Summary

This submission provides comments on policy issues associated with northern Australian infrastructure, specifically the road and rail transport network.

The *Green Paper on Developing Northern Australia* is an important initiative. The RACQ agrees with the need to develop productive new infrastructure and make better use of existing infrastructure in northern Australia.

The RACQ is supportive of the six broad policy directions for northern Australia outlined in the *Green Paper on Developing Northern Australia.* They target:

- infrastructure
- land
- water
- business, trade and investment
- education, research and innovation
- governance.

The road and rail focus of this submission falls primarily within the realm of infrastructure, but is also critical to business, trade and investment policy. In particular, improved transport opens up new markets and promotes greater trade links.

This submission provides comments on practical and policy issues associated with transport, freight and mobility in northern Queensland. These include:

- Upgrading northern Queensland National Highways to improve flood immunity
- Investing in a four-star national road network in northern Queensland
- Improving mobile communications along major highways
- Fixing the Bruce Highway
- Development of an east west infrastructure corridor.

The Royal Automobile Club of Queensland Limited ABN 72 009 660 575
2649 Logan Road, Eight Mile Plains, Qld 4113

On many sections of the Peak Downs Highway motorists face a high crash risk due to poor design features such as roadside hazards, narrow road shoulders and unsafe intersections. From 2007-2011, 15 people were killed and another 72 seriously injured on the Peak Downs Highway[9].

Without investment in road safety improvements this crash figure is likely to increase given that traffic volumes on the highway are increasing by more than five percent every year due to the mining activity in the central Queensland region, making it one of the fastest growing corridors in the state.

Table 3: AusRAP star ratings for the Peak Downs Highway

Highways	Length (km)	Proportion in each Star Rating				
		1-star	2-star	3-star	4-star	5-star
Peak Downs Highway	267	5%	54%	40%	1%	0%

Source: AusRAP Star Ratings Map for car occupants – Peak Downs Highway 2013

The AusRAP study found that an $80 million investment in road safety improvements would reduce the length of one and two star sections on the Peak Downs Highway from 59% to 10%. This could prevent about 70 road deaths and serious injuries over the next 20 years.

The top five road safety improvements required to reduce deaths and injuries on the Peak Downs Highway are:

- Roadside barriers or roadside hazard clearing
- Improved skid resistance
- Additional (overtaking) lanes
- Shoulder rumble strips
- Right turn pockets at 26 intersections.

This $80 million road safety investment is in addition to a proposed Eton Range crossing upgrade that will address a significant blackspot. An Australian Government contribution to this project could bring it into the four year QTRIP funding program.

2. Development of an east west infrastructure corridor (Project Iron Boomerang)

The RACQ supports consideration of an east west railroad linking the north of Queensland to northern Western Australia and associated road and communication infrastructure.

A project to develop heavy rail across northern Australia (known as Project Iron Boomerang), has been developed by East West Line Parks Limited. RACQ considers that the railroad, combined with road and communication infrastructure, would form a valuable nation building project.

[9] AusRAP Star Rating Map for car occupants – Peak Downs Highway, 2013, p4

There is a need to improve roads and communication across northern Australia. The Iron Boomerang Project could be expanded in its scope to encompass a road and communication component, along with any other power or pipeline infrastructure needs.

The rail component of an east west infrastructure corridor would link the Pilbara iron ore mines in Western Australia with the Bowen Basin coal mines in north Queensland. The heavy haul railway would take full payloads each way over a 3,300 kilometre journey (coal to iron ore – iron ore to coal) to value adding first stage steel manufacturing Steel Parks at Abbot Point in Queensland and Newman in Western Australia.

The proposed railroad would be among the world's most efficient heavy-haul, standard-gauge railroads. Project Iron Boomerang would provide estimated productivity gains and value-add Australia's coal and iron ore by 50% to export 44 million tonnes per annum (mtpa) of slab steel equivalent to A$22 billion per annum delivered to east Asia. The rule of thumb generated economic benefit is usually 3 to 1 in dollar terms for every dollar of steel produced. The outcome is A$22 billion of steel, plus A$66 billion of directly related economic generated benefit for a total of A$88 billion per annum.

Against current operating practice for world steelmaking, Project Iron Boomerang offers a world productivity gain of 20 - 30%.

East West Line Parks Ltd predict 35,000 directly related permanent jobs would result with 20,000 at Abbott point and 12,000 at Newman Western Australia and the rest around Australia.

The project would also meet a fundamental need given the limited existing road and rail routes from northern Queensland across to northern Western Australia. The Northern Territory is connected to Queensland by road principally via the Barkly Highway to Mount Isa. From there, the major road networks go north to the Gulf, south to Boulia and Longreach, and east to Cairns, Townsville, Mackay and Gladstone. The Northern Territory and Western Australia are connected by road via the Victoria Highway through Kununurra to the Great Northern Highway, which extends through Broome and Port Hedland to just north of Perth[10].

The project has economic, environmental, national and global importance to Australia and its major trading nations and steelmaker partners in the steel industry. It is likely to be the most sustainable and lowest marginal cost steel supply chain in the world. Creating a multi-user, multi-purpose, open access infrastructure corridor including road and communications, will place this as a major nation building project.

The RACQ believes the Australian Government should assess the feasibility of this project with a view to facilitating progress across the commercial enterprises and governments involved. In an era of manufacturing departing our shores, the opportunity for a high technology value-add enterprise, principally funded by anchor tenants involved in Australia's world class iron ore and coking coal deposits, should not be overlooked.

[10] Green Paper on Developing Northern Australia, Commonwealth of Australia 2014 p13

On the face of it, the proposal offers a major rail, road and communication corridor that delivers strong benefits for the economy and contributes to mobility, safety and accessibility for motorists and opens up new geographic areas for industry.

Conclusion

The RACQ welcomes the *Green Paper on Developing Northern Australia* as a good step forward. Northern Australia has a big part to play in Australia's future economic prosperity, as do its roads and rail.

It is hoped that improved road and rail freight planning will raise the quality of Queensland's major northern infrastructure and roads. Roads should be fit for purpose and safe enough to accommodate heavy vehicles at high speeds sharing the road with other motorists.

http://issuu.com/bydesigngraphics/docs/abhr_mayjune_issuu