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Chairman's Message

This is the first SEATS newsletter published since I was elected Chairman. SEATS is a unique organisation with a diverse membership bound together by the common goal of improving our transport infrastructure. I look forward to working with you all in the coming year.



Local Government elections in Victoria in March have resulted in a number of new elected members in the SEATS region. I congratulate all of those who have been elected and those who have been re-elected.

It is important that new Councillors understand the role of SEATS in improving transport infrastructure and efficiency in the region. Without effective regional transport, industry and commerce cannot operate at optimum efficiency, opportunities of many kinds are lost, citizens react with frustration and despair to delays and congestion, and air and noise pollution become serious environmental and health issues.

SEATS seeks to help its members address these issues by engendering cooperation between Local Governments, industry, State and Federal Governments and others committed to improving transport in south eastern Australia.

We are making progress. For example, since the creation of SEATS we have seen such development as the Hallam by-pass and Pakenham by-pass, improvements to the Shoalhaven end of the Princes Highway, sealing of the Monaro Highway between Canberra and the ACT region, commencement of work on a freight bypass at Queanbeyan, the development of fast train services between Melbourne and Sale and Leongatha, the operation of daily air services by REX aviation between Latrobe Regional airport and Canberra, the development of the Port of Eden, facilities to enable B-doubles to cross Brown Mountain near Bega and commencement to the sealing of Main Road 92 over the escarpment linking Nowra-Port Kembla region with the ACT region and beyond. This list is not exclusive and nor does SEATS claim to have been the driving force for all of these achievements. But there is no doubt that the co-operative support of SEATS members has been an important factor.

Regional and inter-regional strategies will be even more critical to achieving transport funding from State and Federal sources in future. At the March

SEATS meeting, members inspected Port Kembla and considered its role as one of the focal points for our regional strategy. We concluded that the opportunities for the region could be enhanced by strategic co-operation between Port Kembla and Port Eden. We looked, too, at the need for an integrated transport strategy to improve the transport links between south Gippsland and eastern and northern ports, as well as with Melbourne. These developments all form part of the one SEATS agenda.

In coming weeks I will be in touch with the Mayors of all 21 Councils in the SEATS region about the implications of the Federal Government's *AusLink* approach. We hope to meet with both the Victorian and NSW Transport and Roads Ministers, the Chief Minister of the ACT and the Federal Minister for Transport to pursue the interests of SEATS members.

Finally, as new Chairman of SEATS, I pay tribute to the work of my predecessor, Cr Mick Morland from the City of Casey. SEATS made real progress under Cr Morland's leadership and his dedication and support has been appreciated by all members.

Cr Sue Whelan
Chairman

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Truck Stop at Cann River

For several years SEATS and its industry members have been looking for ways to encourage the development of heavy vehicle truck stops along the Princes Highway and the Monaro Highway.

What a long distance driver needs is:

- Well lit and therefore relatively secure area
- Food
- Fuel
- Access to showers and toilets

Truck on Princes Highway near Cann River (pictured at right)



Russell Chester is developing the Mobil service station at Cann River, at the junction of the Princes and Monaro Highways, to meet these requirements. The Road House is open from 6am to 10 pm Sunday to Friday and 6 am to 8 pm on Saturdays. Truckies are, of course, able to park overnight in the floodlit car park and they can arrange for after-hours access to showers and toilets.

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Auslink – The Right Approach but the Wrong Process

SEATS supports the overall thrust of the Commonwealth Government's proposed national land transport plan as outlined in the *AusLink* Green Paper.

But members have called for the Plan to be developed from a regional planning base instead of perpetuating the intensely wasteful funding-focused "application and grant" process that so often distorts inter-government activity.

SEATS wants regional representatives of Commonwealth, State, Local Government and industry to initially assess regional and inter-regional transport needs and options in each region and from that to develop a regional module of the national plan.

The aggregation of the regional modules would provide the Commonwealth and States with a sound base for planning and an opportunity to understand what the priorities are, where pressures are developing and the options for dealing with them.

