

Central West and Orana Strategic Regional Integrated Transport Plan Submission

February 2025



**CENTRAL NSW
JOINT ORGANISATION**

- Bathurst
- Blayney
- Cabonne
- Cowra
- Forbes
- Lachlan
- Lithgow
- Oberon
- Orange
- Parkes
- Weddin

20 February 2025

Reference: jb:jw 200225
Enquiries: Ms J Bennett: 0428 690 935

Transport for NSW
231 Elizabeth St
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Transport for NSW,

Re: Central West and Orana Strategic Regional Integrated Transport Plan

Central NSW Joint Organisation speaks with a unified voice for its collective priorities. This region has a proud history of working collaboratively, representing over 180,000 people covering an area of more than 53,000sq kms comprising the local government areas of its membership - Bathurst, Blayney, Cabonne, Cowra, Forbes, Lachlan, Lithgow, Oberon, Orange, Parkes, Weddin.

Tasked with intergovernmental cooperation, leadership and prioritisation, CNSWJO has consulted with its stakeholders to identify key strategic regional priorities. The CNSWJO Strategic Plan can be found here - www.centraljo.nsw.gov.au.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback to the Central West and Orana Strategic Regional Integrated Transport Plan (CWOSRITP). A regional transport plan for the Central West and Orana has been through two previous iterations that stakeholders in the region have provided substantial input. It is imperative that any plan includes implementation and transparent accountability preferably including governance in place. Transport for NSW (TfNSW) is well positioned to leverage the Central NSW Integrated Transport Group (ITG) it coordinates to deliver this governance and accountability. This region would like to acknowledge the excellent work undertaken by TfNSW through the ITG Group currently led by Holly Davies, Acting Regional Director West.

This response is informed by policy developed in the region as well as recent discussions in the review of the transport advocacy plan, reflecting key priorities identified through intergovernmental collaboration and regional transport assessments.

