



SUBMISSION BY THE RAIL, TRAM AND BUS UNION (QLD BRANCH)

TO

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT AND MAIN ROADS DRAFT REGIONAL TRANSPORT
PLAN FOR SOUTH EAST QUEENSLAND

NOVEMBER 2010

Introduction

The Australian Rail, Tram and Bus Industry Union (RTBU) welcomes this opportunity to contribute to the Department of Transport and Main Road's (DTMR) draft regional transport plan for south east Queensland (SEQ), *Connecting SEQ 2031: An Integrated Regional Transport Plan for South East Queensland*.

The RTBU is a federally registered union of employees with a membership of 35,000 members, of which 4,000 are in South East Queensland. The RTBU has members employed in the provision of:

- Passenger rail
- Freight rail
- Infrastructure and maintenance
- Bus Passenger

Members of the RTBU perform a range of functions – operations, maintenance and administration. As the representative union of most employees in passenger and freight rail transport, the RTBU has a vital interest in promoting the social and economic importance of rail infrastructure to the public.

In particular, the RTBU and its members have long involved themselves in the broader environmental issues of urban planning, efficient passenger and freight transit, energy use, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and social justice.

This submission is part of that ongoing and important community discussion on the many dimensions of urban passenger and freight transport.

The RTBU firmly believes that the broader outcomes to the community and economy of - effective and efficient transport networks; safe and viable transport services; and environmentally sustainable transport infrastructure – need to be comprehensively covered in the development of connecting SEQ 2031 Plan.

In light of the RTBU's unique understanding of rail industry operational and technical issues, it would be willing to accommodate any request for further input as the plan proceeds.

In addition to this submission, the RTBU foreshadows the need for additional discussions and consultation with government and DTMR officers. Given the magnitude of the projects proposed, and the importance of this plan for the SEQ region, the RTBU would appreciate a further opportunity to provide a supplementary written submission.

We also refer to other RTBU submissions as attachments for further consideration in the development of the final Connecting SEQ 2031 Plan.

For further information about any matter contained in this submission, please do not hesitate to contact me on (07) 3839 4988.

Yours sincerely



OWEN DOOGAN
SECRETARY

Attachments

RTBU Submission to DIP on SEQ Climate Change Management Plan – Sept09
RTBU Submission to DIP on the SEQ Regional Plan - May09

Background

The RTBU recognises the importance of policy outcomes which facilitate the efficient investment, operation and use of transport infrastructure in any future development of SEQ.

Of particular importance for this region is the provision of effective and efficient transport; viable transport services; safe transport; and sustainable transport.

The RTBU commends the Queensland Government and the Department of Transport and Main Roads for undertaking the challenging task of identifying a vision and framework for an Integrated Regional Transport Plan (IRTP) for SEQ.

As a key industry stakeholder, the RTBU will seek ongoing discussions with the Government and the DTMR during the next phase of the development of the SEQ regional transport plan to ensure that Connecting SEQ 2031 achieves its visionary transport objectives.

The RTBU would like to better understand the implications of the various projects for the existing network and ways to optimise the overall network performance, capacity and connectivity with the existing network. Further discussions are also sought to determine whether there has been adequate provision for freight services to minimise adverse rail industry impacts.

The RTBU considers that the next stage of the IRTP for SEQ must identify enabling strategies, resources and a timeline of milestones through which the ambitious targets will be met.

The previous IRTP focused on the development of a comprehensive busway network, which is now delivering substantial mode share increases for bus based public transport in SEQ. The RTBU acknowledges that this successful program will be further expanded. However, the RTBU also welcomes proposals for a significant enhancement of the rail network in SEQ.

Many of the initiatives in the Connecting SEQ 2031 draft are consistent with initiatives that the RTBU has advocated for many years in previous submissions to governments.

Therefore, this submission will not seek to provide a comprehensive and detailed submission on specific initiatives and projects. Reference may be made by DTMR to these previous submissions where required.

Rather, comments will be made on strategy, certain other initiatives and suggestions on projects including:

- The Salisbury to Beaudesert (via Flagstone) corridor;
- Use of the North-West Rail Corridor (utilising Trouts Road); and
- The Cross River Rail project to ease inner rail capacity constraints.

Mode Share Targets

The RTBU welcomes proposals for increased public transport mode share targets adopted in Connecting SEQ 2031. However, it is the RTBU's belief that the adoption of even higher public transport mode share targets would be readily achievable and have greater benefits for the community - particularly with respect to the reduction of energy use, carbon emissions and car dependency.

The increased transport of passengers and freight by rail is significantly less emissions intensive than road based transport. Increasing rail and bus share in the transportation of passengers and freight will make a significant and important contribution to the overall reduction in carbon pollution.

While the rail sector can make a significant contribution to a reduction in carbon pollution, doing so at an optimum level will require further investment to bring the rail network up to higher performance standards. This includes improving transit times, reliability, gradients, curves and crossing loops and untangling the transport knot between rail freight and passengers in the metropolitan area.