This level of regional planning is not hugely complex or time consuming. Because of the local knowledge of Local Governments, especially when they work together, and because the local freight industry and transport users know the impediments to their efficient operation, the priority of inter-regional infrastructure issues can be identified and assessed over a couple of months.

The SEATS priority program, which covers parts of Victoria and NSW plus the ACT, provides an example of the kind of planning we envisage being built into the regional modules of a national data base.

This regional co-operation approach is superior to bilateral agreements between the Commonwealth and groups of Local Governments or bilateral agreements between the Commonwealth and States. Apart from being practical and relevant, this approach avoids distortions in transport planning caused by State and Territory boundaries.

SEATS argues that once the planning process is right, the best options for flexible funding will follow.

The suggested approach contrasts with that outlined in the *AusLink* Green Paper, which proposes to perpetuate the "application and grant" process. The process wastes time, wastes money, wastes valuable information and ensures that some good ideas and potentially important approaches end up in the dustbin.

The "application and grant" process absorbs sometimes hundreds of man hours in each of the applicant organisations involved. This includes the time and resources of senior Local Government officers who usually have considerable knowledge, experience and wisdom. Where State Government agencies are involved, similar resources are committed. Where the private sector is involved, important resources also are committed.

If 10 in 100 applications are successful, 90% of the accumulated time and data collected is lost.

Other points made in the SEATS response included:

- The SEATS region is a significant, productive and diverse area in the south east corner of Australia. Its importance was not recognised in the *AusLink* Green Paper.
- Investment in transport infrastructure requires enormous capital and embodies long lead times. There is not enough money in any sphere of government to meet the nation's current transport needs if the effort is fragmented. Only through cooperation and co-ordination between the spheres of government can the transport task be satisfactorily achieved.
- The projected increase in the transport task over the next twenty years prohibits the development of transport infrastructure on a 'predict and provide' or any other generous growth oriented arrangement. Part of the strategy therefore must be to reduce demand in critical areas, to regulate and streamline freight routes and reduce urban congestion through the development of efficient and user friendly public transport systems.
- National policy should encourage the involvement of the private sector in planning as well as investing, but should never lose sight of the fact that governments are accountable for the efficiency and effectiveness of transport networks upon which our economies depend. The use of taxation incentives to encourage private sector inputs needs to be considered.
- *AusLink* cannot generate the necessary reform unless funding is increased substantially. Many Local Governments, especially those in rural and regional Australia with extensive road lengths and limited rate bases, are simply struggling to maintain their existing road assets. Simple reallocation of Local Government's funds would undermine their road maintenance programs leading to real waste of public monies. Hardly effective reform!
- The integration of all forms of transport - road, rail, air and sea - is of paramount importance. The mode which links them all is road. In much of this region road is the only mode of transport but SEATS would like to see the development of other modes and greater utilisation of inter-modal sea and air terminals, railways and inland ports.
- Heavy vehicles operating in the SEATS region, and the industries they serve, are seriously disadvantaged because the mass and length limits applying in NSW are different to the regulations applying in Victoria. This government-induced inefficiency adds up to \$200 per journey for operators. The impacts are felt right through the transport chain to trailer manufacturers, who have to build different equipment depending on which State the vehicle will travel in. The loss of logistical flexibility for vehicle operators is serious.
- Australians are exceedingly frustrated by the tendency of spheres of government to shift blame. Reciprocal responsibility should not be drawing lines between who is responsible for what. Rather it should be based on the fact that all spheres of government are pressed for the transport dollar and can only give value for money by co-operation at regional level.



The detailed response to the AusLink green paper is available on our home page - www.seats.org.au

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SEATS Priority Projects

Twelve months ago the SEATS program listed some 69 projects. Following discussion with Federal MPs, SEATS members participated in a project prioritising process. Our objective was to identify those projects which had a regional strategic objective and which should be realistically achievable within a five year time frame. Details of these projects can be scrutinised on the SEATS home page at www.seats.org.au

Princes Highway – Pakenham Bypass

Pakenham by-pass is necessary to alleviate pressure on the Princes Highway around Pakenham caused by significant residential growth in the eastern regions of Melbourne, economic development in Gippsland and the resurgence of the Latrobe Valley economy. Our objective is to ensure that commitments given by the Federal and Victorian Governments continue to be accorded priority.

