



Strategic Plan [2026 -2030]

Don River Railway | November 2025



We respectfully acknowledge that we operate the Don River Railway on the traditional lands of Tasmanian Aboriginal People who are the custodians of the land. We will continue to honour this and pay our respects to their Elders past and present.

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Contents



Strategy on a Page	04
Vision & Purpose	06
Values	07
Strategic Goal One: The Volunteer Engine	08
Strategic Goal Two: Proudly Local & Connected	10
Strategic Goal Three: Consistent & Captivating	12
Strategic Goal Four: Stewardship in Place	16
Strategic Goal Five: Strengthened Governance Fundamentals	18



Don River Railway Strategy on a Page



Vision

To deliver Tasmania's Premier Historical Rail Experience

Purpose

Don River Railway connects people to Tasmania's proud railway heritage and resilient spirit through authentic restoration, meaningful storytelling, and community engagement.

Values



Accountability

We honour our commitments and deliver experience in all we do.



Care & Respect

We treat each other and our heritage with genuine care and respect.



Community Driven

We build strong connections within our team, with Devonport & across the community.



Opportunity

We embrace growth, innovation and new possibilities for the future.

Strategic Goals

The Volunteer Engine: Don River Railway will continue to thrive thanks to a dedicated, valued volunteer base that grows across generations and drives our future success.

Proudly Local & Connected: Don River Railway will be a celebrated part of Devonport, fostering belonging for locals, collaborations for stakeholders and opportunities for visitors to connect to our region.

Consistent & Captivating: Don River Railway will deliver an exceptional visitor experience that attracts people from around the world and keeps them coming back.

Stewardship In Place: Don River Railway will set the benchmark for heritage management and create a destination celebrated for its exceptional care, vibrant atmosphere, and enduring legacy.

Strengthened Governance Fundamentals: Don River Railway will operate with robust governance and modern systems, empowering confident, agile leadership and ensuring long-term sustainability.



Vision & Purpose



Vision

To deliver Tasmania's Premier Historical Rail Experience.

In 1971, a group of passionate volunteers formed the Van Diemen Light Railway Society to ensure that Tasmania's rail story would not be forgotten or just hidden away – and we are the custodians of this dream. Fundamental to what visitors can experience is riding on our lovingly faithfully restored collection of rolling stock, creating history you can ride while learning about what, and importantly who, has gone before us. This short journey is supported by a range of offerings, including mainline rail operations to further explore the North West Coast, a heritage museum experience worthy of our impressive collection of rolling stock and stories that can be explored at your own place in an interactive and engaging manner and a focus on events to drive community connection and engagement in these stories. Underpinning it all is our workshop spaces, where volunteers are welcomed to continue the legacy of our founders in restoring and maintaining our collection, ensuring Tasmania's railway history is connected with everyone who passes through Devonport.

Purpose

The Don River Railway exists to connect visitors with Tasmania's rich railway, engineering and economic history in an engaging and captivating manner. We are proud of this history and the stories that connect with this, and as custodians, are proud to lovingly collect, restore and present this in a meaningful and engaging manner that upholds our values. We will always operate restored historical rolling stock to Coles Beach, and while we are passionate about trains, Don River Railway is more than this – we are integral to the community, we showcase the resilient Tasmanian experience, and we create a connection to value what has gone before and shaped our island home – and the people who are proudly Tasmanian.



Accountability

We honour our commitments and deliver excellence in all we do.

We take pride in following through on our promises, planning ahead, and setting high standards for ourselves and each other. By being reliable, transparent, and proactive, we build trust within our team and with our community. We continually seek ways to improve, learn from challenges, and ensure our actions reflect the vision and values of Don River Railway.



Care & Respect

We treat each other and our heritage with genuine care and respect.

We foster a welcoming and inclusive environment where every person - volunteer, staff, visitor, and community member - is valued and supported. We honour the history of our collection and the stories it holds, ensuring restoration and preservation are carried out with integrity and historical sympathy. Our actions reflect kindness, safety, and a deep appreciation for both people and place, ensuring our legacy endures for future generations.



