

About the Lower Hunter Freight Corridor

What is the Lower Hunter Freight Corridor?

The Lower Hunter Freight Corridor is a future rail corridor dedicated to freight between Fassifern on the Main North Railway line, and the Hunter Valley Rail Line at Hexham. This vital transport corridor will provide for an essential freight rail connection to support growing communities, businesses and industries.

It is generally 60 metres wide, excluding sections in tunnel, to accommodate two new rail tracks and supporting infrastructure. The future infrastructure may not require the full width of the corridor, which will depend on future infrastructure development and an environmental assessment process.

Why plan for a dedicated Lower Hunter Freight Corridor?

The Hunter region is an important hub for freight transport in NSW and plays a major role in supporting freight movement between Greater Sydney, Northern NSW, and Queensland. Newcastle Port is identified as an international trade gateway with an annual trade worth about \$25 billion to the NSW economy. This growth and future demand for freight rail services will place increasing pressure on the existing rail network.

This is a NSW Government initiative to separate freight and passenger rail operations through Newcastle in order to improve reliability and capacity on both freight and passenger rail networks. A dedicated freight rail line will help businesses and industry move freight more efficiently, and support economic growth across the Hunter region.

Removing freight services along the passenger rail line will allow for additional passenger rail services to connect communities with jobs and services. Most importantly, it will improve amenity for the local communities.

How were the options identified and assessed?

A number of corridor options have been identified and assessed with consideration to the technical investigations that have been undertaken. This process helped the project team identify a long list and short list of options assessed against a wide range of key considerations that affect the best place to locate future transport infrastructure, including identification and consideration of:

- Existing and future residential land uses
- Biodiversity and conservation
- Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal heritage
- Existing landscape and geography including contamination
- Existing bodies of water including floodplains
- Potential noise and vibration impacts
- Visual impact
- Transport planning needs, and
- Socio-economic impacts.

These key considerations have been analysed by subject matter experts to identify the best performing option which minimises impacts to sensitive areas, communities, and existing infrastructure.

Why is early transport planning important for Newcastle region?

Over the next 30 years Newcastle's population is expected to grow from around 575,000 people to around 760,000. The increase in population will also place greater demand for more housing and jobs closer to home. Currently, over 1,500 residential lots are planned on 517 hectares of land near Minmi. In addition to residential development, plans for two large industrial estates, adjacent to the M1 Motorway and John Renshaw Drive at Black Hill, have been submitted.

This growth will continue across the Newcastle area. Identifying a dedicated freight rail corridor now ensures land will be available to deliver the infrastructure in the future and when it is needed. Early planning for the future freight rail line also ensures development for new housing and employment hubs can continue to occur around an identified freight corridor.

When will a final corridor be identified?

There is still a lot of work to be done before a final corridor can be confirmed. At this stage, we are consulting with stakeholders, landowners and communities on the identified recommended corridor. Feedback from the consultation together with further technical investigations will help refine and inform the final corridor location for future freight use.

When will the Lower Hunter Freight Corridor be delivered?

Future population growth and changes in industrial development will drive an increase in the movement of passengers and freight through the Hunter Region and trigger the need for additional infrastructure. The forecast growth in rail freight along the corridor between Fassifern and Newcastle is expected to drive demand for an additional 66 freight train paths per week in both directions over the next 36 years.

The Future Transport 2056 strategy has identified the Lower Hunter Freight Corridor for potential delivery within 10-20 years.

How will the freight corridor ease congestion?

The Lower Hunter Freight Corridor will provide for a dedicated freight rail line between Fassifern and Hexham, removing freight rail services from Main North Railway line along Newcastle's urban area. Planning for a dedicated freight rail corridor will ensure future forecasted freight rail needs can be accommodated. Most importantly, the corridor will improve reliability and increase capacity on both the freight and passenger rail networks.

A dedicated freight rail line will also encourage road freight onto rail to reduce road congestion, and reduce delays for road users at level crossings near St James Road, Adamstown and Clyde Street, Islington.

Has funding been allocated for the Lower Hunter Freight Corridor?

At this time, funding has been allocated to identify a suitable corridor of land for the Lower Hunter Freight corridor. There is still a lot of work to be done before we can confirm the final Lower Hunter Freight Corridor for future use. The Future Transport 2056 strategy has identified the Lower Hunter Freight Corridor for potential delivery within 10-20 years.

How is cultural heritage being managed?

Transport for NSW has been working with the Aboriginal community to identify sites of Aboriginal cultural significance. This is part of the Aboriginal cultural values assessment across Newcastle region. The study area includes the traditional lands of the Awabakal people. A number of areas of significance were identified including ceremonial areas near the head of Hexham Swamp, pathways between Mount Sugarloaf and Hexham Swamp, Hexham Swamp itself and the headwaters of Cockle Creek.

We will continue to work with the Aboriginal community and Local Aboriginal Land Councils to identify and document culturally significant areas.