

# REGIONAL RAIL STRATEGY FOR NSW

## Decades of Neglect and Under Investment in Regional Rail

- Governments of both persuasions started dramatic cuts to regional rail services 2 - 3 decades ago.
- Preference was given to massive investments in dual carriage highways, particularly along the east coast - M1 and M31 toward Canberra and Melbourne.
- The next **NSW Government** needs to adopt a plan to re-invest in the **primary rail routes**.
  - Sydney - Brisbane via Grafton
  - Sydney - Brisbane via Armidale
  - Sydney - Goulburn & Canberra
- The next **NSW Government** needs to announce a plan for re-invigorate regional rail services for **strategic routes** that have been closed down decades ago, including:
  - Casino - Lismore - Murwillumbah, extending later to Gold Coast
  - Sydney - Hunter Valley - Armidale - Tenterfield - Wallangarra QLD

## Vocal Demand for Rail Services by Residents Now

- Fast rising costs of petrol, diesel and almost non-existent EV charging stations away from M1, M31, is hurting **liveability** in “the bush”.
- Brisbane has always been the preferred destination for residents in northern NSW needing specialist medical services.
- They are already demanding more frequent and reliable rail services for their long, expensive journeys to get medical treatment in Brisbane and for visiting family in aged care, etc.

## Moving Huge Amounts of Road Freight to Rail

- As rail freight services were reduced this put dramatically heavier loads onto local roads, particularly bridges in “the bush”.
- Many secondary roads are now **3rd world standard**, made even worse by recent flooding.
- Many bridges on secondary roads already can no longer take **B-double** style trucks for grain, cattle and sheep, adding major costs to farmers now.

## Protecting Strategic Rail Corridors from Extinction

- It is foolish, and without any economic justification, to convert an important, strategic route like Armidale - Glen Innes - Tenterfield - Wallangarra QLD to be used as a walking/cycling trail only.
- There is also considerable pressure from developers to build on the route of the former Casino - Lismore - Murwillumbah (CLM), particularly at the northern end.
- Rail corridors, once fully decommissioned, are virtually impossible to restore as a commercial rail service again. Building housing or commercial developments on the former permanent way for rail services makes a huge obstacle for re-introducing train services.
- Strategic rail routes, like Armidale to Wallangarra QLD and CLM, that can be used for intra-state, inter-state and inter-city freight and rail services must be protected from **total extinction**.
- Too many entrepreneurs have been using their influence over local councils to persuade them to rip up rail lines while the current **NSW Government** is not taking any interest in the issue.

## Appropriate Trains for Regional and Inter-Capital Services

- The current rolling stock on order by **TfNSW** from **CAF** in Spain, is 1 design of train to replace 3 quite different types of trains - **XPTs, the Explorers** and the **Endeavours**.
- Expecting one design to meet the needs for 3 different types of passenger services is a terrible compromise, and a false economy.
- No wonder the delivery of the **CAF** trains is **3 years late** and **100%** over budget and causing huge embarrassment to Dom Perrottet and his failing LNP government.
- The current order to a Spanish manufacturer, **CAF**, which is attracting so much media attention in the past fortnight, is clouded in secrecy due to changes of specification and suspected quality issues.
- The **CAF** order by **TfNSW** will be a case study in Australian business schools for years to come how not to procure big ticket infrastructure serves overseas.
- The next **NSW Government** must consider cancelling the **CAF** order completely, or at least breaking it up:
  - to deliver **modern tilt trains**, which CAF already sell in Europe, to achieve higher speeds for the long regional and inter-capital services,
  - a different, cheaper design for **medium distance** travel, probably built in QLD or VIC, if not in NSW,
  - a different, even cheaper design for **shorter distance** regional travel, definitely built in QLD or VIC, if not in NSW.
- **Tilt trains** can travel faster immediately on existing major lines, even before significant, expensive track upgrade work is done.
- QLD had **tilt trains** 20 years ago for their 3'6" narrow gauge Brisbane to Rockhampton route.

- The alignment of that route was improved in some sections by building them parallel at the same time as building the new dual carriageway highway.
- TfNSW and the NSW Government have never seriously considered the same option on inter-capital routes to Canberra and Melbourne while the M31 was being built.