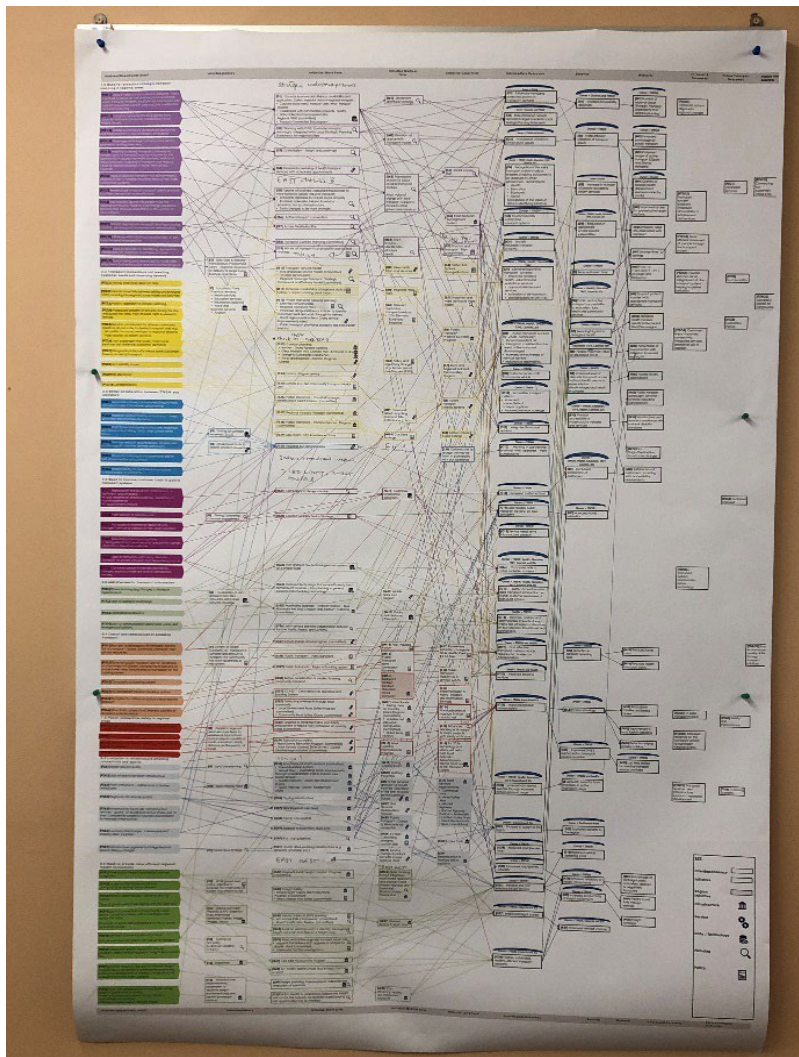


Figure 1 one Input to the CWORITP iteration number 1 from a Benefits' Realisation Workshop in 2018 with no final output.

Executive Summary

Central NSW Joint Organisation (CNSWJO) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of the CWOSRITP. This submission outlines key regional transport priorities to ensure a safe, resilient, and efficient transport network that supports economic growth, community connectivity, and long-term sustainability.

CNSWJO asks that the following advice is given consideration in the CWOSRITP. Firstly, CNSWJO advocacy priorities for transport are:

1. Adequate and predictable road funding – ensuring sustained investment in regional roads, with a focus on betterment and resilience.
2. A safe, reliable, and efficient transport network linking Central NSW to Sydney and beyond – addressing infrastructure bottlenecks and supporting freight and passenger movements.
3. Strengthened freight connectivity and a robust multi-modal freight network – investing in road, rail, and intermodal connectivity to reduce reliance on road freight and improve efficiency.
4. Integrated transport solutions for emerging economic and environmental challenges – considering the impact of the Renewable Energy Zones (REZs), Inland Rail, and climate resilience measures on regional transport infrastructure.

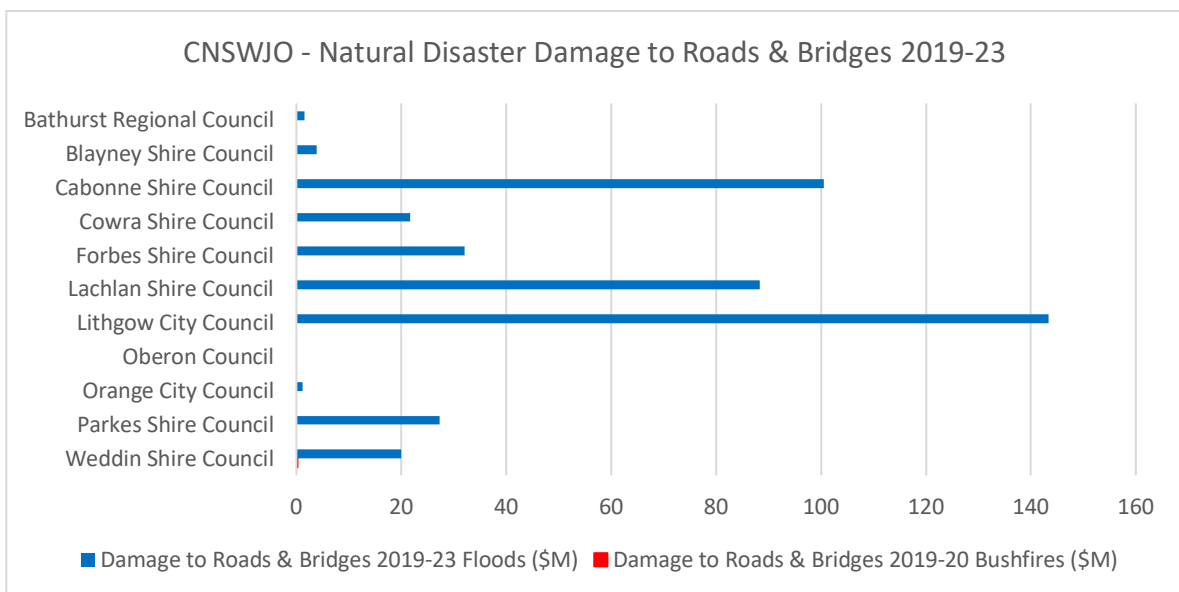
5. Enhancing regional air and passenger services - supporting regional communities, ensuring access to health services, education, and economic opportunities.
6. Ensuring workforce capacity and upskilling opportunities – addressing the critical shortage of engineers and technical staff in local government.
7. Formalising transport planning and data-driven decision making - a clear, accountable framework to ensure transport planning aligns with regional priorities and is embedded into long-term infrastructure strategies.

