National Freight and Supply Chain Strategy

August 2019
QR Code

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Foreword

Every time you go to the shops, overtake a truck on the highway, have a parcel delivered, pass a construction site or see Australian produce overseas, you are seeing Australia’s freight and supply chain networks in action.

Australia’s supply chains are critical to meeting our growing freight task. These freight and supply chains – networks of people and businesses processing, transporting and storing goods – are often behind-the-scenes and can be difficult to see as a whole. However, our supply chains are the key to our future economic success and to strengthening the connections between our regions and urban centres.

Governments provide infrastructure, balance public and private interest through regulation, and open up trade opportunities with other countries. On the flip side, governments can hinder the freight sector through poor infrastructure planning, inconsistent or overly burdensome regulation, and considering only one or two aspects of the supply chain at the expense of the whole network.

This is why the National Freight and Supply Chain Strategy is so important. For the first time, Australian governments have agreed to a national approach to Australia’s freight and supply chains. The Strategy builds on the foundation laid through earlier Council of Australian Governments achievements, such as the 2012 National Ports Strategy and 2013 National Land Freight Strategy, and expands consideration of freight and supply chain networks as an integrated whole.

The Strategy and associated National Action Plan recognise that supply chains cross borders and move freight using the best mode of transport for the task, be it ship, train, truck or plane. Drawing on the findings of the Inquiry into National Freight and Supply Chain Priorities, we have agreed to four critical action areas where joined-up government action can best make an impact.

The Strategy sets an agenda for coordinated and well-planned government and industry actions across all freight modes for the next 20 years and beyond.

By putting the Strategy into action together, industry and governments can improve existing practices, create new opportunities for Australian businesses, consumers and producers, and keep each other to account.

Transport and Infrastructure Council
Council of Australian Governments
From the Expert Panel

Australia’s productivity, international competitiveness and way of life rely on the efficient movement of freight from producer to consumer.

Our increasingly connected domestic and international markets are placing greater demands for efficiency, reliability and cost-competitiveness on the freight and supply chain sector. Such demands apply to the whole sector irrespective of transport mode – air, rail, road and shipping – and without regard to jurisdictional boundaries.

As highlighted in our report for the Inquiry into National Freight and Supply Chain Priorities, we have the opportunity to develop a national approach to freight – one that transcends borders and transport modes to create the environment to deliver significant productivity, safety and environmental reforms.

The National Freight and Supply Chain Strategy and National Action Plan provide the platform to position Australia to meet its freight future. Through the Strategy and Action Plan, all jurisdictions have come together and committed to future freight outcomes with supporting actions. For the first time Australia is taking a coordinated national approach to freight covering all modes.

This is a starting point, with further actions required to achieve the desired 2024 outcomes and deliver on the Inquiry Priorities. We look forward to seeing real benefits flow from the actions committed to in this, the first iteration of the Strategy and Action Plan, and in the published annual reports and regular reviews that will ensure the Strategy is a living document.

We are particularly pleased to see the commitment to keep industry engaged throughout the Strategy’s ongoing delivery.

It is only by governments and industry working together that Australia can meet its freight needs into the future and Australia’s productivity and international competitiveness can reach its full potential.

Expert Panel, Inquiry into National Freight and Supply Chain Priorities

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Nicole Lockwood
Chair, Freight and Logistics Council Western Australia and Infrastructure Australia Board Member

Maurice James
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Executive Chairman, Simon National Carriers and former Chair, Australian Trucking Association
1. Overview

Australia’s freight task is growing and changing. The volume of freight carried is expected to grow by over 35 per cent between 2018 and 2040, an increase of 270 billion tonnes (bringing the total volume to just over 1000 billion tonne kilometres). The nature of the freight challenge is also changing in conjunction with growing population density pressures - urban freight is forecast to grow by nearly 60 per cent over 20 years to 2040. Regional and remote Australia has an important role in responding to increasing demand from Asian and other international markets, underpinning our national economic growth, and our growing urban population.

