

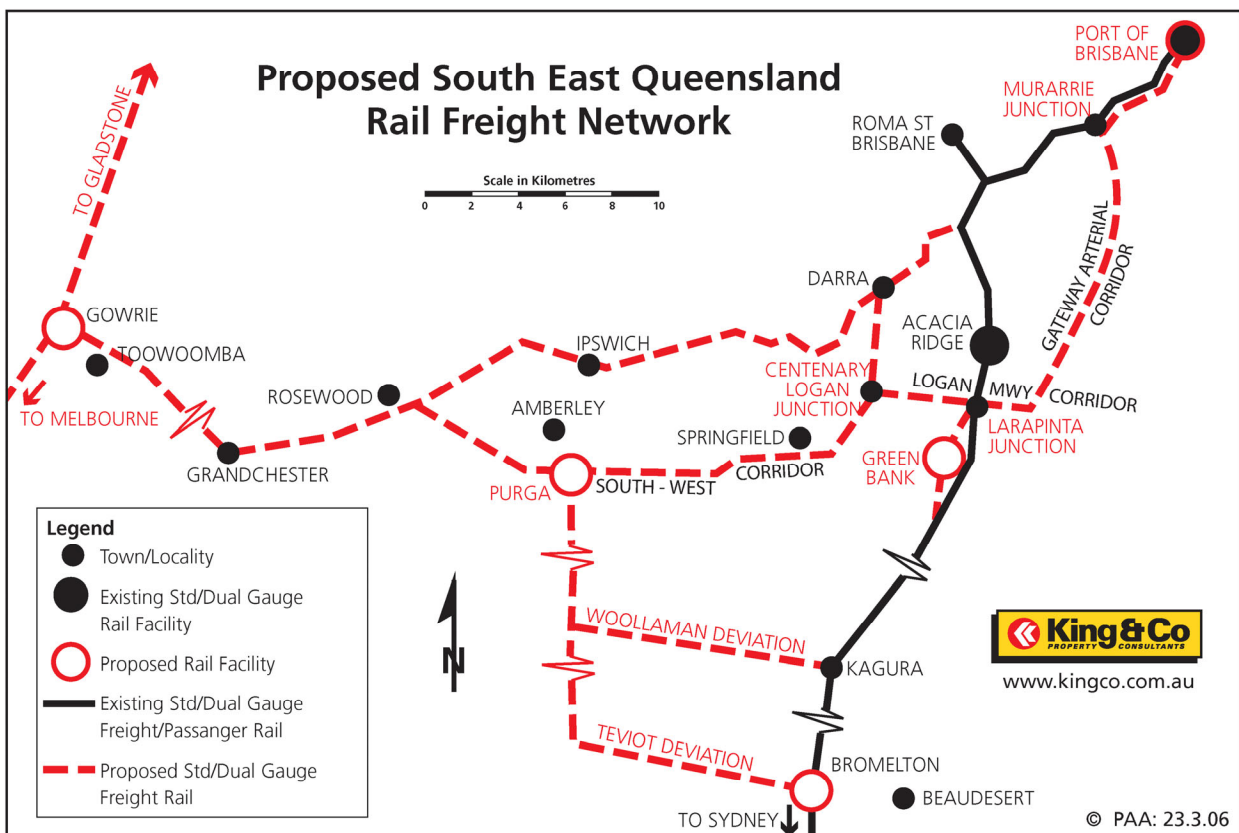
# A proposal to enhance South East Queensland's rail freight network: Part 2

Submitted to the House of Representatives' "Inquiry into integration of regional rail and road networks and their interface with ports"

Presented in Brisbane on 6 April, 2006 by:

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*"Queensland's rail network represents 1/5 of the total Australian rail network but will only receive 0.5% of the available funding for rail under Auslink, with no ...contribution to port infrastructure" -Queensland Government submission to the House of Representatives' Inquiry into the integration of regional road and rail networks and their connectivity to ports*

*"The Melbourne -Sydney-Brisbane main line track received a 'FAIL' grade due to its poor track co-ordination, steam age alignments and inadequate signalling and communications systems"-Engineers Australia ,Infrastructure report card*

*\*Roads will receive 91% of the \$11.8 billion Auslink Budget for 2004-05 to 2008-09, while rail will be given 9%-Property Council of Australia*