Please find following more detail on each of these priorities.

Adequate and predictable road funding – ensuring sustained investment in regional roads, with a focus on betterment and resilience

Central NSW needs long-term, climate-responsive investment and integrated planning to strengthen road networks, improve safety, reduce disaster risks, and build infrastructure resilience to support communities and economic growth.

The region’s 16,589 km of roads are vital for connecting communities, supporting local economies, and ensuring emergency response. However, relentless rains, floods, and droughts have left our road network increasingly vulnerable. From July 2019 to June 2023, the CNSWJO region alone faced over \$440 million in damage, highlighting the critical need for sustained, substantial funding to build roads that can withstand these challenges and road maintenance funding has not kept pace with rising construction costs, expanding networks, and increasing climate impacts.



Graph 1 – Damage to Roads under Natural Disaster Funding Arrangements across the CNSWJO from 1 July 2019 – 30 June 2023 (data from Oberon Council unavailable at this time).

CENTRAL NSW JOINT ORGANISATION – MAJOR TRANSPORT ROUTES AND RESPONSIBILITIES 2023

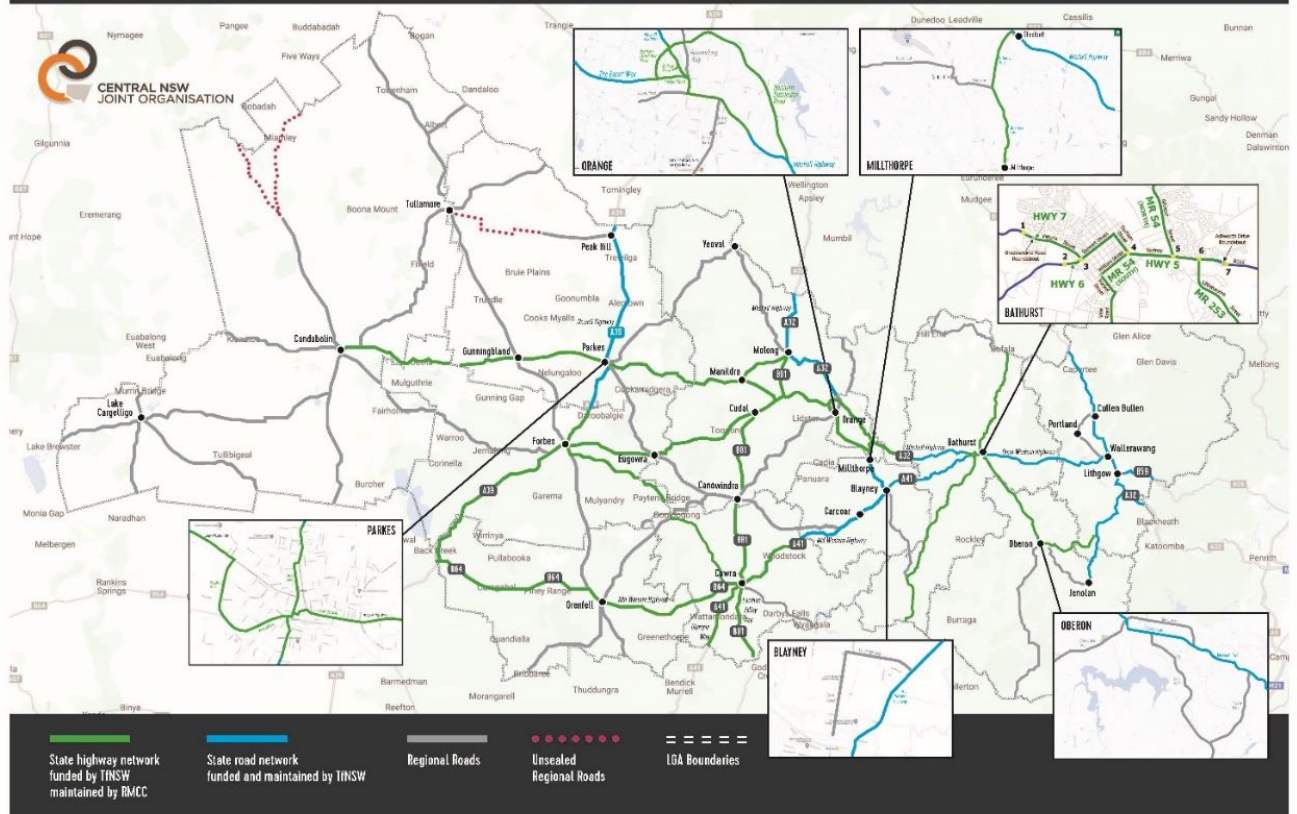


Figure 2 CNSWJO region's major transport routes for regional and state roads, not including local roads.

Many of the region's timber bridges are aging and vulnerable, with a recent study indicating 33 critical structures requiring \$11.5 million in urgent upgrades. These bridges play an essential role in connecting freight routes and emergency services, yet funding for their replacement remains unpredictable and insufficient.

To keep our roads safe, secure, and resilient, councils need fair, sustainable funding that actually meets the scale of the challenge.

Key Considerations for the SRITP:

- consistent, long-term funding for council-managed roads to cover maintenance, upgrades, and road safety improvements;
- strategic investments that focus on resilience, safety, and productivity across transport networks, as highlighted by the [2023 NSW Roads Congress Communiqué](#);
