

HUNTER ACC SUBMISSION FOR THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES TRANSPORT AND REGIONAL SERVICES STANDING COMMITTEE

INQUIRY INTO THE INTERFACE BETWEEN PORTS AND ROAD AND RAIL NETWORKS

The effective integration and interface between the Port of Newcastle and rail and road networks is regarded by the Hunter ACC as a key regional and national priority.

The Port of Newcastle is the world's leading coal exporting port and one of a limited number of ports on the eastern seaboard of Australia that has the capacity to grow to meet Australia's expanding international trade.

The Port of Newcastle has achieved national recognition as an effective port in delivering large quantities of export products efficiently and effectively through the collaborative efforts of industry and government. These efforts and results have primarily been achieved through working within the existing transport infrastructure networks with the port's facilities.

There is a limit on the capacity of these existing transport networks to meet increases in export demand and there is a pressing need to enter into detailed transport infrastructure planning and implementation if the Port is to meet increased volumes.

The Hunter ACC has been working closely with a number of Hunter regional groups and organisations such as Hunter Business Chamber, Hunter Economic Development Corporation, Regional Lands Management Corporation to identify key areas that need to be addressed. In addition, the Hunter ACC has been working with adjacent ACCs such as the Central West, Orana and New England North West ACCs to also identify areas of need to improve the efficiency of the interface between these regions and the Port of Newcastle.

As a result of these ongoing discussions the Hunter ACC has identified the following areas of concern that require planning and investment be undertaken to ensure that there is an effective integration and interface between the Port of Newcastle and the wider regions currently services or potentially could serve.

The areas of concern for planning and investment are as follows:

- The Ardglan tunnel at Murrurundi for access to coal from Gunnedah and other agricultural products from the New England North West region.
- Maryvale to Gulgong rail link to open up the grain areas and mineral deposits from the Central West and alternative for coal from the North West
- A rail by pass of the city of Dubbo to increase the efficiency of freight transport in western NSW,
- Removing bottlenecks on rail in the Hunter, e.g.
 - taking freight off the suburban line,
 - improving freight on the Valley line by dual track at the Antienne section near Muswellbrook,
 - improved rail signaling,
 - Fassifern to Hexham rail line or an alternative line that links up with the freeway at Beresfield/Thornton.

- Road upgrades e.g. F3 Freeway links to Pacific Highway and New England Highways and road by passes of towns such as Muswellbrook.
- Establishing intermodal transport links e.g. at Beresfield/Thornton between road and rail that link to the port.
- Establishing and expanding intermodal transport links in key regional centres such as Dubbo, Parkes, Tamworth etc that will lead to economic growth in these areas and enhance the efficiency of port operations.
- Enhancing the role of the Port of Newcastle in facilitating sea freight in and out of metro Sydney,
- If the North South Rail Corridor study recommends an inland route then it will be critical for this corridor to be connected to the Sydney region. Only the Hunter Valley lends itself to be this link.
- A Multi Purpose Terminal (MPT) proposed for the Port of Newcastle will come into operation in the medium term. The MPT operations will require that there are effective rail and road corridors in place that link the MPT to markets in Sydney, northern and western NSW.
- The NSW Government's Lower Hunter Strategy is at best a concept document that does not go into detail. For example the issue of infrastructure is not covered. This is a major fault and needs to be addressed urgently.
- There is significant pressure on the lower Hunter in regards to population growth, demand for land and environmental pressure (e.g. forest systems, wetlands) and if transport infrastructure planning (i.e. dedicated road and rail corridors and F3 links to the New England and Pacific Highways) are not implemented then the transport interface with the port will increasingly be problematic.
- Substantial expenditure, both private and public, has already been made in port facilities and future expenditure can be expected but will require the role of government to ensure that transport corridors and transport hubs are identified and dedicated. This will enable the private sector, in particular, to undertake long term planning in the knowledge that the transport infrastructure support system is in place.
- Hunter ACC, in its role as one of the Australian Government's regional development bodies, has also initiated meetings with other ACCs so that as a national group we are able to raise the issue of transport with the Australian Government and provide assistance and advice.

The above points have been raised to identify the complexity of the integration between road and rail interfaces with the Port of Newcastle. Although the list is extensive the key to meeting the challenge is to undertake planning. Planning that will ensure that transport corridors are designated and dedicated. All too often planning is only undertaken after capital funding has been programmed. The future transport challenges have to be met regardless of the timing of capital funding, by identifying and dedicating the required corridors clear messages are given to the community, industry and government organisations enabling better utilization of resources.

Without this planning the list of integration issues and problems will grow due to environmental and population pressures and the ability of the Port of Newcastle to make a substantial contribution to Australia's future economic growth will be diminished.