

APPENDIX

INLAND
RAIL 

D

Strategic planning review

NARROMINE TO NARRABRI ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

 ARTC

The Australian Government is delivering
Inland Rail through the Australian
Rail Track Corporation (ARTC), in
partnership with the private sector.

APPENDIX D Strategic planning review

A summary of the plans and strategies that are relevant to the need for, and development of, the proposal is provided below.

National planning

Australian Infrastructure Plan and Priority List

The *Australian Infrastructure Plan* (Infrastructure Australia, 2016) sets out the infrastructure challenges and opportunities that Australia faces over the next 15 years and the solutions required. The plan was informed by the Northern Australia Audit and the Australian Infrastructure Audit, which provide a comprehensive review of existing and required infrastructure over the coming decades.

The plan has four main themes:

- ▶ productive cities, productive regions
- ▶ efficient infrastructure markets
- ▶ sustainable and equitable infrastructure
- ▶ better decisions and better delivery.

Inland Rail is referenced in relation to the first theme. The plan states that ‘the efficient movement of freight into, out of, and across Australia is critical to the nation’s ongoing productivity growth and competitiveness.’ It recognises that the Melbourne to Brisbane corridor is one of the most important and busiest freight routes in Australia, supporting key population, production, and employment precincts. The Plan states that Inland Rail would improve the efficiency of freight moving between Melbourne and Brisbane, as it would bypass the Sydney metropolitan area.

As part of the *Australian Infrastructure Plan*, the *Infrastructure Priority List* (Infrastructure Australia, 2020) is designed to give guidance to decision makers, visibility to industry, and transparency for the community. It is a ‘rolling’ list, which is updated periodically as proposals move through stages of development and delivery, and to respond to emerging challenges and opportunities.

Inland Rail is included as a priority project (national) on the *Infrastructure Priority List* in the ‘national connectivity’ category. It is identified for delivery in the medium term (five to 10 years). The list states, in terms of the ‘problem to be addressed’ that:

The current rail connection between Melbourne and Brisbane, via Sydney, cannot offer the transit times and reliability required by industry. This is largely a function of poor rail alignments and capacity constraints, particularly on the section between Sydney and Brisbane, and delays on freight transiting the Sydney metropolitan area. The current road connection between Melbourne and Brisbane via inland New South Wales offers faster transit times than rail via Sydney. However, much of the road is two-lane single carriageway, with limited passing lanes. Without additional capacity, transit times on this corridor will increase as freight volumes rise.

State of Australia’s Cities 2014-2015

State of Australian Cities 2014-2015 (Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development, 2015) brings together current research and data to present a comprehensive picture of how Australia’s cities are evolving, to strengthen the knowledge base used to develop policy. The report observed that there is more demand for transport in Australia, including freight, than ever before.

Further growth in population, transport passengers, and freight demands is forecast. Recognised key challenges for policy makers include the potential conflicts between the usability of cities with the utility and long term capacity of freight hubs, ports, airports, and the movement of goods and people in cities. The interstate freight task is forecast to grow significantly in the coming decades, with resultant pressure on to transport infrastructure. The report notes that the issues associated with this will be particularly felt in the cities where many freight movements originate and terminate, as there are already capacity constraints experienced when the movement of freight conflicts with the transport of people on roads and rail.

The report notes that all levels of government and industry have agreed on the need to apply a national focus and effort to deliver a streamlined, integrated and multimodal transport and logistics system, capable of efficiently moving freight throughout Australia.

Inland Rail provides a response to some of the issues raised in this report, as it aims to:

- ▶ provide a step-change improvement in rail service quality in the Melbourne to Brisbane corridor to deliver a freight rail service on the east coast that is competitive with road
- ▶ improve road safety, ease congestion and reduce environmental impacts by moving freight from road to rail
- ▶ bypass bottlenecks on the congested metropolitan rail networks on the east coast, and free up train paths for other services on the coastal route.

Urban Transport Strategy

The *Urban Transport Strategy* (Infrastructure Australia, 2013), *National Land Freight Strategy* (Standing Council on Transport and Infrastructure, 2013), and the *National Ports Strategy* (Infrastructure Australia and the National Transport Commission, 2011) (see below) form the key components of strategic planning for transport in Australia.

Relevant to Inland Rail, the *Urban Transport Strategy* recognises that some of Australia's public transport sub-systems influence the performance of urban roads and the national freight systems. The strategy notes that as Australia is highly urbanised, and that urban transport strongly affects national productivity, with road congestion impacting on national productivity and economic activity.

