



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **Rail Upgrade Important To Cut Melbourne's Traffic Congestion**

A lack of efficient and effective freight rail services between Mildura and Melbourne could result in more than 91,000 extra heavy vehicles clogging major roads in metropolitan Melbourne.

The finding is part of the Mildura Derailed report, released by the Sunraysia Mallee Economic Development Board (3<sup>rd</sup> October 2008), which predicts dire road safety, environmental and economic consequences that could result from the lack of a standardised rail line between Melbourne and Mildura.

The Victorian Government is now completing a \$73m upgrade of the line which has been welcomed, but the report shows the long-term benefits of completely standardising the line and providing a more efficient rail freight transport service.

Rail transport for the freight that travels on the line would produce up to 70% less greenhouse emissions than heavy vehicle transport, while accidents resulting from increased heavy vehicle traffic required to transport commodities along the major route could cost in excess of \$2m annually.

The report also predicts an annual cost of up to \$100m to Victoria's economy should there be no effective and efficient rail freight service to Mildura.

In recent years, trains on many sections of the Melbourne-Mildura rail line have traveled at restricted speeds (as low as 20km/hr), while the closure of a major grain transport line in the Mallee near Ouyen in October last year has already added thousands of truck movements to Victorian roads.

The Mildura region is a major industrial and agricultural area that provides for major domestic and export markets. The region produces 95% of Australia's dried vine fruit, 69% of table grapes, 55% of almonds, a third of all olives, 21% of Australia's citrus and 23% of its wine grape crush.

Mineral sands mining is also growing rapidly in the area and the region has more than a million hectares dedicated to grain growing; producing more than 200,000 metric tonnes of grain annually.

Chair of the Alliance of Regional Councils for Rail Freight Development, Vernon Knight, said the report proved the rail line's future as an issue of significance for metropolitan Melbourne and the whole of Victoria.

"With more than 91,000 extra heavy vehicles traveling to ports annually, the impact will be right outside the front doors of Melbournians," Mr Knight said.

“While the Victorian Government has announced a very welcome upgrade that will help keep some freight on rail, going the extra mile and committing to standardisation would reap huge benefits for Victoria.”

SMEDB Chair John Irwin said the report showed standardisation of the Melbourne-Mildura rail line was an economically responsible step that would deliver significant reductions in greenhouse emissions.

“At a time when Australia is debating the setting of a national target to cut greenhouse emissions, surely it is time for the redevelopment of this important freight rail line to begin at standard gauge.”

**END OF MEDIA RELEASE**

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