Princes Highway – Wollongong to Jervis Bay Road

Major congestion problems on the Princes Highway at the northern end of our region make this a priority issue. The existing two lane road needs to be upgraded to a four lane highway. This is necessary because of accelerating growth in freight and commuter traffic. The Princes Highway is the main north/south arterial route and carries the majority of freight and tourists to the South Coast.

South Coast NSW B-double Access

The economic benefits of modern road freight transport need to be extended both to and through the south coast of NSW. The NSW Far South Coast relies principally on road transport. Currently 25m B-doubles are not permitted between Nowra and Bega on the Princes Highway or between Batemans Bay and Braidwood on the Kings Highway. The impediments on the Princes Highway are the Clyde River bridge at Batemans Bay, Wagonga Inlet at Narooma and the Brogo River bridge alignment north of Bega. On the Kings Highway two corners near the top of Clyde Mountain need realignment.

South East NSW Escarpment Crossing

The economy of south eastern Australia suffers because of inefficient east west crossings linking the coastal belt of southern NSW and Port Kembla with significant regional centres and the major transport corridors of Australia. SEATS priority is the upgrade of MR92 between Nowra and Nerriga. The progressive upgrade from Nerriga to Bungendore via Braidwood should follow promptly. Regional links to Gippsland and the Hume Highway corridors need to be incorporated into long term road network plans of all spheres of government. A 10 year strategic plan needs to be developed for the upgrading of the Kings Highway from Batemans Bay to Braidwood. On the Snowy Mountains Highway, improvement to the Brown Mountain crossing needs to be evaluated.

Monaro Highway (in both NSW and Victoria)

The Monaro Highway is developing as a major north-south freight route between eastern Victoria, the ACT region and northern markets in NSW. The enhancement of the Monaro Highway) including some realignment, new overtaking opportunities and maintenance work especially at the southern end are all needed for this major and growing freight corridor. Opportunities exist for freight operators from eastern Victoria to capitalise on the opening of the M5 through southern Sydney.

Pambula Flood Plain Bridge

A top priority is to persuade governments to prevent the breakdown of the Princes Highway corridor due to frequent flooding at Pambula flood plain. The flood induced disruption of industrial and commercial activity is not acceptable. The Pambula River flood plain bridge must be upgraded immediately to achieve a one in 20 years flood frequency. The cost is relatively low.

Orbost to Eden

A series of overtaking lanes along the Princes Highway between Orbost and Eden is also a relatively low-cost priority project. Road safety and the need to reduce the adverse interaction between faster interstate motorists and slower heavy vehicles, caravans and vehicles towing boats makes this a priority.

Southern Gippsland Integrated Transport Study

The South Gippsland region, including Bass Coast Shire, South Gippsland Shire, part of the City of Casey and the Shire of Wellington, has identified transport needs. New transport challenges are emerging. The region has access to some significant transport assets. A strategy is needed to meet the region's transport needs and to explore ways to connect southern Gippsland to the major national transport grids. SEATS is seeking funding to develop an integrated inter-modal transport strategy.

Special Needs – Tumut and Bombala

The Tumut Valley presents a unique transport challenge. The local economy has a timber and manufacturing base but is poorly served by narrow winding roads and defunct rail infrastructure. Investment is needed as a priority but more work needs to be done to identify the most effective way to progress

solutions. The transport system around Bombala, on the Monaro Highway, also needs research. This region also has an important timber industry base and potential for further development of value adding industries. SEATS recognises that these two areas have special needs and has Task Forces looking at the best means of addressing those needs.

