



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Standing Committee on Transport and Regional Services

MEDIA ALERT

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Chair: Paul Neville MP

Regional rail and road networks inquiry

Report of House Committee on Transport and Regional Services

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Transport and Regional Services today released its report for the inquiry into the Integration of Regional Road and Rail Networks and their Interface with Ports.

The inquiry found that many of Australia's ports suffer from deficiencies in their transport and logistics infrastructure. The deficiencies are varied: missing supply links; a lack of rail capacity; bypasses, lack of ring roads or road and rail loops needed to reduce traffic congestion in port approaches.

Predictions indicate that the freight task will double by 2020. This means bold measures will be needed to equip the transport sector to deal with that growth.

It is important, the Committee said, that emerging technologies are incorporated into Australia's transport network as quickly as possible. For example, double-stacking of containers, modern signalling systems for railways and the development of inter-modal hubs in capital cities, can all contribute to the network's ability to handle the growing task.

The depth of water available in the channels of some ports, notably Melbourne, is a cause for concern. The world-wide trend is to larger and larger cargo vessels. Already, many of the vessels servicing Australian ports cannot navigate the channels when fully loaded.

Another major concern is the deteriorating condition of rural rail lines used to transport the grain harvest. The consequence of this situation is additional traffic pressure on regional roads that were not designed for heavy freight vehicles. However, the Committee received evidence from Canada on a methodology that could revitalise those lines.

Mr Vince O'Rourke, formerly of Queensland Rail, issued a challenge to the Australian government sector. He proposed that instead of simply patching and repairing the ageing rail network, Australia should build new lines based on the latest technology and offering a major increase in the speed and efficiency of rail operations. Mr O'Rourke felt that the proposed North-South rail line would be the opportunity to demonstrate this.

The Committee has made 25 recommendations. It has proposed that, as a matter of urgency, the Australian Government assist in resolving Melbourne's difficulties over the proposed deepening of the access channel to the port. Other recommendations propose the provision of funds to allow a major effort to be made to overcome the main problems hampering the transport network's access to ports.

Another issue is the long-standing problem of disagreement and neglect affecting road and rail connections across state and shire borders. The Committee has recommended that the Australian Government provide funding for the establishment of Commissions, involving each jurisdiction, to deal with those problems.

The Committee considers that adoption of its recommendations is essential to ensure that Australia's transport network is up to the challenge of the next twenty years.

The Committee said that during the course of the inquiry it received 194 submissions, held 30 public hearings and carried out numerous inspections of important examples of transport infrastructure.

To arrange media comment, please contact: Paul Neville, House Transport and Regional Services Committee Chair, on (02) 6277 4940.

For **further information**, including copies of the report, please visit the Inquiry website at www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/trs/networks/