



WESTERN AUSTRALIA PARTY

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MEMBER FOR EAST METRO

Putting Western Australians First

Hon Matthew Swinbourn MLC
Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs
Legislative Council Committee Office
18-32 Parliament Place
West Perth 6005

Dear Mr Swinbourn,

Matthew

RE Petition No.163 – Midland Railway Workshops

The Western Australian Government Railways (WAGR) Workshops at Midland was once the state's leading employer of skilled tradesmen, and trained the most trades apprentices. In 2001 the site was evaluated by the Heritage Council of Western Australia as representing 'the most significant example of early twentieth century railway workshops in Australia.' In its prime so it is said, almost everyone in Perth either worked there or was related to or knew someone who worked there.

After closing in 1994 the buildings remained empty as they do today. It is a place of singular personal importance and historical significance particularly to the former workers and their families who have long-held connections to the workshops as verified again by the Heritage Council as they, 'played a major role in the economy, development and daily life of Western Australians for ninety years, including training thousands of apprentices in a wide range of trades.'

The Labour History Society led by the late Neil Byrne was a particularly noteworthy supporter and advocate to create a Rail Heritage Centre at the Midland Workshops and during his funeral many prominent WA Labor Members of Parliament and trade union executives spoke in support of fulfilling his dream, chiefly among those who spoke in favour were Senator Louise Pratt Member for Western Australia, Hon Simone McGurk MLA and Mr Steve McCartney of the AMWU WA.

Regrettably, many of the parties expressing an interest continue to dawdle as the buildings are now being sold off for profit while the current Labor government seem to want to forget history.

The former workers and their families are devastated the Interpretive Centre has been closed down and seemingly forgotten with the final insult being the current crop of Labor politicians having no interest in this significant working class history.

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The WAGR workshops were declared a state heritage icon back in 2004 and I would argue that there is significant historical and social value in retaining and re-using the industrial sites while an appropriately and sensitively made industrial centre and museum is considered.

The Workshops are witness to a time when thousands of workers created goods for domestic use and export. In the steam age the Workshops produced all the components for the state of Western Australia including steam trains, rails and small items like dogspikes used to fix rail to sleepers and in addition parts for the Royal Australian Navy were produced in latter years.

The family and friends of the former workers at the Workshops have been campaigning for a wholly interactive authentic heritage and cultural experience located at Western Australia's railway workshops for many years.

It is now well documented by correspondence seen by myself that the current government despite previously voicing support have turned their backs on this historical opportunity to remember WA's working and manufacturing past.

An industrial museum will make history come alive with for example; hands-on exhibits, multi-media encounters and colourful stories coupled with huge steam locomotives and massive industrial machinery.

As an educational experience, children and adults alike can step into a real heritage railway workshop and see it in operation, just as it has been for 90 years. See genuine restoration of a steam train up close and hear living history from railway workers.

As an education service children can explore larger-than-life exhibits to discover the enormous impact rail has had on our lives in WA, beautifully restored carriages and blacksmithing demonstrations and find out about the generations of blacksmiths, carpenters, painters, metalworkers and other craftsmen who built and repaired locomotives, wagons, carriages and railmotors, and importantly give children a go at these skills and offer them a way to see what this type of work was really like.

In addition, and as suggested by Dr Bobby Oliver Midland could become, 'the national rail and tramway restoration workshops, a centre of excellence, undertaking work at Midland or *in situ* for the myriad rail and tram societies [around Australia] that are now seeking to restore or refurbish engines and rolling stock for the community, tourist and heritage railways.'

To conclude and to quote folk singer Bernard Carney, "It's more than just the buildings; it's what they did inside."

I sincerely hope this Labor government lives up to its earlier promises and honours those who worked at the Midland workshops by having the good graces to create a working industrial heritage centre to commemorate WA's manufacturing history and the men who worked there.

Charles
29/9/20