

31 March2005

Secretary
Senate Rural and Regional Affairs
and Transport Committee
Parliament House
Canberra, ACT 2600

Attention: Maureen Weeks

Dear Sir or Madam,

The Outback Areas Community Development Trust (OACDT) wish to respond to the Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee inquiry into the Auslink Bill 2004 and the associated Consequential and Transitional Provisions Bill 2004 proposal for extending the criteria for Roads to Recovery projects to include public transport, cycling, walking infrastructure and regional airport runways.

The definition 'regional airport runways' is too limiting. Safe aircraft operations require other infrastructure besides the runway. The OACDT would suggest that the definition be modified to 'regional airport aeronautical infrastructure'. This would cover the following:

- Runways;
- Taxiways;
- Aircraft Parking areas;
- Windsocks, aircraft signal areas and aerodrome markers in accordance with the standards;
- Airport lighting for night operations, including runway, taxiway, threshold, apron, glide slope and windsock lights as well as the associated electrical equipment and cabling; and
- GPS approach designs and aircraft navigational aids.

In the 1980's the Commonwealth withdrew funding of regional airports. Progress Associations, with assistance from the OACDT, currently fund all public aerodromes in the 'out-of-council' districts of SA. Many of these small communities in the outback have no sustainable funding source to maintain their aerodromes and most rely heavily on

volunteer labour to keep the facilities open. These communities do not have the funds to maintain and upgrade their airports to acceptable standards.

The funding problem for regional airports was recognised by the Neville Report – Regional Aviation and Island Transport Service: Making Ends Meet. Submissions to that Inquiry documented many cases of the difficulties regional airports have in fully funding their airports. Recommendations 5 & 6 of that report recommended two options for Commonwealth resumption of funding for regional airports.

All Outback communities in SA depend on their aerodrome for access to medical services, and in some instances the aerodrome is the sole access point for emergency medical services. In 2003/2004 the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) operated into 93 regional aerodromes in South Australia. As well as the communities, travellers in the outback depend on aerodromes and the RFDS for access to emergency medical services. The RFDS also provides health services to these outback communities through regular clinic runs.

In many areas of South Australia's outback, the road system is subject to flooding and the only access to a community is by air. Places like Nepabunna, Marree, William Creek and Oodnadatta fall into this category. The cost of upgrading the roads to all weather capability for many of these places is prohibitive due to the cost of bridging significant numbers of creeks. It makes more sense in some cases to provide all weather (sealed pavements and night lighting) aerodromes to allow for 24 hour access to emergency medical services and essential supplies when necessary instead. The cost of upgrading the aerodrome in most cases is significantly less than the cost of upgrading the roads and may therefore represent better use of R2R funding. In any event, inclusion of airport aeronautical infrastructure in the R2R criteria would give communities the flexibility to balance all their transport access needs and to arrive at their own priorities.

Subject to modification of the criteria to include airport aeronautical infrastructure, the proposal to broaden the criteria for Roads to Recovery funding is strongly supported by the Outback Areas Community Development Trust. As well as broadening the criteria, funding should also be increased in recognition of the broader funding needs.

Yours sincerely,



William (Bill) McIntosh
Chair