Community Driven

We build strong connections - within our team, with Devonport, and across our community.

Don River Railway is more than an organisation; it is a vibrant community built on camaraderie, collaboration, and shared passion. We actively engage with Devonport and the wider region, creating opportunities for volunteers and visitors to connect, contribute, and belong. Through our events, partnerships, and everyday interactions, we strengthen the bonds that make Don River Railway a cornerstone of local identity and pride.



Opportunity

We embrace growth, innovation, and new possibilities for the future.

We are committed to striving for excellence and seizing opportunities that advance our mission and enrich our community. By welcoming new ideas, investing in training and development, and encouraging creativity, we look ahead with optimism and ambition. We create pathways for everyone to contribute and thrive, ensuring Don River Railway remains resilient, relevant, and ready for whatever the future holds.

Strategic Goal One:

The Volunteer Engine



Don River Railway will continue to thrive thanks to a dedicated, valued volunteer base that grows across generations and drives our future success.

Volunteers are at the heart of everything we do at Don River Railway. The passion, time, and commitment our volunteers bring have made us what we are today, and ongoing efforts are the foundation of our future. As an organisation, we deeply appreciate and recognise the incredible value of our volunteers. We are committed to celebrating everyone's contributions, supporting growth, and ensuring the volunteer experience remains rewarding and meaningful.

Looking forward, we are excited to build on this strong foundation by enhancing the structures and support that empower volunteers to flourish. Our aim is not only to sustain our current group, but to invite and engage new volunteers who can join our journey and help carry the Don River Railway legacy forward for many years to come. Together, we will ensure Don River Railway continues to be a welcoming, vibrant, and inspiring place for all.

The Don River Railway will achieve Strategic Goal One by focusing on the following:

- 1.1. **Strategy:** Strengthen our human resources framework for volunteers by refining role definitions, induction, training, and ongoing engagement to support excellence.
Implementation: We're taking stock of our current systems, listening to all of the feedback, and identifying areas where we can do better. We will develop a clear project plan to ensure every volunteer has access to comprehensive inductions, regular training, and ongoing check-ins - helping everyone feel connected, supported, and empowered to share our passions and expertise.
Desired Outcome: Every volunteer at Don River Railway feels genuinely supported, connected, and valued as a vital part of our community.



Strategic Goal One:

The Volunteer Engine



- 1.2. Strategy: Elevate the volunteer experience by establishing a dedicated coordination role that celebrates and grows our volunteer family.
Implementation: As we enhance our volunteer systems, we'll identify individuals who can champion this role, or invite new faces to bring fresh energy and leadership. This role will not only ensure our support systems run smoothly, but also share the positive impact of volunteering at Don River Railway - helping others see the value and joy of joining our community.
Desired Outcome: Volunteering at Don River Railway is seamless, fulfilling, and focused on what matters most - enabling every individual to make the greatest impact, while welcoming and supporting new volunteers as part of the team.
- 1.3. Strategy: Shine a light on the incredible volunteering experience at Don River Railway to inspire new involvement across all roles.
Implementation: We will capture and share real stories from our volunteer community, highlighting the rewarding experiences and positive difference volunteers make. By showcasing these stories alongside clear opportunities, we'll invite new members of the Devonport community and beyond to join us, strengthening our team and the impact we have together.
Desired Outcome: Don River Railway is known throughout Devonport as a special place to volunteer, where people give back, grow, and belong.
- 1.4. Strategy: Create an inclusive & diverse volunteer experience that opens doors for all.
Implementation: In partnership with community groups, we will actively invite young people, new arrivals to Australia, and underrepresented groups to join our volunteer base. By supporting and learning from these new perspectives, we will make Don River Railway a place where everyone in Devonport feels welcome to get involved, not just train enthusiasts.
Desired Outcome: Every member of the community sees Don River Railway as a place where they can contribute, connect, and be valued.

This strategic goal will be fully realised when we double our active, rostered volunteer base from December 2025 levels, and a majority of our volunteer feels a deep sense of connection, value, and pride in being part of Don River Railway.