## **An Inland Rail Link, where it should go and who must pay for it. Our 100 year plan**

### **How the Premier can build a much needed rail freight corridor to the Port of Brisbane without being chased by residents with pitchforks**

### **Purga best suited to become Queensland's primary rail marshalling yard once Acacia Ridge approaches its "use by" date**

In the last King's Counsel we offered ideas in support of the ages old case for building a 1,800km Inland rail freight link from Melbourne to Fisherman Islands and back, adding that failure to implement such an important piece of infrastructure might eventually allow port facilities at Gladstone, Newcastle and soon to be dredged Port Philips Bay, Melbourne, to dramatically outperform the Port of Brisbane in terms of freight volume and revenue. Not to do so would also deal a blow to plans for reducing intra city truck traffic in SE Queensland and make impossible the fulfilling of Auslink's projection that "within 20 years 40% of non bulk freight will be transported by rail along the North- South Corridor (Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane), instead of the present 17%."

Included in our presentation was a tunnel based Toowoomba Range crossing from Gowrie to Grandchester (and one that would allow double stacked containers to enter and exit Queensland for the first time), the possibility of developing parts of the 520ha Purga Investigation Area to the south of Ipswich (as designated in the SE Queensland Regional Plan) into a primary inter modal marshalling yard and, most importantly, an argument for providing standard gauge rail freight tracks from Purga to the Port of Brisbane via a Southwest Corridor in both directions as well as along the existing Logan, Gateway and Port Motorways. We also urged that this concept be initiated within the next 5 to 10 years, not the 20+ presently being bandied about, and came to the conclusion that it should be financed solely by Federal and State Governments as part of a national rail freight system, where the money allocated to that end is seen as an investment in our nation's future, not simply the cost of bribing marginal electorates....or so it would seem. Needless to say, this view stands in opposition to those who would rely on the likes of Public Private Partnerships for funding, an option that is not in the best public interest, let alone to the economic benefit of users and operators.

Since then, a number of bothersome questions have arisen and beg to be answered before there's any further talk of the concept's viability, for example how do you counter the Queensland State Government's refusal to even consider a rail freight only corridor to the Port via Brisbane's southern suburbs, a critical link if it's ever to see the light of day,

let alone gain public, therefore political, acceptance? Is the Acacia Ridge marshalling yard, increasingly constrained by residential encroachment and other limitations, approaching a “used by” date as this state’s primary rail interchange? What’s it about Purga that makes it such a promising alternative to the Acacia Ridge yard should the latter’s inter modal function be ultimately reduced by economic, political and geographic realities to servicing purely local rail traffic and second or third tier trucking companies? Finally, what other pieces of the Inland rail network should be considered and how should the whole lot be financed?

Before then, however, allow us to define the concept a bit more closely, review its history and analyse its central premise: when properly resourced the transport of interstate freight by rail is, in most circumstances, superior to road based equivalents. And if it isn’t now, it will be once an Inland Rail and ancillary links come on line. It’s also important to note that this proposal and the issues surrounding it should be considered within at least a 100 year time frame, meaning, of course, that all related planning, infrastructure, resumption and financing should not just be organised for the immediate term but for decades ahead as well. This is especially critical for projects that are presently politically or technically untenable but may be acceptable in the distant future.

### **What is the Inland Rail Link and where should it go?**

In its latest version, the first leg of an Inland Rail Link would connect Melbourne to the Ports of Brisbane and/or Gladstone by way of Parkes, Dubbo, Moree and Toowoomba, a route recently given added recognition in the Federal Government’s Auslink White Paper. The leg from Toowoomba to the Port of Brisbane is yet to be determined and the subject of proposals presented in this article.

Until recently the Inland Rail concept has been largely promoted by private individuals or consortia, with lobbying efforts going back to as early as 1883, and constantly sabotaged, it is argued, by interstate rivalries. Since the mid 1980’s its proponents’ primary goal has been a rail link from Toowoomba (or Warwick) that would allow the unimpeded transport of coal and other minerals from the 1.7 million km<sup>2</sup> Surat Basin, which straddles northern NSW and southern Queensland, to the Port of Gladstone via the Dawson Valley Line (using derived revenues to pay for its construction and operation), with Brisbane’s Port acting as a terminus for delivering agricultural produce from the Eastern Downs area. To be sure, the speedy and economical movement of container freight from the Port of Brisbane to Melbourne and vice versa is also deemed important, this part of the proposal appears as a secondary consideration in their published submissions. (Indeed, some in this group openly push for the whole Queensland link to be limited to the Port of Gladstone, which is a bit baffling considering that the CEO of the Gladstone Economic & Industry Development Board said he never heard of the idea).

