

## **FAR WEST [DRAFT] REGIONAL PLAN 2016 – 2036**

### **COMMENTS**

#### **LEE ROSSETTI**

**BROKEN HILL 10 FEBRUARY 2017**

#### **Direction 6 (p25): Unlock economic potential through improved freight transport and other enabling infrastructure**

**Comment:** In 2010/11 when I was Mining Manager (Perilya Broken Hill) Northern Operations charged with re-opening the dormant Potosi Mine and simultaneously begin the development of the adjoining Silver Peak Mine, there was in place a serious proposal to construct a **Heavy Vehicle By-Pass Route** to the south of Broken Hill city centre.

This By-Pass was planned to begin on the eastern outskirts of the City on the Barrier Highway (A32), link up with the Silver City Highway (B79) for traffic headed from the east to the south, via Wentworth and also link up with Barrier Highway again on the Western edge of the City for freight headed to Adelaide and/or Perth.

This well planned proposal was a quadrella and funded in varying percentages by the Federal Government, NSW State Government, Broken Hill City Council (BHCC) and the mining company Perilya which was to transport its ore regularly via the By-Pass to its Concentrating facilities located at the southern edge of town. The By-Pass Proposal got shelved because at the time Perilya and the BHCC were having financial difficulties (low metal prices and trying to pull out of the effects of the recent GFC). So now Perilya's ore trucks (B-Doubles) run monotonously through the City via Crystal Street, while seemingly all the rest of the nation's Road Trains freighting between Sydney and/or Brisbane to Adelaide and Perth must traverse along Argent (Main) Street, then via Iodide Street then finally onto Williams Street, which is itself the continuation of the Barrier Highway.

I happen to live in my home in Williams Street and I say this: **convoys** of Road Trains 24/7, every day of the year with their exhaust brakes one would surely have empathy for the annoyance. You would also imagine the continuing poor Residential road surface conditions that result from this volume of heavy traffic.

Moreover, since Perilya is now gearing up to re-develop the dormant North Mine and at the same time continue production and transport of ore from the Potosi/Silver Peak Operations, and the fact that the National Road Transport Freight Industry is expected to continue to grow as the **Draft Far West Plan** would indicate, I am sure that due consideration by a reputable body such as yourselves would place this By-Pass Proposal back on a high level agenda.

**Direction 6, PARAGRAPH 4:** ".....It [*The NSW Long Term Master Plan*] requires ongoing commitment to investment to maintain and upgrade transport routes."

### Strategic planning for key corridors, STATEMENT P26, 2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph:

....."The *Western Regional Transport Plan* identifies support for the Broken Hill heavy vehicle bypass." ....

This statement of recognition of the problem and stated support for a common sense solution is a welcome part of the **Draft Far West Plan**, and particularly since the Silverton Wind Farm Project has obtained approval there would definitely be an assumption of increased heavy vehicular traffic.

The important point here is that all sensible indications point to a clear solution to this problem, so I would imagine that if the **Draft Far West Plan** is approved actioning all the recommendations via Steering Committees and Task Forces would be the challenge that perhaps should be planned out and ready to go well in advance. One would hope that the Departmental Terms of Reference just do not stop at the preparation and presentation of this very important **Draft Far West Plan**.

### Local Government Narratives

#### Priorities (P65)

- ) Support Broken Hill as a service centre for the wider Far West region
- ) Promote tourism opportunities
- ) Resolve skilled worker shortages

I wish to comment briefly on each then conclude.

#### **BROKEN HILL AS A REGIONAL SERVICE CENTRE, and** **PROMOTE TOURISM OPPORTUNITIES**

Both of these narratives are effected by statement (Paragraph 2, P 65): *"The major transport and freight links include the Barrier, Silver City and Cobb highways and the Sydney to Adelaide rail route, which provide good links to Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide. Broken Hill also provides a regular airline passenger service to Dubbo, with connecting flights to Sydney. ...."*

As usual, the facilities and infrastructure are OK but the operators and service providers often leave much to be desired.

