BRIEFING NOTE

TO        Mark Coulton, Federal Member for Parkes

CC        Department of Infrastructure & Regional Development

FROM      Inland Rail

DATE      10 October 2017

SUBJECT   Update on Narromine to Narrabri Inland Rail Project

1. PURPOSE

The purpose of this briefing note is to:

- Provide an update on the Narromine to Narrabri (N2N) section of the Inland Rail Programme
- Outline stakeholder and community consultation during concept development
- Outline route options considered and current thinking

2. BACKGROUND, ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION  2016-17

The N2N section comprises approximately 307 km of new track – it is the longest “greenfield” section on the Inland Rail Programme and will complete one of the ‘missing links’ in Inland Rail.

ARTC reviewed a number of route options against the Inland Rail Service Offering criteria and the options that best met these criteria were shared with the community and stakeholders in November 2016. The options were shown as 2km study areas under consideration and were identified on maps and presented to the community through a series of information sessions. The areas under consideration were made public on the Inland Rail website.

Based on the feedback from stakeholders and the community at the information sessions the options were further refined and some route options discarded from further consideration on a variety of grounds, including their ability to meet the Service Offering and capital cost. In March and April 2017, ARTC consulted with over 400 landowners on options which included the 2016 Concept and the alternative short listed options being considered. The objective of this consultation was to obtain feedback on the options.

Landowners have also written to ARTC and political stakeholders identifying a number of issues that are consistent across the route options considered:

- Land acquisition process and compensation (which includes valuation process for impacts on agricultural land and working properties)
- The impacts caused by uncertain time frames until there is a clear decision on the route
- Protection of prime agricultural land
- Minimisation of community impacts
- Creation of connectivity points
3. OPTIONS CONSIDERED
The following options have been subject to investigation over the last 18 months.

Narromine to Curban
At Narromine, the 2016 Concept joins the existing Main Western line and runs in a north westerly direction for approximately 4km before crossing the Mitchell Highway to the west of the airport and heading north east on a greenfield route for 89km to Curban.

An alternative route using existing lines to Dubbo and then north to Curban, with a new bypass around Dubbo was considered in the IRAS. The line through Dubbo is not considered practical due to a number of tight curves that would require speed restrictions, existing level crossings and sidings / rail loading facilities.

Further investigations in this area identified several other options that would provide a mix of “greenfield” and “brownfield” construction to reduce impacts on private property and utilise more of the Coonamble Line.

The key constraints and design considerations in this area are:

- Bypassing the town of Narromine on either the east or west side. The 2016 Concept crosses on the western side.
- Grade separation of the Mitchell Highway. The 2016 Concept would require a diversion of the Mitchell Highway to achieve acceptable road and rail alignments.
- Crossing of the Macquarie River. Major bridge required for all options.
- Narromine airport to the west of town. Consideration of flight path envelopes for double stacked trains and grade separated bridge structures.
- Grade separation of the Oxley Highway.
- Grade separation of Newell Highway at two locations, if the Coonamble Line is used.
- Noise and vibration and potential severance in the town of Gilgandra, if the Coonamble Line is used.
- Track possession requirements and impacts on grain movements for upgrade of the Coonamble line and/or the Main Western rail line.

All options considered were an attempt to minimise property impacts by following property boundaries and/or existing roads and tracks and were presented to the community in November 2016. Following the community information session two options were considered for Narromine to Burroway:

- 2016 Concept (western option); and
- Eumungerie Road option - an alternative option to the east of Narromine.

From broad community and landowner consultation the community concerns and impacts are similar on both options. There are small new lifestyle acreages impacted on both, and community sentiment was similar.
Two options have been considered for the Burroway to Curban section:

- 2016 Concept; and
- Gilmours Road alternate - an alternative option to the east of Gilmours Road.

