2024

Sustainability Strategy

Australasian Railway Association

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A message from the CEO

The transport sector is at a critical juncture in supporting Australia and New Zealand's sustainable development. The way we live, work and travel over the long term will be shaped by the decisions we make in this decade to ensure our infrastructure meets the needs of our community and economy, while supporting improved environmental outcomes for all of us.

Rail will play a leading role in meeting the transport needs of a sustainable future.

The Australasian Railway Association (ARA) recognises the importance of the rail industry in delivering more sustainable outcomes and is committed to ensuring our industry can maximise its contribution to this vital task.

It is no secret that rail is a sustainable transport mode of choice, with rail freight generating 16 times less carbon emissions than road freight and passenger rail taking cars off the road and reducing congestion in our cities and towns. Beyond this, rail creates safer, healthier and more inclusive communities, while also sparking opportunities for urban renewal and growth.

As the industry delivers an unprecedented pipeline of rail projects, there is a concerted effort underway to ensure sustainability is embedded at every stage of the lifecycle, from planning and procurement to construction and operations. This growing focus further builds on the already clear sustainability benefits rail has to offer.

The ARA's 2024 Sustainability Strategy seeks to showcase the sustainability leadership that already exists within our industry, while also providing best practice guidance to industry as it continues to deliver improved outcomes. In each of our six focus areas, we will demonstrate the importance of greater use of rail to address some of the key challenges of our times, from decarbonisation and resilience to supporting diversity and inclusion in our workforce and community.

This strategy spans all aspects of the rail supply chain and is informed by a detailed workplan that seeks to engage with ARA members, industry stakeholders, policymakers and leaders to make the most of the significant benefits rail has to offer.

I look forward to working with our members to progress the strategy's key focus areas in 2024.

Caroline Wilkie

CEO
Australasian Railway Association

Sustainability and rail

Rail is an essential part of our sustainable future. Greater use of rail will be key to supporting our journey to net zero and building healthier, safer, more connected communities.

Reducing transport emissions

Rail freight generates 16 times less carbon pollution than road freight

Passenger rail generates 30 per cent less carbon pollution than driving

One commuter train takes 578 cars off the road

Driving sustainable development

Rail facilitates urban renewal and growth

Rail can play a central role in placemaking, creating more liveable communities

Rail is at the heart of integrated transport strategies to maximise public and active transport use

Delivering community benefits

Healthier communities: Walking to the train as part of your commute equates to completing 5.8 marathons per year

Safer communities: Accident costs associated with road freight are 20 times higher than rail

Connected communities: Rail provides safe and accessible transport

What we have done so far – key highlights

Industry leadership

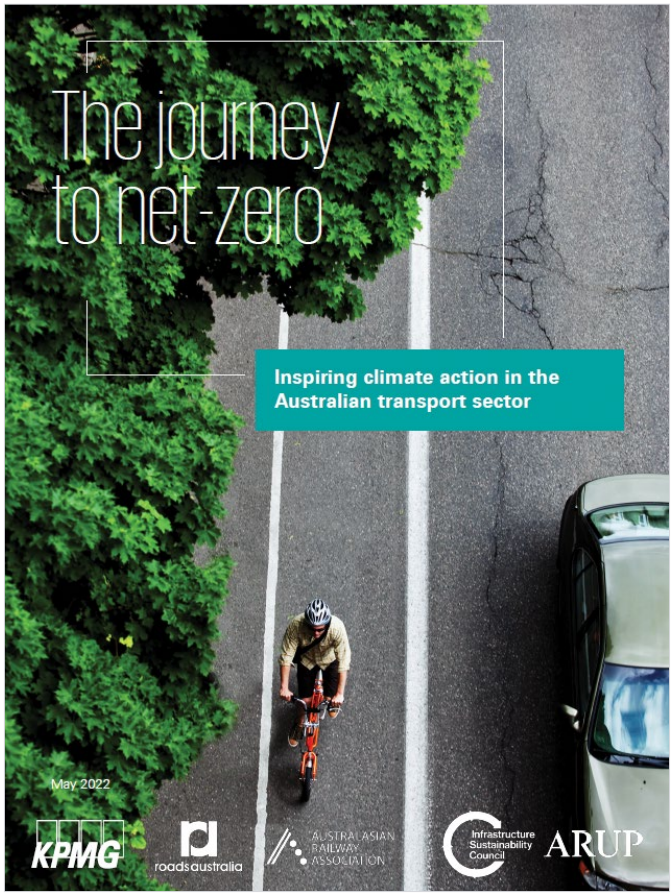
- Founding partner of Infrastructure Net Zero initiative, launched in 2023
- Released Journey to Net Zero in partnership with the Infrastructure Sustainability Council and Roads Australia in 2022
- Released the Sustainability Guide for the rail industry in 2023

