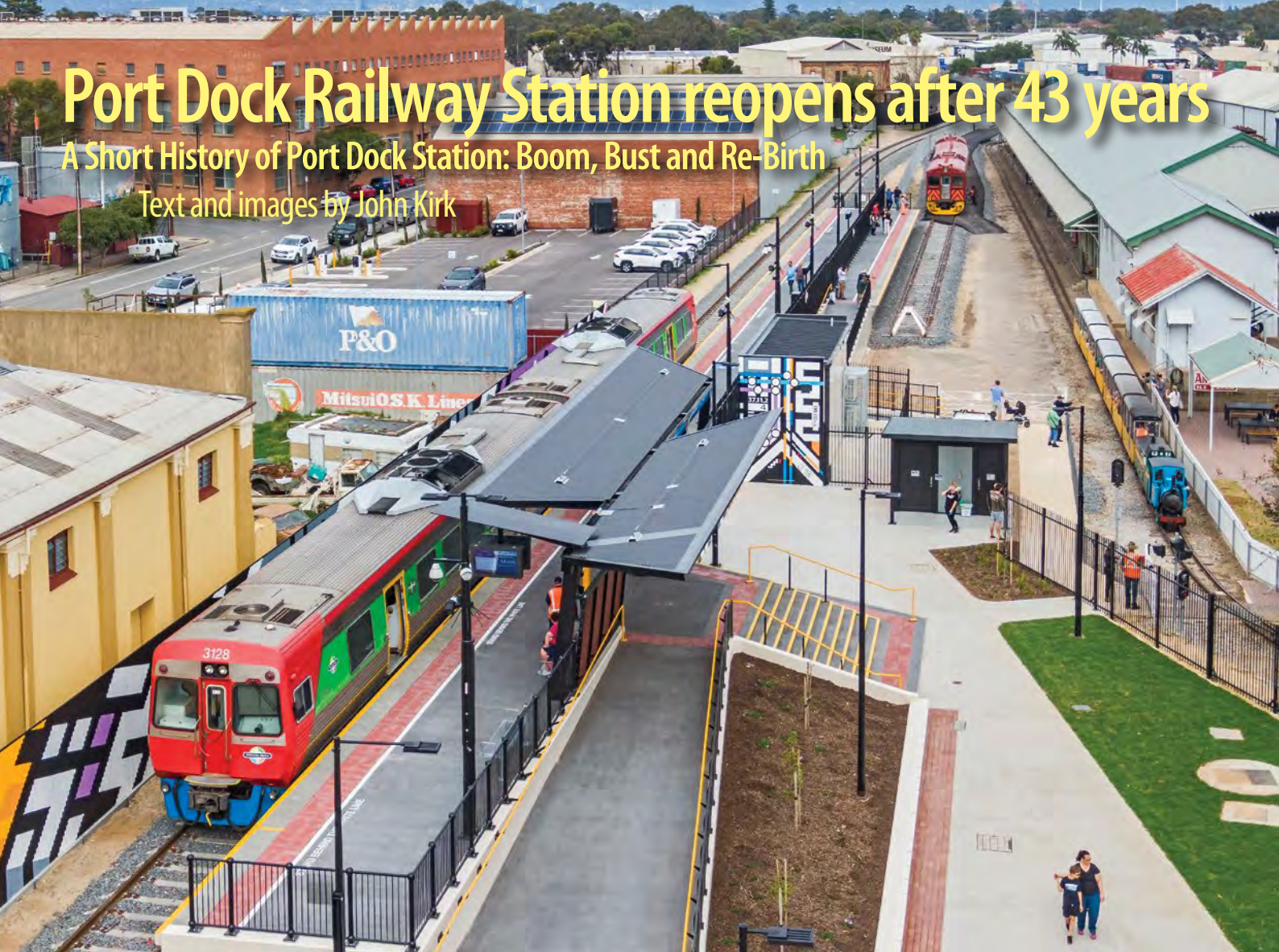


Port Dock Railway Station reopens after 43 years

A Short History of Port Dock Station: Boom, Bust and Re-Birth

Text and images by John Kirk



At precisely 06:39 early on Sunday morning 25 August, Adelaide Metro driver Alecia Robinson eased hybrid railcar set 3136/3135 out of Adelaide Central Railway Station Platform 5 and into history!

This was the first timetabled train service to run from the Adelaide CBD to Port Dock in central Port Adelaide since the line was decommissioned in 1981, 43 years ago.

As the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport, Tom Koutsantonis MP observed during the opening speeches, "it's rare to save rail lines, it's rare to see them rejuvenated, and it's rare to see them back in public hands" referencing the current process of returning Adelaide's suburban rail operations to government ownership.

The line from Adelaide to Port Adelaide (Port Dock) was opened in 1856 and was the first government-owned railway in the British Empire.

The first station named Port Adelaide was located on the corner of St Vincent and Lipson Streets. It provided the hub for a myriad of radiating rail lines serving the busy docks, Harts Mill, the many industrial warehouses and factories, and even Semaphore.

However, over many decades as businesses and facilities were relocated further away from the centre of the Port, it fell into decline. The original Port Dock railway station became one of the least patronised stations on the network and was closed in September 1981.

