



31 May 2024

Freight Policy Reform Advisory Panel

Freight Policy Reform Program
c/o Transport for NSW

Via email: Freight@transport.nsw.gov.au

Dear Panel members,

NSW Freight Policy Reform Program - Moree Plains Shire Council Submission

Thank you for your consideration of Moree Plains Shire Council's submission as part of the NSW Freight Policy Reform Program.

The Moree Plains Shire sits at the heart of Northwest NSW and grows in excess of \$1 billion in agricultural produce each year. The Shire is enveloped by the most productive and fertile soil in the country and is centred at the junction of major National, State and Regional freight routes via rail, road, and air. Having been declared a Special Activation Precinct by the NSW Government, we are now working to grow our community over the next 40 years with some 4,000 projected new and innovative jobs.

We are currently collaborating with the NSW Government through the Special Activation Precincts initiative to help maximise the economic benefits that Inland Rail can bring to our regional economy through diversified investment, enterprises, and land use. The Moree Special Activation Precinct (**SAP**) was acknowledged by Dr Schott within the Inland Rail review as an example of how Inland Rail is unlocking economic opportunities with the regions. The Moree Special Activation Precinct will provide a new business hub, specialising in agribusiness, logistics and food processing.

Recognising these same opportunities early on, Moree Plains Shire Council (**MPSC**) has been at the forefront of support for rail-based logistics and have been progressing plans to leverage this significant national infrastructure project for the industry and peoples of our region.

Much of the Moree SAP design work was predicated on the adopted and committed designs for Inland Rail as enabling infrastructure. Together, this section of Inland Rail and the Moree SAP will be a 'game-changer' for our agricultural, and freight and logistics industries, enabling longer and heavier trains to be loaded with our region's export quality grain, cotton and produce to existing ports in NSW and further afield across the country.

Inland Rail construction in the Moree Plains

The Narrabri to North Star project crosses the three local government areas of Gwydir, Narrabri and Moree Plains. Due to its scale and complexity, it is broken into two phases to enable first phase of construction to begin while planning and environmental approvals are gained for the second phase.

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Narrabri to North Star Phase 1 project (176km of rail) was completed in 2022, while Phase 2 (15km) is still undergoing NSW Government planning approvals.

Overall, the Narrabri to North Star (**N2NS**) Inland Rail project has been partially completed, **falling short of Moree by 22 kilometres**. The adjacent rail sections offer significantly improved safety, increased tonne axle load (**TAL**), longer train capacity, and greater travel speeds.

The 22 kilometres 'missing link' is made up of Section 2C (Attachment 1), and N2NS Phase 2 (Attachment 2), and is having a significant impact on local agricultural businesses who rely on the efficient movement of goods and agricultural products across the country and the world. With the rail line incomplete, existing road-based supply chains will remain, which is not only more expensive but also less efficient and less safe. This, in turn, is impacting the local economy and making it difficult for businesses to remain competitive in a global economy.

Section 2C is of **absolute critical importance** to Moree as this section includes the construction of a 5.8km rail siding just south of the Moree township and within the heart of the Moree SAP.

This 5.8km siding will form part of a large 24-hour open access intermodal facility south of Moree, with positive discussions to date with prospective private logistics operators, industry, and the NSW Government all supportive of this initiative.

Prioritisation of Inland Rail completion in Northern NSW

Moree Plains Shire Council urges the NSW Government to support swift completion of the Inland Rail for the benefit of our region, either through the project planning approvals process and/or through expediting relevant public land acquisitions.

The delivery of the Inland Rail in northern NSW has the huge opportunity to increase competitiveness of NSW ports.

Approximately one million bales of cotton are grown and carted out of our region by trucks to Brisbane, and our Shire yields some 1.7 million tonnes of grain per annum which either travels north or south. Volumes in excess of 1.5 million tonnes per annum originating from the Northern NSW local government areas of Moree and Gwydir are currently moved by road that would more be suited to rail transport, especially higher payload capacity trains to Newcastle and Botany.

Previous modelling has demonstrated that Inland Rail could mode shift most of the cotton freight and some additional 800,000 to 1,000,000 tonnes of grain to rail once a reliable and efficient connection is made to our southern ports. There is substantial benefit for the NSW Government in shifting this material via rail to NSW ports – our farmers will benefit with more efficient rail connectivity, and our road users will benefit from safer roads without as many trucks.

