



# RTBU

Strategic Fleet Policy Section  
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## **SUBMISSION TO THE STRATEGIC FLEET TASKFORCE**

The Rail, Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) appreciates this opportunity to submit to the Strategic Fleet Taskforce.

The RTBU is the principal union in the public transport and rail freight industries, with over 30,000 members around Australia. Our members work on the frontline of Australia's transport sector and bring unique insights to transport policy issues.

Our union firmly believes that the presence of a strategic fleet is important for the successful operation of Australia's freight supply chains, and is in the national interest.

While there is a substantial degree of competition between the different modes of freight transport (ie road, rail, sea and air), each mode also has its own competitive advantages that make it suited to certain freight tasks. Together, the different modes of freight transport complement each other, while providing critical redundancy options for times of crisis when one or more modes is unable to operate at full capacity.

Governments have a critical role in ensuring freight supply chains are deeply reliant on government investment, regulation and subsidy – as the provision of infrastructure such as national road and rail networks are beyond the capacity of the private sector, and when private interest do take control of such infrastructure assets then they often are able to exert monopoly or oligopoly power over markets. Moreover, governments have a critical role in ensuring freight supply chains are supporting the timely and efficient flow of legitimate commerce, while protecting and securing the supply chain from exploitation.

Importantly, governments must also ensure freight supply chains are resilient enough to threats and disruptions. For too long, however, Australia's federal government has failed to provide the leadership and steady hand required, and had hidden behind the myth that impersonal 'market forces' will fill the decision-making void and deliver public policy outcomes that are in the best interests of the nation.

**Rail, Tram & Bus Union Australia** **The Power of Union**

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The lack of a strong domestic shipping industry is a testament to this failure of leadership. This failure was clearly evident, for example, when flooding through central Australia washed out sections of the east-west rail line near Tarcoola Junction in South Australia at the beginning of this year. Not only did this event cause enormous disruption to the delivery of freight to central Australia, it also caused disruption to the flow of goods between Perth and the east coast. Given that the trucking industry was already struggling to meet demand for services, the closure of the rail line led to temporary but acute shortages of some goods in Western Australia. In this context, a strategic fleet would ensure that shipping services would also be available to provide back-up for other modes in times of crisis.

Moreover, the experiences of the past five years with COVID and natural disasters have highlighted the need for resilient freight supply chains, and for these supply chains to have adequate redundancy to handle unforeseen events. As an isolated island continent, Australia must have sovereign capacity to manage its own supply chains when international shipping routes are interrupted.

The RTBU also notes that previously proposed changes to regulations relating to coastal shipping to allow for an increased presence of foreign-flagged vessels on domestic freight routes could undermine the viability of both domestic maritime and rail freight operators. It is essential that changes to regulations such as this are not made without consideration of the overall national interest, and the overarching objective of maintaining coordinated and resilient national supply chains.

To this end, the RTBU suggests that this taskforce should also recommend a broader review and updating of the National Freight and Supply Chain Strategy. This subsequent review should investigate the effectiveness and resilience of national supply chains to ensure all modes of freight transport – road, rail, sea and air – work together in a coordinated approach that delivers efficient and reliable services, and while protecting the sovereign capacity of our transport networks.

Yours sincerely,



**Mark Diamond**  
**NATIONAL SECRETARY**