While the benefits of the first two goals are still being trumpeted by these private advocates, it’s clear that all three tiers of Government have come to focus almost exclusively on the benefits of the third... a view reinforced by the disproportionate number of publicly and otherwise funded studies that have been, are being or will be undertaken, based almost solely on the Melbourne to Port of Brisbane link. Cases in point include a

Department of Transport commissioned feasibility study by Ernst Young and another by Maunsell McIntyre. As part of this process, the House of Representative's has been conducting an "Inquiry into the integration of regional rail and road networks and their interface with ports", to which King & Co was a contributor.

### **Why use rail and not road when shipping between state capitals?**

Those who advocate the benefits of rail over road when shipping freight between state capitals offer a number of counter arguments when confronted with the question: Why is trucking still often cheaper than going by train? Uppermost among their answers is the fact that road transport is disproportionately subsidised, pointing to the Federal Government's road centric funding.

Even worse, they say this skewing seems to occur even where stacks of research show that a properly resourced interstate rail system would far out perform road haulage by a wide margin in terms of cost per kilometre, safety, pollution and impact on amenity, most particularly in the case of an Inland rail link. To buttress this argument, they then point out that Commonwealth road spending from 1997-2004 was \$11.6 billion, while rail spending during the same period was \$992 million. Similarly, in the 25 years to 1999 they note that the Commonwealth spent \$43 billion on roads and only \$1.2 billion on rail.

Along the same line of discussion, they also say that charges on trucks are well below the true cost of their impact on roads in terms of the space they take up and damage they do...an inequity that some believe will not be made any easier if Australia's transport ministers go ahead with their intended rejection of the National Transport Commission's proposal to create "competitive neutrality" between these two modes of freight transport by lifting registration charges to B-doubles and road trains, while raising net diesel excise. Other's, however, argue that these charges are unfair, insisting that, instead, trucks should be assessed against per tonne kilometre travelled as they do in Germany, and soon will in the UK. They say that the technology has been developed, making use of GPS technology, roadside transponders and onboard units which, together accurately record vehicle movements through a road network.

These and the other constraints noted earlier are underlined in a paper provided by the Rail Technical Society of Australasia which says "rail has progressed technically within the limitations of long distance, low-volume operations but at a rate that has not kept up with the competition." This is particularly the case with infrastructure, "which essentially remains as early 20th century alignments with mid-century track." It then goes on to give the Melbourne-Sydney-Brisbane track main line a "F" rating for having "poor track co-ordination, steam age alignments and inadequate signalling and communication systems." Indeed, according to an Australian Rail Track Association study, 41% of the track between these capital cities "failed to meet basic fast train standards of curve radii exceeding 800m", meaning that the cumulative extra costs of being forced to slow down may be around \$2,600 per trip, at least if the less than optimum speed limit between Landsborough and Townsville is any measure. Then, again, this should offer no surprises in light of our national rail system "suffering from time consuming deficiencies such as the

nine separate rail communications systems along the main inter-city routes and 450 so-called temporary speed restrictions along the same routes.”

Closer to home, “Queensland rail has reportedly imposed a weight limit of 21.75 tonnes on each container going between the Darling Downs and the Port of Brisbane because of ageing and under capacity infrastructure, a shortfall that adds another \$330 to the cost of every container...and forcing many to rely on trucks, thereby contributing to congestion on the Ipswich Motorway.”

Further supplementing this “war” for customers, rail operators offer pleas of patience, asking potential users to accept that this price disparity is rapidly becoming more evenly balanced and will soon make shipping by trains significantly more competitive, the caveat to this argument, of course, being whether or not the rail infrastructure deficiencies mentioned above are funded and built, rolling stock is improved, unified national regulations are put in place and, once and for all, a Commonwealth Rail strategy is formulated and imposed (one beyond the limitations of Auslink, which, with respect, seems half baked and half resourced when it comes to funding train systems).

