



**Australian Government**

**Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development**

**Secretary**

Contact: Nicole Spencer

Senator Chris Ketter  
Chair  
Senate Economic Reference Committee  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Senator

### **Inquiry into the operations of existing and proposed toll roads in Australia**

The Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the above inquiry. Noting the relatively short timeframes, we offer the following brief comments together with a paper released by the Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics in September 2016, which includes a national overview of tolling, relative charges and traffic performance (see **Attachment A**).

Existing toll roads in Australia have generally been delivered via a public-private partnership, whereby the private sector is paid to deliver the road infrastructure and the road-related services on behalf of state and territory governments.

Tolls are charges applied to specific parts of the road network, such as particular routes or corridors (as part of a self-contained cost recovery or financing arrangement). The toll charges paid by road users are generally reflective of the cost of delivering and operating the individual section of road infrastructure, and a commercial rate of return based on the risk profile of the infrastructure asset. Motorists can, in most cases, choose to pay a toll (an immediate cost) based on the benefits of using the road or elect to take an alternative route.

The multiple road concession contracts, each individually negotiated by state and territory governments, are different to network-wide road user charges. For example, Australian heavy vehicles are subject to a road user charge, applied to each litre of diesel used by heavy vehicles on public roads during a given financial year.

The Department is playing a key role in two streams of cross-jurisdictional work related to the way we fund roads in Australia:

- Exploring medium and long-term charging, funding and investment reform for road transport services, beginning with heavy vehicle road reform (HVRR).
- Investigating of the potential benefits and impacts of cost reflective pricing for light vehicles.

As part of HVRR, the Australian Government released a discussion paper in May 2017 on independent price regulation of heavy vehicle charges. This is an objective which federal, state and territory governments, through the Transport Infrastructure Council, have agreed to accelerate in accordance with Council of Australian Governments' December 2015 directive.

The discussion paper poses some questions around setting heavy vehicle charges which properly recover the cost of building, maintaining and operating roads for those vehicles. The paper examines the fragmentation of price and economic regulation across the land transport sector, including toll roads, and explores options to improve the transparency and independence of the charge setting process for heavy vehicles.

In November 2016, the Australian Government announced the establishment of a study, to be led by an eminent Australian, into the potential benefits and impacts of road user charging for light vehicles. The Study will, among other things, consider the benefits of transitioning to a more transparent, efficient and equitable charging regime and the interaction with existing and future toll road concession arrangements. The Government has been clear that any move to implement substantial changes to Australia's road funding arrangements would only go ahead if governments were confident that the benefits to the community of any new arrangements outweigh the costs. The governance arrangements for the Study, including the eminent Australian and supporting secretariat, are still to be settled.

Finally, I would also like to draw to the inquiry's attention to key reforms that are already underway to improve the way infrastructure projects are identified, assessed and funded. Through initiatives including the release of *Principles for Innovative Financing* in February 2016 and establishing the Infrastructure and Project Financing Agency, the Australian Government is increasingly seeking to optimise the level of private investment in transport infrastructure through public private partnerships, which can be supported by user pay arrangements on road corridors and the prudent use of innovative financing. The Department is also becoming involved in infrastructure projects earlier to help deliver, not only the best long-term economic returns, but the desired outcomes for users and the wider community. These types of activities ensure that the Australian Government's investment is well-targeted and the benefits are maximised.

I trust this information is of use to the inquiry and consider that the resulting report will be a useful input into future land transport market reform activities.

Yours sincerely



Mike Mrdak AO

13 July 2017



## Australian Government

### Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development

Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics



Toll Roads in Australia

## Overview

The history of toll roads in Australia dates back to 1811 when the first toll road (Sydney–Parramatta) was built.<sup>1</sup> In 1932, the first toll bridge (Sydney Harbour Bridge) was built by the NSW government. Since the early 1990s, there has been increasing involvement of the private sector in toll road projects, causing a fundamental change to the traditional landscape of toll roads in Australia.

Currently there are 16 toll roads operating in Australia (Table 1) with a total length of 241 km. Most of these toll roads involve some form of Public Private Partnership (PPP). Of the 16, eight are in NSW, two in Victoria and six in Queensland. In terms of road length, NSW accounts for 41 per cent, Victoria 25 per cent and Queensland 34 per cent. Figure 1 shows the locations of toll roads in Australia.

The current toll roads in Australia can be broadly classified into three major categories (Table 1):

- *Harbour/river crossing*: bridges or tunnels that are short in length with a reasonable demand due to physical barriers (toll roads 1-3).
- *Tunnels or roads with tunnels*: short-distance routes (2–7 km) that are aimed at avoiding congestion within major urban areas (toll roads 4-8).
- *Intra-city links*: mostly long-distance routes connecting major traffic generating nodes (toll roads 9-16).

