

Enquiries to:

Mark Connolly



11 November 2022

**Dr Kerry Schott AO**

Lead for Inland Rail Independent Review

c/o Inland Rail Review Secretariat

Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts  
Canberra ACT 2601

Via email: [IR.Review@infrastructure.gov.au](mailto:IR.Review@infrastructure.gov.au)

Dear Dr Schott,

**Moree Plains Shire Council feedback on the delivery of the Inland Rail Program**

I am writing to highlight our community's support for the continuation of the Inland Rail project and stress the importance of this freight link for Regional NSW and Australia's eastern states. I will also endeavour to address the key themes of the Independent Review of the delivery of the Inland Rail Program.

Moree Plains Shire Council has been a longstanding supporter of the Inland Rail project, being one of the founding members of the Melbourne to Brisbane Inland Rail Alliance, which brought together many local government authorities along the alignment including Toowoomba Regional Council and Parkes Shire Council. Most Councils understand and see the tremendous positive flow-on effects for regional towns and centres which the Inland Rail passes through.

**Theme 1: ARTC governance and management arrangements for the delivery of the Inland Rail Program.**

Our team has worked, and continues to work collaboratively with Federal and State Government agencies, the Australian Rail Track Corporation (ARTC) Inland Rail, and various contractors on the three Inland Rail projects that touch our Shire, namely:

- Narrabri to North Star Phase 1
- Narrabri to North Star Phase 2
- North Star to Border.

Moree Plains Shire Council also engages regularly with ARTC Hunter Valley for long term operational and business development opportunities and to support alignment with program delivery and freight operations across our Shire.

We note that engagement for this project has always been highly professional and respectful, and where possible, very accommodating of any concerns or issues we have raised.



Council acknowledges that the project delivery methodology has dictated resourcing and management structures within the delivery program, and this is particularly noticeable with Narrabri to North Star Phase 1 and Phase 2 projects. This has resulted in engagement activities with different Inland Rail project teams despite the Inland Rail project being a continuous piece of infrastructure within our Shire. While ARTC Inland Rail have managed this process very well, there may be benefits in coordinating these activities in alignment with the physical nature of the project on the ground to improve efficiency and reduce confusion for the public. Further related comments are made under Theme 4 below.

**Theme 2: The role of Inland Rail in meeting Australia’s growing freight task and providing a Service Offering to meet freight sector needs.**

Moree Plains Shire sits at the heart of Northwest NSW and grows some \$1 billion in produce each year. The Shire is enveloped by the most productive and fertile soil in the country and is centred at the junction of major National, State and Regional freight routes via rail, road, and air.

In the interests of its constituents, Council is committed to improving freight resilience and dependability to benefit both industry and the wider community. The agricultural industry is a key contributor of the NSW economy, creating jobs and delivering a range of broader benefits for the state and national economy. Our region’s agriculture sector is reliant on efficient supply chains to execute commodity delivery within an international orientated market.

An immense regional benefit of the current Inland Rail upgrade between Moree and Narrabri are the faster, longer, and larger freight train volumes that will be able to travel to port. The previous railway only allowed for axle loading of up to 18 tonnes and 80km/h speeds, making some commodities less efficient to transport to NSW ports via rail, versus via truck to Brisbane. Increased rail efficiency will also provide opportunities for a broader range of freight product, thereby reducing or eliminating barriers to industry diversification and the development of secondary industry, such as value adding and food processing.

Once all Inland Rail projects are complete, having access to Melbourne and Brisbane ports will provide our farmers, commodity handlers, and businesses with more reliable and cheaper alternative access to domestic and international markets.

Moree Plains Shire Council has been at the forefront of efforts to capitalise on the investment by the Australian Federal Government into the Inland Rail Project and create a foundation for more efficient flow of regional, national, and international freight. Having been declared a Special Activation Precinct by the NSW Government with an investment of \$194 million, we are now working to grow and diversify our economy by fostering sustainable regionally based industries and a freight precinct capable of being scaled to deliver world class transportation infrastructure commensurate with the region’s volume demand profile. We are looking to grow our community over the next 40 years with 4,000 projected new and innovative jobs.

The Inland Rail program has been a transformative project for our region, catalysing other projects that will make the region less vulnerable to the economic boom and bust cycles experienced in agriculture, help stem terminal population decline and reinvigorate our rural economy and community.

In short, our community would likely not have NSW Government investment into a Moree Special Activation Precinct and its predicted 4,000 jobs long term without the Inland Rail.

