

Inland Rail Communications Research Plan

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Contents

- 1 INTRODUCTION 1**
- 1.1 Communications for the Inland Rail project 2
- 1.2 The role of Elton Consulting in communications 1
- 1.3 Context for communications about Inland Rail 4
- 1.4 About this Research Plan 4

- 2 RESEARCH TO SUPPORT THE COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY 5**
- 2.1 Research purpose and objectives 5
- 2.2 Baseline research 5
- 2.3 Benchmarking research and ongoing monitoring / evaluation 9

- APPENDICES**
- A Research materials

1 Introduction

This Draft Research Plan is provided for your consideration and comment. The draft document outlines our recommended approach to research to support **communications advice** for the Inland Rail project. The document provides guidance on how the proposed research activities will contribute to development of a revised Communications Strategy, and subsequent monitoring and evaluation of communications activities as the project progresses.

1.1 The role of Elton Consulting in communications

Elton Consulting's communications proposal aims to restore Inland Rail to the position of being the premier infrastructure project in the nation, something of value to all Australians, not just people in regional areas or along the corridor. We will work closely with the Department of Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities to develop a project narrative and key messages that will resonate with the Australian people. We will remind people of its long history, of its crucial role in securing Australia's long-term economic future, how it will reduce freight off the nation's roads and we will tell the story of the innovative and world-leading engineering solutions being deployed in its delivery.

While not minimising the importance to individuals of localised concerns, our approach will lift the eyes of the community to raise not just recognition but excitement around the project, so that the stories behind its engineering, environmental, economic and community aspects are sought out and shared amongst industry and the community.

To provide this communication advice and support, Elton Consulting will provide a core team with deep experience relevant to the Inland Rail project and the task at hand, including:

- » extensive communication and engagement experience in major infrastructure projects such as freight lines with joint state and federal interfaces
- » deep experience and knowledge in managing stakeholder relations in regional NSW, Victoria and Queensland including with councils, land owners, Aboriginal communities, peak industry bodies and smaller issue-specific groups
- » experience in managing highly contested and contentious projects especially those involving a wide range of stakeholders at a federal, state and local levels
- » innovative thinkers and creators with proven ability in delivering positive messages and materials and having them distributed across below-the-line channels including media and social media; and leveraging the contact bases of organisations including industry groups, political parties, community groups, councils and other agencies.

Our communication, media and social media strategies will complement but not duplicate ARTC's strategies, through clear articulation of each party's roles and responsibilities, and will include interesting and novel content to engage with media and other stakeholders to negate the need for advertising spend.

1.2 Communications for the Inland Rail project

This research plan will underpin the support and advice Elton Consulting provides the Department on the communications and media engagement for the Melbourne to Brisbane Inland Rail project. The insights gained from the research will shape the messaging and tailoring of the communications strategies, to ensure the key messages feed into communication materials before the commencement of construction on the first Inland Rail project in the second quarter of 2018.

The Inland Rail project is being delivered through the Australian Rail Track Corporation (ARTC), as such the responsibilities and target audience of both the Department and ARTC need to be clear. It is understood that the Department's role is to build support for Inland Rail and to communicate the benefits of the project to a broader audience and from a program and national perspective. The role of the ARTC is primarily responsible for communications regarding project and construction specific matters by engaging with communities, landowners, local businesses and other relevant stakeholders.

Construction for Inland Rail is anticipated to commence in 2018 with operation anticipated to commence in 2025. The insights gained from the research outlined in this document will assist and guide the communications advice Elton Consulting has been contracted to provide the Department until June 2019.

This Plan draws from recent discussions with the Inland Rail project team and documents including:

- Department of Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities, Melbourne to Brisbane Inland Rail Brief – Communications advice
- Department of Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities, Melbourne to Brisbane Inland Rail Communications Strategy
- Elton Consulting Request for Tender Response
- ARTC Stakeholder Engagement, Media and Communications Strategy for Inland Rail

Four-phase approach

Elton Consulting proposes a four-phase approach to meeting the communication objectives of the Department for the Inland Rail Project – Discover, Strategise, Implement, Evaluate.

