

STRATEGIC PLAN FOR NSW LEVEL CROSSINGS 2010 - 2020¹

FOREWORD

This Strategic Plan provides the framework for a consistent approach to the management of level crossings across NSW by road and rail agencies.

Coordination of effort between road and rail agencies is essential to maximising safety at level crossings in NSW. The purpose of this Strategic Plan is to:

- guide Commonwealth, State and Local Government road authorities and rail infrastructure managers in their efforts to reduce risk at level crossings in NSW in a manner that addresses the need for a safe and efficient transport network; and
- provide a framework for risk reduction effort that addresses the need for a safe and efficient transport network.

The development of a longer term plan for improvements in the safety of level crossings was a recommendation of the Staysafe (Road Safety) Committee from its 2004 report on safety at level crossings. The recommendations were supported by the Government.

Goal 10 of the NSW State Plan, 2021², “Improve road safety”, underpins this Strategic Plan.

BACKGROUND

Level crossings are the points at which roads and rail meet at substantially the same grade; they represent significant collision potential for road and rail users and pedestrians. The different levels of risk, institutional arrangements and control measures applied by road and rail agencies make the development of coordinated strategies vital to maximising safety outcomes.

There are more than 3800 level crossings in NSW of which more than 1400 are on public roads.

Incident data collated by the Independent Transport Safety Regulator, operating as the NSW Branch of the Office of the National Rail Safety Regulator, indicates a decreasing number of level crossing collisions and fatalities in NSW, and that level crossing performance in NSW compares favourably internationally and with other states and territories. Nevertheless, the potential for crashes at level crossings, including those of high consequence, remains.

In 2011-12, there were nine crashes between trains and road vehicles in NSW: two at crossings with active controls and the remaining seven at crossings with passive controls. In one of the crashes, a motorist was fatally injured. No fatalities were recorded between trains and pedestrians at level crossings during the year. Overall, the number of crashes between a train and a road vehicle has decreased over the past 23 years in NSW.³

¹ This Plan has been updated to reflect changes in legislation, agency names and to update statistics.

² Source: http://www.2021.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/NSW2021_WEB%20VERSION.pdf

³ Source: LCSC Yearly Report 2011-12

By 2031, the freight task in NSW is projected to nearly double to 794 million tonnes per annum. The NSW road network carried 63 per cent of the total freight task in 2011, or around 256 million tonnes of freight. Heavy vehicles are increasing in size and number, and are operating on parts of the road network on which they were previously restricted.

In 2011, the NSW rail network carried 136 million tonnes of freight per annum, or around 33 per cent of the total State freight task. As with the road network, significant growth is projected across all key NSW rail corridors over the next 20 years.⁴

The Australian Rail Track Corporation (ARTC) is upgrading the rail line between Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane and the rail network in the Hunter Valley to allow for the operation of faster, longer and more frequent trains. ARTC estimates the upgrade of the North-South corridor will result in annual volume growth of eight per cent on the corridor. Rail agencies are already operating more and longer trains on existing rail networks.

The Rail Safety National Law (NSW), which applied from January 2013, includes provisions which obligate rail infrastructure managers and road authorities to jointly identify and manage risks at level crossings. Both parties are required to enter into safety interface agreements which set out the responsibilities of each party for managing the safety risks at level crossings.

Significant progress has been made in recent years to reduce level crossing risk in NSW. Over the five-year period from 2007-08 to 2011-12 road and rail agencies spent more than \$154 million on level crossing safety initiatives, \$33.5 million of which was provided through the Level Crossing Improvement Program (LCIP).⁵

Since 2002 a total of 122 level crossings have been closed, most of which are on private property. In 2011-12, two level crossings were approved for closure in NSW.⁶

Community awareness and enforcement campaigns are undertaken each year in NSW. Behavioural initiatives, including media campaigns, have been successful in raising the profile of risks at level crossings with a view to changing driver behaviour.

Each year a 12 month action plan will be developed and implemented by the LCSC.

⁴ Source: Draft NSW Freight and Ports Strategy, November 2012, <http://freightandportsstrategy.transport.nsw.gov.au/>

⁵ Source: LCSC Yearly Report 2011-12

⁶ Ibid

VISION

No fatalities at level crossings in NSW.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

- Reduce the likelihood of crashes and near misses at level crossings in NSW.
- Improve coordination between road and rail agencies in NSW, and to monitor other states and nationally, to maximise knowledge sharing, skills and practice.
- Gain better value for money through the use of data and cost effective treatments.
- Avoid the opening of new level crossings and close under-utilised or surplus level crossings where appropriate.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

- Number of engineering and behavioural initiatives implemented to reduce risk at level crossings.
- Number of crashes and near misses involving trains and road vehicles at level crossings per year.
- Number of fatalities and injuries involving trains and road vehicles at level crossings per year.
- Number of level crossings closed.