While this is eventuating (or maybe precipitating an eventuation) it’s important to reiterate that, where implemented adequately, interstate rail is up to nine times as efficient, seven times safer, significantly less labour intensive and more than two times as environmentally friendly than road. For example, “one train with two drivers between Sydney and Melbourne equals 150 trucks and saves 45,000 litres of fuel and 130 tonnes of greenhouse gases.” Moreover, with costs of diesel fuel going up and up, resulting in tighter margins, combined with a lack of available drivers willing to suffer lengthy hours away from home, or unrealistic scheduling demands from owners, the situation can only get more economical for train users.

Further exposing the comparative deficiencies of interstate road transport, one only has to look at the congestion around high volume urban rail terminals or interchange yards like Acacia Ridge, a condition that is expected to increase dramatically in the near future and exacerbate already quite vocal opposition to truck access outside limited hours. In addition, trucks on Motorways to and from the Port suffer poor road conditions, particularly around the Toowoomba Range, which is also close to capacity, leaving operators with expensive maintenance or repair costs. Furthermore, current long-haul regulations and requirements for heavy freight vehicles to break into smaller units has resulted in double handling, causing increased unit costs and lost time efficiencies.

Applying this knowledge to the Inland Rail Link, when completed it could allow 2 km double stacked trains between Melbourne and Brisbane at speeds of at least 110km/h, running every six hours, and, according to the Australasian Rail Association, cut transit times from 35 hours to 22 hours and create 2,400 jobs a year during construction. It’s also estimated to eventually carry 75% of the freight traffic between these capital cities, and slash millions of dollars off road maintenance costs. This route would also eliminate the need for trains to pass through the time consuming Sydney bottleneck on their way to Brisbane (or back), and reduce truck traffic by 2,500 a day.

Finally, every dollar spent on the Inland Rail project should generate a benefit of between \$3.60 and \$8.50. This equates to a whole of life economic benefit of at least a \$5 billion asset.

### **A dedicated rail freight only corridor to the Port of Brisbane is in political limbo...and we know how to get it out of there**

The greatest “Achilles Heel” for the Inland link from Melbourne is the Premier’s “cast iron guarantee” that his government would never consider allowing a dedicated standard gauge rail freight corridor through Brisbane’s southern suburbs to Fisherman Islands, either from the Acacia Ridge marshalling yard, as part of a proposed upgrade, or, it’s assumed, any other routes to that end.

While this is an understandable reaction to politically damaging “kerfuffles” with outraged residents over past rail corridor “improvement” proposals ( eg the so-called Gumdale Line battle in the mid 1980s, and a more recent one over a new rail corridor from Yeerongpilly) none of us who care about nurturing a successful and efficient rail freight industry can hide from the fact that the existing dual gauge freight/passenger line from Acacia Ridge via Dutton Park suffers from too much suburban encroachment along its borders to allow adequate speed, 24 hour usage, profitable train lengths and, therefore, the ability to meet enough “just in time” requirements to compete with road transport.

There’s also too little space for additional tracks or sound buffering and heavier duty sleepers would have to be installed to take on the higher axle loads when passenger tracks are used by freight trains, especially when carting double stacked containers if that becomes a possibility. In addition, passenger trains using that track are already at 90% capacity during peak hours, leaving freight movement as an impossibility during those times, or at best an afterthought.

There are, of course, some who argue that this corridor might be improved by way of passing loops at Murarrie and Wynnum North, and a gradient reducing, curve straightening tunnel could be built through the hill between Norman Park and Morningside, thereby reducing noise from straining diesel engines and lessening wheel screech, but, for a variety of reasons, including the high cost of resumptions, this is at best a stop gap measure, one that will satisfy nobody completely and, once again, undoubtedly stir up protest amongst the effected locals at a time when and where the State Government can least afford it.

That being said, we can only assume the Premier or Transport Minister Lucas haven’t seen our proposal to overcome any and all “deal breakers” relating to this issue, including train noise, visual amenity, the economic and political price of resumption, NIMBY sorts with pitchforks and the handcuffs of past promises...an offering, we might add, that has garnered positive interest from QT/QR bureaucrats and other rail transport professionals.