MPSC has recently commissioned analysis which indicates that without the finalised Inland Rail works our region's agricultural exports are facing higher costs of between \$10 and \$70 per tonne. For a region which has historically Australia's largest agricultural production and over 1 million tonnes of exports annually, the cost to both our farmers, our region and the wider Australian economy is extensive.

These costs also directly impact the domestic market as our export supply chain costs set the floor for domestic markets.

Connection to Port of Newcastle

The policy that prioritises Botany, Kembla and Brisbane over our preferred access to the Port of Newcastle forces our producers to send their freight to Brisbane, increasing costs, transit times, and carbon emissions. The current infrastructure necessitates that businesses in the Moree region rely on inefficient freight routes, adding unnecessary costs and delays.

The region exports 1.435Mtpa, with 26,895 container tonnes. The positioning of the Port of Newcastle as a container terminal could facilitate a \$38.80 reduction per TEU and an overall decrease in container emissions by 26,895 tonnes of CO₂ per year.

From Moree to Newcastle we benefit from the Inland Rail and Hunter Valley coal network. Maintaining the axle load at or above 25 TAL on this critical segment is important. It is equal distance to Newcastle as it is to Brisbane, noting that Brisbane would put grain on road, where as Newcastle can accommodate longer heavier trains. Botany and Kembla are further than Newcastle and Brisbane.

Enhancing connectivity between Inland Rail and the Moree-Narrabri-Newcastle corridor is essential, this can be achieved with the investment in the rail interface between the Inland Rail and ARTC network.

Supporting enabling rail logistics infrastructure into the future

To meet growing freight service needs for longer term productivity outcomes it is critical to establish the linkages between Inland Rail and state and local government road networks and state rail networks. It is of paramount importance that there is dedicated funding to support feasibility studies for greater connectivity with the Inland Rail, including relevant spur intersection upgrades along the alignment, and to also consider the continuation and expansion of the Federal Government Interface Improvement Program to capture a broader set of infrastructure links.

This will lead to investments in infrastructure that will ultimately see more freight on rail resulting in improved productivity. For example, Moree Plains Shire Council will be seeking support from the Federal and State Government to fund a critical East-West Connector Road (see Attachment 3) link that will ultimately direct some 2 million tonnes of commodities annually to the Inland Rail interface within the Special Activation Precinct. Approximately 70% of our region's food and fibre is produced on the western side of the Inland Rail corridor, so efficient transportation links via train or truck are critical to getting these commodities as directly as possible to port.

Development of the Moree East-West Connector

The East-West Connector is a proposed heavy vehicle transport corridor bypassing Moree township to the South and linking up with the MIO and Moree SAP, moving produce from the west to the intermodal terminals located to the east.

The construction of the MIO is the first critical piece of infrastructure that will facilitate future development of the East-West Connector.

Together with the MIO, the East-West Connector will provide a far more efficient, direct, and streamlined freight route to our intermodal terminals and the Moree SAP.

This road will also increase road user and public safety, and vastly improve the amenity and social wellbeing of Southwest Moree by diverting heavy traffic. This area of town is bombarded with freight traffic during harvest and contains a high concentration of low socio-economic residential development, schools, aged care facilities, the Moree Hospital, and several recreational and sporting facilities.

The Moree SAP has provided provisional planning support and route alignment, but we are seeking to collaborate with both State and Federal Government to further progress the business case, undertake detailed planning, and conduct concept designs.

Moree Intermodal Overpass

Council was frustrated by the Federal Government's decision last year to not support funding for the Moree Intermodal Overpass (**MIO**). This was part of the Federal Government infrastructure review last year, with a loss of \$32.5 million for the project.

The MIO provides a critical freight, logistics and general transport link to the Moree SAP, intermodal terminals, and the commercial activities enabled by the precinct. An important feature of the MIO is the grade separation of the Newell Highway and Inland Rail corridors providing increased access and safety for critical freight and people movements. Without the MIO, we are concerned with significant heavy vehicle activity across the Inland Rail corridor at level crossings directly adjacent to the Newell Highway.

The Moree Intermodal Overpass is a critical piece of complementary infrastructure for the Moree Special Activation Precinct (SAP) and would optimise opportunities for the NSW Government's \$224.8 million investment into the Moree SAP.

The MIO has the potential to be an excellent regional example of local, state and federal governments working together to achieve enduring infrastructure with positive economic outcomes for the entire region.

