

# Trains push speeds up

## - port dreams still idle

By Brad Lester and Jane Ross

RAIL services may not return to South Gippsland on the back of the Victorian Government's plans to expand brown coal mining in the Latrobe Valley.

Metropolitan media last week touted the long-awaited Port Anthony at Barry Beach could be fast-tracked to enable the export of coal from the valley.

But port developer John Anthony was unimpressed by recent press reports about big boosts to brown coal mining in the Latrobe Valley, necessitating a port in South Gippsland.

"I've been through this with many companies; it's meaningless," he said.

The port was given \$2 million in last year's State Budget, but Mr Anthony said he doesn't have the money yet.

"It will be a couple of years before anything is coming in and out of the port," he said.

His dream of a South Gippsland bulky goods port has been underway for 16 years.

"People are all too frightened to do anything economically, they are really pulling their heads in," Mr Anthony said.

"We're still constructing, we're just plodding along."

Mr Anthony's concerns came as a community group stepped up its call for the return of passenger and freight rail to South Gippsland advancing last Wednesday.

The new website of lobby organisation, South and West Gippsland Transport Group, was launched by South Gippsland Shire Council mayor Cr Warren Raabe.

The group's chair Andrew McEwen told council the government's plans to develop coalfields suggested "it is quite likely that Port Anthony is going to be needed."

The group also said rising fuel costs, traffic congestion and population growth in South Gippsland would drive the return of rail.

"Leading cities around the world are now investing in rail and we are behind the

gun on this and we are going to pay the price for it by way of (traffic) congestion," Mr McEwen said.

The group has called for a fresh feasibility study investigating the costs and practicalities of re-opening the line to Leongatha, including a line linking Monomeith near Koo Wee Rup with Nar Nar Goon, possibly via the Koo Wee Rup bypass road route.

The group is also proposing a dedicated freight line from near Cranbourne to the Port of Hastings and the possibility of a line from Port Anthony to Yarram and then Rosedale, to link the port with the Latrobe Valley. The group will meet Deputy Premier and Gippsland South MLA Peter Ryan in early April and hopes to raise the prospect of the study with him.

"If we don't ask for the plans now, we will find ourselves down the track here with a major problem with congestion and our businesses not being able to survive because of traffic congestion," Mr McEwen said.

He said the communities of Bairnsdale, Ararat and Mildura had advocated for their rail services to be restored and that had resulted in "real economic benefits to those areas".

Cr Jeanette Harding conceded she initially thought restoring rail services was one of "Andrew's dreams", but said public support for the group was expanding.

"This is something that is growing and people are very passionate about it.



**Blast off:** South Gippsland Shire Council mayor Cr Warren Raabe launched the South and West Gippsland Transport Group's website and Facebook page, watched by the group's Max Semken, chair Andrew McEwen and Bret Levenspiel, and councillors Jennie Deane and Jeanette Harding.

We need to have the heavy traffic off the highways and back onto the roads because this will solve a lot of the problems with the South Gippsland Highway and a lot of our other highways," she said.

Cr Bob Newton still believed a rail line to Murray Goulburn's Leongatha factory was possible, despite the dairy company ruling that option out in the past as trucks provide delivery direct to a destination, whereas rail would require multiple handling of goods.

Mayor Cr Warren Raabe said council was supporting the Gippsland Local Gov-

ernment Network's bid for extra services on the Pakenham line.

"There is no good in building a line to Leongatha when there are not enough slots on the Pakenham line for metro services," he said.

The group's Max Semken of Leongatha said a new railway line between Loch, Korumburra and Ruby was needed, and that should be wide enough to accommodate two tracks in the future.

Mr Semken said rising petrol costs would increase demand for public transport, with each bus removing 41 vehicles off the roads

and improving road safety. "We should be looking at an immediate extra six bus services in this shire a day. It would bring more people into this region and improve business and education," he said.

"It is our belief that the population in this area will grow."

Mr McEwen said the cost of driving to Melbourne from Leongatha would increase from \$50 now to up to \$150 in the future due to rising oil prices.

The group's website is: <http://www.swgt.org.au>. Facebook page: [www.facebook.com/SWGT.GROUP](http://www.facebook.com/SWGT.GROUP)

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