

Mudgee Region Rail

A discussion paper



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**The Case for the re-opening of the
Rylstone to Gulgong railway line
for general freight, tourists, and passengers**

**Presented by:
Mudgee Region Rail Incorporated
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Our Mission

To re-establish general freight, boost tourism opportunities and reintroduce a rail passenger service across and beyond the Mudgee Region

MUDGEE REGION RAIL



Mudgee Region Rail Inc. Committee Members:

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Public Officer: David Stewart, B.A., Dip.Ed., proprietor, "Birches B and B", Mudgee

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Members: Robert Clements, A.I.T., Cruise Travel Consultant, Owner/Manager "Riverlane" B and B, Mudgee

Scott McGregor, Owner and Managing Director, Railway Adventures

Andrew Stein, Robert Stein Winery, Mudgee

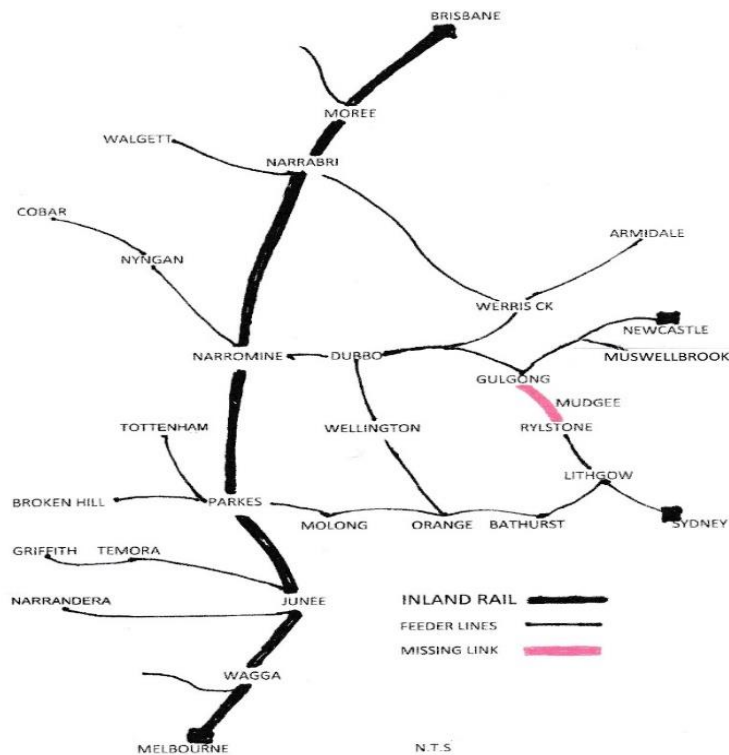
Bruce Wilson, Creative Director, advertising and event marketing

The case for restoration of two important railway links

1. Completing significant loops

A small but enormously valuable strategic complement to the Commonwealth Government's initiatives with Inland Rail, Regional Rail and the Building Better Regions Fund is possible with adoption of this two-part proposal.

The first and major part of the proposal is re-establishment of the 89km rail line between Rylstone and Gulgong. This will complete the connection of New South Wales' active and crucial rail lines:



Connecting this 'missing link' will particularly create many diverse opportunities for more efficient and valuable freight movement and extend the region's tourism and passenger reach.

The strategic value of the line being open is very considerable. In the event of natural emergency, as evidenced during the 1992 Central coast fire which closed the Sydney-Newcastle line for over a week, general freight between Sydney and Brisbane had to be diverted through the line.

The second part of this proposal is the re-establishment of the 20km Oberon-Tarana line. It is understood 7km of this line is already being restored. This line would provide appropriate directional access to the vital and substantial log and finished timber Oberon district suppliers, the scale of which is vast.

With the announcement by the Commonwealth of the establishment of the National Intermodal Corporation Limited (National Intermodal), a plan for an integrated network of independent terminals, the available site at Gulgong, providing a triple point to the upcoming Inland Rail, Newcastle and the Hunter, as well as Mudgee/Lithgow/Sydney delivers a well-placed site for an intermodal terminal.

(Appendix 1 - Synopsis: Freight Opportunities)

(Appendix 2 – Enhancing the movement of general freight)

2. Boosting Regional Tourism

There is a vibrant heritage rail movement in NSW. It runs trains on those lines open throughout the State. There is also a significant number of tour train operators who produce rail experiences to that include the delights of special tour train journeys to selected tourist destinations for a range of off train excursions.