One of the aims of the strategy is to promote the best use of capacity on high use roads. This can be achieved in a number of ways, including by removing freight from urban roads, and prioritising freight on the national freight network.

Inland Rail is consistent with this strategy, as it aims to:

- ▶ improve road safety, ease congestion and reduce environmental impacts by moving freight from road to rail
- ▶ bypass bottlenecks on congested metropolitan rail networks on the east coast, and free up train paths for other services on the coastal route.

National Land Freight Strategy

The *National Land Freight Strategy* (Standing Council on Transport and Infrastructure, 2013) is a partnership between Commonwealth, State, Territory and local governments and industry to deliver a streamlined, integrated and multimodal freight transport and logistics system, capable of efficiently moving freight throughout Australia. The strategy recognises that 'the efficient movement of land freight is crucial for Australia's productivity and competitiveness, and affects the lives of every Australian' and that 'continued growth in freight volumes is giving rise to a range of increasingly complex challenges for governments, industry and the community.'

The strategy seeks to direct the efforts of all governments and industry towards the long term vision, objectives and outcomes for freight in Australia. Identifying the current and future places for freight movement is a core element of the strategy. Inland Rail is included on the map of key freight routes developed by the strategy, based on the route provided in the *National Land Freight Strategy Update Paper* (Infrastructure Australia, 2012). The map shows a single new national network to reflect the emphasis on potential future freight flows, freight (vehicle) connectivity, ports, and settlements.

The background paper for the strategy, the *National Land Freight Strategy Discussion Paper* (Infrastructure Australia, 2011) provides a case and priorities for a national land freight network strategy, and an indicative list of projects and programs that Infrastructure Australia has already flagged for inclusion in a long term national land freight network plan. This includes Inland Rail.

National Ports Strategy

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) endorsed the *National Ports Strategy* (Infrastructure Australia and the National Transport Commission, 2011) in July 2012 as part of a collaborative approach to the future development and planning of Australia's port and freight infrastructure. The strategy was prepared following extensive consultation and engagement with stakeholders.

The *National Ports Strategy* covers both bulk commodity ports and container ports, identifying:

- ▶ the most effective regulatory and governance frameworks
- ▶ ways to improve land planning and corridor preservation
- ▶ future infrastructure requirements of Australia's ports, including road and rail links.

The strategy notes that there are major efficiency implications for Australia if significant improvements are not made to ports and related landside road and rail systems over the coming decades.

Inland Rail would connect key production areas in Queensland, NSW and Victoria with export ports in Brisbane and Melbourne. As a result, it is consistent with the National Ports Strategy.

NSW planning

State Infrastructure Strategy

Building Momentum: State Infrastructure Strategy 2018-2038 (Infrastructure NSW, 2018) notes that the transport freight industry is critical to the NSW economy. The strategy recognises the importance of leveraging the investment in Inland Rail to benefit NSW. The strategy notes that Inland Rail provides an opportunity to reshape the regional freight rail network and the economic geography of the regions it serves. A key focus for NSW is to ensure that Inland Rail supports the State's primary industries by optimising the movement of freight in regional NSW to ports and gateways, regardless of whether those gateways are in NSW, Victoria or Queensland. Inland Rail seeks to deliver efficient links to these gateways and develop economically sustainable freight hubs – operated by the private sector – at appropriate locations along the route.

Key recommendations relevant to Inland Rail include:

- ▶ develop and protect freight and service networks by improving road and rail access for goods and services to local, national and global markets, leverage the Commonwealth's Inland Rail investment and address existing inefficiencies and pinch points
- ▶ overcome local constraints on the regional road and rail networks that limit the use of high productivity freight vehicles and rail freight.

Future Transport Strategy 2056

The *Future Transport Strategy 2056* (Transport for NSW, 2018a) is a suite of strategies and plans for transport in NSW, developed in conjunction with the Greater Sydney Commission's *A Metropolis of Three Cities – the Greater Sydney Region Plan* and supporting regional plans, and Infrastructure NSW's *State Infrastructure Strategy* and the *Regional NSW Services and Infrastructure Plan*. The *Future Transport Strategy 2056* provides an integrated 40 year vision, directions and outcomes for transport in NSW.

The strategy recognises that the importance of the freight sector will continue to grow with volumes expected to double in Greater Sydney and increase by 25 per cent in regional NSW over the next 40 years. The strategy includes reference to Inland Rail, and notes that 'together with industry, and government partners, we will need to ensure that Inland Rail optimises the movement of freight in NSW through efficient links to ports and economically sustainable freight hubs.'

