

Tweed Rail Society Incorporated

Submission to the Cross Border Transport Taskforce - Discussion Paper

The Tweed Rail Society Incorporated has been strongly advocating and lobbying the NSW State Government for the extension of the Murwillumbah rail line to Coolangatta Airport for the passed two years.

The Tweed Rail Society Incorporated was formed in March 2005 as a result of the closure of the Casino to Murwillumbah rail line by the NSW Carr Labour Government of which Michael Costa was Transport Minister at the time. The purpose of the Society is to see the Murwillumbah line is reopened to rail services as soon as possible and to ensure this rail line is linked to Queensland Rail at Coolangatta Airport. These are in fact two key components of the Tweed Rail Societies Mission Statement (that have been in place since our inception - See attachment 1.)

Within the passed two years the Tweed Rail Society has made submissions to the NSW Upper House Parliamentary Enquiry into the Closure of the Murwillumbah Line, to the Feasibility Study into a commuter service for this line, attended regional transport forums and attended a presentation at a Ministry of Transport Rail Working Group meeting in regard to a commuter service for the Murwillumbah line. In addition, the Tweed Rail Society has continually lobbied to have the rail line reopened for both passenger and freight services. It is our strong conviction that this line is not only important to the communities of the NSW Northern Rivers but is can also play a key role in the development and economies of the NSW North Coast and South East Queensland.

The Tweed Rail Society believes it can play a number of roles in regard to:

1. Maintaining the Murwillumbah line 'as is' to reduce further deterioration of current infrastructure
2. Assist to restore rail services on the Murwillumbah line
3. Provision of manpower and skills to develop, manage and operate services
4. Assist with the development of a link to Queensland Rail at Coolangatta Airport

The Tweed Rail Society believes in practical, responsible and cost effective solutions in order to develop a sustainable rail service in the NSW Northern Rivers. To that end we are restoring a rail pay bus vehicle that can be used to maintain the Murwillumbah rail line in 'as is'. Once operational this vehicle will be utilised to minimise further deterioration of rail infrastructure and will also be usefull to reopen the line as well as assist in driver training and track inspections. In doing so this will translate into significant cost savings to the NSW State Government in not having to replace numerous rotten sleepers due to them otherwise being continually wet from vegetation cover.

Other work carried out by the Tweed Rail Society has been, conducting our own survey of potential patronage, fare and timetabling development and constructing safe working systems to reinstate services. Work currently underway is that of financial management to ensure the services planned are both economical for the consumer and practical to operate.

The Tweed Rail Society can also draw upon the skills of others in the rail industry to restore infrastructure to safe operating standards etc. We are prepared to assist the NSW State Government to:

1. Maintain the line for future operation
2. Restore the Murwillumbah line on a progressive basis
3. Establish services progressively
4. Ensure the extension of the rail line to the NSW/QLD border area as soon as possible

In order to allow us to achieve the above objectives it is imperative that a number of commitments are made by the NSW State Government to the Tweed Rail Society. These are:

1. Unrestricted access to the Murwillumbah rail line in order that the Tweed Rail Society can work to remove vegetation on the rail line to prevent further deterioration of the track and corridor
2. Inclusion of the Tweed Rail Society in the Cross Border Transport Taskforce
3. Grant or supply to the Tweed Rail Society suitable machinery to remove vegetation on a large scale – ie a tractor with swing arm and cutter similar to council vegetation maintenance machinery
4. Provide the Tweed Rail Society with track maintenance tools and machinery to repair track as required
5. Permit the Tweed Rail Society to oversee the management of the initial track and infrastructure repairs and maintenance budget for the rail line
6. Permit the Tweed Rail Society to operate its rail pay bus in order to facilitate crews to various work sites along the rail line
7. Transfer 6 x 620/720 2 car diesel rail cars to the Tweed Rail Society from Newcastle on their withdrawal, due in June / July 2007 for operation on the Murwillumbah line
8. Allow the Tweed Rail Society to operate a commuter service on the Casino – Murwillumbah line either A. on a contracted basis B. as a private operation or C. on behalf of the NSW State Government
9. Provide the necessary funding to repair track, bridges, washaways etc to ensure the Murwillumbah line is safe to operate and to replace critical parts of infrastructure periodically removed by RailCorp in recent years from the line – including safe working equipment, various crossing loops, platforms and several thousand steel sleepers
10. Allow the Tweed Rail Society to manage operations and maintenance 'in house' and autonomously
11. Mirrabook Rail Services which managers the Tweed Rail Society to receive an annual management fee in return for consultation, maintenance and management of operation of services on the Murwillumbah line

Corridor Options for rail link to Queensland

A number of corridor options need to be considered for a link up between Murwillumbah and Coolangatta Airport. Before the route options are discussed a number of considerations need to be taken into account. These are essentially

