

SUNSHINE COAST LINE ACTION PLAN

Submission

Description

The Sunshine Coast Line (SCL) connects to the Caboolture Line at Caboolture, approximately 50km north of Brisbane, and runs for a further 123km to Gympie North, whereupon it becomes the North Coast Line (NCL). The Caboolture Line consists of four tracks from Roma Street to Northgate and three tracks to Lawnton, from where a double track operates to Caboolture. In the south, the SCL continues as double track to Beerburum, where it reverts to a single track, with short passing loops at most stations to allow trains travelling in opposite directions to pass each other.

Several characteristics make the SCL unique among South-East Queensland's rail lines. The SCL forms part of the railway track that falls within the federal government's National Transport Network, mainly in recognition of its role in carrying significant volumes of freight each year to and from central and north Queensland over lines that also are traversed by long-distance Travel Trains and passenger trains connecting Brisbane and Gympie North via the Caboolture Line. Any investment in the SCL through the Sunshine Coast hinterland is a direct investment in meeting the transport needs of other regions, most notably Gladstone–Rockhampton, Mackay and Townsville. Much of the SCL is built to a poor alignment dating from the early days of construction that began in the 19th century. At times, passenger trains must slow to 40 km/hr, making the trip to Brisbane inconvenient and slow.

Short passing loops – that require freight trains half that of long super-freighters operating in other states – increase costs for Queensland freight forwarders. Increasingly, freight is being diverted to road. This has consequences for road funding and safety, and the amenity of towns through which the Bruce Highway passes. More and more, the Queensland Government is looking to plan costly bypasses of towns, or augmentation of traffic lanes through towns along the Queensland Coast while paying less attention to rail upgrades that would take significant freight off the highway and transport it safely and in an environmentally responsible way.

The Sunshine Coast (Beerburum–Cooran and coastal areas to the east) is growing rapidly and will be home to 508,000 people by 2031. The state government is driving this growth through its population settlement strategies for South-East Queensland. Not all can find jobs locally and must commute for employment. In turn, this is increasing passenger rail usage. The annual compounded growth rate for morning peak passenger numbers on the SCL north of Caboolture is six per cent, yet the line cannot cater for even the current passenger demand. More than 40 per cent of existing rail services between Caboolture and Nambour are operated by 'rail buses' – buses, not trains. No more passenger trains can be scheduled on the SCL due to capacity constraints. Thus, there is no incentive for the government to encourage more commuters to rail.

The former state government did not intend duplicating the SCL on a better alignment to Nambour before 2031 – just under 20 years away. The current government's timeline is unclear. A spokesperson has said the government 'is doing everything it could' to bring forward the 2031 deadline. Meanwhile, government continues with long-term plans to add an extra lane in each direction to the Bruce Highway between Caboolture and the Maroochydore turn-off at Chevallum, south of Nambour. The federal government would meet most of this cost, whereas the state would be expected to meet a greater percentage of the cost of rail track duplication between the same two points. Cost-shifting is driving the planning process.

The problem

The problems of the SCL are simple, yet profound; known and daunting. They are easy to espouse and formidable to resolve because of a lack of will on the part of the government to look at innovative solutions.

The focus is on the totality of the problem rather than the strategic, targeted adaptation of published infrastructure upgrade plans to wring the maximum benefit from worthwhile financial outlays.

The problem is a line operating at maximum capacity, evidenced by 40 per cent of passenger services between Caboolture and Nambour being operated not by trains, but by buses that take 50 per cent longer to make the same journey. Freight trains, which compete for travel slots on the single track, operate to a curfew and their short length (governed by the length of passing loops) adds to the cost of living for the people of central and north Queensland. Rail freight demand for the line is trending at a 40 per cent increase in freight by 2030, but this level will not be realised because of a lack of track capacity.

Sooner rather than later, the expansion of regional ports, such as Gladstone, will also highlight rail capacity constraints and congestion. The state economy will be curtailed through this lack of foresight. This blind spot is exacerbated by the fact that Queensland has sold off QR National (rail freight), so there is little focus within government on freight issues confronting the line.

The government has been warned that the balance between passenger and freight train operations is so tight that, within a few years, the only way the shorter freight trains now used on the SCL can continue to run through the Brisbane metropolitan stations to the Port of Brisbane or freight distribution centres in the city's south-west would be by cutting passenger services. This is the basis for recommending 1500-metre freight trains. One of the longer trains occupies the same travel 'slot' as a normal train. It also should be noted that peak period passenger trains heading north to the SCL are crowded, with standees no longer evident until after Burpengary. The line is at capacity all the way from Brisbane to Nambour.

By way of broad comparison only, current SCL track performance is below the Australian Transport Council interstate network targets. The implications of this level of service are:

- limitations on average speed impact rail's ability to effectively compete with road's delivery speeds;
- shorter train lengths and lighter axle loads have implications for train operating costs and profitability;
- a higher number of train trips is required to move the same volume, and hence, at greater annual cost to the overall Queensland economy.

A poor alignment affects train running time efficiencies (rail affecting freight costs) and is a disincentive for commuters.

Crucial to the line's problems is a lack of money for infrastructure upgrades, managed by merely pushing out the deadline for track duplication to Nambour year on year, further exacerbating the situation and making more expensive the eventual cost. Duplication now won't occur until 2031, or perhaps slightly earlier. The cost is of the order of \$3.2 billion.

A new government is to disclose its priorities, although the LNP MPs on the Sunshine Coast have promised an Integrated Transport Plan for the Coast once in government. Until now, a catharsis within government revolved around whether to allocate funding to the CAMCOS corridor, branching off the SCL at Beerwah and running to Maroochydore on one hand; or to complete duplication to Nambour ahead of the coastal rail alignment. With the Sunshine Coast Regional Council re-evaluating options for the CAMCOS corridor to include light rail along the Coast, this Action Plan argues that the cheaper option (and only option sufficiently advanced) is to duplicate to Nambour – partially in the first instance – in order to maximise the line's capability. As is the case now, fast buses can link back into the Coast, where CoastConnect (a busway linking Caloundra and Maroochydore) can be the workhorse for carrying passengers north-south along populated areas of the Coast. Alternatively, in future, CoastConnect could be operated by light rail.