The strategy recognises that the freight network will be critical to regional NSW, and that Inland Rail will support intermodal hubs in regional NSW. It includes reference to Inland Rail as a 'regional NSW committed initiative (0-10 years)'.

Regional NSW Services and Infrastructure Plan

The *Regional NSW Services and Infrastructure Plan* (Transport for NSW, 2017a), which forms part of Future Transport Strategy 2056, sets a vision for how transport can support growth and the economy of New South Wales over the next 40 years. The plan includes Inland Rail as a key infrastructure project for regional NSW. It notes that:

- ▶ The commitment to building the Inland Rail through NSW provides a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reconfigure the regional freight network in NSW.
- ▶ North–south freight movements facilitated by Inland Rail and the Newell Highway will provide opportunities for improved movements of freight to ports and also provide relief for the coastal road and rail networks which will continue to experience growth in flows dominated by passenger movements.
- ▶ The ports of Melbourne and Brisbane will become increasingly important to the Riverina Murray and Northern NSW respectively with the implementation of Inland Rail.

Key initiatives for investigation in the plan include, for the regions in which the proposal is located:

- ▶ rail and road connections to Inland Rail
- ▶ new Intermodal facilities associated with Inland Rail.

NSW Freight and Ports Plan

The *NSW Freight and Ports Plan 2018-2023* (Transport for NSW, 2018b), which forms part of *Future Transport Strategy 2056*, sets the strategic direction for freight and ports over the next five years. The plan identifies priority action areas and infrastructure initiatives to create a transport network where goods move efficiently to their markets. In relation to Inland Rail, the plan notes that:

- ▶ The private sector is expected to invest in intermodal terminals along the Inland Rail corridor.
- ▶ The Inland Rail project is likely to increase interstate movement of goods by rail when it is completed. Transport for NSW is undertaking analysis of the benefits of Inland Rail to maximise outcomes for NSW.

The plan confirms that the NSW Government will support the Australian Government's delivery of the Inland Rail, and ensure the project optimises the movement of freight in regional NSW, and to ports and gateways strengthen governance, reporting and performance requirements across the entire NSW ARTC network.

The plan notes that in May 2018 the NSW and Australian Governments signed a bilateral agreement to progress the Inland Rail project in NSW, and that a key focus for NSW will be on improved east–west rail freight networks and connectivity with NSW ports.

The plan includes goal 2-5: Improve rail freight access and flows, with the initiative being to 'support delivery of Inland Rail'.

Road Safety Plan 2021

The *Road Safety Plan 2021* (Transport for NSW, 2017b) sets the direction for road safety in NSW to 2021. The NSW Government is committed to reducing road fatalities by 30 per cent by 2021.

The proposal contributes to the strategy as it aims to improve road safety by moving freight from road to rail.

Newell Highway Corridor Strategy

The *Newell Highway Corridor Strategy* (NSW Government, 2015a, Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Cities and Regional Development, 2019) sets out the objectives, current performance, and issues in managing the Newell Highway corridor over the long term. It details a series of safety, asset and traffic actions to meet the current and future issues along the highway. The strategy prepared by the NSW Government in 2015 notes that:

- ▶ The Newell Highway currently provides the major freight route between Queensland and Victoria, and connects numerous regional centres and communities along its 1,060 kilometre length.
- ▶ The Newell Highway serves as a key economic link to domestic and export markets for agricultural products from the Central West, and interstate road freight between Queensland and Victoria.
- ▶ Traffic volumes along the Newell Highway vary significantly, from around 1,200 to 4,000 vehicles per day in rural areas. Traffic volumes along the Newell Highway increase substantially within urban areas (including Narrabri), where average daily traffic volumes can exceed 20,000 vehicles a day.
- ▶ The Newell Highway experiences high levels of heavy vehicle use, with around 26 to 52 per cent of daily traffic made up of heavy vehicles, depending on the location. Relative use of heavy vehicles is highest to the north between Narrabri and Boggabilla, with up to 1,500 heavy vehicles per day near the Queensland border, and rural sections around Narrandera.
- ▶ A number of significant intermodal freight hubs are located along and around the Newell Highway, including major hubs at Tocumwal, Forbes, Parkes, Dubbo, Narrabri, and Moree. The NSW government aims to support these hubs by improving inland rail access, and supporting the road connections.

