

The Perth Freight Link: Facts and Fiction

Prepared by Peter Newman and Philip Jennings for the Beeliar Group – Professors for Environmental Responsibility



The supporters of Roe 8 and the Perth Freight Link (PFL) have been spreading misinformation and half truths about the developments. Their aim is to discredit alternatives by the selective use of the facts. This analysis of the Roe 8 and PFL myths provides a more complete picture.

Myth 1: The PFL has been on the books for 60 years and no one objected until recently.

The PFL was a Prime Minister Abbott “Captain’s Call” presented to the former Transport Minister, Dean Nalder, at a meeting in Canberra in early 2015, along with similar highly controversial roads in Melbourne and Sydney. The Melbourne East-West Link was rejected by the Victorian people at their last election. It is extremely unusual to have a road project proposed by a Commonwealth politician and it has disrupted all planning processes since it was dropped on Perth without any history or warning. The PFL is still a vague proposal and the detailed design has never been released publicly or assessed by the EPA. Roe 8 was included in the Metropolitan Region Scheme in 1955 without any public consultation or environmental impact assessment as part of a ring road bringing traffic to the southern end of the port. The Cockburn Wetlands Study of 1975 first suggested that the road should not proceed. The first environmental assessment was carried out by the EPA in 1978 and it recommended in its System Six report in 1980 that a new route be found because the proposed route was environmentally unacceptable. It repeated this view in its strategic assessment in 2004. The Government then took this on board and developed a comprehensive Freight Network Strategy which included a new port in Kwinana and the deletion of Roe 8. The current Government abandoned this strategy and reverted to the obsolete 1955 plan without having a comprehensive approach to managing container freight and trucks, which were never imagined in 1955.

Myth 2: Labor and the Greens are responsible for the predicament in which we find ourselves over the Perth Freight Link.

PFL advocates claim that by deleting the Fremantle Eastern Bypass in 2006 the ALP and the Greens cut off the planned link from Roe 8 to the port of Fremantle and this 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 1955. 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 stake-

holders. 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 1955 and this is what has created the present planning problems.

Myth 3: The PFL project will create 10,000 jobs and is economically beneficial

Main Roads claims that the PFL will create 10,000 jobs, while the Premier claims it will create 3,000 jobs. Main Roads has refused an FOI request for it to release its cost benefit analysis for this project, and has not yet released it despite its refusal to release having been largely set aside by the State's Information Commissioner. Further, a cost benefit analysis can make no sense while there is no plan to get trucks through to the port at the end of Roe 9, so no real time savings can be calculated. Most of the jobs suggested will be very short term and very few new jobs will be created. There is no real economic value that could compare with the Outer Harbour and its associated Fremantle waterfront redevelopment where the following benefits have been estimated.

	Outer Harbour	Fremantle water Front Development
Employment	11,000 direct jobs when the 1600 ha is fully developed	7,265 direct jobs when 15.7 to 29 ha of land are redeveloped
Gross Regional Product	\$13.9 billion Net Present Value over 20 years	\$4.4 billion Net Present Value over 20 years
Investment	\$5 billion Net Present Value of external investment initially	\$3.5 billion Net Present Value of external investment initially

The Outer Harbour will enable larger ships to enter a major new modern container port with all the space it requires and with the best road and rail connections to enable containers to be moved around the city.



Figure: Outer Harbour land area and road and rail links. Source: Indian Ocean Gateway.

The Fremantle Inner Harbour is a typical 'sailing ship' port in the mouth of the Swan River similar to most cities that created ports in the 19th century to facilitate cargo and passenger movements in a less exposed environment. It was not created for containers and trucks. The Fremantle Inner Harbour can be rejuvenated as a people-oriented place with many port functions such as cruise ships which brought 10,000 people in the past year. Fremantle's heritage and fabric can flourish as has Darling Harbour in Sydney and the old port area of Singapore, Capetown, Vancouver and London.

Myth 4: Building the Outer Harbour in Cockburn Sound will involve more social and environmental damage than building the PFL

Comment: An important part of the Freight Network Strategy 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 and the building of the BHP port site 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. The Royal Australian Navy and 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 environmentally 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 Coolbellup, Hilton, Hamilton Hill, White Gum Valley, Palmyra and East Fremantle.

