

Rail is the way Forward

Congestion is an issue many Melbournians are facing now, making a city that once ranked high on the world's livable rating, to a city with a ranking that continues to fall every year. What is not often well understood is congestion is not a Melbourne created issue and all Victorians are in this together.

Victoria is a relatively small state, the transport reality is once a freight task commences on road it stays on road and predominantly destined for a major city.

Failing to invest in rail infrastructure means that Victorians will see an increased reliance on trucks; larger, longer and heavy trucks. This does nothing for road safety, congestion, amenity nor reduced vehicle emissions.

Victoria needs a planned investment for freight pathways.

The Murray Basin Rail Project (MBRP), was marketed as removing 20,000 truck movements from the Victorian road network per year and moving more freight on to rail and was due to be completed by 2018.

Currently the MBRP is at a standstill, with the Victorian Government announcing the project is out of funds, with only stage 1 of the 5-stage project complete.

The Victorian Government is preparing a business case and funding application to the Federal Government for consideration.

At the time of writing this article, the Federal Minister has received no request for funding from the Victorian Government. Both the Victorian and Federal Governments are preparing their budgets, the window to have further funding considered for the MBRP by the Federal Government is closing fast.

If this funding application from the Victorian Government to the Federal Government is not received soon, the project that was due to be completed in 2018 will be set back even further, which will see even more freight movements on road.

The failings of the Murray Basin Rail Project (MBRP) are having a direct impact on Melbourne's livability, Victoria's exports, road safety and regional prosperity.

What we do know about a future Victoria is that

- The Port of Melbourne is expected to increase exports by 3-fold by 2050.
- 2019 was the worst year involving heavy vehicle fatalities.
- 1 in 5 vehicles on Citylink is a heavy vehicle.

What we know at this stage of the MBRP

- The freight capacity of the MBRP region has decreased.
- The freight cost from the region has increased.
- More trucks are operating in the catchment to support the freight task

Completion of the MBRP would allow competitive access to Victorian Ports, reducing supply chain costs and grow Victoria's global economy.

This is a vital investment in the prosperity of all Victorians and Melbourne's future liability. The MBRP is a small investment to assist congestion reduction in comparison to one level crossing removal in Melbourne.

The Victorian Freight task is set to more than double by 2050. If Victoria is to benefit from this unprecedented domestic and export growth, the freight network needs to be fixed now.

If the MBRP doesn't go ahead as committed in its original scope all of Victoria will suffer. For every addition truck loaded in the region is another truck impacting on Melbourne.

Rail Freight Alliance are holding Congestion Conference, 16th & 17th April Grand Hyatt Melbourne

Reid Mather is the Chief Executive Officer of the Rail Freight Alliance.