Strategic Goal Two:

Proudly Local & Connected



Don River Railway will be a celebrated part of Devonport, fostering belonging for locals, collaborations for stakeholders and opportunities for visitors to connect to our region.

Don River Railway will be an iconic part of Devonport's story, inspiring pride and a sense of belonging among locals and visitors alike. Our commitment is to celebrate the rich tapestry of our community, inviting everyone to share in our journey, contribute ideas, and build lasting memories through vibrant events and inclusive engagement. By prioritising genuine connections, we're opening new doors for organisations and individuals to collaborate, ensuring the railway stands as a shared achievement for Devonport.

The Don River Railway will achieve Strategic Goal Two by focusing on the following:

- 2.1. Strategy: Build strong assets for marketing and engagement that clearly resonate.
Implementation: The Don River Railway needs to develop a style guide to create a consistent approach to communications, and then support this with a marketing strategy that is focused on community engagement, outreach to tourists and visitors, and where regular community events drive return visitation.
Desired Outcome: That marketing and engagement for the Don River Railway occurs as planned and intended with a professional edge.
- 2.2. Strategy: Strengthen partnership with key tourism and community stakeholders.
Implementation: Seek to create a welcoming rhythm of engagement with local and regional partners such as Devonport Council, West by North West, Department of State Growth, Devonport Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Cradle Coast Authority, and other key regional players. By hosting collaborative breakfasts, forums, and co-created initiatives, the Don River Railway will nurture mutual appreciation, shared goals, and new pathways for organisations to engage in building Devonport's future.
Desired Outcome: That key stakeholders come to the Don River Railway around new opportunities in Devonport.

Strategic Goal Two:

Proudly Local & Connected



2.3. Strategy: Unite across Devonport's unique experiences.

Implementation: Recognising that similar audiences will be coming to other historical experiences across Devonport, the Don River Railway will forge informal partnerships and joint promotion efforts. By cross-promoting through signage and staff recommendations, we'll create a cohesive visitor journey that encourages guests to explore, learn, and contribute to multiple historic sites, amplifying the community's story and deepening engagement for all involved.

Desired Outcome: More visitors attend Don River Railway and spend more time in Devonport too.

2.4. Strategy: Enhance the function hire experience to link into the broader experience.

Implementation: Functions are a useful revenue source for Don River Railway, but this cannot be done in isolation from the overall story and experience. Each event should be an opportunity for organisations and guests to discover the history and heart of Don River Railway. Every gathering will be a chance for storytelling, connection, and building pride in what makes our railway unique.

Desired Outcome: That every person who attends an event at Don River Railway walks away with an understanding of the significance of what is contained on site.

2.5. Strategy: Create an events plan where Don River Railway is driving its own events to maintain engagement and drive repeat visitation.

Implementation: In alignment with our marketing strategy and regional tourism campaigns, Don River Railway will host and co-create events that bring people together, celebrate shared stories, and invite fresh perspectives. These events will be designed to encourage repeat visitation, deeper organisational involvement, and new ways to collaborate - ensuring our railway is a vibrant hub for all.

Desired Outcome: The Don River Railway becomes a dynamic centre for community engagement and pride, with organisations and individuals attending multiple times each year, forging new partnerships and connections as they share in our journey.

This strategic goal will be fully implemented and achieved when the Don River Railway is approached by key stakeholders proactively to engage, and when the Don River Railway is running eight of their own planned and produced events each year.

Strategic Goal Three:

Consistent & Captivating



Don River Railway will deliver an exceptional visitor experience that attracts people from around the world and keeps them coming back.

Recognising the Don River Railway collection has always been restored to share, and visitors help drive revenue to be sustainable, the same care that has been put into the restored collection must be put into the visitor experience. Through developing and refining the experience, this helps create a consistent experience that can be delivered by volunteers and be the key goal that underpins the journey towards being a premier tourism experience for Tasmania that can then be enhanced further with mainline operations along the North West Coast.