Accordingly, the RTBU seeks that the Queensland Government revisit mode share targets so that it reflects more optimal levels and provides additional funds for the construction and enhancement of railway infrastructure in Queensland.

Rail Network and Services Strategy Development

The RTBU submits that, to achieve various elements of a “Rail Revolution”, a comprehensive Rail Network and Services Strategy must be prepared. This will involve a significant enhancement of existing rail infrastructure and rolling-stock in SEQ.

The RTBU believes that the development of a Rail Network and Services Strategy would benefit from a comprehensive assessment of the current rail corridor capability - as well as capacity and constraints - to assess preconditions required to achieve the objects of the “Rail Revolution”.

Context

The rail network in SEQ has the legacy of 19th Century alignments and rail corridor constraints. The RTBU is concerned that, in many instances, there is insufficient corridor land to achieve many of the infrastructure enhancements required to achieve the objectives of Connecting SEQ 2031. Constraints include corridor land width, horizontal, vertical alignments and the lack of modern engineering standards in some areas. The SEQ Rail Network has not had the benefit of receiving a commensurate level of investment to the major road networks which are now benefiting from improved vertical and horizontal alignments and a reduction in travel time.

The RTBU welcomes the belated acknowledgement that we “can't simply build our way out of congestion” and thereby rely on road based transport systems.

Rail revolution

The RTBU notes the plan proposes a major revolution of how services operate, starting with delivery of Cross River Rail, including:

- *UrbanLink*: converting inner parts of the greater Brisbane rail network to high-frequency ‘turn up and go’ with all stops services using high capacity trains
- *ExpressLink*: all day express services connecting outer Brisbane suburbs to the rest of the region
- *CoastLink*: fast express services from the Gold and Sunshine Coasts to Brisbane in about an hour.

Substantial work will be required to achieve the Rail Revolution objectives. The RTBU reiterates that UrbanLink, ExpressLink, and CoastLink proposals will require the development of a comprehensive Rail Network and Services Strategy to identify future and enabling requirements.

Many rail corridors in SEQ have limited ability to improve travel time performance due to existing constraints. The proposed “Rail Revolution” will present serious issues and challenges particularly in brown field corridors, where additional tracks will be required and where there is insufficient corridor width. Transitioning the rail network so that it reflects contemporary safety, operational and engineering standards will also present challenges to maintaining existing services. This is particularly the case where additional tracks will need to be squeezed into existing and constrained rail corridors.

The adequate provision of routine maintenance activities - as well as emergency responses - without compromising safety or service reliability are factors that will also need to be considered in the development of the “Rail Revolution”.

The development of a Rail Network and Services Strategy should also seek to:

- *Optimise the horizontal and vertical alignments:* resulting in greater cost efficiency, reduced energy consumption and CO2 emissions and quicker travel times;
- *Achieve other long-term government objectives:* including Q2 targets, desirable regional outcomes and Connecting SEQ 2031 transport and land use objectives; and
- *Investigate new train operating parameters:* including building the capability within government to control and test a range of assumptions which influence infrastructure, service patterns, network capacity and capability. For example, to achieve improved safety and reduced travel time, high speed ExpressLink and CoastLink services will require “platform free through running” capabilities. This, in turn, may require modifications to a number of key train stations.

A key challenge in achieving ‘Rail Revolution’ outcomes will be to construct new tracks without disruptions to existing services during the construction phases. This will entail safety separation and significantly greater property requirements than the existing constrained rail corridor boundary.

A Rail Network and Services Strategy will therefore also need to undertake range of further investigation studies including:

- Identification of practical/operational aspects;
- Project Staging and sequencing;
- Dynamic modelling and assessment of scenarios;
- Grade separation of key rail junctions; and
- Understanding property requirements.

Preservation of sufficient rail corridor land for future requirements should be an early part of the development of a Rail Network and Services Strategy. It is vital to ensure that different government agencies' planning decisions and commercial development activities do not compromise future CSEQ 2031 plans and objectives.

In preparing these assessments, the RTBU notes and is concerned about the trend towards the excessive use of consulting firms - rather than building up internal rail industry capability for the design of rail infrastructure. The outsourcing of core rail planning components to external consulting firms results in

inconsistency and fragmentation. It also leads to the loss of rail industry expertise within Queensland Rail and other government agencies.

There is an unfortunate disconnect between allowing the end user and/or operator lose control of the outcome, yet be held accountable for overall performance.

The RTBU suggests that Queensland Rail has the expertise and is best suited to identifying the enabling strategies and resources required to achieve the objectives of the plan through the development of a Rail Network and Services Strategy.

Travel Demand and Car Dependency

The RTBU believes a more comprehensive investigation must be conducted into a range of demand management initiatives to facilitate transport mode share changes that are consistent with the CSEQ 2031 targets. Such an investigation should also review the capacity for different demand management initiatives to provide funds to government for investment in desirable transport infrastructure.

It should be noted that transport policy has a major impact on health outcomes, with road-dominated strategies invariably leading to increased car use and lower levels of walking, cycling and public transport use. This has, in turn, reduced the amount of incidental physical activity in our daily lives. A vicious circle can result where pedestrians and cyclists are intimidated by rising traffic volumes and switch back to driving cars, thus compounding this negative trend. Investigations into shifting mode share targets should not be conducted in isolation from the growing obesity epidemic.