The National Freight and Supply Chain Strategy prepares us for this future. It sets an agenda for coordinated and well-planned government and industry action across all freight modes over the next 20 years and beyond. It sets a national vision for freight systems and supply chains to contribute to a strong and prosperous Australia through achieving the following goals:

- improved efficiency and international competitiveness
- safe, secure and sustainable operations
- a fit for purpose regulatory environment
- innovative solutions to meet freight demand
- a skilled and adaptable workforce
- an informed understanding and acceptance of freight operations

These goals guide governments and industry in considering strategic priorities for freight policy, programs and investment.

The goals and priority action areas build on the work of the industry-led Inquiry into National Freight and Supply Chain Priorities and the work undertaken through earlier national strategies and current state and territory strategies for freight.

These goals will be achieved by taking national action across four critical areas:

- Smarter and targeted infrastructure investment
- Enable improved supply chain efficiency
- Better planning, coordination and regulation
- Better freight location and performance data

The Strategy, its goals and how it will be delivered is summarised in the “Strategy at a Glance” diagram on the opposite page.
WHY WE NEED ACTION

• Australia’s freight volumes are projected to grow by over 35 per cent between 2018 and 2040. They are also changing, with urban freight forecast to increase by nearly 60 per cent over 20 years to 2040 – in conjunction with growing population density pressures.

• Australia’s freight productivity and costs have plateaued, with little change in real freight costs since the 1990s. This impacts the competitiveness of our exports, including minerals and agriculture travelling from our regions to international markets.

• Changes in the way goods are made, purchased and distributed and technological advances (especially digitalisation, automation and electrification) have the potential to dramatically improve freight productivity and costs.

• Australia’s freight and supply chains need to build resilience to meet emerging issues associated with natural disasters and climate risk, security and cyber threats and increasing community demands to improve safety and environmental outcomes.

To get there, we need to challenge the way we currently think about and work together on the freight system.

HOW IT WILL BE DELIVERED

ACTION WE WILL TAKE

1. Smarter and targeted investment
2. Enable improved supply chain efficiency
3. Better planning, coordination and regulation
4. Better freight location and performance data

Nationally coordinated and well planned freight systems supporting a strong and prosperous Australia through:

- Improved efficiency and international competitiveness
- Safe, secure and sustainable operations
- A fit for purpose regulatory environment
- Innovative solutions to meet freight demand
- A skilled and adaptable workforce
- An informed understanding and acceptance of freight operations
2. Why we need action
Australia’s freight systems are the lifeblood of our economy and way of life

Each year our infrastructure operators, transport companies and logistics experts deliver about four billion tonnes of goods across Australia – that is 163 tonnes of freight for every person. Melbourne alone requires approximately 15,000 tonnes of food to be delivered every day.³

Australian freight supply chains are typically vast, reflecting the size of the country, and come in many different forms. In its most basic form, a supply chain is the network of people, companies, products and services that gathers raw materials, transforms them into products and transports them to their final destination. They rely on many different actors - such as producers, transporters, customs officials, brokers and inspectors.

Freight supply chains get petrol to the service station, fresh foods to supermarket shelves, household waste to tip, construction materials on site and essential pharmaceuticals to our hospitals. They connect our agriculture regions and resource basins to cities and ports, delivering Australian produce and minerals to international markets.

**Figure 2.1: The domestic freight task in Australia⁴**

**Major Freight Flows in Australia (by volume per mode)**

Figure 2.1 shows Australia’s domestic freight task by mode, with thicker arrows indicating greater volumes of freight, but not the value or performance of Australia’s freight and supply chains. It shows that bauxite (from Weipa to Gladstone) makes up the highest volume moved by coastal shipping, while iron ore and coal make up the highest volume task moved by rail. Iron ore and coal move across privately operated rail networks in the Pilbara, Central Queensland and Hunter Valley. These networks are usually simpler to operate than multiuser networks, being largely single use, and already near, if not at, world’s best practice.

The focus of the Strategy is on our multiuser networks, such as our interstate road and rail systems and the aviation network, that carry some of our highest value freight. As they service a much wider user base, improving our multiuser networks can have significant flow on effects to the country as a whole.

*NB: there are other key Australian freight routes not included as this map focuses solely on proportional volume, not value or number of freight movements.*
Australia’s freight challenge

Our freight task keeps growing

As Figure 2.2 shows, bulk mineral transport from iron ore and coal mines to export ports has driven a threefold increase in the rail freight task since 2000. Road transport is the dominant form of freight for the majority of commodities produced and/or consumed in Australia. Road freight grew by over 75 per cent between 2000-01 and 2015-16. Declining domestic oil reserves and a reduction in the coastal trading fleet have resulted in a stagnation in freight volumes moved via coastal shipping.

