

Adelaide Freight Movement
Study

Department of Infrastructure,
Transport

Regional Development and Local
Government

email:

sarailfreight@infrastructure.gov.au

19-11-09

To whom it may concern,

The following are our responses to the request for feedback on the seven (7) areas listed.

1. In response concerning other features of the route that are important for the Study to take into account:

You have set out very well concerns about the existing route, namely the slow rate when passing through the hills, the increased maintenance resulting from having to pull freight up and through the hills, the height limitations of freight carried caused by having to pass through tunnels and under bridges, the limitation in the length of train,

wear and tear on the track and the costs of having to use up to three locomotives to pull the train.

Residents in the Blackwood area frequently experience frustrating and lengthy delays at crossings on the Main Road and Brighton Parade from freight trains. Any move to

increase the length of a freight train would only make matters worse. Blocking rail crossings is not only a frustration due to delaying movement along either road this frustration affects all drivers and can be seen in their, often irrational, behaviour to make up lost time travelling to their destination. Longer trains will increase this situation.

While not a part of the study a similar frustration is experienced by motorists using crossings such as the Wattlebury Road, Mitcham crossing Torrens Road, Brompton crossing who have to wait for the same freight train that because of the track line after the hills was only passing through Adelaide.

The hills area is known as a high fire risk area which requires prompt responses from the Country Fire Service (CFS). In the event of a fire trains cannot pull up at nice

locations to allow the rapid and safe movement of any of the emergency services. To my knowledge, there is no current adequate method of communication with a train driver to tell them to halt the train. The very length of current freight trains used means a high chance that movement by the emergency services or the population,

should an evacuation be required, can be blocked while waiting for a crossing to be cleared. Such a condition is likely to lead to an over reaction by motorists and vehicle

accidents. Any move to increase the length of a freight train will only add to the risks of additional incidents or a inability to rapidly get to the source of the incident.

The safest action would be to halt the movement of the train through the hills at a point nearer Callington. This removes the risks of rail crossings being blocked and reduces

the risk of a loss of the train, the people on board it or the loss of the freight being carried. Rerouting the line overcomes any of these risks

In the general area of Blackwood there are three (3) CFS stations, Belair, Coromandel Valley and Eden Hills. Throughout the year it is not unusual, particularly during the

fire season to hear the sirens of any of them operating. Apart from the risks of fires there is the inevitable movement of the ambulance service dealing with medical emergencies. While there are a number of younger people living in the area, the Blackwood and surrounding area has a high percentage of older people living in it. On any

day ambulance sirens will be heard. Apart from the Blackwood hospital most patients are taken to the Flinders Medical Centre at the bottom of Sheppard's Hill Road.

There have been two (2) incidents in the last few years in one (1) of which a freight car was derailed and may well have caused more damage or had a person been too

close, a fatality. No figures were in the report that dealt with the level of kinetic energy present in a moving freight car empty, with a mixed load, 40 foot container, carrying

volatile liquids or hazardous chemicals. Any plans to increase the speed of a freight train or its length greatly increases the risk of a disastrous incident.

Finally there is the ever present 'screech' from the freight trains as they move along what is acknowledged as a twisting route. The noise from the wheels of the freight

carriages is not limited to the movement around bends but can be heard as the train passes along straight sections of line.

2. In response to a call for comment on the economic growth assumptions underlying the freight forecasts:

As said above, although not in possession of alternative figures, the case put forward and the figures used make sense assuming, of course, that they are correct.

However; it is reasonable to assume that without major changes to tunnels and bridge works there is no ability to reduce the time taken to run the current length of freight

train any quicker to Adelaide. This will reduce the likelihood of having a more profitable line.

The problem of trying to operate more profitably by double stacking, increasing the length of the train and its speed indicates the lack of a proper review and safety analysis prior to up-dating the rails some while ago so that more weight/freight could be carried. Had such a review and risk analysis been carried out we would be much further along the road towards achieving a more workable system with a greater chance of safely increasing the flow of freight on the line. This assumes that any notice would have been taken of the findings. The process at the time seemed to be more concerned in the cost of removing the existing rails and replacing them with rails capable of carrying heavier loads.