A communication approach will be developed and delivered to meet the communication aim, including media, social media, and issues management strategies, through the following key phases.

- » **Phase 1: Discover:** refine project objectives and build deeper understanding of the project through research, engagement internal stakeholders, and reviewing relevant project information
- » **Phase 2: Strategise:** develop the strategies based on key findings from the discovery phase and revising approaches as circumstances change
- » **Phase 3: Implement:** deliver the strategies
- » **Phase 4: Evaluate:** ongoing assessment of whether project objectives are being met and consideration of whether the approach needs to change.

Commissioned research

A robust program of research and evaluation will underpin communications for Inland Rail. Baseline research will provide a strong understanding of existing levels of awareness, attitudes and values relating to the project. The research results will help to inform the initial phase of communications work including review of key messages and development of the strategies.

Some of the key questions we will be seeking answers to include:

- » **What do people know about Inland Rail now?** What are their perceptions and misperceptions? What else do they want to know (e.g. number and types of jobs it will generate, number of trucks off roads, planned and potential future rail connections)?
- » **What do people think about Inland Rail** – good, bad or indifferent? What do they see as its potential benefits or concerns – for them as individuals, businesses and for their communities (e.g. economic, social and health, environmental)? What does the community/industry expect from the Australian Government in relation to Inland Rail? Which benefits do they see as being most important?
- » **Which messages work best to build understanding and address misperceptions about Inland Rail?** What are the opportunities for communications to build trust and support for the project in local communities, in Victoria, NSW and Queensland, and among Australians more broadly? What are the important stories that can be told about this national infrastructure project? Who are the right people to tell them, and how?

Importantly, the research will complement rather than duplicate stakeholder and market research undertaken to date by the Department and ARTC. The first step of developing the research program will involve working with the Department to understand what has already been done, what can be made available to support the next phase of work, and to develop a research and evaluation approach and questions that respond to the Department's specific objectives at this stage of the project.

We will talk with key communications staff within the relevant Victorian, NSW and Queensland agencies to understand their issues and objectives in relation to Inland Rail. We will identify opportunities for promoting Inland Rail using existing State resources, channels and activities. For example, there may be opportunities to promote key messaging about Inland Rail on their websites or through state-based initiatives such as the NSW Freight and Ports Plan (which is a key supporting plan to Future Transport 2056).

The key tasks associated with this initial research include:

- » **1. Inception workshop** to scope the research and evaluation program – in line with key deliverables and dates for the broader communications activities.
- » **2. Desktop review** of recent relevant research undertaken by the Department and ARTC.
- » **3. Key stakeholder interviews** to inform the upfront revision of the communications collateral/messages/strategies and identify potential stakeholder supporters/champions. Importantly this will include registered Traditional Owner Groups and Land Councils as well as other key stakeholders.
- » **4. Development of research approach and tools** to support targeted and strategic research (that address the Department's specific research aims and objectives) for the period of the contract. This includes the sampling approach, discussion guides, and survey tool.
- » **5. Upfront/ongoing data analytics** comprising a review of current website and social media data, to inform targeted and strategic communications. Beyond the initial review, we will undertake ongoing analysis and report at regular intervals. Timing will correspond with communications and media activity and be confirmed in liaison with the Department.
- » **6. Upfront qualitative research** to support the development of survey tool (for use in the baseline and benchmarking studies). A series of focus groups will be used to explore key aspects of the communications approach with Australians from the target audiences. For instance, along the route, in the three jurisdictions, and across Australia more broadly.
- » **7. Conduct of baseline survey research** – 1,200-person survey of Australians conducted by phone and online in select localities (in line with the three areas described above). The survey will target people across the general population (including workers and business operators) to test

existing levels of awareness, attitudes to recent communications, plus their communications preferences for the future.