Meanwhile, as freight and passenger rail services (including Sunlander and Tilt Train inter-urban trains) compete for train path slots on the SCL's overworked single track:

- the annual compounded growth rate for morning peak passenger numbers on the SCL beyond Caboolture is six per cent, second only to the 7.1 per cent figure for the Gold Coast Line south of Beenleigh to Robina;
- annual freight growth on the North Coast Line is set to more than double over a 20-year period, creating conflicts for scheduling freight trains and passenger trains throughout the day, unless freight trains on this line are made longer, from 670 metres to 1500 metres, but this would require construction of longer passing loops. Growth in non-bulk freight traffic Brisbane–Cairns is running at four per cent annually – the second highest of any corridor in the National Transport Network.

On current trends growth in non-bulk freight carried on the SCL is above three per cent a year, which will result in a 'spilling over' of freight onto the Bruce Highway, with inherent social and safety consequences. Provided rail capacity improves, the freight carrying capability of the NCL could be anticipated to rise from 3.18 mtpa in 2003 to 4.5 mtpa in 2013 and 5.5 mtpa in 2020.

The ACIL (2001) study indicated that rail is far superior to road in terms of safety, in relation to human trauma. The Queensland Rail Network Strategy states '*rail urban transport is seven times safer than road per passenger kilometre*'. Other assessments reveal rail to be 29 times safer than road per net tonne kilometres (ntk) and the Australasian Railway Association report (PJPL 2005) stated rail freight is between 13 and 23 times safer than road freight (in terms of \$ per '000 ntk).

To the extent that lack of funding is hampering further capacity improvements, even the money spent so far has been ineffectual. For instance, the government has ignored departmental advice that duplication of the track between Caboolture and Landsborough would achieve operational efficiencies and, instead, truncated the project at Beerburrum. Formal advice to government and the transport minister (Ministerial briefing note dated 15 July 2009) was that the expenditure involved in duplicating only as far as Beerburrum would not buy any improvements unless full duplication to Landsborough was carried out. The department continued its position in advice to the then Minister and confirmed this in a briefing note for the 2009 Budget Estimates process.

That note read:

"The benefits of increased capacity will not be fully realised until the next stage (Beerburrum to Landsborough duplication) is undertaken."

The briefing note warned that future freight and passenger rail demand would grow as the Sunshine Coast population boomed at a rate that meant it would be 60 per cent higher in 20 years time.

The state and federal governments have signed off on a strategy that identifies the problems on the SCL as follows:

'Despite major below-rail investment over the past decade, the NCL continues to suffer from low operating speeds along its length, due to poor track alignment and other factors such as ageing timber bridges and the prevalence of level crossings. While there have been deviations constructed as part of NCL upgrades, the horizontal alignments and vertical grades between Nambour and Bundaberg remain poor and are a major impediment to attaining any further improvement in transit times and train length.'

Most NCL 'permanent' speed restrictions are now due to tight-radius curves. A minimum curve radius of 800 metres is necessary to sustain normal train running operations at 90kph on narrow gauge track. As a result of the excessive curvature, freight train operations are adversely affected south of Maryborough West and the tilt train averages only 66kph. This compares unfavourably with average speeds exceeding 100kph between Bundaberg and Rockhampton. Citytrain passenger services are unnecessarily slow due to trains being held for crossovers, or having to be shunted onto crossing loops to allow other trains to pass. It is in this area of operations that this Action Plan focuses.

There exist consequences for the orderly and organic growth of Sunshine Coast railway towns – many of which offer affordable housing and established infrastructure and social network support for future population growth – by not settling future track alignments; both south of Nambour (especially at Palmwoods) and north to Gympie North. The long planning timeframe involved in identifying and determining strategic alignments means that land use changes can close-off options. So there needs to be a mechanism to protect planning alignments with an alerting process for potential development. A study into a preferred alignment between Nambour and Gympie North is now warranted and recommended.

In addition, rail freight logistics are currently focussed on Acacia Ridge, on Brisbane's southside. So for the whole NCL, train schedules, rail freight availability, reliability and transit times are all impacted by constraints in the Brisbane metropolitan area. This issue must be addressed if rail freight is to remain viable, and requires – in the medium-term -- consideration of a **freight logistics intermodal terminal to the north of Brisbane**. This would provide a road-rail interface outside of congested areas. Moreover, it should be on flood-free land. This would help address regional employment and industrial/economic diversification at the lower end of the Sunshine Coast, in particular. A ready potential workforce will begin moving into Caloundra South soon (planned eventual population of 50,000).

What government is being told

The Caboolture –Nambour track is the most congested section of single rail track in Australia. It was recognised as congested as long ago as 1994 in the BTCE report of the National Transport Planning Taskforce. The messages to government about a lack of action concerning the inadequacy of the Sunshine Coast Line are consistent, loud and compelling.

A selection of that advice follows.

- The Sunshine Coast's population growth is the second highest in South-East Queensland. During the next 20 years, the Coast's population will expand from 323,400 to 508,200. Major transport deficiencies will occur that cannot be solved by road upgrades and improvements alone. *Source: Queensland Government Population Projections, 2011 Edition.*
www.oesr.qld.gov.au/products/publications/qld-govt-pop-proj-qld-sd/index.php
- The Caboolture and North Coast lines have the greatest forecast increase in passenger patronage before 2026, whereas passenger numbers on the Shorncliffe, Doomben and Airport lines are **not** expected to increase greatly.
Source: Inner City Rail Capacity Study (2008) -- Queensland Transport and jointly prepared by Maunsell |AECOM, Parsons Brinckerhoff, KPMG, Veitch Lister Consulting & SYSTEMWIDE.
www.tmr.qld.gov.au/~media/da0198b7-14c9-4603-98db-0bfa1ed65fe3/pdf/icrcs_stage_3_technical_pre_feasibility_appendix_a_3_passenger_demands.pdf
- Under a 'do nothing' scenario, it is likely that the Sunshine Coast Region would experience **adverse socio-economic effects** should the SCL not be upgraded between Landsborough and Nambour. Increases in demand are likely to significantly challenge the ability of the current infrastructure to support an acceptable level of rail service in the future. *Source: Landsborough to Nambour --- Initial Advice Statement by Arup Engineers (2007).*
www.dip.qld.gov.au/docs/library/pdf/mp_landsborough_nambour_rail_IAS.pdf

- Long-standing plans for duplication of the main northern railway line, both for passenger and freight transport, remain unfunded. Improved rail links has the potential to enhance the resilience of some Hinterland towns through increased accessibility for residents; the potential to attract businesses with regular freight transportation needs, and provide opportunities for existing and future tourism operators.
– *Sunshine Coast Regional Council Draft Rural Futures Strategy*.
- Transport demand on the Sunshine Coast has been growing and there are signs that current transport infrastructure is having difficulty coping. A proposed 87,000 person increase in Sunshine Coast residents at Caloundra South, Palmview and other coast growth areas within 10 years will require infrastructure improvements between Brisbane and the Sunshine Coast. Visitors to the region are saying that **congestion on the Bruce Highway is a deterrent to their future visitation decisions**.

