



10 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 the National Farmers' Federation (NFF) , 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 NFF 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 NFF 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 NFF and is an overdue recognition by the Commonwealth of the need to provide additional funding to local governments, particularly in rural and regional Australia, 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 Australia 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 provide a safe and suitable road network. The NFF would prioritise road maintenance over these other projects.

The NFF acknowledges 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 NFF would be investment in maintaining and upgrading rural roads rather than regional airports.

I note that the 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 NFF urge this Senate References Committee to find against proposals to change the focus of the *Roads to Recovery* program away from roads and bridges.

The NFF would be pleased to discuss this matter with Committee members further.

Yours sincerely,

[signed]

**MR CHARLES BURKE**

NFF Vice President

Chairman NFF Farm Business and Economics Committee