



24 March 2005

Ms Maureen Weeks
Secretary
Australian Senate
Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Reference Committee/Legislation
Committee
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600
E-mail: rrat.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Ms Weeks,

Re: Auslink (National Land Transport) Bill 2004, Auslink (National Land Transport – Consequential and Transitional Provisions) Bill 2004.

I refer to your letter of 2 March to Mr Peter North, Chairman of the Warren Centre, inviting a submission from the Warren Centre on the abovementioned bills.

This submission, like our 6 February 2003 submission to the AusLink Green Paper, is based on The Warren Centre's highly-respected research, the *Sustainable Transport in Sustainable Cities (STinSC)* project, with input from other leading professionals who were involved in that project.

As expressed in our earlier submission, The Warren Centre's position is that the Federal Government should take the lead in the area of transport through a National Transport Plan embracing all transport in Australia, including that in the highly-populated major cities. However, we readily acknowledge that governments tend to move slowly, and the proposed Auslink (National Land Transport) bills represent a logical and valuable first step in the effective integration of land transport modes.

The comments that follow point to perceived strengths and weaknesses in the Auslink (National Land Transport) bills. Since one of the bills' weaknesses is a lack of support for innovation, apart from in the area of land transport administration, we have included some suggestions to enhance the bills' outcomes.

Overview of Bills

By bringing together the current land transport funding programs of the Commonwealth, the bills will improve the integration of land transport investment in Australia, and the administration of Commonwealth transport programs. However, as they maintain the narrow focus of transport on Commonwealth funding responsibilities, the bills have an inordinate emphasis on interstate and interregional





road and rail links and port development and linkages. We are in no way detracting from the importance of freight and regional and interstate transport; however, a broader focus would have been encouraging.

It is appropriate, and to be expected, that when allocating resources, the Federal Government should focus on the soundness of their investments. However, social responsibility and environmental impact should also be taken into account, as they affect the broader community interest and investment in the nation. In this context, it should also be recognised that the cities are the economic drivers of the nation.

In the Warren Centre's view, the bills offer no innovative measures to attract and excite community interest and support. Possible improvements in this area are discussed below. Specific comments on matters raised in your letter of 2 March 2005 are also given below.

Changes to Commonwealth funding responsibility for construction and maintenance

As indicated in The Warren Centre submission of 6 February 2003, our view is that the Federal Government should confine its direct transport funding to the development of national assets, and leave operation and maintenance of these assets to the States, Territories and local governments, since these bodies are better able to fund this latter work through user-pays systems such as fares, vehicle charges and the like.

We therefore suggest that funding for operation and maintenance be excluded from the Commonwealth funding for all national projects.

This would then allow for an allocation of resources to States and Territories on a consistent assessment methodology across all transport modes, allowing for optimum outcomes from funds invested.

Establishment of a National Infrastructure Advisory Council

We support the creation of a national advisory body reporting to the Ministerial Transport Advisor Council (TAC) on strategic planning of infrastructure needs and planning and development of infrastructure projects. It is suggested that representation on such a body include non-aligned person or bodies such as The Warren Centre and the Institution of Engineers.

At present, the government's internal advice comes from bodies with a narrow division of responsibility (on the basis of transport modes), inevitably leading to advice that is itself narrowly-focused. We suggest a single body be given responsibility for providing internal advice on all transport modes: this in itself would provide an initial move towards greater integration of transport.

Extending the criteria of Roads to Recovery projects to include public transport, cycling, walking infrastructure and regional airport runways

There is considerable merit in broadening the scope of this direct funding to local government. Road enhancement is not the only way to improve accessibility to the



local environment: walkways, cycleways and the improvement of public transport services can lead to greater accessibility than roadworks. At the same time, these transport alternatives can reduce car dependency; reduce obesity, by encouraging walking or cycling; and reduce environmental impacts of noise and pollution from car use.

It is suggested that this program be retitled "Pathways to Recovery" and embrace other works in the local area such as walkways, cycleways and works to enhance public transport operation, such as improvements at public transport interchanges, bus priority and the like.

Exciting Innovations

In our opinion, there are two innovations that could be incorporated into the Auslink program to create real community support for the Federal Government initiative being introduced with these bills. The *STinSC* report clearly showed that, in contrast to the decision-makers' (politicians and senior bureaucrats) opinion that the community would not accept technology and were reluctant to embrace it, the community are in fact enthusiastic about new technology and readily adapt to it. The change now being implemented offers a unique opportunity for the Federal Government to show it can respond to community views and expectations.

The innovations proposed are:

- The very high speed train (VHST); and
- The Austrans people mover rail based system.

Both of these projects would seem to align with the proposed *AusLink Transport Development and Innovation Projects* category funding program.

The very high speed train (VHST)

Consultants to the Federal Government showed that an east-coast VHST between Brisbane and Melbourne was not economically justified, and not financially sustainable. However, this work did not examine the possibility of a VHST linking the urban regions within our cities.

The Warren Centre's *STinSC* found that a Greater Sydney VHST could prove economically sound and could probably be financed as a private venture project without recourse to government financial support. In addition, with a network extending to Newcastle in the north and Campbelltown and Wollongong in the south, the economics and financing of incremental extensions of the city system to Canberra and possibly, in due course, linking to a Greater Melbourne system, could take on an entirely different complexion.

The VHST also offers the Federal Government the opportunity to move to maximise outer-city regional hub airports, say at Newcastle and Canberra, avoiding the need for a second Sydney airport.

The Warren Centre strongly reiterates the conclusion of its *STinSC* project that the Federal Government should develop a 50-year airport- and VHST-strategic plan for



Australia. We further recommend that the Federal Government investigate the VHST network for Greater Sydney proposed by the Warren Centre as part of its *AusLink Transport Development and Innovation Projects* funding program.

The Austrans ultra-light rail system

Austrans is a fully automated, ultra-light rail people mover system that carries modules of nine persons at high frequency to various destinations. The advantages of the Austrans system are that as it is independent of the road network, it is not subject to traffic congestion delays; it can traverse tight bends and steep grades; it offers a two-minute service to any destination with travel times better than car travel. It is an effective alternative to the car.

The prototype of this Australian invention, developed with Federal Government financial support, is now operating at Chullora in Sydney. It has been shown to be an economical and financially-sound public transport investment.

Currently, a location for a demonstration project to display this Australian innovation to the world is being sought. The system would provide an ideal airport-city link in a town such as Canberra, where it could link the airport, Civic and the University.

The Warren Centre recommends investigation and development of an initial demonstration project supported by the Commonwealth for this Australian innovation as part of its *AusLink Transport Development and Innovation Projects* funding program.

We would be pleased to elaborate on any aspects of the suggestions above.

Yours faithfully

Professor Michael Dureau
Executive Director