The recent boom in regional and domestic tourism has also included a higher demand for recreational train travel. Although many regional rail services have long been neglected, more recently new services and schedules to places like Bathurst, the New England, Broken Hill, most of regional Victoria and coastal Queensland have seen impressive growth in numbers.

This could also be the case in the Mid-Western region of NSW with the restoration of the ‘missing link’ on the Mudgee branch, and for Bathurst, the Oberon-Tarana line.

There is enormous potential in this space.

The Mudgee Weekend Escape run by Railway Adventures 3 to 4 times a year is one existing product. Cruise Express, Sydney Rail Services and St James Rail are just some of the other commercial operators who would use a re-opened Mudgee line to bring travellers to the region.

Flow on benefits to the broader community would see facilities, currently underutilised, all along line, given a new lease of life such as stations at Mudgee, Gulgong, Rylstone, Lue and Kandos, at Oberon and Tarana, as well as goods sheds, yards and infrastructure. Country pubs, museums and sites would all benefit from an influx of rail-borne passengers. For example, the Lachlan Valley Railway have a new depot based at Orange and have been running sold out tour trains to Stuart Town for lunch at the popular Iron Bark Pub. In the wider region towns such as Millthorpe, Tarana, Ballimore, Premer and Dunedoo are frequented by tour trains scheduling time off train for their passengers to explore the towns.

(Appendix 3 -Boosting Reginal Tourism)

The local government area, centered at Mudgee, is dynamic, forward looking and resilient.

(Appendix 4- A Region Enjoying Extraordinary Growth)

3. Providing Passenger Rail

Rail patronage generally has been increasingly popular where available, and regional rail patronage in some sectors is showing significant growth. Data from Transport for NSW show 17,802 passengers boarded “The Bullet” at Bathurst in the past financial year - an average of 1483 a month or 49 each day. An economic scenario for a Mudgee line link with the Bullet is at (**Appendix 5 – Providing Passenger Rail**)

General services to Mudgee will connect with Interurban trains at Lithgow. Serving passengers twice daily both ways, this would create supply, business and employment opportunities to the region. Similarly, train crews will have the opportunity to relocate with families.

Bus services to towns further out will continue to operate from Mudgee station rather than from Lithgow.

4. Improving Sustainability

The social and environmental costs of congestion in Australia’s capital cities is projected to rise to \$30 billion by 2030. Decentralisation into rural communities, such as represented along the Mudgee rail network, is inevitable.

Increased road traffic is only accelerating the very emissions governments are trying to control. Noise pollution in towns would be reduced as many heavy vehicle movements are replaced by the introduction in the Lithgow-Mudgee link of four train movements each day.

Currently, businesses and people working and living within this proposed rail corridor beyond Lithgow are not given any commercial and commuting alternative to road transport. As our population grows, so will the need for regional people to move safely and conveniently along routes that until now have been limited to road traffic. The number of people aged 65 and over, great supporters of inter-regional commuting, is expected to have increased by approximately 6 per cent by 2027.

Additionally, young people below driving age will directly benefit from access to the wider rail network linking them to greater NSW and beyond.

5. A Driver for Regional Growth

As with every pivotal project, the Mudgee Region Rail Plan needs to address the 3 immediate and long-term benefits to the people of our region: for general freight, for tourism and for passengers.

For the NSW Government here is an opportunity, relatively small in its execution yet profoundly important to the growth of our communities, which will undoubtedly improve quality of life and the future prospects of our diverse regional business base.

Indeed, from a business growth perspective, it is difficult to identify any groups or individuals who would not benefit through the re-introduction of the Rylstone-Gulgong and Oberon-Tarana lines.

(**Appendix 6 - A Driver for Regional Growth**)

6. A Viable Engineering Initiative

During 2007, Hon. John Watkins, the then NSW Transport Minister, wrote to the General Manager, Mid-Western Regional Council advising around \$15 million would be required repair and re-instate the line.

Assuming the costs have tripled, this would extrapolate to \$45M, a little more than one seventh of the August 2020 Transport NSW *Kandos to Gulgong Reinstatement Feasibility Study* based on replacement, not repair.

Lycopodium Infrastructure (Rail) did an in-depth report in 2017, did a track walk, consulted with engineers, assessed bridges, sleepers and culverts and determined that the tracks were mostly in satisfactory condition. Since these reports, there has already been a 6km restoration, Kandos-Rylstone, thus further reducing the costs by about 7%.

