

Secretary: *J. Luker*

13 SEP 05 2005

SUBMISSION NO. 118

Town and Country Planning Association (Inc) submission to:  
REGIONAL SERVICES

The Secretary  
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Transport & Regional Services  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Via e-mail to [trs.reps@aph.gov.au](mailto:trs.reps@aph.gov.au)

Dear Sir/Madam,

**Inquiry into the integration of regional road and rail freight transport and their integration with ports.**

**INTRODUCTION**

On 16<sup>th</sup> March 2005 the Minister for Transport and Regional Services, the Hon John Anderson MP asked the House Standing Committee on Transport and Regional Services to inquire into the integration of road freight transport and regional rail and their interface with ports.

The inquiry has so far received 107 submissions from interested persons and organisations nationwide. The table below gives a general view of where these submissions originated.

TAS	NT	NSW	WA	QLD	SA	VIC	Unknown
4	1	34	16	23	9	14	6

This paper focuses on the issues and concerns raised from the submissions that are of relevance to Victoria. These are described below in the same manner as outlined from the 'Terms of Reference' listed in the inquiry and on the website.

**The role of Australia's regional arterial road and rail network in the national freight transport task**

The Australian Shipowners Association submission notes that the market share of road, rail and sea transport in Australia have altered since the mid 1980s. Australia's non-urban freight task measured in tonne-kilometres showed that the market share in road transport has increased from 22.37% to 32.50%, rail has increased from 33.53% to 39.30% while sea transport has reduced from 44.02% to 28.15%. <sup>1</sup>(Anon 2005, p.1) The figures for Victoria are unknown but we do know that the Port of Melbourne is Victoria's only container handling port and the largest container port in Australia <sup>2</sup> (Begley 2005, p.1) Its neighbouring ports (Geelong, Hastings, Portland) also have major roles in Victoria's freight activities. The Port of Geelong receives products from wide hinterlands including the Gippsland region and the north and south west of the state. The Port of Portland is a bulk port in Victoria's south-west region. It receives products from western Victoria, southern NSW, SA and it services the principle industries from the Green Triangle Region. The Port of Hastings is currently

a bulk port, however it is planned to become the second container port when the Port of Melbourne reaches its sea freight capacity.<sup>3</sup> (Begley 2005, p.3)

Victoria's road and rail network play an essential role in the freight transport task, especially to the Port of Melbourne. Port of Melbourne is well situated with respect to Australia's southeastern rail and road network and is well serviced by transport links to regional areas. Important source of the port's international export cargo comes from the regional and near border interstate areas with heavy cargos being transported via rail. Approximately 40% of the export containers come from outside the Metropolitan Melbourne region. Origin/Destination studies of Melbourne Port's container throughput showed that 90% of import containers are delivered within Metropolitan Melbourne, i.e. within 15-40 km of the port with most of the deliveries made by road transport.<sup>4</sup> (Anon 2005, p.2) As the Auslink White Paper predicted that land freight task is to double by 2020<sup>5</sup> (Anon, p.8), the role of the road and rail network will become even more critical in the future.

### **The relationship & coordination between Australia's road and rail networks and their connectivity to ports**

The connectivity of road and rail network to ports is vital as it impacts on the efficiency of the ports' operations and its capacity to handle current and future trade throughput.