- » **8. Use of GIS data / mapping to inform communication activities** – we will use demographic and other data to build an understanding of the target audiences and to help shape our communication messages – to ensure the right messages go to the right people at the right time. By understanding, for example, the prominence of certain industries in certain areas, we can tailor the communication messages to ensure their relevance.

Further research would be undertaken to support the evaluation phase.

1.3 Context for communications about Inland Rail

Elton Consulting will support the Department in the strategic communications and associated tactical activities to effectively communicate the relevant information regarding the project to a wide range of audiences, including the Minister and government stakeholders, industry and community.

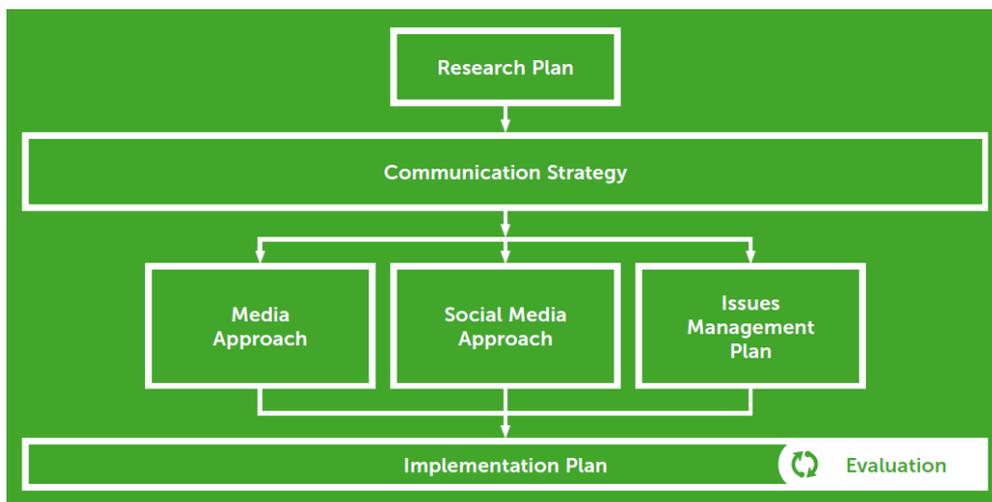
The build of the Inland Rail includes 13 sections or projects, each with their own issues and sensitivities. The ARTC has developed specific communication and engagement plans for each project and it is understood that the ARTC will manage project level communications.

Elton Consulting will support the Department develop the Communications Strategy and activities around the overarching build and program, to ensure the Australian Government derives value for money from the almost \$10 billion investment in the program.

1.4 About this Research Plan

This draft Research Plan will be refined and a final Research Plan prepared that sets out the process, tasks and timeframe for all research activities to be conducted as part of the Inland Rail Communications project. It should be read as the overarching plan for research activities relating to each of the work streams that will support Communications for Inland Rail as delivered by the Elton Consulting team.

The following diagram shows the hierarchy of the documents and plan that will form the basis of Elton Consulting's communications advice.



2 Research to support the Communications Strategy

2.1 Research purpose and objectives

Communications for Inland Rail will be underpinned by a robust program of research and evaluation to support the main communications aim: **to position Inland Rail as a major national infrastructure project which is a solution to Australia's freight transport challenges (particularly for Victoria, NSW and Queensland), generating a range of benefits from creating jobs to reducing congestion on roads.**

The overall purpose of the research is to test levels of awareness, understanding and attitudes towards Inland Rail among the community and other stakeholders both before and after exposure to the revised communications, with a view to supporting effective communications for the Inland Rail project.

This will involve baseline research to test existing levels of awareness and perceptions, to support a refresh of the Communications Strategy. A subsequent benchmarking study is proposed to follow rollout of the revised Communications Strategy, to test any change in levels of awareness and perceptions.

