

4 NOVEMBER 2026

Melbourne Airport Preliminary Draft Master Plan 2027

Submission to Melbourne Airport on behalf of Freight &Trade Alliance (FTA) and the Australian Peak Shippers Association (APSA)

"KEEPING AUSTRALIA'S INTERNATIONAL TRADE MOVING"

FTA
FREIGHT & TRADE ALLIANCE

Australian Peak Shippers Association Inc. (APSA)

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ABOUT THE ALLIANCE

Freight & Trade Alliance (FTA) is the peak body for the international trade sector with a vision to establish a global benchmark of efficiency in Australian biosecurity, border related security, compliance, and logistics activities.

FTA represents more than 500 businesses including Australia's leading customs brokerages, freight forwarders and major importers.

On 1 January 2017, FTA was appointed the Secretariat role for the Australian Peak Shippers Association (APSA).

APSA is the peak body for Australia's containerised exporters and importers under *Part X of the Competition and Consumer Act 2010* as designated by the Federal Minister of Infrastructure and Transport.

APSA is also a member and has board representation on the Global Shippers Forum (GSF) that represents shippers' interests and that of their national and regional organisations in Asia, Europe, North and South America, Africa and Australasia.

FTA / APSA also provide international trade and logistics advocacy support to the following associations:

- Australian Council for Wool Exporters and Processors;
- Australian Dairy Products Federation;
- Australian Horticulture Trade;
- Australian International Movers Association;
- Australian Meat Industry Council;
- Australian Steel Association;
- Feed Ingredient and Additives Association of Australia;
- Grain Trade Australia; and
- Tyre Stewardship Association.

The current APSA Officers and Committee of Management are listed below:

- Brian Thorpe (Visy) - APSA Chair
- Mark Christmas (QMAG) – APSA Vice Chair
- Michael Brittain (AGT Foods Australia) - Treasurer
- Olga Harriton (Manildra Group)
- Flaminio Dondina (Casella Family Brands)
- Sarah Singh (Fletcher International Exports)
- Brian Wright (Australian International Movers Association)
- Paul Zalai - APSA Secretary

A list of all members and further information about FTA / APSA is available at www.FTAlliance.com.au

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Freight & Trade Alliance (FTA) and the Australian Peak Shippers Association (APSA) represent leading exporters, importers, and logistics providers, supported by skilled freight forwarders and licensed customs brokers who ensure Australia's supply chains function securely and efficiently. Our members manage sensitive trade and regulatory data on a daily basis, making them both critical to the national economy and uniquely dependent on well-planned, efficient and resilient airport freight infrastructure, such as that at Melbourne Airport.

Melbourne Airport is a major 24-hour, curfew-free international gateway which is of major economic importance having carried nearly $8.3 billion in international airfreight exports in 2023/24, equal to 23% of Victoria's total export value. The Preliminary Draft Master Plan 2027 recognises growing air freight demand, including fast-moving consumer goods, food exports and e-commerce, and forecasts growth across passenger, freight, aircraft and ground-transport activity. It also provides for continued expansion of the Melbourne Airport Business Park, including manufacturing, logistics, freight and industrial warehouse facilities.

FTA/APSA welcome the recognition of freight and logistics within the draft. However, consistent with our submissions to Brisbane, Perth, Sydney and Western Sydney airports, we consider that the final Master Plan should provide clearer freight-specific commitments, measurable outcomes and long-term safeguards. Freight should be treated as a core strategic priority alongside passenger, commercial and non-aviation development.

The final Master Plan should preserve the airport's 24-hour freight advantage, safeguard land and access for cargo activities, strengthen heavy-vehicle connectivity, provide scalable border and biosecurity capability, support digital integration, workforce development and freight-specific decarbonisation, and embed resilience and transparent performance measurement.

The proposed Melbourne Airport Rail is an important opportunity to reduce passenger and employee pressure on the road network. Its planning and construction should also protect freight access and reliability at all times. Passenger mode shift should be used to release road capacity for time-critical freight, while project staging must avoid constraining heavy-vehicle routes serving freight terminals and the Business Park.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION 1 – Preserve Melbourne Airport's 24-hour curfew-free freight advantage

Melbourne Airport's 24-hour curfew-free status is a major competitive advantage for time-critical imports, exports and dedicated freighter operations. The final Master Plan should explicitly protect the operational, land-use and ground-access settings needed to preserve this freight capability as surrounding development and airport activity grow.