The proposed CAMCOS public transport corridor between Beerwah and Maroochydore, rail track duplication on the Sunshine Coast Line and the Multi-Modal Transport Corridor will **not** meet projected travel demand under the most likely scenarios; more will be needed to meet the needs of a substantially larger population in 2031. *Source: The Sunshine Coast Regional Council Interim Roadmap 2010 (2010)*
www.rdasunshinecoast.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/Sunshine-Coast-Interim-Regional-Roadmap-Final-20101125-v3_online1.pdf

- The majority of the desired levels of service on the SCL cannot be met with the existing rail infrastructure; duplication and realignment of the line between Caboolture and Landsborough is needed now, not in 2020 as proposed.

This would result in an improved level of service for passenger and freight rail operations, especially in terms of service frequency, hours of service, seating capacity, freight capacity, reliability, and travel time. The track upgrade would allow for a progressive increase in rail services throughout the day, and achieve a consequent decrease in railbus services within the corridor. Currently, 44 per cent of so-called 'train' services to and from Nambour are operated by buses that take 50 per cent longer than trains to complete the journey between Caboolture and Nambour. *Source: Caboolture to Landsborough Rail Upgrade Study -- Needs Assessment by Queensland Transport (2002)*.
http://www.arup.com.au/clrs/genfiles/needs_assessment_executive_summary.pdf

- The efficiency of freight movements and the **safety** of passenger services between Brisbane and Gympie is a major strategic issue, as is the competitiveness of the North Coast Line and its capacity to handle long-term growth in freight.

A major current impediment to the corridor's overall performance is rail congestion between Brisbane and Nambour. With reference to the Caboolture, Sunshine Coast and Gympie track sections, poor track alignment impedes efficient transit times. It is important to stress that any improvement in the track south of Maryborough West has a profound knock-on benefit for train operations north of that point. *Source: Joint state-federal government Brisbane –Cairns Transport Corridor Strategy*.
www.infrastructure.gov.au/transport/publications/files/Bris_Cairns_Corridor_Strategy.pdf

- Infrastructure catering specifically to for longer freight trains also needs to be provided. Train lengths on the Sunshine Coast and North Coast lines are limited by the length of the smallest loop (currently 682 metres) whereas freight trains on most major transport corridors around Australia are 1500 metres

long. The prospect of a doubling of average freight train length on a rapidly growing and potentially rail-friendly corridor represents one of rail's most significant national productivity opportunities. This shortest passing loop on the NCL is located at Palmwoods, between Landsborough and Nambour.

Source: National Transport Commission -- Rail Productivity Review Submission by QR Limited (2008), www.ntc.gov.au/rfcDocuments/QR%20Limited2008100614090277.pdf

Finally Queensland Rail has estimated the future transport task (based on underlying market growth rates) and has spelled out the economic benefits to government and society associated with investment in rail. *Source: QR Submission to Productivity Commission (5 July 2006), Review of the Economic Costs of Freight Infrastructure and Efficient Approaches to Transport Pricing (page 94).*

www.pc.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0004/48577/sub053.pdf

The solution

The solution to the problems of the SCL begins with a change in the bureaucratic mindset; from thinking the solution being two decades away and involving expensive infrastructure, planning for which is proceeding at a slow pace in the realisation that funding won't be available for many years to come. Such thinking is unproductive and fails to realise the very real gains that can be made by targeting infrastructure spending at key points on the existing SCL in the short term, consistent with the long-term objective of duplicating and realigning the track between Beerburrum and Nambour.

Secondly, Sunshine Coast commuters feel insulted by references to Queensland having a 'world class' passenger rail service and that the 'world class' plan is virtually is to do nothing by way of improvements on the SCL for a further two decades. The inference is that the current level of transport infrastructure serving the Sunshine Coast – inadequate as it is – will be adequate for the next 20 years, during which time a further 200,000 people will be settled on the Sunshine Coast. It is illogical thinking and illogical planning. Saying that a 'world class' service is being delivered, when 44 per cent of so-called rail services on the SCL are provided by buses, leads to a self-deluding complacency on the part of the state government and its agencies.

It is important to note that these aspects of the solution for improving the SCL come at no monetary cost and can be implemented immediately. Having put forward the means for resetting the thinking of bureaucrats, it is time to reset the roll-out of capacity-improving infrastructure on the SCL. The individual elements required for duplicating the SCL line to Nambour are spelled out in several documents endorsed and promulgated by the former Labor state government. This Action Plan differs from the proposed rollout of infrastructure upgrades, particularly in respect of sequencing, and in the timing.

This proposal seeks to bring forward the benefits to be achieved in 2031, on current planning, without the need to upgrade the SCL progressively from the southern end, or over the entire distance. The imperatives are to eliminate the worst sections of track between Mooloolah and Palmwoods, thus avoiding some outstanding community issues surrounding the alignment at Palmwoods and Mooloolah townships. In the case of Palmwoods, this can be considered as the track duplication progresses from the south; in the case of Mooloolah, deferred. It is also not necessary to fully complete duplication between Beerburrum and Landsborough in order to achieve efficient passing opportunities at the southern end of the line; merely to construct the Beerburrum–Glass House Mountains section first. The feasibility of a small stabling yard south of Beerwah (2x or 3x6-car sets) should be explored. It would allow termination/origin of extra peak-hour services at Landsborough.

Duplication from Beerburrum to Glass House Mountains, single track to north of Mooloolah station initially, then dual track on a new alignment to Palmwoods, reverting to single track with passing loops Palmwoods to Nambour provides the basic infrastructure for half-hourly passenger train services Brisbane–Nambour.

