



22 March 2018

Mr Rod Staples
Secretary
Transport for NSW
PO Box K659
HAYMARKET NSW 1240

Dear Mr Staples

Submission - NSW Draft Freight and Ports Plan

On behalf of Cowra Council, thank you for the opportunity to respond to the release of the NSW Draft Freight and Ports Plan.

Cowra Council acknowledges the significant contribution of the freight task to the State economy. Council also recognises Transport for NSW's commitment to identifying improvements to infrastructure, planning processes and regulatory reform, designed to make the freight sector better able to meet the demands of economic expansion across all of NSW.

Cowra Shire's location, in the heart of Central West NSW, presents the community with both opportunities and challenges for the transport of freight throughout the region. However, these opportunities are currently limited by rail line closures and road limitations, which restrict both the free movement of freight and competition between transport modes.

Since 2009, Cowra and other councils along the route, have taken a proactive approach to the re-opening of the regionally significant Blayney – Demondrille rail line. This cross-country route offers the closest path between the NSW Main Western and Main Southern rail lines west of the Blue Mountains. It also provides a potential freight corridor linking the NSW Central West and the western coalfields (around Lithgow) to port facilities at Port Kembla (for coal, grain and containerised freight) and Port Botany (for containerised freight).

Page 53 of the Draft Freight and Ports Plan highlights problems already identified by Transport for NSW in relation to the movement of coal:

However, coal originating from the western coalfields (around Lithgow) must traverse the shared Sydney Trains metropolitan rail network to reach Port Kembla and Port of Newcastle, thus facing potential path capacity limitations. This trend is set to continue and will require continuing efforts to ensure separation of this freight task with passenger rail over time.

Reactivation of the disused Blayney – Demondrille line could provide an alternate route for the movement of coal from the Lithgow area and freight from the Central West to Port Kembla and Port Botany without the need, and expense, of separating this traffic from passenger services over the steeply graded Blue Mountains line and through the already stressed and congested Sydney metropolitan area rail network.

While the NSW Draft Freight and Ports Plan identifies investigation of a potential NSW Main Western Line upgrade as an initiative within the next 10 years, there is no mention of the Blayney – Demondrille line, even though it has the potential to be reactivated quickly to cater for increased freight demand, and in so doing, address Priority Action Area 4.2 of the NSW Draft Freight and Ports Plan;

Expand the road and rail network to improve connectivity and accessibility for high productivity vehicles and efficient rail wagon loading.

Of concern to Cowra Council is the comment in the NSW Draft Freight and Ports Plan (page 57) regarding transport of construction materials:

Wider use of rail network is restricted by limited rail access to quarries. This lack of access to quarries is compounded by the limited availability of rail adjacent to industrial land in Sydney to enable a receiving site to be developed.

Cowra Shire is home to Glenella Quarry, a significant producer of aggregate and decorative stone products with existing domestic markets and potential export markets, if a rail transport option was available. Glenella Quarry has access to rail loading at Wattamondara or Cowra on the currently disused Blayney – Demondrille line. The company has identified rail off-loading in the Campbelltown area, in southern Sydney for its domestic products. Glenella is ready to expand operation as soon as a rail freight option is available.

Cowra Council recognises the importance of road transport for the movement of freight at a local, regional and state level. The projected 25 per cent increase in freight volumes over the next 40 years makes the continuing development of road infrastructure a priority.

Of particular importance is improving road freight access from Cowra, and the Central West, to and from the Greater Sydney area via the Blue Mountains. The currently favoured Great Western Highway crossing involves traffic passing through a significant number of built-up residential and commercial areas, with ensuing delays caused by numerous restricted speed zones. Neither the Great Western Highway route nor the alternate Bells Line of Road is approved for use by 26-metre B-Double heavy vehicle access.

The NSW Draft Freight and Ports Plan (page 83) identifies investigation of Great Western Highway capacity enhancements as a 10-20 year initiative. Given the lack of rail freight options mentioned previously, a delay of between 10 to 20 years before investigations commence into improvements on the only viable existing road transport option from the Central West to Sydney seems excessive.

