

Public Transport Users Association

Submission on the Ballarat Station Upgrade

Level Crossing Removal Authority

5th July 2024



**PUBLIC TRANSPORT
USERS ASSOCIATION**

The Public Transport Users Association (PTUA) thanks the Level Crossing Removal Authority (LXRA) for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Ballarat Station Upgrade. PTUA members in Ballarat have long awaited this project and are excited to see accessibility improvements come for Ballarat station at long last. To ensure that this project delivers the best possible result for all users of the station the PTUA is calling for:

- The creation on an additional entrance on the eastern side of platform 2,
- The new overpass to protect users from the weather,
- The construction of an additional shelter at bus bay 1,
- More passenger information screens,
- A station-wide wayfinding review,
- Planting of trees in the northern forecourt

We believe that consideration of these recommendations will make Ballarat station a more pleasant and inviting space for all public transport users.

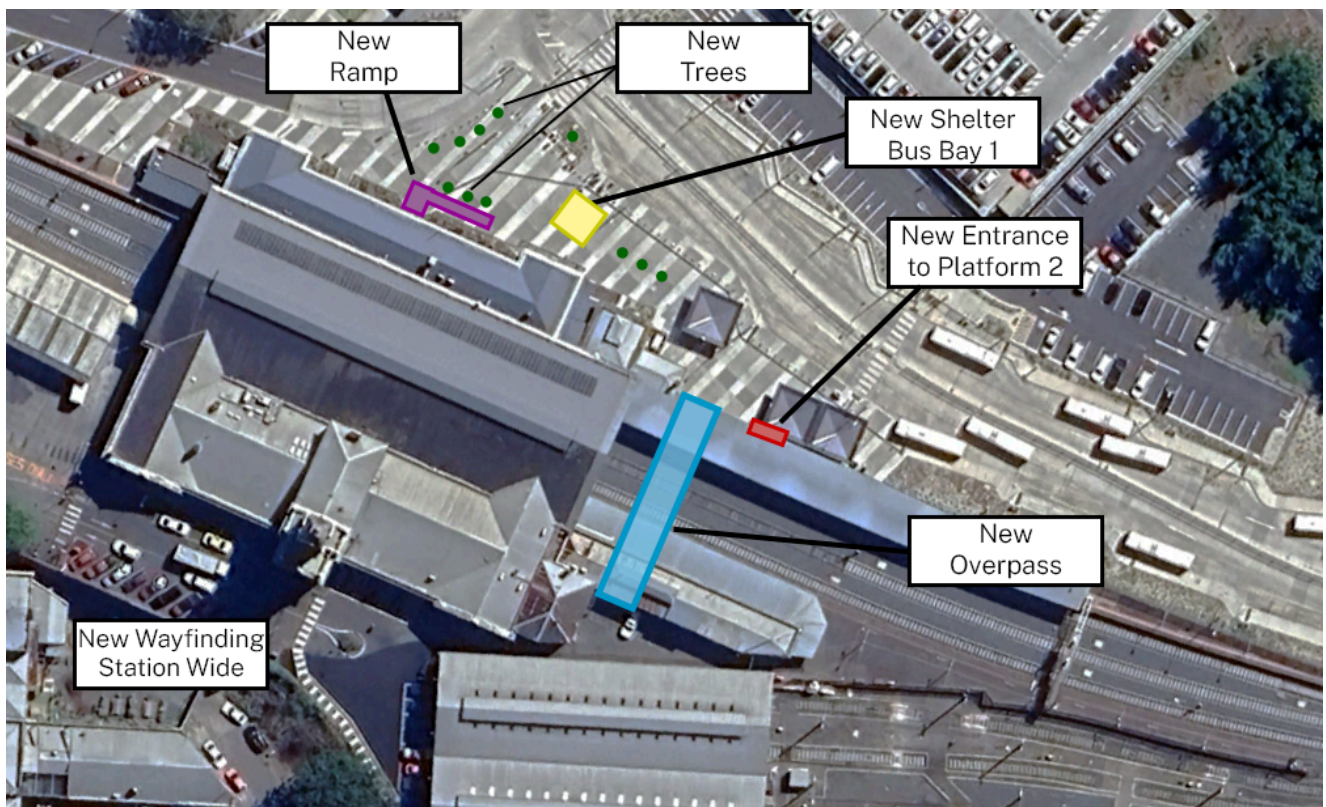


Diagram showing upgrades proposed by the project and improvements recommended by the PTUA

Connectivity

The project proposes the construction of a new pedestrian overpass on the eastern side of the train hall which will connect platforms 1 and 2 via new lifts and stairs. That will improve accessibility for mobility impaired users significantly as they will no longer have to exit the station to cross the tracks. It will also benefit pram users, who are often seen struggling up the existing staircase to cross platforms.

Previous examples of accessible overpasses built in heritage station precincts have created situations where mobility-impaired passengers have to cover a greater distance to cross tracks compared with able-bodied people. The proposed location of the overpass at Ballarat should avoid that design flaw, because it is more centrally located than those at Geelong and Bendigo stations, where the accessible overpasses are at the far ends of the platforms.