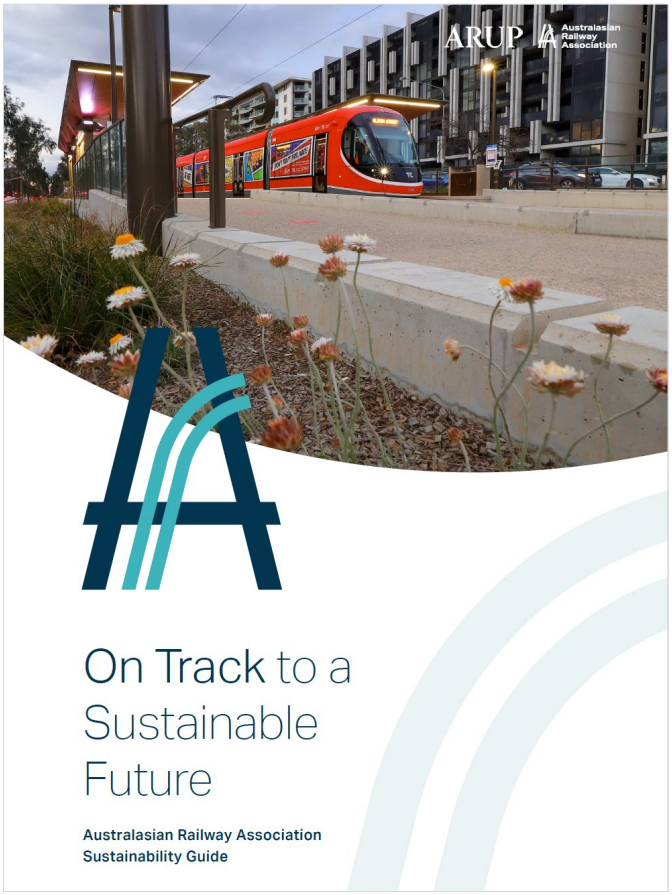
Connecting the rail industry

- Rail Sustainability Conference held in 2022
- Circular Economy Workshop held in 2023
- Establishment of six sustainability focused committees, networks and working groups to support our members

Advocating for industry

- Promoted the sustainability benefits of rail
- Advocated for policies to support mode shift and greater use of rail
- Identified sustainability as a key strategic focus

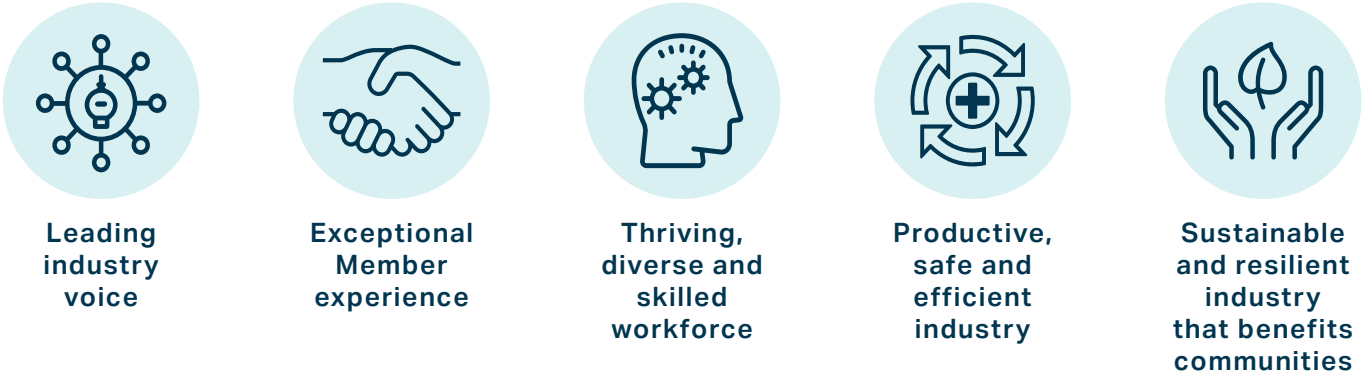




ARA strategy

The ARA's 2022-2025 strategic plan sets out our vision for a thriving rail industry that enables economic growth and drives sustainability. The Sustainability Strategy addresses a number of the Plan's strategic objectives.

