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Maldon to Dombarton Rail Link Feasibility Study  
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**RE: Maldon to Dombarton Rail Link Feasibility Study Issues Paper**

Healthy Cities Illawarra (HCI) is dedicated to improving the health, physical environment and quality of life of people of the Illawarra. People's physical, mental and spiritual health depends on a healthy environment, including sufficient open space, clean water, clean air and sustainable natural ecosystems.

**Local transport impacts**

Wollongong has unique transport problems, the most notable of which is the level of coal trucking on public roads. No less than 5.2 million tonnes of coal was moved to the Port Kembla Coal Terminal by trucks using public roads in 2008. This is high by Australian, or even Newcastle, standards. The transport of new cars from Port Kembla by truck will have added another up to 24 truck movements per hour.

The people of Wollongong have been exposed to increasing heavy freight vehicle movements for many years, above and beyond that which should be borne by any port city.

Such road vehicle traffic comes with associated health impacts, such as:

- Noise pollution which increases stress-related illnesses
- Air pollution which increases respiratory illnesses and cancers
- Road accidents causing injury and death
- Traffic congestion which can slow down commuting times, eating into workers family, recreation and work time
- Increased public funding for the repair and maintenance of roads affected by the truck movements
- Increased greenhouse gas emissions

The completion of the Maldon-Dombarton rail link could reduce the amount of truck movements necessary to shift the increasing volumes of freight coming into and out of Port Kembla harbour. This rail link will also remove coal trains from inner western Sydney and free up pathways for metropolitan passenger trains.

**Cost/benefit**

The pre-feasibility study issues paper demonstrates that it is both cost-effective and good for human health to complete the Maldon-Dombarton rail link. Road freight haulage operations impose large external costs on the Australian public - financially, socially and environmentally. Rail transport provides a superior alternative in most aspects.

The 1990 Wollongong City Council Coal Transportation Task Force report identified some of these externalised costs, such as road infrastructure and maintenance costs, congestion costs, road

**Inspiring a healthy Illawarra**

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accidents, tourism opportunity costs, air and noise pollution and climate change. One loaded B-Double truck causes the same road wear as 20,000 cars.

If these costs were calculated using the RTA's former guide of 3 cents per net tonne km for recovery of road system costs from heavy trucks, then a 40km haul of coal from Appin to the PKCT includes a hidden public subsidy of about \$1.20 per tonne. The 1992 estimated cost to the community to move 10 mtpa coal by road over say, 40km, would be \$12 million per year.

### **Natural and cultural heritage**

There are, however, considerable environmental and biodiversity impacts which must be addressed before any approvals are given or construction begins.

In particular, the impacts on fragile native ecosystems within the water catchments include clearing for the corridor, potential geological damage and the introduction of pest plant and animal species. Land clearing and introduced species have been identified as the two major risks to species and ecosystems.

Catchment wetlands and watercourses are particularly vulnerable to the cumulative impacts of long-wall mining, coal seam gas mining, water mining, and the construction of transport infrastructure. Such damaging activities not only affect ecosystems and threatened species, but also potentially reduce the quality and quantity of water supply to Sydney and the Illawarra.

The Sydney Water Catchment Special Areas are also home to a large number of fragile Aboriginal cultural heritage sites. Any such sites must be identified by appropriate Aboriginal experts and protected from damage.

### **Passenger transport**

Should the Maldon-Dombarton link be completed, a condition must be that it include a capacity for passenger transport. This will maximise the benefits of the new infrastructure while reducing the amount of road traffic into and within the Illawarra.

It would also increase tourism access and the ease of commuter travel from the Illawarra to south western Sydney

### **Coal mining and transport**

The completion of the rail link should not be used as economic justification for the expansion of coal mining. One of the benefits of the use of rail rather than road transport is that it can mitigate climate change. However, its use to facilitate the continuation and expansion of coal mining for domestic or export use will have the opposite effect of exacerbating climate change and Australia's carbon emissions.

Yours sincerely

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