1. Cost considerations
2. Distance from point to point
3. Connectivity for passengers to Queensland Rail and other transport networks and systems
4. Convenience for the travelling public
5. Population locations current and projected
6. Geographic / geologic makeup of the area
7. Current transport infrastructure and locations
8. Rail gauges
9. Construction time
10. Environmental impacts and benefits

On initial examination of the above points it is clear that a rail link from NSW to Queensland should commence from Murwillumbah station, proceed along the existing 3 kilometre rail corridor to Condong. This section requires reconstruction but is still available. From Condong there are three options (1, 2 and 2A)

1. Run a standard gauge line along the Tweed Valley Way (the old Pacific Highway). The line will need to cross the new Pacific Highway, Chinderah bypass at or near 'Melaleuca Station' south of Chinderah. The line would then swing east towards Cudgen and Kingscliff. From Kingscliff the line would turn North West to link up with the Pacific Highway and parallel it on the east side from Chinderah and cross the Tweed River next to the highway. Immediately crossing the Tweed River the rail line would tunnel under the highway at Banora Point and exit on the west side of the highway. It would enter either vacant land or parkland till just before Terranora Lakes. It could cross this waterway either next to or just west of the highway. There are some residences on either side of the Terranora Lakes which will require consideration. However, once past this obstacle there is further vacant land from this point to the boundary of Coolangatta Airport. The line would then have to cross either under the new Tugun road bypass or overhead the road bypass via tunnel portal area and then link up with Queensland Rail at the airport.
2. Similar to option 1. Except rail line swings away from Tweed Valley way at Condong and roughly follows a series of road corridors across towards Stotts Creek where it would cross the new Chinderah bypass in the vicinity of the road tunnel. It would then head towards Cudgen and pick up same alignment as in option 1. This may allow better access for the planned Kings Forest estate due to open in 2014 with a population planned for 5,000. This is the most direct route via Kingscliff and would serve a number of new growth areas on the coast.
(See map attachments 1 – 4)

- 2A. Is similar to option 2 except the line would swing further east instead of north east and cross the Chinderah bypass near Eviron and then track across to Casuarina Beach and Kings Forest then swing north to Kingscliff. This option would service 66% of the Tweeds population whereas option 3 would only service approximately 33% as projected by 2014. Further, options 1, 2 and 2A would also provide freight services for industry in Murwillumbah and to Coolangatta Airport whereas option 3 as proposed would only provide freight service by rail to Coolangatta Airport.
3. Option three is proposed by the NSW State Government. This proposal would see a rail line deviation at either Billinudgel or Mooball to Kingscliff via the coastal settlements of Pottsville, Hastings Point, Cabarita Beach, and Casuarina. This would require an additional 10 – 15 kilometres of track over and above either option 1, 2 or 2A. This option would require approximately an additional 50-70% construction and time costs compared with a rail link between Murwillumbah and Coolangatta Airport via Kingscliff. This would cut off the settlements of Mooball and Crabbes Creek (if the proposed coastal route deviated at Billinudgel), Burringbar, Stokers Siding, Dunbible as well as Murwillumbah (the major centre of commerce and industry in the Tweed Valley outside Tweed Heads) from a through rail service, or any rail service, as this section of track would in fact become a separate branchline beyond Mooball / Billinudgel. This would be also be an unnecessary waste of existing infrastructure.

Considerable additional construction costs will be incurred on the proposed coastal route due to much of the ground surface consisting of primarily of a sand base. This type of base is not ideal for heavy rail construction. Considerable earth and rock fill would be needed to provide adequate 'bedding' for the line to sit on. In some circumstances a rail line on the coast may have to divert around existing settlements or coastal lakes and would encounter hills and gullies west of those lakes and settlements. This would require a number of cuttings, banks and bridges adding considerably to the cost of construction as apposed to an extension from Murwillumbah which would be primarily on flat topography - mainly across a flood plain except for crossing the Chinderah bypass section of the Pacific Highway, requiring perhaps one bridge and approaches and possibly one or two short tunnels. The coastal option may actually better suit Queensland Rail with a cheaper cost per kilometre for construction of this proposed line as far as Pottsville. It could still directly link in with a standard gauge line from Murwillumbah and proposed dual gauge section of line at Kingscliff. Kingscliff could then be an ideal transfer point for NSW passengers heading south to Murwillumbah etc. Passengers heading north need not change trains at all.