2.2 Baseline research

This upfront research will identify and explore what is known about Inland Rail to date, perceptions of Inland Rail, expected benefits, key issues and opportunities, to inform the development of the revised Communications Strategy and key messages.

Research activities would include a review of existing research (as appropriate), review of existing communications channels and collateral, and new research activities as described in this plan.

The new research activities would be designed to support the overall project objectives, and would be undertaken in strategic locations, including communities directly impacted by Inland Rail (such as Gowrie) and those that are set to benefit from the project (such as Broken Hill).

A **research report** would be prepared to provide key insights and strategic recommendations to inform the Communication Strategy. The baseline research is proposed to be conducted within the first two months – that is, by late April 2018.

Key stakeholder interviews

What? We propose a series of interviews with key stakeholders to identify and explore their perspectives on the Inland Rail project – including current levels of awareness, understanding, attitudes and areas of interest.

When? The interviews would commence up front as part of the initial phase of research (within the first month), and would be conducted throughout the course of the communications process, as appropriate.

Why? Qualitative research provides an opportunity to explore current stakeholder perceptions in depth. Interview findings would be used to inform the upfront review of communications and the

development of data collection tools for use in the baseline and benchmarking studies (including focus group discussion guide and survey tool).

Table 1. Influence-Interest Matrix

Level of interest -->	<p>Keep informed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » State and National peak bodies (Local Government, Truck, Rail, Transport, Road, Environment, Infrastructure, Regional) » Community Groups, environmental groups, action groups, local business and industry » Federal Government Departments and Agencies – including Department of Finance, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (Indigenous Affairs Group), Department of Employment » State Government Departments and agencies – with the assistance of communications staff within the relevant Victorian, NSW and Queensland agencies » Land owners (noting that this group is a key audience for ARTC) » Members of the community – along the route corridor, in the three jurisdictions, and across Australia more broadly 	<p>Manage closely</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Minister and Minister’s office » Senior Departmental Officers – Secretary, Dept Secretary, other departmental SES » Federal Government Ministers, Key Shadow Ministers » Aboriginal Groups (Land Councils, Native Title Corp)
	<p>Monitor</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Local Councils – Infrastructure, communication and environment staff » Think tanks and academics » Industry (potential beneficiaries of inland rail) - freight companies, major retailers, logistics, port authorities, trucking companies, road safety bodies » Media 	<p>Keep satisfied</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Departmental Sponsors Group » Backbenchers » Key Government – BITRE, PC » ARTC Staff » State Government Members » Local Government Councillors » Related committees (RDAs etc)
Level of influence -->		

A detailed stakeholder analysis and engagement plan will form part of the Communications Strategy, however detailed mapping and analysis of high order stakeholders will need to commence prior to stakeholder interviews being conducted. Therefore, Elton Consulting will develop a framework and plan for the engagement with key stakeholders by mid March.

The Communications Strategy will include detailed stakeholder analysis as well as a plan for the key messages and communications activities for each stakeholder group.

GIS research

What? We propose to provide GIS services to support an understanding of key communities of interest, to assist with targeting of the research activities and to support preparation of the revised Communications Strategy.

When? The GIS research would commence up front as part of the initial phase of research (within the first month), and would be conducted throughout the course of the communications process, as appropriate.

Why? GIS research can be used to serve a number of purposes as part of the Inland Rail communications advice. We propose to work with you upfront to determine the most appropriate use of GIS to support the project objectives. For instance, GIS mapping can be undertaken to understand the spatial distribution of communities of interest based on demographic characteristics, culturally specific attributes, industry types and densities). GIS research may also be used to support the preparation of key communications messages and or graphics (e.g. GIS maps may be used to underpin the development of infographics or web content).

Focus group research

What? We propose a series of up to six focus groups to explore community perspectives on the Inland Rail project – including current levels of awareness, understanding, attitudes and areas of interest.