In Australia, fixed tolling (not changing with distance or time of day) is the main form of toll charge. Tolls on some roads vary by distance travelled, time of day and day of week. In general, travelling on intra-city long-distance link routes is cheaper on a cents/km basis compared with travelling on the other types of toll roads. All tolls are now collected electronically in Australia.

Traffic performance for each of the above three toll road categories has differed in the past. Toll roads involving tunnels experienced substantial difficulties in achieving their initial and future traffic targets. In contrast, traffic growth performance for most intra-city long-distance link routes was relatively good after the initial traffic level was established.

The toll road industry has seen significant restructuring over the past decade, leading to increased concentration in ownership and operation. Reduced competition among toll road operators may not be desirable from the viewpoint of the efficiency of the industry over the long run.

Congestion in the largest capital cities in Australia has been growing with rising population. Toll roads have helped ease this congestion by allowing road infrastructure to be provided earlier than would have been possible under the traditional model of road provision. Road users have benefited from toll roads in the form of reduced travel time and vehicle operating costs, and improved safety. Studies by consultants have found that toll roads have made a net positive contribution to the economic wellbeing of the country.

<sup>1</sup> KPMG (2015).

Development of new toll roads has been hampered by failures of toll roads in the recent past due to over-optimistic traffic forecasts. More flexible forms of PPPs may be required that are attractive to both the government and the private sector, especially for sharing traffic risks in the early years of toll road operations.

Table 1 Toll Roads in Australia by Type

Type	Name	State	Length (km)	Original owner	Majority Owner	Operator
Harbour/river crossing	1. Sydney Harbour Bridge	NSW	1.1	NSW Dept. of Public Works	RMS	RMS
	2. Sydney Harbour Tunnel	NSW	2.7	Transfield Pty Ltd & Kumagai Gumi	Kumagai Gumi (50%)	Tunnel Holdings Pty Ltd
	3. Go Between Bridge	QLD	0.3	Brisbane City Council	Transurban	Transurban
Tunnels or roads with tunnels	4. Cross City Tunnel	NSW	2.1	CCT Motorways	Transurban	Transurban
	5. Lane Cove Tunnel	NSW	3.8	Connector Motorways	Transurban	Transurban
	6. Clem7	QLD	6.8	RiverCity Motorway	Transurban	Transurban
	7. Airport Link	QLD	6.7	BrisConnections	Transurban	Transurban
	8. Legacy Way	QLD	5.7	Brisbane City Council	Transurban	Transurban
Intra-city links - short - long	9. M1 (Eastern Distributor)	NSW	6.0	Airport Motorway Pty Ltd	Transurban	Transurban
	10. M2 (Hills)	NSW	21.0	Hills Motorway Pty Ltd	Transurban	Transurban
	11. M7 (Westlink)	NSW	40.0	Western Sydney Orbital Pty Ltd	Transurban (50%)	Transurban
	12. M5 (South-West)	NSW	22.0	Interlink Roads Pty Ltd	Transurban (50%)	Transurban
	13. CityLink	VIC	22.0	Transurban	Transurban	Transurban
	14. EastLink	VIC	39.0	ConnectEast	Horizon Roads Pty Ltd	Horizon Roads Pty Ltd
	15. Gateway Motorway	QLD	23.1	Queensland Investment Corp.	Transurban	Transurban
	16. Logan Motorway	QLD	38.7	Logan Motorways Pty Ltd	Transurban	Transurban

Source: Compiled by BITRE based on various sources.

## Toll charges

Toll charges take a number of forms:

- Fixed
- Distance-based (M7 (Westlink))
- Time of day and day of week (Sydney Harbour Bridge and Tunnel)

Currently, 13 of the 16 toll roads in Australia use fixed tolling whereby there is a fixed toll for use of the whole or specific sections of the motorway, regardless of the distance or time of day and day of week travelled. The M7 uses distance-based tolling (cars 38.81 cents/km capped at \$7.76 and trucks 99.35 cents/km capped at \$19.87). Toll charges on the Sydney Harbour Bridge and Tunnel vary according to time of day and day of week. For people travelling outside of the peak periods or on weekends, a lower toll applies.

Table 2 shows charges for the 16 Australian toll roads. For toll roads that do not use fixed tolling or have multiple entries/exits, tolls refer to weekday peak-hour charges or maximum charges for the full distance travelled. Toll charges on intra-city links are generally lower on a cents/km basis (for cars, mostly in the range of 15-32 cents/km and for trucks 41-96 cents/km assuming they travel the full distance), compared with travelling on the other types of toll roads.

