

Our Ref: NTRO NFSCSR2023

28 September 2023

Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts

By email and online submission only

Dear Sir/Madam,

Subject: National Freight and Supply Chain Strategy Five-Year Review Submission

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts (DITRDCA) first five-year review of the National Freight and Supply Chain Strategy.

With over 60 years of heritage as the Australian Road Research Board (ARRB), the organisation has now evolved into the multi-modal National Transport Research Organisation (NTRO) covering road, rail, ports and airports. NTRO has remained at the forefront of independent expert transport knowledge, advising key decision makers on our nation's most important challenges. We have earned a reputation for scientific integrity and are the leading providers of value-added applied research, technical services, and knowledge transfer across the length and breadth of Australia.

With a clear role of partnering with shareholders at Local, State and Federal Government levels we provide timely, accurate and impactful means of successfully achieving objectives in a truly independent way.

At NTRO, we understand that the movement of people and goods is essential for the prosperity and economic growth of our nation. The Australian transport network is vast – providing a range of services, whether it be the movement of freight, commuters, tourists or providing the vital connections to our local communities.

Our freight corridors are our 'arteries of prosperity'. They provide life to our economy and our communities.

To optimise performance and prioritise investment, we first need to identify our key transport corridors, understand their use and quantify their performance against appropriate performance metrics. Quantifying the value of our key freight corridors in this way will enable informed decision-making with respect to investment in building, maintaining and upgrading Australia's most valuable assets.

Incompatible and encroaching development along corridors, also around key freight nodes, remains a threat to efficient and safe freight movement across the nation. We must continue in our efforts to address this challenge.

Through engagement with transport agencies, NTRO has found that our members (charged with managing and maintaining our road, rail, port and airport networks), do not necessarily have the national datasets across Australia and New Zealand required to know which are our best or worst performing key freight corridors/routes.

Further, in recent years natural disasters (e.g. fire and flood events) have negatively impacted freight corridors and remind us of the importance of a resilient network with respect to freight supply chains and the need to respond quickly to allocate resources, enabling retention of supply chain level of service.

NTRO know there is now a greater need to understand the performance of the freight networks, and to understand how our freight networks are performing to make smarter, efficient, sustainable and targeted investment.

At NTRO, we have had the privilege of specifically assisting DITRDCA gain an improved understanding of the national freight transport network and its' resilience. Through this work, we recognise that there are gaps in the understanding of freight networks, and the need for better freight location and performance data. However, to provide a complete understanding of our freight and supply chain better freight movement data must be coupled with better road network data. A similar level of data capture on the performance of our road network with a national perspective with metrics aligned with our long-term objectives is required.

With recognition that National Service Level Standards now exist as part of the Heavy Vehicle Reform initiative, the framework means that there is a nationally-consistent set of road categories, customer outcomes, and performance metrics – alongside a transparent and data informed decision/funding approach for the Australian road network. This piece of work provides vital understanding of how the performance of freight is best supported by road infrastructure and sets the scene for the road across to broader transport network utilisation, management, maintenance and monitoring.

Whilst our specific detail will be provided directly to the consultation sessions being hosted by the Australian Logistics Council on DITRCA's behalf, we offer the following high-level recommendations for your kind consideration:

- A review of the currently identified key freight corridors be undertaken with value, based on their economic, social, and environmental benefits, being quantified.
- Identification of multi-modal key metrics in relation to the use case of each key transport corridor, including those aligned with value of freight carried, traffic volumes, pavement loading, capacity and structural integrity, access, safety, congestion, low emission vehicle readiness and environmental impact.
- Identification of the sources of data related to the metrics, including state, federal and commercial datasets including (but not limited to): traffic volumes, congestion levels, travel times, crashes, road condition, pavement loading, fuel consumption, emissions, and the value of freight moved along the corridors. With the suggestion of collection and interpretation of these datasets being undertaken by suitably informed bodies, such as NTRO, to fully appreciate investment and implementation performance outcomes.
- Development of a framework for identifying, defining performance metrics and quantifying the value of our key freight corridors.
- Strengthened protection of freight and supply chain nodes through better alignment of cross-jurisdictional planning frameworks. We would encourage stronger regulatory direction in this regard.
- Consideration of maintenance within such a framework to ensure that full-lifecycle costs are identified, planned, understood and monitored – including forethought to prevent future remedial works necessities and unnecessary disruptive impact to the supply chain (e.g. temporary speed restrictions on the rail network/changed speed limits on the road network due to poor forward planning on asset maintenance).
- Improve understanding of heavy vehicle segments, types/age of vehicles being used to carry what and where. Data on this will assist with transition to low and zero emissions vehicles and identify where infrastructure upgrades are required, including the placement of recharging, and refuelling necessary to support the transition.
- Energy grid capacity assessment supporting electrification of transport and key upgrade areas identification.
- Identification of options to standardise freight emissions measures (road, rail, sea and air) and develop framework to set targets for reduction of emissions.
- A refresh of the mechanisms that give effect to the strategy be conducted to improve accountability, transparency and timely actioning of the strategic priorities.

NTRO welcomes your consideration of this submission and will be available for clarification if needed.

Yours Sincerely



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