By moving freight through Mudgee and Gulgong towards and from Dubbo, Orange and Bathurst, the savings in fuel and rolling stock wear would be significant. Whilst the rail distance is slightly longer, the line has only one net grade to and from Lithgow, rather than the two grades experienced presently through the other three centres. This represents a great saving in fuel and brake maintenance.

The Oberon-Tarana link will permit utilization by the sizeable timber industries in the area, a lucrative freight option not at present available.

The opening of these two rail links will see an asset being used rather than merely maintained. Leasee, UGL Region Linx, responsible for the non-operational line, crossings and bridges between Rylstone and Gulgong and Oberon-Tarana as part of their contract with Transport NSW, is surely well placed to tender for required 19TAL upgrade work.

(Appendix 7 - A Viable Engineering Initiative)

7. Conclusion

From all perspectives, the time is now right to enable the restitution of the rail link between Rylstone and Gulgong, and re-instatement of the Oberon-Tarana connection. Present and future industries throughout the Central West will be boosted by their advent. Communities feeding into and along the routes will prosper even more. The future of the region will benefit, but more importantly vital links will be opened for crucial freight exploitation, for tourism and for passenger services missed, now, for too long.

Thank you for your interest and consideration.

Michael Sweeney

Chair, Mudgee Region Rail Inc.

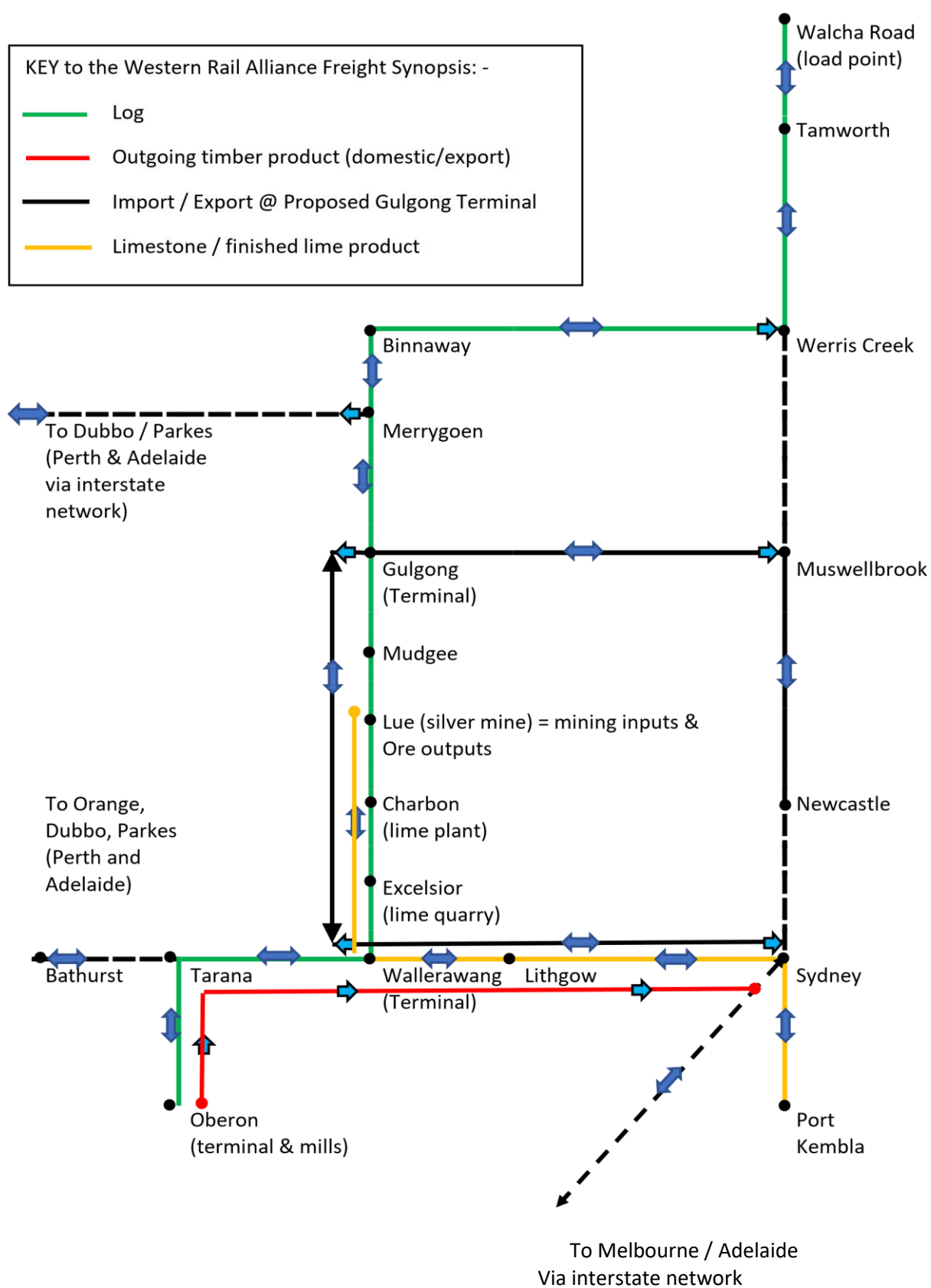
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Completing Significant Loops



