

# Strategic Evaluation of Expanded Road Train Access for the NSW Grain Harvest

Economic evaluation of the Drought Recovery Freight Initiative Program, and recommendations for the future

**LOCATION**

Sydney, NSW

**CLIENT**

Transport for New South Wales

COST-BENEFIT ANALYSIS

PUBLIC POLICY

## Background

In 2021, Transport for New South Wales (TfNSW) implemented the Drought Recovery Freight Initiative Program. After a period of severe drought, the 2020/2021 NSW grain harvest was one of the largest in recent years. The program was designed to maximise the value of this harvest to farmers during their drought recovery.

Through consultation with farmers and freight operators, TfNSW identified key freight access improvements to move grain more efficiently from NSW farms to the relevant markets. These involved temporarily expanded access for road trains along more highways and to key grain terminals. In a typical harvest, these routes would be serviced by smaller trucks and semi-trailers. Allowing vehicles with larger loads enabled efficiency gains, providing value to farmers and to the broader economy.

## Our role

NineSquared was engaged to undertake a strategic economic evaluation of the Drought Recovery Freight Initiative Program and to provide recommendations for the movement of grain in future harvests.

The evaluation was conducted using a discounted future cash flow model, comparing data on the 2020/2021 harvest with a counterfactual 'base case' in which no road trains were granted expanded access. Benefits considered include savings in travel time costs and vehicle operating costs, due to fewer trips being taken overall. Moving freight using heavy vehicles inevitably generates negative externalities. NineSquared quantified how fewer overall trips could reduce costs in terms of environmental impacts, damage to roads, and reduced road safety.

NineSquared's evaluation estimated that the Drought Recovery Freight Initiatives Program's expansion of road train access saved over 4000 trips and delivered \$1.35 million in economic benefits to the

farming industry and the broader economy. NineSquared recommended the continuation of the expanded access scheme for future large grain harvests, investigation of further initiatives to improve efficiency, and engagement with local councils to ensure future access improvements are delivered safely and sustainably.

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## FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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