RECOMMENDATION 2 – Publish a long-term cargo infrastructure development roadmap

FTA/APSA recommend a detailed roadmap for freight infrastructure, including warehousing, cold-chain storage, automation, digital integration, aircraft/apron interfaces and inspection/treatment capacity. The roadmap should identify staging and sufficient land to support air cargo operators, freight forwarders and logistics providers over the 20-year planning horizon.

RECOMMENDATION 3 – Strengthen and protect freight connectivity to key logistics hubs

FTA/APSA recommend a "freight-first" approach to ground transport planning. This should protect B-Double and other approved heavy-vehicle access, improve wayfinding and congestion management, and ensure reliable connections between freight terminals, Melbourne Airport Business Park and Victoria's wider arterial and freight network.

RECOMMENDATION 4 – Safeguard industrial land for air cargo, logistics and cold-storage operations

On-airport and adjoining industrial land required for freight, warehousing, cold-chain and distribution, including airside interface sites, should be protected to preserve air freight capacity as the estate develops. The Business Park's long-term freight and logistics function should be safeguarded alongside the other land uses provided for in the Master Plan.

RECOMMENDATION 5 – Maintain a competitive and attractive environment for freight operators

Freight demand is highly responsive to cost, reliability and turnaround time. FTA/APSA recommend transparent service-level metrics and, where appropriate, incentives that support the attraction and retention of freighter activity and high-quality cargo services.

RECOMMENDATION 6 – Develop a coordinated air freight workforce strategy

FTA/APSA recommend a collaborative workforce strategy with TAFE, universities and industry bodies covering freight handling, cold-chain logistics, aviation operations, security, border compliance and digital trade, including targeted training, apprenticeships and upskilling.

RECOMMENDATION 7 – Embed cargo-specific sustainability initiatives

FTA/APSA recommend cargo-focused measures including sustainable aviation fuel pathways, low-emission or electric ground support equipment, renewable-powered cold-chain facilities and infrastructure supporting low-emission freight vehicles. Freight-specific actions should be integrated with the Airport Environment Strategy and Scope 3 initiatives.

RECOMMENDATION 8 – Enhance operational resilience and surge capacity for air cargo

The final Master Plan should provide for surge warehousing and apron capacity, redundancy in inspection, clearance and IT systems, and robust crisis-management protocols. FTA/APSA recommend a freight-specific Resilience and Continuity Blueprint covering pandemics, biosecurity events, airline failures, cyber/technology outages and other supply-chain disruptions.

RECOMMENDATION 9 – Adopt measurable cargo performance benchmarks aligned with global leaders

FTA/APSA recommend a formal Freight Performance & Service Charter with published KPIs covering cargo clearance times, landside dwell, cold-chain integrity, truck turnaround and congestion, and cargo-terminal efficiency. Benchmarking should draw on leading international cargo hubs such as Changi, Doha and Incheon, with regular reporting to industry.

RECOMMENDATION 10 – Align airport freight planning with Victorian and national freight strategies

The final Master Plan should explicitly align Melbourne Airport freight planning with relevant Victorian freight, planning and transport strategies, the Australian Government Aviation White Paper and national supply-chain resilience and trade priorities.

RECOMMENDATION 11 – Protect freight access on internal roads and to the Business Park through Melbourne Airport Rail delivery

The final Master Plan should ensure passenger and employee mode shift translates into more reliable road capacity for time-critical freight. Rail design, station integration, construction staging and associated changes to the airport's internal road network must protect heavy-vehicle access to freight terminals and the Business Park, avoid new conflicts or bottlenecks, and maintain 24-hour freight connectivity throughout construction and operation.

RECOMMENDATION 12 – Establish ongoing freight-industry governance for Master Plan delivery

FTA/APSA recommend a formal freight and logistics stakeholder forum, or equivalent standing consultation mechanism, to inform detailed design and implementation of cargo, ground-transport, border, digital and precinct initiatives arising from the final Master Plan.

DETAILED RESPONSES

Protection of 24-hour Operations

Melbourne Airport's curfew-free operation is particularly important to freight because cargo schedules, express operations and international network connections extend across the full day. Land-use, safeguarding and transport decisions in the final Master Plan should protect this advantage and avoid future encroachment or access constraints that could diminish 24-hour freight capability.

Freight Integration and Cargo Infrastructure

The draft acknowledges increasing air freight demand and Melbourne Airport's importance as a freight gateway. FTA/APSA support this recognition. The final Master Plan should go further by publishing a clear long-term cargo infrastructure roadmap covering the scale, location, staging and capability of freight facilities. Facilities should cater for bonded warehousing, cold-chain storage, e-commerce fulfilment, specialist cargo, automation, ULD handling and scalable inspection and treatment capability.

