



Hon. Diane Evers MLC
Member for the South West Region

Attn: Mrs Maddison Evans, Committee Clerk
Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs
Parliament House
PERTH WA 6000

Dear Committee Members,

PETITION NUMBER 125 – RAILWAY LINE BETWEEN BUNBURY AND GREENBUSHES

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a written submission to the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs regarding Petition No. 125 – Railway line between Bunbury and Greenbushes. I confirm that I wish the Government/Committee to inquire into the matters raised in the petition. To the best of my knowledge, the issues described in this petition have not been taken to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administrative Investigations (Ombudsman).

The petitioners request that the railway line between Bunbury and Greenbushes be used to transport the lithium mineral spodumene from the Talison Greenbushes mine by rail. I fully support this proposal. Reopening the railway line can address many concerns that have been raised by members of the local community and industry and achieve significant social, health, road safety, economic, aesthetic, environmental and logistics benefits. As Regional Development Australia – South West argued in its submission to the federal Inquiry into National Freight and Supply Chain Priorities, it is important to 'separate road from rail to improve efficiencies'¹. The use of rail will increase road safety, noise and air pollution, reduce the need for expensive road maintenance, and reduce carbon emissions. It will preserve the safety and amenity of towns including Balingup, Mullalyup, Kirup, Donnybrook and Boyanup and ensure that their attraction as tourist destinations is maintained.

The potential for rail to mitigate harm associated with each of the issues listed above is well researched. There is far too much literature available to summarise in this short submission, however information can be provided to the committee as required. For instance, safety is a key issue for local residents and employees. As noted in a 2017 report prepared by the Australian National University, heavy trucks are associated with a disproportionately high number of fatalities. For instance across Australia 'Heavy trucks were involved in 14.7% of fatalities in 2016, despite making up 3.13% of registered vehicles and 7.2% of vehicle kilometres travelled'². The increased use of trucks in the SW is likely to lead to a similar, unacceptable result.

¹ <https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/transport/freight/freight-supply-chain-submissions/RDA-South-West.pdf>

² <https://www.aph.gov.au/DocumentStore.ashx?id=a37c13ee-72d4-47a9-904b-360d3e635caa> p. iii.



The Australasian Railway Association explains that freight rail is mainly used for bulk commodities and that 'Freight rail is cost-effective, proving it can deliver competitively and efficiently over long or short distances...Rail is more energy efficient, produces less emissions and is safer when compared to road freight'³. The railway line connecting the Greenbushes lithium mine to the Bunbury port can potentially be accessed by other companies in the mining and agricultural sectors, particularly if the State Government's current Rail Access Review leads to improved opportunities for rail access⁴. In addition, the line should be extended to cater for transport to the refinery at Kemerton, and additional rail movements north of Bunbury, possibly including transportation of lithium tailings from the refineries to a suitable storage site, once one is identified.

The Greenbushes mine is expected to continue to expand significantly in the medium to long term, despite recent downturns in demand for lithium⁵. It is important to devise a transport strategy that can cater for this, as well as for the transport needs of other commodity industries operating in the South West. Rail is the obvious choice - this view is supported not only by the community, as the number of signatories to this petition indicates, but also industry and transport experts who have detailed the many benefits of the use of rail, including cost-benefit calculations that clearly indicate that rail is the sensible choice in this case. For instance, ports would benefit from increased rail usage, and have indicated support for more rail capacity. The Australasian Railway Association emphasises that 'a coherent logistics solution is required where road and rail work together to maximise efficiency. Port shuttles are a key part of this, along with the development of efficient intermodal hubs'⁶. These considerations should inform the development of an integrated freight transport strategy for the South West.

A pre-feasibility study undertaken by the South West Development Commission, Arc Infrastructure and Talison demonstrated that the re-opening of the line is a viable alternative. Further assessment is being carried out by these stakeholders as well as the state government, to determine the validity of pursuing this investment. The source of funding for the infrastructure upgrade may be the deciding factor, with considerable desire by all parties to have Infrastructure Australia fund a significant proportion. Through this petition, the 3345 people who signed it hope to have their voices of support for rail infrastructure heard and to represent the tens of thousands of other rail supporters who did not have the opportunity to sign the petition. The impact of an additional 200 trucks per day rumbling through the main street of their quiet towns will be extraordinary. So much effort and resources go toward making these main streets inviting for tourists and locals, and the increasing truck traffic will devastate all this good work.

ARC Infrastructure currently manages the below-rail infrastructure of the railway line, and is 20 years into a 50-year contract. It is imperative that the State Government moves now to enable the reopening of the railway line for the benefit of the community and industry for the next 30 years, and plan to take control of it subsequently. The Greens (WA) will support the State Government fully in any endeavours to raise Federal funding necessary to achieve this investment. I therefore support the petitioner's request that the Legislative Council recommends that the State Government pursue the improvement and development of the railway infrastructure to and from Greenbushes to allow for rail freight transport to and from the lithium refineries and the ports of Bunbury and Kwinana.

Yours sincerely,



Hon Diane Evers MLC

Member for South West Region
09 September 2019

³ https://ara.net.au/sites/default/files/FTG_Strategy_Booklet_2017-19_WEB.pdf.

⁴ <https://www.treasury.wa.gov.au/Economic-Policy/Rail-Access-Review/>

⁵ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-09-04/lithium-teething-troubles-put-workforce-on-shaky-ground/11470252>

⁶ https://ara.net.au/sites/default/files/u16/FTG_Strategy_Booklet_2017-19_WEB.pdf p. 8.