

SOUTH EAST AUSTRALIAN TRANSPORT STRATEGY INC.

SEATS

SEATS provides highly co-ordinated and influential advocacy for the development of transport infrastructure in the South Eastern Australia region that supports economic development and the prosperity of its constituents.

SUBMISSION to House of Representatives **Standing Committee on Transport and Regional** **Services**

INTRODUCTION

The South East Australian Transport Strategy Inc (SEATS) aims to stimulate and facilitate investment in transport infrastructure in south eastern New South Wales, eastern Victoria and the ACT Region. Members of SEATS include local government, regional development organizations, government agencies, regional industry and academics. The SEATS region is in a triangle to the east of a line linking the New South Wales City of Shoalhaven (Nowra area) to the north, the Victorian City of Greater Dandenong to the south and the ACT to the west.

South eastern Australia is rich in primary resources, has a skilled workforce and a wealth of natural assets. *Inadequate transport infrastructure is impeding development. Independent consultants report that key transport improvements could generate many millions of dollars worth of new investment.*

SEATS members have developed the South East Australian Transport Strategy. This Strategy is a comprehensive review of the measures necessary to improve transport and access to Gippsland, Western Port, the Snowy Mountains, the Illawarra region, the south coast of New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory region.

In all there are some one and a half million people living and working in the region covered by SEATS and this is growing rapidly as the “sea change” generation “floods” to the coast.

It is unfortunate and a glaring oversight that the already published *Auslink* programme has failed to recognize the claims of this region. The entire South Eastern corner of Australia has been disenfranchised from the national transport network.

This disenfranchisement is obvious when consideration is drawn to the needs of an expanding population in which a greater variety of goods and services will be produced in the area and others goods and services will be transported increasingly into the region.

It is an indictment of our planning that such an oversight has occurred at this crucial time.

The operations of SEATS are guided by a Business and Marketing Plan to generate a broad awareness of the issues relating to the development of transport infrastructure, to promote the benefits of such development and communicate the work of SEATS members by improving access to decisions makers and by providing information.

This information has been provided to Government at Federal, State and local level over the last few years. Regrettably, it has been overlooked in the not unreasonable desire to ensure that the more strategically obvious transport routes of inland areas are planned and developed.

Long term planning however, should not and must not relegate South Eastern Australia transport infrastructure needs to some future date.

It is, in our opinion, time for the needs of this important region to be recognized and funded.

MEMBERS of SEATS

ACT Chief Ministers Department; Bass Coast Shire; Baw Baw Shire; Bega Cheese; Bega Valley Shire; Bombala Shire; Capital Regional Development Council (CRDB); Cardinia Shire; Cocks Group; City of Casey; City of Dandenong; Cooma-Monaro Shire; Dyers Gippsland Transport; East Gippsland Shire; Eurobodalla Shire; Gippsland Area Consultative Committee; Grendas Transit Management; Latrobe City; Gippsland Campus, Monash University; South East Fibre Exports; Southern Councils Group (NSW); South East Area Consultative Committee; NSW Roads and Traffic Authority; NSW Dept of Planning, Infrastructure and Resources; Palerang Shire; Queanbeyan City; Shoalhaven City; Snowy River Shire; South Gippsland Shire; Dept of Sustainability and environment (Vic); Tumut Shire; VicRoads; Wellington Shire.

SEATS EXECUTIVE 2005

Cr Sue Whelan (Chairman - CRDB), Cr Rob Wilson, (Deputy Chairman – City of Casey), David Byrne, (Secretary / Treasurer - Cooma-Monaro Shire), Mayor David Hede (Bega Valley Shire), Guy Brantingham (Eurobodalla Shire), Greg Pullen (City of Shoalhaven), Cr Graeme Middlemiss (Latrobe City), Cr Peter Bommer (East Gippsland Shire), Ralf Kastan (Wellington Shire) and Chris Vardon OAM (Chief Executive Officer)

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The Problem:

1.The role of Australia's regional arterial road and rail network in the national freight transport task

The day this report was written the writer requested a quote for an airline flight from Moruya (on the far south coast of New South Wales) to Sydney. The flying time is 45 minutes and the road distance is about 320kms. The cost of a single return ticket was \$281. On the same day the writer sought a ticket from Sydney to Perth return. This is a distance of about 2000km and about five hours flying time. The cost was \$598.

You cannot take a rail trip from anywhere south of Nowra to Bairnsdale. No train transportation exists.

There are no passenger shipping opportunities between Melbourne and Sydney.

The only avenue available to a would-be traveler or transporter of goods from or to this part of Australia is to drive.

The Princes Highway is the only route available to those living in south east Australia.

