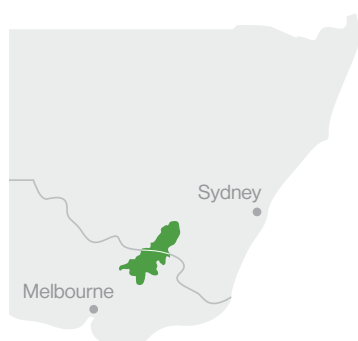




Murray Region Forestry Hub

Optimising the timber freight task

Infrastructure and logistics solutions for regional development in the North East Victoria and the South West Slopes of New South Wales



Introduction

The Murray Region Forestry Hub was established to provide strategic planning, technical assessments and analysis to support forest industry growth in the region. With membership spanning local government, forest growers, forest industry contractors, Government agencies and timber processors, the Hub's priorities include community engagement, people and skills development, resource security and adequate infrastructure.

The Hub is home to a nationally significant concentration of softwood plantations and wood products manufacturing straddling the Victoria/ NSW border from Seymour in the south west to Gundagai in the north east. Each year the region's timber industry processes some 4 million tonnes of logs and other inputs to make nearly 2 million tonnes of paper, cardboard, panels, sawn timber, veneer and roundwood. These products are transported via the Hume Highway to markets across Australia.

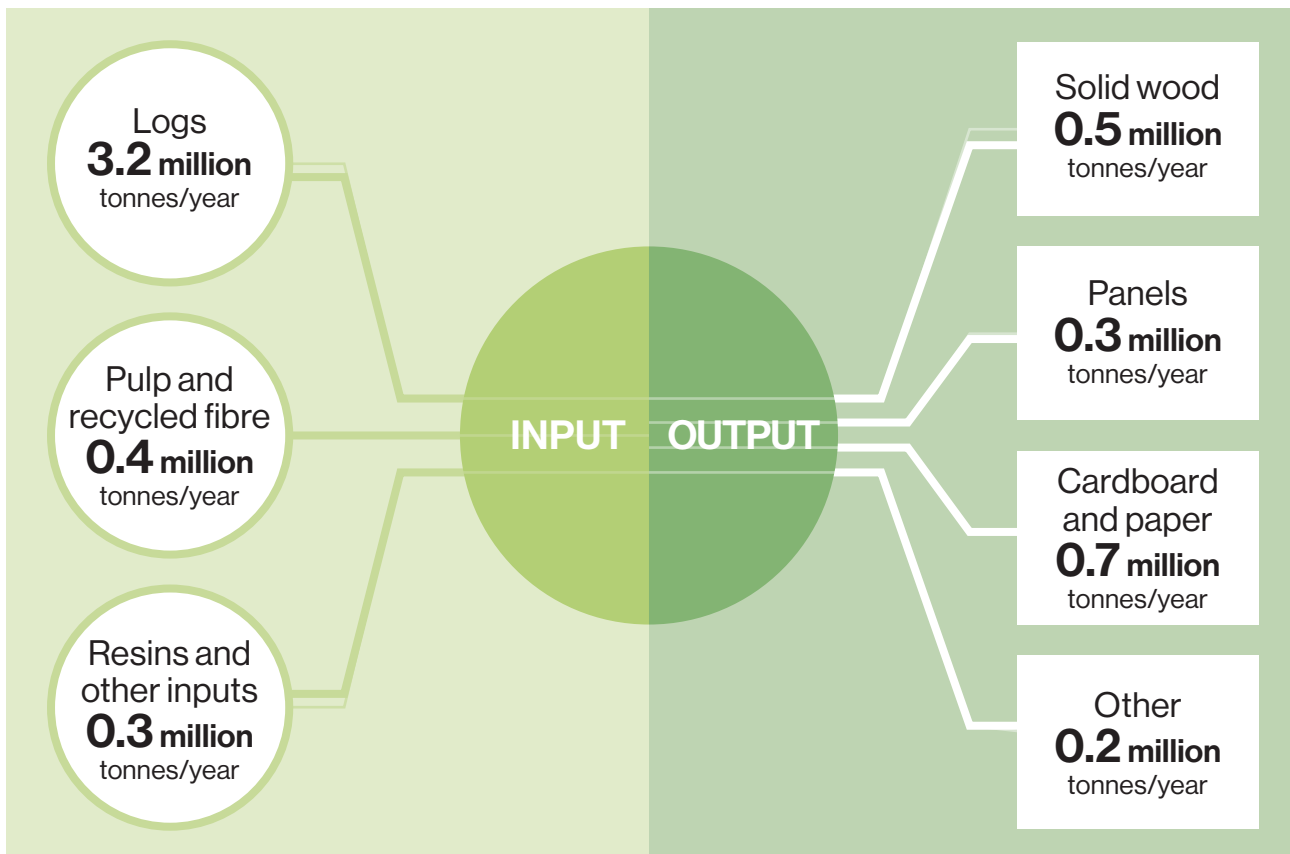
The forest and wood products industry plays a significant role in the regional economy. The sector generates \$3.8 billion in gross regional output and directly employs more than 2,000 people across north-east Victoria and the south-west slopes of NSW, and another 9,000 indirect jobs. Importantly, every dollar of economic contribution and every job relies on the industry's ability to safely and efficiently