To meet growing freight service needs for longer term productivity outcomes it is critical to establish the linkages between Inland Rail and state and local government road networks and state rail networks. Council applauds the work to date of the Federal Government’s Interface Improvement Program in developing feasibility studies for greater connectivity with the Inland Rail, including relevant spur intersection upgrades

along the alignment. It is of paramount importance that there is now dedicated funding to support this great work and to also consider the expansion of the program to capture a broader set of infrastructure links.

Expanding the scope of these programs will lead to investments in infrastructure that will ultimately see more freight on rail resulting in improved productivity. For example, Moree Plains Shire Council will be seeking support from the Federal and State Government to fund a critical East-West Connector Road link that will ultimately direct some 2 million tonnes of commodities annually to the Inland Rail interface within the Special Activation Precinct. Approximately 70% of our region's food and fibre is produced on the western side of the Inland Rail corridor, so efficient transportation links via train or truck are critical to getting these commodities as directly as possible to port.

**Theme 3: The processes for the selection and refinement of the Inland Rail route and whether these processes are fit-for-purpose, including consideration of benefits and impacts.**

In 2016/17 Council had the opportunity to engage with ARTC Inland Rail on the potential development of a rail bypass for the Moree Township. The Council raised concerns relating to severance, amenity impacts and safety.

The Project Team acknowledged Council concerns and investigations were undertaken to explore a range of alternative options. While ultimately the bypass solution was found to be not suitable, the process of engagement, collaboration, exploration, and identifying ameliorating solutions was conducted respectfully and in a manner that helped develop a positive partnership moving forward.

Once the alignment was settled for the N2NS project, Council was also involved in detailed investigations and design processes for all aspects of the rail impacts on the Shire and our residents. Issues of road impacts, level crossing works, flooding, and amenity and safety have been addressed via ongoing consultation and collaboration. It is Council's view that this process was done to a high standard and with an understanding of the need to limit disruptions to community and either eliminate or reduce any longer term negative impacts of the project.

**Theme 4: The effectiveness of ARTC's community and stakeholder engagement processes, and opportunities for improvement, including ARTC's approach to addressing community concerns.**

Council would like to commend the responsiveness, professionalism and adaptability of ARTC Inland Rail staff, contractor Trans4m and representatives from various directorates within the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, and the Arts who have made the time to engage with our Council and community and have taken a genuine collaborative approach to resolving issues and realising positive opportunities.

There have been many times where Council has raised issues, ideas and suggestions, and ARTC and/or its contractors have actively taken steps to take the feedback onboard and worked through any matters that require resolution, particularly regarding impacts to local roads during construction. ARTC's and Trans4m's efforts to engage with both our farming and indigenous communities is particularly commendable.

Council appreciates there are challenges with promoting and informing the community about complex planning, procurement and construction programs, particularly when there are three Inland Rail projects in various stages of planning and construction across our Shire.

However, it can be challenging when the Phase 1 and Phase 2 projects are treated separately from a project and engagement perspective, as the project boundary is located within the Moree township. A specific example of this is areas of the community, both adjacent to each other, who may receive different approaches to noise mitigation and are consulted at different times with the potential for different messaging. It can also be confusing for the wider community who aren't across the Inland Rail projects in detail to differentiate the geographic boundaries between the projects, particularly Phase 2 being an inset of Phase 1. We have raised these issues with ARTC Inland Rail who acknowledge the challenges and are working to resolve these concerns.

Council appreciates the two projects are at different stages and can be difficult for ARTC to provide meaningful updates or information on another project that hasn't progressed to the formal NSW Government approval stage yet.

One point of constructive feedback would be that the Moree community may benefit from a combined stakeholder engagement approach with regards to the section of rail within Moree township, which may provide broader consistency from a messaging and engagement perspective.

Council also commends ARTC in responding to community concerns regarding telecommunications and applaud the Federal Government's and ARTC steps in undertaking a feasibility studies and progress towards construction of improved mobile telecommunications infrastructure in our remote regions, to support construction and operation of the Inland Rail program. This will be a significant legacy the Inland Rail program will leave behind for our remote indigenous and farming communities, supporting greater connectivity and safety along the alignment.

In conclusion, Council appreciates the vast amount of design, construction, preparation, and human effort that has been undertaken for Inland Rail and we see this as a sound investment in the future of our nation. We also regularly engage with various stakeholders across industry and the broader community where there is a definitive and overwhelming sentiment of support and excitement for the project.

We would be more than happy to discuss with you further the benefits Inland Rail will unlock for our region, and we look forward to seeing the Federal Government delivering this significant piece of national infrastructure.

Yours sincerely,



Cr Mark Johnson  
**MAYOR**

**cc:**

Hon Mark Coulton MP  
Member for Parkes

[mark.coulton.mp@aph.gov.au](mailto:mark.coulton.mp@aph.gov.au)