

FONR Newsletter

from The Friends of the Northern Railway

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North-South Rail Corridor Developments

It is now more than a year since the Commonwealth Department of Transport released the final version of the North-South Rail Corridor Study prepared by Ernst & Young.

That report predicts that it would cost \$4,500 million more to develop a new and effective Melbourne to Brisbane line using the existing rail corridor through the Northern Tablelands, compared with the "Far Western Sub-Corridor" via Parkes and Moree. So the Federal Government are embarking on a \$15 million engineering and scoping study of the more western route, excluding all others.

The startling costings in the Ernst & Young study and the almost incredible cost differential have been subjected to a careful and constructive review by the New England Local Government Group (NELG). Councillor Steve Toms of Glen Innes launched their study report at a special NELG event at Armidale on 23rd April. The NELG study considers some of the routes in the Ernst and Young study, but adopts a more modest approach to expenditure on the upgrading of existing lines—in the FONR's opinion, a more realistic approach. The result is an estimate of \$1.3 billion for the Western Route and \$1.0 billion for the Northern Tablelands, to get a viable line into operation with good travelling times.

Not only do the NELG capital expenditure estimates favour the route via Armidale, but they offer a model that is more likely to have an outcome. The figures in the official Ernst & Young report are so high one could imagine nothing happening at all—like Sydney's second airport or the greatly hyped Multi Function Polis near Adelaide.

The NELG proposal for the Central Inland Sub-Corridor (Northern Tablelands) would be less vulnerable to flooding and could be got going a lot sooner than the projected 2019 completion date for the western route, and it can cater for Sydney to Brisbane traffic overflowing the existing North Coast line.

There are, nevertheless, some important factors that favour the western route. It should pick up considerable rail freight business along the way in a region busy with wheat growing and coal mining. In the end a rational decision will have to be made based on logistics and economics. But it would be a pity if the whole project were delayed for decades because of a failure to keep the options open today.

The prospects of opening the line through the Northern Tablelands (customarily known as the Main North Line) as a NSW to Queensland freight railway was also considered at a conference of interested parties in Armidale on 12th December last year, and judged worthy of ongoing investigation. The conference was organised by FONR member Anthony Hardwick and hosted at the University of New England by the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Alan Pettigrew.

Despite the cogent arguments for keeping the Northern Tablelands route in consideration, the Minister's press release in June was concerned only with the Far West Sub-Corridor.

FONR members discussing transport policy with a candidate for the federal election might consider asking about the NELG study report and the importance of including the Central Inland Sub-Corridor in the detailed engineering study.

The NELG report can be downloaded at www.gjisc.nsw.gov.au by following the links to "Your council" and then "Economic development".

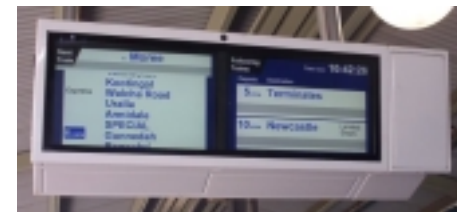


Part of Australia's future? The Main North Line at Tenterfield heads for Queensland.

More Forward Steps than Backward

The new train destination indicators at CityRail stations are certainly impressive, telling curious waiting passengers that vital piece of information so often denied them—how long till the train will arrive.

But Countrylink regional trains fit imperfectly into these essentially suburban devices. At Hornsby now, the *Northern Tablelands Xplorer* is indicated as "Next Train: Moree" and Armidale and Uralla show up as stops along the way. Still, it reliably conveys the essential information.



New train indicator at Hornsby.

The Australian Rail Track Corporation have completed a \$6.3 million upgrade of train signalling at Werris Creek. This should bring new efficiencies in operations for both freight and passenger trains and one hopes it is all now working well. But there were some teething problems. On Saturday, 22nd September, the south-bound Xplorer was delayed for an hour at Werris Creek apparently due to signal failure.



Last days of the semaphore signals at Werris Creek, 11th August, 2007, with the new electric signals controlled from Broadmeadow waiting to be unveiled.