transport raw logs to processing facilities in the region and manufactured wood products to consumers around Australia.

The industry is well serviced by an established and well-understood road infrastructure asset base which operates from the forest, through the local and state government road networks to the Hume Highway, connecting it to both resources and markets well beyond the physical footprint of the region. However, there are challenges associated with road user interactions, infrastructure constraints in some locations and potential efficiencies that can be achieved.

The Hub has completed a major study which has identified, analysed and quantified infrastructure and logistics solutions to improve road safety outcomes for all users and allow more efficient transport of timber industry products. This document provides an overview of the industry freight footprint across Victoria and New South Wales and details opportunities for the sector to work with road funding entities other stakeholders to implement those solutions.

Dean Anderson
Chair
Murray Region Forestry Hub



“ Every year the forest and wood products industry in the Murray Region Forestry Hub turns about 4 million tonnes of inputs into nearly 2 million tonnes of wood products that are used to build new homes, keep food safe and package products for retail consumption. Almost 160,000 truck movements are required to bring raw materials to the region’s timber manufacturers and transport value-added manufactured products out of the region to markets throughout Australia ”



Background

Industry commitment

Throughout the Murray Region Forestry Hub the forest and wood products industry has well established connections with local and State Governments and is committed to working constructively and effectively to identify shared road infrastructure development opportunities, and design and implement solutions for those.

The sector understands its important role supporting positive socio-economic outcomes across the Hub. The timber industry also shares road infrastructure with a wide variety of other road users, including local residents, other industrial users and tourists, and recognises its important role in working with other organisations to ensure that road infrastructure quality is fit for purpose and safe.

In New South Wales, for example, the timber industry's long-term initiative to push for upgrades to Gocup Rd, between the Hume Highway and Tumut, is an excellent example of how the private sector has effectively worked with councils and the State Government to deliver a safer, more efficient transport infrastructure solution.

Understanding the current situation

The Hub has undertaken assessment of the road infrastructure and timber industry freight task to identify safer and more efficient transport solutions. The outcomes of the project include identifying specific opportunities to deliver improved road infrastructure and estimating the benefits from increasing the use of more efficient High Productivity Vehicles (HPVs) and Performance-Based Standards (PBS) configurations, such as A-doubles.

Working with Government towards better solutions

The forest and wood products sector in the Hub is eager to continue working constructively with local shires and State and Federal Governments to identify and address issues of shared concern that deliver better quality and safer roads in our community, and reduce the truck trips, fuel use and emissions through more efficient log haulage configurations.

The assessment has identified 20 infrastructure improvement projects to improve road safety for all users and has quantified the benefits of introducing A-double log haulage configurations. The next step is to establish a work program in collaboration with the State Government to confirm and fund the most important priorities and to support truck configuration trials.





