

## ITS TIME TO ACT NOW TO AVOID A POOR COMPROMISE ON INLAND RAIL

Australia's approach to the delivery of an inland railway between Brisbane and Melbourne needs urgent review or risks becoming a piecemeal solution that could cripple future competitiveness, according to one of the nation's most respected engineers.

Former Thiess chairman Martin Albrecht AC has urged the Federal Government to open up the inland rail project to a competitive Public Private Partnership process as soon as possible.

Mr Albrecht said a PPP approach to the vital east coast transport link would drive innovation and minimise costs to taxpayers and the Government, which currently faced a multi-billion dollar funding gap for the project.

He said the small amount of funding provided by the Government to date was essentially a "look see" at inland rail and not a commitment to funding a real project.

The long-time Queensland business leader will be a key speaker at this week's powerful Transport and Logistics Symposium in Toowoomba, which brings together leading experts and decision makers on future infrastructure development.

He is also chairman of National Trunk Rail (NTR), a private sector group that has invested three years and more than \$5 million to produce an alternative design to inland rail that is shorter, flatter and straighter than the Federal Government's Australian Rail Track Corporation proposal.

Mr Albrecht will tell the symposium that the soon-to-be completed Inland Rail Implementation Group report by former Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson must consider a competitive PPP process as an alternative way forward for a project that had been on the public agenda for decades.

"A decision on the implementation of inland rail is imminent and it would be a tragedy for Australia if we do not deliver the best economic and engineering solution for a nation-building project that will stand for 100 years," he said.

"Failure to do so would cripple our ability to harness the 21st century, integrated supply chain we need to be competitive in the Asian century and risk losing potentially enormous productivity benefits.

"The private sector has an appetite for infrastructure investment and our view is that the private sector is best placed to largely fund and build large infrastructure. The private sector brings innovation and experience to large infrastructure projects – grown out of international competitiveness."

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Mr Albrecht cited Toowoomba's second range crossing as a recent example of an important infrastructure project opened up to private sector competition through a PPP process and praised the Queensland and Australian governments for their approach.

"This is the same approach that needs to be at the forefront of delivering an inland rail solution and it will be Australian industry, the general community and taxpayers that will reap the benefits. We only have one chance to get this once-in-a-generation project right," he said.

"It's time to acknowledge there is no government funding to build the inland rail and gain a commitment from the Australian, Queensland, New South Wales and Victorian Governments to stop the 'look see' and open up the project to a competitive PPP process so the country can actually proceed with inland rail."

The National Trunk Rail group combines decades of engineering, economic and policy experience among its members. Besides Mr Albrecht, it also includes former Queensland Rail CEO Vincent O'Rourke, former CEO of Queensland Investment Corporation Dr Doug McTaggart and former CEO of Queensland Treasury Mark Gray.

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