While it only represents 0.1 per cent of freight by volume, the value of freight moved by air continues to soar (21 per cent of total international trade value). Due to the low volumes involved, airfreight is not represented in Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2: Projected freight growth by mode in Australia

Australia’s freight volumes are projected to continue to grow, even with reduced growth in bulk mineral exports. While Australia’s freight task is growing, freight productivity and costs have plateaued since the 1990s. Urban infrastructure is reaching capacity due to road congestion (which will be around $30 billion a year by 2030), greater noise and environmental regulation, and corridor and precinct encroachment.
Freight productivity and costs have plateaued

Australia’s freight productivity and costs have stagnated since the 1990s, when the impact of reforms such as national competition policy and the introduction of higher productivity vehicles were exhausted. Real interstate freight rates for road and rail fell by 31 per cent and 58 per cent respectively from 1978 to 1998, but have marginally increased by 5 per cent (road) and 8 per cent (rail) in the period from 1998 to 2018.

A 1 per cent improvement in productivity could generate $8-20 billion in savings to the national economy over 20 years.

Maintaining international competitiveness will be key to meeting Asia’s rising demand for our exports, especially high quality agricultural products and minerals moving from our regions. Currently over 75 per cent of Australian exports are destined for Asia.
Business practices and new technologies are changing the nature of our freight task

Figure 2.4: e-Commerce continues to grow due to changing consumer preferences

From 2017 to 2018

$27.5 billion

+24.4%

Value of purchases

+20.2%

Number of purchases

Top e-commerce purchasing locations by volume include the outer suburbs of Sydney and Melbourne, and regional centres such as Toowoomba, Mackay, Gosford and Bundaberg.

As people increasingly order goods online, the ‘last mile’ of the freight journey - that is, the space between key freight corridors and precincts and the final delivery point - becomes more important. Road congestion, network issues, restrictions on access, curfews preventing 24-hour operations, and availability of parking and kerbside space in dense commercial and residential areas affect speed and convenience of delivery in the last mile.

Changing business practices and new technologies, like digitalisation, automation and electrification, have the potential to further shrink supply chains and dramatically improve freight productivity and costs.
Australia needs safe, secure and resilient freight systems

Figure 2.5: Heavy truck fatal crash per billion vehicle kilometres travelled (VKT)

For our freight systems to be resilient, they also have to be safe.

As Figures 2.5 and 2.6 show, progress has been made to reduce fatalities caused by crashes with heavy trucks. However, more action could be taken.

Latest heavy vehicle crash statistics reveal the vast majority of multi-vehicle fatalities involving a heavy vehicle in Australia are caused by cars.

Figure 2.6: Crashes involving heavy trucks by Significant Urban Area

Australia’s growing freight task brings with it many opportunities. To make the most of these, Australia’s freight and supply chains need to build resilience to meet changing consumer preferences and emerging issues associated with natural disasters and climate risk, security and cyber threats and increasing community expectations in relation to safety, security and environmental outcomes.
3. What we want
To help position Australia for this challenge, all tiers of government and industry will work together to deliver:

...nationally coordinated and well-planned freight systems supporting a strong and prosperous Australia.

- Improved efficiency and international competitiveness
- Safe, secure and sustainable operations
- A fit for purpose regulatory environment
- Innovative solutions to meet freight demand
- A skilled and adaptable workforce
- An informed understanding and acceptance of freight operations
How we will know we have been successful

**Improved efficiency and international competitiveness**
Freight precincts, maritime and air connections are planned, accessible, efficient and reliable. Freight network plans are published and provide certainty to industry for future investment. Market principles apply to infrastructure investment and pricing, while economic costs (e.g. cross-border/modal/operator transaction and coordination costs) and externalities are minimised.

**Safe, secure and sustainable operations**
Australia’s freight networks and supply chains are safe and secure for all transport users. Freight infrastructure and operations minimise impacts on the environment, are resilient and sustainable and take into account the Sustainable Development Goals.