Road infrastructure priorities

The assessment has identified 20 road infrastructure improvement projects across four local government areas with an estimated total cost of \$118.8 million. Seven projects are considered urgent, estimated at \$14.375 million to implement upgrades that will deliver road safety improvements for all road users.

Priority	# projects	Shire				Wagga Wagga City
		Strathbogrie/ Benalla	Cootamundra- Gundagai	Greater Hume	Snowy Valleys	
Observe	1		\$20,000,000			
Low	3	\$5,625,000			\$3,625,000	
Medium	1					\$1,000,000
High	1				\$2,400,000	
Very High	6			\$33,300,000	\$40,500,000	
Urgent	7			\$1,000,000	\$13,375,000	
Total	19	\$5,625,000	\$20,000,000	\$34,300,000	\$59,900,000	\$1,000,000

Road infrastructure challenges

The assessment identified three important infrastructure issues:

1

The region's dense population and importance as a tourism destination, meaning there is increased potential for interaction between log haulage and other road users.

2

Well documented localised transport infrastructure challenges, particularly in and around Tumbarumba.

3

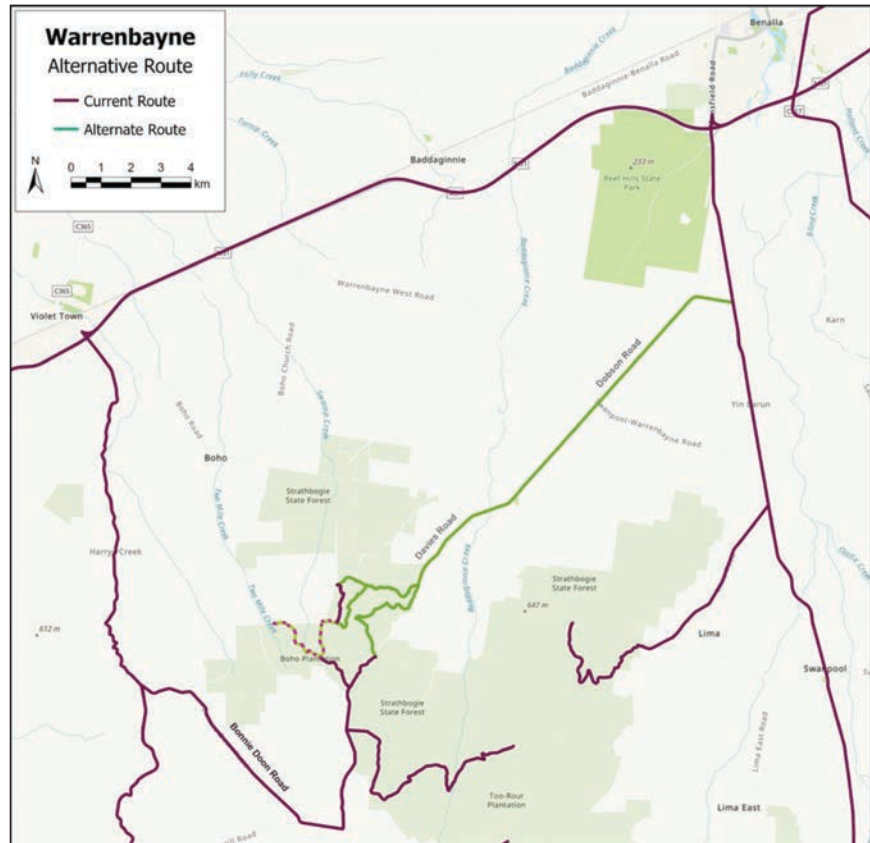
The impact of concentrated increases in log truck movements following the 2019/20 fires, which resulted in an abnormal level of impact on some key haulage routes.

CASE STUDY 1

Warrenbayne alternative route

PRIORITY: **LOW**

The Warrenbayne plantations are located south of the Hume Highway near Violet Town. Logs harvested in the Boho plantation are currently transported by truck south to Bonnie Doon Rd, then north to the Hume Hwy and then to the relevant customers. The proposed alternative route, along Davies and Dobsons Roads, north-east to the Midland Hwy would reduce the haul distance by about 30km, or about 45 minutes travelling time.

