

## **LACHLAN REGIONAL TRANSPORT COMMITTEE Inc.**

### **Addendum to Submission No 25**

**Composition of the Committee:** Ten local government Councils in NSW.

Blayney, Blue Mountains, Cabonne, Dubbo, Lachlan, Lithgow, Oberon, Parkes, Weddin, Young.

President and Secretary/Treasurer: retired members of the public. The Committee has existed since 1983.

It is believed that the problems being experienced by land transport are becoming more and more complicated, and have not been properly dealt by the myriad inquiries into road and or rail use some going back over 10 years.

The approaches made by this committee over the years have been ignored, despite providing simple solutions to such a complexity. These solutions have been consistently presented, in submissions to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communication, Transport and Microeconomic Reform - Inquiries 1997, 1998. Likewise to the Commission's Inquiry into Competition Policy as well as to this Inquiry.

The geographical range of NSW covered by these Council areas, presents a very varied picture of land transport problems as describe in LRTC's many submissions. The demise of rail infrastructure is considered to be the root cause of the road problem, however acknowledgement of this fact is difficult to achieve.

The argument that there is a cost of "not having" an operative rail infrastructure, nation wide, has to be accepted. This cost embodies all those associated as externalities and opportunities lost, as well as all the other costs to the community at large. The detail has been presented in the original submission.

There seems to be a "mind set" that the use of rail infrastructure, in principle, must return costs and in theory a profit. Thus the very quick move to corporatise and/or privatise rail infrastructure over the last 10 years, taking place under the guise of complying with Competition Policy.

The committee took the matter of the non-provision of rail access to the NSW rail network by primary producers in various areas of NSW to the ACCC (May 2002) for investigation under Part IV of the Trades Practices Act, to no avail. The consequence is now manifest in the increasing demand, on, particularly local roads, for which the community is paying. It is well demonstrated that improved roads attract increased usage where rail infrastructure is not allowed to operate.

The committee has already shown that, closed or inefficient and high rail infrastructure pricing, forces increased road use. Increasing any form of road use charge will not solve the problem.

It is misleading and fallacious to assert that a part of fuel excise is a "heavy vehicle road user charge", when in fact it is a "fuel user charge", when such a vehicle is idling on private property it still uses fuel. Some of this excise is spent on road works. By comparison "rail infrastructure use charges" are levied for the purpose of providing the infrastructure.

The need to make rail infrastructure use more economical by reducing it's costs becomes even more imperative with the release of the Stern Report which deals with the economics of global warming.

Power generation and road transport are now considered to contribute the largest proportion of the increasing green house gas emissions which are causing this worrying global problem.

## LACHLAN REGIONAL TRANSPORT COMMITTEE INC.

ABN 73 306918932 INCORPORATION NO. 987545

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### NRMA Safer Roads' Initiative – Great Western and Mitchell Highways - Rural Route Performance Report 2005. Study and Recommendations.

This Report studied road conditions from Lithgow to Dubbo. It produced the statistics about the highways which emphasises what is already well known and has always been believed to be an impediment to the satisfactory development of the Central West Region of NSW.

Lachlan Regional Transport Committee Inc., applauds the report and agrees that this road system is under enormous pressure, due to an increased traffic flow with an ever increasing competition developing between private vehicles and heavy road vehicles for space on the road. This is a common feature for all the major transport routes across Australia. This road's configuration is constrictive, as it tends to follow a route developed very early in the last Century.

The combination of these factors is creating an alarming increase in costs to the community by way of that paid by road users; for vehicle damage, injury and in many cases death resulting from accidents. The community at large on the other hand pays for emergency services, hospitals and medical services. There is also an increase in the cost of road maintenance, while developmental road reconstruction experiences an ever increasing cost, but are essential to cater for this increasing traffic volume.

LRTC agrees whole-heartedly that this situation has to change. It is too simplistic to only examine the physical constraints of the road as a means to solving the problem. LRTC's approach as to how improvement will be achieved differs markedly from the ideological approach taken by the NRMA. Their approach historically refuses to acknowledge that a major underlying cause of current road problems is due to the demise of the rail system, State and Nationally. The NRMA considers it is not its role to:-  
*"become involved in a narrow ideological debate on the so called road versus rail issue"* (David Anderson, Manager, Transport Policy and Economics Department, 17 July 1996).

NRMA however since has shown a softening of approach, agreeing to study the Productivity Commission's Report into National Competition Policy, February 2005, in the matter of rail as a part of Australia's land transport system – (Hilary Wise, Manager, Public Policy, 27 January 2005).

It is well known that the more a road system is improved the more it will be used, which in itself does not alleviate the pressure placed on it. This is the case of the increase in traffic flow on the Pacific Highway because that road has been made more attractive to heavy road vehicles as opposed to the alternate route via the New England Highway. Improvements to the Newell Highway are seeing a similar increase in traffic volume with undesirable consequences as seen over the recent holiday period (December/ January 2005/2006).

The mix of an increasing proportion of heavy road vehicles with the private vehicle sector will continue to lead to disasters as roads become more and more usable. The current highways will never cope while this paradox continues. The situation is being continually compounded by:

- a decrease in the quality of work being done by the Roads and Traffic Authority.
- a desire to reclassify roads into the responsibility of Local Government
- an historically old route with an inadequate foundation and alignment constricted by land tenure.
- the inability of Local Government to carry out ancillary work.

#### MEMBER COUNCILS

BlayneyShireCouncil; BlueMountainsCityCouncil; CabonneShireCouncil; DubboCityCouncil;  
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The funds needed to overcome these shortcomings are just not to be made available, this has been demonstrated by Government disinterest in the proposed redevelopment of the Bells Line of Road as a four lane highway.

The physical problems resulting from increased traffic volume are now being exacerbated by an increasing awareness of poor driver attitudes. Driver impatience; belief in self invincibility; that the road has no hazards; that there is a high expectation of the performance of the vehicle and of the skills of others. These together all make solving the highway problem even more difficult.

The acclaim given to AusLink that it is to be the "panacea" for Australia's land transport problems is quite misleading and spurious in outcome as little change appears to be occurring in the funding of Australia's land transport system.

LRTC's assertion that to solve the roads' problem, first the rail problem must be solved still stands: *"rail infrastructure must be for open use and funded as are road works and development. It should not be owned by private consortia or corporations which require a return; on investment, maintenance costs and use, providing for a profit"*.

LRTC in submitting this argument of equity, to the Productivity Commission's Inquiry into National Competition Policy, has noted, in the findings (February 2005) that an equity between the funding of rail and road infrastructure should exist at public expense:

Chapter 8 : Further Infrastructure Reform,

Section 8.4 Freight Transport, Recommendation 8.8.

Section 8.5 Passenger Transport, Recommendation 8.9.

Chapter 10 :

Section 10.3 Governance Arrangements, Recommendation 10.4

Section 10.4 Oversight of Monopoly Service Providers, Recommendation 10.5.

It is disappointing that neither the State nor Federal Government appears to be interested in such an equity approach in the development of road and rail transport.

It is hoped that in attempting to solve the problems of the Great Western and Mitchell Highways from Lithgow to Dubbo the redevelopment of rail will be included as part of the solution, thus reducing its heavy road vehicle usage, ie of passenger and freight movements, which could be moved by rail much more than happens at present.

Bill Barwood  
President  
Lachlan Regional Transport Committee Inc.  
09 January 2006

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