

6 November 2023

## **Re: Albury to Illabo: Wagga Wagga**

We write regarding the recent proposal to the upgrades of the rail from Albury to Illabo and wish to voice our strong opposition to the current proposal.

We also provide a link to a video we recently recorded with the single-story freight train and the noise and fumes it generates while idle at the back of our property awaiting safe passage.

This is the case for many of the homes that back onto this part of the train track.

<https://youtube.com/shorts/nnE08on3iGE>

### **Summary:**

As Wagga Wagga residents and property owners in the affected area we would like to address 5 main areas of concern including:

1. Complexity of EIS Document for Everyday Community members to interpret
2. Lack of Consideration and Research into Alternate Routes through Boman
3. *Lack of Community Consultation*
4. *EIS Paper Findings do not Adequately Reflect Community Member Lived Experience or Provide Mitigation for Concerns for Residential Homes, including noise and vibration, diesel fumes.*
5. *Lack of Guarantee Around Projected Number of Trains to Pass in the Future and Clarification of The Data*

Not only will the construction and redevelopment phase of the project cause significant disruption to every member of our community while major access bridges are demolished and rebuilt, with direct noise impacts for people residing in those areas between the stated work hours of 6am until 6pm. But the ongoing implications of upgrading the rail will be detrimental to the community, such that an essential railway highway that allows for up to 40 trains or more to pass through the heart of our city on a daily basis.

We feel that to this point that proper community consultation has not been conducted regarding the breadth of the works and both its short- and long-term implications for the residents of Wagga Wagga and in particular those who live in close proximity to the proposed works and along the newly to be completed railway highway.

### **1) Complexity of EIS Document for Everyday Community Members to Interpret:**

We still feel that the information being presented to the community to justify the rail project is complex for most people to navigate.

The information in the initial EIS document was vast, comprehensive and over 29 chapters long. We were made aware of its existence on Tuesday night, 13<sup>th</sup> September 2022- less than two weeks before submissions are due.

At first glance the document bamboozling and somewhat difficult for the everyday citizen to digest, make sense of, and apply to their own situation and circumstance. Perhaps this is the intended end-game?

The current TIS and EIS are really no different with respect to and the Summary of Findings that we were presented with upon attending the information session at the Wagga Wagga City Council that was cancelled without notice, seems to attempt to water down the lived experiences of the homeowners that this rail highway will directly affect. "The findings are intentionally conservative"

The information session at Wagga City Council scheduled for Wednesday 22 November, 2023 was cancelled with no notice, as we found out when we attended. We later read it was cancelled due to fear of protests, which is probably a clear indication right there that community feedback is not really welcome.

We provided our email for an update as to the next session, to which none was given and we missed the subsequent information session that was held at the Wagga Showgrounds. Neighbours in our street also were unaware of the new information session, again limiting the communities ability to respond to the proposal.

We feel that the vast community as a result have little understanding of the scope of works and thus limited opportunity or inclination to voice their concerns and act accordingly.

## 2) Lack of Consideration and Research into Alternate Routes:

One would be forgiven for assuming that the EIS document may be considering a variety of other options and routes and environmental impacts – **but alas not.**

In desperation to make sense of what is in front of us, we referred to the document summary which very clearly states all the positive reasons the project should go ahead and very clearly glosses over the negative impacts on the community and residents.

For example:

The 2022 EIS document Summary, page 8 states that:

***"Between 2015 and 2021, ARTC undertook design work to identify the preferred design solutions for the proposal.***

*This followed a detailed review of where enhancement works would be required to accommodate double-stacked trains along the existing rail corridor between Albury and Illabo. Twenty-four locations were identified that would require enhancement works. The assessment of options for each enhancement site considered a range of criteria, including technical, safety and operational requirements, environmental, community and property impacts, and constructability....."*

We note that the current proposal, is described above by the EIS document as the ***“preferred design solutions for the proposal”***.

We feel this is deliberately misleading the community to believe that other options such as a bypass through to the industrial Bomen precinct was appropriately costed considered, researched and discarded. **It was not.**

Despite the current project potentially inconveniencing our city and community, both in time, noise and damage and potential loss of income and land value, it has also become a trigger of great stress for many who live in the immediate vicinity of the upgrades.

The ARTC information session Tuesday 13 September 2022 confirmed that the ARTC did not look at alternate routes for this vast and expensive project.

We add that this is still the status quo with the current summary of findings stating...

*“There are no plans to consider changes to the alignment from that endorsed by the Australian Government. The route was agreed between the Australia and NSW governments in 2018.*

I stress that this was not endorsed by our community, and in the very least a feasibility study considering an alternate bypass should be considered.

Surely going around a major inland city, avoiding all the drama of demolishing main bridges and causing significant impact to a wide range of residents and the community in general as a whole, warrant looking at all the available options and weighing them accordingly?

A more appropriate course of action would be to develop a bypass going from the south to the east of Wagga- linking into the existing Bomen Industrial precinct, and hence avoiding major disruptions to the town and residents.

