

Road Infrastructure

- 5.1 A substantial proportion of AusLink funding is being applied to the improvement of Australia's main road networks. In this chapter the Committee examines road connections, in areas other than port precincts, brought to its attention during this inquiry – either in evidence or during site visits – where funding of road improvements was demonstrated to be a priority.
- 5.2 As with rail links in the last Chapter, where the road issues relate directly to a port, they have been dealt with in Chapter 3.
- 5.3 It is obviously vital for the main highways to be brought up to an acceptable international standard. However, the Committee received evidence from a wide range of sources indicating that there are bottlenecks and “missing links” in other parts of the freight transport system, that are holding back its overall expansion and efficiency.
- 5.4 In many areas, the infrastructure needed is a section of road that is not covered by either funding from the AusLink program, or by State government funding. The chapter highlights some of these areas, where a project would make a marked difference to the efficiency, and/or safety, of the freight network and, in some instances, the GDP of a region.
- 5.5 This Chapter also refers to some problems of inconsistency between states and territories and the regulations they apply to freight transport by road.

Road Weight Limits

- 5.6 The question of increasing allowable road weight limits and axle loadings was raised by a number of participants in the inquiry. The difficulties caused by varying regulations between states were also raised.
- 5.7 In the face of the anticipated growth in container movements over the next twenty years, evidence cited difficulties caused by:
- different limits in different states; and
 - limits set too low to allow the widespread use of 40 foot containers.
- 5.8 The Australian Meat Industry Council (AMIC) commented that having different limits between states poses particular problems for NSW regional processors. The council said:
- The legal limit in NSW is generally 3 tonnes less than all other States at 42.5 tonnes gross weight. This is an unfair limitation on NSW processors vis-à-vis their fellow processors in other States.¹
- 5.9 The problem of load limits leads into consideration of the trend towards the use of 40 foot containers. The meat industry is quite conscious of the difficulties the larger containers will pose, because meat is a heavy mass product. AMIC calculates that a 50 tonne gross weight limit should be the aim:
- Modern 40 foot units are rated at up to 34 tonnes cargo weight. As a result, the ideal practical objective would be a 50 tonne gross weight limit comprising 34 tonnes cargo, plus 4.5 tonnes container tare, plus 11.5 tonnes for prime-mover and trailer.
- If the objective ...is to place the industry in a competitive position over the next decade, an objective of 50 tonnes gross weight should be adopted as the ultimate goal.²
- 5.10 AMIC went on to say that the global trend is to 40 foot containers. Australia only accounts for about 2.5 to 3 per cent of total world container movements and AMIC said: "...We cannot resist the global trends that are appearing". This means, in turn, that the Australian
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1 Australian Meat Industry Council, Submission 31, p.1.

2 Australian Meat Industry Council, Submission 31, p.2.

transport system will need the capability to move the larger containers freely.³

- 5.11 Trans Bulk Haulage in Toowoomba claimed that its trucks can never use the allowable weight limit. The company said:

...we find that we can never use our mass limits as we never load our grain on a Federal Funded Highway (Mass limits cannot be used off a federal funded highway).⁴

- 5.12 Strong arguments are, of course, made against the widespread application of higher load limits. Residents are concerned about factors such as noise, pollution and safety. As heavy vehicle traffic has grown, local councils have become concerned about the increasing cost of road maintenance. For example, a joint submission from local authorities in the Esperance region, said:

The Shire has a strategic plan to address future transport-related impacts on these roads. However, given current funding levels, the road asset will deteriorate as expenditure is not meeting status quo costs. Reliance on road freight to deliver goods to the Port is also causing the road assets to deteriorate quickly, as well as compromise the safety of road users especially on school bus routes and in tourism areas.⁵

New South Wales

Hunter Valley – F3 Freeway and Golden Highway

- 5.13 In the Hunter valley, the most important infrastructure project, according to the Hunter Business Chamber, is a proposed extension of the F3 Freeway (Sydney to Newcastle), from Seahampton to Branxton.⁶
- 5.14 This link would provide improved freight connections to Newcastle and also between the North West, the Central West, the Hunter Valley, the Central Coast and Sydney. The estimated cost is \$750 million. The Hunter Business Chamber said:

3 Australian Meat Industry Council, Submission 31, p.2.

4 Trans Bulk Haulage Pty Ltd, Submission 3, p.1.

5 Shire of Esperance, Esperance Port Authority and Goldfields Esperance Development Commission, Submission 27, p.6.

6 Hunter Business Chamber, Transcript, 30 January 2006, Newcastle, p.47.

...this piece of road infrastructure is something that the whole region and north-western and western New South Wales want put in place. It takes out the urban parts of Maitland right through Lochinvar and all of those parts in the valley to give us a freeway, which is very important.

We have promoted getting this project constructed to government at different levels. We seriously ask that the funding for this project be accelerated and that the federal government encourage the state government to make it a higher priority than what they currently have made it.

It is an important project. It has been going for some time. I believe that [those] costings probably need revisiting, but it is a very important project.⁷

- 5.15 The Chamber said that some allocation of funds had been made under AusLink but that negotiations on the project had stalled because of increasing costs. The NSW government has agreed to provide 20 per cent of the total cost.⁸
- 5.16 The Committee was pleased to note the inclusion of an allocation of \$20 million in the 2007-08 Federal Budget towards the cost of linking the F3 to Branxton.⁹
- 5.17 Another priority identified for the Hunter region was an upgrade for the Golden Highway, between the Hunter and Dubbo.¹⁰

Shoalhaven Region - Main Road 92

- 5.18 The Shoalhaven City Council has worked hard to gain approval for improvements to Main Road 92, between Nowra and the Southern Highlands. In 1997, the route was designated a "Road of National Importance". Later, the NSW government added its support to the proposal for improvements. However, there have been delays in planning and other approvals, and the budget has been reduced from \$80 million to \$65 million (in 1997 terms).¹¹

7 Hunter Business Chamber, Transcript, 30 January 2006, Newcastle, p.46.

8 Hunter Business Chamber, Transcript, 30 January 2006, Newcastle, pp.46-7.

9 Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Transport and Regional Services, Mark Vaile, and the Minister for Local Government, Territories and Roads, Jim Lloyd, Joint Media Release 002TRS/Budget, 7 May 2007.

