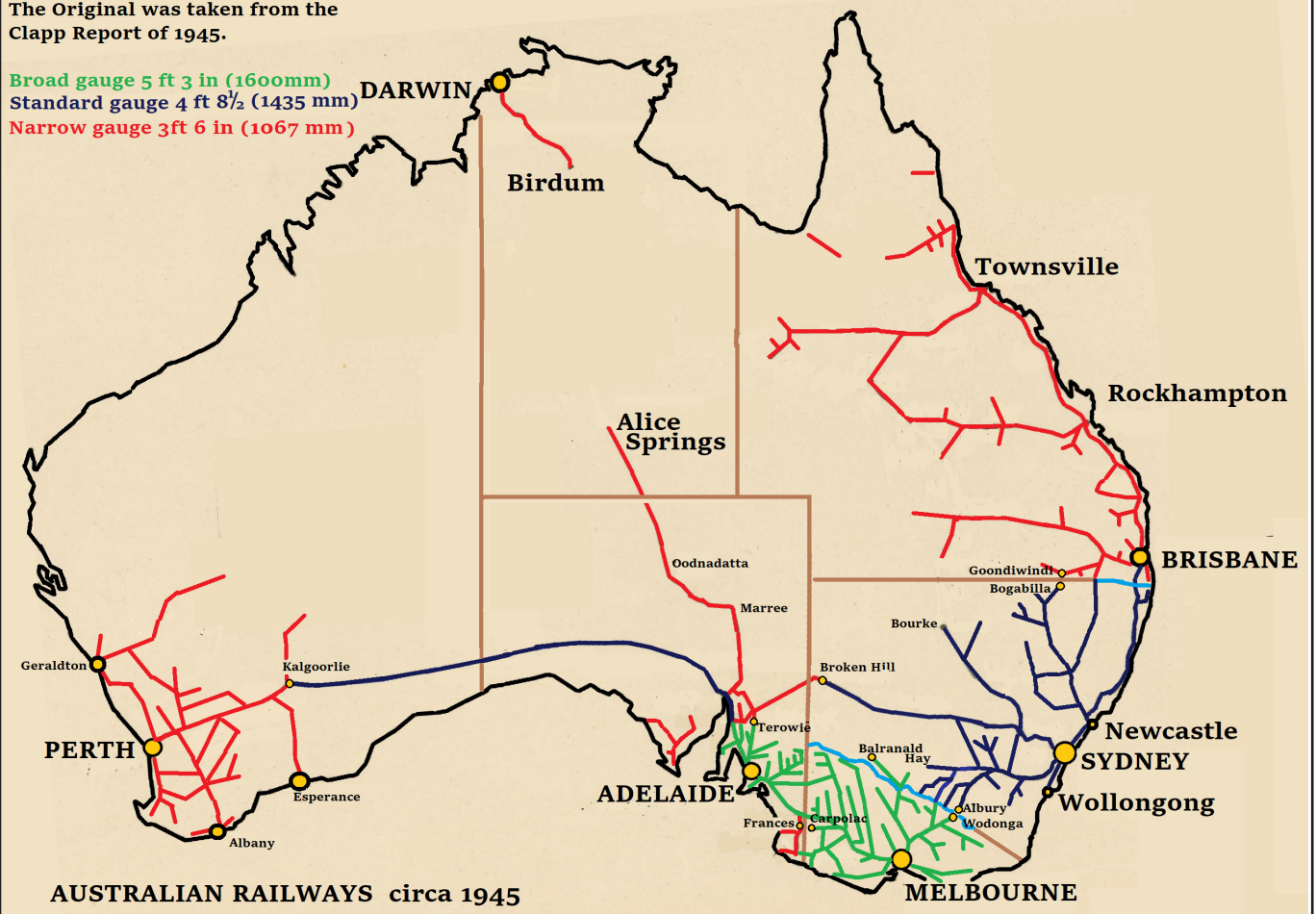


The Original was taken from the Clapp Report of 1945.

Broad gauge 5 ft 3 in (1600mm)
Standard gauge 4 ft 8½ (1435 mm)
Narrow gauge 3ft 6 in (1067 mm)



CHAPTER 21

THE CLAPP PLAN AND THE PROPHECY OF SANTAYANA.

The 1945 report by Sir Harold Clapp was the most thorough investigation of a standardisation project to that time and there have been many train-writers in recent time who have drawn on the vast repository of 'might have been stories' to delight their readers.