It's actually quite simple: Let QR superimpose dedicated, standard gauge rail freight tracks going to and from the Larapinta junction to the Port of Brisbane leg of the Inland rail link on readily available, State owned, unimproved strips within or alongside the Logan, Gateway and Port Motorways. This out of sight, out of mind approach would both obviate almost every source of the resident disquiet noted above, while, at the same time, provide rail freight users and operators with the possibility of 24 hour, seven day haulage, the removal of speed constraints caused by track sharing, presently a sub-optimum 80km/h, and the ability to run longer, more profitable trains now impeded by a lack of grade crossings.

Using these Motorways as a template would also allow engineers to take advantage of the fact that they employ horizontal curve radii similar to the ones used for tracks, therefore precluding a whole range of expensive engineering problems. Indeed, the only areas that might be "problematic" along this whole route is a smallish residential subdivision along the Gateway around Old Cleveland Road and at an industrial complex where the Gateway meets the Port Motorway...both of which can be side-stepped through minor resumption or tunnels. As an added bonus, construction could be incorporated into the Gateway Arterial upgrade and the Port of Brisbane's 283ha reclamation project at Fisherman Islands, thereby sharing expenses as well as operational and planning processes.

In the meantime, should noise continue to be a problem through the corridor to the Port, maybe QR or other users should consider using much quieter shuttle trains like the CRT CargoSprinter. It's made in Victoria, can go 120km/h and is reported to be "ideally suited for operations through urban networks."

### **Is Acacia Ridge approaching its "use by" date as Queensland's primary rail marshalling yard?**

Regardless of who wins the legal battles involving Queensland Rail, Pacific National et al, one fact remains: the half century old 83ha Acacia Ridge Marshalling Yard is too small, awkwardly laid out and encroached upon by residential development to its west to continue as Queensland's primary inter-modal rail transit centre..particularly as each constraint plays its part in limiting the site's ability to lay down additional track or provide adequate container storage areas, all essential to the future profitability and efficiency of its operators and users.

To make matters worse, the yard and its surrounds are suffering ever increasing truck traffic congestion (resulting in noisy rat running through adjoining residential streets), while the ongoing fragmentation of larger parcels has compelled a significant number of big logistics users to relocate elsewhere, usually to the Australia TradeCoast or further south or west, for example Coles and Woolworths. Conversions of large sheds with long sidings into multi unit complexes has forced the loss of the numerous spur lines now unable to accommodate longer trains and shunting has become too expensive and disruptive. As these reductions in space and limits to usage continue unabated, it's not unreasonable to believe the multi-modal aspect of this yard will sooner than later be relegated to servicing

only second and third tier freight companies, with their smaller, more manoeuvrable vehicles and more modest rail needs.

Although some observers believe resumption based amalgamations, possibly led by a QR “buy out” of Pacific National, would sort these issues out, or that a Beaudesert Road grade crossing will be the “magic bullet”, we can, on the available evidence, only conclude that the “decline” in the yards’s usefulness and profitability is inexorable, a condition exacerbated by an apparent inability to get enough money for improvement from Federal or State Governments, or private lessee operators for that matter, unwilling to throw good money after bad.

On that note, even if there was the prospect of funding from any of these sources, bizarrely no costing has been undertaken for the yard’s overdue retrofitting and infrastructure additions, while a long promised Rail Capacity Study is yet to be done, leaving its operators even further in the dark...both unfortunate states of affairs when confronted by the reality that this yard, even with its reduced usefulness in terms of the Inland Rail etc, still has the important function of providing standard gauge access from Sydney, dual gauge to the Port and narrow gauge to points north.

In case anyone is led to believe that changes in the marshalling yard’s prominence will negatively impact on industrial activity in Acacia Ridge as a whole, there are no indications that this suburb shouldn’t continue to be in high demand (and command ever rising prices and rates) since appropriately sized users could still enjoy rail access and have a choice, albeit limited, of high quality standalone buildings. It also is expected to benefit from the State Government’ initiated Brisbane Urban Corridor, which is said to comprise a residential neighbourhood avoiding “regional freight route linking important motorways and the major industrial areas of Archerfield/Acacia Ridge/Rocklea to the Port of Brisbane.” More specifically “Granard-Riawena-Kessels and Mt Gravatt-Capalaba Roads are to form an 11km corridor connecting the Ipswich Motorway (in the west) and the Gateway Motorway (in the east).” Originally this project seemed a back door way to force the relocation of industrial users from Acacia Ridge and adjoining suburbs to areas like the Australia Trade Coast and further west and south, largely in response to residential encroachment and truck rat running, but after doing battle with King & Co and others the Government seems to have retreated from that position.