The government should also investigate the implications of the 'vulnerability assessment for mortgage, petroleum and inflation risks and expenditure' (VAMPIRE) index on car dependency and current transport and land use policies in SEQ. To date, there has been little analysis of the potential social, economic and political impacts and risks of rising fuel costs on the SEQ region. The VAMPIRE index and related research considers and highlights current urban transport problems, and identifies how new planning strategies and broader public policy can address oil vulnerability and supply risks (VAMPIRE Index by Jago Dodson and Neil Snipe, Griffith University).

The RTBU believes a whole of government approach is required to identify the synergies between responses to climate change and oil vulnerability in QLD. At a preliminary level, it must be noted that a significant investment in rail freight and public transport can achieve significant outcomes in reducing QLD's exposure to oil vulnerability and in reducing carbon pollution.

The requirement for adequate and accessible public transport is also a growing social justice issue, as an increasing proportion of the population does not have a car available for most trips. Along with the aging of our community, there is also an increasing proportion of the population with disabilities who rely on public transport services to obtain seamless access to health services.

TODs and Value Capture Opportunities

The RTBU believes that the Connecting SEQ 2031 strategy must include an investigation into a range of value capture opportunities to raise revenue to fund public transport infrastructure and services at TODs and transport hubs.

A greater link between land use and transport infrastructure will better encourage sustainable transport and land use outcomes. To this end, the RTBU supports genuine Transport Oriented Developments (TOD's) that increase passenger transport use. However, a cautious approach must be taken to construction of TOD's over mixed use parts of the rail network. This is particularly the case given future operating requirements can often be overlooked or compromised to achieve short term development benefits.

While TOD's are key government strategy in delivering the Desired Regional Outcomes (DRO's) for SEQ, there has been an apparent failure of the commercial development industry to deliver any substantial or signature TOD's to date. The RTBU suggests that there may be a need for government leadership and investment in delivering best practice signature TOD's.

The RTBU strongly endorses the view that integrated land use planning and transport planning is critical to achieving the objectives of the SEQ Regional Plan, Connecting SEQ 2031 and other desired Government objectives.

Reference may be made to the RTBU's submission to the Department of Infrastructure and Planning on the SEQ Regional Plan in May 2009 for additional information on the importance of integrated land use and transport planning strategies.

Freight transport

The RTBU considers that the major transport policy "blind spot" in SEQ appears to be the lack of support for rail freight. The RTBU notes that Connecting SEQ 2031 proposes a significantly greater role for rail freight with commitments to *"develop facilities to allow more containerised freight to be carried on rail"* and *"the government will work with industry and terminal operators to improve long and short haul rail freight opportunities, to reduce the impact of road freight transport on the community and the environment."*

There is a significant potential opportunity to achieve major modal shift from road to rail for the movement of general freight in Australia. However, to achieve this, "Metro" rail freight capacity constraints need to be urgently addressed. The current passenger peak hour restrictions on "Metro" freight movements will result in a spill over on to road for the current rail freight task, further adding to metropolitan road congestion and carbon emissions.

Whilst the CSEQ2031 has specific initiatives for rail freight, it appears that there is little appreciation of the integrated and shared nature of the SEQ network, with approximately 50% shared tracks. Rail freight is compartmentalised within the report and so the interdependencies with increased passenger service levels need to be considered within the development of a Rail Network and Services Strategy.

Failure to recognise these risks could result in unintended consequences that are inconsistent with the objectives of Connecting SEQ 2031.

The RTBU also believes that there must be an identification of rail network enhancements which will ultimately achieve the separation of freight services from passenger services from Caboolture to Acacia Ridge and Moolabin and Ipswich to the Port of Brisbane. While the move towards a "Rail Revolution" in passenger services is welcome, it may result in unintended adverse consequences for rail freight movement within SEQ if not appropriately managed.

There is an immediate need for various government transport agencies and stakeholders to understand and quantify the interdependencies between freight and passenger services. This will ensure all participants understand the potentially dramatic affect on rail capacity of a dual purpose rail network in SEQ .

The RTBU believes that the Rail Network and Services Strategy should comprehensively identify how the CSEQ 2031 objectives can be achieved - particularly where there is any foreseeable impact on an already constrained SEQ metro network which shares both passenger and freight tasks for approximately 50% of the metro network.

The RTBU observes that the capacity of government to facilitate a number of rail freight terminal objectives in SEQ 2031 (including the expansion of Acacia Ridge Terminal, relocation of Moolabin and a new Freight terminal north of Caboolture) may be questionable if preliminary decisions are driven solely by market and commercial investment priorities.

Conclusion

The RTBU commends the CSEQ 2031 objections but notes a number of concerns, suggestions and alternative proposals.

Given the scope of the projects, the required investments and the importance of the plan for the SEQ region, the RTBU seeks further opportunities to engage with government and the DTMR to ensure all operational and technical are fully understood.