Considering the coastal proposal in totality it would simply be a more cost effective and simpler solution to have a feeder bus service to a rail link at Kingscliff. This feeder bus could link rail services at Kingscliff in the north and Mooball and or Billinudgel in the south. In addition this road link could even service Ocean Shores and Brunswick Heads to and from Billinudgel station. This effectively would retain Murwillumbah rail services and linkup to Coolangatta Airport via Kingscliff. The coastal towns would be connected to rail services north and south by bus and in addition Ocean Shores and Brunswick Heads would also be connected to rail services in both directions. In addition the construction costs for a rail link would be kept to a minimum and there would still be maximum use of the existing rail corridor through to Condong. Also, this would permit the maximum number of existing and projected residents to utilise the rail service either directly or via a connection service.

The Preferred Option

Option 2 would be the preferred option in terms of striking a balance between costs, distance, construction time, proximity to population areas, convenience for the public, topography and geology of the area including soil types and flooding considerations, connectivity at destination and transit points and use of standard gauge rail line to destination. It would be possible as well as desirable to dual gauge the section of rail line between Kingscliff and Coolangatta Airport for additional passenger convenience and for timetabling of services across the border area.

Option 2 would serve a larger population base than would option 3 by some additional 4,000 residents by 2014 according to the Tweed Shire – Retail Strategy, Population Projections Study, Ref Page 25 – Presuming Casuarina Beach / Bogangar and a new estate of Kings Forest (due online 2014) were included.

Option 2A is also considered preferable to option 1 or 3. It would be slightly longer than option 2 but would link in Casuarina Beach and Kings Forest developments directly to a rail service. Areas south of Casuarina would still be linked to rail services by a bus service connection or Queensland rail extension to Pottsville with bus connections south from that point.

Timeframes

The Cross Border Transport Discussion Paper considers that construction should progress from the north to south – see Recommendation No. 3. Queensland Rail is currently extending its Gold Coast rail link from Robina to Reedys Creek – a distance of an additional 4 kms approximately as well as duplicating sections of the line to Brisbane for increased service capacity. QR plans to reach Coolangatta Airport in approximately the next 10 – 15 years or less and is planned to follow the new Tugun Bypass transport corridor to the airport. QR is also considering constructing a rail link to Kingscliff in about 15 – 20 years. This recommendation should be changed to read “Construction should be commenced simultaneously from both the north to south as in the case of Queensland and from south to north as in the case of NSW.” This way true progress can be made towards “bridging the gap” between transport systems rather than waiting for one state government to finish its section before the other government decides to turn the first sod. This creates a delaying tactic of huge proportions and results in the deprivation of much needed transport links for the residents of the area and tourists alike in a rapidly developing part of the country.

Both the Queensland Government and the NSW State Governments need to be “fast tracking” the rail link gap between each state.

An appropriate timeline NSW should adopt for this overall project:

1. 2007 - 2009 Reopening of the Murwillumbah line to rail traffic.
2. 2008 - 2009 Upgrade Murwillumbah to Condong to be completed in conjunction with reopening the Murwillumbah line to traffic
3. 2007 – 2009 Planning and land acquisitions for new route from Condong to Coolangatta Airport via Kingscliff
4. 2009 – 2012 Construction of Condong to Kingscliff section of rail line
5. 2012 – 2014 Complete construction of Kingscliff to Coolangatta Airport

Queensland should adopt a similar timeframe to link up at Coolangatta Airport:

1. 2007 – 2009 Complete Robina to Reedys Creek
2. 2009 - 2012 Construct rail link from Reedys Creek to Coolangatta Airport
3. 2012 – 2014 Assist NSW government to complete dual gauge section of rail line from Coolangatta Airport to Kingscliff

This timeframe would dovetail in with:

- A. Two terms of state government in NSW and possibly Queensland
- B. The proposed opening of Kings Forest residential development near Casuarina Beach which is proposed for 5000 residents by 2014

Funding Arrangements

1. NSW should fund upgrade of line from Casino to Condong and construction of section from Condong to Kingscliff
2. Queensland should fund from Reedys Creek to Coolangatta Airport
3. NSW and Queensland should share the costs of line construction from Coolangatta Airport to Kingscliff
4. Both state governments should be able to obtain half the funding for their respective shares in the project via Federal Government Auslink transport infrastructure fund for this “transport bridging project”.

Notes:

1. In designing the passenger services there should be the following considerations:
 - A. The terminus should be set up for convenient ‘across platform’ or ‘over and under platforms’ transfer between NSW standard gauge and QR narrow gauge services at Coolangatta Airport
 - B. The terminus should be located within easy access to the airline terminal – preferably directly opposite or underneath it
 - C. The rail terminus should also be immediately accessible for quick transfer to local and interstate bus services and taxis and car park
 - D. Due to NSW not having an electrified rail service in the region, consideration will need to be given to any underground terminus for the operation of diesel rail cars – i.e. satisfactory ventilation of diesel exhaust. Optional to this would be an above level platform for NSW services and underground for Queensland services – ‘over and under’ platforms
 - E. Rail services timed to best meet connections between both state rail systems and possibly airline schedules where possible
2. For freight services consideration will need to be given to the provision of a short spur line to the western precinct of Coolangatta Airport that would be established for an intermodal freight terminal. Both freight and NSW passenger services could access the airport precinct via overhead both ends of the vehicle tunnel portals.

