



Goondiwindi
REGIONAL
COUNCIL



Council Response

INLAND RAIL INDEPENDENT REVIEW

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GOONDIWINDI REGIONAL COUNCIL

Independent Review Submission

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Contact Name:	Dion Jones, Director Engineering Services
Organisation Name:	Goondiwindi Regional Council
Address:	██████████ ████████████████████
Telephone:	██████████
Email:	████████████████████
Approved by:	The Hon Cr Lawrence Springborg AM Mayor, Goondiwindi Regional Council

Goondiwindi Regional Council wish to make this submission public.

Introduction

The Goondiwindi Regional Council (GRC) falls in both the Border to Gowrie (B2G) and North Star to Border sections of the Inland Rail Project. Since early in project delivery, GRC has maintained its strong support for the Inland Rail Project. It is Council's position that the project provides significant national and important regional benefits.

It is acknowledged that significant impact results from the delivery of this project, however, Council is committed to continuing to work with ARTC to ensure, wherever possible, that these impacts are minimised or mitigated.

Council maintains a cooperative working relationship with ARTC and its project delivery team and is pleased to provide this submission expressing its continued support to the project and identifying several key issues below.

Negotiation of the Master Inland Rail Agreement between ARTC and Council is well advanced, however, a number of critical key issues remain outstanding. It is understood that significant progress has been made in relationship to Council's road maintenance obligations in rail reserve adjacent to level crossings, which needs to be reflected in future Interface Agreements. The provision of grade separation of the Millmerran Inglewood Road interface and the Kildonan Road interface within our region are yet to be confirmed. Both these interfaces are on greenfield sites and on important heavy vehicle routes within our Council area. It is hoped that resolution of these issues will facilitate agreement to the Master Rail Interface Delivery Agreement (MIRDA) in the very near future.

The following responses are made in relationship to the key themes:

ARTC Governance and Management

Due to the size of the project, the delivery mechanism is understandably complicated. In liaising with ARTC, the high turnover of project staff has made this process more difficult.

During the development of appropriate asset standards for returned assets, ARTC and Council staff have often needed to return to previously resolved issues due to the loss of information as members of project teams change. Similarly, delivery of early works via the design and construct process for the B2G section necessitated engagement of a contractor while consideration of the reference design is yet to be completed. This is seen as premature given the environmental impact statement process within Queensland is still underway and likely to continue into 2023, with design likely to be impacted by conditions imposed by the Office of the Coordinator General. The result is several independent design processes are currently underway.

Relationship between Council and the management of the Inland Rail project has improved during the last year though some difficulty has been previously experienced. Significant focus on stakeholder engagement lead to improvement in the working relationship.

Role of Inland Rail

Council acknowledges the important role the Inland Rail Project can play for the major agricultural producing regions in southern Queensland and northern New South Wales. There is significant

potential to increase rail freight and broaden commodity markets within our region. Importantly, operational access to the standard gauge network for freight generators will be required.

Council has been a supportive participant of the Rail Interface Project, which is preparing business cases for connectivity to the Inland Rail network, and is hopeful of a standard gauge connection further west on the Queensland Rail Southwest corridor. This will ensure that major grain, cotton, and other freight generators are able to utilise the standard gauge network for aggregation of freight and to maximise the regional benefits of this important national infrastructure.

Inland Rail Route Selection

Significant investigation into the impacts of the proposed Inland Rail Project on the Macintyre Flood Plain crossing has been undertaken. Council has provided written submissions for and also met with the independent flood panel and their oversight of modelling and mitigation strategies to avoid significant flood impacts on the flood plain. It is our view that this, or a similar panel, should be maintained throughout the detailed design process.

The alignment of the Border to Gowrie section within Goondiwindi Regional Council utilises the Southwest line for a significant distance, and on the route north towards Millmerran, has largely avoided significant Council assets, communities, and to a large degree, minimised impact on high quality agricultural land. Council must acknowledge however, the personal impact on landowners who live on the route and in some cases the personal hardship associated with impacts from the new rail infrastructure. A lot of the land north of Inglewood in our Council area is state forest or national park and Council has always held the view that this section should be on this state land rather than freehold to lesser the impact on agricultural land within our Council area.

Council is also aware of the operational impact on agricultural businesses due to the significant reduction in level crossings previously existing on the Southwestern line in order to better manage the operational efficiency and safety of the Inland Rail operation. Council believes ARTC are engaging effectively with landholders to mitigate the reduction in access.

ARTC's Community and Stakeholder Engagement

Council has seen a significant increase in engagement both with the Council organisation and the local community since the opening of the local office in Goondiwindi approximately 18 months ago. Liaison staff have gone to significant effort to ensure key project representatives engage actively with Council including participating in numerous meetings held face-to-face in Goondiwindi.

Council has seen increasing benefits resulting from the personal contact and the opportunity to undertake joint field inspections reviewing specific aspects of design or issues identified. Change of staff within the project teams remains a key issue and ARTC should aim to reduce change in delivery processes and the teams supporting the project in order to best engage with Council and our local community.

Council was pleased to see recent engagement with impacted landowners along the B2G alignment in our region, though acknowledging the discussions preceded full details of design being finalised. However, Council remains supportive of ARTC's efforts in direct engagement with impacted landowners as detailed design continues.