The Don River Railway will achieve Strategic Goal Three by focusing on the following:

- 3.1. Strategy: Create a consistent experience for the 3km journey to Coles Beach & back.
Implementation: With a select range of volunteers, create a script that can be shared during the 3km journey, either read out loud or played as a recording, that allows the stories of the area, the history of the railway and other key details to enhance the experience on offer. This should be tested and refined before widely being used, to create a consistently strong experience.
Desired Outcome: To create a more consistent experience for this key aspect of the tourism offering, prioritising the values of the organisation and reducing the reliance on volunteers to deliver this when they are not well suited to do so.
- 3.2. Strategy: Tell & showcase the evolution of Tasmanian railways across the whole site.
Implementation: Recognising the strength of the collection that the Don River Railway already has, there should be a focus on what can be highlighted and focused upon that showcase this evolution, including what assets are already in the collection to showcase this. Once identified, this evolution should be showcased through interpretation panels that both capture the history and the lived experience stories, that allows visitors to learn more while they explore the site and build upon what is offered on the train.
Desired Outcome: That visitors without a high level of railway knowledge can fully appreciate the collection that is on the Don River Railway site in a self-guided experience that elevates the history and the personal stories.

Strategic Goal Three:

Consistent & Captivating



3.3. Strategy: Increase the engagement with tourism industry events, especially those that offer tourism training and product refinement.

Implementation: Begin by showcasing a commitment to a quality tourism product and accessing the support available, including joining the Tourism Industry Council of Tasmania (TICT) and asking for support from West by North West. Through this engagement, ensure that key staff, volunteers and board members are offered opportunities to engage with training that is on offer, to help use this knowledge to develop the tourism product that is offered. This knowledge will also include aligning the tourism marketing around key campaigns and messages, proudly positioning the visitor experience in alignment with other tourism experiences.

Desired Outcome: Delivery of a quality tourism experience that learns from others who operate in the same way, but with a level of engagement that enhances and strengthens what is offered through the Don River Railway.

3.4. Strategy: Explore inclusive and interactive exhibits to drive new groups to visit the Don River Railway.

Implementation: With a select group of people within Don River Railway alongside reaching out to key organisations to support what can be achieved, look to develop new inclusive experiences. Two target groups can be around STEAM based experiences for students that encourage school groups to visit Don River Railway and one that encourages families to stay longer on site during the weekend, and to create an experience that resonates with people from different language groups, encouraging international non-English speaking visitors to feel welcomed on site.

Desired Outcome: To expand the range of audiences that come on site, and that they will stay longer due to an experience that suits this wider range of needs.



Strategic Goal Three:

Consistent & Captivating



3.5. Strategy: Pursue mainline operations to strengthen and diversify the product offering of the Don River Railway.

Implementation: Recognising that it has long been an aspiration of the Don River Railway to undertake tourism operations on the mainline, carefully engage leaders in this space to develop project management plans to help the Don River Railway connect up with mainline operations. This will require significant upgrades to deliver, some of which are contained in other aspects of this strategic plan, however achieving this aspect of the strategy will ensure a diverse range of offerings that extend into Devonport and along the North West Coast that will further enhance the reputation and visitor experience of the Don River Railway.

Desired Outcome: To deliver at a consistently high standard one of Devonport's most loved experiences.

This strategic goal will be fully implemented and achieved through doubling the number of visitors to the site (based on the 2025 level), due to increased connections into the sector and a better quality experience, and delivering an experience that can be nominated for a Tourism award and/or a ATHRA Award.



Strategic Goal Four:

Stewardship in Place



Don River Railway will set the benchmark for heritage management and create a destination celebrated for its exceptional care, vibrant atmosphere, and enduring legacy.

The Don River Railway's commitment to managing its site and cherished collection is at the heart of a welcoming, inspiring experience for both volunteers and visitors. By building on our proud foundations, we continually strive to not only reflect our organisational values but elevate the standard of quality we deliver. As our collection grows and our space evolves, purposeful stewardship will ensure the organisation thrives for generations - shaping a precinct that is admired and sought-after throughout Tasmania and beyond.