Many submissions have pointed out that there has been a strong dependence towards road freight movement with an 'over reliance on road freight for bulk commodities to ports and high external costs'<sup>6</sup>. In the opinion of the TCPA, submissions may have a rail bias. External costs are practically un-collectable according to the BTRE who also have noted that externalities could also be applied to rail. There are other opinions, that, for a start, rail should pay for the social/community dislocation caused by the way their lines cut through communities. Also, the next truck emission standard (1 JAN 2007) has reduced critical exhaust emissions by more than 95% from when "externalities" were introduced in Europe. There may be more biases when only 15% or so of land freight is "contestable" according to the BTRE. In addition there are NO diesel engine emission standards for diesel locomotives and many Australian locos are more than 20 years old. Interesting graphs exist that shows that just one unregulated diesel loco will put out as much NOx and fine particulates as 2,000 or so Euro 4 trucks (Anon 2005, p.3) Many submissions also emphasised that freight transport infrastructure is not adequate to cater for **future** freight demands. **The TCPA assesses it is not adequate now**, especially given increasing urban traffic congestion. The dependence towards road transportation as suggested by the Alliance of Councils for Rail Freight Development is due to the lack of connecting rail network both within Victoria and its neighbouring states.<sup>7</sup> (White 2005, p.1). The TCPA questions any undue assumption of credibility for such an overtly rail boosting organisation. The problems are also due to lack of rail system capacity, timely deliveries, the fact that origin/destinations are very different now than when the rail system was built and that many of the seasonal grain lines are now uneconomic. Mildura is currently facing such a problem as direct freight connectivity to Australia's Ports and major cities is currently limited by shortcomings in the existing road and rail system.<sup>8</sup> (Anon 2005, p.2). Mildura is one just one regional service that needs to thought through. Ballarat and Bendigo lines have just been "upgraded", in broad gauge, and the single track replacing the former double track Bendigo line will be limiting. The use of concrete

sleepers during rehabilitation that cannot be converted to standard gauge or dual gauge is also limiting. Because the Bendigo line is now largely single tracked, its capacity to handle goods trains with widely divergent performance characteristics from high speed passenger trains has been severely curtailed.

The existence of two gauges in Victoria's poses a major problem for rail transportation because in some instances double handling is required which increases travel time and is inefficient and uneconomic, especially with Victoria's relatively short distances. Lack of connectivity between two gauges provides insufficient connectivity to Victorian ports and places many Victoria's industry at a disadvantage in the international market. The joint submission from Mildura Regional City Council and other parties in that region have stressed that their primary industries are under threat from international competitors like Chile, Argentina and South Africa and that any significant infrastructure improvements help productivity and boost regional businesses.<sup>9</sup> (Anon 2005, p.3) The Murray Goulburn Valley (Shepparton) is another region where rail is unconnected to the national freight network because the Shepparton line is broad gauge. It is one of Australia's largest fruit growing regions. Speed and reliability are essential for perishables and livestock with no direct link with Sydney or Adelaide unless it changes gauge.<sup>10</sup> The TCPA view is that fresh produce going to Sydney and Adelaide goes by truck because any rail journey would require a trip through Melbourne where the goods would have to be moved to a block train anyway. Shepparton has a very high per capita ownership of trucks and there is no way rail can compete in running times to Sydney, Brisbane or Adelaide markets. (White 2005, p.4)

A similar situation also exists to the east of the Melbourne Terminus where there are no standard gauges. There is no standard gauge even as far as Dandenong. This limits the opportunity to link Gippsland, South Gippsland or the Port of Hastings directly by rail to the National Rail Network.

The Melbourne to Sydney rail corridor is a one-line broad gauge from Melbourne to Albury, then one line standard gauge to Sydney. Plantation North East Inc said that "the need to standardized and upgrade this link to at least twin board gauges is paramount for all regionally based industries and for commodity growers so that all port options can be considered when consigning logs and processed timber for export."<sup>11</sup> (Young 2005, p.2) The TCPA supports the view, that the sooner there is ONLY a standard rail gauge network the better the nation will be positioned. We note, however, that Melbourne and Brisbane both have extensive and complex non-standard rail gauge suburban passenger rail networks which would be cost prohibitive to switch. TCPA notes in good humour that it was a sudden unilateral switch by the NSW government to 4'8½" gauge in the 1850s in contravention of an agreement with Victoria and South Australia to make 5'3" the national standard gauge, which is responsible for the present rail gauge woes in SE Australia.

The Mildura to Geelong rail corridor as suggested by the Alliance of Councils for Rail Freight Development is another link that needs to be standardized as it will help create a seamless, connective and competitive rail freight-forwarding route to the Port of Melbourne for container exports and for moving bulk products to the Port of Geelong and Portland.<sup>12</sup> (White 2005, p.4)

In fact almost all of the submissions from Victoria urged that regional rail should be fully standardized. Although AusLink has identified the Melbourne to Mildura corridor as one of the National Regional Network with confirmed intentions by the state and federal government to gauge standardise the corridor from Geelong to Mildura, no work has been done.<sup>13</sup> (Anon, p.3) TCPA is quite aware that there is no

guarantee that standardized or any other rail links will survive in a totally competitive transport world. The rail service must excel to survive but it needs improved infrastructure to improve its competitiveness.

