

# Budget rail for Hills

\$35m proposal to use existing line for transport solution



Mayor Ann Ferguson and Mount Barker District Council's infrastructure general manager Phil Burton at the local railway station.

Picture: Keryn Stevens

LYDIA KELLNER

AN Adelaide Hills council says a rail link from the city to Mount Barker could be established for just \$35m – a drop in the ocean compared to state government estimates that run into billions.

A Mount Barker District Council report found it would cost about \$10m to upgrade a section of unused track between the Australian Rail Track Corporation line, which goes to Belair, and Mount Barker station, which is used for the Victor Harbor SteamRanger tourist train.

Another \$25m would be required to buy new trains and carriages that could operate across both standard and broad-gauged track on the existing rail corridor, says the report, commissioned by Regional Development Australia and prepared by Rod Hook

& Associates.

It's a big difference from the government's estimate of \$6bn-\$12bn to build a rail link between the rapidly growing Hills centre and the city.

The council's much cheaper proposal includes modern, airconditioned trains and carriages with Wi-Fi.

With Mount Barker's population expected to exceed 60,000 residents over the next 15 years, Mayor Ann Ferguson said it was time to act.

"Recent South Australian governments have been strong advocates of expansion of the Mount Barker area, having presided over extensive population growth in the area," she said.

"The disappointing aspect is that the governments have not accepted the corresponding obligation to oversee the development of infrastructure to support this expansion."

Ms Ferguson said Infrastructure Australia was currently assessing a number of rail proposals from other states but not SA.

"SA seems to be alone in not taking up opportunities for developing and expanding rail options," she said.

While the use of the existing rail corridor is substantially more cost effective than other rail options, it does little to reduce travelling times because of its indirect route into Adelaide. As such, a longer-term solution should also be considered, the report said.

One option is constructing a new, more direct rail corridor from Mount Barker to the Adelaide Railway Station with a tunnel from Belair to Torrens Park.

At a cost of \$1bn to \$1.5bn, it would reduce the rail corridor length from 55km to 38km with a one-way travel time of about 45 minutes.

"Rail options exist and can be progressively developed," the report said.

"It is not acceptable to leave the Mount Barker and Adelaide Hills region southeast of the city with no operating services beyond Belair."

A copy of the report has been forwarded to Infrastructure SA.

It will form part of an independent review into future public transport options in the Hills.

A copy will also be forwarded to Infrastructure Australia to help source federal government funding.