### Restore Rail Services from Armidale to Wallangarra QLD

- We support the efforts of many residents and local advocacy groups who want freight and passenger rail services restored on the former **Great Northern Railway (GNR)** line, from Armidale north to Guyra, Glen Innes, Tenterfield and Wallangarra, just across the QLD border.
- There is huge potential to move **300 million tonnes** of containerised freight from the **Inland Port at Toowoomba** down the reconstructed **GNR** line to ports at Newcastle and Sydney.
- The cost savings of moving this huge amount off QLD and NSW roads would fund the \$2 billion needed to rebuild this line.
- Converting the existing narrow gauge line Wallangarra - Brisbane to dual gauge would generate significant tourism traffic and opportunities in both northern NSW and southern QLD.
- Having 2 standard gauge routes between Sydney & Brisbane would provide redundancy for both passenger and freight services between the 2 state capitals.
- On 2 occasions in the past 5 years all passenger and freight services between Brisbane and Sydney were cut off for weeks at a time. due to flooding on the east coast line and major damage done due to derailment of a large freight train.

## Restore Rail Services from Northern Rivers to SE QLD

- We support any efforts to progressively restore passenger rail services in the Northern Rivers region: Casino - Lismore - Murwillumbah and then extending it to the end of the rail services on the Gold Coast which already go up to Brisbane.
- Reopening this route will significantly boost economic growth in the **Northern Rivers** and **Far North Coast** of NSW and improve transport access to health and social services in Brisbane, which was a traditional in that area.
- Extending rail services north from Murwillumbah to Gold Coast Airport, by building adjacent to the motorway and re-connecting Lismore to the NSW rail network, makes great sense for the economy of this part of NSW.

## Catering for Walking/Cycling Trails along Regional Rail Lines

- **Re-purposing old rail corridors:** The next NSW government must ensure that strategic corridors are kept free for future rail services in the medium term. But we do support building walking and bike tracks for tourists, beside the rail tracks but not on taking over the position of the existing or former rail tracks.
- Sharing rail routes for both trains and passengers has been successful at the **Oberon Tarana Heritage Railway**, and has proved this model can work well for all stakeholders, without incurring much extra cost.
- We accept there are many kilometres of minor branch lines in NSW that will never see an economically sustainable train service in the short, medium or long term.
- It makes good sense to convert those routes into walking or cycling trails for the local community. and to attract tourists to the area, if that idea is supported by the local community.

## Reduce the Population Growth of Sydney

- New, 1 hour journey, commuter services from Mittagong, Wollongong and Newcastle would allow access to a large amount of existing cheaper houses and new sites for suburban expansion.
- This would also take pressure off from developers who want to build new housing on the flood plains of the Hawkesbury River.
- Creating new 1 hour journey, commuter train services could be done economically by straightening track alignments and some strategic route upgrading
  - Mittagong - Sydney
  - Wollongong - Sydney
  - Support the Federal Govt's High Speed Rail (HSR) Sydney - Newcastle

## Huge Expense of Sydney Metro Disadvantages the Regions

- Support a NSW Upper House inquiry into huge budget over-runs on Sydney Metro projects.
- Put on hold and review the **LNP**'s unrealistic and unaffordable plans to expand the Sydney Metro network.
- We strongly oppose any further takeover of double deck passenger lines to become Sydney Metro services.
- This has been a gigantic waste of taxes, compared with building new middle ring, suburban rail connections, where none now exist.

## Covers on Coal Rail Wagons

- **150 million tonnes** of coal is moved annually in NSW by rail from mines, through major towns and cities, to ports and power stations.
- Dust spread along the coal train routes is probably equivalent to more than **15,000 tonnes** or more of **coal dust** per annum impacting the health of residents along those rail corridors.
- Require all coal transported by rail to meet the same standards as road transport i.e. covers on all wagons.

## Conclusions

Positive action needs to be taken to force containers and bulk loads of coal and grain back onto a re-invigorated regional rail network in NSW. This will also provide a major subsidy for re-introducing passenger rail services on the same routes.

Unfortunately current **LNP Coalition** plans for regional development or transport plans do not include any investment in freight or passenger rail services in the Northern Tablelands or the Northern Rivers.

We are concerned about the removal of rail tracks to create the **Northern Rivers Rail Trail** and along parts of the **Great Northern Railway**. We want the next **NSW Government** to look at whether there is a different way of building the rail trail that still preserves the rail tracks.

There needs to be an immediate **pause** on further demolition of rail tracks and replacing them with rail trails on the Casino Lismore Murwillumbah route and from Armidale to Tenterfield on the former **Great Northern Railway** line.

Rail supporters are not opposed to including rail trails for walkers and cyclists in the final solution. The **Oberon Tarana Heritage Railway** proves this has already been done, at very little extra cost, if it is designed and project managed for up front!

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