Queensland Inland Freight Route considerations

The future upgrade of the Queensland Inland Freight Route between Charters Towers and Mungindi will directly impact NSW highways due to freight entering NSW through Mungindi and southwards.

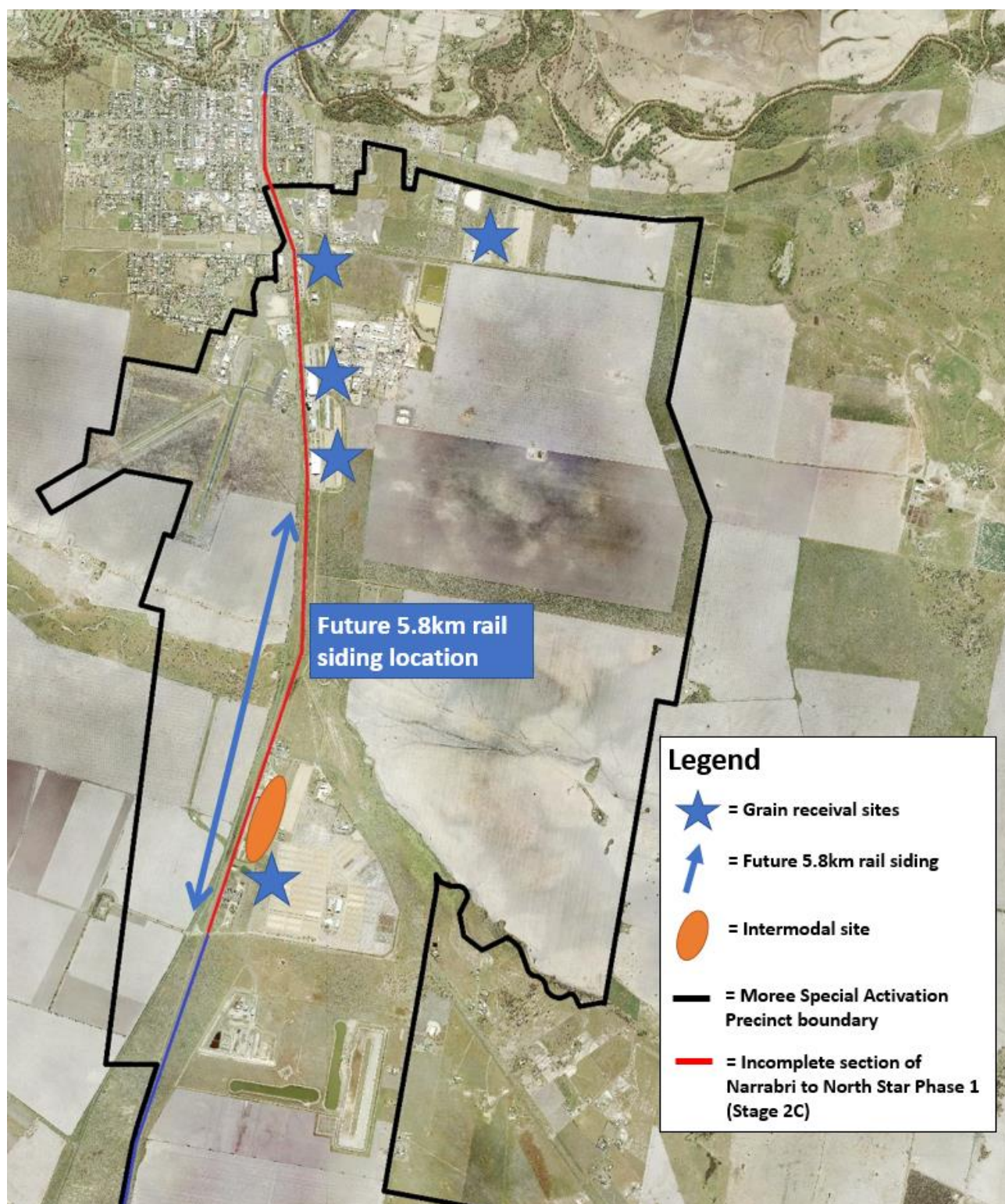
Future NSW Government budget consideration and collaboration with the Federal Government on appropriate upgrades to the Carnarvon Highway from Mungindi (on the Queensland border) to Moree will allow safe and efficient passage of heavy vehicles coming in from Queensland via this route to access the Newell Highway.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to provide input into this process and for further information please do not hesitate to contact our [REDACTED]