The plan involved the conversion to standard gauge of all the broad-gauge lines of Victoria and South Australia. It also provided for the conversion of South Australia's narrow-gauge lines in the South-East of the State and the line from Port Pirie to Broken Hill. Western Australia's line from Kalgoorlie to Perth was also included.

Finally, there was a new standard-gauge line from Birdum in the Northern Territory to Camooweal on the Queensland border and then proceeding into New South Wales by way of 'back-o-Bourke'.

There were many similarities between the recommendations and outcome of the Garvan Royal Commission of 1921 and Clapp Report. The former had come to nothing because the states could not agree.

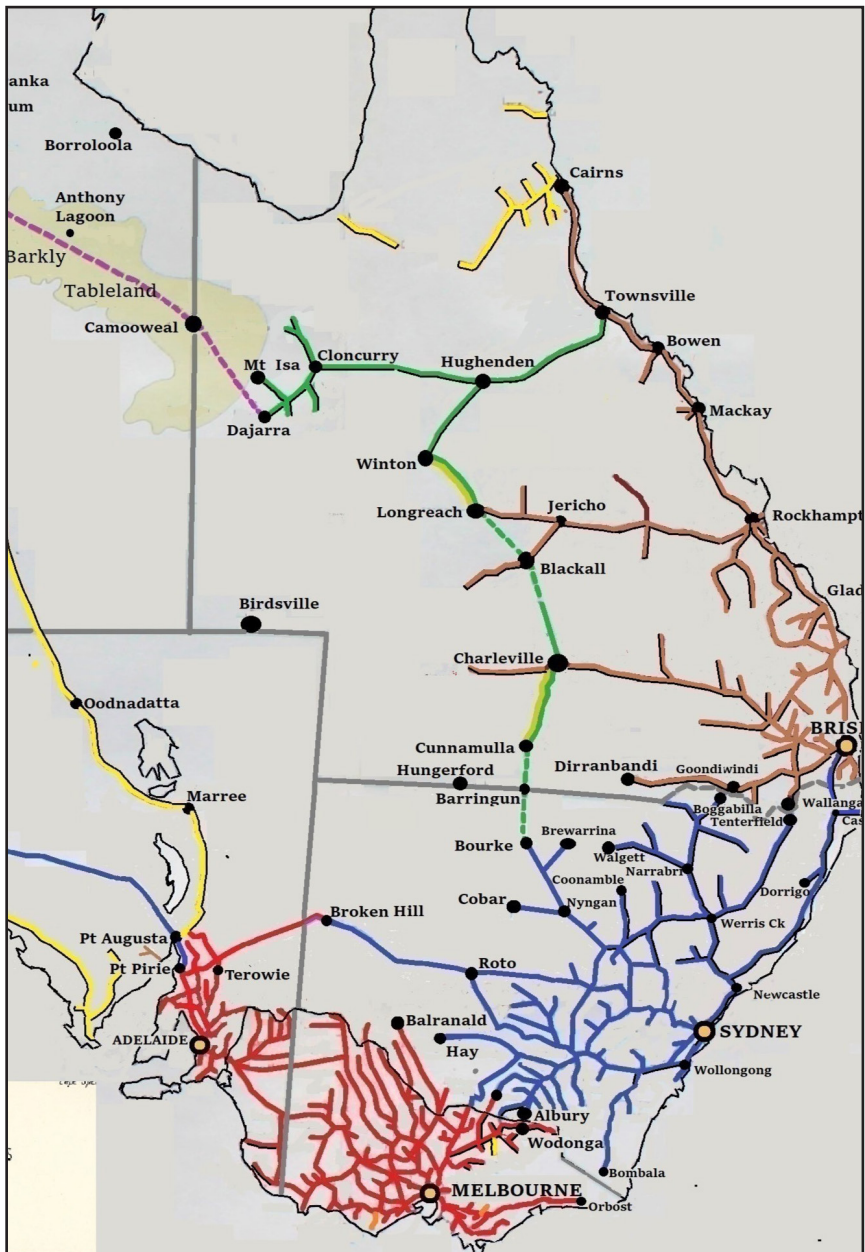
A DIGITALLY ENHANCED COPY OF THE MAP IN THE CLAPP REPORT

Sir Harold Clapp would have been quite aware of that because Victoria, in 1921, had been the most vocal of all the states in voicing opposition. At that time, Clapp had been recently appointed in 1920, to the position of Chief Commissioner of the Victorian Railways.

