Inland Rail

What

The Inland Rail project is a new freight rail network between Melbourne and Brisbane, via regional New South Wales and Queensland. This connection will ultimately become the 'backbone' of the national freight network, improving efficiency, safety and reliability by delivering competitive freight services, to meet the nations increasing freight challenges.

Currently, road freight transport is the most economical option to move freight across the vast distances, between ports and to the various last mile destinations. Rail freight and Inland Rail is not a replacement of road freight, it is complimentary – particularly in our growing freight task. Road freight remains a critical element of the transport supply chain.

The Inland Rail network aims to meet national transport needs by providing a 24 hour transit time between Melbourne and Brisbane with 24/7 operation. The proposed network will meet this challenge by increasing efficiency through double stacking, allowing a 7.2 metre clearance along the entire length of the rail corridor, accommodating for heavier axle loads, and the introduction of advanced train management systems making for a safer, more reliable and more efficient service.

The proposed route bypasses the Sydney rail network, reducing delays and transit time. The network will be much straighter than the existing route via Sydney, allowing trains to maintain higher average speeds of 115km/h, whilst also using less fuel. The proposal ensures 98% reliability in the delivery of freight, and boasts availability in line with market needs.

Why

Inland Rail has long been considered a critical piece of infrastructure that Australia needs, in order to meet the increasing freight challenges, particularly along the north-south corridor. The proposal of this freight network is fundamentally based upon improved efficiency, availability and reliability of the movement of freight around our nation and will provide important development opportunities for regional Australia. The movement of freight along this network will be competitively priced with road freight.

The Inland Rail network boasts the ability to meet the growing desire for flexible services, having the capacity to accommodate faster, lighter services and slower, heavier services, whilst still preserving the 24 hour transit time. The flexibility of services offered by the Inland Rail will be complemented by the connectivity of this network, providing connections to all existing rail networks in Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland. The network will deliver a single standard gauge connection across five states to Australia's busiest ports.

Where

The new rail corridor will span from Melbourne to Brisbane, circumventing the congested Sydney rail network and passing through regional New South Wales and Queensland. It will link capital cities and major centres along the east coast, regional New South Wales and South East Queensland to key regional and metropolitan ports. The creation of new networks will ultimately open up businesses to new and existing domestic and export markets.

A key element of this project is the importance of connecting the Port of Melbourne and Port of Brisbane, as well as linking with the mines of South East Queensland, in order to enhance the quality, efficiency and reliability of freight movement between these key terminals.

The proposed network will utilise much of the existing interstate rail networks throughout Victoria and Southern NSW, upgrading approximately 400km of tracks, as well as creating approximately 600km of new networks throughout Northern NSW and South-East Queensland.

Who

The Australian Government have committed $14.5 billion to the development of the Inland Rail project and Australian Rail Track Corporation (ARTC) has been appointed to deliver the program.

The Government and ARTC have consulted customers, rail users and key stakeholders regarding the development and implementation of this project and will continue to do so throughout the planning and construction stages as it develops its strategy. The Inland Rail Alignment Study in 2010 and Stakeholder Reference Group Forums in May and October 2014 were established in order to consult those with a vested interest in this project. These results of these forums further accentuated the need for flexibility, interoperability and clearly stated the target for reliability.

When

Work has started and in some sections been completed on the Inland Rail, and work continues. Inland Rail traverses 1,700km across three different states and has been split into 13 individual projects. Each section has completion timelines and will progress as per the schedule, The Parkes to Narromine section in New South Wales was commissioned in late September 2020 and is now operational.

https://www.freightaustralia.gov.au/what-is-the-strategy/why-we-need-action
https://www.bitre.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/Bitre-yearbook-2021.pdf
https://www.infrastructureaustralia.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-08/Australian%20Infrastructure%20Audit%202019%20-%205b.%20Freight%20Transport.pdf

As indicated in the NSW Auditor-General's report Rail Freight and Greater Sydney (2021):

https://www.audit.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/Rail%20freight%20and%20Greater%20Sydney_0.pdf
http://www.artc.com.au/library/IRAS_Final%20Report.pdf:
https://www.inlandrail.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/Inland%20RailSupply%20Chain%20Mapping%20Key%20Findings.pdf
https://www.theaustralian.com.au/special-reports/a-freight-revolution-is-unpacked-as-intermodal-hubs-enter-the-chain/news-story/423ecd219407864ebee2797451c67aa9
28% of respondents to the AI Group Australian Supply Chain: State of Play Australian CEO Survey 2021-2022 indicated that building up inventories was their number one plan to ensure inputs are available and in stock when needed to improve the reliability and resilience of their supply
chain: https://www.aigroup.com.au/globalassets/news/reports/2021/supply_chains_state_of_play_dec2021.pdf