Longer freight trains mean fewer freight trains and more efficient operation, thus keeping rail freight costs low and reduce 'spill-over' of freight to road. Currently, freight trains on the SCL and North Coast Line must be 670m in length, because of passing loop restrictions. A 1500m train would require one crew, whereas two trains and

two crews perform the same freight task currently. At 1500m long, there would be fewer trains competing for the same travel slot, while one crew in place of two would reduce operating costs and make rail freight rates more competitive for the communities of central and north Queensland.

The Mooloolah–Eudlo and Beerburrum–Glasshouse sections of track are the slowest in respect of transit speeds (as low as 40 kph on some curves). A significant reduction in overall running times between Beerburrum and Nambour could be achieved by the realignment and duplication of these sections first. The duplication and realignment of the Mooloolah to Eudlo leg could be staged, thus spreading construction costs over a longer period, yet gaining some of the advantage sooner.

The Beerburrum to Glass House Mountains has a very poor alignment. Continuation of the existing double track to Glass House Mountains (but not to Landsborough, in the first instance) gives the greatest improvement in running times, or more bang for buck.

The next sequencing of track duplication should be:

- Beerwah to Landsborough
- Eudlo to Palmwoods
- Eudlo to Mooloolah
- Mooloolah to Landsborough

Realignment and duplication of the Mooloolah to Eudlo stretch would speed up train transit times considerably. Common speeds of 40 kph would be raised to 90 kph for EMU/SMU/IMU and ICE sets; while freight train speeds would rise from 35 kph to 70 kph.

As it dithered about the cost of realigning and duplicating the SCL, the previous state government installed temporary scaffolding at seven stations on the existing alignment – four stations south of Nambour and three to the north. **The temporary scaffolding is on hire**, the government does not own it. Traveston remains a short platform station.

From a passenger transport perspective, temporary platforms at Palmwoods and Eudlo will not last more than five years (approximately QR's original timeline). The extended platforms should not be replaced with more hired scaffolding, but a decision made to divert the SCL to its twin-track new alignment with new permanent platforms. This work (Beerburrum–Glass House Mountains and Mooloolah–Palmwoods) should become a priority.

At the same time, but in a secondary priority to the first, planning should begin for a new Yandina train stabling facility. Land is already available, the local community is enthusiastic and it makes operational sense to establish a train yard there in close proximity to the track maintenance depot. Preliminary investigations into a train stabling yard at Nambour should be abandoned in favour of the Yandina option.

Freeing up the existing train stabling facilities at Nambour and the vacating of the freight yard by QR National pave the way for the Nambour railway station upgrade to be brought forward and to be fully integrated with a station precinct makeover proposed by the Sunshine Coast Regional Council. A new station (including a second platform) and a modern bus-rail interchange should proceed as a priority, and as an integrated project, together with the provision of disability access to the railway facilities. The provision of disability access to Nambour railway station has been approved and will cost \$4 million. However, the Campbell Newman-led state government cancelled construction just weeks before construction was to start in 2012. The station facade should be opened up to Nambour CBD to become a catalyst for a TOD-oriented redevelopment of the Nambour CBD. This would assist in Nambour's revitalisation.

With partial duplication of the track to Nambour, investigation should start on the best alignment for the track between Nambour and Gympie North. Meanwhile, long passing loops should be provided as an interim measure. Connecting existing passing loops (i.e. Pomona—Cooroy) would be a cost effective interim measure. Freight trains would be able to pass at speed. There exists a possibility of passenger shuttle trains, in future, running Nambour–Gympie or further north to Maryborough.

Provision of extended crossing loops north of Nambour is essential. At least three are required, each up to eight kilometres long. They could be delivered in a staged manner, or the same effect achieved by joining two existing and adjacent short crossing loops. The operational benefit would derive from allowing the overtaking of a slower service by a faster service, at speed, without one train having to come to a standstill. Likewise, two trains travelling at speed in opposite directions could pass each other in safety without one having to come to a stop.

While not within the ambit of this Action Plan, the unrestricted operation of 1500m freight trains between Brisbane and Rockhampton would allow long freight trains to be hauled by electric locos (not diesel haulage units) to central Queensland. Shorter trains could be broken down or consolidated at that point (Rockhampton).

These SCL freight capacity enhancements mean **lower costs of living for people in regional Queensland**. Because the SCL forms part of the National Transport Network -- the network of roads and railways that the federal government has agreed to fund -- the works outlined above should attract partial funding from the Commonwealth. This avenue should be pursued vigorously.

A decision will need to be made concerning the long-term viability of the short-platform Traveston station.

In the longer term, investigations will have to begin into the purchase of Citytrains with tilting capacity for the SCL. This will allow faster speeds on realigned and duplicated track.

An investment in rail is an investment in the Bruce Highway

An investment in the Sunshine Coast and North Coast railway lines (SCL/NCL) will have a greater beneficial effect than an equivalent investment in the Bruce Highway, according to a July 2006 Queensland Rail submission to the Productivity Commission's *Review of the Economic Costs of Freight Infrastructure and Efficient Approaches to Transport Pricing* (www.pc.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0004/48577/sub053.pdf).

On page 94 of its submission, Queensland Rail revealed analysis of the future transport task (based on underlying market growth rates) in the Brisbane–Cairns corridor and identification of the economic benefits for government and society associated with investment in rail.

This showed that a \$300 million (2006 dollars) investment in a number of 'below rail' projects on the NCL could result in:

- extraction of just over 850,000 tonnes of general freight / containerised traffic from road to rail on NCL markets;
- road accident cost savings of \$43 million over 20 years;
- environmental gains valued at \$23 million over 20 years;
- road pavement / maintenance savings of \$94 million over 20 years from reduced heavy truck movements on the Bruce Highway and arterial roads;
- benefits associated with better transit times, improved service reliability and improved service availability valued at \$127 million over 20 years;
- benefits to rail operators and customers valued at \$143 million over 20 years;
- potential reductions in rail freight costs in the range of two per cent to six per cent across NCL markets if gains to 'above rail' operators are passed on to customers;
- an increase in gross tonne-kilometres on the NCL associated with additional containerised traffic of 34 per cent 'over and above' underlying growth.

The 'present value' return of this \$300 million proposed investment was \$430 million (2006 dollars).

Revitalising railway towns

The Sunshine Coast Line Action Plan will bring about benefits for freight logistics and efficiencies along the eastern seaboard north to Rockhampton and will provide faster passenger rail services more often to the 320,000 people who call the Sunshine Coast home. Within 20 years, this figure will grow rapidly to 508,000 people.