The 1945 report had been commissioned by the Chifley Government and arising out of concern that the nation's railways had not been ready for the demands placed on them by the war and in the acknowledgement that the diversity of railway gauges was central to that disability. The task of implementing the recommendations of the report was to be by Eddie Ward, the Federal Minister of Transport and External Territories. Ward's next move was to enlist the support of the states.

Now, those readers who have followed the story so far will immediately ask what inducements would be offered to the states because, without the support of the states, this grand plan would remain a paper relic. It was as if they were thumbing their noses at history and following the same old long-travelled track.

There is an element of poetic justice in that statement about the paper relic because it is evident that the availability of paper stock at the close of the war was not good and the pages of the Clapp Report have become very fragile and are deteriorating.



SIR HAROLD CLAPP'S PLAN FOR QUEENSLAND

This map shows the proposed standard-gauge railway route that originated at Birdum in the Northern Territory. Clapp's plan had been to convert the narrow-gauge North Australia Railway to standard gauge. The line would then proceed through Queensland with junctions and break of gauge locations. It would join the New South Wales network at Bourke. Sir Harold clearly favoured this route as it would generate more cattle traffic than the line through Alice Springs. But he had evidently disregarded the South Australians who had previously become quite cranky at any mention of 'their' transcontinental railway being cancelled or delayed. The broken lines on the map show the new construction.

Philip Laird has written in the *Bulletin of the Australian Railway Historical Society*, December 1995, *The Clapp Report - Fifty Years On*, with the comment that there had been a case for New South Wales to have been offered more favourable terms. Queensland, too, had little to gain and withdrew from the negotiations. That presented an opportunity for Ward to revise his map. And the line from Birdum to Camooweal and into Queensland and Dajarra via 'back-o-Bourke' was removed and the railway north from Alice Springs was redrawn on the railway map.

So, harking back to the chapters about *The Curse of the North-South Transcontinental Railway*, readers will immediately be left asking what was Sir Harold Clapp thinking when he was drawing his map and erased the dotted line running north from Alice Springs? He seems to have had no regard to history and South Australia's almost religious fixation on the completion of the north-south transcontinental railway. And sure enough, when the report went out to the states there was a loud protest from South Australia.

Ward approached the states with an offer that the Commonwealth would pay 50% and the other 50% would come from the states, which would pay on a per-capita basis. Somewhat unexpected was a hostile response from Premier Wise in Western Australia who had long been a strong and passionate voice of discontent over the Commonwealth pushing the smaller states around.

New South Wales was the most populous state and would be paying most but they had no track to convert.

I had embarked on this book of *The Break-of-Gauge* initially with the intention that an up-to-date history was long overdue. My target market was intended to be, what I called the rail fraternity, railway enthusiasts and members of heritage organisations.

I had done the research and writing of chapters, one at a time starting with the Sydney Railway Company and slowly working my way forward. It became a journey of enlightenment and discovery and I hope that readers who have followed the narrative up to this point will have enjoyed the same experience.

In July 2023 I posted some complete chapters on the website with the intention of giving potential customers an idea of the standard of content. Then there was Chapter 12, *Nuts & Bolts People*, that was completed that month. It was something of an act of altruism that I posted that chapter on the website with the intention that it may be freely downloaded by all.

As more and more people looked at these chapters it became evident that the interest in the book was swinging around to people in positions where there was a serious desire to get on top of the gauge problem.

The story up to now has been a litany of excuses rather than any determination to seriously tackle the problem, or when there has been some sincere effort, it has either failed completely or has fallen well short of the intended result. The people who share my frustration have generally been from the rail industry but there have been some politicians who are following progress.

As this story has unfolded there have been four lessons emerge, and it is particularly for the movers in the rail industry and the politicians that I expand these lessons.

The first is that the colonies/states have been unable to see beyond their borders. There was good reason for that in colonial times but we have been a federation now for more than 120 years. It follows that if we are going to fix the problem, we must erase borders from the railway map of Australia and for this to be a federal initiative, directed and financed by the Commonwealth. And it is imperative that the Commonwealth recognise that their dealings with the states in the past have been rather heavy-handed. In future the dealings between the Commonwealth and the states will need to be in a spirit of bonhomie.

