

A Perth Christmas

and Rail Operations in the South West in early 2024

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Christmas 2023 was a little different for our family, rather than staying home in Geraldton we visited family in Perth for 10 days. Then, in February 2024 we also had several trips to Perth and the southwest.

The Perth rail scene now seems to be in a constant state of change, and this was noticeable at a range of locations around the metropolitan area. The Metronet urban rail program is undertaking a lot of work on the Perth passenger rail network, some works also mean changes to the freight lines.

We observed trains operated by Aurizon (intrastate/interstate freight), Pacific National and SCT (interstate freight operations), Transwa (intrastate passenger) and Watco (intrastate freight). Some of the freight workings were similar to previous visits but there have also been some changes. It is also worth noting that the Aurizon-operated CBH grain trains will see a major change when Cooperative Bulk Handling's (CBH) new standard and narrow-gauge locomotives and wagons start arriving from late 2024 through to 2026.

We were also able to see grain trains at Moora and Watheroo (north of Moora). Our first sighting was on Saturday 23 December 2023 with P2516 and P2501 loading a grain train at Moora CBH. The same pair was also stabled at Moora on Monday 1 January 2024. Arriving at Watheroo on Monday 5 February were P2516 and P2514 on 2K55 empty grain, whilst on Monday 12 February it was the turn of CBH023 and CBH011 loading 2K56. Three days later P2516 and P2514 were back loading 4K56.

Moora CBH consists of the main bin/loading point which sits at right angles to the mainline. It is served by a single track branching off the crossing loop, splitting into two tracks with one going under the loading bin. Moora CBH also has extensive (over a dozen) multiple storage bulkheads that are located south of the main bin for a distance of over a kilometre. Trucks run a shuttle from these bulkheads to the main storage bin loading point.

Moora CBH has been identified as a location for a new CBH fast loader, which will be located on an extended main line loop. Construction is expected within the next couple of years.

Watheroo is the northern limit of the Kwinana CBH zone grain trains (on the former Midland Railway) line and located 40km north of Moora.

It consists of a main bin with a rail loader but also has extensive multiple bulkheads running for over 700 metres. The Geraldton zone commences at Marchagee 30km north of Watheroo.

We took the opportunity to see a few trains on Boxing Day in the Perth metro area, a drive past the Forrestfield yard complex yielded SCT's CSR011 and CSR010 shunting after bringing in 7GP1. At the same time SCT's X47 was shunting the SCT depot sidings.

Just to the north of the SCT yard, Gemco has its maintenance facility and SCT's other X class, X51 was stabled outside the main maintenance building. Aurizon's Forrestfield Loco Depot is located north of the Gemco facility. At the south end of the Aurizon depot ACD6049 (one of Aurizon's intermodal locomotives) was stabled after receiving attention, whilst at the northern end both DBZ locos from the Albany woodchip train (DBZ2309 and DBZ2311) were stabled. There are AB, DBZ, DC, DFZ and L class locomotives also stored in various areas around the depot.

A couple of hours later at Herne Hill (a suburb north of Midland) Watco's leased VL358 and GL111 hauled 3351 Watco Freight to Hampton (south of Kalgoorlie). The Watco freight trains normally run six days a week, (with a train each way/each day) between Kwinana and Hampton.

Eight minutes later inbound GWU012 and ACD6054 came past on 7MP1 heading to Forrestfield, (this was the first time I had seen a GWU class loco in Western Australia).

The next day, Wednesday 27 December 2023, we ventured to Fremantle. C508 and GML 10 were on 4142 container train to North Fremantle, Watco's Forrestfield to Fremantle North Quay container train. Normally the train is hauled solo by Qube's GML10 (which can run up to four return trips a day) but in December and through to early February a Railfirst/Watco C class often assisted the GML. C508 and GML10 were on 4142 container train to North Fremantle on 27 December, and the train still consisted of the usual 50 wagons.

Just after lunch in the suburb of Naval Base (north of Kwinana) Watco's C503 and GL103 ran through on 4351 freight to Forrestfield, this service normally pauses at Forrestfield to add loading, this can give a second chance to see the train north of Forrestfield. Whilst at Naval Base, Aurizon's Q4017 ran through on 4158 loaded fuel train to Kwinana.

Left (page 44): Aurizon's Q4011 and Q4004 pass through the suburb of Herne Hill with 4s56 loaded grain heading to Kwinana CBH on Wednesday 27 December 2023.