The Victorian rail network limitations described above are part of the reason, some think a minor part of the reason there has been such a shift towards road transportation. But apart from any gauge issues, rail lost marketshare because it was unreliable, inflexible, slow and some of the country lines were uneconomic to maintain and operate. A primary reason for current low rail modal share and obstacle for future rail expansion in region to port traffic is poor connectivity. As indicated by Adsteam Marine limited that "Many market driven logistics have shown a strong preference for roads where there is no additional handling between transport modes and to a much lesser degree rail. Few potential users of sea or rail transport have an in-house rail or marine terminal adjacent to their places of production and consumption, with the result that frequently such cargo is only able to move by road where it can afford to do so, or simply does not move at all."<sup>14</sup> (Sulicich 2005, p.2)

Other explanations such as ongoing policy distortions that subsidises road operators, investment inertia in the absence of longer term investment certainty and misalignment of objectives and lack of coordination between key logistic chain participants have been identified as main reasons that prevented the benefits of rail's lower cost compared to road.<sup>15</sup> (Anon 2005, p.2). The TCPA supports the view of the Bureau of Transport and Regional Economics, the National Transport Commission and the last two federal transport ministers. The last year for which data is available (1998!) shows that road costs attributable to trucks were \$1280 million but trucks were charged \$1393 million, 110% over recovery. Rail mode share of land freight in the Melbourne to Sydney corridor is as low as 15% compared to about 80% from Adelaide to Perth.<sup>16</sup> (Anon 2005, p.9).

Contrary to statements in one submission to the Inquire, standard truck axle mass limits to apply in Victoria to all heavy vehicles including B-doubles. At the old statutory mass limits that is 62.5t GCM and at the road-friendly higher mass limits 68t. One of the TCPA Committee members was on the NRTC Mass Limits Review Steering Committee for two years and is available to provide additional input. However, over reliance towards our roads will have some negative economic, social and environmental problems. Bottleneck congestion, greenhouse emissions, noise pollution and safety are just some of the common issues. (Further investigation is required to look into this in greater detail) The Australian Transport Safety Bureau Fatal Road Crash Database showed that 71% of all fatalities involving articulated trucks occurred on roads with speed of 80km/h and over. Further increase use of heavy vehicles could exacerbate this issue<sup>17</sup> (Marsh 2005, p.6). TCPA notes that that percentage of fatalities is not surprising considering that 82% of fuel used by articulated vehicles is burned in non-metro areas. TCPA also notes that the ATSB, BTRE and other organisations attribute fault in 70-80% of the collisions to the car driver. That, of course, does not mitigate the social impacts, but points the way towards possible measures to reduce the problem though education and cost effective road improvements rather than inefficient operational limitations on articulated vehicles.

**Policies & measures required to assist in achieving greater efficiency in the Australian transport network with particular reference to:**

- land transport access to ports
- capacity & operation of major ports

- **movement of bulk export commodities such as grain & coal**
- **the role of intermodal freight hubs in regional areas**
- **opportunities to achieve greater efficiency in the use of existing infrastructure**
- **possible advantages of using intelligent tracking technology**

Many different measures have been suggested in the submissions. Of these, submissions from various regional areas of Victoria have indicated that a sustainable transport system and network needs to be developed for regional exports and that a wider recognition and understanding of rail markets and their impacts on regional development are important. The TCPA believes we need efficient and cost effective transport systems or our business sector is out of the race. The TCPA questions the aspect of rail which has proved itself to be spectacularly unable to compete for 85% of Australia's non-bulk freight market. . The inadequacy in transport systems particularly with the failure to provide rail network has lead to lost export opportunities, some of this is a result of the different gauge systems that fail to connect to the National Rail Network. Some historians argue that the state (then colonial) rail systems were built to connect regions to their ports to support England's Mercantile System and therefore they essentially radiate out from our capital cities which are all major ports. This may lead one to confuse domestic and export freight. This inquiry is primarily about export freight. Since 2002, none of the gauge standardization projects have moved past the study or reporting stage. Only the west of Victoria have fully gauge standardised rail network.<sup>18</sup> (Anon 2005, p.5) In fact, it would be better off if all rail lines in Victoria can be upgraded for gauge standardisation and be able to support at least 23 tonne axle loading.<sup>19</sup> (White 2005, p.2) It would be financially suicidal to convert Melbourne's broad gauge suburban train network. Dual gauge options need additional investigation.

