

INLAND RAIL PROJECT AND REGIONAL NSW

Organisation: Moree Plains Shire Council

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Mr Justin Clancy MP
Chair
Legislative Assembly Committee on Investment, Industry
and Regional Development
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Via email: investmentindustry@parliament.nsw.gov.au

To the Committee,

Submission – Inquiry into the Inland Rail project and regional NSW

On behalf of Moree Plains Shire Council (**MPSC**), thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission on the inquiry into the Inland Rail project (**the Project**) and regional NSW.

Moree Plains Shire is located 640km northwest of Sydney in the fertile Gwydir River and McIntyre River valleys in north-western NSW. The Shire's largest township Moree, is located along the Melbourne to Brisbane Inland Rail alignment and is home to a dynamic and progressive community, boasting strong agricultural industries in cotton, grain, oilseeds and pecans. Known as the most agriculturally productive broadacre region in Australia, Moree is a key centre for Australian agricultural production along the Inland Rail line with annual production in excess of 1.8M tonnes of grain and 900,000 bales of cotton.

Historically, MPSC has been committed to obtaining the best leverage from Inland Rail to support our local, regional and national economies. With the announcement of the Moree Special Activation Precinct 3 December 2019, Moree is well placed within interstate transport networks (both proposed and existing), for significant opportunities to strengthen western NSW's position within the national context for freight and supply chain priorities.

MPSC has been a longstanding supporter of the Inland Rail project being one of the founding members of the Melbourne to Inland Rail Alliance which brought together a number of local government authorities along the alignment. In response to the Committee's Terms of Reference for the inquiry, please see MPSC's comments below.

A – Economic development opportunities arising from the project

MPSC recognises that the Inland Rail is a transformational project that presents a number of economic development opportunities to our Shire. Despite this, a project of this nature often only provides for short term economic benefits through the construction phase, and is, although very welcomed, sometimes merely a "sugar hit of funds" to the local community.

It is essential that initiatives for long term economic growth be implemented to maximise the Inland Rail investment within regional NSW. Some efforts have been made in our local area to plan for future growth such as the Skills and Industry Study and Report (**the Study**) led by Transport for NSW (**TfNSW**) in conjunction with ARTC Inland Rail and five local councils along the Inland Rail line. The Study resulted in qualitative and quantitative data to inform a region wide Action Plan for future skills and long term employment requirements for infrastructure projects across regional NSW. The Study is one active initiative providing a holistic approach of how the Inland Rail can maximise opportunities across regional NSW.

Furthermore, Council has worked closely with ARTC Inland Rail and the Narrabri to North Star (phase 1) Tier 1 Contractor, Trans4m Rail, to encourage local participation and employment. To date, I am satisfied in the efforts undertaken to encourage local participation, but continued accountability to these social measures are still unknown for the project program and should be maintained for the construction life of the Inland Rail project.

I would like to commend the NSW Government for their implementation of the Special Activation Precincts (**SAP**) initiative, of which Inland Rail has been noted as a catalyst for the Moree SAP. The Inland Rail has presented a unique opportunity for Federal, State and Local Government to collaborate on major infrastructure works for the betterment of our community and to form part of our national economic recovery following the global pandemic.

Initiatives such as the Moree SAP will assist in growing the region whilst enhancing Moree's national and international profile for economic development and investment attraction – an opportunity enhanced by its location along the Inland Rail line.

B – Infrastructure required to ensure regional communities benefit from the project

Moree is well connected at a State and national level, with the Newell Highway providing connection to Melbourne, Brisbane, Newcastle and Sydney, some of the country's most significant export hubs, in addition to high quality airport services. The Inland Rail has revolutionised opportunities for national supply chain and logistics whilst creating a mode shift from road to rail. In order to benefit regional communities, the mode shift to rail must be supported by connecting infrastructure to the rail and associated intermodal hubs whilst not impacting the safety and livelihood of local residents.