**A fit for purpose regulatory environment**
Governments regulate Australia’s freight networks in a way that appropriately balances the benefits (such as national security, world-class biosecurity, community safety and consistent standards) against the regulatory burden and costs.

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**Why?**
A coordinated approach, which extends beyond investment to include regulatory, planning and supply chain reforms, is needed to drive the long term improvements necessary to lift Australia’s supply chain efficiency and international competitiveness.

**Why?**
For Australia’s freight system to be effective it needs to be safe, secure and sustainable. High levels of safety and security from all freight modes limit disruption and build public trust facilitating the introduction of new technology. Efforts to promote sustainability harmonise three core elements - economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection - and through that build industry resilience to change and disruption.

**Why?**
Improving freight access, coordination and regulation, particularly across jurisdictional boundaries and access regimes, will boost performance, enhance first and last mile access, reduce compliance costs and improve certainty.

A lack of consistency in the consideration of freight in decision-making has compromised the ability of governments and industry to balance the economic benefits of moving freight efficiently with social and environmental outcomes.

A lack of certainty inhibits the making of long-term investment decisions.

A lack of consistency across jurisdictions creates confusion and duplication, resulting in costs for operators - for example, regulations managing fatigue, drug and alcohol use in the road and rail sectors.
Innovative solutions to meet freight demand

Producers and consumers benefit from supply chains with advanced technology and information enabling them to thrive in competitive, global markets. New infrastructure is future proofed and flexible approaches to operation of existing infrastructure are adopted to extract as much value as possible.

Why?

Technologies including connected and automated vehicles, drones, telematics, common bar code standards, and distributed ledgers can increase network efficiency, decrease risks to transport users, reduce fuel usage and emissions and enhance supply chain visibility. New technology and innovation, including adaptive and outcomes-focused regulations and targeted infrastructure investment (such as retrofitting), is needed to find greater efficiencies and drive down costs.

A skilled and adaptable workforce

There is a collaborative approach between government and industry to identifying workforce shortages, ensuring training programs address future skills needs, and enhancing workforce diversity to address short-term and long-term requirements of the freight sector.

Why?

The Australian freight sector is having difficulties in attracting skilled workers across its various functions - including logistics, quality control, warehousing and trade negotiations. At the same time, automation and other technological changes are shifting workforce needs. From a government perspective, we need a public sector workforce sufficiently trained to appropriately plan and regulate freight activities and make informed decisions.

An informed understanding and acceptance of freight operations

The freight industry works with governments and the community to deliver positive social outcomes. Communities are more ‘freight aware’ and the importance of freight is reflected in integrated land use and transport planning. Future freight corridors are identified and protected. Planning for freight also considers ways to enable regional and remote opportunities, including integrating the wider social benefits from improved access.

Why?

Residential developments encroaching on freight facilities reduce both the amenity for residents and the efficient operations of those freight facilities. Investment matched to appropriate land use planning to identify and/or protect future freight corridors is vital.

This requires coordinated action by all levels of government and advocacy and engagement by industry.
4. Action we will take
This Strategy will only be successful if all tiers of government and industry take action.

The Strategy outlines the critical action areas for the next 20 years.

This Strategy outlines four critical action areas, building on past reforms including the National Ports Strategy and National Land Freight Strategy, jurisdictional freight and infrastructure plans and ongoing national reform efforts, like Heavy Vehicle Road Reform and the National Road Safety Strategy.

The action areas are illustrated below with examples of actions already underway at the Commonwealth, state and territory levels that will complement the goals and outcomes of the Strategy. More detail on these four critical action areas and associated 13 national actions can be found in the Action Plan, which will be reviewed every five years.
Smarter and targeted infrastructure investment

Investment in Australia’s freight-related infrastructure assets needs to support economic growth and provide signals for private sector investment.

Investment is needed in physical and digital infrastructure in urban and regional areas, and infrastructure user charging needs to reflect costs.

- Australia has 877,651 kilometres of roads. In 2016-17, governments spent $26.1 billion on roads (construction and maintenance).13

- Australia has an estimated 33,221 route kilometres of operational heavy railways. Of these, 2,642 route kilometres are iron ore railways in the Pilbara, 2,764 route kilometres are the central Queensland and Hunter Valley coal networks, and approximately 5,100 kilometres are largely or exclusively used for grain haulage.14

**Success**

Infrastructure supports growing freight needs, ensuring freight is moved in the most efficient and effective manner.