10 Hunter Business Chamber, Submission 131, p.8.

11 Shoalhaven City Council, Submission 44, p.4.

- 5.19 The Council, in company with the Goulburn Mulwaree Council, is seeking assistance from the AusLink program to fund an assessment of the most efficient route. The Council noted that, in addition to its value to the Shoalhaven region, this road would also provide a link to Gippsland via the Monaro Highway, and Northern Victoria and the Riverina via the Hume Highway.¹²
- 5.20 The Council also noted that to complete the link, it would be necessary to upgrade the Princes Highway between Nowra and Port Kembla.¹³

Figure 5.1 Main Road 92



Source: Shoalhaven City Council, Submission 44, p.8.

Illawarra and South Coast - Princes Highway

- 5.21 The Shoalhaven region, 160 km south of Sydney, has a substantial and diversified industrial base. The Shoalhaven City Council expressed concern that the area has no rail link to Port Botany and Port Kembla, and is consequently reliant on the Princes Highway for the movement of freight.

12 Shoalhaven City Council, Submission 44, p.5.

13 Shoalhaven City Council, Submission 44, p.5.

5.22 The Council said in its submission to the Committee:

With the Princes Highway being the main artery for the South Coast, the inadequacy of this transport corridor to service the needs of the communities along its route both in Southern NSW and in the Gippsland became obvious to Shoalhaven City Council.¹⁴

5.23 The Council initiated a Transport Strategy Study in 2000, that:

...highlighted the inadequacies of the current highway system in a north/south direction, as well as the east/west escarpment crossings, which are vital to moving produce and freight between the coastal [plain] and the tablelands of Southern NSW.¹⁵

5.24 Later, in 2003, the Council was the instigator for the formation of a group called PHocus, which consists of representatives from the Southern Councils Group, NRMA, SEATS¹⁶, the Road Transport Association, the Illawarra Business Chamber and Tourism Task Force Australia.

5.25 The aims of the PHocus group were concentrated on improvements to the Princes Highway. The group set out to gain funding commitments that would lead to:

- a four-lane dual carriageway to 100kph standard, north of the Jervis Bay turnoff, by 2010;
- B-double access to the Victorian border;
- eliminate areas of major constraint in bad weather conditions; and
- bring the remainder up to current standards; provide overtaking lanes every five km and local rest areas and parking.¹⁷

5.26 SEATS agreed that there is an urgent need for better transport arrangements in this region:

- you cannot take a rail trip from anywhere south of Nowra to Bairnsdale. No train transportation exists.
- there are no passenger shipping opportunities between Melbourne and Sydney.

14 Shoalhaven City Council, Submission 44, p.3.

15 Shoalhaven City Council, Submission 44, p.3.

16 The South East Australian Transport Strategy.

17 Shoalhaven City Council, Submission 44, pp.3-4.

- the only avenue available to a would-be traveller or transporter of goods from or to this part of Australia is to drive.
- the Princes Highway is the only route available to those living in south east Australia.¹⁸

5.27 SEATS commented that while there is connectivity between the road, rail and ports in this region: "It cannot easily or economically be utilised, however, because of the poor state of the Princes Highway between Bairnsdale and Nowra." The group added:

The road system is sub-standard and is shown to be one of the most dangerous in the whole road network in Australia.¹⁹

5.28 The Bega Valley Shire Council drew attention to the need for completion of several projects in its district, to enable B-doubles to use more of the Princes Highway and to reduce the danger to other drivers in difficult sections. The Council proposed:

Imlay Road: The completion of the Imlay Road to a level where the use of B-doubles and heavy vehicles on a regular basis does not impede the use of this road for other vehicles.

Bega Bypass: The main reason for the Bega Bypass is to remove heavy vehicles from the CBD...Currently there is no B-double route in both directions. South bound and north bound B-doubles have to uncouple and couple outside Bega's CBD. The movement of heavy vehicles through ...Bega township raises concerns for pedestrians and vehicle drivers.

Heavy vehicles have to negotiate a tight turn from Gipps Street onto Carp Street or vice versa. The traffic movement quite often means that other road users are required to back up or move to the side of the road to allow the heavy vehicles to negotiate the turn.²⁰

Other problems are: noise levels, wear and tear on the main streets, and heavy vehicles travelling past a school and several churches.

Brogo Pass: ...a winding, narrow and patched surfaced section of the Princes Highway. This winding gorge road has rock falls that can close the road for several hours. ...The Brogo Bridge is a two-lane bridge...approached by a tight

18 South East Australian Transport Strategy, Submission 59, p.3.

19 South East Australian Transport Strategy, Submission 59, p.4.

20 Bega Valley Shire Council, Submission 77, pp.2-3.

corner. Heavy vehicle drivers will radio ahead to other truck drivers to advise when they will be on the bridge.

...the Princes Highway at Brogo river bridge and Narooma Wagonga Inlet are delaying the use of B-doubles along this southern section of Highway.²¹

- 5.29 The Committee was troubled by the arrangement between Gipps and Carp Streets in Bega and raised the prospect of a safety audit under the Black Spots program.

Other Projects brought to the Committee's Attention

- 5.30 The Northern Rivers Regional Organisation of Councils (NOROC) was mainly concerned with improvements to the Pacific Highway when its submission was lodged. Since then provision has been made for giving priority to the completion of the upgrade to that highway.
- 5.31 Other roads of concern to NOROC were the Summerland Way, from Grafton to Casino and the Woodenbong to Warwick road. NOROC said these roads should be upgraded to at least a high standard single carriageway. The Summerland Way could then act as a major alternative link to western Brisbane and beyond, and the other road as a major link to Warwick, Toowoomba and the proposed north-south railway.²²
- 5.32 A member of the Committee has inspected the Woodenbong to Warwick Road and concurs with the need for a major upgrade.

