

SUBMISSION

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**AUSTRALIAN
CONSERVATION
FOUNDATION**

Change today for
a sustainable future

Inquiry into the role of public transport in delivering productivity outcomes

The Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Senate Standing Committees on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport on the role of public transport in delivering productivity outcomes. ACF would also welcome the opportunity to give evidence to the Committee.

ACF is committed to inspiring people to achieve a healthy environment for all Australians. For over 40 years ACF has been a strong voice for the environment, promoting solutions through research, consultation, education and partnerships. ACF is Australia's leading national not-for-profit environment organisation, funded almost entirely by our 40,000 individual members and supporters.

ACF supports investment in infrastructure that supports economic, environmental and social sustainability objectives.

Good infrastructure planning can result in triple dividends for the economy, society and the environment. However, investment in infrastructure can also compromise our long-term sustainability through poorly conceived and executed decisions that fail to take into account the full range of costs and benefits.

For instance, while the health¹ and environmental costs of fossil fuel use rises, and carbon emissions from the transport sector grow significantly, investment in public transport is substantially less than on roads infrastructure.² The Abbot Point coal terminal and West Petrie Bypass, both in Queensland, are two examples of poorly conceived infrastructure projects that will have devastating effect on local environs the Great Barrier Reef and a Koala population.

Strong leadership is required by governments to ensure independent planning and advice on the appropriate types and locations of infrastructure investments. Only through independence, transparency and accountability can Infrastructure Australia make recommendations on investments that will ensure sustainable economic growth, helping Australia to become a modern and dynamic innovation-based, low carbon economy.

The case for pursuing a rebalance of the Australian Government spending on transport in Australia in favour of an efficient sustainable transport system is strong. Greater investment into a sustainable transport system will improve the efficiency of society's mobility, encourage healthier lifestyles, reduce transport's environmental, social and economic impacts and create more liveable cities.

¹ http://dea.org.au/images/general/DEA_Air_Pollution_Policy_03-12.pdf.

² http://www.bitre.gov.au/publications/2013/yearbook_2013.aspx.

A sustainable transport system is one that provides efficient public and active transport services and infrastructure. It is supported by best practice urban planning that takes into account environmental and social issues, as well as behaviour change programs. A sustainable transport system offers real and competitive alternatives to cars, planes, freight and heavy vehicles.

Poor transport funding allocations that lead to car dependency cost the Australian economy in congestion and road crashes. By 2020 congestion costs will rise to \$20 billion. Public transport based cities spend around 5-8 per cent of their wealth on transport services compared to heavily car based cities, which spend around 12-15 per cent.³

Health budgets suffer directly from inefficient transport systems, from road crashes and air pollution. In 2005, air pollution from cars alone resulted in health costs from morbidity (cardio-vascular and respiratory diseases and bronchitis) and mortality between \$1.5 and \$4 billion.⁴ If public transport use increased by 45 per cent there would be a 28 per cent decrease in exposure to photochemical smog, which would reduce the resulting air pollution human health impacts. Physical inactivity due to car dependence costs over \$10 billion per year in direct health costs.⁵

Poor transport links increase social isolation for people in remote locations and in the ever increasing sprawl of the outer suburbs. In the absence of reliable and regular public transport services, these Australians have little choice but to drive their cars to access employment and essential services. As a result they get less walking related exercise than people who regularly catch public transport and therefore are more susceptible to heart and other diseases.

Australians support an increase in public transport investment. Recent polling showed that 82 per cent of respondents support an increase in Federal Government funding for public transport and 87 per cent of respondents support Federal Government investment in public transport to address the issue of traffic congestion in major cities.⁶

Yet analysis by ACF shows over the past decade all levels of governments spent 4.3 times more on construction of public roads and bridges than on public railway construction.⁷

³ Newman P & Kenworthy J, "Greening Urban Transportation" in O'Meara (2007) State of the World 2007, 'Our Urban Future', Worldwatch Institute.

⁴ Bureau of Transport and Regional Economics, Working Paper 63, Health Impacts of Transport Emissions in Australia: Economic Costs (2005). Online: <http://www.bitre.gov.au/publications/94/Files/wp63.pdf>.

⁵ Stevenson J, Baume A, Armstrong T, Smith B & Bellew B (2000). The costs of illness attributable to physical inactivity in Australia Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care.

⁶ Auspoll survey conducted in July 2011, commissioned by a coalition of transport, environment, health and Local Government groups, including the Australasian Railway Association, Australian Conservation Foundation, Australian Local Government Association, Bus Industry Confederation, Cycling Promotion Fund, Heart Foundation, and International Public Transport Association.

⁷ https://www.acfonline.org.au/sites/default/files/resources/ACF_transport_funding_report_27-4-11_0.pdf.

Greater investment in improved public and active transport systems, together with improved urban planning will address these issues to the benefit of all Australians and the environment.

ACF urges federal, state and local government to:

- Decrease automobile dependence.
- Increase use of public transport services.
- Use best practice urban planning.
- Provide Government leadership for a sustainable transport future.

ACF recommends that a strengthened, independent and transparent Infrastructure Australia:

- review all major transport related infrastructure proposals to ensure green infrastructure, demand management and integration opportunities are maximised; and
- noting that cost benefit analyses demonstrating public benefit have not been provided, review the full business case and cost benefit of the Westconnex and East-West Link projects, and provide recommendations on the merits of these projects.

ACF recently provided recommendations to the Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee on the role of Infrastructure Australia and investment of public funds in infrastructure (see Attachment A). In this submission, ACF recommended:

- incorporating a focus on green infrastructure;
- infrastructure audits based on determining the adequacy, capacity and condition of nationally significant infrastructure, taking into account forecast growth and economic, social and environmental sustainability;
- no limits on the ability of Infrastructure Australia to consider particular classes of proposals, such as public transport; and
- a more transparent and independent Infrastructure Australia.

These recommendations should be considered in the context of this Inquiry.

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