Enhancing Movement of General Freight

Direct Benefits:

For the movement of bulk freight throughout the State (excluding in this instance the transportation of coal) rail freight is a most efficient method.

A number of major freighting opportunities exemplify the significant benefits if the Gulgong-Rylstone rail link was in operation, coupled with the re-instatement of the Oberon-Tarana line and the establishment of a Gulgong terminal as part of the National Intermodal Corporation proposal.

The first is Forestry Corporation of NSW's major logging business from the Armidale State Forest, currently moving by road its plantation timber through to Port Botany - currently trucking by road annually 100,000 tonnes of log timber.

A second is Graymont's Charbon Lime plant and Excelsior Lime quarry south of Kandos, whose product transfer by rail would be a significant boost both economically and environmentally.

A third could be the largest, underdeveloped silver project in Australia and one of the largest globally - the Lue Bowden Silver proposal, located near the village of Lue, approximately 30 km east of Mudgee. Once approved, Bowden would immediately require movement of 30,000 tonnes of ore concentrate, transported by road in sealed containers to Port Pirie (for smelting) and concentrate transported by road in sealed containers to Port Botany (for export).

A fourth freighting opportunity is accessing the considerable vital and substantial 1 million tonne pa log and finished timber freighting business generated by those Oberon district companies presently unable to access appropriate rail because of the closed Oberon-Tarana line.

Further, restitution of the 19 TAL line incorporating a reliable freight system will incentivise potential businesses to relocate to the region and improve the overall economies of the towns embracing the re-established rail links.

In short, these major businesses would enjoy considerable advantage having opportunity to access this rail for their significant transport needs. And to the State of NSW, provide revenue while contributing to the government's environmental objectives.

General Benefits:

Forecasts project the volume of freight to almost double over the next 14 years. Over 780 million tonnes of goods will be moving around NSW by 2031. (*Transport for NSW 2020* report.)

The New South Wales Government's 2021-2022 Intergenerational Report reveals that our state's population will increase to over 11 million more people by 2061, prompting the necessity for 1.7 million additional homes by that time.

Rail freight produces 16 times less carbon pollution than road freight, according to peak rail body the Australasian Railway Association.

A 1 per cent shift of freight from road to rail in Australia would reduce accident, emission, and health costs by \$71.9 million per year, the Association estimated.

COVID-19 has exposed the fragility of Australia's present internal supply lines when a system that relies on a myriad of road freight networks to move products from producers to manufacturers, and on to retailers, is compromised and fractures.

Nowhere is this brittleness more evident than between regional areas and the coast.

In December 2020, the NSW Government released the Fixing Country Rail report - a program that aims to provide \$400million of targeted Restart NSW funding for regional freight infrastructure projects. It is hard to challenge the argument therein that 'food, produce and raw materials feed and power the State – *critical to the economic growth in regional areas*'.

The NSW Government also is currently delivering the largest transport infrastructure program this nation has ever seen - \$72.2 billion of investment over four years for game-changing projects like Sydney Metro, light rail, motorways and road upgrades that will shape NSW cities, centres and communities for generations to come.

Boosting Regional Tourism

October last year was notable for one operator who a different sold-out tour train arriving every weekend to Kandos and Rylstone and another two trains (Rail-motors) came to Gulgong via the Sandy Hollow line.

