

Dr Joe McGirr MP

Independent Member for Wagga Wagga



JM20356

26 August 2022

To whom it may concern

I write to raise the serious concerns brought to me by my constituents, and that I share, in relation to the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Albury-Illabo section of the Inland Rail project.

Wagga Wagga is the largest inland city in regional NSW and it is bisected by the main southern railway line. Without appropriate action, I believe the Inland Rail project will have a significantly negative impact on the city.

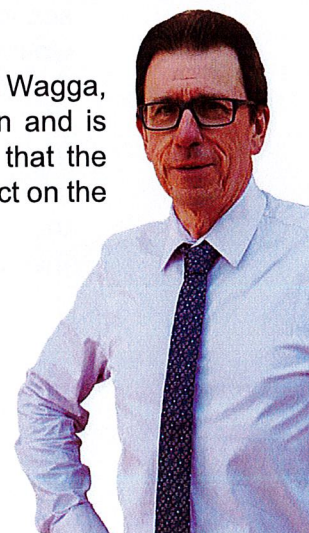
There is no doubt that the Inland Rail development will bring benefits to Australia, but I want to make sure these benefits do not come at a cost to the communities that host rail infrastructure.

I acknowledge that Wagga Wagga's Bomen industrial estate is the site for one of the state's Special Activation Precincts. Part of this development includes the Riverina Intermodal Freight and Logistics hub (RIFL), which has already necessitated the building of additional rail lines and a siding. The development will bring additional jobs and opportunities to Wagga Wagga.

But the concerns of residents on a number of issues relating to the Inland Rail project must be adequately addressed.

In particular, Wagga Wagga is unique in terms of its size and the fact that the railway runs directly through the city, very close to facilities and homes. There are also real concerns that the construction and subsequent operation of the line will have a serious negative impact on the wider transports network of the city.

The NSW government has recently released the Transport Plan for Wagga Wagga, the first for a regional city. The plan involved many years of consultation and is designed to allow the city to grow and remain liveable. I do not believe that the current information in the EIS has taken into account the impact of the project on the Transport Plan, and this should be specifically addressed in detail.



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Residents are concerned that the increasing frequency and length of the trains will create difficulties at all of Wagga Wagga's level crossings. Already, traffic on some of Wagga Wagga's busiest streets is brought to a halt as rail traffic passes through the city. The Transport Plan itself has highlighted the need to assess the impact of the changes to train traffic on level crossings.

One area that is specifically of concern is the impact on the health precinct. There are concerns that an increasing number of longer, more frequent, trains will affect traffic flow particularly around the level crossing at Docker-Bourke Streets. This level crossing is located on one of Wagga Wagga's busiest streets. It is not only a major thoroughfare between the city's northern and southern areas, but also very close to both the Sturt Highway and the Wagga Wagga Base Hospital and health precinct.

I am worried that there will be a serious negative effect on accessing health services, especially in an emergency situation.

Traffic flow across level crossings is not the only issue of concern raised by my constituents. There are also concerns about the plan to rebuild the Edmondson Street bridge, which I understand will need to be at least two metres higher to accommodate the double-stacked carriages of the Inland Rail.

The Edmondson Street bridge is located very close to a busy intersection with the Sturt Highway and adjacent to two schools. The bridge, in fact, overlooks the South Wagga Public School playground and some classrooms. Adding two metres will substantially increase the height of this bridge. Additionally, the work to upgrade the bridge is expected to take at least nine months, which will create a considerable impact on traffic flow, as well as havoc for nearby residents and schools.

The modelling contained in the EIS points to a very negative impact in parts of the city with Levels of Service dropping to D and F in some parts. If this is described in a report that is advocating for the project, I am concerned the impact may be greater.

In light of the concerns, I believe there should further independent consideration of the impact of the project on traffic and transport through the city, both during the construction of the Edmondson street bridge, and afterwards as the line becomes operational.

Many residents have also expressed their concern about the potential impact of noise and vibration from the larger and heavier trains on the homes, businesses, schools and medical facilities along the proposed route through Wagga Wagga. I would expect that any likely impact from noise or vibration is carefully considered so that it can be adequately mitigated. I note that WWCC believe that the assessment of noise and vibration has only really been considered at enhancement sites. I would expect that the impact on all of Wagga Wagga should be assessed. In particular many residents whose properties are close to the railway are very concerned about the impact of the additional heavier and longer trains and have not been reassured that this impact will be properly mitigated.

It is not just residents of Wagga Wagga who have expressed concern about the impact of Inland Rail on their communities. Smaller centres like The Rock and Uranquinty will also face issues with access to parts of their communities being restricted by lengthy and increasingly frequent trains. Again, there is great concern is that emergency vehicles will be impacted.

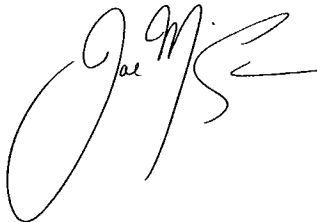
Finally I point out the size of the EIS document and its complexity and the difficulties this creates for residents who wish to review it and make a submission. It is therefore of the highest importance that the Department of Planning thoroughly review the EIS on behalf of the community and ensure that the impact of the project is kept to a minimum.

While I appreciate the importance of the Inland Rail project, it is also vital that the concerns of residents in communities that will be impacted by not only the project, but also the increasing trains in the long term, are heard and their concerns addressed.

Wagga Wagga is the largest inland city in NSW and will be the first to reach a population of 100,000, which is in my view likely to happen in the next 20 years. The community welcomes this growth, but wants to ensure that it does not come at the cost of their way of life and the liveability of the city.

If the concerns of the community cannot be addressed, then an alternative route around the city should be considered.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joe McGirr', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Dr Joe McGirr, MP
Member for Wagga Wagga