

National Land Freight Strategy

Comments from the South Australian Farmers Federation on the National Land Freight Strategy Discussion Paper, April 2011.

The South Australian Farmers Federation (SAFF) supports the development of a National Land Freight Strategy.

It is noted that while the discussion paper is discussing a “National” Land Freight Strategy, that there is very little mention of South Australia.

Recently the South Australian Government prepared a discussion paper on *Strategic Infrastructure Plan for South Australia 2005/2006 – 2014/2015*. While SAFF was critical of this plan as there was a lack of reference to agriculture, it is hoped that those developing the National Land Freight Strategy will take the time to examine those aspects of the South Australian plan that deals with transport (one of the 15 infrastructure sectors addressed in the discussion paper).

In our submission on the South Australian plan, SAFF had the following to say on transport:

- Transport

At some stage in the near future there is the need to look at the north-south route to by-pass Adelaide. It seems ludicrous that the Government is pushing heavy transport down the South Eastern Freeway through the tunnels and through Adelaide along Portrush Road to go north. The number of truck incidents on that steep downhill run has to make people question the logistics of this idea. In addition with the expansion of residential areas such as that proposed at Mount Barker, it would assist traffic congestion if some of the heavy vehicles did not need to use this route.

The State Government needs to consider an alternative route which avoids the need to go near the city. The road from Murray Bridge to Burra should be the designated route. The road which goes through Cambrai and Sedan to Half Way House on the Sturt Highway is already sealed. The Bower Boundary continuing due north to the Goyder Highway should be sealed and promoted as a trucking route. This would take heavy transport out of built-up areas and would miss having to traverse through the Adelaide Hills. The livestock transporters already use this road extensively and fully support the concept. They also use this road to deliver livestock to T&R at Murray Bridge and Lobethal. In time, this road needs to be road train capable.

The state of the roads in the unincorporated areas is of major concern. Many are in very poor condition and this was before all these flooding rains. As an example, in the area north of Morgan known as the Eastern Districts, the roads have not had any re-sheeting work for many years. The traffic is no longer just the residents of the district, as it is being used by many tourists as an alternative route to Yunta or Broken Hill or a day trip around to Renmark. The increased pressure has worn it out and is now an impediment to the grazing industry of the district as after rains it can be some time before transports can take produce out or even for residents to get off their properties for business or leisure. Just closing a road does not fix the problem after rain. Some parts are just plain dangerous.

One other usage factor is the number of “bashes” that go through. Unfortunately sometimes it is wet and they do huge amounts of damage and take years out of the life

expectancy of this type of road. These organisations do great things for charities, but it is the locals who pay for it in the long run.

In relation to road trains, the Goyder Highway should be road train as well. Much of the truck traffic is Sydney to Perth. Road trains can get to Burra from the north. This must be considered if the Government is serious about vehicle emissions and climate change.

It has been speculated that one of the reasons for the halting of the ferry service from Wallaroo to Lucky Bay was that road trains are not allowed through Wallaroo. Mechanisms need to be in place so that planning approval can be considered for road access with any infrastructure developments of this type.

In relation to ports and their development/maintenance, Thevenard need upgrading with the channel deepened, and it appears that this will not be as expensive as first thought. Thevenard is used for shipping both grain and minerals.

At a national level, the South Australian road networks to allow freight to Western Australia and Northern Territory from the Eastern States need to either be upgraded (if from New South Wales and Queensland) or developed (if from Victoria, particularly to be able to bypass Adelaide).

As much of South Australia's agricultural production is exported directly from South Australia, the intrastate freight infrastructure is in place for this to happen through a number of regional ports with a reasonable road network, though this needs to be continually maintained and improved. Rail is a more limiting, and is not assisted by rail companies having agreements in place with major exporting companies and with pricing structures that virtually preclude any other company from using rail in South Australia easily and cost effectively.

In relation to road freight, there is already the proposal to establish an independent National Heavy Vehicle Regulator, to be operational by 2013. This in itself is a bold initiative with over 350 issues requiring resolution, though only 34 have been identified as contentious. If the Regulator can reduce the compliance burden, improve productivity, and make it easier for businesses to operate across borders, this will go a long way towards allowing any National Land Freight Strategy that is developed to actually work.

It is noted that as one of the interim steps towards establishing the National Plan, that consideration will be given to removing the impediments to high productivity vehicle use. Recently in South Australia, there has been a significant increase in the cost of B-double registrations, and it is now expected there will be a move back to semitrailers and smaller trucks, which will not only mean more trucks on the road but an overall decrease in productivity. This is also happening in other States, and will need to be assessed as part of this interim step.

SAFF believes there is an urgent need for a National Infrastructure Plan as Australia appears headed for a crisis in infrastructure nationally. Infrastructure in real terms has declined since the introduction of the GST as governments have become reluctant to invest in big projects due to lack of cohesion between Federal and State Government planning. Developing a National Land Freight Strategy is a start in addressing this issue.