

Submission to the Government review of the Inland Rail of the Gowrie to Kagaru Inland Rail alignment

Introduction

I wish to thank the Federal Government for this opportunity to make a submission to this Australian Rail Track Corporation (ARTC) Review and hope that the information in this submission will be helpful.

The Calvert to Kagaru section of the Inland Rail (IR), and Gowrie to Kagaru section overall is highly impacted by the proposed Inland Rail and is projected to carry very high numbers of high speed trains. The impacts will be both on communities, farmlands and the natural environment.

If a helicopter view is taken of the whole freight industry in Australia, I personally do not think the double-decker, high speed freight trains are going to enhance the freight system. Double-decker, high speed freight trains in most part of the world transverse flat deserts with very few curves to avoid derailment. Very few if any go through populated areas.

I think that the cost to communities and natural environment far out-weigh the benefits that it may provide. We are an island nation with several deep water ports that are underutilized. There are already rail connections to most of these ports. Thus the existing freight system should be improved without building a very costly, inappropriate IR.

Many of the statements made in the 2015 Business Case, as elsewhere in the ARTC documents, have no 'figures' to suppose the statements, therefore they appear to be assumptions.

So why has IR not achieved its objective?

Key Themes

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

- *How could ARTC improve its management arrangements and structures to better facilitate the delivery of the Inland Rail Program?*

The Project Scope

- has been poorly defined;
- has only loosely defined a purpose for building the IR based on perhaps a false premise;
- thus the objectives are not clear;
- and have become difficult to achieve;
- non-transparent risk management practices;
- non-transparent implementation of strategy.

This lack of best practice or governance has led to poorly defined boundaries with moving goal posts, over budget, behind schedule and with no plan for where the IR will start or end. The whole project seems to be ad hoc.

Business Case:

- The outdated 2015 Business Case for IR is not fit for purpose;
- With a complete review a price must be placed upon the destruction of the natural environment, all heritage sites, all towns, all communities and farming land and the negative impact to the health of the people, and flora and fauna;
- These costs will far out weight any benefit to communities.

- The ARTC's commitment to the 24 hour Melbourne to Brisbane time frame has needlessly driven unsound route decisions at the detriment of communities and natural environment.
- When considering the terrain this line must pass through, the availability of only a single line with passing loops and line maintenance, this 24 hour timeframe will often be unachievable.
- An integrated freight system, which Australia already has (shipping, rail, road and air) offers a greater benefit without the exorbitant out going costs of the IR.

ARTC could improve its management arrangements and structures with:

- A Project Scope with well defined boundaries, a statement of project purpose with achievable objectives which will enhance the living standards of all communities.
- A complete and honest review of the 2015 Business Case, as recommended by the Senate Enquiry in 2021;

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?

The IR offers **no** benefit to our region as it will destroy the natural environment, all heritage sites, all towns, all communities and farming land with a negative impact on the health of the people, and flora and fauna.

- By taking a helicopter view of the freight industry and by looking at other opinions of moving freight there may be a more economical and with no destruction to communities and natural environment with an integrative freight system.
- Decentralizing of manufacturing and producing locally would reduce the need to transport goods over great distances.
- Decentralizing would create more local, permanent employment.
- Decentralizing would reduce freight emissions.
- Also there would be no need for an intermodal at Ebenezer, which I anticipate would be used to offload waste from south of the Queensland border to fill mining voids.

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.

Do you consider ARTC's approach to engaging communities on the route is fit-for-purpose?

Response: NO

- ARTC has failed to engage meaningfully with stakeholders. ARTC's processes have always been about managing community expectations rather than responding to genuine concern. The second round of EIS preparation has not demonstrated any improvements in this area.
- The approach is a 'tick-box' approach where the route has already been determined either by State or Federal Government, impacts are already considered a 'given', and the approach to engagement is largely one of 'presenting information' and making minor amendments to satisfy State Government EIS requirements for consultation where essential.
- Years of 'so-called' community consultation with the Calvert-Kagaru community (including for several as a members of the Community Consultation Committee) has resulted in minimal outcomes of benefit to the community at large and community members now seldom attend consultation meetings as they see no benefit.
- ARTC's own Social Impacts research indicates that nearly 50% of the residents of this section have some kind of identified vulnerability including mental health conditions but there has never been a meaningful response to the fact that the people remaining in their homes will be exposed to 24 hour half hourly freight train noise. Others will be forced from their homes becoming 'refugees' acquiring unrecognized and often untreated mental health problems.