Funding towards freight transportation should be more balanced as suggested in the report released by the Productivity Commission into the National Competition Policy (NCP) reforms. It stated that "for transport, policy should work towards an efficient and sustainable national freight system that does not distort activity in favour of individual transport modes."<sup>20</sup> (Anon 2005, p.13) Some submissions particularly those from shipping companies and the Ports have suggested reconsiderations into using sea transportation as it requires no permanent route infrastructure, it is the most fuel efficient compared to road and rail, it generates the least greenhouse emissions, creates the least social impact and port infrastructure for sea transport is fully funded by the shipping industry.<sup>21</sup> (Anon 2005, p.2) TCPA notes it is also the slowest and a good part of that is due to delays while waiting for a reasonable load. It is hopeful that in the future a fleet of small, fast coastal shipping vessels will reduce transit times between ports by sea, taking some of the load off our road and rail network. Water transport costs compared to rail and road transport is in fact at a much lower rate. It is in the ratio of 1:4:10 cents per tonne kilometer respectively.<sup>22</sup> (Sulicich 2005, p.2)

Submissions towards road funding have also been bought up as a few parties have said that funding from the State and Federal Government is required for the maintenance and upgrade of local roads as part of the 'Road 2 Recovery' program. Additional local road funding is essential in any areas where (for instance) obsolete rail grain lines are closed forcing additional grain cartage by road.

In regards to capacity and operations of major ports, Australia still predominately uses 20ft containers for trade, however the trend is towards 40ft containers. While they occupy more vessel space, they materially assist in better use of the vessel's deadweight loading capability. It is inevitable that Australian industry will increasingly need to use 40ft containers if it is to maintain and build its export base in the future.<sup>23</sup> (Martyn 2005, p.1) which means that our land transport systems must be able to efficiently handle 40 foot containers with 34t payloads. Such loading presents challenges under current road regulations.

The Channel Deepening is another hot topic mentioned in many submissions. Many saw the Channel Deepening project as a means for additional trade opportunities rather than simply maintain existing ones. Currently, about 30% of container ships that visit Melbourne cannot enter or leave the port fully loaded because of draught restrictions<sup>24</sup> (Anon 2005, p.4). P & O Ports Limited have described the delay in the Melbourne Channel Deepening as a "disappointment which prevented the full economic of scale from the use of larger container ships and potentially has an impact to all of the major container ports in Australia."<sup>25</sup> (Blood 2005, p.3) Many believed it is an important project and it shouldn't be delayed any further.

Movement of bulk commodities have been done predominately on broad and standard rail gauge connections. The Port of Portland is the main port for handling bulk commodities and rail connections in that region have been standardised in part. There is a broad gauge line from Mt Gambier. Not many issues have been raised in this regard as submissions are supportive towards the movement of grain via rail and will continue to support this view as it provides a greater accumulative capacity at the ports for loading of vessels.

Many submissions called for improving rail productivity and some of the ways were through wider double stacking of containers, upgrading rail line load capacity to 23 tonnes per axle and wider availability of rolling stock for carrying 9'6" and 10' high containers single stacked on some lines.

Setting up intermodal freight hubs was another agenda that many believed is important but their viability wasn't explored or elaborated in any detail. Some criteria for intermodal hubs as suggested by Shipping Australia Ltd include sufficient commercial throughput and viability, cost effective to participants, have ability to undertake container depot tasks and possess the ability to efficiently deliver containers in large volumes to the port at relatively short notice.<sup>26</sup> (Anon 2005, p.8) Already there are a number of regional intermodal freight terminals which are linked to Melbourne. These are established at Merbein (Wakefield), Shepparton (Goulbourn Valley International Terminal), Griffith (Riverina Freight Terminal) and Bomen (Wagga Wagga). New development is underway at Wodonga (Wodonga Logic).<sup>27</sup> (Anon 2005, p.6) Benefits of intermodal freight hubs can include gains in efficiency, security, and investment in infrastructure. Also the use of cheaper land and the opportunities to aggregate cargo into single large shipments can be effectively transported and handled at port terminals than going through multiple trips which may lead to delays and congestion.

