

**By Michelle Reynolds**

Queensland is in serious danger of falling behind other Australian states – in particular New South Wales - in updating existing and creating new rail infrastructure.

That was the consistent message from the recent Australian Logistics Council forum held in Sydney.

In fact, it was fair to say that whether in formal presentations, or at informal gatherings, Queensland “copped a hammering”.

As a Queenslander, I wanted to defend my State, but as rail was being increasingly identified as crucial to the development of Australia as a trading nation, and the facts and figures were trotted out, I found myself losing the argument.

Which means there is no doubt that Queensland needs to start thinking seriously about developing the railway networks of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century if it doesn't want to lose market share to other States, especially New South Wales where transporting freight by rail is well and truly back on track.

It won't matter how many times we win the State of Origin series if all the new jobs and industries that go with a modern transport infrastructure are originating south of the border where they are kicking goals all over the place.

Duncan Gay, NSW Minister for Roads, Maritime and Freight told the forum his State is currently embarking on its biggest ever infrastructure investment program – \$68 billion over four years.

Part of this package includes a Regional Rail Focus, looking at reopening closed lines where the business case stacks up and when it does, looking to partner with private industry to achieve the best outcome.

In addition, NSW Ports (Botany) have introduced a Rail Optimisation Group to try and increase the use and efficiency of rail at that port.

It seems that in NSW they are hearing the message that the Australian Logistics Council wants all of Australia to know: that there are huge public benefits in logistics investment and reform, particularly around rail links to port.

Rail is significantly under-represented at all our major national ports.

In 2015, at the Port of Brisbane and excluding coal, rail's modal share was around four per cent. Productivity reports suggest that it should be at or above 30 per cent.

I meet with Port of Brisbane representatives on a regular basis and I know they don't want to be a limiting factor to the growth of trade in Queensland.

However, things become difficult when successive governments don't work with the Port of Brisbane to meet clearly identified future demands.

One of speakers at the ACL Forum, Brian Haratsis from economic analysis, strategic and statutory planning consultants Macroplan Dimasi, told the audience that the population growth along the Eastern Seaboard – 50 per cent by 2030, 100 per cent by 2060 - means the shipping of a lot more freight.

So one investment that is crucial for Queensland to cash in on is the Inland Rail – and it is now a matter of when this is built, rather than if it is built – is the upgrading of the rail network between the Port of Brisbane and Toowoomba.

None of this is a case of road against rail, rather it is about making these two modes of transport work better together, especially in partnership with the Australian ports.

Huge amounts of freight can be unloaded from cargo boats and on to trains which take it to inter-modal facilities where trucks make shorter journeys rather than long ones up the Hume and Pacific Highway, to deliver goods to their final destination.

It's a win all round: reducing congestion on roads, detrimental impacts on the environment, increasing productivity, enhancing our standard of living.

But the investment needs to be happening right now.

It needs courage from governments who will think beyond the short term.

This applies especially to Queensland governments from all sides of politics.

As Queenslanders, we hate losing to New South Wales in the State of Origin.

We will hate it even more if we start losing jobs and industries to them.

**Michelle Reynolds is the CEO of InterlinkSQ, the intermodal transport hub based in Toowoomba.**