Myth 5: Roe 8 will be needed in any case, regardless of whether the whole PFL is built.

Comment: The supporters of Roe 8 (Stage 1 of the PFL) say that it would be needed for access to the Outer Harbour, regardless of whether stages 2 and 3 are built. Roe 8 will end 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, which trucks will choose to continue using. Access to the Outer Harbour will be difficult due to congestion and traffic lights on Stock Road. It will be easier for trucks to reach it by leaving Roe Highway at the Kwinana Freeway and travelling south to the Rowley, Anketell or Thomas Road exits. 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 6: 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 use 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 within the Beeliar Regional Park to collect runoff from Roe 8.

Myth 7: The PFL will reduce traffic congestion

This is supposed to be one of the major reasons for building the PFL, but it is a road to nowhere. The Roe 9 tunnel will dump thousands of cars and trucks each day at the corner of High Street and Stirling Highway, where there is already serious congestion. Roe 8 will terminate at Stock Road in Coolbellup and traffic is likely to become congested there also. The Stock Road, South Street intersection is already badly congested and trucks carrying dangerous cargoes will have to use Stock Road and Leach Highway to reach the port as they will not be allowed to use the tunnel.

Myth 8: The PFL will reduce pollution and greenhouse gas emissions

Wetlands are a carbon sink from which carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases will be released once bulldozed. This is not mentioned in the Main Roads planning documents. Main Roads' main approach has been to focus on the reduction in idling by the anticipated freer flowing traffic. However the likely increased congestion at the entry to and exit from the Roe 9 tunnel will mean that trucks will spend time idling in these locations and this will increase local pollution levels. The tunnel is likely to be vented at the entry and exit and this will release diesel fumes into the atmosphere in large quantities, especially the fine particles which are increased not decreased by fast moving trucks. These fumes are toxic and carcinogenic and the background levels in the Fremantle area are already above the nationally accepted upper limit. Greenhouse emissions are likely to increase as freeways are known to encourage people to use private cars rather than public transport. Assessments of freeways that claim reductions in greenhouse and other emissions are now discredited as they do not provide a comprehensive approach to the problem.

Myth 9: The PFL will improve road safety and transport efficiency

The PFL will do nothing to improve road safety or transport efficiency. Leach Highway is already a very safe road, thanks to improvements made over the past decade. In contrast Roe Highway has a much higher accident rate. Trucks carrying toxic or explosive cargoes will not be allowed to use the Roe 9 tunnel and so they will continue to use Leach Highway, South Street and High Street. The Outer Harbour, with its far superior road and rail access that will allow long trains (currently excluded from access to the Inner Harbour), will be far better in its road traffic safety and efficiency. A new passenger rail route has been announced, with bi-partisan support, for the Thornlie to Cockburn section of the present Kewdale to Fremantle freight rail route corridor. In the future, passenger rail could continue around the freight corridor to Fremantle completing an important rail link in the southern suburbs – but only if the port were shifted to the Outer Harbour as there is insufficient space for both freight and passengers in the Fremantle section of the corridor. This would be a comprehensive upgrading of transport efficiency and safety for the whole of Perth.

Myth 10: Now that clearing has commenced we may as well complete the project

The Government is recklessly clearing a path through the Beelihar Wetlands in the hope that it will cause irreversible damage and that Roe 8 will go ahead regardless of the outcome of the March Election. Labor has pledged to halt the destruction and transfer the funding to a modern port in Cockburn Sound. The Beelihar wetlands will recover quickly once the bulldozing is stopped. Wetlands have a remarkable ability to regenerate and considerable knowledge has been gained about wetland regeneration in the Beelihar area over recent decades. The Banksia woodlands will take longer to recover and there are 500 year old trees being felled for the Roe 8 that will be particularly slow to recover and which will be greatly missed by the public and by the wildlife that use them for habitat. It is irresponsible to continue clearing for a road that may never be built. The clearing should be stopped.

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 so as to be able to respond to a, now, ex-Prime-Minister's "Captain's Call". 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 from the MRS for social and environmental reasons. We should be aware that the EPA did not exist in 1955 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 current Government came to office and discarded it in 2008. It is not too late to correct this error.