Not all was lost, as part of the site was re-purposed to accommodate the relocation of the Mile End Railway Museum that opened as the Port Dock Station Railway Museum in 1988, renamed the National Railway Museum in 2001. The new Port Adelaide Police Station and Magistrate's Court were built on the site of the old railway station building.

In 2016, the then State Labor Government considered two options for the future of the Outer Harbor line. The first was to electrify the heavy rail line and provide a short spur into central Port Adelaide. The second option would convert the rail line to light rail and add a new on-street branch to Semaphore.

\$16.4 million was allocated in the 2017 SA State Budget for a new Port Dock

Station in the heart of Port Adelaide and construction of a 1.0km (1100 yard) spur line off the Outer Harbor line using the existing corridor beside the National Railway Museum where a connection to the Outer Harbor line had been maintained.

However, the project was soon to become a "political football" when the incoming Marshall conservative government put it on hold in June 2019 citing a cost increase to \$40 million and instead, announced a "North-West Planning Study".

The Labor Opposition responded by making the construction of the new line and station an election promise and when re-elected to government, announced in 2022 that it would commit \$51 million for the construction of the new Port Dock Railway Line with a new station and bus interchange to provide integrated connections between transport modes.

Site preparations were re-commenced in June 2023 and the new line opened for timetabled services on August 25, 2024.

The Public Transport Projects (PTP) Alliance comprising of McConnell Dowell, Arup and Mott MacDonald, together with the Department for Infrastructure and Transport (the Department), delivered the project.

The re-opened Port Dock Line shares its route from Adelaide Central with the Outer Harbor and Grange lines to Woodville where the Grange line diverges and then to Alberton where the short 1km spur to Port Dock station branches off near Grand Junction Road.

The official opening of the new line, new station and bus interchange was held on Saturday 24 August 24, with many hundreds of people attending an open day with free entry to the three main museums in the Port Adelaide area (Rail, Aviation & Maritime), free sausage sizzles and plenty of entertainment!

Deputy Premier and Member for Port Adelaide, Susan Close MP performed the official opening assisted by Minister for Infrastructure and Transport Tom Koutsantonis MP, City of Port Adelaide Enfield Mayor Claire Boan, and NRM Executive Officer Bob Sampson.

Left (page 42): On Saturday 24 August we see "Three-Trains-In-One-Photo", with the New, the Old and the Mini. Adelaide Metro Hybrid Railcars 3128-3127 sit on display in the new Port Dock Station platform, with the two NRM Redhen railcars 321-400 on the museum's track in the middle background and the 457mm (18in) gauge museum train ride locomotives *Bub* #4 and *Ken* #7, with a healthy load of happy visitors, on the right. **Right:** The first timetabled train to the new Port Dock Station with Hybrid 3136-3135 departed Adelaide Central at 06:39 arriving at Port Dock at 07:01. Alecia Robinson had the honor of driving the first train. The same set ran the first departure out of Port Dock at 07:18 on Sunday 25 August arriving back in Adelaide Central at 07:41, a round trip of just over one hour.



In her remarks, Susan Close observed that the Port has many magnificent attractions but "the one thing missing from Port Adelaide was a decent train service to the heart of The Port. And now we have that investment in public transport right here in our wonderful Port Adelaide."

She added, "one of the great things about this train service is that it will run every half hour every day, even on weekends. It will be completely predictable."

In his supporting remarks, the Transport Minister enthused: "A regular rail service coming back to the heart of Port Adelaide is going to link it to the CBD, link it to the services in the city, and link the city back again to the Peninsula, revitalising the Port as a whole."

NRM Executive Officer Bob Sampson reminded the media and the crowd that the Museum was a major partner in the project and had worked closely with the SA Department for Transport, the Public Transport Project Alliance (PTPA) and the Council to arrive at an acceptable plan to overcome the many hurdles presented by the reduction of land, rail siding space, and carparking.

Mr Sampson added "The new station is ideally located in Port Adelaide, with numerous museums, attractions and businesses all within about a 10

minute walk. We are hopeful that the station will generate extra visitation to the railway museum and the Port in general."

The project has not been without considerable public criticism with a popular theme appearing on social media sites wrongly claiming that the project delivered the most expensive one kilometre of rail line in the country.

In fact, the project delivered much more than just a railway line and included numerous additions and alterations for the Museum, such as a new running track for the heritage trains, a shared platform at Port Dock railway station for NRM train operations, 400 sqm hard stand with 200m of rehabilitated multi-gauge tracks for loading/unloading the Semaphore loco and carriages and coal deliveries, and a new small sealed onsite car park for volunteers.

Also included in the cost of the project were: a new railway station and plaza at Baker Street; landscaping around the station; a new roadway to the SA Aviation Museum in addition to a new sealed car park area; a new cycle/footpath between SA Aviation Museum to access Barlow Crescent; and the complete reconstruction of the existing car park to accommodate the new bus interchange.



The Plaque Unveiling during the Official Opening on Saturday 24 August: From left to right: Claire Boan, Mayor, City of Port Adelaide Enfield; Tom Koutsantonis MP, Minister for Infrastructure and Transport; Susan Close MP, Deputy Premier, Member for Port Adelaide; Bob Sampson, NRM Executive Officer. The new Port Dock Station was officially opened by the Deputy Premier.