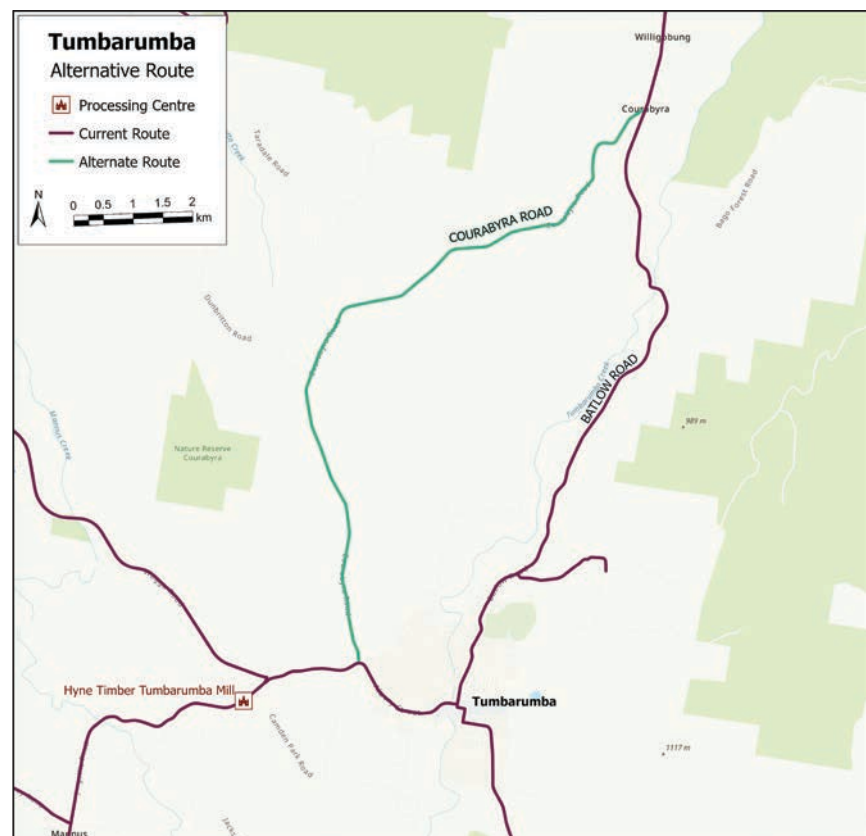


CASE STUDY 2

Tumbarumba Bypass

PRIORITY: **VERY HIGH**

Bypassing Tumbarumba along Courabyra Rd has the potential to address several identified issues, including bridge load and width limits within and adjacent to the township, and removing trucks from the main street of Tumbarumba. A strategic upgrade of Courabyra Rd to a standard that would enable it to transfer log truck traffic from Batlow Rd would require a significant capital investment in pavement improvements, realignment and widening, at a minimum cost of \$40 million. Initially, there is a need to undertake a comprehensive study to fully assess the engineering, economic, safety and social requirements of the bypass.



CASE STUDY 3

Jingellic Road upgrade

PRIORITY: **URGENT**

Following the catastrophic wildfires in 2019-20, Jingellic Rd was a key haulage route for dramatically increased volumes of plantation logs that had to be quickly salvaged from the burnt forests. This unexpected activity followed by an extended period of severe wet weather that resulted in the road deteriorating rapidly. Jingellic Road has serious, substantial, and on-going pavement failures and pot-hole development that cannot be remediated adequately by patching. The industry and Greater Hume Shire have developed a business case for upgrades worth over \$32 million able to support the current and future transportation needs of this important thoroughfare that services the day to day needs of the local communities (including school buses) as well as the commercial requirements of the agricultural, horticultural, timber and tourism industries.