Right: Aurizon in W.A. has reactivated two of its previously stored L class locomotives, primarily for shunting but they do get some use on the main line as well. Here, both locos LZ3120 and LZ3111 are at Bellevue (east of Midland) on 5112 light engine movement from Avon Yard to Forrestfield on Thursday 28 December 2023.

Below: With the Fremantle Port Authority building as a backdrop, Watco's C508 and GML10 on 4142 container train to North Fremantle are seen passing through Fremantle on Wednesday 27 December 2023.



We moved location to Bushmead Road in South Guildford and soon SCT007 and CSR015 passed on 3PM9 to Melbourne. A move further north to Millendon then yielded a second view of Watco's 4351, then Q4011 and Q4004 on 4s56 Aurizon loaded grain heading to Kwinana CBH went through. It was then Pacific National's turn with NR54 and NR18 (in *Ghan* colours) on 4PS6 interstate freight.

The Watco freights have a mix of Railfirst's C, GL and VL class locos, Watco's own G511 or 422 class units HL203 and FL220 can also be used. These trains haul products principally for BHP's Nickel West operations and are fed by trains serving Leonora, Hampton, and Kambala in the Eastern Goldfields. With a severe slump in nickel prices in 2023-24 the Nickel West operations are under review; it can only be hoped that these trains continue to run.

Thursday 28 December began with NR45 and *Ghan*-liveried NR74 shunting the Pacific National yard at Kewdale. P2507, P2514 and P2509

then went through on 5K64 loaded grain to Kwinana CBH. A move then to the Kalamunda Road overbridge saw CBH025 and CBH001 pass on 5K03 empty grain to York and Q4015 on 4430 sulphur train to Kwinana.

A location I had not been to for many years in Bellevue (east of Midland) yielded Aurizon's LZ3120 and LZ3111 on 5112 light engines from Avon Yard to Forrestfield, (both reactivated L class together!). The previously popular photo location on Robinson Road in Bellevue is not so easy to use given the road changes in the area following the construction of the Metronet EMU assembly facility.

Kalamunda Road was visited again to get Q4004 and Q4011 on 5s57 empty grain towards Midland. Later we moved to the Daddow Road overbridge at Kewdale and saw VL358, GL111 and VL361 on 5351 Watco freight to Forrestfield/Hampton. A quick side trip to Forrestfield found C508 and HL203 running round their train, which had arrived from North Fremantle.





An earlier start on Friday 29 December at Herne Hill saw the two-car *Avonlink* railcar set pass by heading towards Midland and then a three-car *Prospector* service to Kalgoorlie. Next was CSR018 and CSR022 on 3MP9 to Forrestfield. Recently overhauled GL107 was also seen stabled at Forrestfield. Later in the day at Kalamunda Road CBH003 and CBH008 went through on 6K43 empty grain train towards Midland followed by C503 and GL103 on 6351 Watco freight to Hampton.

An opportunity arose on Saturday 30 December 2023 to pay a visit to Thornlie Railway Station and the adjacent Spencer Road overbridge. Thornlie Railway Station is the current terminus of a short electrified single track branch line from Kenwick Junction. Construction is underway on its extension through to Cockburn Junction (on the Mandurah line), this is a Metronet project which will see a double track electrified railway built.

A key issue was that the alignment would require the relocation of the double track dual-gauge freight line from Kenwick to Cockburn Junction from

the southern side of the rail reserve to the northern side of the rail reserve. During 2023 a new double track dual-gauge freight line was constructed and my visit allowed me to see Q4011 and Q4004 on 7S57 empty grain heading towards the Avon Valley and Northam using the new alignment.

Later at Bushmead Road in South Guildford, CBH010 and CBH006 were on 7K02 loaded grain to Kwinana CBH, then VL358, VL361 and C508 on 7351 Watco Freight to Hampton. A two-car empty *Prospector* also went past heading to its Kewdale servicing area. P2507, P2514 and P2509 on 7K63 empty grain to Koorda ran through and were followed a short while later by NR116, NR85 and NR97 on Pacific National's 7PM5 heading east.

On New Years Eve a visit to Herne Hill saw CBH001 and CBH004 on 1K03 empty grain towards Avon, CBH003 and CBH008 on 1K44 loaded grain train towards Midland then Aurizon's GWU013 and ACD6047 on 5MP1 to Forrestfield. Just before sunset my last train for the year was NR92 and NR36 on 6MP4 freight to Kewdale.



