

Rail Freight Alliance Submission to The Victorian Parliament Economy and Infrastructure Committee

The Rail Freight Alliance

The Rail Freight Alliance (RFA) is made up of rural, regional and metropolitan Councils across Victoria. The Alliance membership has a strong belief that more freight on rail will add to the safety, efficiency, productivity and prosperity of all Victorians.

Our Membership includes the Councils of Ararat City, Buloke, Central Goldfields, Ballarat City, City of Melbourne, City of Wodonga, East Gippsland, Latrobe City, Loddon, Gannawarra, Glenelg, Greater City of Bendigo, Greater Shepparton, Hindmarsh, Horsham Rural City, Maribyrnong City, Mildura Rural City, Moyne, Northern Grampians, Pyrenees, South Gippsland, Southern Grampians, Strathbogie, Swan Hill Rural City, Warrnambool City, West Wimmera, Wyndham City and Yarriambiack.

Victoria's Road Toll

2019 has seen a tragic increase in Victoria's Road toll. The road toll and acquired injuries from road trauma has a horrific impact on families across Victoria. The Alliance considers that the issues relating to the road toll must be considered holistically.

The focus of this submission is Transport Infrastructure. The RFA acknowledges that this is outside but not limited within the terms of reference of the inquiry.

The RFA considers Transport Infrastructure and Policy setting to be a critical element in road safety and decreasing road toll and road trauma.

Expected Port Growth

It is estimated that the Port of Melbourne (PoM) throughput will exceed 8.7 million TEU by 2050. For the PoM to achieve its forecast growth, rail connectivity and infrastructure must be planned for immediately. The Ports of Geelong and Portland are expected to increase throughput of bulk commodities into the future.

The Victorian Freight task cannot be serviced by road freight alone.

The Rail Freight Alliance believes that rail is essential in the current and future Victorian supply chain, ensuring access to global markets through Victorian Ports.

Recommendation

Identify and acquire future corridors to access Victorian Ports.

A Transport Plan for Victoria

Victoria's population is expected to grow by approximately 3.5 million people over the next 30 years. This growth presents a huge challenge to continuing to provide a liveable, affordable and productive state and economy.

A transport plan is critical in making our roads safe; it is vital that detailed planning is undertaken to allow for freight and passenger to co-exist.

The Alliance considers it vital that the Victorian Government develop and endorse a Transport Plan as required in the Transport Integration Act. A plan would allow the government to identify and procure future freight routes.

Recommendations

Create and endorse a Victorian Transport Plan.

Set targets for freight mode share.

High Productivity Freight Vehicles (HPFV)

Currently Victoria gazettes HPFV routes on Victoria's major highways including the Calder, Hume, Princess, Monash and Western Highways. All these routes have access to the rail network; the RFA does not support the HPFV network where it competes with the rail network.

Recommendation

Invest in complementary rail and road infrastructure.

Set policy to allow fair competition for rail freight.

Access to Ports

Rail Operators must have guaranteed and efficient access Victorian Ports. The Alliance considers there are four key areas that must have reasonable and competitive access to the Port.

- North West Region
- North East Region
- Gippsland Region
- South West Region

North West Region

Currently the North West Region's capacity to efficiently transport freight to the Port of Melbourne has been restricted by the current status of the Murray Basin Rail Project. As a consequence of delays in completion and the quality of the works, capacity from this region has effectively decreased and a substantial amount the freight task has subsequently moved to road.

Competition of this project to its original scope would allow further investments such as upgrading the axle loading of the Maroona to Portland Line to create competition across Victorian Ports.

Recommendation

Complete the Murray Basin Rail Project its original scope

North East Region

Sections of the existing North East Region rail infrastructure will become integrated as part of the Melbourne to Brisbane Inland Rail Project. Success of this project lies in the ability to access the Port efficiently. The connection into Melbourne is currently being assessed.

Recommendation

Locate the new Freight Terminal as close to Melbourne as possible, utilising the Outer Metro Road and access to the Port Rail Shuttle.

Gippsland Region

The Gippsland Region is continuing to grow in population and its freight task continues to increase. As Victoria's population and freight task also grows, this region must have capacity to access the Port of Melbourne.

Recommendation

The corridor between Caulfield and Pakenham be serviced by four rail lines.

South West Region

South West Victoria is an important exporter for Victoria, currently the Port is accessed by both road and rail freight from this region. The Warrnambool line provides an important service to passenger and freight customers in Western Victoria.

Recommendation

Assessment of this line to optimise scheduling of passenger and freight services, determine both the adequacy and location of existing passing loops.

Mode Shift Incentive Scheme

The Mode Shift Incentive Scheme (MSIS) is funded until June 30, 2020. The MSIS is essential in stimulating mode shift from road to rail. The Victorian Government is currently committing to the MSIS on an annual basis, making it difficult for operators to plan their businesses into the future.

The RFA acknowledges some last-mile investment at the Port. The MSIS provides a vital stimulus at the first mile of the freight task, reducing depreciation on the Victorian road network, reducing congestion and increasing safety for all Victorians.

Recommendation

The MSIS should be funded at \$5 Million per year until June 2022.

Future Interstate Freight Terminal

The Melbourne to Brisbane Inland Rail Project is scheduled to be completed by mid-2025.

Recommendation

Locate the new Freight Terminal as close to Melbourne as possible, utilising the Outer Metro Road and have access to the Port Rail Shuttle.

Port Rail Shuttle

The Alliance considers the Port Rail Shuttle an essential piece of infrastructure to preserve the liveability of Melbourne, reduce tollway congestion and increase road safety.

The Alliance considers it vital that the shuttle have connectivity to the new Future Interstate Freight Terminal.

Recommendation

Commit the final allocation of funds to the Port Rail Shuttle.

Assess areas for further investment in the Port Rail Shuttle.

Train Speeds

The speed trains can travel along rail is critically important for productivity, timeliness and cost efficiencies of Rail Freight in Victoria. Currently all State-owned rail lines in Victoria are regulated by VLine, with some sections of line gazetted as low as 15 kilometres per hour. This does not allow rail to maintain competitiveness with Road Transport.

Recommendation

Victorian rail freight lines be regulated and maintained to a standard that allows for rail speeds of at least 100 kilometres per hour.

Standardisation of the Victorian Network

Standardisation of rail lines allows greater flexibility of Australia's rail network and creates competition among service providers.

The Alliance recommends the following sections of track for standardisation:

- Maryborough to Ballarat
- Ballarat to Geelong
- Korong Vale to Dunolly
- Sea Lake to Korong Vale
- Manangatang to Korong Vale
- Ballarat to Ararat Line
- Tocumwal to Mangalore
- Deniliquin to Echuca Line
- Echuca to Toolamba Line
- Shepparton to Dookie Line