People wishing to come to Broken Hill from Adelaide on the **Indian Pacific** Rail Service are required to purchase a full Adelaide-Sydney ticket (cost around \$600.00). So, thinking that this is unfair would-be visitors using the train would think twice before getting ripped off to that extent.

A once weekly train service to Sydney from Broken Hill (Tuesdays) is provided through the **"Explorer"** at a more reasonable cost of \$70.00, but the service is limited.

With regards the airline passenger service the Broken Hill-Dubbo leg to Sydney is not always regular, but more importantly REX as the carrier knows it has the monopoly and so a basic

average ticket to Sydney from Broken Hill is around \$800.00. Compare this with a recent advertised offer from *QANTAS* being Sydney-Tokyo for \$420.00.

To promote Tourism from interstate and overseas targets, other than the caravan toting or motorhome driving “grey nomad” retirees who generally come through, stay for a brief stint, spend “*two bob*” and move on is a challenge that we need to solve. This is the general affordability issue emanating from a selfish operational “*bottom line*” mentality. Maybe the Tourism Institute needs to be more proactive with these operators and lobby hard to attempt to get a fairer deal not just for the potential tourists but also for the locals.

### **The skilled worker shortage issue:**

I predicted this problem back in around 1982 when I was a middle manager at the mine in Broken Hill for what was then *CRA (now RIO)* the world’s second largest mining company, one behind *BHP*. In those days and up and until that time top management would make available at the mine 60 apprentice positions per year and most of the Year 10 students would automatically apply. As the finishing apprentices were qualifying we would choose six of the best from the final year being two boilermakers, two fitters and generally two electricians to be kept on. The rest were let go, but invariably got positions at other mines and projects around the whole of this country, and invariably as they obtained experience in their respective fields would return to Broken Hill to work.

So there was a constant rotation of young people getting good practical and formal training as we had a first class “*Apprentice Training Workshop*” that worked hand in hand with the “*Broken Hill Tafe College*” which produced excellent results.

We understood that we were not just educating and training these young people for our own mining operation, but for the whole Australian Industrial landscape. Looking back on it, it was a most selfless approach to ensuring that as a nation we would not be in the embarrassing situation that we find ourselves in today, where we have to issue 457 Visas to (often) Filipino and others trades people, and some are absolutely brilliantly skilled at their respective trades because we cannot fill the positions locally.

Then something happened around mid-1980’s. Companies quietly found that their top on site management along with their respective Boards were having the traditional (old school) professional membership of groups replaced with more the accounting style managers and Boards. The effect of this change saw a halt to “extracurricular” items appearing in the balance sheets for which the training of apprentices was only one such item. We have been suffering over this problem since other companies like RIO followed suite and halted or at best severely curtailed the training of our young people.

### **How do we turn this perilous situation around?**


I believe foremost that we have to be truly honest with ourselves.

We need to take a specific test and ask ourselves, seriously “*do we want to resolve this problem?*”

If we do, then we need to take another series of tests with very basic questions seeking some honest answers:

1. What are the industries that are suffering most from this situation?

2. What is their individual current level of meaningful commitment to training? Numbers of apprentices to total employees.
3. What is their P/E (Price/Earnings) ratio or even their Revenue/Cost of Commitment ratio? This will give a hierarchy of companies that truly want to help solve this problem and will also show those who are simply paying "*lip service*" to fixing the problem, or at worst those companies that do not wish to be part of the solution but are willing to take whatever benefits that emanate from a good result in this matter.
4. I would even try to design a rating system that is fair but unanimous and compulsory which is brief but is required to filled out by the employees that determines the "*level of soul*" of a company. This in turn will determine the level of selfishness vs selflessness. This is where the Social Psychologists may well design a pathway for future generations that has an objective of producing better trained and less selfish industrial and political leaders, and you never know we might get back to the days where we did things as a service to others rather than the motive of a service to self.
5. In the shorter term, and possibly a most practical and immediate solution would be to identify those companies and corporations that would be able to do something practical, but are currently not doing anything proactive and offer some form of incentive (tax or otherwise) in order to get the ball rolling. If we do nothing, then nothing happens; we need to approach this issue with all seriousness and endeavour.



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