Victoria

- 5.33 Most of the evidence given to the Committee about road issues in Victoria, related to access to a port or an intermodal terminal and these have been dealt with in Chapters 3 and 6. The following issues, however, were also brought to the Committee's notice.
- 5.34 In conjunction with its plans for an intermodal terminal at Thurla, the Mildura Rural City Council has plans to include a road upgrade. The Council would like to reroute the Sturt Highway around Mildura, to provide easy access to the Thurla facility, and a new Murray River crossing to reconnect with the Sturt Highway. This alternate route

21 Bega Valley Shire Council, Submission 77, pp.2-3.

22 Northern Rivers Regional Organisation of Councils, Submission 119, p.7.

- and the new bridge, would allow passage of heavy vehicles between South Australia, New South Wales and Victoria, without passing through central Mildura.²³
- 5.35 The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) called for the duplication of the Calder Freeway between Melbourne and Bendigo.²⁴
- 5.36 The ACCI also called for construction of the Geelong Bypass. Work has already commenced on that task, and in the 2007-08 Budget the Australian Government earmarked \$60.1 million to continue the project. This funding is part of a total of \$186 million that the Australian Government has agreed to provide.²⁵
- 5.37 The Gippsland Councils, the Gippsland Area Consultative Committee and SEATS jointly raised with the Committee their concern about the capacity of the Princes Highway between Traralgon and Bairnsdale. The group pointed out the need for a dual carriageway between Traralgon and Sale and the removal of accident black spots on the remainder of the route.²⁶
- 5.38 Included in their concerns were issues relating to heavy traffic through Bairnsdale and Sale, which will require heavy vehicle bypasses in the future, and the potential need for through traffic arrangements in Traralgon as traffic on the M1 grows. The councils also reported several impediments on the South Gippsland Highway that contribute to its high accident rate. The group considered that if these issues were addressed it would "...enable Gippsland to achieve greater efficiency on their arterial road network".²⁷
- 5.39 This group of local government bodies from Gippsland also told the Committee that the area's "...economic development, particularly along the Princes Highway East spine, is restricted by the lack of a

23 Mildura Rural City Council, Wentworth Shire Council, Sunraysia Area Consultative Committee and Sunraysia Mallee Economic Development Board, Submission 22, pp.1 and 5.

24 Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Submission 57, p.25.

25 Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Transport and Regional Services, Mark Vaile, and the Minister for Local Government, Territories and Roads, Jim Lloyd, Joint Media Statement TRS03/Budget Joint, 8 May 2007, pp.2 and 4.

26 Gippsland Councils, Gippsland Area Consultative Committee, and the South East Australian Transport Strategy, Submission 62, pp.3 and 28-9.

27 Gippsland Councils, Gippsland Area Consultative Committee, and the South East Australian Transport Strategy, Submission 62, pp.3 and 27-8.

suitable highway connection to the ACT and New South Wales market". The group commented:

On the section of Highway from Cann River to the NSW border the road conditions and the narrow and windy alignment of the road are not adequate. The highway currently operates as a two lane, narrow two way rural highway...

Consultation and review reiterated the problems to users of tight alignment and narrowness of the highway pavement and shoulders restricting overtaking opportunities along the highway.²⁸

Queensland

Ipswich Motorway

5.40 The Ipswich Motorway provides a traffic and freight corridor from Rocklea to Dinmore, a total of about 19 km. It is the main traffic connection between Ipswich and Brisbane. It also connects the Warrego Highway, Cunningham Highway, Logan Motorway and Centenary Motorway to the Brisbane traffic network.²⁹

5.41 Two major projects are under way:

Ipswich/Logan Interchange: Involves an upgrade to the interchange and 2 km of the Motorway. It began in February 2007; expected completion date is early 2009. The Australian Government has allocated \$255 million to this project.

Wacol to Darra Upgrade: Involves an upgrade of this stretch of the Motorway, including a major upgrade of the Centenary Highway Interchange and two new bridges. Construction should begin in late 2007 and completion is expected by mid-2010. The Australian Government has allocated \$320 million.³⁰

28 Gippsland Councils, Gippsland Area Consultative Committee and the South East Australian Transport Strategy, Submission 62, pp.2 and 25-6.

29 Queensland Government, Department of Main Roads, <http://www.mainroads.qld.gov.au/MRWEB/PROD/Content.nsf/DOCINDEX/Ipswich+Motorway?OpenDocument>, accessed 2 July 2007.

30 Queensland Government, Department of Main Roads, <http://www.mainroads.qld.gov.au/MRWEB/PROD/Content.nsf/DOCINDEX/Ipswich+Motorway?OpenDocument>, accessed 2 July 2007.

- 5.42 On 5 March 2007, the Australian Government announced a further allocation of \$2.3 billion for construction of the Goodna Bypass between Dinmore and Gales. This involves a 9km route. It will be a six-lane road and will separate long distance traffic from local traffic. Construction should begin in late 2008.³¹

South East Queensland

- 5.43 The Queensland Government listed a number of projects as priorities for the development of the freight transport network. In South East Queensland it included the Toowoomba Range crossing and the Ipswich Motorway. It also listed projects on the Brisbane-Darwin corridor. Those projects included: a grade separated interchange at Minden (estimated at \$11 million), a Toowoomba Bypass (\$585 million), and a four-lane road from Toowoomba to Oakey (\$38 million).³²
- 5.44 The Warwick Shire Council called attention to the need for development of the road from Legume to Woodenbong. This is the worst section of the Woodenbong-Warwick Road, referred to by NOROC in paragraph 5.31. Strong convergent opinion from both sides of the border should mark this section in particular, and the Woodenbong-Warwick Road, for urgent attention under State and AusLink programs.
- 5.45 This road then connects to the Lindesay Highway to Rathdowney, and also the road to Kyogle. The council said that improving this road would divert both tourist and freight traffic and let it bypass some of the bottlenecks through the Gold Coast and Brisbane. The Council added:
- Fifty years ago that was one of the best roads in our locality; today it is without a doubt the worst. It is an arterial road that connects the northern rivers of New South Wales to the Darling Downs. ...It is an alternative route from Lismore-Casino...³³
- 5.46 The road was described as in good condition except "...that section of the road from Woodenbong to Legume is extremely poor. It needs a

31 Queensland Government, Department of Main Roads, <http://www.mainroads.qld.gov.au/MRWEB/PROD/Content.nsf/DOCINDEX/Ipswich+Motorway?OpenDocument>, accessed 2 July 2007.

32 Queensland Government, Submission 95, pp.11-12.

33 Warwick Shire Council and Cunningham Rail Link Committee, Transcript, 7 April 2006, Toowoomba, pp.12-13.

significant injection of capital to bring it up to ...standard". While no current costing was available, the Council said it had been valued at over \$30 million about 2001 - "...to upgrade that section of road to a standard that would be acceptable for heavy traffic".³⁴

Central Queensland

- 5.47 The Central Queensland Area Consultative Committee indicated that in the Central Western region, adjacent to the coast:

...a number of arterial roads need to be upgraded... This would reduce the congestion and demand on the existing road networks on the coastal strip and existing and proposed resource projects in the Bowen Basin.