Table 2 Toll Charges (A\$ per full trip, excluding fees)

Type	Name	State	Length (km)	Cars	Trucks	Notes
Harbour/river crossing	1. Sydney Harbour Bridge	NSW	1.1	4.0	4.0	Cars=Class A Trucks=Class B
	2. Sydney Harbour Tunnel	NSW	2.7	4.0	4.0	Cars=Class A Trucks=Class B
	3. Go Between Bridge	QLD	0.3	3.1	8.2	Cars=Class 2 Trucks=Class 4
Tunnels or roads with tunnels	4. Cross City Tunnel	NSW	2.1	5.4	10.8	Cars=Class A Trucks=Class
	5. Lane Cove Tunnel	NSW	3.8	3.2	8.9	Cars=Class A Trucks=Class B
	6. Clem7	QLD	6.8	4.9	13.1	Cars=Class 2 Trucks=Class 4
	7. Airport Link	QLD	6.7	5.3	14.0	Cars=Class 2 Trucks=Class 4
	8. Legacy Way	QLD	5.7	4.9	13.1	Cars=Class 2 Trucks=Class 4
Intra-city links - short - long	9. M1 (Eastern Distributor)	NSW	6.0	6.8	13.6	Cars=Class A Trucks=Class B
	10. M2 (Hills)	NSW	21.0	6.7	20.2	Cars=Class A Trucks=Class B
	11. M7 (Westlink)	NSW	40.0	7.8	19.9	Cars=Class A Trucks=Class B
	12. M5 (South-West)	NSW	22.0	4.5	13.0	Cars=Class A Trucks=Class B
	13. CityLink	VIC	22.0	8.7	11.6	Cars=Cars Trucks=HCV
	14. EastLink	VIC	39.0	6.0	16.0	Cars=Cars Trucks=HCV
	15. Gateway Motorway	QLD	23.1	4.4	11.6	Cars=Class 2 Trucks=Class 4
	16. Logan Motorway	QLD	38.7	2.7	7.3	Cars=Class 2 Trucks=Class 4

Notes: Definition of cars and trucks across the three States is slightly different.

Source: Compiled by BITRE on 31 August 2016 based on the latest information available on the relevant websites.

## Traffic performance

Traffic performance just after opening was generally poor compared with the forecast traffic levels. According to Black (2014), the actual traffic volumes at the opening were only 32-45 per cent of the forecast values for tunnel projects and 48-82 per cent for selected intra-city link route projects (Table 3).

Table 3 Comparison of Daily Forecast and Actual Traffic on Australian Toll Roads

Toll Facility	Opening Volume (Daily Forecast)	Opening Volume (Daily Actual)	Ratio (Actual/Forecast)
Cross City Tunnel, Sydney	85,000	27,000	0.32
Lane Cove Tunnel, Sydney	104,786	44,420	0.42
Clem7, Brisbane	60,000	26,711	0.45
Airport Link, Brisbane	135,000	47,000	0.35
Eastern Distributor, Sydney	33,000	27,000	0.82
M2 (Hills), Sydney	72,000	40,000	0.56
M7 (Westlink), Sydney	196,500	94,808	0.48
EastLink, Melbourne	259,000	149,000	0.58

Source: Black (2014).

Traffic performance since opening has varied. Figure 2 reproduces the chart created by Loader (2016) showing traffic growth performance since 2006 for selected Australian toll roads. A number of observations were made by Loader:

- Most roads show a cyclical trend, with weak growth between 2008/9–2011/12 (possibly related to the Global Financial Crisis), and strong growth in 2013/4 and onwards.
- Growth in traffic has been much faster on non-radial roads (intra-city long-distance link routes):
  - Sydney's M7 (Westlink) and Melbourne's EastLink have been outstanding examples.
  - Melbourne's CityLink has seen fairly steady growth over the past 5 years.
  - More recently, traffic on Sydney's M2 (Hills) and M5 (South-West) has rebounded strongly.

## Industry ownership and operation

According to IBISWorld (Magner 2016), in the past 5 years, there has been an increased concentration in ownership and operation in the toll road operators industry. Altogether, there are only six enterprises now, a reduction from the nine enterprises that operated in 2010/11. The industry is now dominated by Transurban with a market share of 73 per cent (in revenue terms). The second largest toll road operator is Horizon Roads Pty Ltd, which manages EastLink (Melbourne) with a market share of 13.8 per cent. In recent years, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission approved a series of acquisitions by Transurban on the grounds that there is adequate competition from non-toll roads and public transport, and that state governments have powers to regulate the industry. IBISWorld rated the level of competition in the toll road operators industry as 'medium'.

