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MELBOURNE-GEELONG CORRIDOR STRATEGY

Submission

Although the report is entitled “Melbourne-Geelong Corridor Strategy” it is very light on strategic thinking. Trends are reported and challenges noted, but concrete recommendations to overcome these challenges are lacking or non-existent in a number of key areas.

We note that the Draft Corridor Strategies web page states “Corridor Strategies are about Strategic Priorities not projects”. Nevertheless, a number of possible road projects are in fact referred to in the report, whereas there are proportionally fewer specific references to possible rail and public transport projects.

On page 12, the report says that “the broad gauge passenger network operates at capacity during peak periods. While capacity problems could be relieved in the short term through longer trains and more trains at the shoulder of the peaks, predicted growth in commuter trips will needs to be addressed through longer-term solutions.”. However the report doesn’t mention any ways in which this problem could be tackled.

The Melbourne–Geelong Corridor is recognised as "peri-urban" (p.9), with high proportion of light vehicles. Therefore urban transport solutions are required, which necessitates considerable improvements in the provision of public transport.

Rail could also play a more significant role in the movement of people both during *and* outside peak periods, if inter-city services were of an adequate standard and well-integrated with metropolitan services at either end.

On page 16 it is stated that “improvements to public transport between Geelong and Melbourne present another opportunity to reduce passenger traffic growth on the road corridor and free up space for commercial vehicles’. Given the importance of reducing the consumption of fossil fuels, for environmental and economic reasons, this is very vague. There is no mention of any measures which might improve the provision of public transport.

In a similar vein is the assertion that “public transport needs to respond to growing demand” (p.16) and the twice-repeated statement about “improving public transport’s level of service” (p17 & p18). Despite these statements, and the listing of public transport improvements as a short-term priority, there are no suggestions made anywhere in the

document as to how these enhancements might be made, or any indication that they will even occur.

Indeed, the pie charts on page 9 project an increase in road's proportion of the passenger modal share in the next twenty years. So a mode-shift away from road is not in fact predicted, despite the sentiments noted above about the importance of improving public transport.

Encouraging public transport use will require concrete measures which increase both the share and the absolute patronage of public transport in and along the corridor, and the avoidance of measures which contradict this aim.

The future impact of Avalon Airport is mentioned on page 15. If it is to serve as a serious passenger airport, and given plans to more than double domestic passenger numbers at Avalon Airport to one million per year by 2007, there is a clear need to improve the public transport provision to Avalon.

Rail must play a greater role in moving freight by improving capacity and connectivity of both broad and standard gauge lines, and by facilitating intermodal hubs that get freight onto rail, including for short-haul. A significant amount of the road freight to and from Melbourne along the Corridor is destined for western Victoria (p. 6), so the Geelong – Melbourne Corridor is not just a short-haul extension of the Melbourne urban freight task, as is suggested (eg p.i).

On page 14 a number of current rail projects are referred to, including "network wide signalling and communication upgrades, the Dynon Port Rail Link to improve rail access to the Port of Melbourne and Dynon inter-modal precinct and line and signalling system upgrading between Tottenham and Dynon."

The Corio Independent Goods Line is not mentioned. This project has been planned for up to a decade, and is a vital piece of infrastructure if the Port of Geelong is to be adequately connected to the interstate standard gauge network. There is only a vague implication of this essential development in the reference to "inadequate provision of standard gauge rail access into the Port of Geelong" (p.16).

On page 15, the report states that "road freight is expected to play an even greater role in transporting both bulk and non-bulk freight by 2025". The environmental, economic and social consequences of this prediction are not dealt with, and there seems to be an assumption that improvements in rail infrastructure, which the Strategy itself calls for, will not in fact occur, or if they do, they will be inadequate and ineffective.

Given current concerns about climate and energy consumption, the concept of sustainability is increasingly important. Although touched on in the report, sustainability is neither defined nor discussed. Ensuring that developments in the Corridor are sustainable is surely one of the major "Corridor Challenges", but is not mentioned in the list on page 17.

Despite this, the building of the Geelong Bypass, and the enhancement of the Princes Highway through Waurn Ponds, are both marked as increasing sustainability, whereas providing "additional rail capacity (both freight and passenger) to cater for the impact of growth in the corridor and improve average speeds" and "providing adequate broad and

standard gauge access to the Port of Geelong" are not (p. 19). It is well recognised that improvement of rail infrastructure is more sustainable than expansion of road capacity.

The report states that "the completion of the Geelong Bypass in 2009 will further reduce traffic and improve safety within Geelong." (p.11) This claim has the status of "received wisdom" and is rarely, if ever, analysed. However VicRoads has noted that the Geelong Bypass will not result in a reduction of traffic, except in the short term:

"Preliminary traffic modelling work undertaken for the Geelong Bypass indicates that there is likely to be a reduction in traffic volumes of up to 17% in Latrobe Terrace and up to 4% in Aberdeen Street immediately on completion of the Geelong Bypass. However the natural growth of traffic (approx 2% per year), as well as a redistribution of traffic from other north/south routes, is expected to result in traffic volumes on these two routes returning to their pre-Bypass volumes in a relatively short period of time."
(VicRoads submission quoted in report of Greater Geelong Planning Scheme Amendment C97 Panel Hearing, April 2005, p.44)

The Corridor Strategy report states that "capacity of the road infrastructure along the Melbourne-Geelong corridor generally meets current demand" and congestion is limited to short periods of the day (p.11). By contrast, it is noted that "the [rail] corridor suffers from inadequate capacity" and that "capacity constraints in the corridor are likely to worsen in coming years as the freight task increases and more and longer trains are required to cope with increased rail mode share." (p.12)

The clear conclusion from this is that urgent priority must be given to a significant expansion of the relevant rail infrastructure. For example, the report says that "rail capacity on the Melbourne - Geelong AusLink corridor is influenced by the number of crossing loops between Laverton and Gheringhap. There is presently only one loop between those two points and an additional loop would increase capacity which would reduce transit times and improve reliability". (p.13)

To provide sufficient capacity and flexibility in the standard gauge rail corridor, it is essential that two additional crossing loops are provided in the 85 kilometre section between the existing loops at Manor and Gheringhap, particularly when the Port of Geelong is fully connected to the standard gauge line. As evidence, in the 70 kilometre section west of Gheringhap there are two 1600 metre crossing loops.

Finally, to the extent that the corridor can be considered an extension of the Melbourne metropolitan transport task (page i), the following Victorian government strategies are relevant and should be reflected in the Melbourne-Geelong Corridor Strategy:

- 20% of motorised journeys on public transport by 2020
- 30% of port freight on rail by 2010.

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