

NSW Freight Policy Reform Submission

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**Liverpool
Plains**
Shire Council

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the NSW Government's consideration of freight matters. I would like to share some of the issues and opportunities that affect Liverpool Plains Shire Council. The fertile Liverpool Plains produces some 500,000t of grain product annually which is transported through local roads to dedicated grain intermodals spread throughout the shire, along with an increase in containerisation at the Werris Creek intermodal for export.

Werris Creek offers unique opportunities for a push towards increasing the share of freight moving on rail. With an intermodal capable of handling 1,200m long trains, and a turning head available to link Tamworth and Armidale into the Inland Rail at Narrabri.

Question One

In relation to the above six matters, are there particular aspects of policy that are causing challenges to your business operations or efficiency?

The priority constraint for Liverpool Plains Shire Council is getting freight efficiently to the Werris Creek Intermodal. Several roads, bridges and intersections are not suitable for higher productivity vehicles, which extends the transport time and cost from farm to intermodal. Preliminary estimates indicate \$10-\$15M is required for key intersection upgrades, enabling Council to open its network to A-Doubles and B-Triples to move throughout the key routes and increase freight productivity.

Uncertain capacity of concrete bridge structures is currently constraining Council's road network. Council is working to assess them, but some of those completed assessments have identified structures that are unable to accommodate higher productivity. Current funding regimes do not consider the replacement of concrete structures as applicable for funding to improve heavy vehicle access.

Flood resilience is a key issue for Liverpool Plains Shire Council. A key freight route in Coonabarabran Road consistently has to be closed due to flooding. This results in a 70km detour for heavy vehicles, and the travelling public. It constrains the local farmers from moving their product to market, and also isolates communities.

The primary freight corridors (road and rail) face congestion at Botany and the lack of recognition of Newcastle as a container port. Utilising the Port of Newcastle could result in annual savings of over \$2.4 million for local producers in travel costs alone.

In relation to the above six matters, are there particular actions – short, medium or long-term, that you think the NSW Government alone or together with the Australian Government should take to support the efficient operations of your business?

There is an opportunity to leverage existing infrastructure at Werris Creek to provide for access between the Inland Rail and the Main North Line. Werris Creek is unique in that it has a current intermodal terminal capable of handling 1,200m long trains without any shunting, and up to 1,800m with shunting. This combined with a turning head to the southwest capable of turning around a 1,200m long train without shunting provides access to the Inland Rail from Tamworth and Armidale.

Additionally, there is 20ha of currently zoned, vacant industrial land that adjoins the current intermodal. This provides a prime opportunity to co-locate an intermodal terminal and a distribution centre. Council has gazetted A-Double routes into this facility enabling quick easy access through to the Kamilaroi Highway, and further onto the New England Highway, along with providing access to the fertile Liverpool Plains to enable the efficient transport of grain and other agricultural products.

To leverage this, it is imperative that the turning head at Werris Creek be identified and maintained to provide this service. Along with improving the rail corridor through to Narrabri to enable 1,800m trains to easily connect from Werris Creek across to the Inland Rail.

Question Two

Do you have recommendations or issues to note about rail freight policy?

Council supports the push to increase the freight share onto rail and believes that Werris Creek is uniquely situated to provide access to the Inland Rail. Speaking with the intermodal terminal operator at Werris Creek, it is understood that the line to Narrabri does not readily cater for 1,800m trains. To enable an easy link for Tamworth, Armidale and Werris Creek to the Inland Rail to travel interstate, upgrading of the line to Narrabri should be a priority.

Question Three

Do you have recommendations or issues to note about ports?

A large amount of the grain harvested within the Liverpool Plains moves onto rail through either the intermodal terminal at Werris Creek, or any of the 7 grain silos that are within the shire. Improved access to ports would reduce costs for our local farmers and improve the competitiveness of the region. Newcastle Port is the closest port geographically, so having it available for containers would increase the productivity of the grain transport.

Question Four

Do you have recommendations or issues to note about road freight?

Council supports the comments made within the review regarding the need for more stable and consistent funding for road maintenance and upgrades, especially for the local and regional roads that connect to intermodal terminals. Having a long-term funding plan would allow us to allocate resources and prioritise projects more effectively and ensure the quality and safety of our road network.

Within the Liverpool Plains, local and regional roads account for 94% of our road network, with only a small proportion of the Kamilaroi Highway needed to move freight to the seven silos and intermodal terminal at Werris. This means the greater than 500,000t that is generated annually travels mostly on Council owned and operated roads.

In rural council's, knowledge around the capacity of their bridge structures can be limited. With the increasing push to PBS and higher productivity vehicles, it is common that these vehicles result in loads placed on bridges that were not foreseen at the design stage. For Liverpool Plains Shire Council, there are a handful of concrete bridges where Council does not know if these vehicles would overload the bridge. This leads to conservatism in how Council approves new routes for these vehicles.

Consideration should be given to funding detailed assessments of the load capacity of these structures, along with funding available for the renewal of concrete bridges where they are inadequate for the increasing freight task.

Intersections are another key constraint for the longer vehicles such as A-Doubles and PBS Level 3 vehicles. Liverpool Plains Shire Council has identified several intersections that are constraints on access to grain silos and across the broader road network. Funding targeting upgrading of intersections to accommodate these higher productivity vehicles would assist in opening up more of the first and last mile.

Improving the resilience of the road network is also crucial to enable freight to move when it is required. Increasing frequency of extreme weather events will result in roads being closed for longer periods of time. For the Liverpool Plains in particular, the risks of this are that farm product cannot be moved in a timely manner and may result in loss of product for farmers.

Question 5

Do you have recommendations or issues to note about decarbonisation or changing technology?

Moving to higher productivity vehicles and increasing the modal share of rail freight can help reduce carbon emissions. Incentives should be available to accelerate the adoption of higher productivity vehicles.

Question 6

Do you have recommendations or issues to note about strategic land use planning and industrial land?

The current framework is somewhat inflexible for rural councils. Reviewing land use is heavily reliant on demonstrating that there is limited available land already existing. This constrains some options, as the existing land may have been developed many years earlier and may not reflect the needs of the current market.

For example, Liverpool Plains Shire Council has numerous vacant industrial parcels, ranging from approximately 2,000m² up to 3ha. The lack of larger parcels could be a constraint if there is a need for distribution centres near intermodal terminals. Having the capacity to more easily rezone alternative parcels to increase the available lot sizes will provide further flexibility for industry.

Question 7

Does the NSW Government provide adequate consideration of freight matters?

Liverpool Plains Shire Council has had difficulties working with the NSW Government in the gazetting of higher productivity vehicle routes on the Kamilaroi Highway. The nature of Council's road network is that only a small portion of the Kamilaroi Highway is required to ensure access to the intermodal terminal and the main silos within the area. However, it took over 18 months for Council to achieve gazettal of these key routes, with the Kamilaroi still not providing the desired service level to match in with Council's target. It has improved now, but it essentially delayed Council in providing meaningful access across its network.