

**Southern Councils Group**  
Submission to the  
House of Representatives  
Standing Committee on Transport and Regional Services

**INTEGRATION OF REGIONAL ROAD AND RAIL NETWORKS AND THEIR  
CONNECTIVITY TO PORTS**

**Introduction:**

The Southern Councils Group (SCG), formerly the Illawarra Region of Councils, is the peak organisation representing Local Government in the Illawarra and South Coast regions. Member Councils include Bega Valley Shire, Eurobodalla Shire, Kiama Municipal, Shellharbour City, Shoalhaven City, Wingecarribee Shire and Wollongong City Councils.

The Terms of Reference for the above Inquiry encompass areas in which Southern Councils Group has taken an active role, both in issues surrounding our principal access road, the Princes Highway, and in our work within the regional Freight Group.

**Terms of Reference:**

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

The freight task in the Illawarra and South Coast region is chiefly concerned with moving local produce either for processing, export or to market, or to provide services to the community.

As there is no rail link south of Bomaderry, all freight into, through and from this large and expanding region, strategically centred between Sydney Canberra and Melbourne, has to be transported by road. There are considerable problems associated with this, as the Princes Highway, the only road servicing this region's growing community, and expanding businesses, is in dire need of proposed, defined, but not yet funded upgrades in many places.

Southern Councils Group has formed a strong allegiance with NRMA Motoring & Services, SEATS, NSW RTA, Australian Business LTD, and the South Coast Labour Council (PHocus) to campaign, on behalf of the community and those who are affected by the condition of the Highway, personally, socially, and commercially, to expedite its upgrade to the desired standard for its current and future usage. Although this has seen some movement towards improving the Highway, there is a very considerable task ahead to ensure that the Highway is a safe highway capable of adequately serving the needs of the community and its users.

The viability of the Princes Highway requires:  
Adequate safety features for the projected volumes of traffic so as not to be a constraint on both local and regional economic growth.

Recognition of the conflicts of the Highway's role in servicing the region's role as a major and increasingly popular holiday destination for both domestic and international visitors.

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

SCG would like to see:

- Recognition of the strategic significance of the locations of Port Kembla and Port Eden

*The port of Port Kembla is uniquely positioned to service the needs of some of the current users of Port Sydney and growth from Sydney and Port Botany with resulting social environmental and economic gains for all communities concerned. There is some commitment to this position within the State Government Sydney Metro Strategy planning but the potential could be more fully exploited. The road and rail connections to Port Kembla are currently adequate to serve existing use and have more potential to be upgraded for future growth than the very heavily populated and denser inner Sydney and southern Sydney networks surrounding the ports of Sydney and Botany.*

*The Port of Port Eden has been significantly upgraded to meet the munitioning task of the Australian Government and thus the regional road network, primarily the Princes Highway, assumes a significant role in national security. This role is increased with the large defence presence located in the Shoalhaven. While the Hume Highway is and will continue to be the main Sydney-Canberra-Melbourne freight route, the potential emergency role of the inter-connections with the coastal Princes Highway and the Princes Highway itself are significant.*

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

The task of providing and maintaining a suitable, yet continually evolving regional transport network is a shared one for the three levels of government. However, it must be stated that the maintenance of the Princes Highway to the standard which is currently required for the usage it gets is too big a task for the State Government to achieve without additional assistance from the Federal Government.

By working together the outcomes have the potential to be most beneficial not only to the local community and in terms of potential economic growth regionally, but to have significant benefits for the broader community.

SCG also believes it is the role of National and State Governments to ensure that sufficient resources are available for:

- Maintenance and improvement of all elements of the existing networks to the increasing expectations and standards of safety and serviceability. *Local government believes that funding mechanisms need to recognize and build in these costs for the future and not predicate maintenance of the asset solely on historical patterns.*
- Timely identification and planning for necessary upgrades, design, costings, and ultimately, construction and maintenance. *Partnerships, response to as yet unidentified opportunities, and unexpected changes in forecasts and trends can only be speedily taken advantage of if this necessary planning has been undertaken. Competitive advantage may be lost if our projects are not pre-designed and costed, given that we are subject to the lengthy delays that our consultative and environmentally responsible approaches require. For example, SCG would like to see a fully-costed plan and designs for the known necessary Princes Highway improvements. Similarly the “Thirroul Tunnel” proposal for the South Coast rail line requires further planning and design work in order for construction costs to be competitive against other identified projects Australia wide.*
- Retain important identified corridors for future use and inter-generational needs eg. *recent protection of the F6 corridor .... SCG supports preservation of this corridor and continuing evaluation of its most appropriate transport use options; eg. retention of the “Maldon-Dombarton” corridor between St Mary’s and Port Kembla. It is interesting to note that while reports commissioned in the late 90’s saw this corridor as unviable because it could not meet rail infrastructure requirements of that time, technological advances would now probably make the route viable.*
- Where necessary, identify further such corridors, linkages, or important elements that need to be built-in to futures planning. *Forward thinking and vision are required of all levels of government despite the pressures to concentrate on backlog and immediate needs. Both the Caloola Pass option and Main Road 92 are examples of this region’s adherence to this approach. Vision of this kind is most likely to arise within local and regional areas however, as it requires strong familiarity with the potential, and the possibilities of local geography and constraints. Recognition and exploitation of this local leadership is necessary at the macro levels.*