

Inland Rail Position Paper

Introduction

The Australian Government has proposed the construction of the Inland Rail Project from Melbourne to Brisbane. The Australian Rail Track Corporation (ARTC), an Australian government owned corporation, has been tasked with the delivery of the Inland Rail. This Inland Rail Program has been divided into 13 projects. Two of these component projects, the Gowrie to Helidon (G-H) and Helidon to Calvert (H-C) directly involve the Lockyer Valley Region.

While recognising that national benefits can be achieved, the Lockyer Valley Regional Council and the communities that make up the region, have serious concerns over the impacts that the projects will cause.

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to:

- (1) Articulate and coordinate Council's response to the proposed Inland Rail Project.
- (2) Provide strategic direction for Council officers consulting with the Australian Government, ARTC, Queensland Government and other stakeholders
- (3) Provide a policy context for the proponent's more detailed design work
- (4) Focus community attention on widely held concerns.

Background

Previous railway planning through the region was the Gowrie to Grandchester Rail Corridor Study which identified a preferred route from Gowrie (west of Toowoomba) to Grandchester through the Great Dividing and Little Liverpool Ranges. This Gowrie to Grandchester alignment has generally been adopted by ARTC.

A significant aspect of the design criteria for that study was that it involved planning for both passenger and freight trains. This has led to a project alignment that is directed at communities and designed to attract patronage for passenger services. This is despite the fact that Inland Rail is only designed for freight services.

Current Design Project

Inland Rail is a proposed railway travelling 1700 km from Melbourne to Brisbane via regional Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland. Key design specifications are listed below to provide context for an understanding of the impacts:

- Corridor minimum width 40 metres
- Dual Gauge with axle loads sufficient to provide for coal/bulk product
- Clearance to allow for double stacked containers (min 7.1M above rail)
- Train maximum speed of 115 km/h
- Trains 1.8 km long (potentially 3.6km)

Impacts

The Queensland Coordinator-General is preparing the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the G-H and H-C Projects. The Lockyer Valley Regional Council identified a broad range of impacts which were included in its submission to the Coordinator General for consideration in the Terms of Reference for the EIS work. That submission and other pertinent information on the projects impacts can be found on Council's web site via the following link:

<http://www.lockyervalley.qld.gov.au/our-services/community/Pages/Inland-Rail-Information.aspx#link6>

This Position Paper is not intended to provide a complete list of project impacts and the means to mitigate those impacts – that is the role of the Coordinator-General. Rather this Paper seeks to identify broad areas of concern that the community is expressing to Council. This is to ensure that decision makers in State and Federal governments are fully aware of the concerns and comprehend the effects such projects will have on our communities when considering what Inland Rail will do to this region and its future.

Clearly a 40m wide freight line (suitable for coal trains and 1.8km long, double-stacked, container trains) that traverses the entire Lockyer Valley Region will have enormous severance impacts. It will split the entire region, divide communities and introduce a serious flood threat. This corridor will create a physical barrier and the community is most concerned about loss of connection and access as well as the dangers of increased flooding impacts.

Our Lockyer Valley communities have been severely impacted by floods in 2011 and 2013. In some locations in the region the existing railway played a role in exacerbating the impacts of those floods. Clearly, a new rail corridor with significant green field construction is a concern to our community. This concern is heightened when it is noted that the Inland Rail project as currently designed indicates embankments on a scale not previously witnessed in Queensland.

For example the indicative design through Laidley shows embankments gradually rising from the existing rail embankment height at Forrest Hill to a height of 8 metres at the Plainland Road and continuing to rise as it approaches the Little Liverpool Range. In communities, still very aware of the dangers of flooding, such a wall creates serious concerns.

Safety concerns around level and occupational crossings are self-evident when considering a design train of those dimensions travelling at 115 km/h. Clearly the economic costs associated with time delays at these crossings will also be a consideration.

The design train is intended to operate 24/7 across the valley. This clearly has raised community concern around noise, light, dust, smell, vibration and visual amenity. This substantial loss of amenity will need to be mitigated as far as possible. It is noted that our communities will be impacted regardless of any design measures that can be introduced. This raises broad social, community health and wellbeing concerns.

Regional economic impacts identified include loss of productive land including good quality agricultural land, direct costs associated with severance such as increased transportation costs, reduction in property values, direct business impacts and loss of Gross Regional Product.

ARTC have reiterated that their interest is purely in terms of freight operations. Nevertheless residents of the Lockyer Region and beyond have a legitimate interest in future rail passenger transport and active transport solutions. It is pleasing to note that the Commonwealth Budget announced funding for a business case for passenger transport between Toowoomba and

Brisbane. However, that work is outside the scope of the existing Inland Rail EIS. It is considered that this business case work being carried out in conjunction with the EIS would be more beneficial and may deliver more integrated solutions.

The EIS and existing legislation provides a framework to deal with environmental assessment and aspects such as compulsory acquisition of land. However, beyond that framework and given the extent of the potential impacts, Council has worked with the State Member and the Federal Member to identify some key principles that need to be applied by the ARTC project proponents, decision makers and considered in any assessment of the EIS by the Coordinator-General.

These are by no means the only aspects that need consideration, but reflect areas of concern that have been frequently expressed by members of the community.

These principles are, that with respect to the proposed Inland Rail projects, there should be:

- 1. No loss of connectivity (where the proposed corridor severs existing access, alternate access should be provided of comparable or better standard)**
- 2. No flood impacts (from new rail corridors and where existing rail corridor is utilised the opportunity should be taken to improve flood resilience)**
- 3. Mitigated amenity impacts (noise, vibration, light, visual, dust, smell)**
- 4. Limited (as far as possible) loss of good quality agricultural land**
- 5. Promotion of integrated transport planning (to allow for future passenger transport and the support for active transport)**

It is considered that the application by decision makers of these principles will assist in defining better projects that will limit as far as practicable the impacts on the Lockyer Valley communities in the long term.

Council is prepared to discuss these matters with decision makers to determine how these long term impacts may be mitigated across the broader region. For example issues of severance can be dealt with on a case by case basis to ensure no loss of connectivity and access.

Solutions to potential flooding issues can be informed by Council's flood modelling and alternate projects may be identified that can make communities, and the rail corridor itself, more flood resilient.

The amenity impacts of such a freight railway will never be removed. However, these must be reduced as far as possible to minimise harm; decision makers must consider how to compensate those affected.

The loss of any productive land is detrimental, but the loss of good quality agriculture land to a proud agriculturally based region is severe. The impact must be minimised so we can continue to feed the nation.

Passenger transport solutions must be part of the decision making process for a railway that traverses our region. Council will work with the state Government and ARTC with the expectation that passenger transport and active transport options can be part of the future transport solution for the Lockyer Valley region.