

**Submission
No 24**

INLAND RAIL PROJECT AND REGIONAL NSW

Organisation: Central NSW Joint Organisation RDA Central West

Date Received: 5 February 2021



Legislative Assembly Committee
Investment, Industry and Regional
Development

Inquiry into the Inland Rail project
and regional NSW

February 2021



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5 February 2021

Mr Justin Clancy, (LIB, LA Member)
 Chair
 Legislative Assembly Committee
 Investment, Industry and Regional Development
 Parliament House
 6 Macquarie Street
 Sydney NSW 2000

To whom it may concern,

Re: Inquiry into the Inland Rail project and regional NSW

We welcome the opportunity to provide a joint comment with Regional Development Australia Central West on the Inquiry into the Inland Rail project and regional NSW. This is a once in a lifetime project and this region advocates on leveraging this opportunity regularly. On a national level the Inland Rail project will improve the global competitiveness of Australia's key exports, through providing a reliable rail transport alternative for agricultural and mining; it is also facilitating the creation of thousands of jobs during and after construction, many in rural and regional areas.

About the Central NSW Joint Organisation

Local Government Regional Joint Organisations (JOs) were proclaimed in May 2018 under the NSW Local Government Act 1993. The Central NSW Joint Organisation (CNSWJO) represents over 200,000 people covering an area of more than 50,000sq kms comprising the Local Government Areas of Bathurst, Blayney, Cabonne, Cowra, Forbes, Lachlan, Oberon, Orange, Parkes, Weddin, and Central Tablelands Water.

Tasked with intergovernmental cooperation, leadership and prioritisation, JOs have consulted with their stakeholders to identify key strategic regional priorities. The CNSWJO Strategic Plan can be found here:

https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/51b46b_31886650ecf546bc916f15e99a733b3e.pdf

About Regional Development Australia – Central West

Regional Development Australia Central West (RDACW) is a not-for-profit organisation. They work in partnership with governments, local communities and other stakeholders to develop initiatives that enable the Central West region to grow sustainably. The RDACW strategic plan is available here:

<https://rdacentralwest.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Framework.pdf>

We understand the terms of reference to be:

The Committee on Investment, Industry and Regional Development inquire into and report on the Inland Rail project and regional New South Wales, with particular reference to:

- a) *economic development opportunities arising from the project*
- b) *infrastructure required to ensure regional communities benefit from the project*
- c) *engagement with regional communities to identify opportunities*
- d) *alignment of the project with the NSW Freight and Ports Plan 2018-2023 and State Infrastructure Strategy 2018-2038*
- e) *any other related matters.*

a) economic development opportunities arising from the project

In 2016 Regional Development Australia Central West in partnership with the NSW Department of Industry conducted research into the logistical challenges for Small Agricultural Enterprises.

<https://rdacentralwest.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/SME-Ag-Logistics-Report-final.pdf>

Since this time the Inland Rail project has gained momentum and has progressed significantly. With the Parkes SAP now underway and investments in this site growing by the day, producers across the Central West are seeking to better access Inland Rail. There are a number of high value products grown or made in this region from cherries, apples to wine and honey. Further, there is growing interest in value add in agriculture including leveraging raising the dam wall at Wyangala into high value product.

The challenge is for smaller producers to tap into the transformational nature of this project. This includes an understanding of infrastructure changes and access barriers that need to be made to better leverage Inland Rail and support transport linkages to make this a reality.

Over \$2.5 billion of economic output across the Central West can be attributed to agriculture and related industries.¹ This is the opportunity that needs more detailed work in this region.

The 2019 Central West Food and Fibre Strategy identifies pathways to grow the value of agriculture in line with the CNSW JO priorities for 2020 of freight links and agriculture in support of the Federal Government's vision of a \$100 billion agricultural sector by 2030. Collaboration between levels of government leveraging Inland Rail is identified as a priority for action from the Plan.

RDA Central West has a strategic focus on connectivity and regional competitiveness as a priority area for the medium term. This project will be vital in highlighting and quantifying bottleneck's and access issues to Inland Rail. This project also supports RDA Central West to deliver on the RDA National Charter which underpins the efforts and priorities of RDA's. <https://www.rda.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/rda-charter.pdf>

¹ <https://app.remplan.com.au/rdacentralwest/economy/summary?state=VB3WFnMYRTrjZ7pSo2QWZxUKhbh4kv>

The opportunity is to bring together key stakeholders to inform a pathway, not just for the SME of the Central West of NSW but along the alignment. This includes work with Business NSW, CSIRO, the Central NSW Strategic Transport Group and the Parkes SAP.