The strategy prepared by the Australian Department of Infrastructure, Transport Cities and Regional Development in 2019 notes seven key issues along the corridor:

- ▶ barriers to wider adoption of high productivity vehicles, including inadequate facilities for certain road freight tasks such as decoupling and truck washing sites
- ▶ safety concerns, due mainly to fatigue and speeding, a lack of fit-for-purpose infrastructure such as proper facilities at rest stops and heavy vehicle safety stations (HVSSs), and several level crossings with limited line of sight
- ▶ lack of resilience to major flooding events
- ▶ desire for real-time traffic condition and travel time information, as well as mobile network coverage
- ▶ localised congestion and reduced amenity in some towns, especially those with high levels of heavy vehicle traffic
- ▶ lack of sufficient overtaking opportunities along the corridor
- ▶ substandard and deteriorating pavement quality, with insufficient support for operational maintenance.

Relevant to Inland Rail and the proposal, the 2015 strategy notes the issues associated with moving significant volumes of freight along the road corridor. The 2019 strategy notes:

Of particular importance is the interdependency with the Inland Rail project, and how road and rail will work together to meet the growing freight task and reduce costs for regional supply chains. A holistic, multimodal view of freight transport that leverages the strengths of each mode is a key consideration for enhancing the overall efficiency of Australia's transport networks.

Consistent with the strategy, Inland Rail supports north–south freight movement between the communities of western and north-western NSW, along with interstate movements between Victoria, NSW and Queensland.

Regional and local planning

Central West and Orana Regional Plan 2036

The *Central West and Orana Regional Plan 2036* (NSW Government, 2017a) is a consolidated strategic plan prepared for the 20 local government areas in the Central West and Orana region, and includes the Narromine, Gilgandra, Coonamble and Warrumbungle LGAs.

The plan outlines a number of challenges facing the region, such as increasing freight volumes. A regional vision is presented of a sustainable future based on diverse economic industries, helping to service a healthy environment and strong, resilient communities.

The plan presents four goals with associated actions to help achieve this vision. The goals are:

- ▶ the most diverse regional economy in NSW
- ▶ a stronger, healthier environment and diverse heritage
- ▶ quality freight, transport and infrastructure networks
- ▶ dynamic, vibrant and healthy communities.

The plan includes reference to Inland Rail, noting that it ‘...could boost the region’s reputation as a freight hub and increase opportunities for freight and logistics facilities and intermodals close to road and rail corridors’. The following directions and actions in the plan are relevant to Inland Rail:

- ▶ Direction 18: Improve freight connections to markets and global gateways.
- ▶ Action 18.2: Strengthen and leverage inter-regional connections to support economic growth.
- ▶ Action 18.7: Work with the Australian Government and local councils as the Melbourne to Brisbane Inland Rail progresses.

New England North West Regional Plan 2036

The *New England North West Regional Plan 2036* (NSW Government, 2017b) is a consolidated strategic plan prepared for the 12 local government areas in the New England North West region, and includes the Narrabri LGA.

The plan recognises that:

- ▶ The region is strategically located between Sydney and Brisbane, and that high-quality transport networks to Newcastle, Sydney and South East Queensland will provide ready access to domestic and international markets and services.
- ▶ Upgrades to transport infrastructure, including the development of Inland Rail and intermodal freight terminals, are making it easier for goods, services and people to move across the region and beyond.

Relevant goals, directions and actions include:

- ▶ strong infrastructure and transport networks for a connected future
- ▶ expand emerging industries through freight and logistics connectivity
- ▶ work with the Australian Government and councils as the Melbourne to Brisbane Inland Rail Corridor project progresses.

Economic Development Strategy for Regional NSW

The *Economic Development Strategy for Regional NSW* (DTIRIS, 2015), provides the framework for driving economic growth in regional NSW.

Inland Rail is relevant to the following goals included in the strategy:

- ▶ drive regional employment and regional business growth
- ▶ invest in economic infrastructure and connectivity.

The strategy notes that greater physical and virtual connectivity between regional centres, major ports, Sydney, neighbouring states and the broader region can increase prosperity in regional NSW.

Relevant actions include improvements in regional transport through Regional Transport Plans and the *NSW Freight and Ports Plan*.

Central West Freight Study

The *Central West Freight Study* (Regional Development Australia Central West, 2013) documents the freight task in the Central West region, in terms of net tonnes transported via road, rail and air. It highlights constraints and opportunities, considers possible network improvements, and provides guidance on the benefits to the region of these improvements.

Relevant to the proposal, the study notes that Inland Rail is strongly supported, and that it meets the strategic merit test applied by the study. The study notes that Inland Rail would:

- ▶ provide an opportunity for regional businesses to access Melbourne and Brisbane markets and export ports, as well as other regional nodes
- ▶ provide a viable alternative for freight travelling along the Newell Highway
- ▶ unlock significant value in the supply chain, open up new markets to freight users across the region, and provide significant economic benefits to the region and the broader NSW economy.