Above: Hired Rail First locos VL358, GL111 and VL361 are on 5351 Watco freight from Kwinana at Kewdale on Thursday 28 December 2023. They will pause at Forrestfield to pick up more wagons before heading to Hampton (near Kalgoorlie). **Left:** Q4016 on three BIS Ammonia Anhydrous tank wagons at Kwinana Beach on Sunday 31 December 2023. The wagons are added at Kwinana to the Murrin Murrin Sulphur train to Malcolm on the Leonora Branch.



Above: CBH025 and CBH001 at High Wycombe just north of Forrestfield on Thursday 28 December 2023 hauling 5K03 empty grain to York CBH.
Below: Aurizon's Q4011 and Q4004 are on 7S57 empty grain heading towards Forrestfield and seen at Thornlie on Sunday 30 December 2023. The two dual-gauge lines are the freight tracks, built on a new alignment to allow construction of the new Metronet Thornlie- Cockburn link, in the space on the left.





Above: P2503 and P2505 are loading grain at Carnamah CBH on Monday 5 February 2024. Once loading is completed the train will head to Geraldton Port.

Below: GL111, FL220 and C508 are on Watco's 3351 freight to Hampton on Tuesday 6 February 2024. FL220 is the former New South Wales Railways "Super Series" Clyde/EMD loco 42220.



February 2024

We headed off to Perth again on Monday 5 February 2024 and P2515 and P2504 were observed arriving into Mingenew CBH on 2G52 empty grain. P2503 and P2505 were loading 2G50 grain at Carnamah CBH and P2516 and P2514 on 2K55 empty grain were just arriving at Watheroo CBH. Once in the Perth metro area we saw ACD6046 and ACD6050 on 6SP1 passing through South Guildford heading to Forrestfield.

On the 6 February 2024 at Daddow Road, Kewdale GL111, FL220 and C508 were on 3351 train to Forrestfield where FL220 was removed, loading was then added for the trip to Hampton.

A move to Kalamunda Road saw ACD6054 and ACD6053 on 7MP1 to Forrestfield, a further move to Millendon got Q4011 on 3S59 empty grain heading towards Northam, P2514 (running long end leading) on 3117 empty grain to Avon Yard. In the other direction CBH120 and CBH122 were on a loaded grain to Kwinana.

A move away from Perth on Wednesday 7 February saw us at Beverley (on the Great Southern Railway to Albany). Beverley CBH has been home to 10 stored DBZ locomotives for several years. They were initially acquired by CBH and three were reactivated for a while on grain trains (DBZ's 2301, 2302 & 2305). The locos have since been acquired by Watco and they have decided to relocate them to the old CBH bin at Minnivale (used by Rail Heritage WA and Shire of Dowerin). As luck would have it DBZ2301, DBZ2312, DBZ2304 and AB1535 were getting ready to depart on 4WL2 loco transfer to Minnivale. A quick trip towards York allowed for a few photos to be taken on part of their journey.

This was the second such loco transfer and only DBZ2302, DBZ2308, DBZ2303, DBZ2306 and DBZ2307 were then still at Beverley. Two more transfer moves saw all the DBZ's moved.

Back in Perth on Thursday 8 February saw C503 and GML10 on the ILS container train arriving at Forrestfield from North Quay, Q4011 on 5S59 empty grain heading towards Northam through Millendon then Watco's DR1565 and DR1564 on a rail train on the former Midland Railway heading north. A move south to Herne Hill saw CSR012 and CSR008 on 2MP9 heading to SCT Forrestfield, and they were seen again at West Parade, South Guildford.

A change of scene on Friday 9 February saw us venture onto the South West main line to Bunbury. Because of all the Metronet works, the Armadale suburban line and the line through to Byford and then through to Mundijong is closed and as reported previously has meant the demise of the *Australind* services until the Armadale line works are complete.

Sections of the Armadale line have been lifted to facilitate new stations and Perth's own version of Victoria's Skyrail at several locations. The Armadale suburban line services are going to be extended to Byford and that section of line has been lifted to facilitate its reconstruction and electrification.

Back to train operations, I was keen to see some of the Alcoa bauxite trains that are loaded at Alcoa's Pinjarra refinery and run through to the Alcoa refinery at Kwinana. Alcoa have announced the Kwinana refinery will be closed with changes to commence in the second quarter of 2024. This will mean the end of the bauxite trains, which are made up of three consists, each hauled by an Aurizon S class, with each set generally running two return trips in a 24-hour period.