The example mentioned, was 30 km of road between Duaringa and Bauhinia.³⁵

- 5.48 The Gladstone Area Promotion and Development Limited said that, while significant upgrades to the Dawson Highway have been funded, there is still a need for further development to bring the Highway up to national highway standard.³⁶

- 5.49 The Monto Shire Council sought support for the upgrading of the Gladstone to Monto road. The road is 57 km shorter than the current sealed link via Biloela. Approximately 36 km of the road remains unsealed. The Council said that much of the unsealed section: "...is characterised by sharp curves, steep gradients, inadequate sight distances, flood-ways and narrow formation width".³⁷

North Queensland

- 5.50 The Mackay Area Industry Network set out as its priorities the upgrading of several important roads in the area: Moranbah to Dysart (which passes or links to five coal mines); Middlemount to Capella (passes two coal mines); and the Peak Downs Highway between Moranbah and Clermont. The evidence on the Peak Downs Highway confirmed comments made to Committee members in Mackay:

It is seen as imperative that both the State and Federal Government assess the current Peak Downs Highway and

34 Warwick Shire Council and Cunningham Rail Link Committee, Transcript, 7 April 2006, Toowoomba, p.13.

35 Central Queensland Area Consultative Committee, Submission 4, p.7.

36 Gladstone Area Promotion and Development Ltd, Submission 84, p.10.

37 Monto Shire Council, Submission 76, pp.1-2.

seek alternative routes, particularly around residential towns in the Pioneer Valley.

...The most critical...appears to be Walkerston where, for example, trucks carrying millions of litres of fuel are forced to navigate an intricate road over a narrow bridge and around a sharp corner, whilst passing within metres of a school, a shopping centre and residences.³⁸

- 5.51 The Committee saw this as another area of concern and suggested that it should be subjected to a Black Spot audit.

South Australia

- 5.52 The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry proposed the duplication of the Dukes Highway between Adelaide and Melbourne, from the Victorian border to Tailem Bend. The Chamber estimated the cost at \$600 million and said that:

Traffic volumes particularly between Tailem Bend and Keith, warrant the duplication of this road.

Principal route to Melbourne, which carries high volumes of freight moving to market or export exit points (and imports). Key regional areas such as the Murraylands and South East of the State funnel traffic onto this route.³⁹

- 5.53 The Australian Chamber also proposed further investigation of the possible routes to bypass Adelaide, by connecting Murray Bridge and Port Wakefield. The estimated cost would vary up to about \$100 million depending on the route chosen. Another proposal was an extension of the duplication of the Princes Highway to Port Augusta, at an estimated cost of \$600 million.⁴⁰

Green Triangle Region

- 5.54 The South East Local Government Association (SELGA) said that:

38 Mackay Area Industry Network, Submission 101, p.1.

39 Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Submission 57, p.21.

40 Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Submission 57, p.22.

...without investment in an integrated plan...the transport system in the Green Triangle region⁴¹ will remain dependent upon road transport. Truck congestion is likely to increase in Mt Gambier and at the Port of Portland as the existing infrastructure struggles to cope with the projected increase in wood flow traffic, particularly to Portland.⁴²

- 5.55 When the increasing timber movements are added to the grain shipments already in the system, and the expected mineral sands production, the pressure on the road system can be expected to increase rapidly:

It is estimated that in the period 2005-2009, over 2 million tonnes of wood product will be transported to Portland each year. This is projected to increase in the following five years to over 5 million tonnes per annum.

In addition to the timber and wood chip traffic, the ongoing movement of grain and the commencement of mineral sands mining and processing in the region, will extend the pressure on transport infrastructure, particularly at the Port of Portland.⁴³

- 5.56 SELGA noted a point that was of concern to most local government bodies in rapid growth areas:

Road transport is very flexible, however truck traffic volumes of this size will generate significant road deterioration, crash costs and environmental impacts. There will be a significant need for additional road investment and maintenance, and investment in the Port, to reduce inefficiencies and improve road safety.⁴⁴

- 5.57 The Riddoch Highway, in the south east of South Australia, is quite congested and a proposal has been developed by SELGA, to relieve some of that congestion, and offer an alternative route for timber trucks, by building a "Border Road". There is considerable support

41 Midway between Melbourne and Adelaide - it includes the South East of South Australia and the Western District and Wimmera Regions of Victoria. South East Local Government Association Inc, Submission 40, p.5.

42 South East Local Government Association Inc, Submission 40, p.3.

43 South East Local Government Association Inc, Submission 40, p.3.

44 South East Local Government Association Inc, Submission 40, p.3.

for this project, particularly from major logging contractors and wood chip hauliers.⁴⁵

5.58 The proposal is to build a road running along the South Australia/Victoria border, for a distance of about 72 km, from Wrattontully to the Princes Highway east of Mt Gambier. Cost of the project was estimated at \$15 million in 2001. A benefit-cost analysis of the project showed a very positive outcome.⁴⁶

5.59 SELGA said that local governments on both sides of the border believe:

...the freight infrastructure in this region is not adequate to deal with the increase in freight movements expected to occur over the next 10 years.⁴⁷

Eyre Peninsula

5.60 The Eyre Peninsula/Spencer Gulf region has almost 14,000 km of roads, about 94 per cent unsealed. These roads are maintained by nine councils that have an average revenue base of \$3.3 million, compared to the state average of \$14.5 million. Some councils spend almost all of their revenue on road works; most of them spend up to half:

...there are serious limitations on local government's capacity to maintain existing levels of road maintenance, let alone manage a serious escalation in the task by way of a partial or full demise of the region's rail system.⁴⁸

5.61 Details have not yet been released on the funding allocations to this region in the 2007-08 Budget, but one specific allocation was made – funds to seal 13 km of the Kimba to Buckleboo Road, to assist grain haulage in that area.⁴⁹

45 Limestone Coast Regional Development Board, Submission 39, p.4.

46 Limestone Coast Regional Development Board, Submission 39, p.3.

47 South East Local Government Association Inc, Submission 40, Letter to Deputy Prime Minister, p.1.

48 Eyre Peninsula Local Government Association, Submission 1, pp.3 and 8.

49 Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Transport and Regional Services Mark Vaile and the Minister for Local Government, Territories and Roads Jim Lloyd, Joint Media Release 005TRS/Budget, 8 May 2007.

