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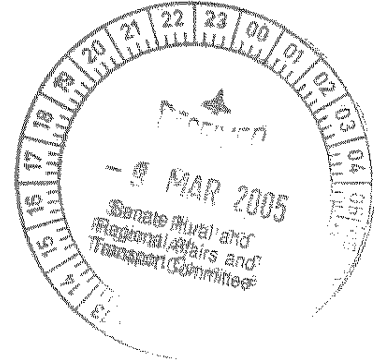


Victorian Farmers Federation

25 years - Fighting for Farmers

9 March 2005

Ms Maureen Weeks
 Secretary
 Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Senate References Committee
 Parliament House
 CANBERRA ACT 2600



Dear Ms Weeks,

**Auslink (National Land Transport) Bill 2004 &
 Auslink (National Land Transport – Consequential and Transitional Provisions) Bill 2004**

Thank you for the letter to Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) President, Paul Weller, dated 2 March 2005 and received 7 March 2005, regarding the above mentioned Bills.

I note that the letter requests a submission by 7 March 2005. This is a very tight timeframe and inadequate for the VFF to consider either Bill.

However, I wish to make comment in response to the issue posed in your correspondence, that the criteria for *Roads to Recovery* projects be extended to include public transport, cycling, walking infrastructure and regional airport runways.

The VFF is strongly opposed to the suggestion *Roads to Recovery* projects should be extended to include public transport, cycling, walking infrastructure and regional airport runways.

The *Roads to Recovery* program is supported by the VFF and is an overdue recognition by the Commonwealth of the need to provide additional funding to local governments, in particular local governments in rural and regional Australia, with additional funding to provide for the maintenance and upgrade of local roads and bridges.

Rural councils are facing a funding crisis with inadequate revenue from local rates and governments to provide for the upkeep of existing infrastructure. The standard of local road infrastructure across much of rural Victoria is deteriorating as a result of inadequate funding being made available by local government.

The *Roads to Recovery* program has been positive providing funding direct from Commonwealth to councils to upgrade roads. By requiring local governments to maintain existing road infrastructure investment in addition to *Roads to Recovery*, the program has made a positive difference, with extra road being maintained.

Despite the *Roads to Recovery* program, there remains inadequate funds available for the maintenance and upgrade of rural roads. As a result, any change to the program which would dilute the resources available for road upgrades should be strongly opposed.

The provision of public transport, cycling and walking infrastructure is a responsibility of State Governments and should be considered in isolation from the requirement of these governments to

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provide a safe and suitable road network. The VFF would prioritise road maintenance over these other projects.

The VFF recognises the value of regional airports to rural Australia and recognises that the Commonwealth may wish to consider investing in such projects. However, any Commonwealth initiative to upgrade regional airports should be considered separately from Auslink and the *Roads to Recovery* program. Again, the priority for the VFF would be investment in maintaining and upgrading rural roads rather than regional airports.

The VFF has prioritised additional road funding in our 2005/06 pre-Budget submission to the Victorian Treasurer, the Hon. John Brumby MLA. Central in our request has been that the Victorian Government match Commonwealth *Roads to Recovery* funding to councils.

I note that the National Farmers' Federation (NFF) is currently represented on the Australian Logistics Council by Mr Geoff Crick. If the Commonwealth Government was to establish a National Infrastructure Advisory Council, I believe it would be appropriate for the NFF to be invited to participate on that council.

The VFF would urge this Senate References Committee to find against proposals to change the focus of the *Roads to Recovery* program away from roads and bridges.

In general terms, the VFF would like to express concerns that it is our understanding *Roads to Recovery* funds have been allocated in Victoria to councils within the metropolitan area. The program was intended to provide resources for rural and regional councils to address the backlog in local road maintenance. It is not appropriate that these resources be diminished through sharing with metropolitan municipalities. The VFF request clarification in the allocation requirements such that *Roads to Recovery* funds be made available only to municipalities that are bona fide rural and regional councils.

The VFF would be pleased to discuss these matters with Committee members further.

Yours sincerely,



Geoff Crick
Chairman
VFF Economics Committee

cc. Senator Julian McGauran