### **Is Purga the next big thing in rail marshalling yards and intermodal freight?**

Assuming the Inland Rail Link becomes a reality it begs the question of where to put a marshalling yard when it’s time to supersede Acacia Ridge. While all agree this has to be further to Brisbane’s west there have been some ongoing differences of opinion as to whether the location should be at Parkinson, Greenbank, Bromelton or Purga. Recently, however, Parkinson has been eliminated due to citizen protests, limited space and environmental issue, Greenbank is not really an option because it’s owned by a Defence Department with no clear intention of selling and Bromelton, preferred by some in the Department of State Development and Pacific National, which has bought up some land there, suffers from issues of topography, a lack of road infrastructure, water/gas



availability, broadband access, fragmented ownership and reliance on an antiquated standard gauge rail line.

This leaves Purga, a 520ha area to the south of the Cunningham Highway, which, with impeccable timing and forethought, is under investigation for use as a future rail marshalling yard in a Site Investigation Study by Maunsell/Aecom commissioned by Queensland Transport. Since the results are not yet available for disclosure we can only offer the following arguments in Purga's favour, fortunately reinforced by some "reading between the lines" after conversations with a variety of rail transport professionals, delving into various written works relating to the subject, including topographic maps or simply getting in the car and looking the place over.

As far as we've been able to find out, the area under consideration for an intermodal rail marshalling yard in Purga is an approximately 265ha parcel of land on an east west axis, with Stevens Road as its southern border and Green's Road the northern limit, while Warrill and Purga Creeks lie to the west and east, respectively. It adjoins a sizeable portion of land to the south earmarked for General Industry use, including "logistics, distribution, warehousing and associated activities." Parts of the latter are also being looked at as an alternative to the yard outlined above, while land to the north of the 265ha site to Amberley has flooding restrictions.

According to the SE Queensland Regional Plan, Purga's "potential is based on the area's accessibility to interstate highways, supported by the connector between the Cunningham and Warrego Highways and the proposed dual gauge freight railway linking the area to the standard gauge line north of Bromelton." It also would link to the existing rail corridor at Rosewood, via a relatively easy connection to the Inland Rail., and can, as per our proposal, provide a direct rail freight link with the Port by way of a Southwest corridor to Larapinta either onto Acacia Ridge then to Dutton Park or continuing along the Logan, Gateway and Port Motorways. Larapinta would also act as an interchange for the rail to Sydney, using a sliver of Greenbank as a crossing loop.

Aside from these virtues, Purga also enjoys the ability to service some of Queensland's most significant parcels of land designated for industrial uses, including the 3,350ha Ebenezer Industrial Park at Willowbank, the 700ha Swanbank Enterprise Park, the 200ha Bremer Business Park in Bundamba, while to the north, and straddling the Cunningham Highway, 183ha of land abutting the Amberley air force base is being examined for aviation/aerospace uses, possibly to commence before 2010. It's anticipated 2,800 additional employees will be working here over the next 10 years, logically necessitating an extension of a passenger link from Ripley Valley, where many would be residing.

The Purga marshalling yard would be divided into freight heading to the Port, Acacia Ridge and other points by train or carted by trucks, with the latter enjoying infrastructure that, unlike Acacia Ridge, would be able to accommodate rigs of any size, weight, height and length. Also, when compared to Acacia Ridge, this yard would be a 24 hour seven day a week operation that can store or on/off load an almost unlimited number of containers via an automated system, including double stacked, which would be available via the Toowoomba Range bypass from Melbourne. Indeed, unless the New England Highway is

improved, or rail tunnels from Sydney to Brisbane are enlarged, the Toowoomba route would be the only source of double stacked containers into Queensland.