Railway Adventures 3 day tour provides a well-appointed train with dining and lounge cars journeying to Rylstone and the guests are then bused to Mudgee for two nights returning to Kandos for the return train trip to Sydney. *Vintage Rail Journeys* host sleeper train experiences on many different programs on most of the currently open lines in the state bringing significant benefits to the communities where the train visits.

The demand is growing. For example, on the last weekend in May this year there will be two tour groups arriving at Rylstone delivering hundreds of passengers to the region on the same weekend, with another sold out tour arriving the weekend after for a three-day visit! There is no doubt that enormous potential exists to increase tourism products based around a new railway to the town of Mudgee and its neighbouring communities.

There has been a number of other regions around Australia that have built significant tourist demand through a viable tourist and commuter rail services. Places such as Warwick, and Queensland's Savannah region, the Cockle Train on the Fleurieu Peninsular in South Australia, Gympie and the Mary Valley and the soon to re-open Zig Zag Railway at Lithgow are all great examples of how rail tourism has contributed to a vibrant tourist scene. The Mudgee region and beyond could also be on this train.

These trains have brought significant benefits to the local communities. The goal of the rail tourism and heritage rail sector is to grow this market on the back of restoring the Rylstone to Gulgong "missing rail link". Ideas for a new breed of tourism product include:

- A wine themed train that would run on a semi-regular schedule bringing a new breed of high value traveller who would normally be taking off on luxury cruises or other overseas destinations.
- Day trips along the Capertee Valley, the Sandy Hollow line as well as to and from Gulgong and Mudgee.
- Longer tours that explore the region in a loop from Lithgow, through Mudgee and Gulgong to Dubbo and return via Orange and Bathurst, alternately, on the existing freight line through the Bylong and Hunter Valleys or even north via the link to Werris Creek and elsewhere.

A region enjoying extraordinary visitor growth

In May 2021, the Mudgee Region won the Inland Tourism Award for Best Regional Town with a population over 5000 people.

Mudgee is a refined country town which provides a wealth of attractions for visitors, with a strong metropolitan flavour, including:

- A wide range of accommodation options including 5 star boutique cottages, luxury glamping, motels, hotels and caravan parks.
- Over 40 family-owned cellar doors serving award-winning wines.
- Two boutique breweries and a distillery.
- Two fine-dining restaurants, plus a range of other restaurant options including an indigenous dining experience.
- Several pubs, each with their own unique atmosphere.
- Numerous sophisticated cafés and wine bars.
- Boutique shopping.
- Farmers' markets showcasing locally grown produce and farm walk tours.
- Well-established wine tourism operators providing tours for small, medium and large groups, which can be customised on demand.
- Local history museums including The Holtermann Museum explaining the development of the goldfields, the Henry Lawson Centre Museum, several history museums and the Gulgong Gold Experience.
- A range of wedding and conference venues.
- Two Olympic-sized pools, waterpark, adventure parks and skateboard facilities.
- Local history walking tours.
- Mudgee Art Gallery and Arts Precincts including sculpture walks.
- The Glen Willow Regional Sports complex, a new modern sporting precinct, with two stadiums hosting all football codes, major state NRL championships and netball.
- A local observatory.
- Bush walking, kayaking and camping in Wollemi National Park.

Providing Passenger Rail

The successful 'Bathurst Bullet' works well as a fast, efficient once daily passenger service to and from Sydney. One part of that service could be the provision of a single, self-propelled unit attached to the Bullet, to disengage at Lithgow and supply a branch service on the reinstated Rylstone to Gulgong line.

Domestically, passenger rail growth has outpaced other surface transport modes over recent years, yet still makes up only a small portion of passenger kilometres. Passenger rail patronage has seen resurgence in capital cities across Australia since 2009.

The Mudgee Region Rail proposal addresses this significant social issue with a solution both timely and cost effective.

The road safety issue is, rightly, paramount in the eyes of decision-makers. The NSW Government is to be congratulated for having introduced the concept of a tunnel beneath the central-western end of the Great Western Highway under the Great Dividing Range. By adding the Rylstone-Gulgong rail line into the mix, the problems of road transport of people and goods will be mitigated still further.