- targeted funding for essential planning activities, such as flood mapping, pavement analysis, and structural assessments, to strengthen road infrastructure foundations;
- support for councils in maintaining integrated transport networks by prioritising investments across both road and rail infrastructure to reduce bottlenecks and improve freight productivity;
- dedicated funding for critical bridge upgrades and replacements to ensure safe, reliable connections for freight, emergency services, and communities; and
- a strong funding framework to support disaster resilience and "betterment" planning. Investing in long-term resilience will allow critical infrastructure to withstand and recover from the extreme weather events that are increasingly impacting our region. This framework should include funding for ongoing maintenance, proactive disaster resilience measures, and sustainable "betterment" to protect and improve our transport network.

A safe, reliable, and efficient transport network linking Central NSW to Sydney and beyond – addressing infrastructure bottlenecks and supporting freight and passenger movements

The CNSWJO region relies on efficient transport links to Sydney, but outdated road and rail infrastructure that limits capacity, slows freight and passenger movement, and increases congestion. Critical issues include:

- Highway congestion, with travel speeds dropping to 40 km/h during peak periods and long weekends;
- Daylight rail curfews, forcing more freight onto already overburdened roads; and
- Stalled funding for essential Blue Mountains tunnel projects, impacting connectivity.

The Great Western Highway (GWH) and Bells Line of Road are vital freight and passenger links requiring strategic planning to accommodate increasing freight volumes - especially from Renewable Energy Zone (REZ) developments and the Rewiring NSW initiative. The movement of over-mass turbine blades along the Golden Highway - up to 10 trips per night for the next 10-20 years - will disrupt road access and safety. Though these loads are not permitted on GWH or Bells Line of Road, displaced traffic will increase pressure on these corridors, making efficiency and safety improvements essential.

