



Still suffering: Vicki and Karl Winkel.

Picture: DARREN SEILER

Vicki Winkel's injuries

- Upper jaw separated from cranium
- Left eye socket shattered
- Nose broken into many small pieces and pushed back to her adenoids
- Lacerations around left eye
- Fractured little finger

Her rebuild at The Alfred hospital

Operation 1 – soon after the accident

- Reattach upper jaw to cranium
- Reconstruct eye socket fractures
- Reattach major pieces of nasal bones to cranium
- Insert titanium plates to rebuild cheekbone

Operation 2 – one week later

- Remanipulate facial structures

Operation 3 – one year later

- Reconstruct nose

This 3D image was taken 10 months after the accident.

Train crash survivor robbed of life

WHEN Vicki Winkel looks in the mirror, she sees an unfamiliar woman.

And, since the Kerang train crash that nearly claimed her life, she also struggles to recognise the person on the inside.

Lucky to be alive, but daily facing the demons the crash unleashed, Mrs Winkel is one of the most seriously injured survivors of the disaster that killed 11 people.

She is the third victim from the crash to launch civil legal action against the driver of a truck that ploughed into the V/Line train north of Kerang in June 2007.

A Supreme Court jury cleared the truck driver, Christiaan Scholl, of all charges on June 13.

Ruth Lamperd

Mr Scholl's insurer, the Transport Accident Commission, will start mediation with Mrs Winkel, 51, in about a month over her civil compensation claim.

She will never work again and her husband, Karl, who has given up his job working on rural properties, has become her full-time carer.

They went close to bankruptcy after the accident and have struggled to pay the mortgage on their Merbein house on the modest \$470 pension that they each receive every fortnight.

Mrs Winkel doesn't remember the accident. Eleven of the passengers in her carriage died. Two of them were



New battle: civil cases flow from the Kerang train crash.

happy little girls sitting across the aisle from her.

"I can remember their smiling little faces and thought how well-behaved they were," Mrs Winkel said.

She was on a trip from Mildura to Melbourne to sup-

port her daughter through some day surgery. But it was she who ended up in hospital.

Mrs Winkel was taken to The Alfred hospital with horrific injuries to her face and swelling to her brain.

The Alfred hospital's head

of maxillo-facial surgery, John Redman, said Mrs Winkel's recovery was exceptional, given her injuries.

"She has good eye function and sight and damage to her brain was minimal considering what could have been," he said.

Mrs Winkel was in a coma for six days, undergoing major facial surgery to rebuild her shattered bones. About 12 titanium plates and screws were inserted to hold the surgeons' work together.

She says she's been told she will suffer numbness on the left side of her face and reduced facial muscle control for the rest of her life.

"I think about the accident every day of my life. Every time I get up and go to the

shower, I look at myself in the mirror and I see a different person," Mrs Winkel said.

"I'm afraid of crowded places now. I spend a lot of time at home."

Fighting back tears, she said she tried to climb a rung of an invisible ladder each day, but came crashing down when Mr Scholl's court case was being heard.

"I can't move forward because he got nothing for what happened," she said.

A TAC spokeswoman said the insurer had received two civil damages claims for the Kerang rail disaster. One was resolved last year.

She said the TAC expected most damages claims would be settled through dispute resolution or mediation.