

Community Use of Vacant Rail Buildings

Community Use Program

Community groups across Victoria have an exciting opportunity to create unique and functional spaces to accommodate their activities. The Victorian Government's Community Use of Vacant Rail Buildings (Community Use) Program aims to revitalise some of Victoria's disused station buildings and precincts by making affordable space available for a range of community uses.



Architectural concept for refurbished Beaufort station



Donald station - available for community use



Art gallery in the restored Stawell station building

The potential use of each building will be considered on a case-by-case basis that takes into account the feasibility and sustainability of the intended activities, the cost to upgrade the building and the breadth of support for the proposed use. Key to the success of the program will be the strength of local government support and community uptake.

Many regional railway stations have iconic status and are highly valued by local communities. Some of these buildings are on non-operational train lines within town centres. These buildings are of particular interest to communities.

About the program

The Community Use Program is funded by the Victorian Government, which in 2011 committed \$10 million over four years.

The program is being managed by VicTrack, on behalf of Public Transport Victoria (PTV), and complements the work VicTrack already does under its Heritage Program to restore heritage railway buildings for community and commercial use.

The Community Use Program will initially focus on regional opportunities, with metropolitan opportunities to be explored at a later date.

How does the program work?

VicTrack is the custodial owner of the majority of built assets in the rail corridor.

VicTrack is engaging with local communities and councils to explore opportunities for the use of available rail buildings.

VicTrack is looking for unified support for the proposed use of rail buildings to ensure broad community benefit and dividend to the local community and region.

Applicants are required to submit a nomination form, including a business case, which demonstrates:

- feasibility and sustainability
- value for money (capital works)
- that the space will serve a variety of community uses
- that the proposal has the support of the local council and a lease is likely.

Once a potential use for the site has been identified, VicTrack will scope and cost capital works.

An in-principle lease agreement with the relevant local council or alternative entity will be negotiated prior to commencement of works.

If the application is successful, the capital works are funded (from the Community Use program) and the lease is subsidised for the life of the program (until June 2015).

What are the funding criteria?

1. The proposed works represent good value for money.
2. The building is suitable for a variety of community uses.
3. The proposed use has the support of local council.
4. Access to the building is available from non-operational areas of station platforms.
5. A nomination, including a business case, has been submitted by a community group/s.
6. The building is able to be restored to be safe and fit for use by community groups.

Rail buildings within town centres or activity centres will be preferred for community occupation.

What will it cost?

In most cases, the capital works will be fully funded by the program, with no requirement for council funding. The cost to lease each building is then determined on a case-by-case basis.

VicTrack can offer subsidies (for rent, insurance, utility costs etc) for the life of the program (until June 2015).

The aim is to help communities and councils build toward a sustainable tenancy beyond the funding period.

What determines whether the necessary works are 'good value for money'?

In assessing the value of the works, VicTrack will look for propositions that:

- deliver broad community benefit
- create a dividend to the local community and/or the region
- do not detract from other activities already occurring in a community
- add value to current endeavours or creates new activity
- activate rail stations positively.

Will any use be considered?

In the first instance, VicTrack will consider whether the building is fit for the intended purpose. Some proposed uses may not be suitable for either the railway environment or the particular building. Conversely, some rail buildings may not be able to be restored to be safe and fit for community use.

What is council's role?

It is vital that the proposed use of the building is supported by council to ensure the benefit to the community is maximised. VicTrack's preference is to enter into a lease agreement with the relevant local government authority to ensure that the appropriate levels of insurance are in place. VicTrack may consider leasing to an alternative appropriately constituted entity if leasing, insurance, service costs and management requirements can be met.

What does the community Nomination need to include?

Community groups and councils need to complete a Nomination Form which includes a business case that demonstrates:

- how the proposed use/s of the building can be sustained over a period of time
- how maintenance, insurance and service costs will be met during and beyond the funding period
- how the proposed use aligns to local community plans or strategies.

A nomination form is available via email from CommunityUse@victrack.com.au

Who is responsible for the building?

There are a number of ways that the responsibilities can be managed and carried out. With council as the Head Lessee, options for managing the building include:

- under a committee of management, appointed by the council
- by a sub-lease agreement with council (approved by VicTrack)
- as part of council's asset management program.

If an alternative Head Lessee is nominated this will be considered if suitable and workable governance and management structures are proposed.

What help can VicTrack provide?

In addition to helping communities explore opportunities for the use of vacant buildings, VicTrack:

- will, wherever possible, use materials and design that will minimise the operational cost and ongoing maintenance of the building
- will, as part of the lease, develop maintenance schedules to assist community tenants in meeting cyclical maintenance requirements for the building and its surrounds eg: cleaning, weeding
- will be responsible for fire plans and will work with council planning departments to accommodate any local planning issues
- will negotiate access to the rail corridor, if the building is on an operational rail line.

For more information

- ☎ 1800 095 800
- @ CommunityUse@victrack.com.au
- 🌐 www.victrack.com.au/communityuse
- f www.facebook.com.au/VicTrack
- 📱 @VicTrack_Vic

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