

Questions and answers



GENERAL Q&A

Q. Why is there no set and/or published timetable for freight rail operations, like passenger rail?

A. The freight rail network operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The train timetable varies from day to day depending on a number of factors, primarily customer requirements, weather conditions and port operations.

Even with the experienced teams who plan rail traffic across the State and country, daily schedules are likely to change due to the number of variables across the supply chain.

As such, freight rail operators will not publish train timetables. A frequent user of a road crossing may expect a scheduled service at 2pm, however the train may be held up at port and consequently run late. Vigilance around railways is important and must not rely on when a train has previously run.

Q. Why does freight rail run 24/7?

A. Freight rail is one of Western Australia's most important contributors to economic growth and an integral link with remote and regional communities, the east coast of Australia and vital export markets. It is integrated with other transport infrastructure and part of an extensive supply chain. Any restrictions on the freight rail operations would significantly affect the State's economic development, competitiveness and access to and cost of goods, especially given Western Australia's isolation and lack of manufacturing base.

Q. How is the freight rail industry and its networks regulated?

A. Arc Infrastructure manages and operates the rail across the South West on behalf of the Public

Transport Authority (PTA) in accordance with the Rail Infrastructure Lease.

A number of pieces of legislation and regulatory instruments govern Western Australia's freight rail industry. These include the Rail Safety National Law (WA) Act 2015, the Rail Safety Act 2010, Draft State Planning Policy 5.4 (State Planning Policy No. 5.4 Road and Rail Noise; September 2017), Draft State Planning Policy 5.4 Road and Rail Noise Implementation Guidelines; September 2017, and Draft State Planning Policy 4.1 Industrial Interface.

The Western Australian Rail Access Regime regulates price and access of the State's rail networks. The Rail Safety Act requires that all railway owners, operators and maintainers must be accredited by the Office of National Rail Safety Regulator (ONRSR). The ONRSR regulates all players in the rail industry on the safety and compliance of their operations. It does this by conducting annual audits and there are serious implications for non-compliance.

Q. Who is involved in the Western Australian freight rail network?

A. Arc Infrastructure maintains the corridor and fixed railway infrastructure and has commercial arrangements with private train operators who operate the trains. Arc Infrastructure sets the operational requirements in accordance with the National Code of Practice for Railway Infrastructure (2009), such as permissible loads and speed based on the capacity of the track to sustain the operations safely.

Watco Companies, Aurizon, Pacific National and SCT Logistics are the individual train operation companies and are responsible for the safe operation of their trains.



NOISE Q&A

Q. Is freight rail noise regulated?

A. Freight rail noise is not currently regulated in Western Australia. However, Western Australia Draft State Planning Policy 5.4, Road and Rail Transport Noise and Freight Considerations in Land Use Planning ('SPP5.4') sets out criteria for noise related to proposals for new land use and/or development, and new or upgraded major roads and railways. The industry uses this policy and criteria as a guide for their current operations and rail and infrastructure operators are committed to ensuring all reasonable and practicable measures are taken into consideration to align with State planning policies and to prevent excessive noise.

Q. Why is SPP5.4 important for freight rail noise?

A. SPP5.4 is important to the freight rail industry because it aims to promote a system in which sustainable land use and transport are mutually compatible. A key objective of SPP 5.4 is to minimise the impact of road and rail noise on noise-sensitive land uses and protect the State's key transport corridors.

An appropriate policy context is an integral part of the industry's efforts to ensure there is necessary balance between vital freight links and growing and affordable residential communities.

Q. Who is responsible for noise from freight trains?

A. The rail track access providers – Arc Infrastructure and the Public Transport Authority (PTA) - and each individual rail operator have responsibilities when it comes to noise.

Arc Infrastructure and the PTA are responsible for maintaining the track and associated infrastructure, while the rail operators – Watco Companies, Aurizon, Pacific National and SCT Logistics – are responsible for maintaining and operating their trains.

Q. What causes the noise?

A. Broadly, freight rail noise is a combination of three things – the track, the trains and the location or operational environment.

There also are other noises associated with freight rail. Warning signals at level crossings and trains sounding their horns are essential safety precautions when trains cross roads or pedestrian paths.

Q. Why are there different noises from the same train at various points on the track?

A. The noise freight trains make is dependent upon a combination of factors which include speed, the rail corridor environment (for example, tunnel or open track) and the rail and wheel contact dynamics. This combination means the same train may make different noises at various points on the track.

Q. Why are some trains noisier than others?

A. There are many different factors that affect the noise trains make and the level of noise is always a combination of these factors and sources. For example, fully loaded trains have different dynamics to empty trains on different types of track and short trains interact differently with the track to long trains. Trains can also sound different from day-to day depending on prevailing weather conditions.



NOISE Q&A

Q. Have freight rail companies been breaching noise regulations?

A. No. Freight rail noise is not currently regulated in Western Australia, however the industry uses noise criteria in Draft State Planning Policy 5.4 as a guide. Noise monitoring has shown that freight rail noise levels are in line with SPP5.4 noise criteria.

Q. I've heard noise coming from the rail corridor but it's not trains. It sounds like drilling and compacting, and beeping from vehicles reversing. It's loud and happening at night. What's that all about?