The Pinjarra to Kwinana alumina and caustic trains are expected to continue running, but the line from Kwinana will see a significant reduction in train movements once the bauxite trains cease.

The first sighting was S3305 on 6964 loaded bauxite to Kwinana, passing Mandella (just south of Mundijong) followed by S3310 on 6238 empty caustic train to Kwinana leaving Pinjarra. A quick side visit in Pinjarra allowed some photos of ADP103/ADQ121/ADP102 *Australind* cars in storage.

Our next train was not until Picton where we saw freshly painted P2508 on a loaded alumina train, also at Picton were stored *Australind* driving car ADP001 (this will be going to Rail Heritage WA at Boyanup) and ADQ122 intermediate car (to go to the City of Bunbury for community use).





Above: Aurizon's S3310 hauls 6238 empty caustic train through Pinjarra heading to Kwinana to reload on Friday 9 February 2024..

Below: Q4016, Q4019, 6023 and Q4010 are seen arriving into Forrestfield on 1157 empty fuel train from Kwinana to Kewdale on Sunday 11 February 2024. The fuel train is often used to bring locomotives to Forrestfield loco depot for attention.





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Although there are significant works around the metro area there are works also taking place around Bunbury with the Bunbury Outer Ring Road project. A new bridge is being built over the South West Highway and the railway together with various road connections between Brunswick Junction and Picton. These works need to be considered when photographing trains in that area due to traffic delays caused by these road works.

At Burekup we saw ACN4145 on 6832 loaded alumina train to Bunbury Port followed by P2502 on 6903 empty caustic train to Bunbury Port. Within Bunbury Port (P)2512 was loading another caustic train.

A move to Brunswick Junction saw P2513 on a loaded caustic train pass through along with ACN4152 on 6876 empty Alcoa alumina train. The next to come through was ACN4145 on an empty Worsley Alumina train to Hamilton and this train was photographed on the climb to Beela (on the Collie line). A cross at Beela saw ACN4173 on a loaded Worsley Alumina train to Bunbury Port coming the other way.

We started our trip back to Perth and got S3308 on a loaded lime train to Hamilton (Worsley Alumina) near Benger. The final sighting was S3303 on 6973 empty bauxite to Calcine (Pinjarra Alcoa) seen just north of Keysbrook.

Our first location for Sunday 11 February was Kalamunda Road, first

up CBH003 and CBH007 on 1K44 loaded grain to Kwinana, followed by CSR015 and SCT004 on 5MP9 to SCT Forrestdfield. Next in was Aurizon's GWU013 and ACD6047 on 5MP1 to Forrestdfield. A move south to the Daddow Road overbridge was necessary to get Q4016, Q4019, 6023 and Q4010 on 1157 fuel train from Kwinana to Forrestdfield. This train is often used to bring locomotives up from Kwinana to Forrestdfield.

We were heading back to Geraldton on Monday 12 February; however a brief stop was made at Herne Hill to get NR120 and NR50 on 7SP7 to Kewdale followed by SCT010 and CSR021 on 6MP9 heading to SCT Forrestdfield. As we made our way home P2515 and ACN4169 were stabled at Moora and were part of a light engine move from Narngulu to Forrestdfield. At Watheroo CBH023 and CBH011 were just starting to load grain on 2K56. At Carnamah CBH P2504 and P2510 were loading 2G51 grain (later it would head to Geraldton Port).

We had a visit to Mandurah on Thursday 15 February 2024 which enabled us to see P2516 and P2514 on 4K56 loading grain at Watheroo CBH and S3302 on 5971 empty bauxite to Alcoa Pinjarra passing through Mundijong. On our return the next day back to Geraldton we paused just west of Mundijong to see S3307 on 6966 loaded bauxite to the Alcoa Refinery at Kwinana.



Above: CBH023 and CBH011 are loading 4K56 grain at Watheroo CBH on Monday 12 February 2024. Watheroo CBH is the northern limit of the Kwinana Zone for CBH. The next bin north, at Marchagee, sees its grain delivered to Geraldton Port.

Below: Alcoa has announced the intended closure of its Kwinana Alumina Refinery. This means that the Pinjarra to Kwinana bauxite trains will cease during the second quarter of 2024. The three sets utilised have already been reduced to a two set operation. S3302 is on 5971 empty Bauxite seen passing through North Dandalup on Thursday 15 February 2024.

