

To the Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
PO Box 6100, Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600

Subject: Perth Freight Link – A resident’s concerns

Definitions

Perth Freight Link (PFL) – inclusive of both Roe 8 and Roe 9 extensions, any graded works, noise walls or other scope of works (either proposed or finalised) detailed or yet to be proposed or finalised.

The Port – Fremantle Port

Background

My wife and I moved to the suburb of Hilton in 2011, having previously lived in Karratha for 2 years. The rear boundary of our property backs directly onto Stock Road and is separated by a road reserve containing trees and shrubs. We were aware of the proximity of Stock Road and the traffic it carried when we bought the property but would have never have bought this house if we knew that the PFL would eventuate. The same cannot be said for those people who currently reside on Leach Hwy. Clearly the situation has become intolerable for those living on Leach Hwy but shifting the problem to another urban road is clearly a not a solution. The *status quo* is not acceptable but neither is shifting the problem to other suburbs.

Summary

I assert that Roe 8 will serve to shift the current problems associated with transportation of freight to and from the Port. It will not solve the problems. The proposed solution for the increasing freight coming to WA should be dealt with in the most cost-effective way possible, with minimal impact to communities, living standards and the environment.

The PFL proposal is inherently flawed as it fails to address the nub of the problem which is that the Port is in the wrong place. The \$1.7 billion proposal as currently proposed does not even reach the Port. The benefit-to-cost ratio that has been suggested fails to take into account that the road does not reach the Port and a huge bottleneck will be created before Stirling Bridge which will have a detrimental effect on all of the benefits cited by the State Government.

No alternative proposals have been evaluated to improve concerns with the current situation and the forecast growth of the Port. The Port will reach capacity within the next five to ten years so any long-term benefits to the wider WA economy will be limited in nature.

Any enquiries into facts and figures have been stonewalled by a “commercial in confidence” clause which means the public cannot judge the merits of the project against the downsides to local communities and the environment. Transparency would mean a reasonable conclusion could be arrived at with all the facts presented without “spin”.

There is a huge amount of opposition to this plan. Other alternatives are available with less impact in most areas of concern. They arguably have an anticipated higher cost benefit ratio and would have a greater long-term benefit to the wider WA economy. Putting freight onto rail will alleviate congestion problems. It is acknowledged that trucks still have a role to play in the movement of freight but minimising their impact should be the State Government’s focus. The PFL does the opposite.

Terms of Reference

As a member of the community that the PFL (which is inclusive of the Roe 8 extension) will affect, I have been compelled to make this submission. My opinion on this project, how it has unfolded and the adverse effects of building the Roe 8 and 9 extensions, will be described below from a personal perspective. I am unable to see any of the documents that relate to the case for the PFL and give this due consideration, as they are not in the public domain due to being “commercial in confidence”.

On 13 August 2015, the Senate moved that the decision to commit funding to the Perth Freight Link project be referred to the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee for inquiry and report by 26 November 2015, with particular reference to:

- a. the decision-making process that led to the announcement that the Perth Freight Link would receive Commonwealth funding,
- b. the information relied upon by state and Commonwealth governments informing the decision to fund this project,
- c. the importance of transparency of decision-making in relation to infrastructure decisions,
- d. evaluation of options for managing growth in the Perth freight task, and
- e. any related matters.

Discussion of the above

To buy our property we carried out extensive legal searches and due process before taking the decision to proceed. We were aware of the Latitude 32 project and the bipartisan agreement for development of the Outer Harbour at Kwinana. During the entire process of purchasing our home, there was no mention about any plans which would have an impact in increasing the freight traffic on Stock Road.

This project was suddenly announced and appears to be motivated by an ideology in the Federal government which is completely at odds with all current thinking on urban planning and has gone against all planning from the previous 20 years of both Liberal and Labour WA Governments. Where did the PFL come from?

In reference to the decision-making process, it has become apparent that there has been no investigation of alternatives to the PFL. All of the benefits being claimed for this project by the WA Government have been assessed by Infrastructure Australia and many have been identified as being optimistic (read as overinflated) but say it still meets the threshold of having more than a 1:1 benefit-to-cost ratio. I note that they do not say by how much it exceeds this ratio and surely this is what we need to know. We also need to know the underlying assumptions so that proper scrutiny of the proposed benefits can be truly evaluated.

Any useful information relating to any project where public money is being spent should be, by its very nature, open to the public's scrutiny. The majority of useful information relating to this project has been hidden from the public by using the argument of it being “commercial in confidence”.

I do not care about what has happened under either current or past Liberal or Labour State Governments with respect to such projects. Public money is being used here (there is no private money at risk) and as such any information requested by any

interested party who pays into the tax system to generate the public purse should be made available on request.

I have heard about the “free-market” and the “global market” since my youth and yet it seems whenever public money is used for something everything is shrouded in secrecy. The public can only conclude from this, in the absence of any information to the contrary, that something underhand, self-serving or ethically questionable is happening.

With respect to the PFL, much of the information that has been provided to the public has been based upon assumptions that we, the public, are not privy to due to them supposedly being “commercial in confidence”. In the absence of hard facts, conjecture fills the void. If someone wished to justify a questionable decision they had made they would look for possible benefits and then make these appear as large as possible, while either minimising or ignoring problems. It is of the utmost importance that this information is released to the Senate and the public and quickly before Roe 8 begins construction.

The “commercial in confidence” clause has been used with the PFL to shroud the decision-making process despite questions and pressure by both Federal MPs and the Senate to release information pertinent to the decision making process.

There is no transparency here, just wall after wall behind which the real facts are hidden.