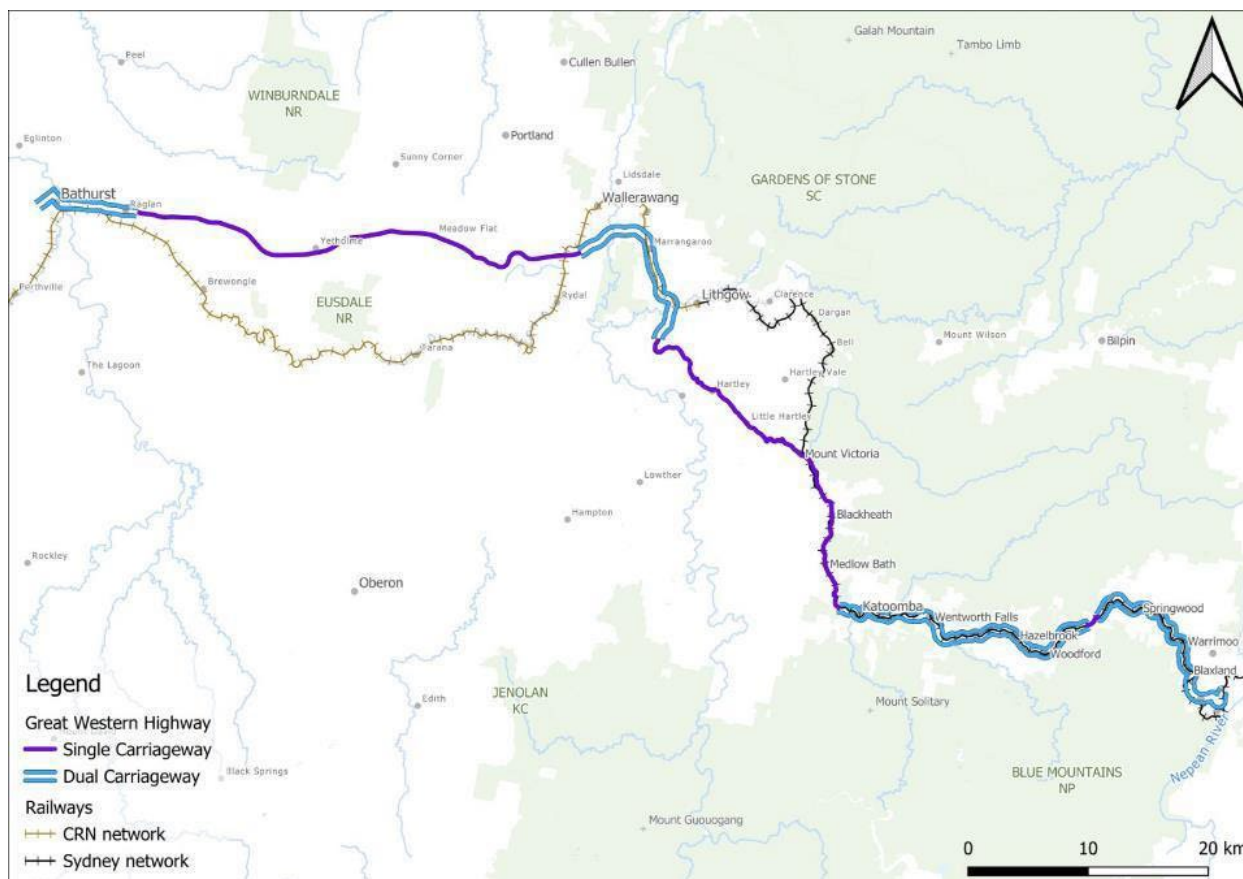


Figure 3 Image provided by TfNSW

The CWOSRITP should consider freight efficiency, network resilience, and route planning. A regional oversight mechanism, rather than online feedback alone, is needed to ensure accountability and effective implementation.

Key Considerations for the SRITP:

- In recent discussions, the regions mayors have highlighted the need to improve the Blue Mountains connection through tunnel upgrades to enhance safety, reduce travel times, and enable medium-speed rail (160 km/h) between Sydney and Lithgow.;
- Address safety and freight limitations on Bells Line of Road, currently rated 3U (urban) but treated as 3R (regional), with single-lane operation in each direction;
- Resolve freight constraints on GWH and Bells Line of Road, which both allow 19m B-Doubles over 50 tonnes, but lack a direct route for larger B-Doubles due to a restricted rail bridge;
- Advance stalled infrastructure projects, including Medlow Bath and Coxs River Road, which are the only approved projects under the GWH Upgrade Program, while others remain paused;
- Shift freight from road to rail - currently 80% of regional freight moves by road, increasing costs and safety risks. Reopening the Blayney-Demondrille Line and investing in Cowra Rail Lines would provide alternative routes, reduce congestion, and strengthen network resilience. Upgrading rail curves between Lithgow and Blayney would enable medium-speed rail (160 km/h) to integrate freight and passenger services;
- Plan for long-term freight demand, with oversized wind turbine blade transport expected to continue for at least 20 years, adding pressure to Golden Highway, GWH, and Bells Line of Road;
- Secure the Bells Line of Road corridor with an M7 connection for long-term freight and transport solutions, as 80% of Central West road freight passes through Lithgow;
- Consider a second Hawkesbury River crossing near Richmond as part of future transport planning;
- Invest in a high-speed, high-capacity corridor now, leveraging lessons from the M5 and M2 corridors, which drove regional development; and
- Resolve recurring congestion on GWH, where speeds frequently drop to 40 km/h, particularly on long weekends, damaging the visitor experience and local economy.

