



**CONSERVATION COUNCIL**  
OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA INC.

6 May 2005

The Secretary  
Standing Committee on Transport and Regional Services  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Madam/Sir

**Integration of Regional Road and Rail Networks and their Connectivity to Ports**

The Conservation Council of WA is a peak community based organisation working to promote conservation and sustainability. We offer the following comments towards the Committee's inquiry into the integration of freight transport networks, especially links to port facilities.

Freight transport is critical to Australia's economic performance, it is also important because of environmental impacts. Environmental costs of land freight transport include consumption of fossil fuels and resulting atmospheric emissions such as greenhouse gases and fine particles. Diesel fueled trucks can be a significant local source of fine particles that cause or exacerbate respiratory disease and other health problems. The impact of new transport infrastructure on biodiversity and human settlements is also of concern, including clearing and fragmentation of habitat for new road routes.

Recognising the environmental costs of road freight transport in particular, the Conservation Council is keen to see greater use of rail and smarter logistics to reduce road freight traffic. Integrated land and transport planning is important to minimise travel demand and focus investment on sustainable solutions.

A local example of planning for integrated and sustainable solutions to minimise the impact of freight transport is the Freight Network Review in metropolitan Perth. The Conservation Council was involved in the review process together with many other stakeholders. Road freight access to Fremantle inner harbour is a concern to local communities and freight operators, and container freight movements are growing rapidly.

The traditional response to network pressure to increasing road freight demand is to build more capacity into the road network. This is what road planners had long proposed, with the Fremantle Eastern Bypass to link the Fremantle port with the

Kwinana Industrial Area and Roe Highway to provide access from industrial areas and rural highways to the east. Problem was that these routes would significantly affect bushlands and wetlands in Beeliar Regional Park and run through existing suburbs, severing some suburbs and degrading neighbourhood amenity. Further, there is growing acceptance by transport planners that adding capacity to urban road networks can just encourage additional car travel and add to total vehicle kilometres traveled and associated pollution.

The WA Government's Freight Network Review provided for stakeholder involvement in examining ways to enhance freight transport and lessen community and environmental impact. Whilst the Fremantle Eastern Bypass was not an option in the review (and we oppose the bypass), the extension of Roe Highway was considered. After a freight planning congress, stakeholder workshops to look at Roe Highway and alternatives and a series of working group meetings there was broad, but not unanimous, agreement about the way forward.

The key elements of the freight network strategy arising from the review include:

- Extend the Roe Highway to the Kwinana Freeway but no further
- Get more freight on to rail, in part by improving rail access to the Fremantle inner harbour to make rail more efficient
- Reduce empty running by building container depots and establishing a scheduling and truck booking system for the port
- Progress planning for the outer harbour facilities to take overflow from the inner harbour within ten years
- Enhance the existing road network through strategic improvements such as traffic light coordination, grade separation and extended turning lanes.

(More details of the Freight Network Review are available at [www.dpi.wa.gov.au/freight/fnreview/](http://www.dpi.wa.gov.au/freight/fnreview/)).

The Conservation Council supports the general direction of the strategy but concerns remain. Roe Highway stage 7 is under construction, fragmenting important bushland habitat. Developing new port facilities in the outer harbour will impact on Cockburn Sound, an important but stressed marine ecosystem. We endorse efforts to manage freight transport within the existing road network and support improvements to freight logistics and rail access to the port. Important natural habitat will be protected under this strategy, despite the federal government's threat to withhold transport funding if Roe Highway is not built through Beeliar Regional Park.

The Freight Network Review is an important example of how stakeholder engagement and consideration of options beyond adding new road capacity can generate better outcomes. This sort of innovation should be encouraged. We hope that in its findings the Committee will support integrated planning that involves the community, a triple bottom line approach to considering costs and benefits and progress beyond the traditional more money for more roads approach.

The reform of national land transport investment was an opportunity to promote better solutions to transport problems. Unfortunately the federal government's AusLink legislation falls short of the mark. The United States has a better framework for national investment in transport projects, including requirement for integrated regional planning as the context for any proposals, requirement for community involvement and provision for funding of public transport, cycling and pedestrian measures. A copy of the Conservation Council's submission on the AusLink Green Paper is enclosed.

In Australian cities the growth in passenger traffic is impacting on freight transport efficiency. Investing in freight transport infrastructure to improve access to freight hubs including port facilities may offer a solution, it is certainly important to improve the role of rail in meeting the freight task. Gains could also be made by managing travel demand. Improving travel alternatives like public transport and extending behavioural programs like TravelSmart to encourage use of these travel options can deliver multiple benefits. As well as enhancing the efficiency of freight on road networks, achieving a reduction in car dependence should reduce the emission of air pollutants and greenhouse gases, consumption of fossil fuels that may run short within the decade (peaking oil supply) and pressures to expand the road network (with associated financial and environmental costs).

In summary, the Conservation Council considers that:

- The environmental impacts of freight transport can be significant and should be addressed in the inquiry
- Stakeholder involvement and consideration of innovative options can deliver sustainable solutions to transport problems – as the Freight Network Review in WA shows
- Building more road capacity is likely to exacerbate environmental impact and traffic growth, demand management can provide a better approach especially in major urban centres
- Rail offers environmental benefits, infrastructure should be enhanced so that rail can take a greater share of the national freight task
- AusLink should support sustainable transport options, including urban passenger transport improvements and demand management programs that would deliver efficiency and environmental gains.

Should you require further information on points raised herein please contact the Conservation Council on telephone 08 9420 7266.

Yours sincerely,

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