

Ms Margaret Liveris
Committee Clerk
Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs
GPO box A11
Perth WA 6837

26 June 2015

Dear Ms Liveris,

Petition No 93 – Perth Freight Link Project

I am the principal petitioner in connection with this petition.

Good government doesn't necessarily result in decisions that keep everyone happy. But it usually results in decisions that people can respect. However, the decision-making "process" that led in 2014 to the selection of the Perth Freight Link project for funding of \$1.6 billion and construction based on a so-called "rapid benefit cost ratio", and the planning process since then, leave me and others deeply uneasy. It is important that the matter be scrutinised by the Parliament in order to avoid, if at all possible, any further waste of public funds or damage to the environment, including the urban fabric of our southern suburbs.

I was at a meeting held by the North Fremantle Community Association on 25 August at which Premier Barnett spoke, as did Professor Peter Newman, of Curtin University Sustainability Policy Institute. As has now been widely reported, the Premier stated, in relation to section 2 of the PFL:

'We haven't even selected a route, haven't decided if it's going to be above ground or in a tunnel—and tunnels are incredibly expensive—haven't decided yet whether it will be done at various interchanges, haven't designed it, haven't done the engineering work, haven't done the environmental work and haven't done the planning work. So the connection is still a long, long way away.'

Professor Newman, who was on the board of Infrastructure Australia in 2014, has said that at that time the Perth Freight Link was "nowhere to be seen". Professor Newman says that he has never seen anything like this project, in that the proposal to IA did not consider the end destination (how to get the trucks across the river and into the port).

In May 2014, Prime Minister Abbott announced almost \$1 billion in federal funding for the Perth Freight Link, with a further \$650 million to come from the State of WA and, initially, from private enterprise. On purely economic grounds alone, that this sum of public money could be committed to a proposal that was not properly planned is of grave concern.

Lack of Transparency

It has now been recognised diverse bodies and persons that the national economy is being held back because there is not a long-term pipeline of major infrastructure projects that is agreed. RBA Governor, Glenn Stevens, said in an address on 10 June 2015 that the impediments are not financial. "The impediments are in our decision-making processes and, it seems, in our inability to find political agreement on how to proceed." Agreement, of course, pre-supposes adequate transparency.

Indeed, in its Audit of 22 May 2015, Infrastructure Australia specifically addressed the need for improved transparency in planning of major infrastructure projects. In just the Executive Summary of that Audit alone, IA wrote:

"Improvements in infrastructure project appraisal and project selection (*including the consistent use and transparent reporting of cost benefit analyses*) are necessary if Australians expectations are to be realised."

We need to improve our infrastructure planning

"International and local reviews show that **rigorous project selection** is key to boosting economic activity and supporting productivity growth. However, investment in poorly conceived projects can undermine a country's economic prospects.

"Our infrastructure planning processes need continuous improvement and greater **transparency**. The key areas requiring attention are the collection and analysis of data, benchmarking, integration of planning processes, and *sharing of data to support the development and prioritisation of projects.*"

Yet not even the traffic modelling in relation to the project has been made public, let alone any comparison of viable options for addressing Perth's freight task.

The Chamber of Commerce and Industry Western Australia in its publication 'Future of infrastructure: a vision for WA', Vision Series, at p 36, made the case for necessary changes in the way that infrastructure is delivered in WA:

"To improve the transparency and accountability around infrastructure planning in WA, it is important that **all documents and assessments conducted by a new infrastructure body should automatically be made public, unless there is a demonstrated confidentiality issue**. To ensure the plan remains relevant and takes into account demographic, economic and technological changes, it is important that it is regularly reviewed and updated on a set, periodic basis.

My application under freedom of information laws for a copy of the business case for the PFL was rejected on the basis of broad general claims that the contents were "commercial in confidence". The public interest in major infrastructure planning and selection is so great that there needs to be a more rigorous assessment of circumstances in which commercial confidentiality should be allowed to defeat the public interest in transparency.

Economically, socially and environmentally the project is too expensive.

The Perth Freight Link disturbs very many members of the community for a variety of reasons. Local residents face either losing their homes or living with increased noise, vibration and pollution from heavy diesel trucks, as well as the severance of their communities. Business owners fear traffic, caught on a freeway behind 6.2 metre walls, will pass them by. The degradation of the Beelihar Wetlands is a cost many find simply unacceptable, notwithstanding vague promises of "environmental offsets". Taxpayers question the spending of \$1.6 to \$2 billion without appropriate assessments to support this design as the best solution.

As you know, in addition to alternative routes, other options for handling container traffic include a more sensitive upgrade of existing roads, putting more freight on rail, situating container parks away from the port to reduce the number of empty trucks travelling to the port and the further development of the outer harbour at Kwinana.

I look to the Committee to bring sunlight to bear in relation to the Perth Freight Link. Thank you for your time.

Yours sincerely,

Gráinne O'Donovan