For the 80,000 people living in the hinterland of the Sunshine Coast, a realigned, dual-track SCL will impact on lifestyle, individual character and shape of their service towns. That is why this Action Plan recommends formation of a joint government coordinating group to manage issues surrounding the SCL upgrade, the aim being to build upon the strengths of these towns to prepare for their role in 21st Century living on the Sunshine Coast. The Sunshine Coast Regional Council proposes to undertake an integrated place-based planning process for all Sunshine Coast towns and villages located on the railway. Through a consultative and integrated approach a clear vision for each town and village should be established. Planning outcomes, solutions and actions that seek to ensure achievement of the vision should be prepared. Hinterland towns are the economic and community hubs of activity for the rural areas, therefore creating and enhancing vibrant, attractive and well functioning town centres should help ensure strong, sustainable rural communities.

The \$1 billion, five-year Action Plan has, as a core element, significant urban improvements to five railway towns, most notably **Nambour**, but to a lesser extent **Eudlo, Palmwoods, Yandina and Gympie**. The improvements and benefits are outlined below. In the medium to longer term, better rail transport services to communities from Beerburrum to Yandina maximise their built and social infrastructure, and an ability to grow organically, while preserving an individual identity. It is possible to absorb additional population, while continuing to offer affordable housing options and job opportunities for Sunshine Coast residents. This discreet growth contrasts with the broadacre development that the state government has mandated at Caloundra South.

While people will live at Caloundra South, they are unlikely to fund the number and range of jobs necessary on the Sunshine Coast. In the long-term, this could be addressed by locating a transport and logistics hub at the southern end of the Sunshine Coast, close to the SCL. (See details elsewhere in this document.) Further strain would be placed on the SCL south to Brisbane, where people will seek employment opportunities. However the line is working at capacity – over capacity if railbus services are considered. The solution must not be road-based (the Bruce Highway), but rail-based. Additional rail capacity need not contribute to inner-city rail capacity congestion either, if Caboolture is used for more passenger transfers and shuttles to Nambour and Gympie utilise the extra track capacity and extended crossing loops outlined elsewhere in this document.

The Action Plan recommends the formation of a **cross-jurisdictional coordination group** involving the Department of Transport and Main Roads, Queensland Rail and the Sunshine Coast Regional Council to implement the urban design spin-offs of an investment in rail infrastructure along the Coast hinterland. The guiding principles of the council's *Our Place Our Future* planning process and its subsequent strategy documents will be useful tools in the process. This could be widened to examine options for light rail on the Coast – a concept the council believes is more in keeping with its thinking. Links from the light rail network back to the heavy rail line at Nambour and Beerwah will need to be considered. In this respect, disused cane train corridors could be useful for exploring inter-linking light rail, without the need for costly land resumption.

The relevant council strategy documents are:

- The Sunshine Coast Social Infrastructure Strategy
www.sunshinecoast.qld.gov.au/addfiles/documents/opof/social/soc_infras_strat_11.pdf
- The Sunshine Coast Sustainable Transport Strategy
www.sunshinecoast.qld.gov.au/addfiles/documents/opof/transport/sc_sustainable_tpt_strategy_1131.pdf
- The Sunshine Coast Active Transport Plan
www.sunshinecoast.qld.gov.au/sitePage.cfm?code=sc-trans-plan#tdocs

Eudlo

Together with Beerburum–Glass House Mountains, the Eudlo–Palmwoods section of track is among the first two stages of critical ‘hit and miss’ duplication of the SCL to create dual-track sections that will allow faster and more frequent train services to Nambour without duplicating the entire track north of Beerburum to Nambour.

Eudlo is small and beautiful, but its school and general store cannot be augmented without additional population that the rail duplication through town would afford. The plan is to build the dual railway track further west of town and a station approximately 90 metres west of the current one. Eudlo School Road would pass over the new railway line. Bringing forward this work would instigate a revitalisation of Eudlo, including an opening up of vistas to the new railway station, better pedestrian access and a more functional road network. Surplus railway land could be vegetated into a town park, with recreational facilities and the whole centre of Eudlo made more attractive.

Fast, efficient rail services to Nambour and centres to the south of Eudlo would reinforce its rural charm and make it easier for more people to live here and commute to work. Modest residential subdivision growth could be managed by the Sunshine Coast Regional Council, while strengthening Eudlo’s village character.

Palmwoods

While track duplication occurs elsewhere under this Action Plan, transport planners need to engage meaningfully with the people of Palmwoods about the shape and form of their town ahead of a track duplication between Eudlo and Palmwoods on the planned new alignment. A joint planning approach with the Sunshine Coast Regional Council is the way forward. The track widening and straightening will impact on future residential growth at Paskins Road and Jubilee Drive, the Palmwoods Bowls Club will have to move, while Kolora Park and its ‘duck pond’ will be impacted by the preferred alignment further east. A major supermarket development has had to be put on hold because of a ‘do nothing until 2031’ approach by government. Its development is seen as critical to stopping a loss of shopping dollars to nearby Woombye and Nambour and to the viability of other existing shops in town.

Meanwhile, plans for a Palmwoods CBD development may never become a reality if a land battle between Sunshine Coast Council and the State Government is not resolved soon. The debate is around a 1ha parcel of state-owned land behind the IGA supermarket in Main Street, to the west of the existing Palmwoods railway station. The Sunshine Coast Regional Council is eyeing the land for a ‘place-making’ redevelopment that would link the old and new shopping precincts in the town, as well as open to the proposed new Palmwoods railway station.

However, Queensland Rail says the land is required as a staging area for emergency and maintenance operations associated with the NCL duplication, which is being pushed back and back, thereby stalling the orderly development of the Palmwoods town centre. Obviously, Queensland Rail is looking to make money on the sale of the land eventually, once its value has been enhanced by the track duplication. On current timelines, this will be in 2031.

An alternative site exists to the east of the railway line, but QR wants a developer, or the council, to meet the costs of relocating maintenance facilities to the new location.

Implementing the \$1 billion, five-year SCL Acting Plan will become a catalyst for community discussion about Palmwoods’ forward direction. Once determined, the roll-out of the dual track can occur and private sector development can follow, better linked to a new station north of the existing structure. New facilities must preserve Palmwoods’ distinctive character as a ‘village in the valley’.