3. In response a request for comment upon the base case forecast for traffic carried on the Adelaide Hills route:

Again, one is not in possession of the figures, other than those provided in the Study. On the assumption that the figures are accurate and there is no reason to think they are not it is not surprising that no real increase can be seen in the short term in the amount of freight on the line. Without seeing a reduction in the time taken for freight to be moved between Melbourne and Perth or vice versa and the amount of freight carried it is understandable if freight forwarders choose to continue with whatever system they currently have. Adelaide is not a large industrial area despite any efforts to portray it as such and certainly not large when compared Melbourne. Freight forwarders in Melbourne, Perth or Darwin could be expected to decide which freight has to be moved rapidly in which case, depending upon type weight and overall size it may suit them to work towards the development of sending freight by aircraft. As with much else the cost would be passed to the customer but a factor in their assessment process would be the ability to rapidly meet customer demand and by doing so make any cost increase more acceptable. A further alternative would be to send the freight by road. Trucks leaving Melbourne would be in Adelaide in under 24 hours and the trip to Perth would likely be under three (3) full days. An advantage in forwarding freight by road would also be a better ability to deliver direct to customers. A further alternative is to utilise a container shipping system between Perth and Melbourne. While this system can and does allow for the movement of mixed and/or heavy freight a drawback is the time between ports. Shipping remains an ideal way to move freight in and out of the country but is not seen as a serious competitor to rail.

Although changing the rail route to another, if longer route but over flatter terrain may not markedly reduce the time taken for movement between Melbourne and Perth.

Nevertheless the ability of the train to carry more and heavier loads at a reduced amount of wear and tear on locomotives and the track seems to set the basis for greater freight movement and set the scene for the rail system to be more competitive. Apart from any overall increase in the total amount of freight there is the possibility

of transferring the existing amount of freight from other systems used. That is transferring it from road to rail or aircraft to rail. A particular benefit would be the reduced

pressure on the connecting roads and vehicle incidents. In the case of the roads, any reduction in the amount of heavy goods along them would be a benefit to both Federal and State governments.

4. In relation to the relative share of freight traffic on the Melbourne Perth and Melbourne corridors the following comments are made:

As said in three (3) above, Adelaide indeed South Australia has not got a large industrial base and despite real efforts to promote the state as a good base from which to

operate an Industry it is not seen as likely that the overall size will markedly improve in the short term. Even allowing for a population of some 1,172,105 million (As at June

2008) in Adelaide out of a total state population of 1,601,800 (as at June 2008) this does not match the size of Melbourne of something in the order of 3,892,419 million (as

at June 2008). This is neither a good or bad thing but does indicate the level of growth which must take place if Adelaide wishes to be seen as a main freight handling

area. Having a freight line running into Adelaide while on its way to Perth is seen as an unnecessary delay. More so if there is no freight to be delivered to the city. Not only

is there currently the need to travel more slowly on the Melbourne to Adelaide corridor but also while running through the city area and out the other side there is a need to

reduce speed both for other rail crossings, the presence of homes and other buildings and the like along the side of the track.

There are currently moves afoot to increase the population in Adelaide, however; this is not likely to show much increase, in a meaningful way, for sometime and would be

dependant upon existing industry growing or new industries coming to the area. Problems facing any industry in the area would be distance from other larger and more

developed centers and despite lower overall costs such as housing, food and wages the cost of getting the necessary materials in. Given time it is reasonable to assume

that industry will grow but over the next ten (10) or more years it is not seen that the growth would be sufficient to maintain the existing Melbourne Adelaide corridor and

accept the operating costs and difficulties of being competitive with other methods of transporting freight.

5, In relation to the query concerning the extent to which a more efficient rail alignment would improve freight services and lead to a greater use of rail instead of road:

Some of the comments made concerning point three(3) and four (4) above also apply here.

Having a reliable system of moving large amounts of freight presents an opportunity for marketing to rail freight industry and other clients the fact of its reliability and the

amount which it can carry. Examples are: reliability, no hold ups by breakdowns, vehicle incidents, some of which may mean loss of the freight, the ability to plan better for

receipt of the freight and in so doing provide a more attractive system. Sending freight by trucks may appear quicker but even when the goods arrive at the other end there

is the matter of distribution. This can mean it arrived this morning but the delivery will not occur until later in the day or even to-morrow. Knowing accurately a arrival time,

similar to passengers travelling by aircraft, allows the receiver to better plan how to collect their freight using either their own or local transport.

