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Response to the Maldon to Dombarton Rail Link Feasibility Study Issues Paper

December 2010

Regional Development Australia brings together people and information to promote collaborative decision making for the sustainable and just economic development of Sydney, with a focus on employment growth.

Regional Development Australia Sydney (RDA Sydney) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Maldon to Dombarton Rail Link Feasibility Study Issues Paper, developed by the Department of Infrastructure and Transport.

RDA Sydney is a partnership between the Australian, State and Local Governments created to strengthen regional communities. RDA Sydney works in partnership with governments, regional key organisations, local businesses, community groups and key regional stakeholders to provide strategic and targeted responses to economic, environmental and social issues affecting Sydney.

This response underpins the objective of RDA particularly to consult and engage with the community on economic, social and environmental issues, solutions and priorities and support informed regional planning.

This response provides comments from a Sydney Metropolitan perspective on the Issues Paper, while we are not technical experts on railway design and construction, we are providing a Sydney perspective on the environmental impacts, local economic development and transport efficiencies that the Department of Infrastructure and Transport will need to consider when making a decision about the building of this railway line.

RDA Sydney supports the proposal to complete the Maldon-Dombarton railway line as it will provide a critical additional freight corridor and link to Sydney via the new Southern Freight Line and would bring economic and environmental benefits for the Wollondilly and Illawarra areas.

In the last nine months RDA Sydney has consulted with a large number of key stakeholders in the process of developing its Regional Plan for Sydney. Most organizations consulted raised concerns about the lack of appropriate infrastructure in Sydney. There was general consensus in the fact that infrastructure deficiencies are already an obstacle to economic development and there are fears NSW's future growth may be hindered by a lack of investment in vital infrastructure.

Concerns were raised about the need for effective and efficient freight movement as an imperative for the future economic development of Sydney, particularly in the necessary growth of transport and logistics and other key industries in Western Sydney. Existing infrastructure is already under pressure as the volume of freight has been growing at an average annual rate of eight per cent and is expected to double by 2020.

Stakeholders recommended the construction of more freight rail infrastructure and intermodal terminals in an effort to improve transport, alleviate congestion and improve liveability.

RDA Sydney believes that the current advanced status of this project means it can quickly be restarted and benefits enjoyed sooner than most other projects of this size.

This project is consistent with the NSW State Government objective to increase rail use from 18 per cent to 40 per cent freight over the next 15 years.

Increased transport efficiencies:

- RDA Sydney agrees with the findings of the pre-feasibility study in that the new Link has the potential to support or complement overall efficiencies in freight distribution and intermodal networks in the greater Sydney metropolitan region.
- It would not only reduce congestion on existing lines, particularly the Illawarra line, but has the potential to increase capacity on the network to move goods efficiently in the future and reclaim passenger capacity on the Illawarra line.
- Reduction in fuel costs and rail-road congestion are important outcomes.

Environmental benefits:

- The completion of the rail line will reduce the number of truck movements (particularly coal truck movements) on Picton Road, Appin Road, F6 and the Hume Hwy, reducing greenhouse gas

emission. RDA Sydney believes that we should achieve a better economic/environmental balance wherever possible. The environmental cost that trucks impose on local communities and other road users is high as it reduces community wellbeing (accidents), environmental impacts (noise, pollution, degraded amenity and liveability) as well as intrusion impacts which must be borne by local communities and other road users.

- The new Link will contribute to greater fuel efficiency than using roads. Studies have revealed that rail freight is up to five times more fuel efficient per tonne/kilometer usage than road freight. It is at least seven times and up to 20 times safer than road and it is the least carbon intensive mode of transport, accounting for only 2 per cent of Australia's greenhouse gas emissions. According to BTRE the total road emissions are predicted to grow by 42.3 per cent between 2000 and 2020 (around 1 per cent per annum). Commercial vehicle utilisation is projected to grow at a substantial higher rate than that for private vehicle travel. We believe that rail freight is the key to sustainability.

- According to the *Wollondilly Economic Development Report*, Melbourne-Sydney rail and road freight is projected to increase significantly in the next 22 years. By 2025 it is expected that 5,000 to 6,000 heavy trucks will be moving along the Hume Highway each day. According to the *North-South Rail Corridor Study*, the total freight movements between Melbourne and Sydney will increase from around 10 million tonnes to 25 million tonnes per year between 2004 and 2029, with the share carried by rail expected to double to around 20 per cent. Taking these projections into account, the completion of this Link is vital.

- According to BTRE, the projected increase of 30 per cent in national number of km travelled by all vehicles (between 2004 and 2020) is comprised of an increase of about 23 per cent in travel by passenger cars, 62 per cent by light commercial vehicles, 19 per cent by rigid trucks and 58 per cent by articulated trucks. Considering the 2020 scenario, without the Maldon Dombarton rail line, there will be a significant increase in congestion on the Illawarra South Coast Line to a point where future growth in the region may be limited. It will impose limitations to wealth creation and employment in both the Illawarra and South West Sydney.

All present and future environmental impacts need to be considered, measured and cost adequately in the feasibility study, including the additional costs to the health of residents, pollution, congestion as well as the savings in road maintenance. The cost of not completing the project, particularly to the future, needs to be outlined.

Economic development benefits:

RDA Sydney believes the completion of the Maldon-Dombarton Rail Link has the potential to enhance the local economy, the South Western Sydney economy as well as the Illawarra's.

- The construction of the new railway line will create local employment in an area that has low employment self-containment, in which 59 per cent of the workforce leaves the area for work, resulting in high social and environmental costs.

According to the pre-feasibility study the total base estimate of direct man-hours for the construction program is approximately 1,200,000 hours over 39 months. Jobs could be created in the construction industry and on-going maintenance of the line.

- The development of the line will generate indirectly new support industries and businesses and jobs.
- The major beneficiaries of this project will be Port Kembla and its future expansion as well as the existing and proposed coal mines in the Appin-Wilton areas in the Wollondilly area. The completion of the line would allow the coal from the western fields (Clutha, Tahmoor and Tower mines) to access Port Kembla by rail. At present the coal is trucked to the port. The port's expansion will maximize the ability to move cargo efficiently into and out of the port. This would need adequate rail. The feasibility study will need to look not only at the coal terminal growth plans but also at the port's growth plans in order to make an assessment to ensure efficient movement of freight through South Western Sydney.
- Better rail access to Port Kembla made possibly by the Maldon-Dombarton line could further support the options for the port to be developed to supplement operations at Port Botany, as well as providing better services for its current customers. This has the potential to have less road freight on the Sydney roads.
- The Maldon-Dombarton line may further stimulate the potential for other south western Sydney intermodal freight terminal capacity, based on the assumption that the Moorebank is established, thereby opening up other commercial and industrial opportunities.
- It supports potential employment lands development in southwest Sydney particularly for freight related businesses. The rail line could become a precursor for economic development by encouraging new companies with rail dependent transport needs to invest in the area.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this Issues Paper.