Industrial Land Safeguards

The Melbourne Airport Business Park already performs a substantial logistics function and the draft anticipates continued manufacturing, logistics, freight and industrial warehouse development. FTA/APSA consider it essential that land required for freight is ring-fenced so essential aviation-linked logistics activities are not progressively displaced by higher-value commercial uses. Airside/landside interface sites are particularly valuable and should be protected for operators that require them.

Landside Connectivity and Freight Corridors

Commercial freight and logistics traffic is a material component of airport traffic, and the draft recognises that Airport Drive, South Centre Road, Link Road and Sky Road accommodate larger freight vehicles. FTA/APSA welcome existing heavy-vehicle access arrangements. The final Master Plan should nevertheless adopt freight-first design principles across future road upgrades, preserve direct and reliable access to freight precincts, and ensure passenger-generated congestion does not erode freight productivity.

Melbourne Airport Rail and Freight Prioritisation

FTA/APSA support improved public transport where it reduces reliance on private passenger vehicles and relieves pressure on the road network. For freight, the benefit should be deliberately captured. The final Master Plan should state that road capacity released through rail mode shift will support reliable commercial and freight access. Heavy-vehicle routes must be protected during rail construction and operation, with staging plans designed around 24-hour cargo requirements. Station, forecourt and internal-network changes should not shift congestion into freight routes or constrain access to the Business Park. Longer term, any future rail or transport-corridor planning should preserve the option for freight-supportive uses where operationally and commercially justified, rather than precluding them through corridor design.

Border and Biosecurity Processes

Cargo clearance depends on effective integration of Australian Border Force and Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry processes. The final Master Plan should protect capacity for bonded facilities, inspection bays, quarantine-approved premises and treatment facilities, with sufficient room to scale for peak volumes and future trade growth. Efficient airside and landside links between cargo facilities and inspection functions are important to minimise double handling and delays.

Digital Integration and Data Flows

FTA/APSA recommend Melbourne Airport be positioned as a digitally enabled cargo hub, supporting e-freight standards, electronic documentation, integration with airline and government systems, freight community systems and end-to-end cargo visibility. Digital systems should include resilient architecture and redundancy to protect trade continuity during outages.

Workforce and Skills

Growth in the Business Park, terminals and cargo operations will require skilled personnel across handling, screening, cold chain, aviation operations, compliance and digital systems. The Master Plan should include a coordinated freight workforce strategy developed with TAFE, universities and industry.

Sustainability and Decarbonisation

The draft contains substantial sustainability and Scope 3 ambitions. FTA/APSA recommend translating these into freight-specific initiatives, including low-emission GSE, renewable-powered cold-chain facilities, SAF pathways and charging or alternative-energy infrastructure for freight fleets, while ensuring new requirements do not compromise cold-chain integrity or operational reliability.

Resilience and Future-Proofing

Air cargo is particularly important during disruption because high-value, essential and time-sensitive goods cannot always shift to other modes. The final Master Plan should include explicit cargo resilience measures: surge warehouse and apron capacity, redundant border-clearance and IT capability, contingency heavy-vehicle routes, and protocols for biosecurity, technology, weather and airline disruptions.

Global Benchmarking and Transparency

Melbourne Airport should adopt measurable cargo KPIs and publish results. A Freight Performance & Service Charter should include clearance times, landside dwell, truck turnaround and congestion, cold-chain integrity and cargo-terminal performance. Transparent benchmarking will help identify bottlenecks and provide a consistent basis for improvement.

Policy Alignment and Ongoing Industry Engagement

The final Master Plan should explicitly connect airport freight planning with Victorian and national freight, aviation, trade and supply-chain resilience frameworks. FTA/APSA also recommend a standing freight-industry engagement mechanism to ensure detailed project design remains informed by the operators and cargo owners affected by implementation decisions.

CONCLUSION

Melbourne Airport is a critical national freight gateway and its 24-hour curfew-free operation provides a significant competitive advantage for Victoria's exporters, importers and logistics sector. The Preliminary Draft Master Plan 2027 contains positive recognition of freight growth, logistics development and heavy-vehicle access, but the final Master Plan should translate this into clearer freight-specific commitments.

Clear commitments to freight land protection, cargo infrastructure planning, border and biosecurity capacity, digital integration, road access, workforce development, sustainability, operational resilience and measurable performance will help ensure freight capacity grows in step with passenger and commercial development.

FTA/APSA look forward to working with Melbourne Airport, government and industry partners to ensure the final Master Plan delivers a future-ready freight environment that supports Victoria's trade competitiveness and national supply-chain resilience.