## Benefits of toll roads

Two studies have been undertaken by consultants<sup>2</sup> to show the net benefits of Australian toll roads. In 2008, Ernst & Young investigated the toll roads in Sydney and their economic contribution to NSW and Australia. The approach was to update earlier cost-benefit analyses (CBAs) with revised traffic forecasts and actual costs. The net present value (NPV) of the Sydney Orbital toll road projects was calculated to be \$22.7b (in 2007 dollar terms). The direct road user benefits were estimated to be \$30.8b, 80 per cent of which were travel time savings. The improved road networks were also expected to increase GSP in NSW by 0.89 per cent in 2020 compared with the no toll road development scenario.

KPMG (2015) assessed the net economic benefits of all toll roads in Australia. Congestion in the largest capital cities in Australia has been increasing and toll roads have enabled infrastructure projects to be delivered earlier than they would have been under the traditional model. KPMG assumed a base case of delayed implementation (10 years as the central scenario), in contrast with Ernst & Young where the toll roads were never built in the base case. The total discounted road user benefits were estimated to be \$38.3b in 2014 prices, 60 per cent of which were travel time savings and travel time reliability benefits. KPMG (2015) also estimated the wider economic benefits (WEBs) associated with toll roads in Australia, which amounted to \$13.3b in discounted terms.

## Future challenges

Currently, three projects are in the development pipeline: the Toowoomba Second Range Crossing, NorthConnex and WestConnex in Sydney. The proposed Western Distributor in Melbourne is being negotiated.

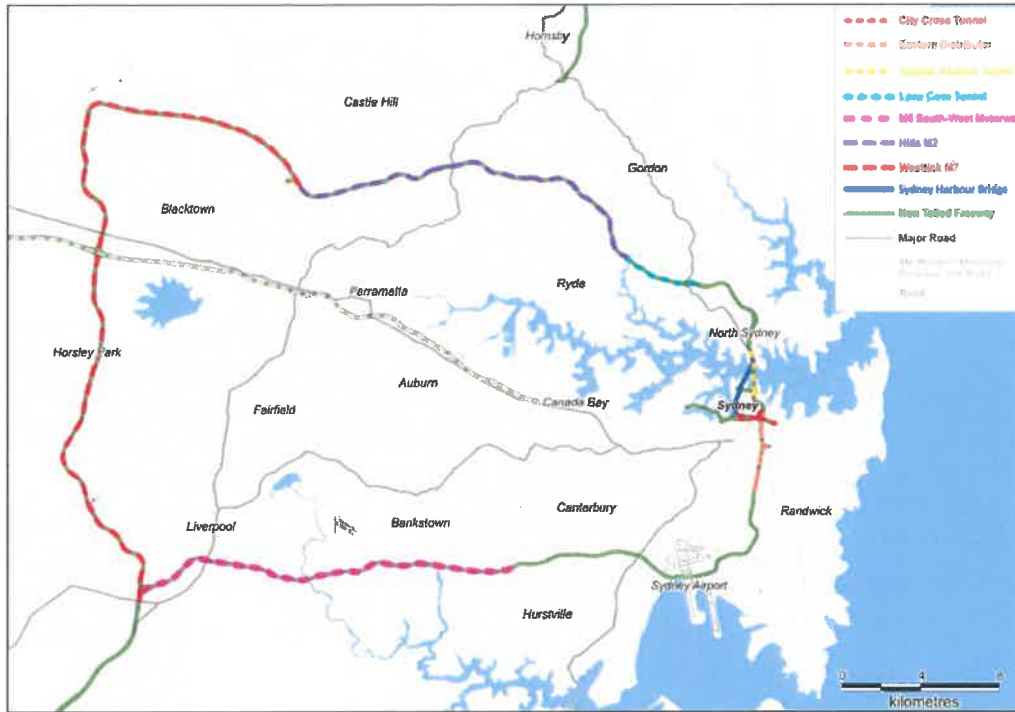
The private sector has been more cautious of taking on demand risks after a series of failures in the toll road operators industry (Magner 2016). The structure of PPPs is under pressure for change, notably in relation to the handling of traffic risks in the early years of toll road operations.

There are signs that concentration in the Australian toll road operators industry will remain high for the foreseeable future. Lack of competition among toll road operators may not be desirable from the viewpoint of the efficiency of the industry over the long run.

<sup>2</sup> Both studies were commissioned by Transurban.