### **3) Lack of Community Consultation**

The 2022 EIS document Summary, page 8 then goes on to state:

*“This process considered issues raised during engagement with key stakeholders and the community, **enabling the design to respond to and minimise potential impacts**, where practicable.”*

We feel this is somewhat misleading as the summary implies that we the community were properly consulted and our concerns discussed, addressed and abated- **which they were not.**

We feel that the vast community as a result have little understanding of the scope of works and thus limited opportunity or inclination to voice their concerns and act accordingly.

We feel there has been a significant lack of proper consultation with the community in general and in particular with the residents and landowners in the early stages of the

proposal, whereby people had no real opportunity to voice their concerns and act accordingly and make necessary objections in a reasonable amount of time.

The information session at Wagga City Council scheduled for Wednesday 22 November, 2023 was cancelled with no notice, as we found out when we attended. We later read it was cancelled due to fear of protests, which is probably a clear indication right there that community feedback is not really welcome.

I provided my email for an update as to the next session, to which none was given and we missed the subsequent information session that was held at the Wagga Showgrounds. Neighbours in our street also were unaware of the new information session, again limiting the community's ability to respond to the proposal.

Since we became aware of the project in September last year, we have received one letter in the mail dated November 1 2023, alerting us to an information session that was later cancelled without giving us prior notice.

We attended a booth at Wagga Wagga City Council with a security guard present and two ARTC representatives who could offer no explanation nor answer our most basic questions. They took down our email for an update to be sent to us, yet none was given regarding the meeting the following week at the showgrounds, and we sadly missed it. This is simply not good enough.

I argue that one cannot attend such information sessions if they are unaware that they exist in the first place.

I certainly were not notified at any stage about the project until late 2022, its real implications and what it would look like to have up to 40 massive, double decker freight trains passing by our property on a daily basis.

I did not receive a maildrop letter informing us of the project, where to get information about its implications, any community information session or how to object or raise any concerns.

Adding to this, my experience of the information session Tuesday 13 September which was pitched at informing the community and answering questions felt more like a justification about the why, and less about listening to concerns and acknowledging them.

I felt our concerns were being dismissed or minimised by those with vested interests in the project moving forward.

As a land owner who resides in Brookong Avenue, whose residence is directly along the said rail track upgrade, (or highway) we have not been duly informed of this project by ARTC or any of the stakeholders involved first in its initial proposal and impending implementation.

We have never been asked about our experience living along the train tracks and if the trains impact our home or level of 'human comfort.'

It is one thing to quote data, but another to actively engage with the residents for whom the project affects.

I feel that every member of every community affected by these upgrades should have received a letter in writing at the very minimum and on numerous occasions, clearly outlining the complexity of the project and that no other options are being currently considered.

I assert that each and every person in our community should have been directly informed about the proposal at its inception, the very real scope and implications. **They were not.**

Again I stress that this was not endorsed by our community, and in the very least a feasibility study considering an alternate bypass should be considered.

#### **4) Paper Findings do not Adequately Reflect Community Member Lived Experience or Provide Mitigation for Concerns for Residential Homes.**

##### **a) Noise and Vibration**

While the current Operational noise and vibration mitigation solutions include noise barriers and at property treatments, the Brookong Ave area is an area listed with heritage homes, and the upgrades to windows would result in the potential removal of heritage features like stained glass windows, bubble windows and extra boundary fences will further impact the value of our homes.

We have a number of large cracks in my ceilings and walls that are shaken and rattled when the trains pass by. We have witnessed dirt falling from these cracks when as a result of the vibrations, which in some instances seem to go on for periods greater than 5 minutes!

Our house is double brick and well built in the 1930's, and similar to most houses along Brookong Avenue, and while I cannot attribute the cracks to the constant vibration of trains going past and the vibration, we cannot rule it out. I would argue that it certainly is not helping our efforts to keep our cracks repaired!!

The windows in our house frequently rattle when trains pass, and if we are sitting and talking. Adding to the noise is the sound of the train passing. We are often unable to hear each other in normal conversation, and need to wait for the train to leave before recommencing.

This is despite the 10 foot brick wall we have installed along the boundary of my property adjacent to the train line. We doubt any extra boundary fence will mitigate this moving forward.

Hence we assert that noise and vibration most certainly do significantly impact human comfort as it stands now, and will only further impact our human comfort and experience as the frequency and size of trains increase- in particular when considering the upgrade is to accommodate larger, heavier, taller trains more often!

## b) Diesel Fumes

**Diesel fuel fumes** that are emitted by the trains, especially when they are shunting or waiting for other trains to pass (crossing loops) have a significant impact upon residential houses along Brookong Ave as train traffic currently stands, and the increased train traffic will only make this situation worse.

My partner and I have experienced prolonged periods (sometimes in excess of thirty minutes) where the train is simply idling and not moving, the fumes are suffocating and impossible to avoid, especially if one is outside.

Hence we have serious concerns regarding the proposal to upgrade the rail through Wagga to allow for more frequent, larger, double decker trains, to pass through the heart of our city, and through a residential area.