Western Australia

5.62 The Eastern Metropolitan Regional Council (EMRC) in WA proposed that the Perth-Adelaide National Highway should be extended to allow road trains to "...continue straight through to key industrial precincts saving considerable time and therefore costs". The Council said that at present, the road trains must break down their loads at Northam.⁵⁰

5.63 The Council's suggestion was that the road be upgraded to national highway standard from Clackline (near Northam) to the high standard Roe Highway in Midland. It said that there would also be safety benefits:

The safety benefits would also be significant as the new...section would take much of the truck traffic and through traffic from Great Eastern Highway as it would be to a much higher standard.⁵¹

The South and South West

5.64 This area of WA is a good example of the difficulties being experienced by local government in dealing with the damage caused to local roads by large trucks and road trains. The Great Southern Timber Industry Road Evaluation Strategy Group (TIRES) pointed out that:

One of the biggest issues local government has with smaller local roads is ...that they originally serviced a couple of farms ...the biggest vehicle you saw was a semi-trailer. ...Now we have an industry that is carting road train configurations all the year round.

...in the last twelve months, 2005, we had a 40-inch rainfall... We had log trucks working on dirt and gravel roads right through the year, so you can imagine the damage and problems we are having. Even bitumen roads are sinking badly under those conditions.⁵²

50 Eastern Metropolitan Regional Council, Submission 41, p.6.

51 Eastern Metropolitan Regional Council, Submission 41, p.6.

52 Great Southern Timber Industry Road Evaluation Strategy Group, Transcript, 8 March 2006, Albany, p.19.

5.65 TIRES also said that:

They have basically tried to re-fund local government roads in the same way as in the past. Then a whole new industry is dumped on top of that. TIRES was trying to attract funding to address the new export industry on top of what is normally in place.

The problem with the state funding is that it just keeps on funding what has happened in the past. There is no influx of new money to address the new industry, and that is where I think the federal and state governments could help.

Federally, there are the main roads, which need upgrading, and the local shires are really struggling to keep up with the impact of the new industry. Somehow we have to get some more infrastructure funding to upgrade that to allow the shires to keep up with their normal road maintenance.⁵³

5.66 The TIRES group highlighted the problems caused on the highways by mixing tourist vehicles and heavy transports. It also noted some particular problem areas:

The region's highways play an important role for not only the timber industry but also the tourist and grain industries. The use of these roads by both heavy haulage and tourist vehicles is a major safety concern.

Consideration needs to be given to additional investment in, particularly, the Muirs Highway, Chester Pass Road and Hassells Highway to widen the seal and provide passing opportunities. Additional pavement strengthening is also required to accommodate the intense heavy loading of the timber haulage vehicles.⁵⁴

5.67 TIRES added that the result of the intensive use of these roads will be substantial structural damage:

Logs and woodchips will be hauled on the lower standard local roads in the region...throughout the year, including the winter period when road sub-grades may be saturated. Heavy usage during these periods could cause substantial structural damage to lower standard roads. This contrasts to

53 Great Southern Timber Industry Road Evaluation Strategy Group, Transcript, 8 March 2006, Albany, p.26.

54 Great Southern TIRES Group, *Five Year Regional Transport Plan for the Timber Industry*, Prepared by Peece Consulting, Exhibit 33, p.7.

the grain industry where the transport is within a narrow seasonal band and most often during a dry time of the year. The timber haulage will have a much greater impact on the local road system than the grain industry or any other industry in the region.⁵⁵

- 5.68 The Great Southern Development Commission also referred to these problems and estimated that about \$7.66 million was needed from the Australian government to restore the timber roads to operating condition.⁵⁶
- 5.69 Near Bunbury, several major highways converge at the Eelup Roundabout. This poses problems of congestion for both freight movements and tourist traffic (up to 3 million visitors a year).⁵⁷
- 5.70 The area generated 14.6 million tonnes of freight in 2004-05. Of this total, 14 per cent went to Fremantle in containers, 34,000 in all, and all by road.⁵⁸
- 5.71 BHP Billiton (BHPB) is developing a nickel mine near Ravensthorpe, 155 km west of Esperance. It will supply a refinery 25km from Townsville.⁵⁹
- 5.72 The nickel will be transported by road to Esperance along the South Coast Highway, and then by ship to Townsville. Half a million tonnes of sulphur is imported through Esperance and trucked to the mine site. BHPB estimated that the mine traffic will make 54 one-way movements each day. The problem part of the journey is part of the road between Ravensthorpe and Esperance.⁶⁰
- 5.73 BHPB is seeking recognition of the road as being of national and economic importance. The Shire of Ravensthorpe is also asking that the road be funded "...as a road of national importance and/or be categorised within the Auslink network".⁶¹ The Committee endorses this view.
- 5.74 The Shire said that the road from Esperance to the Munghlinup River:
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55 Great Southern TIRES Group, *Five Year Regional Transport Plan for the Timber Industry*, Prepared by Peece Consulting, Exhibit 33, pp.6-7.

56 Great Southern Development Commission, Transcript, 8 March 2006, Albany, pp.60-63.

57 South West Development Commission, Transcript, 7 March 2006, Bunbury, p.15.

58 South West Development Commission, Transcript, 7 March 2006, Bunbury, p.15.

59 BHP Billiton, Transcript, 9 March 2006, Esperance, p.55.

60 BHP Billiton, Transcript, 9 March 2006, Esperance, pp.57 and 60.

61 BHP Billiton and Shire of Ravensthorpe, Transcript, 9 March 2006, Esperance, pp.57 and 79.

...is a good, wide and reasonably maintained road. Once you go west of the Munglinup River ...the road deteriorates to a narrow road which is extremely rough and in extremely bad condition.⁶²

5.75 The traffic load for the road is mixed. BHPB estimates that nearly two million tonnes of grain is produced in the South West region. A large proportion of that comes from the Munglinup - Jerdacuttup - Ravensthorpe area and is transported by the South Coast Highway to Esperance. Added to that are the tourists, school buses, general freight (much of which comes from Perth to supply Esperance) and, in future, the mine workers and their families living at Hopetoun on the coast.⁶³

5.76 Both BHPB and the Shire of Ravensthorpe said that the road is too narrow for the traffic that will use it:

The Ravensthorpe Road is not wide enough to even get two white lines on either side...