Figure 1 Geographical Location of Toll Roads in Australia (2015)

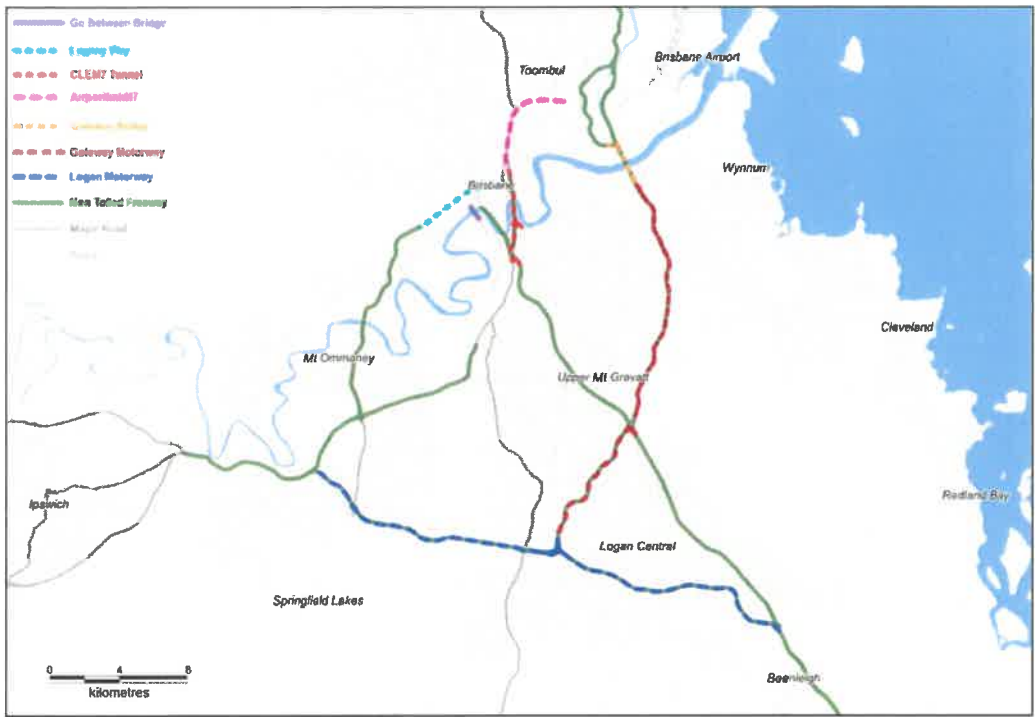
NSW



Victoria

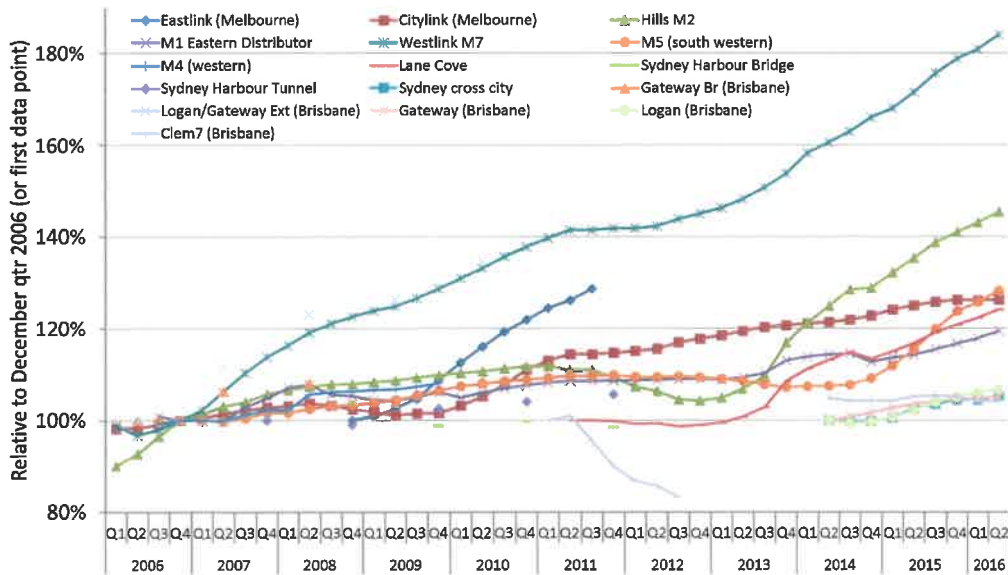


Queensland



Source: KPMG (2015).

Figure 2 Rolling 12 Month Average Daily Traffic: Australian Toll Roads



Source: Loader (2016).



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