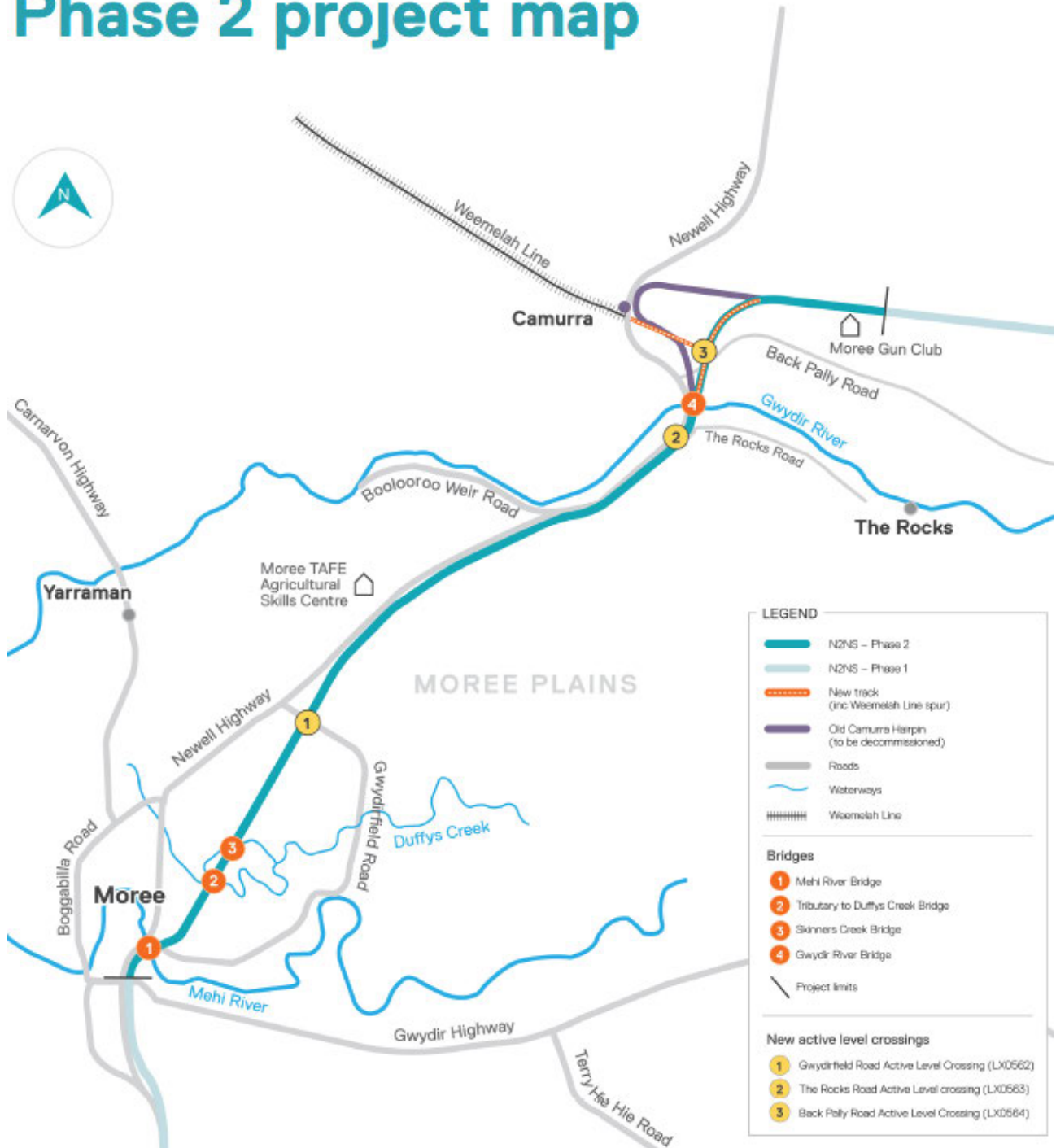
Yours sincerely,

[REDACTED]

