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Subject: Progress on Rail Reform
Date: Wednesday, 19 May 1999 1:02PM

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5 May 1999

Progress in Rail Reform Inquiry
Productivity Commission
Locked Bag 2
Collins St East Port Office
MELBOURNE VIC 8003

Dear Sir/Madam

Thank you for sending a copy of the Draft Report from the Commission's Progress in Rail Reform Inquiry. This new report is certainly different from the report 'Tracking Australia' of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communication, Transport, and Microeconomic Reform in their inquiry of the role of rail, and we would like to see the Final Report to be more in line with the findings of 'Tracking Australia'.

Healthy Cities Illawarra was encouraged by the interest shown by the Commission at public hearings in October 1998 on the extension of rail electrification and construction of a long overdue transport interchange at Oak Flats, and was pleased, with the assistance of Shellharbour City Council, to provide further information. However, it does not seem to appear in the Draft Report. The Task Force regards this facility, in view of the recent and ongoing development of three major residential subdivisions in Shellharbour City (with about 10,000 homesites), as long overdue. We also see a role for the Commonwealth in assisting such urban transport upgrades, and indeed, Coniston - Dapto electrification was assisted by an earlier Commonwealth program.

In the absence of a Maldon - Port Kembla rail link, or construction of a Maglev, the upgrading of the Waterfall - Thirroul section is also rated as a high priority. We are pleased that the NSW Action for Transport 2010 statement issued by the NSW Premier in December 1998 addresses this issue.

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However, there may be a need for Commonwealth and/or private sector funding to expedite the process, and we agree with the Commission that attention is needed to road issues in order to progress some rail issues.

Healthy Cities Illawarra is part of an International network of 3000 places that believe that our health is determined by economic, environmental, social, mental and physical factors. To improve the health of communities we must work cooperatively and collaboratively to address these various causal factors.

For nearly 9 years Healthy Cities Illawarra has convened a Transport and Environment Taskforce which aims to improve the health of the Illawarra community by lobbying for improved public transport, reducing private vehicle use and reducing freight haulage by road.

As an industrial city freight haulage is a critical issue with environmental, health and safety implications for our community. There is some evidence that there is an increase in the amount of freight being transported by rail in the region. However, task force members representing industry state that the biggest barrier to further freight haulage by rail is inefficiencies imposed by restricted axle loads, older track alignments, and rail congestion in Sydney. Transportation times for freight travelling out of the Illawarra are too long and for those trains going to Melbourne it is clear that it is the older 'steam age' alignment of track with too many curves and steep grades in NSW that causes much of the time delays. In Victoria, the standard gauge rails and sleepers are too old to sustain high speeds.

For those members representing industry on our Task Force there is a desire to utilise rail more however, these infrastructure caused inefficiencies often means that rail is not a viable option. The problem is compounded by ongoing road upgrading, increased size of trucks, and current road pricing which actually fell in NSW in 1996.

Healthy Cities Illawarra is extremely concerned about air pollution including motor vehicle emissions in the Illawarra. There is a great deal of community concern about air quality in the Illawarra partly due to a cluster of leukemia cancers which were investigated in 1997. There is evidence of increased private motor vehicle use for commuting purposes with large residential developments occurring in Shellharbour and people commuting the approximately 20 kilometres to Wollongong and Port Kembla. There are now also large numbers of people commuting over 80 kilometres from the Illawarra to Sydney for work and the train service on the present inefficient track means that many are choosing to drive private motor vehicles.

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It is a source of great wonder to see private motor vehicle use being encouraged by the development of better, bigger and wider roads. We should have learnt from the US example which in the past has simply continued to invest in the development of their road system at the expense of the rail system. However, the US Federal Government does now invest in urban public transport, and there is a case for the Federal Government here to again fund public transport as it has in the past. We hope that the Commission will consider the recent US initiatives in Federal funding of urban public transport.

We also hope that the Commission's final report will endorse the Neville Committee's recommendations on funding of intercity rail track upgrades, as we

don't want to wait until road pricing has been changed so as to make a better climate for private investment in rail.

Healthy Cities - Illawarra would be pleased to provide further information on request.

Yours sincerely,

Frank Wallner
MANAGER

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