More obvious benefits are a reduction in running costs. This means that for the same amount of freight the operating costs can be lower. While difficult to quantify there is

also the ability to present a far more acceptable image to the people living in the Blackwood and surrounding hills area. Too often the impression given is that organisations

do not care what people think provided the organisation makes a profit. There are occasion where organisations such as railways find it difficult to make changes even if

they want to because any such changes would need to be assisted by either Federal or State governments both of which have political agendas some of which may involve

little activity unless they can see a political change to their advantage. The length of time it has taken for this study to occur may be seen as a case in point. A further

indication is the lack of any government Federal or State to undertake noise level testing to deal with complaints of sleepless nights and general loss of a pleasant

environment. Had tests been carried out the government involved would be placed in an awkward position if nothing meaningful was done. While not really related to the

Study, a further indication is the continuing development of land areas, example Blackwood Park, for housing in areas poorly suited to the rapid movement of people away

as the result of an emergency such as a catastrophic fire. Even before Blackwood Park was developed the road system showed signs of an inability to cope with large

and rapid movement of people. Now that it is, any action to increase the lengths of freight trains compounds the problem. Despite the poor road conditions the handling of

an evacuation has largely been left to the individual. None of this is related to rail freight operation but from the point of view of those in the area any organisation not seen to be trying to overcome such problems or be adding to them would could be seen as acquiescing in the name of profit.

6. In relation to the request for comment upon "the options identified, and whether there are any alternative rail alignments that should be considered" the following is offered :

The Study shows that the greater amount of freight moves between Melbourne and Perth. Some freight does come to Adelaide but it would be some years before the

amount was such as to warrant the use of the current corridor. As and when the level of freight between Melbourne and Adelaide does grow to something more economical

there would be a return to the same sorts of problems currently being experienced. That is, having to travel more slowly, wear and tear on the locomotives and the

rails because of the gradient and the inability to prevent the noise levels now existing.

Not having the detail to be in a position to properly assess which land area is most suited it is difficult to write suitable upon alternatives. However; any area chosen should

be such that the least amount of changes in elevation would be most desirable. This would enable a freight train to maintain the optimum rate of speed for the least running

cost. At the same time the route would need to be such as to return to the existing line to Perth as soon as it were feasible having by-passed the hills area. This is taken to

be near Two Wells at a point where the freight for Adelaide can be diverted away from the new main line. The understanding is that the line from Adelaide towards Two

Wells area already exists and adequately copes with the freight rail traffic. Table 2, page 14 in the Adelaide Rail Freight Movements Study, October 2009 indicates a connecting point to the North of Two Wells whether or not a new line was to run north or south of Truro. Given the location of Gawler and plans for the surrounding area to be

developed for housing a new route should not be such as to solve one problem in the hills area create another around Gawler or Two Wells. In the Elizabeth area is the

Holden car plant which no doubt moves its vehicles to Western Australia for sale in. Using rail and being able to load at a new terminus near Two Wells would be an advantage.

In the Study reference is made to an alternative route passing south of the hills area and south of Mt Bold Reservoir. This is considered to be worse of the three (3) possible

alternatives and still has a freight train with freight for Perth but not Adelaide having to pass through Adelaide and the Torrens Road crossing, Brompton.

7. In response to a request for comment upon "the assumed freight paths, and whether these reflect the choices that above rail operators are likely to make":

There is an old saying which probably originated from rail systems in the U.K.: "There is a right way, a wrong way and the rail way". The import of this is that that regardless

of what data, facts, public opinion and the like are put forward operators of rail systems are not seen as moveable having once taken a stance. In the case of the Melbourne

to Adelaide rail corridor a lot of money has already been spent installing rails capable of carrying more freight. Regardless of the problems which the public in the hills and

Blackwood area face because of the freight trains the public probably has no effect upon their thinking. Had more thought gone into long term gains by re-routing the rail line

it is likely that the heavier rails would never have been installed nor would there be any thought of changes to tunnels or bridges. They would have been campaigning for a

new route allowing for faster rail traffic, lowering running costs and better ways of attracting additional freight. That this Study has identified alternatives shows what can be

done and the committee involved has to be congratulated. Without a financial input from Federal and the State government it is likely that the operators will persist in

running with the established system and if making changes seek to persuade further changes to the existing line. Without the changes mooted in the Study it is unlikely that

freight will increase at any real rate and that residents in the hills area will be left with an additional hazard in the event of a catastrophic fire and the continuing

disturbance of noise largely generated by the use of the concrete sleepers, the weight of the carriages with or without loads and finally the ever present risk damage to life

and property from a derailment.

Yours faithfully

D. A. G. Ross M App Sci, Grad OHM FSIA, AIES
and A. Ross