Overall, many believed that a national strategy would have a direct positive impact on any specific measures that could be considered to address network impediments such as land transport access to ports and installation of intermodal freight hubs.

## **The role of the 3 levels of Government & the private sector in providing & maintaining the regional transport network**

Many believed that the federal government would need to be more involved with a more proactive approach of both logistics and transport policy as well as regional development policy. The TCPA believes policy is meaningless without funding. AusLink provides both and a recent COAG meeting voted to extend AusLink funding to ports and channels. This action is supported by the TCPA. In addition, the government will need to have a clearer direction and need to have a better understanding of the planning and detail strategies of the major ports and its connectivity. Most importantly, planning for long term freight transport requires a high level of co-ordination between the three levels of government. In the past, rail development has been neglected and should now receive more attention. Rail development has been neglected because it was uneconomic, especially when under government ownership. Rail never paid its own way except in specific instances such as Queensland Rail gouging coal miners to subsidise operations. Maybe coal revenue is the reason why the Queensland government has not sold off QR.

They should also work together to deliver a high level of environmental sustainability and to meet safety requirements in particular to the OH & S concerns. These must be realistic and should be coordinated between governments and not continuously changed.<sup>28</sup> (Anon 2005, p.13). The case for rail as a sustainable system weakens rapidly when applied to most regional and grain lines. The case is strongest for bulk operations like coal and iron ore and longhaul like east west. That might apply to Melbourne-Brisbane after east coast rail is upgraded but Melbourne-Sydney and Sydney-Brisbane are short hauls for rail to be efficient and effective, especially when one factors in that most of the goods get to and from rail by truck. Double stacking is part of the reason east west rail has such high market share

Given that investments are swayed by political considerations, sometimes investments are inefficient and will involve contribution from the private sector. Private sector involvement has grown significantly in recent years and many believed it is likely to continue in the future.

## **CONCLUSION**

The submissions have provided many views as to what people thought about the integration of road freight transport and regional rail and their interface with ports. Many submissions have addressed issues that are in the interest of their business. This made it difficult to give an unbiased account of what has been said. Nevertheless the primary issue associated with Victoria which virtually all parties agreed upon is the full standardisation of rail gauges so that it can be connected to the National Rail Network. Resolving this problem will help improve freight movement both at the inter and intrastate and allows more opportunities for regional business growth and hence giving a boost to the economy and meeting future freight level demands. Export rail freight does not go interstate. This Inquiry is about export freight which is growing at twice the rate of domestic freight

Many also agreed intermodal hubs would benefit the whole integration and connectivity of rail, roads to ports but it will need to be looked at. The TCPA strongly

states that land use allocation should be looked at now and must be if they are going to be a viable solution to the problems of individual transport corridors. Connectivity and neutralisation of rail access with roads is important, and support from the three levels of government towards this is paramount.

Given the contents of the submissions, there were certain issues/topics that could have been addressed in more detail. These include:

- an elaboration into the social and environmental impacts that freight transport infrastructure currently imposed and what strategies have been/will be undertaken/applied to future planning
- comprehensive feasibility studies into the more effective and efficient methods of transportation and how it is related to sustainable planning
- more detail views into the intelligent tracking technology on rail freight and ports, i.e. using RFID/EPC tag systems
- detail into the economic impacts associated with double handling and time delays
- more detail into the ports area in regards to the future projections,
- reviews or studies undertaken into the need for enhanced infrastructure on a total supply basis

Thank you for this opportunity to provide input to the Inquiry. If you have any queries or wish to discuss any points we have raised, please feel free to contact us.