To conclude, it is hoped that this discussion paper will result in real action being taken by the NSW Government to breathe new life into the Murwillumbah line as well as provide the backbone for a fully integrated transport network for the NSW Northern Rivers and linked up with South East Queensland transport systems. It would be extremely disappointing but not unexpected if this discussion paper turned out to be yet another NSW State Government talk fest and or smokescreen for other transport issues as has so often happened in the past.

The Tweed Rail Society is keen to become part of the Cross Border Transport Taskforce in order to make a tangible contribution towards a best outcome solution to the provision of satisfactory public transport for both the NSW Northern Rivers and South East Queensland

It is vital that a passenger rail service be established as soon as possible on the Murwillumbah line. It is what the communities of the NSW Northern Rivers demand and it is what a number studies into this line clearly demonstrate is needed.

Only when this project is completed will it be realised what a significant benefit this will make to the many lives of people living on both sides of the state border in order to provide access to tourist destinations, access to jobs, improved freight movements, removal of many trucks off the Pacific Highway as much of that freight would now be on rail, reduced road trauma and carnage, reductions in CO2 gasses from reduction in number of trucks and motor vehicles on roads due to better public transport, general improved mobility for people without motor vehicles, reduction in traffic congestion in built up areas, delay in the necessity for governments to build more expensive roads for many years due to better public transport, better connectivity and intermodling of passengers and freight at a strategic transport hub.

You may wish to refer to our website for additional information. It is www.tweedrail.org.au .This website is being developed progressively. Thank you for the opportunity to present this submission to the Cross Border Transport Taskforce on behalf of the Tweed Rail Society.

Yours Faithfully,

Phillip Mackenzie

President, Tweed Rail Society Incorporated

Attachment 1.

Mission Statement of the Tweed Rail Society

This mission statement of the Tweed Rail Society Inc. is to ensure the return of rail services to the Casino – Murwillumbah rail line (located in the NSW Northern Rivers Region) as soon as possible . In the absence of any government operated services, the Tweed Rail Society has developed plans to reintroduce services that would meet the needs of both the local populace of the NSW Northern Rivers as well as the wider community. Our methodology is to use practical, workable and cost effective solutions in order to reinstate rail services.

The objective of the Tweed Rail Society is to ensure the travelling public have a reliable and convenient means of rail transport that will enable them to travel at reasonable cost throughout the Northern Rivers region and beyond.

Services have been timetabled to meet with connecting CountryLink services at Casino as well as meet the needs of local commuters to and from work; day trippers, business travellers, as well as the many tourists who frequent the region. A reintroduction of the daily Murwillumbah XPT would also be welcomed by the Tweed Rail Society for the convenience of the long distance traveller.

It is intended that daylight commuter services will be introduced progressively, using 2 car diesel rail cars. Initially a rail pay bus will be used to assist with re establishing the line to a serviceable condition and thereafter for general line maintenance. It will be necessary to upgrade some infrastructure particularly bridges and reintroduce infrastructure removed by RailCorp and associated departments.

It is intended that the Murwillumbah line will link up with Queensland Rail at Coolangatta Airport in due course. In doing so, this will form the backbone of a fully integrated transport network connecting N.E. NSW and S.E. Queensland.

It is an absolute necessity to establish a safe, convenient alternate means of transport for many people who either do not have a motor vehicle or who are unable to drive. Further in the world of global warming it is essential to provide a means of transport that is minimalists in its carbon output in comparison to the number of motor vehicles that would be required to move a similar number of people.

The Tweed Rail Society will draw on the expertise of current and previously employed rail staff and welcomes all those with an interest in railways. Although we are not a political activist group it may be necessary to be politically active at times in order to achieve aims and objectives. This includes revealing the truth on many issues in relation to the line closure.

Attachments

1. Mission statement of the Tweed Rail Society

Map 1

Murwillumbah to Tweed Heads recommended route overview

Map 2

Condong to Stotts Creek / Kings Forest – Casuarina Options, 2 and 2A

Map 3

Stotts Creek - Kingscliff – Chinderah section Options 1, 2 and 2A

Map 4

Chinderah - Coolangatta Airport section 1, 2, 2A and 3

Aerial Photograph

Outline of Tugun Bypass proposal

Acknowledgements

1. NSW/QLD – Cross Border Transport Taskforce – Discussion Paper
2. Google Maps
3. Tugun Bypass Submissions Paper
4. Tweed Shire – Retail Strategy Paper