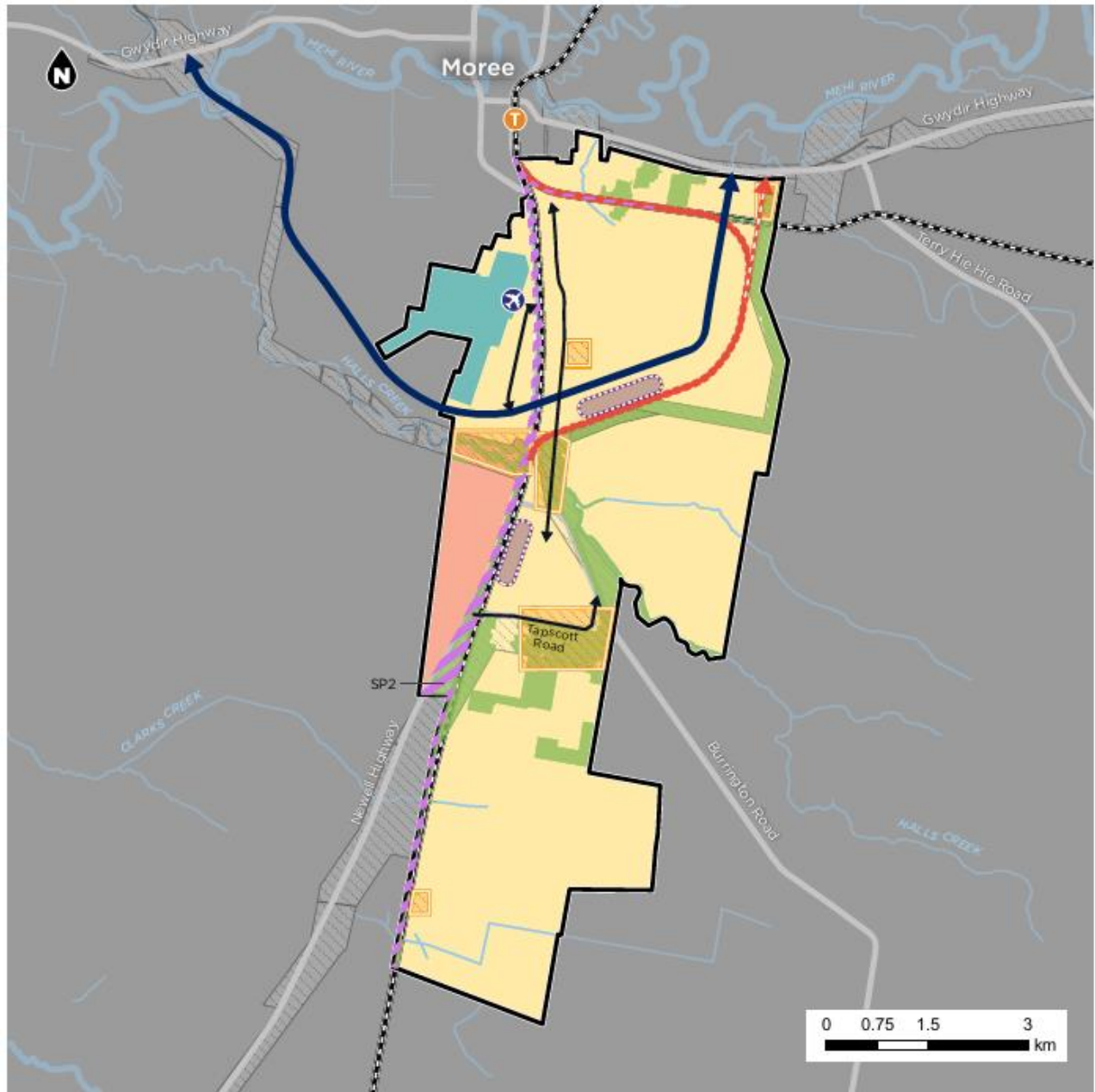
Attachment 1: Section 2C and Moree Special Activation Precinct Boundary



Narrabri to North Star Phase 2 project map



Attachment 3: Moree SAP Structure Plan featuring proposed East West Connector



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| Special Activation Precinct (4,716 ha) | Proposed east west connector (strategic corridor) | Travelling stock reserves proposed relocation |
| Moree Regional Airport | Proposed road | Travelling stock reserves |
| Railway station | NE rail bypass | Areas of environmental value |
| Railway | NE intermodal loop | Air transport |
| Road | Proposed intermodal sites | Rural activity |
| River/creek | Aboriginal heritage sites | Regional enterprise |
| | | Special purpose infrastructure |

Attachment 4: Queensland Inland Freight Route