However we believe that the current proposal falls short when it comes to accessing the overpass from the northern forecourt, which is the primary access point for those getting to the station by local bus or car. The proposal involves replacing the existing bluestone step with a new ramp. While that is a welcome improvement, it does not involve the “entry room” between the forecourt and the platform. That room has some attractive and historic architectural elements, but is extremely impractical for a modern transport hub.

Due to the narrow doorway, it is not uncommon to see the room full with passengers as they try to exit during peak times, creating difficulties for those trying to enter at the same time. The entrance was never intended to be the main access point for the station, but has become so due to the newly built bus interchange and multi deck carpark. To take pressure off that space, the PTUA recommends cutting out a section of fence further east, thereby creating a second entrance point to platform 2 that avoids the heritage structure altogether. This second entrance would also be located near the new overpass, allowing direct access across to platform 1.

Weather Protection

Ballarat’s weather is notoriously cold and wet, as well as being blistering during summer heat waves. Therefore, it is essential to provide adequate shelter at the city’s major transport interchange. The heritage train shed provides a place to stay dry and relatively sheltered from the wind, but newer additions to the station, such as the bus interchange, lack that level of shelter. The new overpass also risks becoming another pain point for users, exposing them to poor weather.

The PTUA calls on the government to ensure that the new overpass adequately protects people from wind and the rain, avoiding large openings as much as possible. The initial renders show the shelter has a solid roof and perforated side panels, and we welcome

that design. However, we would prefer to see a combination of perforated and solid panels to further protect against the elements.

In addition, we advocate that an additional shelter be constructed at the bus interchange for passengers waiting for buses at bus bay 1. The nearest shelter is too far away to allow passengers to get to their bus before it departs.

Heritage Impact

Upgrading heritage railway infrastructure in Victoria has presented a multitude of challenges for successive state governments. Unfortunately, there has been a pattern of projects being cancelled, delayed or scaled back due to heritage-related problems, leaving public transport users significantly worse off. There have also been cases in which the project's scope has shifted from ensuring an improved travel experience for passengers to protecting heritage architecture.

The PTUA accepts that Ballarat station is a significant heritage asset. However we urge the project team to work with Heritage Victoria and VicTrack to ensure that heritage constraints are identified early in the project, to avoid it becoming delayed significantly, or requiring scope modifications which will create unnecessary cost to the taxpayer and a worse passenger experience.

Building an overpass that meets modern accessibility standards into a heritage station, that is itself space-constrained, is a difficult challenge. The PTUA is pleased to see that the proposed overpass will be on the eastern side of the train hall, where it should avoid disrupting the most sensitive heritage views, such as those of the train hall from Lydiard Street, and the southern entrance.

Passenger Information

Passenger information at Ballarat station is good, with two displays on platform 1, two displays in the two waiting rooms, and an additional display on platform 2.

However, since those displays were installed, the “entry room” between the northern forecourt and platform 2 has become much more used, but it does not have any information screens. The PTUA recommends that an additional summary information display be installed above the stairway to platform 1, in the platform 2 “entry room”, to allow passengers to see which platform their train will be departing from before crossing the tracks.

In addition to that, we feel that additional summary information displays should be installed at all entrances to the station, including the entrances to both platforms from Lydiard St, as well as our proposed additional entrance to platform 2 from the bus bay.



The lack of any passenger information display in the platform 2 “entry room” makes it unclear whether passengers need to cross the tracks for their train service.

Wayfinding

Wayfinding signage at Ballarat station is poor, and some signs even point users in the wrong direction. Wayfinding has not been updated since the new bus interchange was provided, meaning most of the signs relating to buses take people to the old stops on Lydiard Street and not the new interchange,

There must be a review of all wayfinding signage at Ballarat station, to ensure that it fulfils its purpose and points passengers in the right direction. That review must also ensure that correct accessibility information allows users to find the new overpass.



An example of incorrect wayfinding at the coach bay exit of platform 1. It points users in the wrong direction for buses and does not indicate pram/wheelchair access to platform 2

Greenery and visual appeal

The northern forecourt is sparse and concrete-heavy. It is well understood that trees in built environments not only increase their visual appeal, but cool an area during summer and provide shelter from rain. There are also many benefits for the environment (1).



The barren northern forecourt

Trees should be planted in the northern forecourt to create natural shelter from the weather and beautify the space.

Toilets

The current toilets at Ballarat Station are located beside the Platform 1 waiting room. These toilets were previously well-suited to passengers' needs when the southern side was the primary entrance to the station. However, with increased use of the northern side, there is now a greater demand for additional toilets on the northern side.

At least one accessible unisex toilet should be built near Platform 2, the bus interchange, and the northern forecourt to provide accessible toilet access without requiring passengers to cross the new overpass and traverse the length of Platform 1. Additionally, there is an opportunity to install toilets for bus drivers using the bus interchange during their breaks.

Work Cited

- 1) Sustainable Gardening Australia. "The value of trees in urban areas." *Sustainable Gardening Australia*, 2014,
<https://www.sgaonline.org.au/the-value-of-trees-in-urban-areas/>. Accessed 10 06 2024.