At the November 2016 consultation, the alternative option to the 2016 Concept was not the Gilmore’s Road alternate. The alternative option was Eumungerie Road option that traverses east and crosses the Castlereagh highway to join the Coonamble line. From the November 2016 consultation there was a clear preference for the Eumungerie Road option as many felt that using existing rail line was reducing the impacts on agricultural land and that there would not be a duplication of impacts and impacted communities.

The alternative Gilmore’s Rd option was a suggestion progressed to minimise impact. As a result of this situation, landowners first heard of the new Gilmore’s Road alternative option when the March – April 2017 consultation occurred. This option has not been canvassed with the broader community. There are questions in the community about the origin of this alternate option.

Coonamble Rail Line and Options to the East of Warrumbungle
The Coonamble Line runs between Dubbo and Coonamble and is approximately 145km long. Works required to bring this line up to a standard to comply with the Inland Rail Service Offering would include formation reconditioning plus new ballast, 60kg rail and concrete sleepers. Culvert and bridge structures would all need to be assessed for capacity and flooding and it is likely that the majority would need to be replaced to bring these up to the standard required for Inland Rail.

Generally options to the east of the Warrumbungles would either have grades steeper than 1% or be too long, leading to transit times that could jeopardise compliance with the Service Offering criteria of an overall transit time between Malbourne and Brisbane of less than 24 hours. As such, these options are no longer considered.

Curban to Mt Tenandra
During consultation options between Curban and Mt Tenandra were presented and discussed with Gilgandra Shire Council. Council suggested that a potential alignment that uses the Coonamble Line from Curban and then heads west from around Gulargambone could reduce impacts on prime agricultural properties around Curban. This option reduced impacts on distance and time. It also mitigates noise and vibration impacts on residents along the Coonamble Line and re-joins the 2016 Concept before to Mt Tenandra to capture potential construction fill material in this area. This option was presented to the community as the Box Ridge Option.

Curban to Narrabri via Pilliga and Wee Waa
This option would be an alignment from Curban – Coonamble – Pilliga – Wee Waa. This alignment is longer than the other options being considered, but either runs parallel to existing roads or uses the existing rail line between Wee Waa and Narrabri. The length of this option is approximately 340km, which at an average speed of 81km/h would result in an overall transit time between Narromine and Narrabri of 4 hours 12 minutes. This exceeds the target transit time of 3hr 40min by 32 minutes and would also pass through the Pilliga West National Park / State Conservation Area, having greater impacts from flooding, particularly between Pilliga and Wee Waa. As such this option has been discounted.

Gwabegar to Narrabri (Pilliga State Forest) options
From Gwabegar, the 2016 Concept runs in a north easterly direction across farmland and scattered forests towards Narrabri. The final 10km of the route use the existing Narrabri – Walgett rail corridor to minimise impacts on residents adjoining Yarrie Lake Road. The IRAS did not consider alternative options in this section, including through the Pilliga State Forest. Subsequent discussions between ARTC, the local community and Councils requested that an option through the Pilliga State Forest be considered to reduce the impacts on properties between Gwabegar and Narrabri that tend to be relatively small lots.
A visual site inspection indicated that the existing track could be suitable for construction access and that the forest adjoining the track has been extensively harvested in the past and affected by bush fire. A subsequent meeting with NSW State Forests and the National Parks and Wildlife Service confirmed this to be the case.

Options through the Pilliga State Forest were presented to the community in November 2016. Following community feedback there were two shortlisted options from Kenebri to Narrabri:

- Kenebri to the Newell Highway via Pilliga Forest Way the north to Narrabri; and
- Kenebri through the Pilliga Forest via Pilliga Forest Way, then head north via 20 Foot Road to re-join the Walgett line on the approach to Narrabri from the west.

Narrabri options
The N2N section joins the existing Narrabri to Moree (Mungindi) Railway north of Narrabri. Inland Rail has to cross from the south to the north of Narrabri on either the eastern or western side or using the existing rail line through the centre.