An alternate highway crossing of the Blue Mountains has been under consideration for a number of years with Centroc (Central NSW Councils) strongly advocating for a Bells Line corridor as the preferred option. Cowra Council, as a member of Centroc, strongly supports this initiative and asks that consideration is given to including the Bells Line corridor in the NSW Draft Freight and Ports Plan as an initiative to be investigated in the shortest possible term. In the interim Council, also supports the securing of the corridor along the Bells Line of Road alignment, with a link into the M7, as the first step in this process.

The NSW Draft Freight and Ports Plan makes no mention of the Lachlan Valley Way, an important north-south road route, which provides direct access from Canberra to the central west and far west of NSW. The Lachlan Valley Way connects the Hume Highway near Yass to Boorowa, Cowra and Forbes, where it connects with the Newell Highway. At Cowra it creates a crossroads connection with the Mid Western Highway providing direct links to Bathurst and the Great Western Highway in the east, the Newell Highway at Marsden in the west, and north to the Mitchell Highway at Molong via the Cowra - Canowindra – Molong Road (State Route 81).

The Western NSW Road Plan – Phase 2, produced in October 2013 by Councils of the New England, Hunter Councils Group, Namoi ROC, Centroc OROC and SEROC, identified improvements required to the Lachlan Valley way between Cowra and Boorowa to cater for the increased volume of vehicles using the route since the closure of the Blayney – Demondrille line in 2009. The importance of the Lachlan Valley Way as a significant South – North Network connection was also recognised by Transport for NSW in its *Newell Highway Corridor Strategy – May 2015*.

Since the release of these reports, Roads and Maritime Services has undertaken works designed to improve travel times on the Lachlan Valley Way and increase safety by road widening and the installation of additional overtaking lanes. While these works are welcome it is disappointing that the route is not seen as significant enough to warrant even investigation of major improvements within the next 20 years.

We note that the NSW Draft Freight and Ports Plan makes no mention of the establishment of an intermodal terminal at Cowra within the report's timeframe. Cowra's central location at a crossroads of the Mid Western Highway and Lachlan Valley Way, makes the town a logical site for establishment of an intermodal terminal, particularly as the facility would be placed at least 70 kilometres from the nearest established terminals at Bathurst, Blayney, Cootamundra, Forbes and Parkes. The need for an intermodal at Cowra would be further enhanced if the Blayney – Demondrille line were to reopen. Council looks forward to the release of Transport for NSW's *Regional Intermodal Task Force* report, which we understand has been under Government review since June 2016, with regards to the positioning of future terminals in central west NSW.

Finally, it is noted that completion of the Maldon – Dombarton rail line is not included in the NSW Draft Freight and Ports Plan. Completion of the much delayed Maldon – Dombarton line will improve long-term freight access to Port Kembla from southern and central NSW, including freight customers on a reactivated Blayney – Demondrille line. It will remove existing constraints that are inherent with the heavily graded single line route between Moss Vale and Unanderra, and separate freight and passenger rail services on the

Sydney Trains T4 Illawarra line. It will also ease commuter congestion that is likely to arise from population growth in the Illawarra and Wollondilly Shire areas.

Both the Maldon – Dombarton rail line and the Blayney – Demondrille (Cowra lines) featured prominently in the NSW Freight and Port Strategy – November 2013. Council finds it astonishing that these projects no longer appear to have similar prominence in the NSW Draft Freight and Ports Plan.

Thank you again for providing the opportunity to respond to the release of the NSW Draft Freight and Ports Plan. The Plans potentially play a vital role, not only in the progress of regional development and growth, but in optimising opportunities to reduce unaffordable congestion in the Sydney region.

Cowra Council would welcome the opportunity to provide further information if required and looks forward to release of the final report.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Bill West', is written over a faint, rectangular stamp. The signature is slanted and fluid.

Cr Bill West
Mayor