Nambour

The state government has cancelled a \$4 million upgrade of the existing Nambour railway station to allow disability access to station facilities. This upgrade was due to have been completed by the end of 2012. To that \$4 million project, this Action Plan proposes expenditure of an additional \$19 million (\$23 million in total) to bring forward the full upgrade of the Nambour railway station and transit centre and to bring about the revitalisation of the Nambour town centre as a Transit Oriented Development 20 years earlier than currently envisaged.

The revitalisation would position Nambour as the 'capital of the hinterland' and cater, eventually to commuter trains operating regularly between Beerwah and Pomona to provide access for railway communities to the retail, medical, entertainment and educational facilities not able to be provided locally in each town.

The Sunshine Coast Regional Council has been highly critical at the way government transit agencies have not adopted a holistic plan for the Nambour railway station precinct and had failed to work with the council to develop a project that has the potential to be a game changer for the wider Nambour community. In particular, the Department of Transport and Main Roads, Translink and Queensland Rail have proceeded to undertake various works and studies, among them the disability access facilities, the bus station redevelopment, the examination of a location for a train stabling yard and additional car parking in isolation of each other. There is no station precinct 'master plan'. The potential is for each element to interfere with the next in a planning and functional sense and to ignore the synergies that could be created by developing the station area as a whole, with each element fully integrated with the next.

The station is a barrier to pedestrian movement from one side of town to the other. This needs to be addressed. It is possible for the area around Petrie Creek to become the site for a hotel or apartments, linked across the station site to the town centre via walkways accessing a second platform. The redevelopment of the old Moreton sugar mill site does not integrate with the civic centre, on the opposite side of Mill Street, or with the adjacent railway station. There is room to develop the airspace above the transit centre and railway line as a cinema complex, thus enhancing the civic centre's viability, while also providing more patronage to restaurants and pubs in Currie Street.

Train stabling in vicinity of the Nambour station has the potential to make this land 'dead'. Train stabling should be relocated to Yandina, which is a better operational fit, while freeing up land around Nambour station for other purposes. With the relocation of QR National's depot to Woombye, this space is available for car parking facilities, including staff car parking for the Nambour General Hospital. Currently, Queensland Health proposes staff car parking at a more remote location involving a shuttle bus to and from the hospital. A staff car park at the station could be used by hospital personnel during the day and theatre patrons at night.

Current plans are for the Nambour station to be hidden away, roughly where it is now. A holistic redevelopment would allow for a plan to rebuild the station and make it fully operational with an upgraded bus transfer station sharing common toilets and waiting areas. It is also possible to realign the Lowe Street junction with Currie Street and the access point to the station itself. An existing newsagency and the Mc Donald's restaurant could be integrated into a station concourse with direct frontage to Currie Street, at the top of Lowe Street. None of this can occur with the piecemeal approach currently envisaged, and with a substantial proportion of the work to be done around 2031.

Much more could be achieved by expending the money using current value dollars, and working constructively with the Sunshine Coast Regional Council to deliver a total station precinct makeover dovetailed with the council's town centre revitalisation plans. That way, Nambour railway station becomes a pivotal point for bus-rail transfers and can provide a destination for people in the railway towns along the SCL to access superior medical and shopping service, in particular.

A train stabling yard at Yandina and extension of Nambour trains to Yandina will make that town a more convenient point for park and ride facilities, thereby reducing traffic activity in and around the Nambour railway station.

Yandina

Currently, Queensland Rail is investigating three potential sites within one kilometre of the Nambour railway station for stabling trains, in other words parking them overnight or when not in use. The Yandina community wants those plans scrapped and current railway land immediately north of Yandina station used as stabling instead. This Action Plan supports that idea.

Nambour is divided by the NCL and the development of train stabling in the vicinity will restrict options for integrating the railway station with the Nambour town centre. Land at Nambour is more expensive to buy, especially since Queensland Rail has excess land not in use at Yandina. In addition, Yandina is home to a Queensland Rail maintenance crew and the facilities at their depot can be refurbished to cater to the needs of train crews ending or beginning their shift.

The Nambour station precinct is being choked with commuter parking intermingled with parking associated with the Nambour General Hospital. People from towns further north, and from Coolumb, are driving to Nambour to park and catch the train. For those travelling to Brisbane, their car sits all day at Nambour. Having Yandina as a train stabling site would allow trains with a Nambour destination to continue north to Yandina and either terminate there or make the run back to Caboolture/Brisbane. Those driving their car from places north down to Nambour to catch a train need not travel as far, traffic congestion would be relieved in the Nambour CBD and the Yandina local economy would be strengthened by changing current thinking on train stabling.

The Cooroora towns

The Sunshine Coast Regional Council has begun developing a set of master plans for railway towns south of Nambour, where a new route for the SCL has been determined. The Cooroora towns of Cooroy, Pomona and Cooran are at a relative disadvantage because consideration of any impacts of train track deviations on these three developing towns won't occur until after 2031 when their urban form will have changed considerably and opportunities to examine new route options through town will be limited. Compromises affecting train efficiency may have to be made at that time.

This Action Plan proposes that a track alignment study for the towns between Nambour and Gympie North occur within three years, funded by the sale of the old Gympie rail yard. Meanwhile, there are immediate issues that need to be addressed, but can't because of moribund state government thinking and a mindset which focuses on the immediate problems of the SCL (generally south of Nambour) and relegates other issues to be considered after 2031.

At Cooroy, the town is grappling with traffic management and pedestrian movement issues hampered by a single narrow bridge, without pedestrian access, across the railway tracks near the railway station and an old pedestrian overpass – the only cross-town and cross-track point – linking both sides of the town. The overbridge fails current disability access standards. Cooroy is a linear town, running along both sides of the railway track. It is the railhead for Noosa and a designated Transit Oriented Development (TOD).

In 2006, the former Noosa Shire Council commissioned consultants Cardno Eppell Olsen to examine ways the town's traffickability could be improved. The subsequent report found that 50 per cent of traffic through Cooroy, originating from the expanding industrial estate, wanted to travel east-west across the railway line. A further 40 per cent wanted to travel south and 10 per cent wanted to go north, towards Gympie.

The Jarrah Street extension to Garnet Street is one response to the report findings. Among other issues yet to be considered include: the management of traffic flows to and from Noosa and the Bruce Highway, a pedestrian path in the railway reserve, a pedestrian overbridge across the SCL in the vicinity of the golf course and a possible traffic underpass linking Maple Street (the main street) and Elm Street.

