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Hunter Valley rail infrastructure expansion gets the green light

The NSW Government has approved a \$210 million expansion of the Hunter Valley's rail infrastructure that will increase the capacity, reliability and performance of the region's coal transportation network.

Construction of a third rail track between Maitland and Minimbah adjacent to the Main Northern Railway will provide additional network capacity ahead of forecast increases in demand and throughput at the Port of Newcastle.

The Department of Planning's Deputy Director-General Richard Pearson said the upgrade would avoid potential bottlenecks at key locations and ensure no additional impacts on mainline operations.

"With the demand for coal in the Hunter Valley forecast to increase, it is important that the region's rail network also continues to expand and evolve," Mr Pearson said.

"This approval forms a vital part of that expansion process and builds on the approval last year of a third track between Minimbah and Whittingham.

"This particular project will also result in the creation of up to 650 jobs during construction."

The approved project will consist of:

- Construction of around 30 kilometres of new track adjacent to the existing Main Northern Railway, including widening of the rail corridor;
- Construction of major new infrastructure such as new bridges, turnouts and junctions;
- Modification of other existing infrastructure items such as overbridges, underbridges and three existing railway stations.

Mr Pearson said the Department of Planning had undertaken a thorough environmental assessment of the project, including careful consideration of key issues including: noise and vibration impacts; biodiversity; heritage; construction traffic; and air quality.

"The Department's assessment found that, subject to a range of important mitigation and management measures, the project can be delivered in a way that does not create unacceptable impacts on the local environment or amenity.

"In particular the proponent has demonstrated, and committed to, compliance with the relevant public guidelines on noise generated from rail infrastructure projects.

"A total of 69 strict conditions have also been imposed which the proponent must comply with throughout construction and operation of the rail line."

These conditions include the requirement to:

- implement a number of measures to minimise noise, vibration and blasting impacts including construction of noise mounds and a noise wall to mitigate impacts at key locations, limited construction hours, and preparation of a Construction Noise, Vibration and Blasting Management Plan;
- design and operate the project taking into account proposed development in the vicinity and the evolving nature of the Hunter Valley as a result of increasing urbanisation;
- monitor and report on noise commitments during construction and provide alternate accommodation for noise affected residents where necessary;
- develop a Biodiversity Offset Package in consultation with the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water to compensate for necessary vegetation clearing;
- minimise vegetation clearing, retain mature trees where possible and develop and implement a Flora and Fauna Management Plan;
- maintain the operation of local roads and intersections at or as close to existing levels of traffic performance as possible throughout construction.

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