

Submission to the Inland Rail Review

11th November 2022

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Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and
the Arts
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Dear Sir/Madam,

Introduction

I am sending this submission under themes 2 and 3, as I am concerned about the way Inland Rail Project is being implemented at considerable cost as well as risk to the community. I question whether optimal use is being made via this project in its current form in terms of better and faster delivery offreight between metropolitan destinations and regional centers in various States? I strongly suggest that a passenger train service by using existing rail infrastructure along the northern railway corridor between Armidale and Wallangarra could be a groundbreaking proposition to connect with Toowoomba or Brisbane at competitive cost.

Preamble

According to the Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Reference Committee report titled *Inland Rail: derailed from the start* (2021), Inland Rail project 'is governed by an out-of-date business case and undermined by predictions that the project will exceed \$20 billion' The committee stated 'that the original costings and allocated budget for Inland Rail was inadequate from the outset, and is a failure on behalf of the Australian Government and the Australian Rail Track Corporation (ARTC) to appropriately prepare, plan and implement Inland Rail'. It was the view of this committee that 'this substantive increase in the cost of Inland Rail alone warrants a review and update of the 2015 business case'. It stipulates further cost blowouts. In light of these observations, I am compelled to send my concerns and comments for the current review of Inland rail instituted by the Minister for regional infrastructure, transport, regional development and local government.

I note community concerns expressed by various councils along the route e.g. Grave Concerns Over Inland rail In *Australian Rural and Regional News*<https://arr.news/2022/09/27/grave-concerns-over-inland-rail/>, The Right Railway in the Wrong Place: Narrabri Council Objects to Route of 14bn Inland Rail by Natasha May 6th May 2022 (<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/may/06/the-right-railway-in-the-wrong-place-narrabri-council-objects-to-route-of-145bn-inland-rail>). I further note various investigative reports by national media outlets where they highlight the issue of flooding, impact on property owners and the poor community consultation in the

planning and construction stage (Trouble on the Tracks: is Australia's 14billion Inland Rail Project Going Off the Rails? by Gabriel Chan, Mike Bowers, Andy Ball, and Natasha May, The Guardian 25 January 2022(<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/ng-interactive/2022/jan/25/trouble-on-the-tracks-is-australias-40bn-inland-rail-project-going-off-the-rails>)). These report highlight significant issues that need careful consideration in the review process.

In a 2007 submission, the coalition of New England Councils very convincingly argued that the route should be via the New England Great Northern Line (also known as Main North Railway Line.) This submission strongly recommended 'that an inland standard gauge rail route be established between Cootamundra and Brisbane, and that the Central Inland Sub Corridor should be adopted, as it offers distinct advantages in terms of cost and strategic location' (2007). The cost was estimated as 1 billion dollars then for the central inland route, which equates to the main northern railway line (MNRL). If the government heeded the request by the coalition of New England Councils and the route was selected according to the submission, many of the challenges faced by Inland Rail today could have been easily avoided. Northern Railway line between Tamworth and Wallangarra (Qld border) is built on higher ground so that no flooding can occur.

The rest of my comments are provided according to themes 2 and 3.

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

- How could Inland Rail and access to intermodal terminals create new opportunities and benefits for your region/industry/community?

Recommendation 15 of the Senate Review (2021) highlight the need for efficiently linking Inland Rail to other key rail and road freight routes. However, thus far planning for the Inland Rail and location of intermodal terminals have largely ignored adjoining regions such as New England or the future utilisation of currently non-operational main northern railway line (MNRL) between Armidale and Queensland. This is a serious error that needs to be corrected. Movement of freight between South East Queensland and Tamworth intermodal terminal through Armidale by utilising the main northern railway line can bring significant cost savings, take hundreds -if not thousands - of trucks off the New England highway, and provide growers and manufacturers along the northern railway line an opportunity to move their produce to ports in Queensland and NSW faster and economically. This could also provide a secure freight line in times of natural disasters such as floods that are increasingly becoming frequent events. Storage facilities in towns such as Armidale that were used until late 1980s still exist. With minimal repair they can be restored. Current Country Link service between Sydney and Armidale is only a passenger service with no capacity to transport freight although train services earlier did carry some freight.

Already existing businesses such as Guyra Tomato farm that relies on trucking its produce at present and future industries such as the Organic food manufacturing industry to be relocated to Llangothlin may use a freight line to Tamworthinter model terminal while reducing the carbon footprint. In fact, the owner of the latter industry Mr. David Peters is even willing to invest his own funds in the restoration of existing rail line between Armidale and Llangothlin to the value of \$7 million if he can secure access to the line.

Additionally, use of alternative energy sources such as solar and wind energy for the running of trains can also be possible as Solar and renewable energy zones are springing up in several locations in New England, as this is now a very large, declared Renewable Energy Zone.