The second is that there seems to have been a failure of planning and co-ordination. Of these first two lessons I shall not make further mention.

The third lesson is that to procrastinate or do nothing is to condemn the state railway networks to a level of inefficiency to the extent that they follow South Australia's fate of seeing the disintegration of the non-metropolitan rail enterprise. I perceive Victoria to be particularly vulnerable. And if Victoria goes the same way as South Australia, there will a transport void in the vast area of those two states, and road transport will roll in and there will be many more road trucks coming out of the region into the other states. The effect will go beyond South Australia and Victoria and will impact negatively on the rail business of the other mainland states. In effect, we will be handing over to road transport.

South Australia has already had a policy by earlier state governments to run down its rail infrastructure and have a cosy relationship with the road transport industry. But we are now in a climate where we must address the efficiency of the transport task that we get out of every litre of diesel fuel.

The fourth lesson has been a complete failure to heed the Prophecy of Santayana. George Santayana was a Spanish-born philosopher whose career was mostly in America about the commencement of the 20th century. There appear to be variations of his prophecy but the central theme is constant:

Those who cannot learn from the errors of history are doomed to repeat them.

Quite independently of my present writing, I have noted a recent paper (16 February 2023) related to the sorry state of Victoria's Murray Basin project that ends with the following:

L'histoire se répète et se ressemble.

History repeats itself and resembles itself.

I was obviously not the only one who had noted the failure of the project to include some history lessons. Both Sir Harold Clapp and Minister Eddie Ward had failed to heed the lessons of history. The remnants of the Clapp plan were New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia, moving forward with what was called the Rail Standardisation Agreement of 1946. But New South Wales pulled out. Ward continued to negotiate with Victoria and South Australia, but eventually Victoria withdrew.

More about the Murray Basin Project in Chapter 24.

SOUTH AUSTRALIAN RAILWAYS narrow-gauge locomotive No. 409. It was a Beyer Garratt and 409 was the last steam locomotive to enter service on the South Australian Railways. Pictured here at Terowie JLW.





CHANGING TRAINS AT PETERBOROUGH The train on the far track is the westbound *Indian Pacific* which has unloaded many mail bags that would have been from Broken Hill. On the near track is the Bluebird railcar, on the broad-gauge, that will travel to Adelaide via Terowie. When they constructed the Peterborough platform they gave themselves plenty of room. Quite different to the platform at Terowie. JLW

In the next chapter we will examine the developments in South Australia under the leadership of 'Uncle Tom' Playford.

Within the chapters of this book are many examples of what hasn't worked. We really want to know if there is something from the pages of history that did work. Yes, and it is waiting there for our consideration. As far as I can determine it has never been explored as a possibility for Australia.

That one lesson from history that worked was the Railway Regulation (Gauge) Act of 1846. It prohibited the construction of any railway in England to a gauge other than the 4 ft 8½ in.

Harding, in his closing comments of the chapter, *Constitutional Powers of the Commonwealth*, wrote that he had put the question to Sir George Knowles, when Commonwealth Solicitor-General, regarding the power of the Commonwealth. The reply was:

The Commonwealth could enact valid legislation to provide for a uniform railway gauge. What are the views of the Commonwealth Crown Law advisers. No one seems to know. (It is not clear whether that last sentence was from Knowles or Harding. JLW).

I ask if this is the way forward? It won't be immediate in fixing the problem but offers the possibility of being somewhere to start.

Let us now imagine that this idea had been put, as a matter for consideration by Sir Harold Clapp, and had been the one item that had become established policy. We will use South Australia to look at those railways that have been built to a non-conforming gauge (5 ft 3 in or 3 ft 6 in) subsequent to 1945. How would it have worked?

The Wolseley to Mount Gambier conversion (and branches to Kingston and Millicent) in the early 1950s could not have proceeded with a widening of 3 ft 6 in to 5 ft 3 in gauge. Converting to 4 ft 8½ in would have resulted in no reduction of the number of break-of-gauge stations. Wolseley and Mount Gambier would still be break-of-gauge stations. The difference would have been one of ridding ourselves of the old 3 ft 6 in track. The new 4 ft 8½ in line would have been a strong modern railway, ready to 'plug in' when the mainline was converted. It would have precipitated some operational difficulties, but no worse than what were being experienced with the narrow-gauge operation. The hope would have been that it could have generated some hurry-up to the conversion of the Adelaide to Melbourne mainline and the line from Mount Gambier to Heywood in Victoria.

