

On line for the future

By BEN DICKINSON

The Jolimont man who drew the first Metronet map wants the State Government to build passenger rail lines from Geraldton to Esperance.

Kevin McQuoid, a retired marketing academic and self-confessed "train obsessive", published an opinion piece in the POST in 2012 calling for a massive expansion of the urban rail network to serve a future Perth of four million people.

He pitched the plan to the Labor Party, which later produced a similar rail map it called Metronet.

This month, Mr McQuoid published a paper calling for a new regional rail network to take the population pressure off Perth.

"Three-quarters of WA's nearly three million people live in Greater Perth ... but only one tenth of the State's population is located in the remainder of the lower western and southern coastal strip from Geraldton to Esperance," he argues.

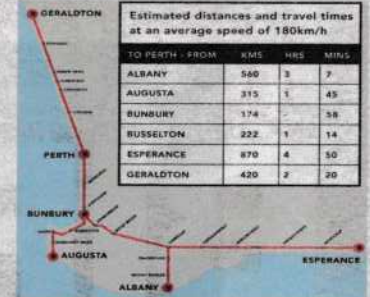
"It is not economically, socially or environmentally rational to have so many people in Perth while the rest of this particular region - a world-class lifestyle zone - is mostly empty."

Mr McQuoid's plan would turn Bunbury into a major rail hub, with lines linking it to Augusta (via Margaret River), Albany, and Esperance.

Both the Albany and Esperance lines would run through Tambellup, Boyup Brook and Donnybrook to take advantage of flat land.

Another line would stretch from Perth to Geraldton, with stops at Lancelin, Cervantes, Jurien Bay, Green Head and Dongara.

The entire network would



A map of Mr McQuoid's proposed country rail network Geraldton to Esperance.

consist of narrow-gauge track, which is cheaper but slower than broad-gauge high-speed rail networks.

The main advantage, according to Mr McQuoid, is that regional trains would be able to travel on the metropolitan network to reach the major stations at Perth and East Perth.

He estimates a narrow-gauge train departing Perth could reach Albany in 3 hours and 7 minutes, Geraldton in 2 hours and 20 minutes, and Esperance in 4 hours and 50 minutes - all much quicker than by road.

"Because the population is so sparse it gives us the opportunity to do it now," he said.

"It's an opportunity to get it right for the future."

Mr McQuoid said regional towns could then host transit-oriented developments, with higher-density housing close to train stations that would help fund the entire project.

"If you were going to put the system into Busselton, for example, the Government would probably buy up two or three farms on the edge of town and subdivide them," he said.

"Quicker access to the capital city's range of social, cultural, recreational, professional and

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Kevin McQuoid says a regional rail network would help take population pressure off Perth.

Photo: Paul McGovern

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governmental needs and wants would not only be beneficial to people in the regions, but would also draw many city-dwellers to relocate to country areas."

He said cost concerns that always swirled around major rail projects represented the wrong way of thinking about transport.

"Nobody asks how much roads cost or whether they have to be subsidised," he said.

"We just accept that there has to be roads there.

"When the Mandurah line was built there were people kicking and screaming."

The State and Federal governments have each contributed \$4million to produce a business case for a faster rail service between Perth and Bunbury to replace the ageing Australind service.

A report is due in the middle of 2023.

A spokesperson for Transport Minister Rita Saffioti said she had not had time to consider Mr McQuoid's proposal when the POST went to press.