Strengthened freight connectivity and a robust multi-modal freight network – investing in road, rail, and intermodal connectivity to reduce reliance on road freight and improve efficiency

Central NSW plays a vital role in national freight movement, but inefficient rail corridors and high reliance on road transport place significant strain on regional infrastructure. Investment in intermodal hubs, particularly at Parkes, reopening the Blayney-Demondrille Line, and investing in Cowra Rail Lines is critical to reducing reliance on road transport and shifting more freight to rail.

Key Considerations for the SRITP:

- developing Parkes as a key freight hub, aligning with Inland Rail, major ports, and intermodal freight precincts;
- reopening the Blayney-Demondrille Line, enhancing freight redundancy and reducing truck movements on regional roads;
- rail corridor upgrades, including realigning the Lithgow-Blayney rail line for medium-speed freight rail; and
- strategic road bypasses in Bathurst, Cowra, Forbes, and Orange to separate freight from local traffic and improve urban connectivity.

TRANSPORT WITHIN NSW

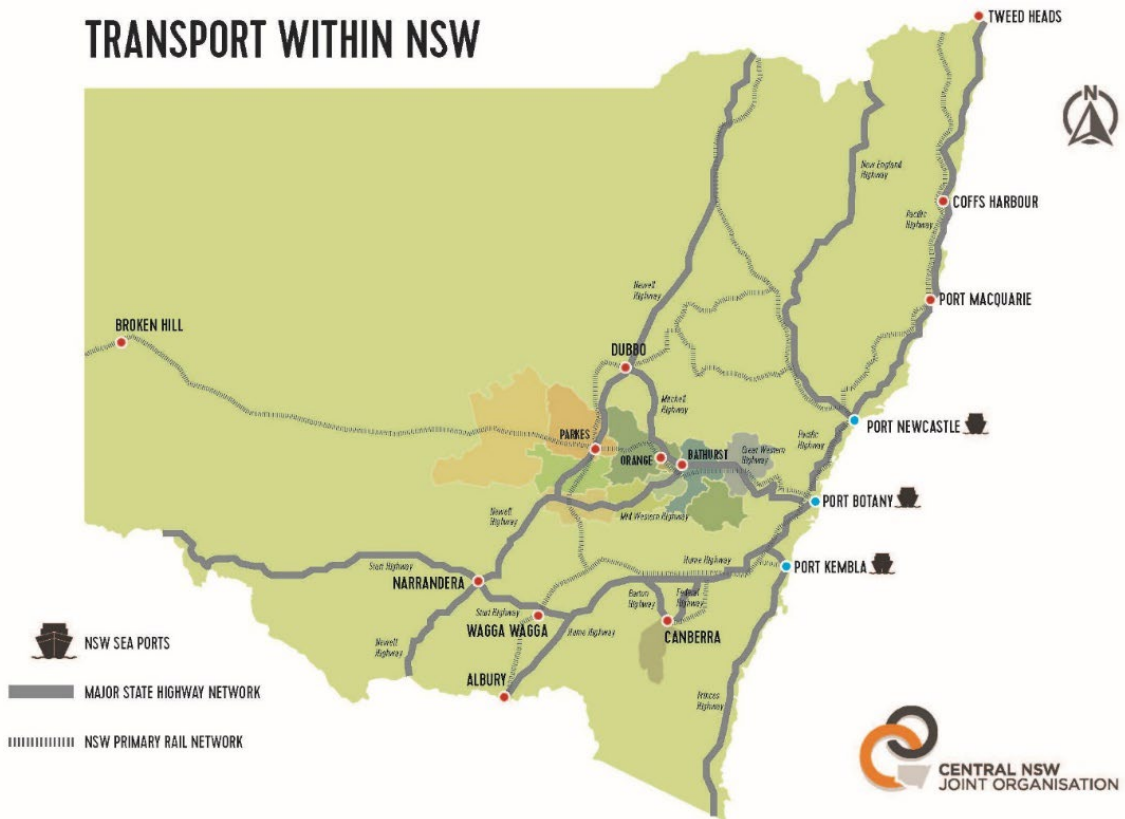


Figure 4 CNSWJO's position in relation to NSW sea ports, major state highway networks and NSW primary rail networks.

Integrated transport solutions for emerging economic and environmental challenges – considering the impact of the Renewable Energy Zones (REZs), Inland Rail, and climate resilience measures on regional transport infrastructure

The REZs and Rewiring NSW initiative are placing immense pressure on regional transport networks. Transport planning must account for the movement of oversized turbine components and increased freight demand over the next two decades.

Key Considerations for the SRITP:

- assess the cumulative impact of REZ freight traffic on key transport corridors, particularly the Golden Highway, Great Western Highway, and Bells Line of Road;
- invest in rail-based solutions to transport renewable energy infrastructure, reducing the burden on road networks; and
- ensure transport planning aligns with regional climate resilience and adaptation strategies to future-proof infrastructure.

Enhancing regional air and passenger services - supporting regional communities, ensuring access to health services, education, and economic opportunities

Air services play a critical role in supporting regional communities, ensuring access to health services, education, and economic opportunities.

Key Considerations for the SRITP:

- preserving regional slots at Kingsford Smith Airport (KSA) to maintain essential connections for regional residents;
- strengthening air connectivity to Western Sydney Airport (Nancy-Bird Walton Airport) for passengers and freight; and
- investing in the Parkes Air Freight Hub, capitalising on its potential to drive export growth and economic activity.

