

25 September, 1997  
HCP/52

Ms Meg Crooks,  
Secretary  
House of Representatives Standing Committee  
on Communication, Transport, and Microeconomic Reform  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Ms Crooks,

### **Inquiry into the role of rail in the national transport network**

Could you please bring the following letter as a submission to the Committee.

At its August 1997 meeting, our Transport and Environment Task Force resolved to make a submission to the Committee's Rail Inquiry.

The Task Force has been active since 1992 when it published a report "Air Quality and Transport Options". An updated summary of this report Sustainable Transport for the Illawarra" was published as a brochure in 1995, and copies are attached.

The points made, from a national perspective, in the brochure include:

1. Road vehicle use, particularly heavy trucks, is continuing to increase, despite the costs in air pollution, greenhouse gases, noise pollution, health impacts, and road congestion.
2. Urban public transport should be improved, and the level of funding of rail track upgrading projects is inadequate. Both State and Federal Governments need to support Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESD) principles in giving an even handed approach to road and rail track funding.
3. Road pricing should be increased, particularly for bulk haulage with heavy trucks.
4. The environmental impact of road vehicle use should be met by users, with Government investment to improve energy efficiency in all forms of transport so as to reduce Greenhouse gas emissions from moving people and freight.
5. "Business as usual" in transport with escalating road vehicle use and low investment in rail and public transport is a poor deal for the community in environmental and health outcomes. Strategies such as demand management for road use and major investment to the existing rail system, need to be committed to and funded.

Support for some of the above views, including a more even handed approach to funding road and rail, was given by the National Transport Planning Taskforce (NTPT) which also found that about \$3 billion of intercity mainline rail track upgrading was economically warranted.

Moreover, the NTPT concluded that *"Significant changes are needed in the way Australia makes and implements transport decisions"*, and the need for government to provide *"vision and leadership"* in this area.

Sadly, this is lacking at present. Take for example, the Federal funding of road, rail and urban public transport. Road funding, continues at high levels (despite the budget constraints) whereas no Federal funding for rail capital works has been made in the 1996 and 1997 budgets. Additionally, the former Government's urban public transport program "Building Better Cities", has been terminated.

The impact on our region includes:

- A. Rail tracks linking Port Kembla to Melbourne and Brisbane remain 'inefficient' (to quote former Transport Minister John Sharp in a May 1997 press statement) with severe 'speed-weight' restrictions. As per our brochure, Goulburn - Yass realignment has been needed for some years now, and the present rail alignment compares poorly with the new Hume Highway between Goulburn and Yass.
- B. No start has been made on a long overdue Picton Rail Bypass for the Main Southern line - which should have formed part of the former 'One Nation' program or an immediate follow on so as to improve rail efficiency between Australia's two largest cities.

No start has been made on a new Waterfall - Thirroul track with tunnel to replace an older route with severe curvature, geo-technical and other problems, whilst the Maldon-Port Kembla Railway (MPKR) remains only partly completed.

- D. Not even the preliminary steps of environmental impact assessment and land acquisition have been undertaken for the above upgrading (except for MPKR).
- E. Plans for a new public transport interchange at Oak Flats with extension of electrification from Dapto, to service major new residential developments, remain unfunded.

Some of these concerns, together with road pricing, have been represented to the Government. The response from the former Minister for Transport and Regional Development this year to the Member for Hughes (copy attached), is most disappointing, and we fail to understand the suggestion that heavy trucks pay their full road costs, when annual NSW fees for the heavy six axle semitrailers were

halved in 1996 from about \$8,000 a year to just \$4,000, and annual NSW fees for B-Doubles were slashed from nearly \$15 000 to \$5,250/\$5,500. '

Healthy Cities Illawarra would request the Committee's consideration of:

1. A formal Government response to the 16 recommendations of the National Transport Planning Taskforce.
2. Whether or not (if a National Track Authority is formed), the Federal Government is to fund, each year, upgrading of interstate mainline rail tracks at a level of 10 per cent of all Federal land transport funding.
3. The Federal Government to reinstate a program of funding urban public transport improvements, including interchanges.
4. Deferring the proposed round of mass limit increases for heavy trucks until mass-distance pricing is introduced.
5. Encouraging forward planning, with environmental impact assessment and land acquisition, for future mainline rail deviations.

Yours sincerely,

Frank Wallner  
MANAGER

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