The Don River Railway will achieve Strategic Goal Four by focusing on the following;

- 4.1. Strategy: Create an acquisition and asset management policy that is implemented across the whole organisation.

Implementation: In coordination with key volunteers and those with a legacy within the organisation, the Don River Railway will create an acquisition policy that provides a clear framework on how new additions to the collection are handled and managed, alongside a consistent asset management policy to understand how everything is cared for. This will help rationalise the collection that is at Don River Railway's site to one that the organisation can actually host and take care of to the high standard that it deserves, and understands the importance of every single piece in the collection.

Desired Outcome: That the Don River Railway knows what they are restoring, what they are seeking and how it fits into the story of the story that is told.



Strategic Goal Four:

Stewardship in Place



4.2. Strategy: Create a masterplan for the Don River Railway site that creates a clear approach to future developments, with a focus on the visitor experience that is offered, undercover space to treat the collection with respect and an integrated events strategy.

Implementation: With the input of key stakeholders, Don River Railway will develop a comprehensive masterplan for the site that takes into account the asset policy above and what needs to be held on site, the visitor experience that could be created through a museum space, undercover workspace and storage of the rolling stock, and an integrated events approach. The events approach should be integrated into the tourism and heritage experience, where the indoor space adds to the experience offered with outdoor space and public gathering areas outside that add to this in an integrated fashion. Once the masterplan is in place, then look to coordinate all future infrastructure funding to work with this strategy, removing a short term approach of using grant funding to meet the current need rather than planning the site for future decades.

Desired Outcome: Infrastructure developments are completed with a future strategy that enhances the site, rather than locks in buildings that prevent future developments.

4.3. Strategy: An approach to site beautification that respects the asset collection on site.

Implementation: In alignment with the masterplan, site beautification should be prioritised around the way the site is presented, gardens and landscape elements. This could involve a new group of volunteers to support these tasks which can help present the site to a higher level that reflects the care that is put into the restoration of the collection.

Desired Outcome: The care and respect of the history of Don River Railway is understood from the moment people walk on site.

This strategic goal will be fully implemented and achieved through a clear understanding by the board and management that they can say no when it comes to acquiring new assets, and that everything has a clear purpose in the collection.

Strategic Goal Five:

Strengthened Governance Fundamentals



Don River Railway will operate with robust governance and modern systems, empowering confident, agile leadership and ensuring long-term sustainability.

With the strategic plan providing a clear direction, the board of Don River Railway is well positioned to further strengthen governance and enhance the collection and utilisation of key information to support the organisation's ongoing success.

The Don River Railway will achieve Strategic Goal Five by focusing on the following;

- 5.1. Strategy: Proactively embed strong financial systems and processes to ensure the organisation's financial sustainability.

Implementation: Continue refining and streamlining financial systems, including delegations, budgets and approval processes, so the organisation operates confidently within its means and is empowered to invest in its future.

Desired Outcome: Don River Railway remains financially healthy and able to confidently allocate resources to support its goals.

- 5.2. Strategy: Leverage the power of subcommittees to broaden inputs to the governance and leadership of the Don River Railway as a community asset.

Implementation: Begin by establishing a robust framework for subcommittees that clarifies their creation, functions, authority, and reporting responsibilities. Once clear documentation is in place, further develop subcommittees to focus on critical aspects and emerging opportunities, ensuring each area receives dedicated attention and effective oversight. This progression allows external expertise and broader perspectives to be integrated into vital discussions, strengthening management and supporting the board in achieving strategic objectives. Subcommittees may address functions, events, mainline operations, and other areas identified in recent meetings and the strategic plan, all while the board retains final decision-making authority.

Desired Outcome: Subcommittees are respected, well-integrated elements of the organisation's management, delivering valued contributions and clear communication with the board. This approach provides strong leadership, maximises oversight and expertise throughout the organisation, and maintains a clear focus on core governance responsibilities.

Strategic Goal Five:

Strengthened Governance Fundamentals



This strategic goal will be fully realised by establishing strong leadership and a supportive structure, giving the board the confidence and capability to achieve the other four strategic goals



