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ARA welcomes rail funding, skills and training investment in Federal Budget

The Australasian Railway Association (ARA) has welcomed new rail funding in tonight's Federal Budget as the industry continues to support the nation's economic growth and recovery.

ARA Chief Executive Officer Caroline Wilkie said new rail funding and investment in skills and training would be welcomed by the industry.

The ARA also commended new innovation initiatives, which could deliver further benefits if extended to industries like rail as part of their implementation.

Ms Wilkie said the Government's \$2 billion initial investment in the Melbourne Intermodal Terminal would deliver significant benefits to the freight sector.

"This is a key project that will support greater use of rail, take more trucks off the road and ensure we are ready to meet the nation's growing freight task," Ms Wilkie said.

"An intermodal terminal in Melbourne with the capacity to manage double stack containers was an important part of the business case for Inland Rail.

"This will realise that ambition and maximise the significant benefits of the Inland Rail project."

Additional funding for key rail projects such as WA's METRONET, Queensland's Gold Coast Light Rail, the Canberra Light Rail and SA's Gawler Rail Line Electrification project were welcome investments in the passenger rail network.

"While the past year has been a challenging one, people are returning to rail and the network needs to be ready to meet future demand," Ms Wilkie said.

"For many years, rail has suffered from historic underinvestment when compared to other modes and this trend must be reversed to support the sustainable development of our cities.

"It is important that governments keep supporting projects like these to avoid traffic gridlock and help reduce emissions as populations rise."

Additional funding for new apprenticeships and traineeships would be welcomed by the rail industry as new construction projects got underway.

“The rail industry is already facing skills shortages and is actively working to improve pathways into the industry to support future demand,” she said.

“We welcome any initiative that encourages more people to consider a career in rail and supports greater diversity in the industry.”

While the ‘patent box’ initiative to drive new innovation was to be commended, Ms Wilkie encouraged the Government to consider broadening its focus to include additional industries.

“The rail industry lags its international counterparts when it comes to technology and innovation, in part due to a lack of national research investment and focus,” Ms Wilkie said.

“Initiatives like the ‘patent box’ could drive greater investment in rail innovation and maximise the significant investment in rail infrastructure to come over the next 15 years.”

Ms Wilkie said it was pleasing to see employment rates improve following the challenges of 2020.

“The rail industry has maintained operations throughout the pandemic to keep people in jobs and make sure essential services were there when we needed them,” she said.

“The collective effort of the wider community has allowed Australia to weather the challenges we are currently faced with.”

Key rail funding announcements confirmed in the 2021-22 Federal Budget included:

Intermodal facilities and freight rail

- \$2 billion for initial investment in a new Melbourne Intermodal Terminal, VIC
- \$61.8 million for Melbourne Intermodal Terminal planning and development, VIC
- \$16.5 million to establish the National Freight Data Hub to enhance the collection and access to freight data across all modes, including rail.
- \$300,000 for proposed Tennant Creek Multimodal Facility and Rail Terminal development study, NT

Rail upgrades

- \$347.5 million for the METRONET Hamilton Street-Wharf Street grade separations and elevation of associated stations. Enhanced METRONET Byford Rail Extension,

with a new grade separated rail crossing at Armadale Road and an elevated station at Armadale, WA

- \$178.1 million for the Gold Coast Rail Line Capacity Improvement preconstruction (Kuraby to Beenleigh), QLD
- \$132.5 million for the Canberra Light Rail - Stage 2A, ACT
- \$126.6 million for Gold Coast Light Rail - Stage 3, QLD
- \$92.8 million for commuter car park upgrades including Berwick, Frankston and Ringwood stations, VIC
- \$60 million for the Gawler Rail Line Electrification, SA
- \$24 million for the Tasmanian Freight Rail Revitalisation - Tranche 3 - Port of Burnie Shiploader Upgrade, TAS
- \$3.1 million for the Goodwood and Torrens Rail Junctions Project, SA

Signalling

- \$31.5 million towards the METRONET High-Capacity Signalling project, WA

Planning and business cases

- \$2 million for the Kalgoorlie Rail Realignment Business Case, WA

ENDS

Further information

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**The list of key funding announcements was updated on 12 May 2021.*