

Inland Rail Submission - Passenger Rail Brisbane to Toowoomba

PASSENGER SERVICE - TOOWOOMBA TO BRISBANE - THE RAIL REALITY?

A side issue to the concept of the Inland Rail freight line is the proposal to investigate a rail passenger service between Toowoomba and Brisbane. The public announcement was made this year that the federal government had allocated \$15 Million in funding for the Groom electorate to develop a business case for this proposal.

Whilst this news was hailed with enthusiasm by the media as well as local and federal politicians as being an essential service for the Downs and Lockyer Valley, there are numerous issues which need to be considered very carefully.

MAIN RANGE TUNNEL

Inland rail is proposed to be built from Gowrie to Helidon by tunneling under the Dividing Range. Because of obvious altitude differences between these two centres, the tunnel is, of necessity, required to be more than 6 km long. This extreme length is required to keep the track gradient to within the Inland Rail gradient specifications. (Even at this length it does not meet the 1:80 gradient which is the most extreme gradient acceptable according to ARTC)

However, this uphill gradient from Helidon will mean that future freight trains as well as any proposed passenger trains will have to be under engine load to be able to ascend through the tunnel to Gowrie – with consequential engine exhaust pollution concerns! ARTC has already admitted concern over ventilation within this very long tunnel.

So, the dual issues of a long ascending tunnel together with the operational need to have locomotion engines under load, will present a unique challenge to air quality for drivers and engines alike.

This air quality challenge is more of an issue for a passenger service where the well-being of proposed future passengers has to be considered.

How ‘fail safe’ will the essential ventilation and exhaust extraction equipment be within this tunnel and what will be the emergency procedure guidelines for engine failures in the tunnel? How will these guidelines address any necessary evacuations from within the tunnel – given that it will be only single track?

PASSENGER SERVICES

- (1) Electrification The existing suburban passenger train system of Brisbane and Ipswich is electric powered by overhead power lines. On the Toowoomba line from Brisbane, this ends at Rosewood. This overhead electric system could be extended westwards but, because of tunnel height constraints due to double-stacked containers, it could NOT be used in the proposed 6 km tunnel.
- (2) Because of the above tunnel complexities, the western terminal of this proposed passenger service would, of necessity, have to be at Helidon. So, any Toowoomba residents intending to use a rail service would have to use road transport to go Helidon to board the train to Brisbane. This may or may not be an inconvenience to people but this “coordinated” service has been used before – but subsequently abandoned as the highway to Brisbane was progressively upgraded and bus and car travel became much quicker -and cheaper.
- (3) Potential passengers will want to know what the COST of rail travel will be to Brisbane. The well recognized lack of use of Brisbane road tunnels is an excellent example of perceived excess toll

charges resulting in people NOT using these tunnels -despite their convenience. If the rail fares are deemed to be excessive, people will NOT use this service!

- (4) How many services per day will be offered -particularly before and after peak hours -and how many stations will the train stop at? Stopping at stations obviously takes time and adds to the total journey time. This could be eliminated by running express services from Helidon but will this suit Lockyer valley travelers? Stopping more would result in more passengers but this would have a corresponding negative effect on passenger numbers if stopping frequently made the trip too long to be practical.

Commuters want a quick, convenient service otherwise they will seek alternatives!

- (5) How will Lockyer Valley residents access this service? ARTC C.E.O. Richard Wankmuller appeared on TV recently in company with the Lockyer mayor and the State and Federal Government members. ARTC committed to selecting a route which would NOT impact on the towns of Gatton, Forest Hill, and Laidley. Are then train stations to be built away from these towns to allow passengers to use this service? How far away from these towns will these stations be located?

In addition, the ARTCs own business case on P 365 Table B.2 says not passengers in the tunnel:

ATTRIBUTE	SPECIFICATION
Rollingstock refuge sidings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No specific rollingstock refuges provided. In the event of a rollingstock failure, loops or maintenance sidings will be utilised.
Disaster recovery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ARTC disaster management protocols to remain as per current standard. Possible options are but not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> New local diversion. Divert over current class 1 and class 2 lines. Divert to current North Coast line. Unload at alternate location and road bridge.
Braking curve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> GW40 for intermodal reference train.
Toowoomba Range tunnel train restrictions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No Class 1—explosives. No passenger services or livestock services.
Peaking / seasonal capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ARTC’s modelling has allowed for capacity to deliver the capability to supply peaking and seasonal capacity.

<p>Dangerous goods</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To be assessed via a risk based approach: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Class 1 – explosives. - Class 2 – gases. - Class 3 – flammable liquids. - Class 4 – flammable solids. • Class 5 – oxidising substances. • Class 6 – toxic substances. • Class 7 – radioactive material. • Class 8 – Corrosives. • Class 9 – Miscellaneous dangerous goods.
<p>Passenger services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All current NSW and VIC passenger services will be catered for within the overall network (including coastal route). • Additional passenger services could be negotiated as per access protocols, where appropriate to paths or infrastructure allows. • No provision has been made for new QLD passenger services.
<p>Livestock Services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No provision has been made for QLD livestock services.

Source: ARTC, 2015.

CONCLUSION and B2G ROUTE CHOICE IMPLICATIONS

The above issues are ones that proponents of a passenger rail service will need to consider carefully. This rail passenger service may appear desirable and, as the greater Brisbane metropolitan area expands westwards, the existing QR line may well be electrified towards Gatton to reduce road congestion. This is what suburban rail systems achieve! They facilitate movements of commuters into the hubs of cities without using roads.

However, the inability of any future passenger service to be able to use the Gowrie-Helidon tunnel effectively precludes a direct train service from Toowoomba to Brisbane.