President's Message

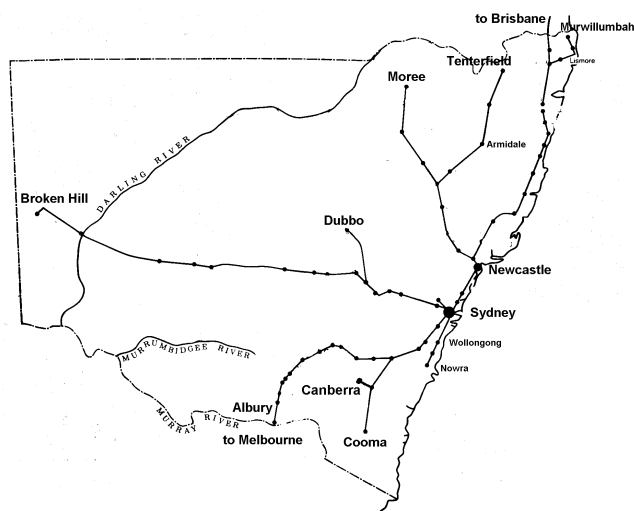
The Xplorer has been running relatively well lately, to both Armidale and Moree, and passenger loadings appear to be good.

One might think that the FONR can concentrate on local details: prospects for freight on this line and drawing Countrylink's attention to the occasional glitch in the operation of the Xplorer—such as the blunder with the booking plan in June that caused prospective passengers to be turned away unnecessarily.

The North and North-West and the railway corridor from here to Sydney are

been fully replaced by a more frequent system of day trains.

Other serious shortcomings derive from selective but harsh cuts that were made in 2003 and 2004. In mid 2003 the management of Countrylink and the new Minister for Transport announced that staff shortages had forced them to cut the frequency of services to Canberra. Those trains have never been fully reinstated. As a result passengers from Armidale can travel through to Canberra only on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays. If you want to come back the other way it is not possible to travel through. You have to stay overnight in Sydney! Students from the north studying in Canberra have abandoned the railway in droves because of these bizarre third world arrangements.



NSW regional passenger train services in 1988, the year before the Friends of the Northern Railway was formed.

not, however, an island. The railway and the trains are part of a statewide network, and part of a rail network for the whole Australian continent. Today that network does not always treat prospective passengers well. Increasingly it fails to meet their travelling needs and so they turn away from rail. The development of the passenger train services here in the North and North-West is constrained by the limits of the service that the Countrylink network as a whole offers.

Although the map of New South Wales regional passenger train services in 1988 does not look very different from the ones in Countrylink flyers today, the timetables are generally thinner, some important destinations are no longer served and connections between lines have become harder to make.

It was at the end of 1988 that all the overnight mail trains were withdrawn. The choice of travelling times offered until then and the ability to make connections between day and night trains has never

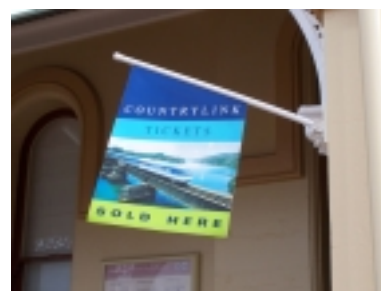
the train used to arrive at Lismore.

Even apparently positive moves have become part of the problem. The restoration of service to Griffith in the 1990s with only one train per week tends to confirm the suspicion of some Australians that trains are not for busy travellers.

The committee has never been inclined to form an umbrella organisation for rail advocacy groups around the state. This would create a new administrative burden for hard pressed volunteers. But it is important to co-operate with those fellow campaigners, such as Northern Rivers Trains for the Future, and to support them for our mutual benefit.

I want to thank Greg Smith, who attended the Sustainable Living Expo in Armidale in March and spoke on behalf of the FONR at one of the workshops when I was unable to attend, and all the dedicated committee workers and members who keep the FONR going.

Matthew Tierney



Call
6774 8630
to buy a train ticket from
Countrylink
at Armidale Railway Station.

Opening hours:
Mon to Fri: 8.15 am to 5 pm
Saturday: 8.15 am to 11 am

Xplorer Timetable

Armidale to Sydney Daily

Armidale	depart	08:50
Uralla		09:10
Walcha Road		09:41
Kootingal		10:29
Tamworth		10:46
Werris Creek		11:29
Quirindi		11:53
Willow Tree		12:03
Murrurundi		12:26
Scone		12:50
Aberdeen		12:59
Muswellbrook		13:08
Singleton		13:44
Maitland		14:13
Broadmeadow		14:36
Fassifern		14:55
Wyong		15:26
Gosford		15:41
Hornsby		16:25
Strathfield		16:48
Central (Sydney)	arrive	17:03



The Moree portion of the Xplorer approaching Werris Creek on Saturday, 11th August, 2007.