Peterborough to Terowie was converted from 3 ft 6 in to 5 ft 3 in at the time of the standardisation of the Broken Hill line, that was completed in 1970. Could this have been the trigger to convert the railway from Adelaide to Terowie ahead of the standard-gauge line from Adelaide to Crystal Brook? The Adelaide to Terowie line was historically the mainline to the north and saw a lot of traffic destined for Sydney when it was a broad-gauge line between 1970 and 1982. That was the year of the standard gauge connection between Adelaide and Crystal Brook. The Sydney traffic now goes via Crystal Brook. Adelaide to Peterborough via Crystal Brook is 282 km. It was 248 km to Peterborough via Terowie. It could possibly cut off an hour. That may not sound a lot but rail is presently in a tight contest with road transport and that hour matters. There is also a lot of grain traffic that comes from that region that now goes by road.

The line to the Chowilla Dam site. It was built in the late 1960s specifically for the purpose of the stone haul for the construction of the dam that didn't happen. It was about 20 km and branched off the existing broad-gauge line near Paringa. There is a belief that it only saw one train, and universal opinion is that it should never have been built.

But if it had been built as a 4 ft 8½ in line it would have started a chain of events. It would have required conversion of the Murraylands line from Tailem Bend, and that in turn would have required conversion of the Loxton line. The stone was coming from a quarry at Kinchina, which was just east of Murray Bridge. The likely solution to that would probably have been to lay a parallel track alongside main (5 ft 3 in) interstate line between Tailem Bend and the quarry. Crossing the Murray would have been a challenge but it could have been done with third rail or gauntlet track over the bridge. Could it have precipitated conversion of the Adelaide to Melbourne mainline?

There were two other major railway construction projects in South Australia. There was the narrow-gauge line from Thevenard to the gypsum deposits near Penong in 1966. The second, again a narrow gauge construction, was the private line to the Iron Duke in 1990. These lines, if they had been built as 4 ft 8½ in gauge, would not have caused any flow-on to the main network. The examples that I have used above have been a fanciful journey of musings but it has served the purpose of showing how a statute requiring the adherence to the 4 ft 8½ in gauge could rapidly bring about meaningful change.

There were some who were critical of Clapp's plan of converting all the broad-gauge lines of Victoria and South Australia to standard gauge. Their concern was the cost, coupled with many years of disruption to the travelling public, and thus made it unattractive to the states. One of these was Bill Wentworth, the Member for Mackellar in the House of Representatives.

Wentworth saw the need for the standard-gauge connection of all the mainland capitals and with world-class luxury expresses using those routes. Harding (page 99) reports that Wentworth had been the only private member, at that time, who had taken up the matter of a uniform railway gauge. He went on to explain that the matter of uniform railway gauge was low down on the list of priorities of the politicians as it had no organised sectional interests to serve when compared with the claims for government expenditure in other directions .

He commented that Wentworth's activity on the matter was 'all the more commendable'.

But Ron Fitch saw Wentworth from a different direction. He described Wentworth as 'something of an amateur railway buff' and could not see anything beyond intercity working to the detriment of the regional lines. That led to the gauge conversion of the Albury to Melbourne line that was opened in 1962. The Wentworth Plan was also to include the standardisation of the Port Pirie to Broken Hill line, and the line from Kalgoorlie to Perth. We will consider them in the next chapter. Ron Fitch closed his commentary on Bill Wentworth with 'it is a pity that he ever became involved'

Nothing is more enduring than change.

There are already battery-powered locomotives in Australia. I don't know if there are battery-powered road trains but I'm sure they are coming. Intuitively, I know that if we have a battery-powered locomotive, and a battery-powered truck alongside it, and each of them has an equivalent charge of power from a solar farm, that the locomotive will pull more payload further than the truck. But intuitively I also know that road transport has the advantage of generally shorter distances compared to rail. The rail network is burdened by the routes that were deemed appropriate more than 100 years ago and of course, there is the inefficiency of the break-of-gauge. The challenge before us is to convince the politicians to spend big money on smarter rail routes and fixing the break-of-gauge. If that happens, then rail is a winner.

THE WESTLAND AT PERTH. 18 January 1969, about to do its overnight run to Kalgoorlie where it would connect with the Trans-Australian Express. One year on, almost to the day, freight was running coast to coast. **JLW**