Of utter-most importance to our local community is ensuring that our community does not suffer from severance associated with Inland Rail. Council sought, unsuccessfully, a rail bypass of Moree, however, this was not agreed to by ARTC. This has led to the critical need for an overbridge of the rail corridor to address severance issues for Moree. MPSC is working through a process to reach concurrence with ARTC Inland Rail, in collaboration with TfNSW, that the overbridge (known as the Moree Intermodal Overpass) be located just south of Moree township within the area being developed as the Special Activation Precinct referred to above. Combined with the future proposed East West Connector, the infrastructure leveraging the Inland Rail construction needs to provide a heavy vehicle route running East West to avoid the residential areas of south Moree which are already heavily impacted by truck traffic and would be much more impacted as a result of Inland Rail. It is necessary that trucks be able to travel directly to the Moree Intermodal hub. This infrastructure requires sufficient funding to realise the full benefits to the community.

MPSC is supportive and thankful for the range of funding opportunities to allow for associated infrastructure linking to the Inland Rail. Our Shire has been fortunate in receiving funding under the Restart NSW fund for Stage 1 of the Moree Intermodal Park - North South Link construction. There are a number of Federal Government funding options such as the Inland Rail Interface Improvement Program, Roads of Strategic Importance and Building Better Regions Fund providing opportunities to seek funding for infrastructure providing better connection to the Inland Rail but these opportunities are subject to budgets and high scrutiny of applicable criteria. At this stage, we are yet to realise all the necessary funds required, but continue to progress through these channels.

Moree is fortunate to be declared as a SAP, however, other regional NSW councils would likely need additional NSW Government funding and support to enhance their connection to the Inland Rail throughout regional NSW. Additional support from the NSW Government is suggested for councils in this regard.

C - Engagement with regional communities to identify opportunities

I would like to commend the professionalism of the Inland Rail team, and acknowledge their commitment and tremendous efforts towards achieving a great outcome for regional NSW. Our interactions with ARTC Inland Rail CEO, Mr Richard Wankmuller, and the entire project team has been, overall, positive and collaborative.

MPSC continue to be strong advocates to maximise the benefits of the Inland Rail for the Moree Plains Shire community. As noted above, significant consultation has been undertaken to encourage local participation and employment for the Project. I would like to ensure that accountability on social measures of the project continue to be monitored and met wherever possible, which are unknowns at this stage in the Project. I would like to encourage the ongoing engagement efforts now the Tier 1 Contractor has been awarded.

D – Alignment of the project with the NSW Freight and Ports Plan 2018-2023 and State Infrastructure Study 2018-2038

The Inland Rail project is generally consistent with the NSW Freight and Ports Plan in addition to the State Infrastructure Study. I note that both documents have a large focus on Sydney and Port of Botany, whereby regional NSW benefits should have additional focus. In this regard, it is of absolute importance ensuring the connection to the Port of Newcastle, as well as ports beyond NSW, such as Brisbane and Melbourne. Containerisation capacity, at a competitive price, is a critical additional need for facilities at Port of Newcastle. This will allow for greater benefits for regional communities along the Inland Rail line. General outcomes of freight efficiencies, regional productivity, supporting intermodal terminals and a mode shift from road to rail are met by the Inland Rail.

E – Any other related items

I would like to reiterate MPSC's satisfaction with the holistic approach and collaboration with the NSW Government Department of Planning, Infrastructure and Environment, in addition to the associated agencies, for the integration between the Inland Rail and the Moree SAP projects. Maximising the benefits for the local community and regional NSW continues to be at the forefront of all stakeholders' minds allowing MPSC to plan for economic growth across the Shire.

MPSC look forward to acknowledgement of this submission and would be happy to provide any additional information that may be of assistance. Should you wish to discuss this matter further please don't hesitate to contact Council's Regional Activation Manager, Mark Connolly, on [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] or by emailing [REDACTED]

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]
Katrina Humphries
MAYOR