Other options considered at Narrabri included:

- Central Narrabri: utilise existing rail line through town and modify structures to meet F-Plate clearances for double stacking.
- East Narrabri: alignment on the eastern side, between the airport and town.

Given the issues associated with the Central Narrabri option it was concluded that a route through Narrabri using the existing alignment was not a practical option for Inland Rail in the long term. The options to pass either east or west of Narrabri were presented to the community in November 2016 as being the two options considered.

Options Assessment
Refinements were made based on the feedback from the community information sessions and a further MCA workshop was held in December 2016 that resulted in the shortlisted options being taken back to the community and stakeholders for direct engagement with individual property owners between February and April 2017.

The Final MCA Workshop, that assessed the short listed options against the Concept Alignment, was undertaken on 11 May 2017.

The options reviewed in the May 2017 MCA Workshop are shown in

Figure 1.
Figure 1: Corridor Options assessed in May 2017 MCA against the Concept alignment
4. CURRENT PROJECT STATUS

ARTC has prepared a Corridor Assessment Report on the assessment of the shortlisted options using the Australian Government endorsed route selection process. The Report identifies a preferred study area, areas where further investigations are required and potential community issues. The Report has been forwarded to the Australian Government for consideration and a decision on a preferred study area will be made in due course.

Following a decision on a preferred study area, it is often the case that a preferred rail corridor alignment arises as a result of feedback received from landowners, community or other stakeholders during the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). It is considered likely that such refinements will occur as engineering work and associated studies (e.g. geotechnical, social-economic, ecological) progress.

In October 2017 ARTC will write to landowners along the preferred study areas advising that the Government is considering options with a view to making a decision on a preferred study area to be taken forward into the next phase of design and a formal project assessment and approvals process. [A copy of that letter is provided with this Briefing Note.]

ARTC will convene a series of public meetings in the first two weeks of December 2017 at which it will present information similar to that contained in this Briefing Note together with an overview of next steps in consultation and project assessment and approval. These meetings will be convened even if the Australian Government has not made a decision on a preferred study area by that time.

10 October 2017
Dear Name

RE: INLAND RAIL, NARROMINE TO NARRABRI PROJECT UPDATE

The Australian Rail Track Corporation (ARTC) has been working closely with landowners, Councils and local communities as we have progressed Inland Rail over the past 18 months. We are very grateful for the assistance we have received so far, and accordingly I would like to provide you with the following update.

Preliminary investigations have occurred along a 2km wide study area on route options being considered. This has included working with local Councils to conduct ecology, hydrology and geotechnical studies, as well as meeting with over 400 landowners and conducting information sessions throughout the area.

As you can appreciate, this work generated a significant amount of information. ARTC has been working through the results with a view to recommending a preferred alignment to the Federal Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, the Hon. Darren Chester MP. The Australian Government will ultimately determine the preferred study area to be taken forward to the next phase of design and into the formal planning assessment and approvals process.

A series of open meetings will be held in the first two weeks of December 2017, even though a decision by the Australian Government on a preferred study area may not have been made. The objective of the meetings is to discuss the route assessment process, different corridor options that exist, answer questions you may have and outline next steps. Details regarding the meetings will be provided shortly.

We are mindful that this timing is not ideal for all in the community in light of the upcoming harvest season. Our project team will be available to meet landowners individually to ensure all members of the community get the chance to make their voices heard.

We are also committed to informing you as soon as practicable once a preferred study area is determined by the Australian Government. There will be many opportunities for you to provide feedback and make both formal and informal submissions throughout the planning process which will take approximately 12 - 18 months. We will ensure that feedback from landholders and the community will be considered when determining the final rail corridor and the final design.

ARTC is committed to engaging as many people and organisations as possible and we will be making contact with many of you over the coming weeks and months. I also invite you to contact the project team at inlandrailnsw@artc.com.au or 1800 732 761 should you have any questions or issues you wish to discuss. You may also visit the website https://inlandrail.artc.com.au/ for more information.

Sincerely,

Olivia Newman