

29 April 2005

Australian Senate
Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
Legislation Committee
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600



Dear Senator

Engineers Australia is pleased to have the opportunity to submit its views on the Auslink (National Land Transport) Bill 2004 and the Auslink (Land Transport – Consequential and Transitional Provisions) Bill 2004.

Engineers Australia is the peak body for engineering practitioners in Australia and represents all disciplines and branches of engineering with 77 000 members Australia wide. It is the largest and most diverse engineering association in Australia. All members of Engineers Australia are bound by a common commitment to promote engineering and facilitate its practice for the common good. The planning, delivery and maintenance of transport infrastructure is a key concern of a substantial portion of our membership.

Engineers Australia is strongly supportive of an integrated approach to land transport planning and funding, and applauds the boldness of the AusLink initiative.

In recent years Engineers Australia has participated in many processes and undertaken many initiatives of its own which are of relevance to the concepts addressed in AusLink. In particular we would highlight:

- The 2000 and 2001 Australian Infrastructure Report Card – a report on the state of the nation's infrastructure.
- The 2003 New South Wales Infrastructure Report Card
- The 2004 Queensland Infrastructure Report Card

These reports provide some commentary on the physical and regulatory issues that apply to the operation of Australia's infrastructure, and are attached for your information.

Engineers Australia is also undertaking work to produce infrastructure report cards for Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia, Western Australia, the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory. It is hoped that these reports will fill the remaining gaps for all governments and other stakeholders to assess what needs to be done. All reports will be finalised in early September 2005.

The *Australian Infrastructure Report Card* shows the state of national infrastructure as rated in the 2000 and 2001 exercises. The gradings (A is best, E is worst) are based on asset condition, availability, reliability management and sustainability.

Table 1 Assessment of National Transport Infrastructure

Infrastructure	2000	2001
Ports	B	n/a
Airports	B	n/a
Telecommunications	B	n/a
Roads – National	C	C
Roads – State	C-	C-
Roads – Local	D	D
Rail	D-	D-

Source: Australian Infrastructure Report Card 2001

The NSW and Queensland reports noted the following:

Category	2004 Qld Grade	2003 NSW Grade
National Roads	C+	C+
State Roads	C	C+
Local Roads	C	C-
Rail	C+	D
Ports	B-	Not rated

The following addresses two of the terms of reference of the inquiry.

Responsibility for construction and maintenance of infrastructure

The Department of Transport and Regional Services (DOTARS) has stated that AusLink’s focus is not on meeting ‘here and now’ needs, but on establishing a framework for transport infrastructure investment that will meet Australia’s long-term transport needs. They have also stated that the Australian Government is also retaining its maintenance contribution at the same level (\$300 million per annum) as in 2003-04 for the former National Highway System.

One of the major concerns of Engineers Australia has been the level of funding allocated to maintenance of Australia’s infrastructure. Existing infrastructure is, in some cases, in a disturbing state, especially rail and local roads. The emphasis of Auslink is on the development of new projects. However, existing investment in infrastructure, and overall system performance, needs to be safeguarded as well. We believe it essential that the national infrastructure programming methodology adopt a whole of life analysis approach when prioritising investment in the expanded National Land Transport Network.

Given that State and Territory roads are included in the National Land Transport Network, Engineers Australia agrees that it is reasonable to expect that the States and Territory Government’s to contribute to maintenance of the network. However, it is imperative that the Australian Government also contribute the appropriate proportion of maintenance funds.

There should be a balancing proposal to address infrastructure maintenance as well as infrastructure development.

Planning and decision-making for future investment priorities

An issue that has been of concern to Engineers Australia for some time is the lack of a national advisory body to provide advice on strategic planning of national infrastructure needs. The proposal by DOTARS to gain input and the views of non-government stakeholders during the development of the corridor strategies is most welcome. However there is a need for a higher level of consultation to provide stakeholders with the opportunity to contribute to long-term planning and investment priorities in Australia's land transport infrastructure.

Therefore, the statement by DOTARS that it continues to be the Australian Government's intention to set up an advisory council to allow the private sector to input into future land transport infrastructure funding is welcome. However, while the Australian Transport Council (ATC) Ministers agreed in principle to an independent advisory council structure, unfortunately, the operations of this proposed council have not yet been agreed by ATC Ministers. It is understood that some jurisdictions have opposed the concept of an independent council, preferring to retain existing State/Federal working groups. At present, the government's internal advice comes from bodies with a narrow division of responsibility (on the basis of transport modes), which leads to advice that is narrowly-focused. It is our view that a single body be given responsibility for providing advice on all transport modes, to provide greater integration.

Engineers Australia strongly believes that an independent advisory body is essential to the Auslink process. We believe that the advisory body needs to include representatives from the private sector, as well as Federal, State and local government representatives.

An independent advisory body would provide a distinctive national perspective on a range of matters, including:

- strategic development, best practice and standards;
- cross-jurisdictional issues and impacts;
- relationships and interaction between different forms of infrastructure;
- the application of the principles of ecologically sustainable development; and
- overall balance of infrastructure provision.

It would be necessary for the advisory body to consult with all interested parties, and advise and report on such matters as:

- the state of infrastructure and future infrastructure needs (including national accounting standards and data collection);
- best practice principles in infrastructure provision and management;
- the coordination of infrastructure planning and assessment across all levels of government;
- the type and quality of information that providers should make available to the public;
- the establishment of a set of principles to guide infrastructure planning; and
- other infrastructure issues referred to it.

An organisational framework could be established which combines a top-down approach which establishes the appropriate level of funding in relation to need and resources, at a strategic level, and conducts a bottom-up technical analysis of candidate projects – and then matches the two via a needs analysis and some form of optimisation process, supported by appropriate databases and information systems. The result would be a funding allocation and works program committed for an appropriate time period.

I trust this will assist in your deliberations. If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Leanne Hardwicke
Director, National and International Policy