



All sorts of people of all ages love rail and its stories. They love the experience, journey, technology, destinations, movement across landscapes, history, and heritage.

## Project Background and Purpose

### Rail History

Rail was a game changer. It completely revolutionised how we moved across the colony of NSW. From reliance on river and coastal maritime transport, rail opened up inland settlement and industry (mining, pastoralism and agriculture), reducing travel time and improving communication. Rail provided huge employment opportunities during construction and later for its operations across NSW as never before. The railways attracted people and trade to favoured towns, strengthening communities and their economic growth and prosperity. The social impact of the railways was immense.

For one and a half centuries, regional railways delivered commerce, freight and passengers across NSW. The remaining rail lines, stations and infrastructure that still provide rail services today were part of an extensive network of rail services that peaked in the 1960s. Cessation of many regional line operations in the 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s, and replacement with road and bus transport, now sees these lines in a serious state of decline.

Over the last 50 years, various operators have been contracted to provide ongoing management across regional rail. There has not been an overarching strategy, or forethought given to long term heritage management, or the future for redundant lines and their heritage assets.

## Why we need a Regional Rail Heritage Strategy



The regional rail network expresses our heritage more than any other part of Transport for NSW's (TfNSW) portfolio. In recent years, the Heritage Council of NSW and Heritage NSW have raised concerns about the lack of a state-wide context for regional rail to guide assessment of cumulative impacts and one-off applications to demolish or remove state listed regional rail heritage assets.

As of 2023, natural and other causes including fire and floods, as well as lack of funding and systematised maintenance, have resulted in many heritage assets on the regional rail line either being sold off in earlier years, demolished or lost. Remaining unoccupied assets like smaller rail stations, goods sheds, and other assets constructed of ephemeral materials, such as timber rail bridges, are of particular concern. Many other remaining infrastructure assets, particularly bridges and viaducts, are at considerable risk due to their deteriorating condition which pose public safety and environmental risks.

Also at risk of potential loss is the social and economic importance of rail, the identity it brings to a place and the contribution it makes to the regional NSW visitor economy.

To protect significant parts of our historic rail system, immediate action must be taken to ensure assets are in a 'good enough' condition for us to be able to plan and deliver viable and possibly innovative conservation and management options.

Failing to intervene now does not buy time, but rather prolongs the deterioration of assets resulting in increasingly reactive decision making.

This Strategy starts from the position of a much-diminished regional rail portfolio that is at considerable risk. There is increasing public concern and broader community interest evidenced by media articles about the future of regional rail, often focused on 'at risk' rail heritage assets.

The Strategy presents an opportunity for us to review, set objectives and successfully plan proactive management outcomes, actions, and interventions to future proof our regional rail heritage.



## Strategy Scope

...like jewels on a necklace

Given the quantum and geographic spread of heritage assets on the regional rail network, the Regional Rail Heritage Strategy (the Strategy) provides a high-level contextual overview across NSW, focusing on a line approach to understand how the regional rail lines developed and operated, like jewels on a necklace:

- It views individual heritage assets as part of a collection that relate to and inform an understanding of how the railway lines shaped and changed NSW.
- It works with an understanding that the network or rail lines have been developed and engineered to respond to the terrain and landscape. It accepts that associated track elements, bridges, viaducts, tunnels, operational elements including signals and signal boxes and functional built elements are dependent on location and use, such as the hierarchy of stations with termini and intermediate stations, freight and goods handling facilities, loco maintenance depots and workshops and accommodation.
- It recognises that rail delivery relied on consistent, standardised and repetitive operational and built elements to build an affordable and effective network on a large scale.

This Strategy approach is different to considering and prioritising individual, isolated heritage assets by asset class and type. This can be devoid of appreciation or understanding of the rail line and its context. However, the Strategy will draw and build on this substantial body of asset baseline information.

The Strategy also draws on expertise in heritage and asset management to inform strategic management recommendations. It will be informed throughout its preparation by consultation with key external and internal stakeholders and stakeholder reference working groups, drawing on their expertise and oversight of the strategy direction and recommendations.



## Objectives

The objective of the Strategy is to guide our next steps by recognising value, addressing challenges, risks and opportunities for rail prioritisation and management in the 21st century.

The Strategy will assist TfNSW to return value to the community and meet regulatory requirements to:

- Understand the history and heritage significance of the regional rail network, its function, operation, and what we have today.
- Identify key heritage and asset management considerations and prioritise a representative collection of non-operational heritage assets and rail lines.
- Identify key risks, challenges and opportunities for future heritage asset management including statutory and management requirements, and community and economic expectations and opportunities, utilising a whole of government approach to supporting regional NSW.
- Identify future management options and recommendations to mitigate risks to heritage assets that consider successful heritage asset management models and whole of government delivery to meet community expectations.





## Alignment

The Strategy addresses broad NSW Government context and objectives, including:

- NSW Treasury Capital Planning Policy guidelines for asset management
- TAHE objectives - 'Social Responsibility' Building stronger communities
- Future Transport Strategy 2056
- Transport Environmental & Sustainability Plan 2020
- Heritage Council of NSW, s170 Register Asset Management guidelines.

## Outcomes

The Strategy will provide recommendations and a representative collection of ongoing and future management options and opportunities to help build community resilience and revitalise heritage assets for the enjoyment of the people of NSW:

- generally, for regional rail network managers and operators including Country Regional Network (CRN), Australian Rail Track Corporation (ARTC), NSW TrainLink and Transport Heritage NSW places; and
- specifically, for the CRN non-operational heritage assets managed by UGL Regional Linx (UGLRL) on non-operational rail lines.

The Strategy will underpin a Treasury funding bid, as NSW Treasury commitment to heritage asset management is critical to successful Strategy implementation.

## Public Consultation

This Strategy will be put on public exhibition where members of the public will have an opportunity to provide feedback and make comments. We anticipate this to take place in 2024.

If you would like to register your interest in this project and be notified once the Strategy is on public exhibition, please go to <https://bit.ly/3rSJPva>, scan QR code below or email [landassessment@transport.nsw.gov.au](mailto:landassessment@transport.nsw.gov.au).

