

I would like to see, as a first step, recovery from freight operators of road surface damage costs due to their operations. I understand that failure to recover those costs constitutes a huge hidden subsidy to over-use of a mode of transport that is, when heavy loads are carried long distances, inefficient. We should put more long-distance freight on rail. That would improve road safety for small vehicles, it would reduce our reliance on imported oil and it would reduce our greenhouse emissions. Also, freight should be borne in mind when road congestion in urban areas is discussed.

I would like to see the Inland Rail project accelerated.

I refer you to an article by Phillip O'Neill (see below) at <http://www.theherald.com.au/story/3947134/weight-of-the-freight-is-holding-us-down/> arguing that economic benefits to the Hunter will flow from carrying more freight. O'Neill would presumably be happy to see the same argument applied elsewhere.

Jim Donovan

Text of <http://www.theherald.com.au/story/3947134/weight-of-the-freight-is-holding-us-down/>

Weight of the freight will hold us down
Phillip O'Neill
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When I drive to Sydney for work I leave early so I reach the Wahroonga end of the M1 by 6am. I travel in the company of B-Double trucks. Each truck is hauling 40 tonnes of freight and most have travelled through the night from Queensland. They bring fresh fruit and vegetables from those warmer climes, and containers unloaded from the Port of Brisbane. Like me, they want to get onto Pennant Hills Road before Sydney's daily traffic chaos commences.

Transport NSW tells us that in 2011 20 million tonnes of freight was carted one way or t'other along the M1 between Hornsby and Newcastle. By 2031, Transport NSW says this annual load will rise to 36 million tonnes. This equals two B-double trucks every minute, at an even spread. Bank them up, though, and good luck on your drive.

The nature of Australia's population growth is creating a massive freight movement problem. Last week the NSW Intergenerational Report predicted NSW would exceed 11 million people by 2056. Most of the increase will occur in Sydney's sprawling western suburbs. Melbourne is on a similar growth trajectory. Brisbane too is growing, although not by as much.

But the rest of the nation isn't keeping pace. Australia is turning into two very large cities plus Brisbane.

The economies of these cities are based on the production of high-end services, especially in finance and business, but also in health and education. By world standards incomes in these three cities are high.

Services industries are grand, but they don't produce actual things. So Sydney and Melbourne are huge importers of goods: food from interstate and manufactured goods from overseas. The latter arrive via three ports: Melbourne, Brisbane and Port Botany in Sydney.

The logistics are simple. Shippers choose to land in one of the three big east-coast cities. Nowhere else is economical. Then trucks take over. An interstate road trip is no big deal cost-wise. Rail cannot compete. Alternate locations, such as Newcastle, are inconvenient.

The trucks head straight to giant warehouses. In Sydney these now fill the M7 motorway corridor to the west. From there, legions of small trucks deliver not just to shopping malls and showrooms but direct to the homes of online shoppers, or to click-and-collect lockers now appearing across the suburbs. The freight supply chain penetrates a city's every nook and cranny.

But as our three east coast cities grow, the freight delivery task soars.

Planners are aware of the problem, at least as far as Sydney is concerned. By 2019 the NorthConnex tunnel will take trucks straight off the M1 motorway and feed them along the M2-M7 corridor. Then when this corridor fills, trucking and warehousing will shift to an outer orbital corridor stretching from Windsor to the Badgerys Creek airport site and on to Campbelltown. A serious possibility is that this corridor will be linked to the Central Coast via a new Hawkesbury River crossing somewhere west of Brooklyn.

But there are no plans for extra freight capacity through the lower Hunter and the Central Coast. The two-lane M1 configuration from Newcastle to Gosford is already inadequate. Weird stop-starts are common through the Wyong-Tuggerah stretch, a sign the road is over-filled, while truck crashes close the whole thing all too frequently.

The lower Hunter's main transport link to the wider world is the M1. But it is becoming a noose around the lower Hunter's neck.

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