A. This is likely to be related to inspection or maintenance activities of the track, signalling or crossing systems. Inspections are performed regularly to identify potential safety issues and ensure the infrastructure is in optimal condition for train operations.

As part of maintaining a live and busy railway, there are only certain times when maintenance track works (such as sleeper replacements or ballast tamping) can be conducted with minimal disruption to the entire supply

chain. It can be expensive mobilising full work teams to track, so often the works will occur for a period of time without stopping to prevent demobilising and remobilising. Otherwise, teams will have to come back around the same time over a longer period to work around scheduled trains.

The amount of time taken for maintenance will depend on what work needs to be done, where, and the significance of the task.

Residents should be advised of significant works programs that will have noise impacts. Usually it will be either Arc Infrastructure or PTA conducting the works.

Arc Infrastructure

T (08) 9212 2800

E: ask@arcinfra.com

Public Transport Authority

T: 13 62 13

E: RailFreightInfo@pta.wa.gov.au

ADDRESSING NOISE Q&A

Q. What is being done to address residents' concerns about excessive freight rail noise?

A. Cities all over the world are dealing with these issues as more and more people move to urban environments. This increases the freight task while placing pressure on strategic freight corridors (both road and rail). There is a growing expectation by consumers that products can and should be delivered to homes in a timely and affordable way. The same expectation is in Western Australia.

The freight rail industry understands noise from freight rail is a concern to people who live near a freight rail line. A number of measures have been undertaken by industry to address these concerns and control noise at its source. These include installing noise dampening measures, trialling modifications to track lubrication and train operations to reduce wheel squeal, 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 and training and monitoring rail operators in complying with network rules.



ADDRESSING NOISE Q&A

Q. Why can't you apply a curfew to freight trains?

A. Western Australia's freight rail network operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It is one of the State's most important contributors to economic growth and an integral link with remote and regional communities, the east coast of Australia and vital export markets. As a critical link in the State and national supply chain it is necessary for rail freight to be transported on a 24-hour basis to meet demand and export timetables. A curfew on trains would put this at risk and only shift the freight onto the road network which also operates on a 24/7 basis with no curfews. A curfew on trains would require compressing all the traffic into a shorter time period which would have other implications, such as more frequent level crossing closures and increased costs.

Q. Why can't train horns be sounded less loudly or frequently or in shorter duration, especially late at night?

A. Sounding train horns is a critical, mandatory safety measure to warn people in or near the rail corridor that a train is approaching or about to move. Train crews must also sound the horn if their view is restricted or they perceive a hazard on or near the railway.

Freight rail network rules require locomotive drivers to sound the horns on approach to level crossings so as to give ample warning of the approach of the train. In addition, if they perceive a potential danger and/or hazard at the level crossing three short horns will be sounded as a warning.

Q. Can the warning bells and flashing lights at level crossings be reduced at night?

A. There are a many policies, regulations and committees that contribute to managing and planning Western Australia's level crossings. Warning bells and flashing lights at level crossings are an important, necessary safety measure to warn pedestrians and motorists that a train is approaching. Their operation and use are governed by Main Roads WA through the Road Traffic Act 1974 and Road Traffic Code 2000. Any change to these level crossing safety measures would require an assessment and recommendation to change the Railway Crossing Control in Western Australia Policy and Guidelines, via the Strategy and Policy Railway Crossing Protection Sub-Committee.

Q. Will home owners be compensated for damage incurred by excessive vibration from freight rail movements?

A. Compensation is not provided as vibration levels measured at various locations across the Perth freight railway network have consistently been about 10 times below the levels likely to cause cosmetic damage to buildings (for example, cracks to paintwork). At these levels the vibration may sometimes be felt by people in nearby residences, but it is far less than the level required to cause cosmetic damage.

Q. Vegetation along the track would help dampen the noise we're hearing. Can we plant some trees in the rail corridor?

A. Trees may not be planted within the rail reserve due to train operation safety requirements. While advice from independent noise experts is that vegetation does not significantly reduce noise levels at nearby residences, if feasible you may wish to consider planting trees on your property to create some noise buffer.



ADDRESSING NOISE Q&A

Q. I've noticed noise has been increasing over the past year. Can you put in some monitoring equipment?

A. Both industry and Government undertake noise monitoring to understand baseline noise levels. It is anticipated that noise monitoring will be repeated over time to measure and understand trends and the effectiveness of mitigation activities and studies.

Q. I've read the NSW government is doing a lot to regulate and manage noise and pollution from freight rail operations. What's the WA government doing?

A. The Western Australian government has recently revised State Planning Policy 5.4 to make it easier to read and understand for the rail industry, land developers and the community. The government is also working with the Freight and Logistics Council of Western Australia to identify opportunities to reduce freight noise at targeted locations.

HEALTH AND SAFETY Q&A

Q. The freight rail trains are old, outdated and noisy. I'm sure they're contributing significantly to pollution and this is a health issue. What's being done about the diesel emissions?

A. The freight rail industry continues to work collaboratively to minimise the impacts of freight rail. This includes operators running regular programs of rollingstock maintenance. The Freight and Logistics Council of Western Australia is also working to understand better the impacts of freight rail more holistically, including diesel emissions, to help inform the industry's strategy to manage and minimise potential impacts.

For more information and a list of contacts please visit
www.transport.wa.gov.au/Freight-Ports/freight-rail

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