Ensuring workforce capacity and upskilling opportunities – addressing the critical shortage of engineers and technical staff in local government

Cadetships, apprenticeships, and funding for worker training programs are vital to building a sustainable workforce. Comparative salaries, conditions, and career development opportunities also needs to be considered, particularly in regional areas, to improve retention. Programs and solutions are essential to ensure councils can continue to deliver resilient infrastructure, address climate challenges, and meet the needs of their communities.

Key Considerations for the SRITP:

- councils need state-supported programs to address the growing shortage of engineers and technical staff in local government;
- cadetships, apprenticeships, and training programs are essential to building a sustainable workforce; and
- councils need support to offer competitive salaries, conditions, and career development to attract and retain skilled staff.

Formalising transport planning and data-driven decision making - a clear, accountable framework to ensure transport planning aligns with regional priorities and is embedded into long-term infrastructure strategies

A clear, accountable framework is required to ensure transport planning aligns with regional priorities and is embedded into long-term infrastructure strategies.

Key Considerations for the SRITP:

- co-designing the SRITP with regional councils, ensuring local input is integrated into planning frameworks;
- developing a regionally supported accountability framework for the SRITP to track progress and ensure implementation aligns with regional needs; and
- improving transport data collection and sharing, including real-time freight movement data and climate impact modelling, to inform decision-making.

Conclusion & Next Steps

CNSWJO appreciates the opportunity to contribute to the SRITP and looks forward to ongoing engagement with Transport for NSW and key stakeholders to ensure a transport network that meets the needs of regional communities, businesses, and industries.

We urge Transport for NSW to:

1. recognise the strategic value of CNSWJO in delivering regional transport initiatives and funding programs;

2. commit to sustained consultation with CNSWJO and its member councils throughout the SRITP process; and
3. ensure funding allocations align with regional priorities to deliver tangible, long-term transport solutions for Central NSW.

We welcome further discussions and remain committed to working collaboratively to achieve a resilient, safe, and efficient transport future for Central NSW.

If you require further information or clarification on comments in this submission, please do not hesitate to contact Jenny Bennett on 0428 690 935 or jenny.bennett@centraljo.nsw.gov.au

Yours sincerely,



Jenny Bennett
Executive Officer
Central NSW Joint Organisation