

## Comments on the Inland Rail- Albury to Illabo

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### From

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Comment

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### Shortcomings of the EIS

1. It is disappointing that the ARTC EIS is confined to the impacts on areas where new infrastructure will be required and not the whole rail corridor that will be subject to increased traffic volume with much longer and heavier freight trains.
2. The EIS has a narrow focus on a few locations within the City of Wagga Wagga and, while it is extensive in the aspects it does cover, it does not present a comprehensive account of the overall, and long-term, impact on the city, for example, real estate values and long-term health issues.
3. The consultant who produced the EIS report consistently restates that best practice mitigation strategies will be used and thus all identified risks will be managed. This does not mean that there will be no risks. The actual level of the risk depends both on the *likelihood* of an event taking place and the *consequence* of such an occurrence. Any risk assessment should have a clear delineation of the scope of the risk, identify the main concerns of key stakeholders and the political, economic, social, legal, technological and policy context. In this case, the EIS is short in terms of disclosure. These disclosures are both narrow, confined and shorter term. Moreover, Appendix E table 4 which summarises the risk analysis, includes nine areas of medium risk and six which are rated high or very high.
4. The use of existing train lines and related infrastructure has limited scope in that it does not allow for the possibility of higher speed trains in the future. Such developments would make possible the rapid transport of perishable goods between Melbourne and Brisbane in the future. This should have been considered as it would have further impact on those areas through which the inland rail traverses.
5. The underlying assumption in this project appears to be the need to keep the initial cost down and avoid problems associated with acquisition of land. However, the cost of maintaining the infrastructure associated with this rail link has not been considered. The longer-term benefits of initially more costly alternatives but with less negative impacts and longer-term benefits in lower maintenance costs have not been discussed.

### Impact on Wagga Wagga


1. The long-term health outcomes for people in Wagga Wagga who live or work near the rail corridor, including school students, are likely to be significant. The UK *Health matters: air pollution* (2018) paper begins – “Poor air quality is the largest environmental risk to public health in the UK, as long-term exposure to air pollution can cause chronic conditions such as cardiovascular and respiratory diseases as well as lung cancer, leading to reduced life expectancy. Epidemiological studies have shown that long-term exposure to air pollution (over years or lifetimes) reduces life expectancy, mainly due to cardiovascular and respiratory diseases and lung cancer. Short-term exposure (over hours or days) to elevated levels of air pollution can also cause a range of health impacts, including effects on lung function, exacerbation of asthma, increases in respiratory and cardiovascular hospital admissions and mortality.”

Additionally, the rail corridor is adjacent to the busy Sturt Highway, which together, will contribute twin rivers of toxic gasses in which citizens will be immersed for years to come. The International Agency for Research on Cancer classifies diesel engine exhaust as carcinogenic to humans. Tech Paper 14 in the Environmental Impact Statement for Inland Rail - Albury to Illabo lists 10 substances of interest including oxides of nitrogen, carbon monoxide, sulphur dioxide, volatile and semi-volatile organic compounds and particulate matter less than 10 and 2.45 micrometres that are linked to both short and more complex long-term health problems. Recent studies have linked increased risk of dementia to greater exposure to PM2.5, NO2/NOx, and CO.

2. Location is a prime factor influencing the value of any real estate. The Inland Rail will decrease the value of real estate located near a noisy, polluted, busy rail corridor and subject to disruptive vibration. It will not only be those properties close to the rail line dividing the city of Wagga Wagga that will be affected but also those on streets that experience long traffic queues resulting from the increased rail traffic and those whose visual outlook has been negatively impacted by the proposed developments.
3. In the foreseeable future the city of Wagga Wagga will have a population of 100,000. Its CBD will need to expand to accommodate this increase. Plans to reshape the city by the Wagga Wagga City Council have already commenced. If these are to be comprehensive and realistic, then certainty about the rail corridor is an essential prerequisite. The rail development and the highway both reduce the liveability and amenity of the city and its capacity to grow. Good planning for the future of the largest inland city in NSW should not be delayed. The outcomes of poor planning are often costly or nearly impossible to resolve.
4. There is a strong case for the inland rail to by-pass the city. The cost of this development has to be weighed against the long-term outcomes to the health and wellbeing of the citizens of the city and its future growth and prosperity. A city by-pass would largely alleviate any negative impacts of the inland rail development on the city. Enhancing the liveability and amenity of the city will have a positive effect on its growth.

5. If the present plans for the use of an existing rail line that divides the city goes ahead, it is unlikely that such a by-pass will ever be built. If a by-pass were to be built and the rail line dismantled, a significant parcel of land along the rail corridor would become available. Moreover, the building of a by-pass would avoid some of the proposed city infrastructure costs. The cost of building a by-pass will increase over time. A decision to build it needs to be taken now to allow time for planning the city's future.

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