Both parties were concerned at the mix of normal traffic, tourists and farm tractors all sharing the road with 88 tonne B-double trucks carrying a net load of 70 to 75 tonnes.⁶⁴

5.77 The Shire and BHPB mentioned that \$10-11 million had been set aside by Main Roads WA to put in some passing lanes and upgrade a bridge. However, since then Main Roads have advised that the regulations have changed and that the funding allocated will no longer be enough. The road can no longer simply be widened but must be rebuilt:

They are not able to do that under the new process. That was the process that was going to be used...now, because of the new road specifications, they have to remove all the road and rebuild it completely out to the new configuration. It has to be completely new road.⁶⁵

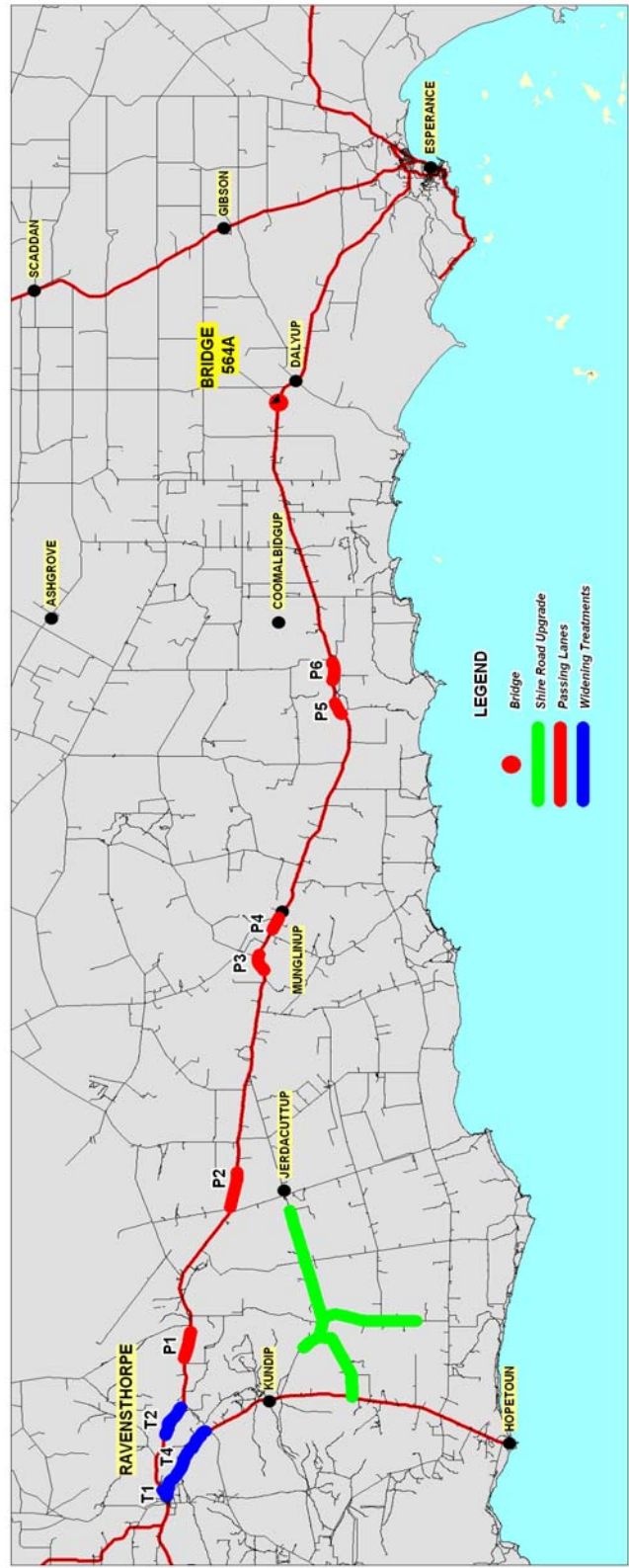
62 Shire of Ravensthorpe, Transcript, 9 March 2006, Esperance, p.79.

63 BHP Billiton and Shire of Ravensthorpe, Transcript, 9 March 2006, Esperance, pp.56 and 78.

64 BHP Billiton and Shire of Ravensthorpe, Transcript, 9 March 2006, Esperance, pp.60 and 79.

65 BHP Billiton and Shire of Ravensthorpe, Transcript, 9 March 2006, Esperance, pp.60 and 79-80.

Figure 5.2 Ravensthorpe to Esperance Road



Source: Shire of Ravensthorpe, Supplementary Submission 152, p.1.

- 5.78 Recent advice from BHPB indicates that some widening has been undertaken on the critical stretch of road from the Munghlinup River to the mine.

Recommendation 9

- 5.79 **The Committee recommends that the Minister for Local Government, Territories and Roads give urgent consideration to assisting the state and local governments to fund an upgrade of the road between Ravensthorpe and the Munghlinup River.**

Goldfields and Kalgoorlie-Boulder

- 5.80 The City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder told the Committee that there are two important road issues in this area. The highway at Lake Raeside, near Leonora, is subject to regular flooding. When this happens, the City said "...it closes off that portion of the state to its closest road route".⁶⁶ It has come to the Committee's attention, that the WA Government has made a commitment in the 2007-8 Budget to proceed with upgrading and flood-proofing this road.
- 5.81 The other road problem is the need for a road link north from Wiluna, to join the Great Northern Highway north of Meekatharra and south of Newman (probably around Doolgunna). The distance is about 150 to 170 km, depending on the route, and the anticipated cost is \$80 to \$100 million.⁶⁷ The City said that this road would "...open up the Pilbara-Goldfields link":

With its common mining industries, that could be a very important freight route.⁶⁸

- 5.82 The Government of Western Australia is strongly in favour of this development:

...the notion of having that connection, the Goldfields Highway, north to connect through to the Great Northern Highway is something that we would strongly support.

