

T. R. Doust

Ref:-Submission to Federal Government and regional services committee

I currently work as a locomotive Driver at Geraldton Western Australia. I have been employed in the rail industry since 27th January 1977 and have worked for the last 14 years as a locomotive driver. During this period in Western Australia I have worked on the railway districts at Picton, Collie, Kwinana, Kalgoorlie, Northam, Narrogin and Geraldton. I am currently employed by the Australian Railroad Group as a locomotive Driver at the Narngulu depot near Geraldton.

Prior to 1989 I was employed in the Civil Engineering section as a Painter working in and around the rail network in both the Narrogin and Bunbury districts of the Westrail system.

My submission will relate to the experience I have gained working as a locomotive Driver over both standard and narrow gauge railways on Mineral and Grain lines of the ARG network in Western Australia.

Since being employed in the rail industry the layout and alignment of the rail network is largely unchanged from the time it was first constructed. The steepness of gradients and tightness of curves greatly affect the efficiency of the network.

Limits are imposed by the physical layout of the railway track on both the tonnage able to be hauled, speed able to be maintained and subsequently effect the efficiency of locomotives. As an example of the gradients needing to be traversed a single P class (2500 class) Locomotive can haul 3,800 tonnes from Eneabba to Geraldton but can only haul 1,600 Tonnes from Mingenew to Geraldton.

Further limits are imposed by both the age and size of the steel rail of the track. Some of the rail in use dates from the early part of the 1900's. The size of this rail imposes limits on the individual tonnage and maximum speed of both wagons and locomotives. It also is subject to heat buckling through summer. As an example the majority of the Geraldton district has an axle load limit of 16 tonne whereas the East West line has an axle load in excess of 20 tonne.

The most significant limitations to efficiency of rail transport is the summertime heat speed restrictions which impose time losses that result in cancelled trains due to both the slow speed and in some cases trains being barred from moving until cooler conditions prevail. Depending on the temperature of the rail Heat speed limits in summertime can impose a maximum speed limit of 40, 30 or 20 kph over entire districts. The heat restrictions can last for up to 8 hours per day. In the area I work in the heat speed restriction are imposed where the forecast temperature is above 35 degrees Celsius. The majority of the locomotives and wagons used over the narrow gauge network have maximum permissible speeds of 80 kilometres per hour. Large areas of the narrow gauge

T. R. Doust

Submission to Federal Government and Regional Services Committee

1 of 3

grain networks have lower permissible speed than this. As an example in the Geraldton District normal maximum speed on the railway from Narngulu via Mullewa to Maya is 60 kilometres per hour when empty and 50 kilometres per hour when loaded. The maximum permissible Gross wagon weight over this railway is 64 tonnes or an axle load of 16 tonnes. Where wagons with a greater load capacity are in use they carry a reduced load so as to remain at the permitted gross amount.

Some grain growing areas serviced by the rail network have permanent speed restrictions of 20 kilometres an hour due to the poor condition of the track. Other outlying grain growing areas such as between Maya to Dalwalineu no longer have trains operate on them and have been closed. Grain being carted from the rail bin by road to the next rail head for loading onto trains.

The limitations of the track load carrying capacity restrict what areas various wagons and locomotives are able to operate. In Western Australia this prevents full utilization of the narrow gauge wagons and locomotives across all areas of the narrow gauge network.

The road network is largely free of the limitations imposed on the rail network such as abovementioned heat speed restrictions. The road network unlike rail has been greatly modernised since federation. Some parts of the rail system still operate over rails older than 60 years. None of the bituminised road surfaces are of this age

The ability of Australia to move its export commodities to port and maintain its market share in a viable cost effective manner is directly related to the ability of the transport system used to perform the task and its ability to operate in a viable cost effective manner. The rising price of fuel will see the ability to be competitive on world markets come under a strain. Commodities that require transport to port over large distances may become unviable and cease to operate.

Current transport policy fails to provide for the future particularly in regard to the ready availability and price of fuel. Susan Baker's in the Kalgoorlie Miner on Wednesday the 13th of April detailed Pacific National Railways fuel use per day at one million litres. As a major exporting nation we are widely dispersed with export commodities requiring to be transported to ports over significant distances. The transportation task is heavily reliant of liquid fuels.

Current competition policy sees a number of cases where roads run alongside railways causing both modes to require funding to maintain competitiveness. The rail system has a narrow base of funding and as a consequence funding is targeted to the most profitable areas which results in outlying grain growing areas being starved of funds leading to their non use and subsequent closure. It also sees a rail system operating over different gauges nation wide making it impossible for any one operator to traverse all rail systems without first investing in wagons and locomotives of the various gauges.

Transport policy needs to serve the longer term national interest so as to guarantee the nation's ability to transport both Farm and Mining products to and from ports regardless of the availability of liquid fuels. It is essential that policy be directed to make the most prudent use of liquid fuels and to reduce reliance on liquid fuels wherever possible. The rail system is unique as it is the one form of land transport that is able to be totally powered by electricity. Current Diesel electric locomotives are little more than electric power stations on wheels.

The currently competing road and rail transport operating along parallel corridors need to be given separate tasks. Rail Transport, once electrified, would be responsible for the transport of freight and commodities between ports and strategic locations. Road transport would then be responsible for moving the freight and commodities to and from these strategic locations.

Where parallel corridors exist public funding should be diverted away from the road system to the rail system. This would make better use of funds particularly where financing competing modes along the same corridor.

I would recommend that Transport policy,

- is one of cooperation between rail and road to transport and distribute commodities and freight.
- gives urgent priority to funding of the electrifying of the freight railway systems of all states.
- provides that State and interstate Railway tracks be treated as a national highway and incorporated into a nationwide body that will maintain, manage and control access to the entire system.
- provides State and National rail corridors be identified for priority upgrading.
- gives major publicly funded investment on a nation wide basis to bring rail corridors up to a standard load carrying capacity, axle loadings, operating speeds, gradients, curvatures and gauges.
- Provides a national standard for construction and operation of railways.
- ensures the reliance of liquid fuel is reduced by extending rail networks into mining areas not currently serviced by rail.
- ensures isolated rail systems such as that in the Northwest of Western Australian are connected into the remainder of the rail network.
- Provide for all rail operators to standardise communication and rail operating systems.

Regards

Terence R Doust
Locomotive Operator
Geraldton