CASE STUDY 4

Bombowlee Creek Road and the Blue Cut Bridge

PRIORITY: **URGENT**

The log freight transport over Bombowlee Creek Road will exceed 7,000,000 m³ over the next decade, making it one of the most important transport routes for the industry. The Blue Cut Bridge was built in 1962 and is a width constrained bridge, with access via a very sharp bend from the east making it unsuitable for the increased log truck movements. Also, only general mass limit combination vehicles are authorised to use the bridge, which limits HPV access. Safety for the industry and the local community remain the priority for this upgrade. Preliminary cost estimates, supported by local government and industry advice, indicate that realignment and reconstruction of the bridge could be delivered for between \$2 to 3 million, representing a significant benefit for relatively low investment.



CASE STUDY 5

Bridge widening on the Wagga-Tumbarumba Road

PRIORITY: **VERY HIGH**

The Wagga-Tumbarumba Rd is an important transport route for logs travelling to Tumbarumba and for finished products heading to the Hume Hwy from Tumbarumba. The road is also important for a large number of other road users, including freight, agriculture, tourism and local community. Four bridges along the road (at Munderoo, Mannus, Murraguldrrie and Carabost Creeks) are too narrow to allow a semi-trailer or B-double to cross at the same time as traffic from the opposite direction. A bridge widening program is required to deliver improved safety outcomes for all road users. The estimated cost is between \$4-6 million.



Alternative freight configurations

Alignment with Government policy

High Productivity Vehicles (HPVs) and Performance-Based Standards (PBS) can deliver improved road transport efficiency, reduced fuel use and greenhouse gas emissions, and improved safety outcomes. The State Government's *Heavy Vehicle Access* policy encourages increased use of HPVs and PBS solutions by supporting innovation in vehicle designs and investing in infrastructure to facilitate more efficient road transport.

Industry at the forefront of innovation

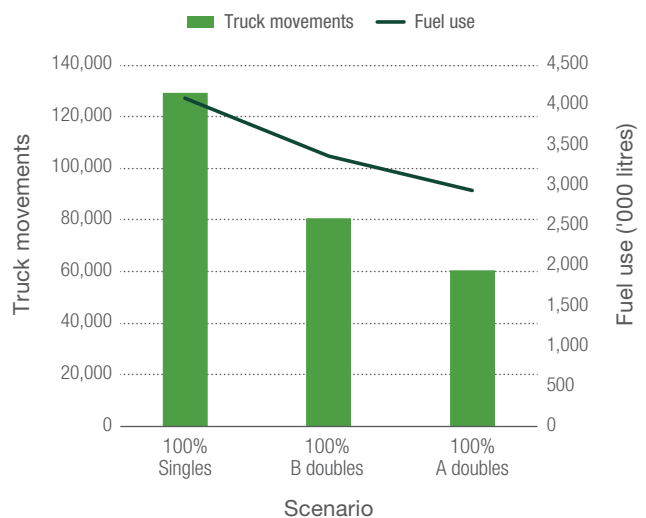
The forest and wood products sector in the Murray Regio Hub has been at the forefront of improved transport efficiency, especially in relation to log transport, for two decades. Almost all logs are now transported on B-doubles, and a reasonable proportion of manufactured goods are now transported on A-doubles.

Measuring the benefits of more efficient freight

The assessment modelled the changes in truck movements, fuel use and CO₂e emissions that would result from introducing A-double trucks to the region's log haulage fleet.

Reducing the B-double proportion to 50% of trucks and replacing them with A-doubles would reduce truck movements on the regions roads by 11,200 every year (14%), as well as reducing fuel use and emissions. If the majority of B-doubles are replaced and A-doubles are used for 90% of the log freight task, the reduction in truck movements is 20,500 each year (25%).

A comparison of changes in truck movements and fuel use for different trailer types is shown in the graph below.



Next steps

The Hub has engaged with the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator to develop and implement a trial of A-double truck transport. The trial is considering the current regulatory environment and its implications for configuration issues such as trailer length. The industry has also sought engagement with Transport for NSW and keen to collaborate with the State Government to build support for and input to this important trial.

