

A Submission by

The Friends of the Northern Railway

**to the Study of the
North-South Rail Corridor
under the Auspices of**

The Department of Transport and Regional Services

April 2006

The Friends of the Northern Railway
PO Box 319
Armidale NSW 2350
Fax: 02 6773 3802

Contents

<i>General observations</i>	2
<i>The north-south rail link: alternative routes</i>	2
<i>Concluding comments</i>	4

General observations

Australian rail is under funded, compared to roads. Road traffic, both heavy trucks and cars, continues to grow generating constant demand for more investment in roads. The nation has reached a point where there needs to be significant diversion of bulk goods carriage away from ever growing fleets of heavy trucks and onto the rail system instead. There is also potential for getting bus and car passengers onto rail passenger services. For this to come about, imaginative investment in the national rail system is required. Currently the national rail system is well articulated from east to west. There is also a ‘stand alone’ link between Adelaide and Darwin. What is called for is effective articulation north from Melbourne to Brisbane, linking to Sydney but not necessarily going through it.

Investment in this north-south corridor, thereby establishing an effective national rail network, stands to generate a huge amount of profitable rail business. Beyond this it would generate positive externalities linked to the reduction of road damage and the reduction of road accidents and associated trauma. Further positive externalities would flow from the improved efficiency of fuel use characteristic of an effectively integrated rail system. In the presence of positive externalities there is a case for government to be an active investor. While there will be ample incentives for the participation of private investors, government should be prepared to lead the way in setting up the north-south rail corridor.

The north-south rail link: alternative routes

One option for the north-south rail corridor is the coastal route north from Sydney to Brisbane. Discussion from the Australian Rail Track Corporation (September 2004) indicates that in terms of a comparison between cost outlay and estimated travel time, this is the most favourable option. The estimated travel time, however, appears to be based on unimpeded ‘best running’. The real point to be considered is that the coastal route is currently congested and, as forecasts of future freight traffic predict, is likely

to become ever more congested in the future. The relatively low cost estimate for the coastal route appears to reflect a mentality of making marginal adjustments to the line, rather than significant new investment in a connection that will cater for the future flow of traffic.

An inland route north through Parkes, as a natural hub, and proceeding on to Brisbane or a point north of Brisbane is the bold step required to create an effective national rail system. Such a route would generate system efficiency and would also provide a means of tapping the economic potential of Australia's heartland. There are two main contenders for this inland route. One goes from Parkes to Werris Creek then via Moree and Boggabilla north to Brisbane. The other goes from Parkes to Werris Creek then via the northern line through Tamworth and Tenterfield to Brisbane.

Discussion from the Australian Rail Track Corporation makes both these options more expensive in investment cost than the coastal option, and roughly comparable or slightly worse in terms of travel time. The congestion factor, which will increasingly apply to the coastal option, and has already been referred to, will impair travel times. Also, what the characterisation of benefits in terms of improved travel times does not capture, are the benefits accruing from tapping resources hitherto under served by rail. The ability to foster the economic potential of hinterlands, together with the improvement in economic potential which will arise from effective national integration, confers on a northern inland rail route the status of an important nation-building exercise.

Of the two inland routes, the Tamworth-Tenterfield option has an established right of way. Investment in compatible track and modern alignments would be required north of Wallangarra, but there would not be the expense of land acquisition and other expenses of establishing track across pristine territory as with the Moree option. Importantly also, the route through Tamworth and Tenterfield is not subject to flooding. The Moree option is subject to the expense of embankments being built to prevent exposure to flooding. Even if this proofing from flood is achieved by an appropriate embankment and culvert system, there would be potentially major ecosystem problems generated by interference with the free flow of water across the broad flood plain.

The Tamworth-Tenterfield route serves rich agricultural and pastoral areas, as well as areas producing resources such as timber and coal. There is good potential for generating freight opportunities in conjunction with an upgraded rail route. This potential also exists, of course, for the Moree option. The Tamworth-Tenterfield route services a series of significant regional centres. There is currently a daily rail passenger service from Sydney to Tamworth and Armidale, as there is also via Werris Creek to Moree. If there were potential to develop an inland rail passenger service from Sydney to Brisbane, regional population dictates that Tamworth and Tenterfield would be the appropriate route. The original AusLink report was mainly concerned with rail freight options and appeared somewhat sanguine about private car use, but if there is potential for development of rail passenger transport we should not lose sight of it.

Thus The Friends of the Northern Railway makes a case for close examination of the merits of a northern rail link from Parkes to Werris Creek and on through Tamworth and Tenterfield to Brisbane. The other option for a northern inland route is through Moree, and both of these are preferable to the continued sole reliance upon the coastal option. The nation needs its rail decision makers to have the confidence to act in an effective way to establish the best possible integrated national rail network.

Concluding comments

The Friends of the Northern Railway's contribution to the North-South Rail corridor Study establishes three levels of priority:

- i. There is a national need to make well-judged investments in rail and for there to be a reassessment of the historical primacy of investments in road.
- ii. Investment in a northern inland rail route is required in the north-south corridor to provide effective connections and the basis for an integrated national network (continued reliance upon the coastal route would not meet these conditions).
- iii. Of the two possible northern inland rail routes, due consideration should be given to the Tamworth-Tenterfield option as against the Moree option.