**Actions**

**Action 1.1:** Ensure that domestic and international supply chains are serviced by resilient and efficient key freight corridors, precincts and assets.

**Action 1.2:** Provide regional and remote Australia with infrastructure capable of connecting regions and communities to major gateways, through land links, regional airports or coastal shipping.

**Action 1.3:** Identify and support digital infrastructure and communication services necessary for improved and innovative supply chains.

**Action 1.4:** Advance heavy vehicle road reform to facilitate efficient investment in infrastructure.
Enable improved supply chain efficiency

There needs to be a ‘supply chain’ approach to freight planning that recognises the relationships and dependencies between freight sector participants, and builds capacity and readiness to meet emerging challenges.

National and global standards need to be adopted and implemented, the freight workforce needs to have the skills and capabilities to deliver, innovative freight technologies need to be adopted and community acceptance of freight is vital.

• In 2014 there were around 42,000 road freight transport businesses operating in Australia.\textsuperscript{15}

• According to the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator, 165,000 businesses make up the heavy vehicle supply chain.\textsuperscript{16}

• The transport and logistics sector employs over 600,000 people across its major sub-sectors: road transport, logistics, warehousing and stevedoring.\textsuperscript{17}

• In 2015-16 freight rail carried 1.3 billion net tonnes of freight and contributed around $5.1 billion to the Australian economy in its own right.\textsuperscript{18}

Success

Freight needs are serviced by efficient and competitive supply chains underpinned by collaboration and accessible data.

Actions

Action 2.1: Adopt and implement national and global standards, and support common platforms, to reduce transaction costs and support interoperability along supply chains.

Action 2.2: Promote training and re-skilling of industry and government workforces appropriate to current and future freight needs.

Action 2.3: Facilitate new and innovative technologies that improve freight outcomes and understand the deployment, skills and workforce requirements for operators and infrastructure.

Action 2.4: Build community acceptance of freight operations.
Better planning, coordination and regulation

Government regulation and decision-making has a critical impact on freight productivity and efficiency.

Land use planning, transport network access and management and fit for purpose regulation are all critical to efficient networks.

- Local roads comprise around 75 per cent of Australia’s road network.\(^{19}\)
- More than 50,000 permits a year are processed through the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator portal.\(^{20}\)
- Transport enforcement agencies directly interact with heavy vehicle drivers and operators more than 320,000 times a year.\(^{21}\)
- Potential savings from the protection and early acquisition of seven corridors in the 2016 Infrastructure Priority List was estimated to be $10.8 billion.\(^{22}\)

Success

Freight’s importance is recognised and balanced with other needs in transport and land use planning across all levels of government. Planning guidelines and regulation protect freight assets while meeting community expectations for safety, security and environmental outcomes.

Actions

Action 3.1: Ensure freight demand is integrated in transport and land use planning across and between jurisdiction boundaries and freight modes.

Action 3.2: Strengthen the consideration of freight in all other government planning and decision-making.

Action 3.3: Investigate policy, planning and operational solutions to improve freight access and movement along domestic and international supply chains.

Action 3.4: Improve regulation to be more outcomes focused and risk-based to support innovation and reduce regulatory burden whilst maintaining safety, security and sustainability.
Better freight location and performance data

Better measurement of freight and supply chain performance will help government and industry to improve day-to-day operations, identify where action is required to maintain and improve freight outcomes, and evaluate the effectiveness of investments made.

- Freight represents a significant portion of the 4.6 per cent that for-hire transport activity contributed to Australian GDP in 2015-16, while in-house transport activity (including freight and logistics) contributes a further 2.7 per cent to GDP.23

- The World Bank’s Logistics Performance Index ranked Australia 18th in the world in 2018 (based on qualitative evaluations of Australian logistics by its trading partners – logistics professionals working outside of the country).24

Success

People making decisions have relevant information in a timely manner to improve freight performance and decision-making about infrastructure investment needs, areas of reform, and operations, governance and community amenity.