Queanbeyan Northern Upgrade

The Kings Highway runs through the Queanbeyan CBD. The population and industrial growth of the ACT region means that this route is no longer appropriate, especially for heavy freight vehicles. Traffic congestion is choking the Queanbeyan CBD and is impacting seriously on the economic life and amenity of the CBD as well as reducing transport efficiency for those seeking to trade with and in the region. Completion of the proposed northern upgrade is a priority strongly supported by SEATS.

Traralgon to Sale – Princes Highway East Duplication

This project is listed in the Princes Highway East Strategy produced by VicRoads. The planning phases are underway. There are limited passing opportunities along this section of the highway, which is frequented by heavy traffic and tourist vehicles. Princes Highway East provides essential access between the 'transport hub' of Melbourne, the Latrobe Valley, southern NSW and the ACT. It forms a key element of the coastal route between Melbourne and Sydney as well as linking with the Monaro Highway.

Airports

Regional air transport is especially important in this region, much of which otherwise relies on road infrastructure. The most critical airports are Canberra International, Latrobe Regional airport and Merimbula and Moruya airports. Cooma Monaro airport, operated by the Snowy River Shire Council, is also important. SEATS argues that regional Australia needs a stable, reliable regional airline system to service remote communities and strategic centres. For further details see the SEATS Submission to the House of Representatives enquiry into regional air services on the home page www.seats.org.au.

Heavy Vehicle Regulations

Differences in regulations governing heavy vehicles operating across State borders impose completely unnecessary inefficiencies on regional transport companies. The impact on timber, dairy and refrigerated foods sectors is especially galling given that these industries are being required to adjust to deregulation in the name of efficiency and resource management. Rationalisation of regulations to a common standard is urgent and should be easily achievable.

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Meeting with Federal Politicians

A delegation from SEATS met with Federal parliamentarians in December. The SEATS delegation was led by Chairman Cr Sue Whelan and included Cr

Roger Norton, Greg Pullen and Geoff Robin. Cr Mick Morland had to withdraw at the last minute.

The Member for Gippsland and Minister for Science, Peter McGauran, (pictured below left) showed considerable interest in the SEATS presentation and the benefits of enhancing transport links between Gippsland and South East NSW and ACT region.

The Minister for Local Government and Regional Development, Wilson Tuckey, indicated that the regional transport approach being sought by SEATS would most likely to come through the implementation of *AusLink*.

The Shadow Minister for Regional Development and Local Government, Gavan O'Connor, (pictured below right) joined members of the ALP Caucus to view the SEATS presentation. Like others, he expressed satisfaction at the way the presentation addressed the regional and inter-regional transport issues. Mr O'Connor talked about specifics including roads, railway and planning issues and indicated support for the underlying principles of *AusLink*. Other MPs attending the meeting organised by the member for McMillan, Christian Zahra, included Anthony Byrne MP, the Member for Holt and the Member for Isaacs, Ann Corcoran MP. Bob McMullan MP, the Member for Fraser, was a last minute apology.



The meeting with Coalition backbenchers was not as productive as hoped. It was attended only by the member for Eden Monaro, Gary Nairn and the Member for Gilmore, Joanna Gash, who made a constructive and supportive contribution. Subsequently the Member for Flinders, Greg Hunt, contacted SEATS and was given a detailed briefing on the proposed South Gippsland Integrated Transport Study.



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New SEATS Executive

A new SEATS Executive was elected at the Annual General Meeting on December 6. Cr Sue Whelan (ACRDC) was elected Chairman and Cr Mick Morland (City of Casey) Deputy Chairman. Other members elected were: Cr Roger Norton (Cooma Monaro Shire), Leigh Harrison (Wellington Shire), Robert Ward (Bega Valley Shire), Guy Wilson-Browne (Bass Coast Shire), Greg Pullen (Shoalhaven City), Bill Barber (Latrobe City), David Byrne – Secretary-Treasurer (Cooma Monaro Shire) and Geoff Robin (Chief Executive Officer).

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Meeting Dates

June – Traralgon Thursday 5 and Friday 6

September – Bombala – Thursday 4 and Friday 5

November - Canberra Queanbeyan Thursday 27 Friday 28 (To be confirmed)

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