Strategic Objectives



Leading industry voice

The ARA provides a united industry voice to demonstrate the rail industry's sustainability leadership and highlight the importance of greater use of rail to achieve improved sustainability outcomes.

Thriving, diverse and skilled workforce

Our Sustainability Strategy includes a strong focus on diversity and inclusion to ensure a thriving workforce and help communities prosper. We are committed to supporting continued capability and skills development to support new requirements as we work towards a net zero future.

Productive, safe and efficient industry

A coordinated, national approach to the key sustainability challenges we face will support improved interoperability in our industry, and help enhance our productivity and efficiency as we adopt new approaches and innovation.

Sustainable and resilient industry that benefits communities

We are committed to supporting our industry as it meets the needs of today, continues to support growing transport demand and adapts to a changing world.

Sustainability strategy

Our Sustainability Strategy is guided by six focus areas.

Leadership

Be a leading voice to demonstrate the rail industry's sustainability leadership and promote the benefits of greater use of rail. Advocate for a strong national approach on sustainability issues to streamline and accelerate the industry's progress

Decarbonisation

Demonstrate rail's leading contribution to our net-zero future and advocate for policy solutions to support the acceleration of decarbonisation in the industry.

Resilience

Support the development of resilient rail infrastructure to meet current and future needs.

Circular economy

Advocate for consistent national approaches to support circularity in the rail industry and identify opportunities to increase the use of recycled or remanufactured materials in the rail industry.

Diversity and inclusion

Support increased diversity and inclusion in the rail industry.

Industry capability

Provide opportunities for industry collaboration and information sharing to build capability on sustainability issues.

Leadership

Be a leading voice to demonstrate the rail industry's sustainability leadership and promote the benefits of greater use of rail. Advocate for a strong national approach on sustainability issues to streamline and accelerate the industry's progress.

Greater use of rail not only supports reduced emissions, but also delivers a range of health and safety benefits and makes our communities more liveable. The rail industry is building on its existing sustainability leadership as it works to decarbonise and adopt more sustainable practices across every aspect of the asset lifecycle.

To continue to make the most of the sustainability advantages rail delivers, we will need a strong national approach to our efforts to decarbonise and the right policy settings to adopt more sustainable practices. Our leadership focus area will make the case for policy settings that support these goals.

How we will do this

- Play a leading role in the infrastructure sector's efforts to deliver sustainable development
- Advocate for policy settings that recognise the rail industry's leadership in delivering sustainable transport outcomes
- Promote the sustainability benefits of rail
- Provide guidance for industry on key sustainability issues

Key Inititative

Infrastructure Net Zero

Infrastructure Net Zero is a collaboration of existing organisations committed to working together on the highest priority initiatives to accelerate decarbonisation in the infrastructure sector, and drive lasting policy change and industry innovation. The ARA is one of the founding partners of the initiative, together with six other peak bodies and three government agencies. In 2024, Infrastructure Net Zero will deliver projects across a number of workstreams, including capability, procurement, net zero pathways and public/private sector engagement.

Decarbonisation

Demonstrate rail's leading contribution to our net-zero future and advocate for policy solutions to support the acceleration of decarbonisation in the industry.

Mode shift initiatives to support greater use of rail will be essential to reducing emissions in the short term to ensure a sustainable, integrated transport infrastructure network. The rail industry is progressing a range of measures to further decarbonise as we move towards a net zero future, including the adoption of new technologies and energy sources.

We will lead industry efforts to further define its net zero pathway and identify opportunities for collaboration between industry and government to accelerate our progress.

How we will do this

- Advocate for policy outcomes that recognise the benefits of greater use of rail to support decarbonisation and help accelerate the industry's own decarbonisation efforts
- Define a clear pathway for rollingstock decarbonisation, including consideration of policy and regulatory change that may be required to support the transition
- Contribute to wider infrastructure sector efforts to accelerate decarbonisation
- Advocate for greater use of rail to support reduced transport emissions

Key Inititative

Rollingstock decarbonisation critical path

The ARA is developing a rollingstock decarbonisation critical path to support the industry's journey to net-zero. The project will define the policy, regulatory, investment and skills considerations impacting the decarbonisation of rollingstock nationally, and provide recommendations on how industry and government can work together to support the transition to a decarbonised fleet. It will consider the unique considerations for freight, heavy haul and passenger rail operating on non-electrified sections of the national rail network.