Recent studies of the Princes Highway as outlined in a study undertaken by the NSW Roads and Traffic Authority published in December 2004 shows that from 1 January 2004 until 7 December 2004 there were 21 fatalities on the Princes Highway with most occurring between Shellharbour and Ulladulla. From August 2003 until July 2004 there were 22 fatal accidents resulting in 26 fatalities. An analysis of the provisional data shows that nearly two-thirds of fatalities were aged under 26 (30%) or over 60 (31%)

A number of the issues associated with the road environment were identified including:

The majority of the highway is two lane undivided carriageway with limited overtaking opportunities

There are a high number of rural road junctions and private accesses to the highway

Some sections have narrow or unsealed shoulders

There are some sections with substandard crash barriers and obstacles in the clear zone

(Source: Princes Highway Safety Review. December 2004)

Those using this highway are residents or tourists of the southeast of Australia *or they are those whose task it is to deliver goods to the rapidly growing town centres in this region.* Road transport is the only viable transportation system for those living in this part of our region (that is between Nowra in New South Wales and Bairnsdale in Victoria.)

There is no alternative but to use the road transport system. It is **the only** option available to those bringing in produce and other goods to the area.

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It is **the only** option for tourists wanting to holiday in the south eastern region of Australia between Nowra in NSW and Bairnsdale in Victoria.

It is **the only** option for those living in the area to gain access to specialist medical and paramedical services.

For those who produce goods in the region, it is **the only** viable transportation option.

There is connectivity between road and rail and ports in this area of Australia. *It cannot easily or economically be utilized, however, because of the poor state of the Princes Highway between Bairnsdale and Nowra.*

There is no viable means of full-scale air transportation of goods into this part of the SEATS region.

There is no viable means of sea transportation for a wide range of goods produced or coming in to this region of Australia

There is no viable rail transportation in this part of the region to places beyond Nowra and Bairnsdale.

There is passenger rail travel from Nowra (Bomaderry) to Sydney and there are passenger travel and goods services between Bairnsdale and Melbourne.

The road system is sub -standard and is shown to be one of the most dangerous in the whole road network in Australia.

The Government response to the lack of adequate transportation infrastructure in this south eastern region of Australia is an indictment of those whose task it is to plan for the needs of all Australians.

That our area has been so shamefully disenfranchised is unfortunate, if not reprehensible.

The Problem beyond the Nowra to Bairnsdale section of our region

Much of the information supporting our submission to the Committee regarding transportation issues in Gippsland is covered in a separate paper prepared by Latrobe City Council specifically outlining their particular issues.

Latrobe City's submission will detail the work they have undertaken regarding rail and the possibility of a rail/ road modal at Morwell which will benefit the SEATS region in Gippsland and beyond.

A further report submitted by Latrobe City on the wider issues in Gippsland is supported by all the local government areas in Gippsland and by SEATS and represents the views of the wider membership who wholeheartedly support the issues raised in that report..

We believe that Bega Valley Shire Council has prepared a submission to the Standing Committee. Bega Valley Shire is a member of SEATS and their report is accepted by us as offering further support to our other submissions.

A further report has been prepared by the Southern Councils Group through their PHocus Task Force of which SEATS is a member

It is not the intention of this report to add further to those submissions.

It is important to indicate to you that those reports are accepted by us as being an important component part of this submission. In the event that the Committee agrees to hearing a verbal submission from SEATS, we would ask that you consider our report as being one of a series of reports with those submitted by Latrobe City, Bega Valley Shire Council and the Southern Councils Group.

Those reports clearly identify the connectivity between roads and rail with the various ports in that part of the region covered by SEATS. Those submissions clearly demonstrate the ability of goods to be transported by road and rail to ports at Melbourne, Geelong, Hastings and Barry Point as well as the multi-purpose wharf at Eden in New South Wales.

2 The relationship and coordination between Australia's road and rail networks and their connectivity to ports

It is not an easy process to demonstrate any economically viable connectivity between Narooma, Moruya, Batemans Bay and Ulladulla to ports at Eden, and Port Kembla because of the very bad condition of the Princes Highway in this part of the region.

It is imperative that we explore the possibilities given that there is little connectivity between road, rail and ports in this part of the region. There is a

solution to the problem. The solution requires the will of the Federal Government to accept responsibility for adequate transportation planning which enhances and improves what we do have. It requires the will of the Federal Government to expand their horizons to include this part of Australia in its Auslink program updates. It requires the Federal Government to recognize that this area is a growth area whose transportation infrastructure requires expansion which is beyond the resources of any State Government to provide in the long term let alone the medium term.

