

Submission to the Adelaide Rail Freight Movement Study – November 2009

Safety Aspects

Safety of the existing alignment has been one of the main reasons put forward for an alternative freight train route between Murray Bridge and Adelaide.

The two most recent derailments in Glenalta were major incidents and it was fortunate that no injury or deaths resulted. Whilst it could be argued this was just good luck it is also possible that the slower train speeds required in the hills meant these derailments were, in the main, confined to the rail corridor minimising the potential for injury or death.

In contrast, the majority of recent rail related fatalities and serious injuries in South Australia have been experienced on the interstate rail freight network to the north of Adelaide (Australian Transport Safety Bureau – Rail Safety Investigation Reports) where track speeds are higher. Many of these fatalities involved level crossing accidents and occurred on the same section of line proposed in option 3 to carry the additional Adelaide Melbourne, Melbourne Adelaide freight.

The Adelaide Rail Freight Movement Study needs to consider that the increase in freight between Two Wells and Islington will increase the risk of further fatalities on this section of line that unfortunately already has a proven poor safety record.

Option 4, with a southern bypass has considerably less potential for accidents to impact upon communities and people within them as it the shortest route and much of it is proposed to be underground (page 19 Adelaide Rail Freight Movement Study).

Passenger Services

Whilst the terms of reference for the Adelaide Rail Freight Movement Study relates to the movement of freight consideration needs to be given to the potential of future passenger services.

The only 'non freight' train utilising the existing line is the Overland passenger train that runs between Adelaide and Melbourne. This service runs 3 times a week in each direction (Great Southern Railway) and therefore represents limited justification to keep the existing line open between Adelaide and Murray Bridge as it would be the only train using the route.

The extension of local Trans Adelaide passenger services beyond Belair to Bridgewater and further east is unlikely for the same reasons that options for alternative freight train routes are being investigated i.e. the tight alignment. The tight curves and length of the current alignment would make commuter travel by train slower than other available travel options. For example, the South Eastern Freeway currently provides a quicker alternative to travel to Adelaide from hills suburbs such as Stirling, Aldgate, Bridgewater and Mt Barker than the existing rail corridor could provide.

As the current alignment makes a commuter service unlikely beyond Belair and the only other train to use the line in a very limited capacity is the Overland passenger train it is highly likely the existing line will close if option 3 or 4 is implemented.

As the populations of Murray Bridge and Mt Barker increase a viable and efficient alternative to the South Eastern Freeway for travel to Adelaide will be required. Whilst the South Eastern Freeway can currently accommodate existing traffic expediently between Mt Barker and Glen Osmond in time it will become more congested along with Cross Road, Glen Osmond Road and Portrush Road leading to increasing vehicle travel times.

Fast rail services can provide a viable alternative if planning and appropriate infrastructure is put in place. Option 4 represents such an opportunity with the potential to construct a short standard gauge extension from the proposed line near the Bugle Ranges northwards to Mt Barker along the existing rail corridor operated by Steam Ranger Heritage Railway. This extension would allow passenger trains to transport people quickly between the centre of Adelaide and the centre of Mt Barker and potentially Murray Bridge.

Option 3 does not provide any additional passenger service benefits and if constructed will see the end of any potential rail link for commuter services between Mt Barker and Adelaide.

If option 4 were to proceed travel times for the Overland passenger train would be reduced by 1.8 hours (table 2 Adelaide Rail Freight Movement Study) leading to increased patronage. This would result in fewer trips by road between Adelaide and Melbourne and vice versa with related road safety and environmental benefits. Under option 3 train travel times between Melbourne and Adelaide are only improved by a marginal 0.4 of an hour (table 2 Adelaide Rail Freight Movement Study).

Traffic Delays

The discussion paper highlights the level crossing at Main Road Glenalta, Main Road Belair (should this be Blackwood?) and Cross Road Hawthorn experience long traffic delays. The delays experienced at Main Road Glenalta and Main Road Blackwood are not ideal however they are part of a much bigger traffic congestion issue within the Mitcham Hills. Accordingly, moving the freight line to ease traffic congestion will have minimal impact as other significant traffic congestion issues of the Mitcham Hills will remain.

Furthermore, removal of freight trains may actually lead to an increase in traffic congestion on some roads. In peak periods there is considerable build up of vehicles trying to access Main Road from local and connector roads. The passing of a freight train provides a temporary break in traffic on Main Road allowing traffic to clear from these local and connector roads (i.e. Laffers Road Belair, James Road Belair). Trans Adelaide Commuter services achieve this to a lesser extent given the short time for these trains to clear level crossings.

The delays experienced by freight trains at the Cross Road level crossing are caused by trains slowing or coming to a stop to 'give way' to Trans Adelaide commuter services crossing Goodwood Junction. Commuter trains are given priority at this junction meaning freight trains need to slow or stop until the Trans Adelaide line is clear.

Delays experienced at Cross Road would be reduced if freight trains were given the priority at Goodwood Junction as they would not need to slow or come to a stop. An alternative option to changing the priority at Goodwood Junction is to hold freight trains south of Barretts Road at Lynton and then release them 5 minutes (approximate travel time) before a clear path over the junction is available. In this manner when they arrive at the junction there will be a clear path and therefore will not need to slow or stop.

Given the above points traffic delays are not sufficient justification to warrant a 'cheap as possible' freight bypass be constructed as soon as possible. Accordingly, there is time to investigate and implement the most appropriate rail freight bypass that will provide fast and efficient freight and passenger services.

Preferred Option

Option 1: Not worthy of further consideration.

Option 2: Not worthy of further consideration.

Option 3: Option 3 provides Adelaide Hills residents affected by the existing alignment with full resolution of the social issues of safety, noise, level crossing delays and community amenity. However, this will be at the expense of people in the northern suburbs of Adelaide where increased freight volumes will lead to an increase in undesirable rail related social issues already experienced by those communities.

Option 3 only has marginal benefits in terms of travel time between Adelaide and Melbourne and is also an indirect route for freight travelling between the two cities.

Option 3 is not worthy of any further consideration.

Option 4: Option 4 with a southern bypass provides superior benefits to all other options and therefore is the best option for further investigation.

Benefits include:

- Fastest freight travel time – 1.4 hours quicker than option 3;
- Low operating costs;
- Low fuel consumption;
- Low levels of emissions;
- Satisfies social criteria;
- Low traffic delays;
- Decreased travel time for Overland passenger train services leading to increased patronage; and
- Potential for a fast public transport link between Adelaide and Mt Barker with potential to extend to Murray Bridge.

Whilst option 4 is the most expensive the existing alignment has enough capacity to meet demand until 2020 or 2027 and therefore there is sufficient time to fund the estimated 2.4 billion required to complete it.

The discussion paper outlines this option is expensive due to tunnelling and grade separation. The grade separation at Goodwood, Cross Road and Torrens Junction could be implemented ahead of the main project to provide some relief at Cross Road in the short term whilst funds are secured for the construction of a new southern bypass.

Option 5: Not worthy of further consideration.

Conclusion

The key purpose of the Adelaide Rail Freight Movements Study is to improve the capacity and efficiency of the interstate freight line between Murray Bridge and Adelaide.

A southern bypass, with superior travel times, freight volumes and environmental benefits, is the most appropriate alternate route to achieve this purpose. A bypass to the south would also provide an opportunity for a fast passenger service between Adelaide, Mt Barker and Murray Bridge.

The additional expense of option 4 should not be used as justification to dismiss the southern bypass as there are clearly considerable benefits with this route over the other options that will provide Adelaide and South Australia with a first class southern freight and passenger rail line.