Each group would involve six to eight participants professionally recruited to reach the key communities of interest. Groups may be used to target residents and businesses. For instance, they may be used to target a mix of men and women from a range of age groups including:

- » The local communities along the Inland Rail corridor
- » The broader populations of NSW, Victoria and Queensland
- » The broader Australian population.¹

When? Subject to your confirmation, the focus groups would be conducted up front as part of the initial phase of research (within the first two months).

Why? Qualitative research provides an opportunity to explore current community perceptions in depth. It is proposed that the focus group findings are used to inform the upfront review of communications and to support refinement of the draft survey tool, prior to conduct of the baseline survey. Alternatively, the focus groups could be conducted *following* the survey research to explore the latter in depth and assist with interpretation. Sequencing of the focus groups and survey research would be discussed and confirmed with the Department.

¹ Alternatively, the focus groups may be used to target specific hard to reach groups such as people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who are less likely to be engaged as part of the survey research.

Survey research

What? A 1,200 person survey is proposed to identify community perceptions of the project – including current levels of awareness, understanding, attitudes and areas of interest.

The multimode survey would be conducted by online panel and phone to reach a large sample of Australians in and around the study area.² We propose to conduct the survey with people located in three zones:

- » Inland Rail corridor – to provide insights from local communities along the Inland Rail route
- » Remainder of NSW, Victoria and Queensland – to support an understanding of the perspectives of people in Australia’s eastern states more broadly
- » Other states and territories – to test the perspectives of Australians beyond the eastern states.

Survey results will be presented overall, and will be analysed by geographic location and key variables of interest such as industry of employment, income level or age.

When? Subject to your confirmation, the baseline survey would be conducted up front as part of the initial phase of research (within the first two to three months).

Why? Quantitative research will be used to provide the Department with an understanding of current community perceptions relating to the Inland Rail project. The survey results will be statistically representative of the views of the wider population, to within the desired level of random sampling error (RSE). The survey findings will be used to provide input to refinement of the Communications Strategy.

Zone	Sample size	RSE (95% confidence)
1. Rail corridor	n=500	+/- 4.4%
2. Remainder of NSW, Victoria and Queensland	n=500	+/- 4.4% (or +/- 7.6% per state)
3. Other states and territories	n=200	+/- 6.9%
Total	n=1,200	+/- 2.8%

Analytics

What? The baseline research would also involve analysis of website and social media activity.

When? Subject to your confirmation, analytics would be captured and reported on up front as part of the initial phase of research (within the first two months).

Why? Web and social media data will be used to provide the Department with an understanding of online and social media activity among the community and other stakeholders. The initial analytics review point will be used to provide input to refinement of the Communications Strategy.

² Phone survey research would be used to reach people in regional areas.

2.3 Benchmarking research and ongoing monitoring / evaluation

Benchmarking research will be undertaken to test any differences in the levels of community awareness and understanding over time, following implementation of the revised Communications Strategy.

A **research report** would be prepared to support further refinement of the Communication Strategy. The benchmark research is proposed to be conducted within approximately three to six months from the baseline study – that is, by late 2018.

Survey research

What? A benchmark survey is proposed to provide a comparison with the baseline research.

When? This research is proposed to be undertaken in late 2018.

Why? The survey will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the revised Communications Strategy and identify if communication objectives have been met. The survey would be used to test whether there has been any change in levels of awareness, knowledge and attitudes through the communication activities.

Analytics

What? Ongoing monitoring and evaluation would involve analysis of website and social media activity.

When? We propose, that analysis and reporting is undertaken on a regular basis (e.g. every two months or to coincide with peak periods of online and social media activity).

Why? Web and social media data will be used to provide the Department with an understanding of online and social media activity among the community and other stakeholders. Review points will be used to provide input to the refinement of communications.

Further research

Additional research such as further focus groups, interviews, six or 12-monthly benchmarking surveys, and further GIS research or mapping may be undertaken to support the Inland Rail communications approach – over and above the current scope of work.

Appendices

A Research materials

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