When considering the provision of a service to meet freight sector needs, social or community dividend from large-scale projects like this is an important and essential dimension to be considered. The Senate inquiry found 'significant shortcomings in the ARTC's efforts to meaningfully engage with communities and landholders along the proposed alignment of Inland Rail. These failures have significantly undermined public trust in the ARTC and its management of Australia's largest rail infrastructure project' (2021). Independent oversight of the ARTC functions is very important for the smooth operations of Inland rail whichever alterations to the current procedures and functions are effected as a result of your review.

Commenting on the 24-hour delivery time limit between Melbourne and Brisbane, the Senate committee report (2021) states that 'the interests of rural, regional and urban communities throughout Victoria, NSW and Queensland have been sidelined by an arbitrary time threshold established by the Australian Government'. The submission by New England Local Government or the New England Coalition of Local Government (2007) used a 28-hour time frame in its estimates. I cannot agree more with these remarks because in New England we feel that our community interests and concerns about the future use of northern railway line as a freight or passenger line between Armidale and Queensland have largely been ignored by both levels of government due to the over reliance by authorities on Inland rail in its current formulation. This over reliance has effectively excluded a large part of northern NSW from any extensions or renewals of regional rail for the foreseeable future. It is my hope that this current review will correct this historical mistake for the benefit of regional communities that have been left out from the promised benefits of Inland Rail.

Given the fact that NSW parliament has recently approved the movement of containers through Newcastle port, the possibility of connecting Tamworth intermodal terminal with Inland rail or Intermodal Terminal to be built by Wagner family enterprise at Toowoomba, the ports in Brisbane or Gladstone needs your attention and consideration to bring further efficiencies in the delivery of freight.

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.

The Senate committee review (2021) recommended passenger trains alongside the Inland Rail route in addition to a freight line. Given the range of challenges facing the Inland Rail project, however, whether a passenger train service is most suitable for the current Inland rail route is questionable compared to utilising the already existing rail corridor/line between Armidale and Brisbane. The government should seriously look into the latter option because the railway infrastructure already exists along the Northern railway line/corridor requiring minimal expenditure for restoration or reconstruction. Restoration of the line and introduction of a passenger train service between Armidale and Brisbane can be achieved at significantly less cost compared to constructing a separate and new passenger train line alongside the Inland Rail freight line.

This can be highly useful in terms of better cross border mobility and connectivity between New England and Southern Queensland. Such a train service can be even more useful for the residents of New England as there are no public transport options between the two destinations currently i.e. trains or coaches. A population of over 375,000 is there in SE Queensland and about 45,000 people live in LG areas such as Armidale, Glen Innes and Tenterfield. The demands by residents of New England for better public transport facilities between Armidale, Glen Innes, Tenterfield and Brisbane as well as smaller towns in between have drawn no proper response from the NSW Government except it is conducting community consultations about improving bus services within 16 selected cities in NSW. I made a submission to the NSW government when it was seeking feedback about the Draft New England Northwest Regional Plan 2041 highlighting the importance of renewing train services between Armidale and Brisbane but it appears that my suggestion has fallen on deaf ears.

Following observation made by New England Local Government submission in 2007 needs to be considered in relation to the above remarks:

Whilst the directness of a new rail line travelling from Narromine to Moree is appealing, the major disadvantage is that it will duplicate 414 kms of existing rail line infrastructure that is currently already struggling to be maintained. The shortest upgrade option, quite clearly is the Central Inland Sub Corridor.

(Submission by New England Local Government 2007).

Recommendation 10 3.69, by the Senate the committee (2021) recommends the Australian and Queensland governments to publicly release, upon its completion, the business case study into southeast Queensland's Inland Rail intermodal terminals. It would be advisable to not only look at inter model terminals in SE Queensland e.g. Toowoomba, but also adjoining region of New England in NSW and inter model terminals such as Tamworth as a potential subsidiary route for the movement of freight and passenger trains in the future so that optimal capacity for movement of people and

goods across the states can become a reality. This is especially prudent, as the NSW government has passed legislation to allow for the port of New castle to load and unload containers - a facility not available until now.

Conclusion

Your review provides an excellent opportunity to correct the course as far as Inland Rail fiasco is concerned and to make sure public expenditure on this project is made to achieve optimum outcomes in terms of freight movement, future passenger movement by rail, reducing carbon imprint on the environment, reducing the impact from floods and community resentment and faster movement of people and goods. By introducing several key changes to the current configuration mid stream, the government will be able to not only streamline the planning and construction processes and functions but also expand the area of impact to nearby regions such as New England. I hope my comments and concerns can be useful in such endeavor! I strongly recommend your staff to examine the 2007 submission by New England Local Government (collective of New England Local Councils) dealing with the need and various options to establish an inland North South Rail Corridor as an alternative to the existing Sydney-Brisbane rail route. It highlights benefits other than pure commercial ones such as national security, connections to SE Queensland, facilitating a switch from road to rail, reduction in fossil fuel consumption, and reduction in green house gases.

References

New England Local Government 2007. Submission to the North-South Rail Corridor Study Report of Sept 2006 Commissioned by the Department of Transport and Regional Services.

Inland Rail: Derailed from the Start, Senate Committee Report 2021. Commonwealth of Australia.