66 City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder, Transcript, 9 March 2006, Esperance, p.22.

67 Government of Western Australia, Transcript, 10 March 2006, Perth, p.30.

68 City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder, Transcript, 9 March 2006, Esperance, pp.22-3.

...we will be coming up with a plan recommending that framework which may well have that link in it as a prospective link rather than looping into Meekatharra.⁶⁹

The Pilbara

5.83 Road access to the Pilbara from southern WA is via the Great Northern Highway or the Brand Highway/North West Coastal Highway. The main road issue in the Pilbara region is the omission of the Brand Highway/North West Coastal Highway from the AusLink Network. The WA Government maintains that this is a key link in the national transport network.⁷⁰

5.84 Commenting on the omission of the North West Coast Highway, the WA Chamber of Commerce and Industry said:

...the Great Northern Highway...bypasses the port of Dampier, whereas the North West Coastal Highway better accesses that particular infrastructure. For the sake of connecting to the Great Northern Highway, we thought that might be worthy of inclusion in the AusLink plan.

The Great Northern Highway is the identified corridor of importance for AusLink yet it bypasses the port of Dampier. ...There are clear reasons for that being identified, and we have no objection to that other than that it does not link to the port of Dampier.⁷¹

5.85 The WA Local Government Association said that the Great Northern Highway, which is listed:

...bypasses major industrial areas such as the Burrup Peninsula and the Port of Dampier, where a number of projects considered to be of national significance are located.

The Brand Highway/North West Coastal Highway is the main link between regional centres at Geraldton, Carnarvon, Karratha and Port Hedland, as well as the access road to various tourist destinations and coastal, mining and pastoral communities. It is also a major freight haul route operating 53.5 metre long combinations north of Carnarvon.⁷²

69 Government of Western Australia, Transcript, 10 March 2006, Perth, p.30.

70 Western Australian Local Government Association, Submission 35, p.6.

71 Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia, Transcript, 10 March 2006, Perth, p.3.

72 Western Australian Local Government Association, Submission 35, pp.6-7.

5.86 The Association added:

The route is critical in servicing the growing industry and coastal communities between Perth and Port Hedland. Three of the top six tonnage ports in Australia (...Port Hedland, Port of Dampier and Port Walcott) are all located on the North West Coast highway and provide significant tax revenues to the nation.

The WA State Government considers that both the Great Northern Highway (the inland route from Perth to Darwin) and the Brand Highway/ North West Coastal Highway (the coastal route from Perth to Darwin) should be ...in the National Land Transport Network.⁷³

5.87 The WA government said that for AusLink 1 it had been asked to choose between these highways for inclusion:

We said, "No, we think both are important in the national sense because both of them are doing a task." They said that we had to choose one or the other. We maintain once again that we are not asking the Commonwealth to pay for everything. We are happy to make the case, but we want each of those routes to be eligible - and at that time there was Dampier, the second biggest iron ore port in the country behind Port Hedland, just down the road effectively but not on the network.⁷⁴

High, Wide Load Corridors

5.88 The WA Chamber of Commerce and Industry referred to difficulties faced in moving high, wide loads in WA. The chamber said that there is a growing trend in construction, to fabricate modules of infrastructure in workshops and assemble them on site. The technique provides cost savings and helps to offset the growing shortage of skilled labour. A reduced need for having that skilled labour on site also helps save on costs.⁷⁵

5.89 The Chamber pointed out that:

Local fabricators are, however, currently restricted in their ability to compete for this work due to power line and road furniture impediments within the metropolitan area and

73 Western Australian Local Government Association, Submission 35, p.7.

74 Government of Western Australia, Transcript, 10 March 2006, Perth, p.30.

75 Chamber of Commerce and Industry Western Australia, Submission 19, p.7.

along the key corridors from the metropolitan area to the regions.

There is an urgent need to establish a high, wide load corridor network in Western Australia by clearing away these impediments to the movement of over dimension loads.

If acceptable routes are not available to allow local fabricators to compete for this work, these modules will be fabricated overseas, off-loaded at regional ports and transported to the project site, bypassing the bulk of the transport impediments facing local companies.

Alternatively, the higher construction costs in comparison with those available elsewhere, may preclude resource development from occurring in Australia.⁷⁶

Northern Territory

5.90 The Territory has unique road transport problems, linked directly to seasonal conditions and sparse population. Because most roads are not sealed, the wet season causes severe access problems. The Northern Territory Department of Planning and Infrastructure (NTDPI) commented that many of those roads were laid down in the 60s and are now showing their age.⁷⁷

5.91 The NTDPI also commented that the Territory Government had allocated \$10 million to upgrade the beef roads. It said they are:

...a series of principally dirt roads that provide access to the main arterial, the Stuart Highway. They need to be capable of running triple road trains because that is the most cost-effective way of shifting product over long distances and of countering the effects of isolation.⁷⁸

5.92 NTDPI added that the main highways are generally in good condition, but:

76 Chamber of Commerce and Industry Western Australia, Submission 19, p.7.

77 Northern Territory Department of Transport and Infrastructure, Transcript, 27 September 2005, Darwin, pp.1-2.

78 Northern Territory Department of Transport and Infrastructure, Transcript, 27 September 2005, Darwin, p.2.

...once you get off the national and state highway network, the level of access degrades considerably, whether you look at a single-seal beef road constructed in the 1960s or one of the many other arterial roads that go out to sparsely populated areas. The Port Keats Road and the Central Arnhem Road are examples – and there is a very long list of roads like those.

In the top end of the Territory, if you have a heavy wet season a lot of those roads are closed – for example, the Daly River Crossing, which you must go across to access the Port Keats Road. Port Keats ...is closed for six or seven months of the year simply because of water levels in the Daly River. So that area is isolated.⁷⁹

- 5.93 On the Tanami road, running 700 km from the Stuart Highway to the WA border, when the road is flooded the mines on that road are effectively shut down; the fuel tankers and re-supply vehicles are cut off from the mines.⁸⁰
- 5.94 Further south, the problem is the opposite: not enough rain. In those areas only dry-grading can be carried out and the road quickly returns to its original state.⁸¹
- 5.95 Because of the access issues, the cattle industry has had to structure itself around the seasonal road access. It structures its breeding program around that timing, assembles stock shipments in holding yards, and then moves them to the port on road trains.⁸²
- 5.96 When asked whether improving the rail network would assist the cattle industry to overcome the access problems, the Port Corporation said it would not:

...there is this inherent problem of the quality of the beast ...when it gets to the port, because it would involve a truck operation to rail, then a rail operation, then a truck operation off the rail again to a holding yard and then back to the port.