- The most significant response has been to offer counselling, which is meaningless and even insulting, in the context of the problems that will be added to people's lives by the impact of 24-hour noise and relocation.
- Despite years of consultation with regard to natural environmental impact and specifically Koala, no genuine acknowledgement has been forthcoming of the very serious impacts on the natural environment of C2K by Inland Rail with no consideration of relocating the route to protect the natural environment and only minimal attempts to 'mitigate' impacts.
- The C2K section of the line severs the Flinders-Karawatha Corridor which is now an extremely important territory for the endangered Koala and many other threatened species. Despite repeated questioning the ARTC refuses to commit to effective mitigations such as fauna fencing, instead pretending that this will be addressed in the 'design phase'.
- For C2K in the first Draft EIS 5 fauna tunnels were offered which proved to be bridges needed for engineering purposes that had no relationship with fauna populations or movement corridors. During further consultation this has expanded to 27 bridges, however, questioning reveals that the bridges are still based on engineering purposes, not koala or other threatened species population needs. ARTC is now engaged in conducting research which is designed to prove post-facto that the predetermined tunnels are effective. This is a potent example of ARTC's ongoing insincere manipulation of information to get the project over the line;
- The ARTC are to provide offsets to mitigate the destructive impacts on koala habitats and swamp tea tree vegetation. Removing these high value environmental systems will further fragment these fragile areas. Any offsets will take at least years to become a viable ecosystem, if they survive at all. Koalas being territorial species with specific and localised food trees, do not survive their removal to other habitats.
- Many of these ecosystems are protected under the Federal Government *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act, 1909* (EPBC) and Queensland's *Environmental Protection Act, 1994* (EP Act). The Government and its parts are not exempt from 'breaking the rules'.
- The ARTC has decided that dead koalas and destroyed ecosystems are the cost of national infrastructure development.
- The ARCT shows no regrets for the destruction of communities that will occur if IR proceeds.

How could ARTC improve its engagement with communities and stakeholders along the route in regard to the processes used to consider benefits and impacts?

Response:

- ARTC should be required to implement stakeholder engagement processes and personnel that are prepared to genuinely engage with stakeholders and the community and initiate change. This has been a constant criticism of ARTC stakeholder consultation through many meetings and through the Senate Enquiry of 2021. There is no sign however that ARTC is either willing or able to significantly change their approach;
- Community engagement is considered an annoying part of the process that simply must be done to meet EIS requirements, because ARTC's objective is to build this line no matter what.
- Community Consultation Committee members express frustration and exhaustion with the continued pretence of consultation;
- As long as ARTC is wedded to its predetermined route and determination not to properly mitigate and protect community, fauna and flora, in order to avoid yet more cost blow-out, it is difficult to see them being able to make the shift to genuine consultation. ARTC consultation is 'information givers'. To fill their obligation to the draft EIS instead of truly engaging with the community the number of 'empty' meetings have increased hoping to silence disagreement.
- A lack of transparency by ARTC is evident when 'the too hard' questions are asked by the community, ARTC uses phrases such as, 'will take that question on notice' or questioners are referred to the 'design phase' to avoid giving a correct answer.

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

What has ARTC done well in engaging with communities, including addressing community concerns?

Response:

- ARTC staff in general have as individuals been attempting to do 'their job' and have largely done so in a polite manner but have been constrained by the 'brief' they are operating under which has specified a route that 'cannot be changed' because it must comply with timeframe constraints and/or has been predetermined by State Government (eg Calvert to Kagaru) and mitigation methods (including noise impact criteria) that cannot be varied.

In what ways could ARTC improve its communication and engagement processes with communities and stakeholders?

Response

- Because of the constraints the ARTC staff is under, communication and engagement processes with communities and stakeholders cannot be improved.

How could ARTC improve its engagement with communities and stakeholders in responding to concerns?

Response:

- For ARTC to improve its engagement with communities and stakeholders in responding to concerns, the Project Scope and therefore the Business Case needs to be revisited and reviewed with openness, to build a sustainable freight system for the future.
- The question should be asked: will the future generations benefit from this project without having their environment destroyed?

In conclusion there is no forethought or innovation in this project. A 100 year old technology is being used for the next 100 years. The whole project is not sustainable and will add to emission causing not only health problem, but cause further climate change.

Yours faithfully,
Rosemaree Thomasson



Submission can be made public, but please withhold my email address, mobile number and postal address.