I have written to Minister Nalder on the issue of the PFL and I received a standard letter noting my concerns, but that his office believed that the following benefits would be produced:

- *Improved safety for all traffic users,*

My thoughts:

All traffic users? Has there been any study into the effects of funneling traffic from Roe Hwy onto Stock Road (a four-lane highway) from Leach Hwy (a six-lane highway)? If there has – release the study. If not you cannot make this claim, as making another road’s traffic density higher will undoubtedly make the frequency of accidents on that road higher.

- *Reduced traffic congestion enabling the efficient movement of people, goods and services to support community and economic development,*

My thoughts:

As mentioned previously, moving traffic from one road to another moves the problem. There will continue to be a significant bottle-neck at Stirling Bridge so this benefit doesn’t exist until a solution is found for this particular problem. As the project hasn’t been scoped properly this means that the Benefit-to-Cost Ratio reduces further. Does it fall below the threshold?

- *Reduced fuel usage and exhaust emissions through reduced stop-start traffic movements It is estimated that the project will deliver savings of nearly 450,000 tonnes of CO₂ equivalent by 2031*

My thoughts:

As discussed previously, bottle-necks in traffic will mean a knock-on effect and reduction in the flow of traffic on the proposed route. Traffic entering the route also has an effect on flow of traffic. Furthermore induced traffic onto the road will reduce the flow further. What is the basis for this figure? Without the assumptions this calculation is based on the figures are meaningless.

- *Enhance the wider Beeliar wetlands area for the community, for example by providing a network of shared paths for cyclists and pedestrians,*

My thoughts:

A four-lane highway in this area will not enhance the area. The environmental impact on a sensitive wetland ecosystem is impossible to predict, but the presence of the Roe 8 extension is certainly unlikely to improve the strain the Beeliar Wetlands area is already under. As has been highlighted by Main Roads in recent times, debris falling from vehicles is on the increase. As far as I am aware there is no measure put in place to deal with this problem with respect to Roe 8. You only need to drive along the Kwinana Freeway or Roe Highway to see debris lost from vehicles using the road.

"1,675 callouts to collect debris from our roads were recorded by us [Main Roads WA] in 2013. Every year, debris that has fallen from unsecured loads such as household goods, building materials and green waste, cause road closures and disruptions especially on our freeways.

This costs thousands of dollars in damages to vehicles and property and is a major contributor to serious crashes. Both light vehicles drivers and heavy vehicle operators are responsible for proper and safe load restraint."

<https://www.mainroads.wa.gov.au/UsingRoads/RoadTrafficInformation/Pages/load.aspx>

- *Fewer trucks on urban roads which will mean safer neighbourhoods for families, and*

Stock Road **is** an urban road and flanked by suburbs including Hilton, Hamilton Hill, Coolbellup, Samson, Willagee and Palmyra. Strangely Stock Road is one of those listed as being expected to have a reduced amount of freight traffic as a result of the PFL. As the proposed route for Roe 9 uses Stock Road I don't understand how this can be the case. Roe 8 will funnel freight traffic onto Stock Road so neither part of the PFL does what is currently being advertised by Main Roads WA and this, in my view, is misleading and misinforming the public.

- *Significant freight industry productivity improvements.*

According to the traffic modelling done by Main Roads WA, 42% of freight traffic will choose to use other routes to the Port. A GPS system to charge a toll to all freight traffic is being proposed at a cost of approximately \$60 million to freight companies. They are now suggesting an increase in the permitted axle weight of

trucks to offset this cost. What assumptions are the improvements based on? What are the specific productivity improvements? As I understand it, a time saving of 7 to 9 minutes per journey has been stated but this doesn't take into account any of the problems in the approach to the Port before crossing the Swan River – the bottlenecks.

As has been revealed recently and previously stated, no other options have been evaluated. The project has therefore been decided before proper evaluation of other options including the Outer Harbour at Kwinana (Latitude 32).

A long-term view of this problem should be taken. A 'cap and transition' plan suggested in the CUSP document (Professor Newman et al) has a great deal of merit. Most inner city ports in developed countries have been moved out of residential areas and to predominantly industrial areas, lessening the impact of increases in freight to and from ports by increased trade. The current Fremantle Port will continue to be a working port for some time to come, but a decision about ultimately moving operations to another more suitable location need to be made and soon. The redevelopment of the current Fremantle Port location would be a lucrative proposition developers and the WA Government.

Building the PFL just doesn't make good financial sense. This would have become apparent if other options had been evaluated but as has been reported this has not been done and so there has been no due process here. It will greatly affect my quality of life, that of my children and those in the suburbs surrounding the current location of the Port. The health impacts of diesel particulates and the correlation with asthma, allergies and lung cancer are well documented and the PFL will increase these from current levels.

The environmental concerns about Roe 8 have not been fully considered, the concerns of indigenous people about sacred sites in the wetlands area. The impacts on public health and on the standard of living in areas affected have been ignored. Finally, the uncertainty with which the State Government has approached this project has caused unnecessary and undue stress to all those affected. A complete disregard for the public has been shown. The public has placed their trust in and devolved power to politicians. As a resident and a citizen of Australia, I seek to stop this road until other alternatives have been given due consideration and a long term and apolitical view has been taken.

The State and Federal Governments are servants to the people, not the other way around. Use our power and our money wisely. The PFL is not a wise use of our money and the power we have invested in the State and Federal Governments has been abused in their handling of this project. There has been an attempt to obfuscate the truth and hide behind commercial sensitivities due to the current Federal Government's ideology of favouring roads as a solution to every transport issue across the country without due consideration of any alternatives.

Nicholas O'Brien