79 Northern Territory Department of Transport and Infrastructure, Transcript, 27 September 2005, Darwin, p.5.

80 Northern Territory Department of Transport and Infrastructure, Transcript, 27 September 2005, Darwin, p.16.

81 Darwin Port Corporation, Transcript, 27 September 2005, Darwin, p.16.

82 Darwin Port Corporation and Northern Territory Department of Transport and Infrastructure, Transcript, 27 September 2005, Darwin, p.16.

...Every time you put it on a different mode of transport there is an impact on the quality of the beast.⁸³

5.97 AustAsia Export Services explained:

Basically, the more times you handle cattle, the more the risk of injury. We try to minimise all the stresses involved in handling livestock. If you have to load livestock on a truck to get them to a railhead, you may as well leave them on a truck – you are actually going to do them more good than unloading and then reloading. The rail goes nowhere near the port itself, so the cattle would have to be dumped into the trucking yard...⁸⁴

5.98 The Committee noted that cattle are moved by rail in other areas and asked AustAsia Export Services whether an improved rail connection would solve some of the access problems. AustAsia replied:

...The average property size is 3½ thousand square kilometres. Once the cattle are on a truck and have settled into their positions, you take them straight to the induction-export facility.

The issue is that on some of these properties it is 40, 50 or 60 kilometres before they get to the front gate of the property. Then they hit the really bad roads, the regional roads. Then it is 300 or 400 kilometres before they get to a highway... They then take them to a railhead, unload them and settle the animals down.

Alternatively, perhaps they would co-ordinate a lift of 3,000 head to meet the timetable of a train. They would put them in a facility, move them to Darwin, unload at the railhead..., transfer back to a set of yards, do the induction for the boat, settle the animals down – because now they have been moved three or four times – then put them onto a boat.

That does everything to reduce the weight of the cattle, and the stress is increased. Let's face it we make money out of weight on cattle. Losing weight does not do a lot for us.⁸⁵

83 Darwin Port Corporation, Transcript, 27 September 2005, Darwin, p.17.

84 AustAsia Export Services, Transcript, 27 September 2005, Darwin, p.42.

85 AustAsia Export Services, Transcript, 27 September 2005, Darwin, p.42.

- 5.99 Representatives of the NT Cattlemen and Livestock Associations, reported that to bring the roads up to an all-weather standard and allow year round shipping of cattle:

...We are looking at around \$300 million, with an injection on top of that of between \$100 million and \$200 million over a five-year period to bring them up to speed. That is talking about regional roads and some local roads.

We would need in excess of \$600 million for arterial upgrades and \$300 million for local roads – that is, secondary roads.

Realistically, that would have to be over a longer period, because of getting contractors and whatever else, so I daresay it would be over about five or 10 years.

We would hope it would be some sort of shared arrangement between the federal government and the Northern Territory government.⁸⁶

- 5.100 The industry moves over 200,000 cattle through Darwin each year, and expects to get up to 230,000 or 240,000. However, the industry moves even greater numbers (approximately 300,000 a year) within Australia.⁸⁷

Committee Assessment

- 5.101 The Committee recognises that the increasing use of larger vehicles will pose a problem for local government. Against this, must be weighed the efficiencies and cost reductions made available by the use of such vehicles.
- 5.102 What is needed is a joint effort between the Australian Government and the state governments, to assist local governments to extend the B-double capable network. It is a task that will require a high level of planning and co-operation, because due care must be taken to preserve the safety and social amenity of regional districts. It may require an extensive program to by-pass many country towns and small cities.

86 AustAsia Export Services, Transcript, 27 September 2005, Darwin, p.46.

87 Northern Territory Cattlemen's Association Inc and the Northern Territory Livestock Exporters Association, Transcript, 27 September 2005, Darwin, pp.40 and 47.

- 5.103 The task must begin soon. The trend to the use of 40 foot containers will steadily force importers to unpack the larger containers close to the port. That, in turn, will require the goods to be repacked into 20 foot containers for movement further afield. The additional costs involved in this sequence of events will soon erode Australia's competitive position.
- 5.104 The Committee considers that Australia must keep pace with the world trend to larger containers. The increasing use of 40 foot containers reinforces the urgency of shifting a substantial proportion of freight from road to rail.
- 5.105 That alone will not solve the problem, however, and it is essential that Australia's main freight routes are able to move the larger containers freely. Even if a substantial proportion of freight is moved from road to rail, the freight task is growing so quickly that there will still be an increase in the volume on the roads. As that occurs, the transport companies will be pressured by their managements and their customers to use larger, more cost-effective, trucks.
- 5.106 The Committee recognises that a more extensive use of B-doubles and similar large transport vehicles will increase the road maintenance problems for local governments. It believes that this problem must be addressed quickly.
- 5.107 The Committee considers that COAG is best situated to determine how that funding gap could be overcome – it is a problem that is not simply confined to a few areas, but is faced by local authorities all over the country.
- 5.108 The road infrastructure projects mentioned in this chapter all have the potential to lift the productivity of the transport network itself and have a downstream effect on the efficiency and productivity of rural enterprises (as described in paragraph 5.94). In many cases they also offer improvements to road safety and reductions in the noise and congestion in residential areas.
- 5.109 The standardisation of regulations between states and territories stands out as one of the most urgent tasks facing transport authorities. An example brought out in evidence is the difference in mass limits applied to vehicles in NSW in comparison to the adjoining states.
- 5.110 The burden of complying with different regulations for various parts of a journey, reveals itself in: delayed deliveries, extra handling and the need for additional equipment – all of these translate into additional transport cost.

- 5.111 If Australia's transport industry is to be internationally competitive, the alignment of regulations across the country must be achieved without further delay.

Recommendation 10

- 5.112 **The Committee recommends that the Minister for Transport and Regional Services refer to COAG the question of how local government can be assisted with the extra cost of road maintenance caused by the increasing use of heavy transport vehicles.**

Recommendation 11

- 5.113 **The Committee recommends a spending program (subject to the outcome of recommendation 2), of not less than \$100 million a year for 5 years, to address key arterial roads, major feeder roads and community bypass roads in the Northern Territory and on connector roads into Western Australia and Queensland.**

Recommendation 12

- 5.114 **The Committee recommends that the Minister for Transport and Regional Services ask COAG to urgently progress the alignment of transport regulations between all the states and the mainland territories.**