It would be foolish to build any new infrastructure, only to have it impacted by a future rail alignment. These issues can be resolved only in conjunction with a track alignment study.

Similar pedestrian access issues exist at Pomona, where the railway station platform has been extended by the addition of a hired temporary scaffold structure. This won't last the next 20 years, which is the timeframe during which the state government proposes to do nothing about the line north of Nambour.

The Sunshine Coast Regional Council wants to work with Queensland Rail to build a sealed pedestrian pathway on railway land to link both sides of town. At the same time, emergency services want to relocate Pomona's 64-year-old, asbestos-ridden and flood-prone fire station to higher ground within the railway reserve.

Again, this is best considered in conjunction with a track alignment study so that the fire station is not built in an inappropriate location, only to be demolished in future to make way for any track straightening.

Traveston station

The former state government bought up properties in the Mary Valley, depopulated the valley to make way for the now cancelled Traveston Crossing Dam, and then wondered why the Traveston station patronage dropped away. Traveston remains the only short-platform station on the line to Gympie North. Passengers must alight and disembark from the leading door of the train only.

In late 2009, Queensland Rail wrote to the then Minister for Transport and Main Roads seeking approval to conduct an operation review of Traveston station. It is understood that Queensland Rail is yet to receive confirmation from the minister and, therefore, no timeframe for the review has been set. This Action Plan proposes an end to the delay and the conduct of the operational review in 2012–13. Meanwhile, the station will remain operational, but with a short platform. The station building has been restored.

Gympie

Some of the worst sections of speed-restricted track on the NCL are between Nambour and Gympie North, requiring the fast tilt train to average less than 70kph, yet the state government proposes that even planning for a track upgrade over this section won't begin until after 2031, with construction occurring subsequent to that. Towns in between are growing steadily, but their expansion, functionality and urban form is being compromised by the current railway alignment.

Track straightening is required between Nambour and Yandina and, while the track has been realigned at Eumundi, an examination of its optimal route is required further north, through Cooroy, Pomona, Cooran and onwards to Gympie North. The government says it has no money for such a study. The Sunshine Coast Action Plan proposes that an examination of NCL realignment options between Nambour and Gympie North be brought forward to start in 2016; earlier, if feasible. The cost would be met from the sale of surplus railway land adjacent to the Gympie railway station.

The old Gympie train yard sits idle, yet its redevelopment for medium density housing, community recreation or as a site for a campus of the University of the Sunshine Coast specialising in food science are options to be explored further. The land is of little use to the Queensland Government and Gympie as it is. Selling it off would spark an urban renewal project for Gympie and raise revenue to bring forward a Nambour–Gympie North track realignment study. One aspect of the study could examine the feasibility of returning Citytrain passenger service to the heart of Gympie, using hybrid train sets (electric/battery powered), via the disused Banks Pocket line. These hybrid trains could operate elsewhere on the network, such as beyond Rosewood (end of electrification) to Gatton. It is possible to develop the eastern end of Gympie station for Citytrain operations without compromising the historic nature of the Gympie railway station, or interfering with the operations of the Mary Valley Historic Railway. The potential exists for the MVHR to be an agent for Queensland Rail, sell go-card tickets and maintain Gympie Citytrain facilities for a fee.

Funding and construction

This Action Plan assumes a solution can be found to improving Brisbane's cross-river rail capacity, which will become critical from 2016. Without this capacity being found or addressed, there will be no capability for additional passenger services to and from the Sunshine Coast. Also, without track amplification between Petrie and Northgate, the line between Petrie and Northgate will not have sufficient capacity to cope with the Petrie–Kippa Ring line trains when they come into service from 2016.

Not only would this allow for more peak period overtaking opportunities by freight trains, the TravelTrains (mainly the tilts) and Nambour and Gympie IMU train sets, but the few peak-hour trains that operate as 'slow expresses' to Nambour could become express between Caboolture and Northgate. The advantages of Petrie–Northgate and Petrie–Narangba triplication would need to be explored further.

However, most importantly, without duplication of the SCL between Beerburrum and Nambour, that line lacks the capacity for any expansion of services at all; and there is no capacity for CAMCOS to Caloundra and Maroochydore without track amplification to Landsborough.

The most beneficial sequence of infrastructure upgrades is an immediate focus on capacity improvement for train links across the Brisbane River, some initial duplication at key locations on the SCL to allow efficient passing between passenger and freight trains travelling in opposite directions, track amplification between Petrie (or Narangba) and Northgate, then continuous realignment and duplication of remaining sections of Beerburrum to Nambour by 2020, not the 2031 timetable envisioned currently.

A **\$1 billion five-year funding commitment** (\$200 million year-on-year) ensures that detailed planning, consultation, environmental assessment, and geotechnical and design work can progress now on an interim program of works along the SCL, with preliminary construction work commencing in 2012, and construction due to finish by 2017. The difficult duplication work between Mooloolah and Palmwoods would proceed towards the latter part of the construction timetable.

The interim works, consistent with the overall master plan, are detailed in the tables on the following page.

Action Plan summary — 2012–2015

| Project | Cost (\$m) | Reason and benefits |
|---|---------------|---|
| 3 rd track, Petrie-Lawnton | 200.0 | To relieve capacity constraints on the Caboolture and Sunshine Coast lines and required for Petrie-Kippa Ring Line when it opens in 2016. |
| Beerburrum-Glasshouse Mountains duplication | 120.0 | Track duplication will address capacity constraints on the single track and allow greater flexibility for crossovers. |
| Complete planning for Mooloolah–Palmwoods track duplication, including outstanding land acquisition | 5.0 | This is the worst section of track between Caboolture and Nambour. This section lies at a point along the network where non-precision train crossovers can occur. Together with extension of duplicated track to Glass House Mountains, half-hour train services to Nambour could be possible and railbus services curtailed. |
| Total: | 325.00 | |

