National Freight Data Hub: Options Discussion Paper – Port of Brisbane Pty Ltd (PBPL) Response – adjunct to Ports Australia response

Respondent details

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Why your organisation is interested in the National Freight Data Hub

Because of its potential to provide data to enable more efficient land use and infrastructure planning, and to facilitate more efficient and transparent supply chains. We have recently provided a submission through Ports Australia to the ABF seeking container origin and destination data. The National Data Hub (NDB) is the obvious location for this data so that it can be accessed by the ports.

Questions for discussion – Design Principles

1. Please share your organisation’s perspectives on the proposed design principles, including any which are not represented here.

   The proposed design principles are fine. In addition, the hub should be scalable to meet future demands and changing funding arrangements and it should be designed around common data standards.

   The hub should also be simple and easy to use and provide a first-class user experience. These requirements are fundamental for most start-ups. Without this its potential will not be realised.

   There is a question mark around the granularity of data to be captured by the hub, especially in relation to operational level data. This issue needs to be resolved early, because it will influence the choice of technology, hence the need for a comprehensive Requirements Document (discussed further below).

Questions for discussion – Data

2. What specific benefits would each data priority provide to your organisation?

3. What level of data fidelity (i.e. transaction level data or aggregated data) and frequency (i.e. near real-time, weekly, monthly, quarterly) would be required to make the data priorities you’ve identified be of value?

   The data priorities are generally supported. Initially the most important data for the Ports is ABF data which allows the location of container origins and destinations to be determined. This fits squarely within the ‘Container’ data priority. This is the subject of a recent Ports Australia submission to the ABF. Whilst this is granular level data, it will need to be aggregated for the ports to ensure security and confidentiality are not compromised.
There is also very limited rail data on interstate or intrastate volumes and without this it is very hard to make the case for more coastal shipping. It would also be beneficial to know the actual Melbourne to Brisbane road and rail freight task with a greater level of detail.

It is not clear whether the scope for the data hub includes transaction or operational level data.

A key issue for the NDB is data standards. These will need to be determined as part of development of the hub eg, data fields for dates for example. This is probably the most important function of the NDB and should be outlined in an NDB Requirements Document. The NDB presents an opportunity (arguably an obligation) to facilitate national freight data standards and this opportunity should not be lost.

Questions for discussion – Technology

4. If a centralised or federated architecture model were pursued, what would be the benefits and challenges to your organisation to participate in the Hub?

5. What are the preferred methods and technologies to integrate with the data exchange platform?

Arguably this is the wrong question. The most important issue/question is the business requirements of the NDB as this will determine the most appropriate technology solution. Hence there is a need for these requirements to be articulated in a comprehensive Requirements Document. By way of example, the development of the National Trade Community System (TCS), which until Covid 19 was being progressed by the Port of Brisbane and a number of other ports, required a TCS Requirements Document to be developed. This detailed the requirements of the TCS in enough detail to allow vendors to provide comprehensive proposals to develop a pilot platform. A similar document should be developed for the NDB before the technology architecture is chosen.

Questions for discussion – Governance

6. Which governance structure could enable the Hub to be established quickly and generate quick wins, and should it change over time?

7. Which governance structure is most likely to facilitate the greatest use and participation?

The key attributes of the NDB are that it must be independent, including of government, and trusted.

In order to focus on quick wins, a couple of use cases to demonstrate the value of the hub needs to be articulated quickly. The ABF data being requested by the ports could be one such case.

Questions for discussion – Funding

8. What funding arrangements could ensure users gain the value they are seeking from the Hub?

9. What services could the Hub provide that could be paid for by users?
Initially the hub should be funded by Government, but it is unrealistic to expect its use will be free forever. It should therefore be able to transition to a user-pays model, depending on the type and form of data being sought.

Perhaps access to the data could be driven by contributions initially. As an incentive, early adopters could gain access to the data at no charge provided they share their data. Once established and the value is proven a commercial model could be established for access for the wider community.

Questions for discussion – Regulatory

10. To support the Hub’s governance, ability to collect and share data, setting of standards and funding model, which regulatory option is best suited?

11. Would there be significant costs or benefits for your organisation associated with each of the regulatory options?

12. Are there additional circumstances to those outlined above, that may warrant a change, introduction or removal of a regulatory mechanism?

Initially provision of data should be voluntary, but with an option to transition to a mandatory approach if this fails.

A key issue is data standards. The provision of data according to a set of agreed standards is fundamental to the efficacy and value of the hub and should not be compromised. Hopefully a voluntary approach will work but, if not, a different approach will need to be considered. A good example of this is the ICS, even though data protocols for the ICS were mandated by the ABF.