As a greenfields site Purga's owners have the added benefit of being able to set the ground rules from day one, including the number of terminal operators and their relationship with the lessor, who's going to be the best manager and what are the most efficient points of access. The new entity also would have clear rein to institute the best methods of interfacing with the industrial users who moved here to be near a rail link, including the provision of single and cluster based rail sidings, multi user terminals and spur lines. These sidings and the rail yard generally would be able to accept trains up to 2,000m, the optimum length for profitability, as well as provide narrow gauge track and sidings where needed. Most importantly, it can be planned for the distant future, a century hence if possible or necessary. In any case, no matter when Purga and its associated links are earmarked to come on line, urgent consideration must be given to setting aside and maintaining the requisite land for buffer zones and rail corridors, as well as forbidding residential development to get anywhere near them. Land banking these areas now would also be much, much cheaper

Busy beavers that they are, the Department of State Development and Innovation has also been busily investigating two additional rail freight corridors. The first is a dual gauge set of tracks linking Purga to the existing Brisbane-Sydney line by going from Kagaru west along Woollamar Creek south of Flinders Peak. While looking good on a two dimensional map, unless someone's up for a very long and expensive tunnel this concept is severely impeded by the need to cross the 200m high watershed between Purga and Woollamar Creeks.

The second one also tries to link Purga with the Brisbane-Sydney line but by paralleling Beaudesert-Boonah Road. Problems with this option include the fact that the planned Wyaralong Dam will flood a significant part of the Teviot Valley and the road near where the tracks were to go.

Meanwhile, and in addition to our proposal for a link from Purga to the Port via the Southwest Corridor and the Logan, Gateway and Port Motorways, we would like to see a standard/dual gauge line hook up from the Centenary Motorway to Darra, one that would have the advantage of providing a backup route to the Port should there be a problem along the Logan Motorway leg. This implies the ramp currently being worked on at the intersection of the Centenary Highway and Ipswich Road should be built to allow an extension of the standard/dual gauge tracks as well as the planned narrow gauge passenger rail from Darra to Springfield to Ripley. This could also be lengthened another few kilometres through Ebenezer, across the Bremer River to Rosewood then onto Toowoomba.

Also, it's essential that work on the on/offramps onto the Logan Motorway at Larapinta Junction be built to allow sufficient height for double stacked containers, as should all the other bridges and overpasses along the route to and from the Port. Similarly, current planning for the Paradise Road on/off ramps to the Logan Mororway should incorporate

the future provision of dual and/or standard gauge tracks east and west along the Logan Motorway Corridor as well as Acacia Ridge.

### **Where's the \$3 billion to fund the whole thing coming from?**

Depending on a PPP or other private investment schemes to fund and build the (estimated) \$3 billion Inland Rail Link, as some supporters continue to press for, means this project will be a long time in coming...if ever. Then, again, waiting on the Commonwealth, the level of government that should really be funding projects like this, to come through with the necessary dollars seems equally misguided...and will probably require a "regime change" in Canberra, especially since the party in power seems to take the Smart State for granted on these matter. For example, the Queensland rail system, which represents 1/5 the total Australian network, received only 0.5% of Auslink's Investment Program budget, or \$7 million, with no contribution to port infrastructure.

By comparison, Queensland Rail has invested over \$1.4 billion for major rail infrastructure over the past six years, including around \$400 million for the metropolitan network and over \$1 billion for coal and mainline regional networks. Indeed, QR spent more on upgrading the Brisbane-Townsville mainline during the 1990s than the Federal Government's total rail spending.

### **Garbage In-Garbage Out: Rail data contradictory or inadequate**

Mindful of the old computer geek aphorism "Garbage in-Garbage out", it should be cautioned that all too many sources of information used in the above analyses provided data that were contradictory or, to be polite, "inadequate", primarily (surprise,surprise) where rail was at issue, shortfalls that allow, even encourage, a skewing of policies in favour of trucking, be they government or industry driven. Clearly, (and thankfully) I'm not alone in this conclusion, witness a 2005 Senate Report on the Auslink Bill, which said "...that data on rail asset conditions are not yet available (and) basic information on intermodal transport facilities is even less readily available." A situation, they add, that will potentially be made worse by corporatisation and privatisation, "with their need to protect information as Commercial in Confidence." The report also warns that the "involvement of so many competing and poorly co-ordinated agencies involved in rail and trucking might fragment information gathering on industry wide importance."

Locally, one only has to look at the impossibility of finding how much it would cost to upgrade the Acacia Ridge Marshalling yard, either because the information is unavailable to those who would undertake the task or simply that it doesn't exist, which is probably the case. As noted above, this goes hand in hand with the fact that no Government agency has undertaken a much needed and anticipated Rail Capacity Study, a prerequisite for funding and planning projections and implementation.

How convenient.