Growth is an issue now. "Sea changers" are moving here now. They require city infrastructure in what has been traditionally thought of as rural Australia. We cannot back away from that by simply arguing that they knew what they were getting when they moved to the area. Like all "aspirational" Australians they require facilities to enjoy the lifestyle to which they are accustomed. The elderly who came here as pioneers (it must be remembered that some of the local government areas in the south east of Australia have over 25% of their population over 60 years of age) are reaching that stage in their lives when they constantly require the services of medical specialists and of palliative care specialists and of aged care facilities which will bring younger families of those providing these services to this region. These providers and their families will only meet these needs if they are satisfied that the region can supply those goods and services they require. Transport infrastructure must be improved to provide those linkages.

Transportation infrastructure improvements are therefore absolutely necessary in the immediate future to cater for those needs. We can no longer deny the claims of this community.

This community cannot be subjected to a further round of total denial of any forward planning on these transport issues.

WHAT DO WE NEED?

3. The role of the three levels of Government and the private sector in providing and maintaining the regional transport network

The area between Nowra in the north and Bairnsdale in the south requires some real connectivity between the roads and the rail which is a long distance from most of those towns and it needs easier access to the ports which service the region such as Port Kembla, Eden, Geelong, Hastings and possibly Barry Point.

It would be possible, if a good road transport highway was established, to bring produce along the coast to Port Kembla for export to Oceania and to other places elsewhere within Australia. The value of produce grown in this region and now being transported to overseas via circuitous routes is vast. However, many export markets are being lost because of the lack of suitable

and easy access to ports. Part of the problem is the lack of ability for B-Doubles to easily travel the Princes Highway south of Batemans Bay. The NSW State Government has decided to expand the operation of Port Kembla in its determination to lessen the usage of the port of Sydney. When Port Kembla is expanded, it will provide a real opportunity for growers to export their commodities and industries such as the oyster industry, the flower industry and the recently productive camper van and mobile home industry being established in this region.

Others will be able to access this facility. The ability of growers in the Cooma, Snowy and Tumut region to use road transport links to bring produce to Port Kembla would be vast if the Main Road 92 was fast-tracked. This could then be expanded to include linkages to Bombala and the north eastern part of Gippsland thus producing links between them and Canberra and beyond.

It is estimated that the tourism industry is worth in excess of \$550million per annum to this part of the SEATS region. Almost all of this is accessed by road travel. It would be a considerable boost to this area economically if the Port Kembla facility, the Eden Multi-Purpose Wharf and the facilities at Hastings and Barry Point were enhanced to provide easy access between Tasmania and Victoria and between other Australian ports

It is recognized that environmental and cost factors may have an adverse impact on an extension of the rail service from Bomaderry further south to link with Bairnsdale.

It is feasible that a fast train link could be made between the Gippsland area and the Snowy Mountains and Canberra regions. This would have enormous benefits for the transfer of goods, services and passenger traffic in those areas relieving road traffic on the Princes Highway.

The only viable opportunity for our region in this part of south eastern Australia is for the Federal Government to recognize that the Princes Highway is an important part of the Australian transport infrastructure system. It must budget accordingly commencing in the 2005/06 Federal Budget.

The Government must be prepared to take responsibility for this Highway and ensure that its upgrade is funded in future Australian Budgets.

Recognition needs to be made that this is a problem beyond the responsibility of the State Governments and local governments in the area.

It requires injection of Federal funds now if the needs of the present generations are to be met let alone those of future generations.

SEATS members are determined to keep lobbying the Federal Government and the Victorian and New South Wales governments on these issues. We believe that it is essential that our claims are recognized by the Federal

Government and urge the Standing Committee to recognize the power of our submissions by recommending that funding be given to the Princes Highway in future Commonwealth budgets. It is imperative that such funding be on a similar basis to that given to the Pacific, Hume and Newell Highways. It cannot be some token funding which fails to recognize the needs of hundreds and thousands of Australians who are currently disenfranchised on this issue.

OTHER SOURCE MATERIAL

This submission is only a small part of other more detailed submissions prepared by member partners of SEATS. We urge you to accept this as part of the submissions made by Latrobe City Council, Victoria; Bega Valley Shire Council, New South Wales; The Southern Councils Group, New South Wales and one prepared on behalf of SEATS and the Gippsland area councils and the Gippsland Area Consultative Committee.

We would also refer you to studies undertaken by Meyrick and Associates auspiced by SEATS on the Gippsland Transport Study undertaken in 2004 and 2005 and soon to be launched by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Transport and Regional; Services, the Hon John Anderson.

Reference should also be made of a study prepared for SEATS in 2000 by Maunsell McIntyre Pty Ltd entitled Australian Capital Region Road Transport Priorities Study

Other source material is found in the East Coast High Speed Train Scoping Study by Arup -TME in 2001