The Perth Freight Link: Facts and Fiction

The supporters of Roe 8 and the Perth Freight Link have been spreading misinformation and half truths about this project. Their aim is to discredit the alternatives by selective use of the facts. In this brief response I will focus on four of the most plausible myths that they have created. My aim is to try to provide some balance to the discussion.

**Myth 1: Labor and the Greens are responsible for the predicament that we find ourselves in over the Perth Freight Link.**

**Comment:** The advocates of the PFL claim that by deleting the Fremantle Eastern Bypass in 2006 the ALP and the Greens have cut off the planned link from Roe 8 to the port of Fremantle and this has left us with an expensive and difficult planning problem. This is a half-truth. The ALP and the Greens did support the deletion of the FEB, which was part of the Stephenson-Hepburn Plan of 1965. However, they did this after careful consideration of the social, economic and environmental impacts. The Freight Network Congress in 2001 supported the deletion of the FEB and this was an open, democratic process involving a representative group of the key stakeholders. The Freight Network Congress did not ignore the consequences of the deletion of the FEB, in fact it proposed a 6-point strategy to provide for freight movement through the Metropolitan Area out to 2030. The incoming Barnett Government in 2008 chose to discard the 6-point plan and return to the old Stephenson-Hepburn Plan of 1965 and this is what has created the planning predicament we are now facing.

**Myth 2: Building the Outer Harbour in Cockburn Sound will involve more social and environmental damage than building the PFL.**

**Comment:** An important part of the 6-point plan was to accelerate the construction of the Outer Harbour in Kwinana, together with improved rail access via an intermodal terminal at Henderson. Road access was to be provided via Roe 7 and the Kwinana Freeway and via the Tonkin Highway, with connections via Rowley, Anketell and Thomas Roads. A private port proposal at James Point had already been assessed and approved by the EPA and the Minister in 2000. There are no seagrass meadows at James Point as they were destroyed by industrial pollution in the 1960s. The shipping channels through the Success and Parmelia Banks were dredged by Cockburn Cement under licence for shell sands in the 1980s. Large grain ships already use these channels. The road network to the Outer Harbour is largely in place already and there are no direct impacts on Bush Forever sites or the Beeliar Regional Park. The only contentious issue is with the proposed Rowley Road extension which runs adjacent to Lake Wattleup and along the southern boundary of Mt Brown. This proposal was subjected to considerable discussion in 2004 and an agreed route was found that minimized the environmental impact. Therefore, the environmental and social impacts of building the Outer Harbour and its access roads are much less than putting the PFL through the Beeliar Wetlands and through the established suburbs of Palmyra and East Fremantle.

**Myth 3: Roe 8 will be needed in any case, regardless of whether the PFL is built.**

**Comment:** The supporters of Roe 8 say that it would be needed for access to the Outer Harbour, regardless of whether stages 2 and 3 of the PFL are built. This claim in quite incredible if you look at a map and consider the alternatives. Roe 8 will be a toll road for trucks, which ends at a busy intersection with Stock Road in Hamilton Hill. Without stages 2 and 3 of the PFL, access to the Fremantle Port from Roe 8 and Stock Road will be slower than using Leach Highway. Access to the Outer Harbour will be much more difficult due to congestion and traffic lights on Stock Road. A better alternative for trucks would be to leave the Roe Highway at the Kwinana Freeway and avoid the tolls and travel south to the Rowley, Anketell or Thomas Road exits. No sensible truckie would choose to pay the toll on Roe 8 only to be left in a traffic jam on Stock Road. This is why the transport industry has rejected Roe 8 unless it is part of the complete PFL. The Freight Network
Review of 2001 - 2007 took all of this into account when it considered the future needs of the freight industry and concluded that Roe 8 was redundant and that the best solution was to upgrade Leach Highway and accelerate the development of the Outer Harbour in Kwinana.

**Myth 4: Roe 8 will be built on land that is already partly cleared for power lines.**

**Comment:** This is a half-truth. The EPA required Main Roads to move the alignment of Roe 8 to the north to utilize the power line easement through the North Lake wetlands. However, Roe 8 still involves the clearing of 97.8 hectares of good quality banksia woodland, including 5.4 hectares of the Beeliar Regional Park and 7 hectares of Bush Forever site 244. Also 6.8 ha of conservation category wetlands will be cleared for Roe 8 and the wildlife habitat at North Lake will be severed and fragmented. Most of this land is also the habitat of the endangered Carnaby's black cockatoo (80 ha). Main Roads are also planning to construct wastewater basins, to collect runoff from Roe 8, within the Beeliar Regional Park. Several businesses will also lose part of their land to the Roe Highway/Murdoch Drive interchange. The details of the land to be resumed are given in the Planning Control Area Notice no. 120 on the WA Planning Commission web site.

**Final Comment:** The Roe 8/PFL saga is a planning disaster that the Government has brought upon itself. It has succumbed to persistent lobbying by the City of Melville and the Main Roads Department. They have persuaded the State Government to discard a modern, carefully considered freight strategy (the 6-point plan) and revert to an obsolete plan that was drawn up 50 years ago. The weaknesses in the Stephenson-Hepburn Plan were identified by the EPA in its System Six study in the 1970s and it warned in 1980 that Roe 8 was unacceptable. Several other aspects of the Stephenson-Hepburn plan, such as the Stephenson Highway and the Point Walter/Point Resolution bridge, have also been deleted for social and environmental reasons. We should be aware that the EPA did not exist in 1965 and the original Stephenson Plan was never subjected to environmental or social review or to public input. In contrast the Freight Network Strategy of 2007 was carefully considered and publicly reviewed and was being implemented when the Barnett Government came to office and discarded it in 2008. It is not too late for them to listen to our concerns and admit the error of their ways and return to a rational planning solution to meet Perth’s long term freight transport needs.

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