

INLAND RAIL 25-27 MAY 21 CONFERENCE

ALBURY ENTERTAINMENT CENTRE, ALBURY NSW



Press release 27 May 2021

The 2021 Inland Rail Conference: Connecting Regions And Building Australia

The Australian Logistics Council (**ALC**) and the Australasian Railway Association (**ARA**) welcomed leaders from across the industry to the Albury-Wodonga region to attend the third Inland Rail Conference held on 25-27 May 2021, which was opened by Deputy Prime Minister Michael McCormack.

The Inland Rail project, now well and truly in the construction phase, will create a corridor of commerce, bringing to regional Australia sustainable quality jobs whilst removing freight from the road network to alleviate congestion.

The conference heard that the promise of the ability of moving freight from Melbourne to Brisbane in one day could change the way freight is moved in Australia from a ratio of 30% movement by rail, to 62% by 2050.

It also heard that growth occurs around transport routes, with research^[1] indicating that complementary market driven investments made along the rail line could support 2500 full time jobs after 10 years of Inland Rail's operation and boost gross regional product by up to \$13.3 billion in the first 50 years.

This will have the effect of creating quality sustainable jobs that enhance the continued viability of Australia's inland towns and cities. It will attract Australians who are looking to move from cities to regional areas for lifestyle reasons and allow regional Australians to stay in their home towns rather than move to cities to gain employment.

The construction phase of the project has delivered local benefits. For example, 1862 people (including 302 indigenous Australians) gained employment during the development of the Parkes to Narromine segment of the line, with 99 local businesses (including 9 indigenous businesses) providing supplies to the project.

Furthermore, Australian industry gained advantages through the use of concrete sleepers sourced from Mittagong NSW, rail clips from Blacktown NSW and steel rail from Whyalla SA.

The Australian Rail Track Corporation (**ARTC**) is working closely with communities to engage them in the development of the project in areas of Australia where Inland Rail is to be constructed. The next phase of the project has commenced from Narrabri to North Star.

Skills development is important. The Inland Rail Skills Academy (a project endorsed by both the ARA and ALC) has gone some way to develop STEM skills and business capability training. However, there are still shortfalls in the labour force required to meet the development of the Inland Rail project to allow it to develop at the same time as other major rail projects under construction. Rail construction projects are forecast to peak in 2025.^[2]

The importance of the development of intermodal capacity was also recognised. The conference discussed the importance of the role intermodals play to ensure that Australia's transport network works as a complete system.

The establishment of special activation precincts designed to facilitate the establishment of businesses that will support the efficient operation of Inland Rail in places such as Wagga, Parkes and Narrabri have assisted this outcome, as have the development of intermodals in places such as St Marys and Moorebank in NSW and Toowoomba in Queensland.

The conference was told the development of the Parkes hub is particularly important as its position at the juncture of Inland Rail and the East-West rail line will permit the cost effective movement of goods to all States of mainland Australia.

However, industry and government needs to work together so that both consumer choice of transport mode for freight and investments in road and rail networks can be optimised.

Industry needs to ensure that the information is shared so efficient decisions as to how freight can be moved are made. In the long term, this could be done through the Freight Data Hub being developed as part of Australia's National Freight and Supply Chain Strategy, which is the Federal framework that considers issues that cross state borders, on a whole of network process.

Governments need to ensure that planning decisions such as restricting residential encroachment on industrial precincts enable the continuous movement of freight.

Attendees urged the NSW Government to take urgent action to deliver its rail productivity strategy so that its missed target of rail having a 28% share of freight movement in 2021 is realised.

ALC CEO Kirk Coningham said "The Queensland Government must advance the next stage of analysis for a link to the Port of Brisbane to confirm the preferred alignment and begin the planning and approval process. This needs to include all necessary corridor and land acquisitions.

The outcome needs to be a dedicated freight corridor not mixing with passenger freight.

A dedicated freight rail corridor linking terminal and container linking terminals and container ports exists in Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, and Perth." Mr Coningham concluded.

Finally, the approval pathways for the development of the Kagaru to Acacia Ridge link should be prioritised, as should any work being performed to facilitate the movement of freight by rail from the Port of Brisbane.

ARA CEO Caroline Wilkie said the conference highlighted the significant benefits that can be achieved by moving more freight on rail.

“This is not just a nation building project, but a community shaping one too. We must make the most of it to maximise the jobs, opportunity and wider community benefits that will flow from Inland Rail,” Ms Wilkie said.

“Mode shift to Inland Rail will help drive lower emissions, improve safety outcomes and ease congestion across the freight network.

“It is essential that policy settings support greater use of rail freight to leverage the capacity and efficiency Inland Rail will provide as the industry meets the needs our growing national freight task.”

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[1] Ernst and Young *Inland Rail Regional Opportunities* (2020):
https://www.inlandrail.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/inland_rail_study_full_report_final_1.pdf

[2] Source: BIS Oxford *Economic Engineering Construction in Australia* (updated)