CHALLENGES

- Ensuring road and rail agencies develop initiatives to reduce level crossing risk and jointly identify priority locations and treatments for risk reduction efforts.
- Understanding and accurately assessing risk at level crossings.
- Allocating resources in a manner which maximises risk reduction benefit.
- Managing the impacts of growth in road and rail traffic, and changes in vehicle characteristics.
- Managing the impacts of road and rail traffic generated by land use development at level crossings.
- Ensuring that operational and safety impacts on level crossings are assessed when road authorities consider applications for access to the road network by restricted access vehicles.
- Keeping abreast of national and international best practice approaches to risk reduction, including intelligent transport systems, and applying proven cost-effective approaches in NSW in a timely manner.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Road and rail infrastructure managers are responsible for implementing risk reduction treatments based on their respective risk frameworks and priorities. Agencies' continued implementation of level crossing risk reduction initiatives is critical to managing safety outcomes.
- The Level Crossing Strategy Council is the NSW interagency forum that coordinates level crossing safety initiatives by road and rail agencies.
- The Australian Level Crossing Assessment Model (ALCAM) will be used as the principal means of ranking public level crossings for safety improvements funded under the Level Crossing Improvement Program. Decision-making will be supported by incident data provided by the Independent Transport Safety Regulator and local knowledge.
- Proposals to close level crossings will be based on a comprehensive analysis of road and rail operational risks/impacts/benefits, consultation with the affected community and key stakeholders, and the availability of safe and convenient alternative access.
- Reducing safety risks at level crossings requires a thorough assessment of site conditions (both rail and road) and a consideration of the effectiveness of existing and potential controls. The application of low cost treatments will be considered in the first instance. Higher cost road and rail management measures will be considered when necessary.
- Where level crossings are upgraded under the Level Crossing Improvement Program from passive to active controls, the active controls will include boom gates and warning lights.
- Where the development of either the road or rail network leads to a change in a risk profile resulting in the need for an upgrade of a level crossing the associated costs for both the road and rail components will be met by the developer.
- The purpose of the Level Crossing Improvement Program is to accelerate safety improvements at priority level crossings by providing supplementary funding to rail and road agencies. The Level Crossing Improvement Program funds level crossing safety initiatives at level crossings on public roads.
- The strategy will be informed by evidence and data, historical trends, and tools that can effectively rate safety risks at level crossings

IMPLEMENTING THE STRATEGIC PLAN

This Strategic Plan outlines the direction for the ten-year period to 2020.

Priority actions in the Strategic Plan are to be undertaken in the period to June 2013. The Plan applies to rail infrastructure managers' and road authorities' arrangements to reduce risk at level crossings and the Level Crossing Improvement Program.

PRIORITY ACTIONS

- Consider innovative engineering, operational, education and enforcement options for reducing risk at level crossings, including options identified through national initiatives and from overseas. This includes the:
 - potential use of road and rail technology options;
 - identification of cost effective controls at level crossings on less densely used roads and rail lines; and
 - investigation of the practicality and safety benefits of reducing road and rail travel speeds on the approaches to level crossings.
- Work collaboratively to improve ALCAM through the National ALCAM Committee
- Manage a GIS database of all level crossings in NSW.
- Advise Government on funding for level crossing safety initiatives.

ONGOING PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

Agencies will:

- Continue to upgrade level crossings to Australian Standard AS 1742.7 and other applicable road and rail standards
- Continue to use a risk management approach to ensure resources are allocated where most needed.
- Continue to improve safety at NSW level crossings through their own programs and the Level Crossing Improvement Program.
- Continue to implement state-wide road user education campaigns, and use an evidence-based approach to their ongoing development, including on content and target audience.
- Promote the investigation and implementation of closures of public and private level crossings by road and rail managers.
- Review Roads and Maritime Services (RMS) Route Assessment Guidelines to strengthen assessment requirements on level crossing safety and operation for restricted access vehicles.
- Seek appropriate contributions/works in kind for level crossing upgrades from land use developers through the Department of Planning and Infrastructure's State Environmental Planning Policy (SEPP) process.
- Continue to implement enforcement campaigns with the NSW Police Force.
- Where appropriate, trial intelligent road and rail technology to reduce level crossing risk including road traffic enforcement measures.

GOVERNANCE

- Rail infrastructure managers and road authorities are responsible for implementing measures to reduce risk at level crossings on their network, including level crossing closures.
- Road authorities and rail infrastructure managers are responsible for complying with the interface provisions of the NSW *Rail Safety National Law (NSW)* as they apply to level crossings and ITSR is responsible for enforcing the Act.
- The Level Crossing Strategy Council is the interagency forum that promotes coordination and monitors performance of level crossing safety effort, including implementation of this Strategic Plan and the Level Crossing Improvement Program.
- Level Crossing Strategy Council policies will be agreed, adopted and promoted within member agencies within NSW.

VALUE FOR MONEY

- Opportunities to reduce the cost of level crossing controls will be pursued.
- A business case will be developed to inform Government on funding for the Level Crossing Improvement Program post 2014-15, when the current allocation of funding expires.

THE LEVEL CROSSING STRATEGY COUNCIL

This Strategic Plan has been developed by the Level Crossing Strategy Council (LCSC) which has been established to manage and set priorities for the LCIP.

The LCSC is made up of senior representation from:

- Transport for NSW (TfNSW)
- Roads and Maritime Services (RMS)
- Country Rail Contracts (CRC)
- Sydney Trains
- Australian Rail Track Corporation (ARTC)
- John Holland Rail (JHR)
- NSW Branch of the Office of the National Rail Safety Regulator
- NSW Police Force
- Local Government and Shires Associations of NSW (LGSA).

The Level Crossing Strategy Council is an interagency forum which coordinates effort to improve level crossings safety in NSW.

The role of the Level Crossing Strategy Council is to support member agencies to continuously improve safety at level crossings by:

- ensuring coordination between agencies in developing and/or implementing level crossing safety improvements, including specific initiatives such as the Government's Level Crossing Improvement Program and the level crossing education and enforcement campaigns;
- providing information to members and Government;
- informing Level Crossing Strategy Council members of sites identified as priorities for upgrading;
- monitoring the progress of Level Crossing Improvement Program against budget;
- providing a forum for member agencies to consider level crossing safety and improvement initiatives, and to research and monitor national and international level crossing safety developments and the application of new technology;
- ensuring data is collected and analysed to assess safety risk at level crossings; and
- reporting on progress with regard to improvements, replacement or elimination of level crossings.