

# The Friends of the Northern Railway Inc.

# Newsletter

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## Editorial

It has been a long time since we have published a formal newsletter, so your Secretary has decided to add a few items with the President's Report and call it a mini-newsletter.

I am very concerned about the highly favoured treatment given to road transport by our political representatives and government instrumentalities. There is still a widely held view in our community that rail transport is highly subsidised compared to road transport, and this incorrect view is fostered by influential and well-funded lobby groups who manage to ensure that the playing field remains heavily tilted in favour of road transport.

The recent government-induced rail reforms have concentrated on introducing competition within the rail freight sector, and

have had some benefits, such as allowing smaller private short haul operators to take up business unwanted by the government carriers. But they have failed to address the major issue of the lack of competitive neutrality between road and rail.

Over the coming months we will try to pass on further factual information about the true state of competition between road and rail, and we would encourage you, our members, to take up the fight. Write to our policy makers and set the facts before them. Point out how unfairly rail transport is treated. Make your views known in public forums. Write well-reasoned letters to the editors of our newspapers. Your efforts can help to secure a future for rail in this country.

Dave Heap

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## The Tilted Playing Field

The Australasian Railway Association has drawn attention to the fact that NSW Environment Protection Authority rules now limit the noise emission from locomotives to 87dB (A). However, the limit for heavy trucks is 105dB (A), four times the permitted rail level!

While existing rail operators may continue using non-compliant equipment, new operators must comply with the EPA regulations. Since most of the new short haul operators have purchased serviceable

second-hand locomotives from government operators, this is threatening their ability to operate in and out of Sydney.

Since one locomotive can do the job of 30 semi-trailers, this is in effect decreeing that 30 very noisy trucks are preferred to one moderately noisy train! This is just one example of bureaucratic discrimination against railways.

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## President's Report

The last twelve months have again seen a steady demand for our services, covering a variety of issues.

We have maintained our public profile with a view to keeping railways in the minds of all the community. Twice we have been featured in the Armidale Express's community organisation page "Up Front", and we have been mentioned in all media on three other occasions.

The "Up Front" item provides a useful reminder to the public of our community-based nature, and hopefully will inspire extended participation from people who share our desire to promote greater utilisation of our railway infrastructure.

The other occasions in which we received substantial media coverage related to our more specific lobbying actions. In February the State Shadow Minister for Transport, Michael Photios visited Armidale to discuss rail-related matters with us. The MP's press releases gave prominence to the FONR, reflecting the significance that is placed on our lobbying role. I discussed a number of matters with the Shadow Minister including service quality, timetabling, and luggage facilities. I must say that I was quite impressed with the Shadow Minister's knowledge of rail matters, which was a considerable contrast to my impressions from when I first spoke to him some years earlier. It is very satisfying to see that politicians quickly learn that railway issues are not things to be taken lightly.

The other matter that received significant media coverage related to our response to the State Government's announcement that they were to conduct a series of feasibility studies into the possible restoration of services on rural rail lines that had been effectively closed for some years. We welcomed this announcement and indicated our intention to consider a submission to any inquiry that resulted.

In addition to these matters that received public attention, we have also been active on

a number of other fronts. In April we finally received a reply from the Minister's office regarding our expressed concerns about luggage services. The Parliamentary Secretary for Transport indicated that on-train services were to be retained and that both Countrylink and CityRail intended to maintain luggage facilities at Sydney terminal station and selected city stations. However, the precise nature of the station facilities is yet to be determined. We are maintaining a watch on this matter.

We have also maintained contact with the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal regarding its report on rail services. We made a substantial submission to this body in response to its draft report. We have been awaiting the final report for many months. The most recent communication suggests we will be continuing to wait for quite a bit yet. We were told that the release of the report has been delayed pending the outcome of State Rail Authority "internal procedural changes".

We have widened our contacts over recent months to include the Australasian Railway Association, a lobby group comprising the nation's rail operators and manufacturers. They have become a significant force in rail politics and are definitely worth watching. We have obtained a number of the group's Rail Fact Sheets together with permission to copy and distribute them to members in order to broaden our lobbying activities. Several of these sheets are included with this newsletter. The group's magazine, "Network Rail", is available at newsagents.

Once again we ask for your support for our activities for another year. It is clear that an authoritative voice is not only needed but is also sought by those whose decisions can have a direct impact on the presence and quality of rail services to our region. By renewing your membership you enable us to carry this authority on your behalf. The more members we have, the more our voice matters.

Don Martin