

Mrs Susan Kerry Pike

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The Economics and Industry Standing Committee  
Legislative Assembly Committee Office  
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SUBMISSION TO:

The Parliamentary Inquiry into Management of Western Australia's Freight Rail Network.

I would like to address the general investigative inquiry based on my opinion, observations and views as a concerned public citizen living in the rural community and using the highways when travelling to Perth and other country and main roads for country travel and by necessity.

I have spent over 40 years in the agricultural industry whereby most of the grain we produced has been transported by rail. In the 1970's we had the cartage saving of being able to collect our fertiliser from railway wagons that were left at a nearby siding, then later bulk fertiliser was also available. No back loading of products on rail is available now. We have upgraded our own truck from 8 to 25 tonne, more a logistics than economic decision, made possible with established bank loans. Lucky for us the nearby siding is still operational but due to the number of varieties of grains produced and segregations required we only deliver one grain type to the close siding. All other grain is carted double the distance and along a residential street before reaching Main Roads preferred route to the bin. Both bins we deliver to are on the Rail Network Tier 2 Lines.

There was:

- less pollution of the environment and use of diesel fuel
- less congestion
- less driver frustration and risks being taken by fewer trucks on highways and through the metropolitan area
- less damage or wear and tear to main roads

Because farmers did not have long distances to travel they had smaller trucks which didn't cause the damage we are now seeing on shire roads when heavy trucks are traversing on roads not suitable. Currently on the Brookton Highway between Armadale and Brookton there are mobile signs telling drivers to proceed with caution. The road has patches which are sinking, developing potholes and damaged edges and wheel ruts can be felt. As well as those signs there are road gangs working to repair same. The Brookton Highway has had considerable upgrades carried out over a number of years and some sections which are breaking up are not many years old.

Some of the issues creating the problem now faced with rail freight were predicted before the Federal Government 'deregulated the wheat industry'. There was an orderly system of getting the export grain to port.

Information I have seen from Cooperative Bulk Handling (CBH) and Wheatbelt Railway Retention Alliance Group (WRRRA) have added to my personal views and I support their position.

Strategic direction and policy decisions relating to the current network lease. The regulatory arrangements in place for the Network.

Without seeing much of the document from what I have read and heard it appears to be poorly considered, in that MAINTENANCE of the Lines has been left out, or hidden. An investigation should be undertaken – someone is responsible which has and is going to cost the Agricultural Industry and the Western Australian Taxpayer a huge amount to upgrade lines and roads. The question has to be asked if the fees CBH has paid to use the lines has not gone into maintaining the lines where has it gone? If it has gone to Brookfield's and previous Lease holder's shareholders outside of Australia this also should be investigated and not allowed to continue.

After a successful effort to remove a monopoly such as the Australian Wheat Board (AWB) was seen to be it appears our State Government is determined to demise the benefits of the farmer owned organisation CBH whereby profits have been returned into growing the organisation to be a modern and efficient service primarily to its grower members. The Board and Executive meet on behalf of growers to reach the best outcome for the customer and grower.

Criticism has been made that CBH will not commit to volume of usage of the lines. It is unreasonable to be able to indicate due to many factors starting with the weather and what will be grown. Now with so many different buyers of export grain going into various countries with different delivery and storage needs and capacities the whole grain to port is unpredictable. Should new companies wish to set up new ports in Western Australia we do not see this as something the tax payer should pay for. Efficiencies can be found in the system we have.

On an interstate tour to Victoria in 2011 I happened to meet a supervisor of rail maintenance who quoted 1 in 4 sleepers only needed to be viable. See WRRRA reports on line speeds – factual information is required.

The Strategic Grain Network Committee (SGNC) Report appears to be the only report which the present State Government will acknowledge and yet appears to be out of date with the findings of all other reports and inquiries. An example of that is the purchase of rolling stock by CBH which changed volume of grain per locomotive.

Regardless of whether low or high traffic lines, maintenance should be in the agreement. If the lines close, all that tonnage, including the back-travel (empty trucks back to the up country storage bins) must be on roads. Road MAINTENANCE then has to be met by Government Grants to Shires or Main Roads.

Although you are considering 'current' it is unreasonable not to forecast or/and consider other issues which have a financial impact:

- Rail creates employment in the regions
- Untapped tourism opportunities
- Potential other users/cargo
- Containers being railed upcountry



- The life of the rail versus life of road
- Rail maintenance versus on-going cost of road maintenance
- Fuel use and cost
- Environment impact road versus rail
- OH&S issues for Trucking Companies
- Risk to other road users by higher volumes of heavy vehicle traffic
- Cost to St John Ambulance Services in attending any accidents
- Accident Road clean-up to avoid contamination of products and risks to other road users/versus same with Rail incidents

It is in the best interest of the Growers, Users of the Rail and the Tax Payers that all Agreements be Transparent and signed off on by Industry representatives not only a Government representative, who may choose not to consult with Industry or/and is voted out of that position at the next election.

#### The Management of the Network by the Public Transport Authority.

Has PTA undertaken checks, performance standards, and penalties for non-performance, safe guards or transparency with the operation of the WA Grain Freight network?


What protection is there for the users who pay an access fee?

It appears to me that it is easier to check the condition of the line than the condition of the road networks. Whilst standards of rail seem to be defined and have been upgraded, are the road making specifications under the same scrutiny?

#### Conclusion

I feel there are many unanswered questions and hope this inquiry can identify whether the current Lease arrangements of the Western Australian freight rail network, comprising Tier 1, Tier2 and Tier 3 lines, facilitate or hamper state development. In my opinion costs associated with maintaining lines and roads need to be extrapolated out over a number of years based on the most current information today and all consequences of maintaining and utilising the rail or closing it and the implication to road and all users' needs to be taken into consideration.

In closing I do not wish to present my case before the Committee as I am unable to add facts and figures to your deliberations only common sense in that it does not make sense to let the Lessee of the Lines have a monopoly over the use then prevent anyone else doing so. Short term cost may be long term gain.

  
Susan Kerry Pike  
13th April 2014