Driving Regional Growth

The local government authority is Mid-Western Regional Council. The region continues to be a key gateway to the Central West and Far West regions of the State. The region's location, its connections to Sydney, Newcastle and Canberra and its broad range of industries provide a strong foundation for both light freight, tourist and passenger rail services. That foundation is strengthened by the following:

- Unlike some other non-metropolitan centres of comparable size, population growth has exceeded projections, with close to 26,000 people in 2020 calling this region their home.
- Over 655,000 visitors are attracted each year to experience the local wine, food, sporting and cultural events, a visitation trend which grows each year.
- Considerable community support exists for Mudgee passenger rail. The highest priority projects captured in the most recent community consultation for the Mid-Western Regional *Towards 2030 Community Plan* were:

Hospital upgrade (44.5%) – **completed**

Indoor aquatic centre (37.1%) – **currently being considered**

Outdoor water park (34.8%) – **completed**

Return passenger trains (21.7%)

- The Central West and Orana Regional Plan 2036 vision for the Region is to be 'the most diverse regional economy in NSW' with a vibrant network of centres leveraging the opportunities of being at the heart of NSW.

A Viable Engineering Initiative

The Rylstone-Mudgee Track Itself:

- **Earthworks** are substantially intact and were soundly ballasted in 2000.
- **Rails** 48km Rylstone-Mudgee, 41km Mudgee-Gulgong. All are in 99% unworn and uncorroded condition. All are suitable for 19 TAL at 100 K speed.
- **Sidings and points** In 2000, the minor sidings were 'straight railed' thus eliminating the high maintenance switch points.
- At Mudgee, a **passing loop** of 1000m and a refuge siding known as No 2 Siding have already been installed.
- **Tourist trains** The loop is on platform (a great benefit) to allow tourist trains to park during visits or, even in the case of sleeping cars, to stay overnight without impeding the traffic of other trains passing through on the main line.
- **Sleepers** Twenty % of these were replaced with steel in 1999. The remaining eighty % need replacing.

Bridges:

It is important to recognise that none of the past cost estimates have considered the relocating of the 8 unused long span steel bridge girders on abutments in the Beryl area, which would significantly reduce the bridge costs. These are in good condition and lie idle.

Eleven major bridges were rebuilt to modern standard in 1999/2000.

The 8 steel spans (see above) would suffice to **cover all major bridge works below:**

Lue - (Utilising 3 girders ex Beryl) - a high level timber bridge over the main road and creek. Total replacement with steel/earth combination (including replacement of the steel/concrete culvert to the service road access to North Lue.

Hunts Bridge near Havilah - currently a steel and timber hybrid structure to be upgraded.

Snakes Creek near Bunnamagoo vineyard - (Utilising 2 girders from Beryl) - a timber bridge to be replaced with greater span. The existing bridge, built 1909, has had 3 major washaways, most recently in 2000, due to inadequate span width.

Munna - (Utilising 3 girders from Beryl) - a timber truss bridge built 1909, refurbished 1999. Presently in serious decay, recommend replacement with steel.

There are heritage issues with this bridge but if not demolished it will be lost due to decay. If a grant was made available to preserve the structure as a stand-alone item, a modern girder bridge could be constructed alongside within the existing corridor.

Rylstone - a girder bridge requiring safety handrails to be fitted.

Stations:

Kandos, Rylstone, Lue, Mudgee and Gulgong all have 'at grade' sound and safe passenger access.

There is community use by several organisations at these stations, and rail passenger access would positively impact their operations.

In fact, the well-known Mudgee Arts and Craft studio located in Mudgee station would more than welcome passenger trains, as they did in 2000.

The management of Bunnamagoo Wines has considered a private platform in their vineyard to offer tourist train stops, and possibly a short regular shuttle between Mudgee and their vineyard.

Level Crossings:

The three flashing light crossings in Mudgee, and one at Rylstone, had the flashing light crossing equipment replaced to current standards in 2000. These would need to be re-commissioned.

The Church St overbridge in Mudgee guarantees continuous access to all parts of the town including Mudgee Hospital and Mudgee Fire Station.

Consideration should be given to installing flashing lights at Henry Lawson Drive, Gulgong and Lue Rd, North of Lue.

Social and Environmental Issues:

Mid-Western Region has a 50m buffer zone to the corridor's edge for all residential subdivisions adjacent to the rail corridor.

The towns of Kandos and Rylstone will again have their twice daily both ways service restored which, earlier, was reduced to one service Monday to Saturday, none Sunday.

The 'No2 siding' at Mudgee could be used overnight to stable, refuel and clean a rail car set (approx. 11 hours available). Serving passengers twice daily both ways, this would create supply business and employment opportunities to the region. Similarly, train crews will have the opportunity to relocate with families.