This region would also like to note that Inland Rail must look at better grade separation and potential alternative routes particularly for the community of Forbes. It would be a travesty if the economic value of Inland Rail comes at the expense of the economic prosperity of any rural town but most particularly Forbes where the road rail interfaces in the town are both a safety concern and will have roads closed for unacceptably long periods of times as the trains traverse the town.

Finally, the biggest constraint for the broader region in Central NSW is linking the two Wests – the Central West to Western Sydney. As the crow flies the swiftest link by road or rail between Sydney and Central NSW is due west over the Blue Mountains. At the moment there are two slow, freight inefficient roads and one slow freight constrained rail linkage. While this region appreciates the \$2.5m spend on the GWH and the ongoing incremental improvements to over taking lanes and safety on the Bells Line, to realise the opportunity of Inland Rail transport costs between Sydney and Parkes must be reduced.

b) infrastructure required to ensure regional communities benefit from the project

In the first instance this region calls for the infrastructure required for grade separation in the community of Forbes.

More generally, road funding to Councils has declined in real terms and needs to be reinstated. Local government must have control of its revenue raising and investment decisions and be fairly funded by the Commonwealth and State/NSW Governments to meet its infrastructure and service responsibilities.

- FAGs funding should be increased to 1% of total Commonwealth tax revenue
- That the FAGs distribution methodology be reviewed and modified to achieve a more equitable distribution based on need.

Of particular interest in Central NSW are

- last mile issues
- a sensible approach to bridges and culverts
- connectivity into Sydney on both road and rail
- connectivity to Canberra
- connectivity between the Hume and Newell
- reinstatement of the Blayney Demondrille Line

c) engagement with regional communities to identify opportunities

RDA Central West and Central NSW JO are seeking to collaborate with the Federal Government on Better Access for Small to Medium Enterprise in the Central West leveraging Inland Rail.

At consultations with customers on Inland Rail in region, small to medium producers have raised questions around access to the benefits of this transformational infrastructure. This proposal seeks to identify barriers, enablers and ultimately solutions for SME local Producers to benefit from access to markets as a result from Inland Rail.

A particular area of focus will be the Parkes Special Activation Precinct (SAP) and this project will seek to combine both the potential of the SME and other activities under development for this precinct with the

through put of other small to medium producers in region. This will include work with the CSIRO SME Mission where in NSW this Mission is focussing its efforts through SAPs.

It is also noteworthy that the CNSWJO resource a Regional Strategic Transport Group with membership from TfNSW, Regional NSW/DPC including the Inland Rail Division Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications and RDA Central West and have done so since 2016. Please request the TOR where the role is to identify synergies and opportunities; to share information and provide feedback to stakeholders and to influence the regulatory and planning frameworks.

d) alignment of the project with the NSW Freight and Ports Plan 2018-2023 and State Infrastructure Strategy 2018-2038

The NSW Freights and Ports Plan is a very high level document as is the State Infrastructure Strategy. Having worked with TfNSW on the Transport Plan for the Central West and Orana region is it likely that it too will shy away from specifics regarding Inland Rail. This region seeks to work collaboratively with the State Government to optimise outcomes from Inland Rail. Perhaps more important than alignment with State strategies is ensuring that the mechanisms are in place to enable solutions to be developed and opportunities to be realised in the region.

Where Joint Organisations such as Central NSW Councils have been purpose built to facilitate collaboration, willing State partners and investment are required to realise their value.

Happily, in this region TfNSW have agreed to coordinate collaboration including Inland Rail on transport at the regional level through the administration of a Regional Integrated Transport Group. Where the Term of Reference are under development, it is anticipated that this group will include optimising outcomes from Inland Rail as part of its brief.

e) any other related matters.

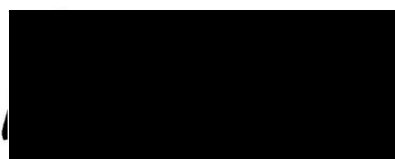
This region would be keen to provide further evidence and invites the Committee members to come and visit particularly Parkes and Forbes to have experience the challenges and opportunities identified in this submission.

Thank you for considering the information provided in this submission. Please contact Ms Jenny Bennett, the Executive Office of the Central NSW JO on [REDACTED] should you wish to discuss further.

Yours sincerely,



Cr John Medcalf, OAM
Chair
Central NSW Joint Organisation (CNSWJO)



Ruth Fagan
Chair
Regional Development Australia -Central West