

15 September 2022

**Re: Albury to Illabo: Wagga Wagga  
Response to Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Information Session and Q&A**

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

**Summary:**

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 object to the inference from those presenting the findings of the EIS information Session Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> September, that the disruptions will be minimal, and that said noise and vibration from the current train traffic has little impact, as a basis for arguing that the increases in rail traffic are then of little significance. **This is in fact not the case.**

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.

Many of us have only recently found out about this proposed upgrade, especially in relation to its complexity and timeline, including the increase in size and frequency of trains to pass right through the centre of our city.

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 feel that the information being presented to the community to justify the rail project is complex and hard to find if you are not privy about where to look.

The information in the EIS document is vast, comprehensive and over 29 chapters long. We were made aware of its existence on Tuesday night, 13<sup>th</sup> September- 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?

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 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 misleading the community to believe that other options such as a bypass were considered and discarded. **They were 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 confirmed that the ARTC did not look at alternate routes for this vast and expensive project.

**We would like to ask why not?**

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?

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

The 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 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 conducted Tuesday 13 September 6-7pm documented the measures that ARTC had employed to consult with community members.

I feel these consultation sessions are tick box attempts to display consultation but largely miss the mark.

Presenters went on to showcase all the instances they have consulted the community, including their facebook pages and invitations to attend meetings in person.

We never received notification of any said information session, as many in our community also did not.

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

We certainly were not notified at any stage about the project, 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.

We 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 impeding 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.

For example, I was informed by my neighbour yesterday who handed me a photocopy of the event on a piece of paper, because I had not been notified by the ARTC that the event was scheduled. I worry about our elderly neighbours who also are not tech savvy who are unaware about how to engage in such forums. They too have no say.

We 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.

We 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.**

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

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

We would also like to draw your attention to a few things we have managed to dissect from the 29 chapter, comprehensive and jargon filled document we were made aware of for comment in Tuesday night's information session. In particular to the chapter referring to noise and vibration impacts as we feel that the science behind the paper completely ignores the lived experiences of the people who actually live along the rail corridor.

The EIS document: SLR Ref No: 2-0021-210-ESV-00-RP-0002\_G.docx June 2022/ Tech Paper 7 refers to potential mitigation options to address :

*"The effects of vibration in buildings can be divided into two broad categories which are considered further in the following sections where the:*

- Occupants or users of the building are inconvenienced or possibly disturbed either from tactile vibration or audible noise generated from the building vibration ('comfort risk').*
- Building contents or internal linings may be noticeably affected or where the integrity of the building or the structure itself may be prejudiced ('cosmetic damage risk')."*

The document finds that

- a) *"vibration levels at the listed structures are not expected to significantly change from levels currently experienced"*
- b) *"operation as per the proposal is not considered to change the risk of cosmetic damage to these buildings and structures".*

We note that the buildings listed in the document do not seem to include the plethora of residential houses that are located along the tracks and hence find the EIS claim to be in direct opposition to my (and other residents in the area) current experience and hence somewhat misleading.

**As such the findings do not properly consider or reflect the lived experience of many residents who live along the rail corridor.**

For example: 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.

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!

We argue that the document's assumption that the development is not expected to significantly change what is currently experienced is misleading and fails to account for the people for whom this development directly impacts- the homeowners.

**b) Apparent lack of sound mitigation plans for affected residents during construction and ongoing train traffic**

The EIS document also does not seem to account for sound mitigation plans for residents who live along the main train corridor, both during construction, and for when trains eventually pass in greater mass and frequency.

In response to a question about the impacts of the trains on residences, one of the presenters noted in Tuesday night's information session that the vibrations from the trains do not affect houses and are minimal. We feel this is not completely accurate and

is in direct contrast to our lived experience. We find that they most often do, especially the longer freight trains that pass by, as well as when parked, running yet idle.

### **c) Diesel Fumes**

The EIS document also does not seem to account for the Diesel fuel fumes that are emitted by the trains, especially when they are shunting or waiting for other trains to pass (crossing loops).

We 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.

### **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

We 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?

**We 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:

We 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.

We 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.

We 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.

We 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.

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.

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.