

Managing freight rail noise



Western Australia's freight rail network operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week, every day of the year. It is one of the State's most important and consistent contributors to economic growth and an integral link with industry, regional communities, the east coast of Australia and vital export markets.

Noise from freight rail operations is an unavoidable aspect of ensuring goods can be moved efficiently and sustainably into, around and out of the State.

There are no noise limits within Western Australian Environmental Legislation which are applicable to noise from existing freight railways, however State Planning Policy 5.4 Road and Rail Transport Noise and Freight Considerations in Land Use Planning (SPP 5.4) provides guidance when noise-sensitive land use and/or development is located in areas affected by rail operations.

As the State's rail network will be increasingly important in moving freight across Western Australia in the future, the freight rail industry and government recognise that a collaborative effort is required to better manage potential impacts associated with freight rail transport.

What industry is doing to reduce freight rail noise

Noise from freight rail is a recognised issue by both industry and government. There is no single answer to addressing freight rail noise and mitigation of noise requires action from all parties.

An effective general noise reduction strategy for the freight rail network needs to target both rolling noise generated from wheel/rail contact and locomotive engines, as well as noise from level crossings, namely the crossing warning signals and train horns.

The Freight and Logistics Council of Western Australia (FLCWA) has established a working group to better understand and manage potential impacts associated with freight rail transport and is in ongoing discussion with government about implementing reasonable and practicable measures to manage the noise from freight rail operations.





Measures in place

The industry has identified a number of measures to address concerns raised which are a mix of 'quick wins' and longer term, more complex solutions that will require consultation and collaboration with community, industry, regulators and law makers. Industry has already implemented several measures, including:

- Installing rail noise dampening measures at the Fremantle Roundhouse curve
- Trialling modifications to track lubrication and train operations to reduce wheel squeal on curves
- Undertaking specialist investigations to understand the rail/wheel interface
- Rail grinding of rail curves to reduce wheel squeal
- Installing rail friction modifiers and gauge face lubricators at targeted curve locations to reduce wheel squeal
- Reviewing rollingstock maintenance methodology and records
- Modernising locomotive fleet to reduce baseline noise levels
- Training and monitoring train drivers to ensure compliance with rail network rules such as speed.

Proposed measures

The State government and industry are currently considering several other proposed measures which are longer-term, more complex solutions. The FLCWA Freight Rail Working Group will keep the community informed when any decisions have been made.

Who will decide what noise mitigation measures are implemented?

Freight rail noise is a combination of track, trains and the location or operational environment. This means that all parties in the industry – rail track operators, freight rail operators and government - have a role to play in deciding what reasonable, practicable measures are implemented to reduce noise for local communities while protecting the 24 hours a day/7 days a week/365 days per year operating nature of strategic freight corridors.

What will be considered in making these decisions?

Safety, cost and degree of benefit for the investment are some of the factors that would be considered in deciding what additional measures may be implemented to reduce freight rail noise. An appropriate policy context that supports a sustainable balance between the protection of freight rail corridors and improved amenity for communities in close proximity of these corridors is essential in making any decision.

When will a decision about new noise mitigation measures be made?

Noise management is an ongoing, continuous improvement process for the rail industry and government. The Freight and Logistics Council of WA is in discussions with the State government about the proposed measures. In parallel, the Council's FLCWA Freight Rail Working Group continues to work collaboratively to understand the community's noise concerns and review ways of reducing noise.

