Australasian Railway Association

MEDIA RELEASE

ARA welcomes focus on moving more freight on rail in Queensland Freight Delivery Plan

14 September 2026

The Australasian Railway Association (ARA) has welcomed the release of the Queensland Freight Delivery Plan 2026, including a strong focus on making rail a more competitive and practical option for freight customers.

ARA Chief Executive Officer Caroline Wilkie said the plan recognised the important role rail must play as Queensland's freight task continues to grow.

"Queensland's freight task is forecast to rise 20 per cent by 2032, so improving the productivity and capacity of the freight network will be critical to supporting the state's economic growth," Ms Wilkie said.

"The ARA welcomes the strong focus on improving the competitiveness of rail and addressing some of the practical barriers that have limited mode shift.

"This plan reflects extensive collaboration between government and industry, and we are pleased to see this has resulted in a range of practical solutions to support greater use of rail."

The ARA welcomed a number of measures designed to support mode shift to rail, including:

- a new, three-year Rail Freight Container Incentive Scheme, offering eligible customers a rebate of up to 50 per cent on below-rail access charges for additional container freight moved on the North Coast Line, Mount Isa Line and Southern Queensland systems
- continued access charge support on the Mount Isa Line, including a 10 per cent subsidy for all customers and discounted arrangements for rock phosphate and diesel fuel
- new open-access intermodal freight facilities, with an initial focus on the Mount Isa Line and the Port of Townsville
- a commitment to work with industry to unlock underutilised rail infrastructure
- more flexible rail access arrangements designed to reduce customer cost and risk and support mode shift.

The plan also commits to targeted planning and investment to improve rail freight capacity and reliability, including connections to the Port of Brisbane and regional ports, upgrades to the Mount Isa Line, first and last mile improvements for grain freight, and longer-term rail corridor planning across Queensland.

Ms Wilkie said these measures were an important step, but sustained reform would be needed to deliver lasting change.

"Mode shift does not happen through a single incentive or infrastructure project. It requires a long-term policy framework that makes rail consistently competitive, reliable and easy to access," Ms Wilkie said.

“The plan provides an opportunity to establish a long-term focus on access pricing, network reliability, rail capacity, intermodal terminals, first and last mile connections and long-term corridor planning.”

Queensland’s rail network already carries a major share of the state’s freight task, moving 270.2 million tonnes in 2023–24 and accounting for 61 billion tonne-kilometres of freight movement.

Rail is the most efficient form of freight transport and can deliver significant sustainability benefits, with rail freight generating 16 times less carbon pollution compared to road.

Ms Wilkie said greater use of rail would therefore deliver significant wider benefits to the state.

“The plan provides an opportunity to build on that foundation and ensure rail captures a greater share of future freight growth to support an efficient state network,” Ms Wilkie said.

“We look forward to continuing to work with the Queensland Government and industry on the implementation of the plan and on the longer-term reforms needed to achieve meaningful and sustained mode shift to rail.”

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