



### EYRE PENINSULA RAILWAY LINE 3 & 4 June 2003

**Mrs PENFOLD (Flinders):** The railway line on the Eyre Peninsula is under threat and the region could soon find itself with a closure of lines. This would result in chaos for the grain and future mining industries and could well be tragic for motorists on the roads, particularly given the paltry amount of regional road funding allocated in this budget. According to a Transport SA report, an injection of \$50 million is required to make the railway competitive with road transport and ensure its survival. Eyre Peninsula covers an area almost the size of Tasmania and produces up to 30 to 40 per cent of the state's grain harvest. Its vast area has a huge underlying mineralisation called the Gawler Craton. This area is host to gold, diamonds, iron ore, coal, jade, gypsum, graphite, granite, marble and much more.

Transport SA investigated the future of the transport and delivery aspects of the grain industry, particularly in relation to the future of Eyre Peninsula as a rail system and Port Lincoln and Thevenard. However, it is imperative that another report be undertaken with wider consultation about railways with all the affected businesses, communities and industries. It must not be limited to grain only. We must be proactive and lateral thinkers. In particular, the potential growth in the iron ore and coal mining industries must be taken into account when considering rail transport. These industries could be decimated by any closure of the railway in the region. However, imagine the possibilities for the state if the railway were upgraded and the opportunities that could be provided by linking the largest natural deep water harbour in the southern hemisphere, located at Port Lincoln, with the new Adelaide to Darwin railway.

At the moment the railway is in a terrible state. Tracks are buckling due to heat in the busy harvest seasons, while ageing wooden sleepers need to be replaced with steel or concrete ones. The existing infrastructure has loops that are too short to allow for long trains to pass, and there is limited track space in Port Lincoln to allow for unloading. Operation of a rail service with such bad infrastructure in this environment is unsustainable and not viable.

We are just about to see the track connecting Adelaide to Darwin and the economic opportunities of having this new connection with Asia come to fruition. The length of that new railway is similar in length to the existing Eyre Peninsula railway. Is South Australia trading a new railway for an old one? Closing the line would have a serious impact on the transporting of bulk goods throughout Eyre Peninsula. It would reduce competition and leave road transport as the only alternative, throwing more than one million tonnes of grain onto the peninsula's roads. This would create serious congestion problems, with large vehicles on the road adding to the probability of a greater number of accidents.

According to a press release by the Hon. Rory McEwen MP, 'accidents cost the community \$220 million annually, with 10 per cent of road fatalities caused by trucks'. Some of the most dangerous stretches of road for heavy vehicle accidents exist within the Flinders electorate, with regular truck accidents on some parts of the Eyre Highway. Closing railways would only add to the danger and likelihood of more heavy vehicle accidents, particularly at locations such as Wudinna and Kimba.

Moving from railroad to road transport increases air pollutants and greenhouse gases and the consumption of more non-renewable fuels. These would add up to between 7 to 11 times as many pollutants and gases than if rail

was used. As a Transport SA papers states:

Any complete shift in grain from rail to road on Eyre Peninsula would produce external costs that far outweigh the cost of any rail upgrade.

Any study that looks at closing the railroad must also take into account the costs of the upgrades needed to bring roads to a heavy transport standard and of the inevitable heavy vehicle by-pass that would be required in Port Lincoln due to the quantity of heavy vehicles accessing the storage area of the town. I seek leave to continue my remarks later.

Leave granted.

***Liz continued this speech 4 June 2003.***

**Mrs PENFOLD (Flinders):** Any recommendations for a more extensive report on the possible closure of the Eyre Peninsula rail system must ensure an appropriate level of industry and community consultation. For example, the effect on the ability of the local council to maintain roads is a major issue. In the May 22 edition of its local paper, *The Tribune*, the District Council of Cleve stated:

Grain transport marketing boards will be advised of council's disappointment and alarm over recent decisions to transfer grain from Ausbulk silo storage facilities by road when those silos are serviced by the Eyre Peninsula rail transport network. These decisions have caused a major impact on council roads, specifically the Balumbah/Kinnaird Road (Buckleboo to the Lincoln Highway), which runs parallel with the railway line for much of its length. The cost of additional road maintenance is increasingly beyond the council's capacity to finance at the levels required and this trend also puts at risk the future viability and survival of the rail transport network.

In 2001 a Rail Transport Facilitation Fund was established by an act of parliament specifically to extend or improve a railway or associated equipment or infrastructure. Funding for the upgrade of rail on the Eyre Peninsula from such a source is well within this fund's purpose. In his recent AusLink statement regarding the improvement of the national rail system, John Anderson, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Transport and Regional Development, stated that the federal government proposes to invest more than '\$870 million in rail infrastructure over the next five years'—that is in New South Wales. What about South Australia, Mr Anderson?

It has been estimated that \$50 million is needed to ensure these lines stay open. This is a similar amount to the \$56 million that recently has been allocated for the upgrading of the Adelaide to Glenelg trams. Surely, the generated benefits of the upgrade of the railway on Eyre Peninsula would far outweigh the benefit to the environment and the economy of new trams. Even local government bodies have taken up the challenge of trying to keep the lines open, with councils such as Elliston District Council looking at options for getting involved in assisting. The funding decision for infrastructure such as this should consider carefully not only the economic benefits but also the greater external cost and benefits, such as the health and wellbeing of all who access the region, the amenity of our towns and the environmental considerations.

A decision is required. Will the government assist in rail or will it increase road use with its associated wear and tear and accidents? Ultimately, the fate of the Eyre Peninsula rail network will lie with the state Minister for Transport, with perhaps some help from Canberra. Let us hope it is a decision that is right for the people of Eyre Peninsula and South Australia, with a permanent reduction in the mortality risk on the roads, a reduction in the cost of the replacement or upgrade of roads to heavy transport standards, and a reduction in the environmental impact.

I wish to conclude by quoting from a letter from Mr Kindinger of Kindinger International Consultants in Johannesburg, South Africa, who has been studying Australia's railways and Eyre Peninsula for some time. The letter states:

I feel convinced that our efforts to get the Eyre Peninsula railway widened, made more viable and joined from a point near Whyalla to Kimba, plus connecting line [from] Kimba to near Wudinna will proceed within the next three to four years.

I certainly hope he is right, but it will take visionary governments at local, state and federal level to do it.