Action Plan summary — 2016–2017

| Project | Cost (\$m) | Reason and benefits |
|--|--------------|---|
| Mooloolah-Palmwoods track duplication and new stations at Palmwoods and Eudlo | 450.0 | Together with Beerburrum-Glasshouse Mountains, this project would allow faster trains to Nambour, with greater operational flexibility. Eliminate railbus services. |
| Nambour-Gympie North passing loops | 120.0 | Four new passing loops 1500m long, on new alignment, if necessary, (or extension of existing passing loops) to allow for super-freighter consists south of Maryborough West. |
| Yandina train stabling – extend rail services to northern SC hinterland | 80.0 | Yandina stabling will free up rail land at Nambour for second platform/redevelopment while allowing operational efficiencies. |
| Review track realignment options for the line between Nambour and Gympie North | 6.0 | To preserve within the town plan the optimum alignment through hinterland railway towns. |
| New Nambour railway station, integrated with council and private enterprise, to develop TOD-style makeover of the town centre. | 19.0 | A new bus-rail interchange, linked to surrounding precinct, and commercial development above, has the potential to revitalise Nambour, which lies at the geographic centre of the Sunshine Coast. |
| Total: | 675.0 | |

Beyond 2017 (unfunded)

| Project | Cost (\$m) | Reason and benefits |
|---|-------------|--|
| Station upgrades at stations with temporary platforms (Eumundi, Pomona and Cooran), on new alignment, if necessary. Traveston resolution. | | End wasteful hiring of scaffolding. Better land use and town place outcomes for railway towns offering affordable housing and good social infrastructure supporting organic population growth. |
| Total: | 00.0 | |

Possible cost offsets

Partial offsets against these costs could be achieved through the following:

- the recovery of unpaid fines, currently standing at around \$800 million (as of 2011), through the State Penalties Enforcement Agency;
- sale of tunnels through Dularcha National Park for commercial horticulture (ie, produce storage or mushroom farm);
- sale of air space above the Nambour railway station (as part of reconstruction, including second platform);
- sale of extensive land at Gympie railway station (the former goods yard) for medium-density housing, motel, nursing home etc, and a new swimming pool for the city (in conjunction with Gympie Regional Council);
- contributions from the federal government towards the freight capacity improvement component of this plan (longer passing loops catering for 1500m trains).

Identified benefits by electorate

This \$1 billion, five-year reconstruction program for the SCL line will achieve several key, statewide benefits:

- with the assistance of the federal government under its National Transport Network funding obligations, a shift in rail's modal share of freight traffic on the Brisbane–Cairns corridor, thereby cutting the growth in numbers of large transport vehicles on the Bruce Highway;
- a reduction in freight forwarding charges for the people of central and north Queensland who rely upon rail transport for the transportation of goods;
- more efficient allocation of rail rolling stock through the operation of 1500m super-freighter trains south of Rockhampton, including having electric locos replace diesel units;
- faster running times for the Sunlander, Inlander and the Tilt Trains to Rockhampton and Cairns;
- the prospect of extra inter-urban passenger trains Brisbane–Gympie and Brisbane–Maryborough;
- indirectly, assistance for Australia's ailing steel industry.

Caloundra electorate

- realignment of the worst, time restricting section of the SCL track north and south of Eudlo;
- new Eudlo railway station, thus allowing for village revitalisation;
- opportunities for re-use of Dularcha National Park tunnels for commercial functions (ie, mushroom farm and/or storage).

Glass House electorate

- duplication of slow track, Beerburrum to Glass House Mountains;
- refurbished Glass House Mountains railway station;
- additional train stabling at Beerwah to allow for more passenger trains, terminating/originating at Landsborough in peak periods and fewer railbus services;
- a new Palmwoods railway station, thereby ending the uncertainty that has plagued development of that town, including a new supermarket. Redevelopment of the town centre.

Gympie electorate

- extra long passing loops Nambour–Gympie North to allow for faster running times for passenger and freight trains;
- on the augmented track, the possibility of additional passenger train shuttles between Gympie North and Nambour;
- an examination of better, faster track alignment through the railway towns between Nambour and Gympie North, funded by the sale of excess railway land at Gympie;
- revitalisation of Gympie's Tozer Street rail precinct.

Kallangur electorate

- track augmentation Petrie–Lawnton, thereby allowing for more express passenger rail services and faster travel times for trains to and from Caboolture and the city.

Moorayfield electorate

- faster and more frequent passenger train services due to track augmentation Petrie–Lawnton.

Nicklin electorate

- a new Nambour railway station and bus-rail interchange as a catalyst for Nambour TOD makeover and revitalisation of the CBD (boost to construction jobs locally);
- the feasibility of a rail service every half hour between Brisbane and Nambour, and faster journey times;
- Yandina stabling facility;
- new freight logistics centre serving north side of Brisbane and creating jobs.

MORE FACTS AND FIGURES:

Population Growth Highlights and Trends, Queensland 2012

June 2012

Population Growth Highlights and Trends, Queensland 2012 provides an overview of Queensland's population growth at state, regional and local levels, suitable for informing policy development and planning across government, private and community sectors.

At 30 September 2011, Queensland's preliminary estimated resident population was 4,599,360 (Figure 2.1), representing 20.3 per cent of Australia's total of 22,695,980 persons. For the 10 year period to September 2011, Queensland's population recorded an average annual growth rate of 2.3 per cent. This was well above the Australian average of 1.5 per cent and higher than any other state or territory for the same period.

More than two-thirds of Queenslanders now live in SEQ with 3,178,030 people, or 69.4 per cent of Queensland's resident population at 30 June 2011.

In 2010-11, 71.1 per cent of Queensland's population growth occurred in South East Queensland (an average of about 1,020 people per week).

The median age of Queensland's population was 31.8 years in 1991, increasing to 36.4 years in 2011³. By 2031, the median age of the State's population is projected to increase to 40.2 years⁴.

Sunshine Coast population

| | | | | | | | |
|----------------------|---------|---------|------------------|-------|-----|--------------|-----|
| 247,170 (in 2011) | 295,080 | 330,320 | 335,270 (now) | 8,810 | 3.1 | 4,960 | 1.5 |
|----------------------|---------|---------|------------------|-------|-----|--------------|-----|

Caboolture Central pop: 23,890

Morayfield pop: 24,620

Gympie (R) and Tablelands (R) contained the largest populations of the rural and remote regional LGAs (50,010 and 47,280 persons respectively at 30 June 2011). Excluding those LGAs that are also SLAs (and as such were covered in Section 4.5.1), the most populous rural and remote SLAs at 30 June 2011 were Gympie (R) - Cooloola (26,030 people), Tablelands (R) - Mareeba (21,440) and Whitsunday (R) - Whitsunday (20,550).