

Most notable was the narrow-gauge railway between Broken Hill and Port Pirie which prevented the interchange of much-needed standard-gauge locomotives and rolling stock from New South Wales to the Trans-Australian Railway.

We must remember that narrow-gauge trains cannot carry as much as broad-gauge trains, and thus there is a need for more trains on the narrow gauge. There was a shortage of motive power in Queensland for which the response was to design what was known as the Australian Standard Garratt and proceed to build 65. The war was over before the order was complete and only 57 were built. They proved to be too powerful and were beyond the limit of drawgear capacity of the Queensland rolling stock. The aim had been to have longer trains which was to translate into to less trains, but the lower drawgear capacity prevented that. We can see that one of the disadvantages of railways is that, in a crisis situation, whether it be track or rolling stock, it takes time to plan and implement.

The conflicting gauges were an impediment to the transport of troops and military equipment, thus leading to delays. Transfer of troops and military equipment required major military encampments at break-of-gauge locations such as Terowie, Port Pirie, Albury and Tocumwal.

There is a strong impression that in their present condition the Australian railways are not well placed to handle crisis situations. There is the suspicion that any future hostilities would be vastly different to what happened in 1939-1945. On speculating what weapons will be thrown at us in some future conflict, we are confronted with super viruses and hacking into bank and national finances. We are also facing the reality that the enemy is already within the country.

In such a situation we could be faced with the need to evacuate whole populations out of a region, or essential supplies in. On the matter of bringing the railways up to a standard whereby they were better able to function in a national emergency, there is the lesson to be learnt from the standard-gauge line to Darwin. Everyone agreed that it would serve a defence function, but the Government was quite adamant that there would be no money forthcoming from the defence budget.

A good place to start is to look at what has happened in the realm of railways since 1945 – good things and bad.

Bad things. There has been the loss of secondary or alternative routes, specifically via Pinnaroo and Mount Gambier, and these have both been a consequence of bungled policy regarding railway gauges. The closure of the railway through Hillston, whilst not obviously a result of a gauge issue was an important alternative link.

The cost blowout and delay of the Inland Rail - This must impact on other rail infrastructure projects awaiting their turn. As an example there is the bottleneck over Mount Lofty for which the only logical solution is via Truro, the Barossa and to Mallala. But if governments are having to grapple with the inevitability that rail infrastructure projects that go way over budget, they may shy away from them entirely.

The failure to get any action in Queensland - Presently Australia is cut in two by the inconsistency of gauge which separates Queensland from the rest.

The dominance of road transport, the structure of which is of many operators in competition with each other. In a national emergency we would be looking for a central point of command which the road transport does not offer.

The split of the rail structure – There were once 5 administrations, each headed by a Commissioner. And the Commissioners would confer annually or more often as needed. Admittedly there were times when they couldn't agree, but the structure was there. It is now scattered amongst many enterprises.

The failure to achieve standards - Examples are track standards such as axle-loading, safe working, and voltages of electrified track.

Rail has abandoned the regions - I have mentioned Mount Gambier. There is also the railway via Burra.

Good things. Standard-gauge connections to all capitals, and the railway to Darwin.

I close this chapter with some points to ponder.

The following appeared in *Railway Digest*, August 2022:

The pandemic demonstrated in 2021 and 2022, that without rail, Australia's land transport system and web of supply chains relying on trucks will indeed become jammed, leading to empty supermarket shelves, logjammed distribution centres and idle factories.

But where would this fit into the Government order of things? We would be looking for some direction from the Government.

My MHR is a good man who works well for his constituents. He is Labor man. He is a quiet achiever and seldom is in the national news. Intuitively, I believe that on the matter of policy regarding railways, Labor doctrine leans in the right direction whereas the position taken by the Liberals is a non-event. My Member has shown a genuine interest in the topics addressed in my previous books and I recently spent half an hour where we talked about railway gauges. I put to him the question, 'Who in the Federal Government has ownership of the agenda regarding the gauge problem?' His reply, slightly sheepishly, was 'no-one'.

'*THE TRAIN TO OODNA WOOP WOOP*' was my 2022 publication - a social history of the Afghan Express (the *Ghan*) that featured a double-spread caricature by Greg Judd. This is one little part.

