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Contact: Randall Medd

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Committee Secretary
Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Secretary

**MANAGEMENT OF THE INLAND RAIL PROJECT BY THE AUSTRALIAN
RAIL TRACK CORPORATION AND THE COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT**

Thank you to the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee for this opportunity to make a submission to this enquiry.

Gilgandra Shire Council is located in the middle of the Narromine to Narrabri (N2N) project of the Inland Rail and has 100km of greenfield alignment through our LGA.

Gilgandra Shire Council supports the Inland Rail project. It is a true nation-building piece of infrastructure that has potential to deliver significant opportunities to regional communities including Gilgandra Shire. Gilgandra is well positioned to benefit from the construction activities and is actively pursuing these to ensure our community maximises both short and long term opportunities.

In stating the position of long standing support for the project, 100km of greenfield construction will have a significant impact on our community and the landowners who are impacted and currently involved in the process of engagement with ARTC. The project has caused considerable stress for many of these impacted landholders and has taken far too long to progress through the alignment refinement process. These delays have caused considerable uncertainty for people at a time when drought has had a severe impact on all aspects of their lives.

I wish to make it clear that individual landowners impacted by the project have serious concerns in relation to the process used to determine the route and alignment. Gilgandra Shire Council has advised the Federal Government and ARTC of these landowners concerns and in Council's view both the Federal Government and ARTC have the joint responsibility to address this issue and provide a satisfactory response to these people. Council has made numerous representations to the Federal Government and ARTC on behalf of landowners and this correspondence can be reviewed on Council's website:

<http://www.gilgandra.nsw.gov.au/Grow/Inland-Rail-N2N/Community-Update-Correspondence>

The community and stakeholder engagement of ARTC has improved in the past six months which coincides with the refinement of the study corridor from up to a width of 5km to, in the main, a 150 metre wide corridor. From late 2017 to early 2019 the community engagement was of the upmost disappointment and a source of constant frustration to all stakeholder groups and indeed our entire community. The Inland Rail staffing resources available to our community were, in Council's view, inadequate and have contributed significantly to:

- A lack of wider community understanding of the business case and rationale for the project
- A lack of trust in the project as there has not been staff to follow through on promises made and simple follow up of stakeholder enquiries
- Confusion over timelines and project progression and how and when the community will be engaged to provide their feedback or have their issues and concerns addressed

In addition, there has been a high rate of staff turnover in both the community engagement and project management roles on the N2N project. This has led to a lack of consistency in the messaging and communications with stakeholders.

In relation to reviewing the performance of ARTC Inland Rail, the current leadership in Richard Wankmuller and his executive team have done a good job in trying to set the project on a more positive path. Council has found the executive team responsive, available and committed to addressing the past issues and ensuring our community realises long term benefits and positive legacies from the construction. The development of a functioning and competent executive team has taken nearly two years and the continuity of the current team would be beneficial in the future management of the project.

Some impacted landowners are not supportive of the alignment that has been selected and have their own views about the process and methodology to select the alignment. Council has taken the position that they have no preferred alignment as any alignment that Council were to "prefer" or "endorse" will impact a different group of people.

Council has been significantly hamstrung compared to other communities on brownfield sections as we have not been able to openly engage and promote the opportunities. There are many communities in NSW that have been able to get on with looking to long term opportunities and benefits and Gilgandra Shire Council has been consumed in dealing with legitimate landowner concerns due to lack of certainty of the alignment.

To actively promote the benefits of inland rail was seen as insensitive to and unsupportive of the impacted landholders.

Access to water for construction purposes throughout the N2N alignment is a concern and major risk to the project. Not enough has been done to work with local communities to investigate and secure water supplies, particularly water supplies which do not compete with existing stock and domestic supplies. Despite direct representation to ARTC and the Federal Government for Council to lead community discussion to find a solution to this problem, no feedback has been received and therefore no progress has been able to occur.

Recommendations

Gilgandra Shire Council would like to make the following recommendations to the committee:

- That ARTC make a greater commitment to a visible presence and availability of staff in our community. This would include a physical office in Gilgandra to improve project visibility and the access to information on the project for the entire community.
- That the Federal Government reinforce to impacted stakeholders and landowners that the alignment is their decision and Councils have had no official role in its determination.
- That financial support be made available to communities on the alignment to be ready to deal with the impacts of the project. The focus need to be ensuring there are long term legacy projects created off the back of the infrastructure investment.
- That project design and construction methodology of the N2N project take into account investments Gilgandra Shire Council has made in developing industrial land with rail access suitable for material storage and distribution, areas to accommodate temporary workers and the availability of natural resources such as basalt quarries and sand which is required for the pre-casting of concrete products used in the construction of the project.
- That ARTC and the Federal Government rapidly expedite investigations in securing and quantifying water sources for construction purposes, for the long term benefits for the community prior to any construction tender being released.

Yours faithfully



Doug Batten
Mayor