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<sup>1</sup> Anon, May 2005, *Inquiry into interaction of regional road and rail networks and their connectivity to ports* [Online]. Melbourne, Australia Shipowner Association. Available from: <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/trs/networks/subs/sub013a.pdf> [Accessed: 16 Aug 2005]

<sup>2</sup> Begley, J., June 2005, *Inquiry into interaction of regional road and rail networks and their connectivity to ports* [Online]. Vic, Victorian Freight and Logistics Councils. Available from: <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/trs/networks/subs/sub089.pdf> [Accessed: 19 Aug 2005]

<sup>3</sup> Refer to 2

<sup>4</sup> Anon, 2005, *Inquiry into interaction of regional road and rail networks and their connectivity to ports* [Online]. Melbourne, Port of Melbourne Corporation. Available from: <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/trs/networks/subs/sub067.pdf> [Accessed: 18 Aug 2005]

<sup>5</sup> Anon, May 2005, *Inquiry into interaction of regional road and rail networks and their connectivity to ports* [Online]. ACT, Rail Technical Society of Australasia. Available from: <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/trs/networks/subs/sub014.pdf> [Accessed: 17 August 2005]

<sup>6</sup> Refer to 5

<sup>7</sup> White, G., 2005, *Inquiry into interaction of regional road and rail networks and their connectivity to ports* [Online]. Portland, Alliance of Councils for Rail Freight Development. Available from: <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/trs/networks/subs/sub026.pdf> [Accessed: 17 August 2005]

<sup>8</sup> Anon, May 2005, *Inquiry into interaction of regional road and rail networks and their connectivity to ports* [Online]. Mildura, Mildura City Council. Available from: <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/trs/networks/subs/sub022.pdf> [Accessed: 17 August 2005]

<sup>9</sup> Refer to 8

<sup>10</sup> Refer to 7

<sup>11</sup> Young, B., May 2005, *Inquiry into interaction of regional road and rail networks and their connectivity to ports* [Online]. Wangaratta, Plantations North East. Available from: <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/trs/networks/subs/sub066.pdf> [Accessed: 18 Aug 2005]

<sup>12</sup> Refer to 7

<sup>13</sup> Refer to 8

<sup>14</sup> Sulicich, M., May 2005, *Inquiry into interaction of regional road and rail networks and their connectivity to ports* [Online]. NSW, Adsteam Marine Limited. Available from: <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/trs/networks/subs/sub034.pdf> [Accessed: 17 August 2005]

<sup>15</sup> Anon., May 2005, *Inquiry into interaction of regional road and rail networks and their connectivity to ports* [Online]. NSW, Pacific National. Available from: <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/trs/networks/subs/sub048.pdf> [Accessed: 17 August 2005]

<sup>16</sup> Refer to 5

<sup>17</sup> Marsh, W., May 2005, *Inquiry into interaction of regional road and rail networks and their connectivity to ports* [Online]. NSW, Council of the City of Botany Bay. Available from: <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/trs/networks/subs/sub015.pdf> [Accessed: 17 August 2005]

<sup>18</sup> Refer to 8

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<sup>19</sup> Refer to 7

<sup>20</sup> Anon, May 2005, *Regional road and rail network and connectivity to ports* [Online]. ACT, Australian Chamber of Commercial and Industry. Available from:  
<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/trs/networks/subs/sub057.pdf> [Accessed: 18 Aug 2005]

<sup>21</sup> Refer to 1

<sup>22</sup> Refer to 14

<sup>23</sup> Martyn, S., May 2005, *Inquiry into interaction of regional road and rail networks and their connectivity to ports, a review of maximum road weight limits* [Online]. NSW, Australian Meat Industry Council. Available from:  
<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/trs/networks/subs/sub031.pdf> [Accessed: 17 August 2005]

<sup>24</sup> Refer to 4

<sup>25</sup> Blood, T., May 2005, *Inquiry into interaction of regional road and rail networks and their connectivity to ports* [Online]. NSW, P & O Ports Limited. Available from:  
<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/trs/networks/subs/sub054.pdf> [Accessed: 18 Aug 2005]

<sup>26</sup> Anon, May 2005, *Inquiry into interaction of regional road and rail networks and their connectivity to ports* [Online]. Shipping Australia Limited. Available from:  
<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/trs/networks/subs/sub049.pdf> [Accessed: 18 Aug 2005]

<sup>27</sup> Refer to 4

<sup>28</sup> Refer to 26