This will mean more interruptions to daily living in our home, increased noise, more vibrations and potential damage to our home and more fumes when the trains seem to park on the tracks at the rear of my property, as they often do.

With respect to the latest Summary of Findings 2023, air quality modelling was completed at “specific rural and urban environments, which are typical of towns along the rail corridor...” Section 6.3 or PIR.

Noting that we were unable to identify exactly where these samples were taken in either the PIR or EIS tech paper 14, and most likely not in the backyards of the houses affected along Brookong Street when trains are parked there idling for excessive amounts of time.

Wagga Wagga	Uranquinty Yard clearances	534900 to 536800	259	Residential
			6	Educational
			6	Place of worship
			89	Commercial
			5	Industrial
	Pearson Street bridge	522600 to 524500	367	Residential
			8	Educational
			19	Recreational
			42	Commercial
			141	Industrial
	Wagga Wagga Yard clearances Cassidy Parade pedestrian bridge Edmondson Street bridge Wagga Wagga Station pedestrian bridge	520200 to 522100	730	Residential
			26	Educational
			7	Recreational
			4	Place of worship
			4	Medical
			89	Commercial
			36	Industrial

The Summary of findings seems to shirk responsibility for any future excessive emissions caused by train idling in future with the below.

*“While exceedances are modelled to occur along the rail corridor, the maintenance and operation of trains is the responsibility of the train operators. During operation of the proposal, it is expected that existing trains that have reached their operational life would be retired from use and replaced by new models that would be required to comply with the latest air emission limits, as specified in EPLs required for train operators’ under the Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997 (NSW).*

**The mantra of we will insist to build a rail highway through your backyard but its not our fault when its operational and emission’s increase simply is not good enough.**

*While the document predicts that emission’s “are predicted to result in concentration well within the assessment criteria” we disagree and invite you to spend an afternoon in our backyard with the train shunting at the back of our house sometimes for periods greater that 30 minutes and measure again, perhaps sit out there and try to enjoy the fresh air you are supposedly predicting.*

As a homeowner and resident who lives along part of the direct route for the proposed track upgrades, (approximately 10 metres from our back fence to the train track) I wish to highlight our lived experience residing in such close proximity to the tracks including the impact the trains currently have on our property.

Our concerns and experience are similar for other residents who live in the properties adjacent to us along Brookong Avenue and other streets that run parallel to the train track.

As previously mentioned we provide a link to a YouTube video we have uploaded that demonstrates the trains parked at the rear of our house, this one for in excess of 30 minutes and the noise and fumes generated. <https://youtube.com/shorts/nnEO8on3iGE>

## **5) Lack of Guarantee Around Projected Number of Trains to Pass in the Future and Clarification of The Data**

The EIS document: SLR Ref No: 2-0021-210-ESV-00-RP-0002\_G.docx June 2022/ also-refers to Potential Daily Train Movement Projections:

Current- 16

2025 – 18

2040 – 22

I argue that the trains currently impact many residents who live along the rail corridor, and will significantly further impact resident into the future. We have not been guaranteed of the number of trains that will pass in years to come, and feel that once the upgrades are completed it will be ever increasing.

The real fear among the people in our community regarding these changes may also have a longstanding impact on the value of our properties, with the size, height and number of trains passing not guaranteed.

What compensation for affected residents has been allowed to account for this?

**I would also like clarification around the projections and data that has been used in the EIS document, in particular in reference to the calculated ground borne noise level predictions and vibration assessments and if they reflect the change in mass of the trains, as this railway project is to accommodate trains that are double decker in size?**

#### **In Conclusion:**

I feel that this project should not go ahead in its current form, in part due to the lack of proper community consultation allowing for meaningful feedback regarding this project from the get go and in part due to the complete disregard for another viable option, including a rail bypass.

I are not talking about a simple rail upgrade, but about an upgrade that facilitates huge double story trains through the heart of our city, through residential areas and across major arterial intersections, requiring the rebuilding of bridges!

Once complete this will have the effect of increasing rail traffic, fumes, noise, potential damage to homes and impact on the property prices of houses close to the rail system.

I argue that if we the community were properly informed, there would have been a display of major concern from members of the community, we would have been more outspoken and perhaps other options such as a Wagga bypass may have been properly considered, researched and reported on.

I compare this attitude to perhaps deciding to build a new airport adjacent to our main street in town, Baylis Street.

At least the cab ride might be a little cheaper.

In light of all of the above we ask that you are able to assist and intervene and facilitate the rejection of this project in its current form, and force the stakeholders to reconsider their proposal, and instead plan the upgraded rail system to bypass the town of Wagga Wagga.

I, like many who reside in Wagga Wagga maintain that a more appropriate course of action would be to develop a bypass going from the south to the east of Wagga- linking into the existing Bomen Industrial precinct.

It is not appropriate to facilitate the construction of a railway highway through the heart of our residential areas and growing city, with blatant disregard for the residents and community members it will affect now and into the future.

This then would in turn mitigate all the negative impacts to the community members that have been glossed over by the current stakeholders, while also allowing infrastructure and services to grow.