Resilience

Support the development of resilient rail infrastructure to meet current and future needs.

The national rail network forms an essential part of our supply chain. Its resilience is therefore critical to ensuring a productive and efficient economy. New rail projects and upgrades to existing infrastructure must ensure a focus on climate resilience.

We will work with the rail industry to advocate for funding to maintain the resilience of the network as the impact of extreme weather events increases. We will also provide opportunities for industry guidance and information sharing on a range of issues, including the development of resilience strategies, consistent approaches to climate change and adaptation planning, and biodiversity.

How we will do this

- Provide guidance for the rail industry to support the resilience of the national network
- Advocate for funding for key resilience rail projects

Key Inititative

Rail freight resilience projects

The ARA partnered with freight rail members and the Freight on Rail Group to assess the resilience of the national freight network and identify opportunities for upgrades to improve climate resilience in 2023. The ARA is continuing to engage with government on the importance of investing in rail upgrades to the network that improve its ability to withstand extreme weather events and provide greater redundancy on key freight routes when they occur.

Circular economy

Advocate for consistent national approaches to support circularity in the rail industry and identify opportunities to increase the use of recycled or remanufactured materials in the rail industry.

A national approach to adopting circular practices in the rail industry will be essential to drive innovation, build scale and streamline the adoption of circular materials. Improved tracking of materials across the asset lifecycle will also be key to the industry's success.

In 2023, we established a Circular Economy Working Group to identify opportunities to increase circular economy measures in the industry, and explore which materials provide the most impactful opportunities to progress towards full circularity. We will continue to work with industry on these issues, drawing on international best practice.

How we will do this

- Provide guidance for the rail industry to facilitate greater circularity in rail
- Advocate for a national approach to the circular economy in rail

Key Inititative

Identifying opportunities to increase circularity in the rail industry

The ARA is working with members to identify consistent national approaches to increase the use of recycled and remanufactured materials and support information sharing on the adoption of circular materials. This includes continued advocacy to streamline type approvals processes, which will help fast track the adoption of circularity in the rail industry.

Diversity and inclusion

Support increased diversity and inclusion in the rail industry.

The ARA has maintained a long term commitment to diversity and inclusion in the rail industry through its Women in Rail and Young Rail Professionals initiatives. As we progress our Sustainability Strategy, we are committed to building on this to ensure our industry can meet future demand, and reflect the communities in which it operates.

As our Women in Rail Strategy continues to deliver key programs to support gender diversity in the industry, we will broaden our focus this year to facilitate greater engagement and partnering with First Nations people in 2024.

How we will do this

- Work with industry to achieve improved diversity and inclusion in the rail industry
- Support industry's efforts to continue to improve accessibility in the rail industry

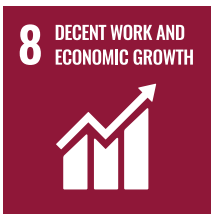
Key Inititative

First Nations participation, engagement and partnering in the rail industry

The ARA is commissioning new research to benchmark the participation, engagement and partnering of First Nations people in the Australian rail industry and develop best practice guidance for the industry. The research will help identify opportunities to build long term and meaningful engagement with First Nations people across the rail industry.

Industry capability

Provide opportunities for industry collaboration and information sharing to build capability on sustainability issues.



The rapid pace of change when it comes to sustainability necessitates a strong focus on building industry capability to meet new and emerging needs. Our rollingstock decarbonisation critical path project is exploring this issue when it comes to transitioning to new technologies in the rail industry. However, our people will need to continue to evolve to meet changing operational, reporting and compliance requirements as we become more sustainable.

We will continue to provide a wide range of opportunities for the industry to build capability as the changing sustainability landscape influences how we work. In 2024, supporting industry's focus on meeting new sustainability reporting requirements will be a key focus.

How we will do this

- Provide learning and development opportunities for rail industry professionals on sustainability issues
- Support the workforce transition to a net-zero economy

Key Inititative

Sustainability reporting

The ARA has established a new working group to support collaboration and share best practice on sustainability reporting in the rail industry. The working group will inform a new project to provide industry guidance and best practice on sustainability reporting for rail, and assess opportunities to improve reporting processes such as data collation.

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