Actions

**Action 4.1:** Develop an evidence base of key freight flows and supply chains and their comparative performance to help business and governments improve day-to-day freight and network operations, make better investment decisions, and monitor and evaluate the performance of the freight system.
5. How it will be delivered
We will work together

Implementing the Strategy involves a high degree of coordination and collaboration across all levels of government and active involvement of the freight industry to drive productivity and efficiency improvements in the freight sector.

The actions that governments will take to implement the Strategy are detailed in the Action Plan. The Action Plan has been informed by priorities identified in Commonwealth, state and territory freight plans and policies. The Strategy and Action Plan form the basis of ongoing consultation with industry.

Figure 5.1: How the Strategy relates to the Action Plan, Implementation Arrangements and Jurisdiction Plans.
What guiding principles do we need to commit to?

These principles will guide actions and implementation over the 20 year span of the Strategy.

**National coordination**
A nation-wide, collaborative, and integrated approach to freight and supply chains at all levels of government and across industry

**Evidence based actions**
Supply chain activity and performance will be measured to monitor domestic and global competitiveness over time and identify areas where action is required to maintain and improve productivity

**Supporting achievement of long-term vision**
Robust and targeted reform and investment to ensure Australia’s freight system and supply chains are future-ready and flexible enough to meet the long-term needs of Australian business and the community

**Responsive to emerging trends and challenges**
Freight precincts have adequate capacity to handle expected future volumes, with sufficient capacity in the associated land, maritime and air connections

**Fit-for-purpose regulation**
Regulation is fit-for-purpose and outcome focused to enable innovation and the adoption of more productive, efficient, environmentally sound and safe processes
Keeping the Strategy relevant

The Strategy has a 20 year outlook and will be reviewed every five years to maintain its currency and enable action areas to be updated and new ones developed. Ongoing measurement and reporting on the freight system’s performance over time will be critical to this process.

Local government has been extensively consulted in the development of the Strategy and Action Plan. For practical reasons no specific actions have been assigned to individual local councils. Input into the consolidated implementation arrangements will also indicate how local governments can be involved in implementing actions (including through local government peak bodies where applicable) and actions to be taken to support local government planning for freight more generally.
Making progress and maintaining momentum

Governments will report to the Transport and Infrastructure Council at the end of each year on their progress in delivering the Strategy and Action Plan.

The annual report will feature outcomes from the freight performance framework being established to monitor the delivery of the Strategy. It will also include input from the Australian Local Government Association and industry, who play a critical role in delivering freight outcomes. The reporting process will provide an opportunity to discuss freight performance, emerging issues and challenges for particular supply chains, modes or jurisdictions.

A major review of the Strategy and Action Plan will occur every five years in consultation with industry. These reviews will ensure continuous improvement in supply chain performance, help identify gaps in government or industry actions, and ratchet up efforts to meet Australia’s freight challenge.

Figure 5.3: Implementing the Strategy and Action Plan
Roles and responsibilities

All tiers of government and industry have a role to play in helping Australia meet its future freight needs.

The diagram below shows the relationship between different parties involved in delivering and reporting on the Strategy and Action Plan. Other entities, such as local governments and industry, will be consulted throughout the Strategy’s implementation, reporting and review cycles.

Transport and Infrastructure Council

*Membership*: Federal, state, territory and New Zealand ministers responsible for transport and infrastructure.


Role:
- Oversee the implementation of the Strategy
- Publish the annual report
- Set the five year review terms of reference
- Facilitate an integrated national approach towards freight

Transport and Infrastructure Senior Officials Committee

*Membership*: Chief Executive Officers of the departments and agencies with responsibility for transport and infrastructure issues. These officers also report to their ministers.


Role:
- Support the Council by coordinating and progressing the strategic agenda of the Council
- Oversee the Freight Jurisdictional Working Group, annual reporting and regular review processes for the Strategy

Freight Jurisdictional Working Group*

*Membership*: Working-level senior officials in the departments and agencies with responsibility for transport, infrastructure and planning issues. These officials also report to the chief executive officer of their department/agency. Chaired by the Commonwealth.

Role:
- Manage the reporting and review processes
- Where appropriate, develop a coordinated response to planning, transport and other emerging freight issues
- Report to the Committee and prepare documents for consideration by the Council

* Secretariat services provided by the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Cities and Regional Development

Industry advisory body*

It is anticipated this body will consult broadly with industry in developing their advice to Council on the Strategy.
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