping car for "The Overland" Melbourne-Adelaide express are being built in South Australia. One, quite new to Australia, consists entirely of single-berth "roomettes" (the first car of this type is already in service) ; the other has two-berth compartments, each with a hot and cold shower cubicle. Both types have modern, fluorescent lighting, and both are fully air-conditioned.



BUT all this is not nearly enough, nor is workshop potential sufficient, to put the railway system right quickly. New equipment must be imported, and more manpower. "Operation Snail," as it has been called, is already afoot and a-sail. The better part of a thousand men, many of them skilled railway artisans, will soon be on their way from Britain ; and pre-cut houses, if not on their backs, are at least coming with them (some are already here) to avoid aggravation of the housing problem. The £80 million plan, "Operation Phoenix," is gathering momentum.



ALL STEEL CAR FOR COUNTRY LINES

It is a tremendous project. "The Commissioners have been good enough to show me their general plans and ideas," said Mr. John Elliot, in his report last year to the Victorian Government, "and they seem to me sound and sufficiently far-reaching to serve the main purposes for which they are designed. I am fully satisfied that the technical knowledge and practical experience available among the Commissioners and Heads of Branches of the Victorian Railways are ample for the fulfilment of this great work."

Mr. Elliot has had a distinguished career in public transport. When he wrote his report he was, in effect, general manager of what was the British Southern Railway, a system that most travellers about the world know for its "Golden Arrow," "Bournemouth Belle" and other modern steam trains, its extensive and highly efficient electrified network of lines and its vast Southampton Docks. He is now in control of the London Midland Region (the former London, Midland and Scottish Railway), an even larger system that has produced, among other famous trains, the "Royal Scot." His opinion is authoritative; and his praise is not given lightly.



ONE of the first and most urgent steps was to place orders for a hundred powerful steam engines, seventeen Diesel-electric main line and ten shunting locomotives, thirty Diesel rail-cars and a thousand trucks. All the steam engines and half the trucks are being built in Britain. Eighteen of the Diesel rail-cars are here and running on country branch lines. The remainder will appear at close intervals, and they will include twelve units of 280-horsepower that will be extremely useful to relieve main line trains of roadside stops, and so help them to run to faster schedules.

The railway workshops are now engaged on a comparatively modest programme of twenty "N" class engines, fourteen air-conditioned steel cars and two complete new suburban trains. With a greater supply of labour and basic materials, they would be doing much more, but their output will be supplemented by contracts elsewhere. The importation of the Diesel-electric main line locomotives depends on getting a dollar allocation to buy some of the components from America.



DIESEL RAIL-CAR AND TRAILER

Highly versatile machines, they will speed up express passenger and freight services, and return valuable savings.

All told, "Operation Phoenix" envisages buying or building 350 steam, Diesel-electric and electric locomotives, 30 rail-cars, 290 all-steel cars for steam trains, 280 suburban carriages, 9,000 trucks and 300 vans, at an estimated cost of nearly £40 millions. It also includes new electrical equipment which, with the new cars, will increase the acceleration and speed of suburban trains, especially on the longer routes.



BESIDES all this, it is proposed to spend nearly £43 millions on a huge works programme that includes an underground railway between a new Richmond station and North Melbourne, by way of the present ill-served north of the city. Other works, equally important if less spectacular, are track regrading and duplication, replacing timber bridges by permanent structures, modernizing workshops and depots (including the North Melbourne locomotive depot) and reconstructing and expanding the Melbourne yards and goods sheds.



BROWN COAL FIRED ENGINE

Another important and immediate project is main line electrification. The first stage concerns the Gippsland line, between Dandenong and Traralgon. Electrified, regraded and with progressively duplicated track, it will cope with the rapid exploitation of Morwell brown coal, make substantial operational economies and help to reduce the State's demand for New South Wales coal by about sixty thousand tons a year. Electric locomotives to be imported for this line will be suitable for hauling heavier passenger and freight trains faster. New sub-station plant will be ordered, shortly, for this and some of the suburban lines.

Closely following the Gippsland line project, the Railways expect to electrify the Geelong line and to duplicate the track between North Geelong and North Shore. Here again, there will be marked improvement in passenger and goods train performances, as well as further useful economy in New South Wales coal.



SUMMED up, "Operation Phoenix," in its planned progression, will make Victoria's railway services more efficient and comfortable than they have ever been: re-establish them in public confidence and regard: restore in them the full measure of railwaymen's own pride.

The public, it is hoped and believed, will extend their patience a little longer. It will be well rewarded. Phoenix-like, the spirit of progress is regenerating.



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NOTE ON THE PHOENIX

EGYPTIAN mythology has several legends about the phoenix. The most familiar describes it as an Indian bird that, after living on air for at least five hundred years, loads its wings with spices and flies to the temple at Heliopolis where it is burned to ashes on the altar. Next day, the young regenerated phoenix emerges, already feathered, from the ashes. On the third day, with wings full grown, it salutes the priest and flies away.

In some legends, the phoenix, variously likened to an eagle, a heron and even a stork, was associated with the rising or regenerated sun, and the blue, golden and purple hues of dawn became the colours of its plumage.

*Issued, under direction of the Commissioners,
by the Public Relations and Betterment Board, Victorian Railways*