WOODCHIPS ON THE WATERFRONT

Steve Wallace (Mercury Oct 5) has raised the alternative of using the Derwent Valley Railway via Karanja to log containers going down Macquarie Street to the wharf.

In 2004 I gave a paper to the Association of Australia and New Zealand for the Advancement of Science which looked at the Southwood Report of Forestry Tasmania.

The Southwood Report considered various routes for carrying out timber products from the Huon including saw logs. DIER ruled out using the Plenty Road on a safety audit. The other alternative which I supported was to use the Lane Link Road through the Styx Valley with a railhead at Karanja.

Steve Kerrison the then CEO of Pacific National indicated a transfer station could be built at Karanja for $1m to enable railing north to Bell Bay or Burnie via the Derwent Valley Railway subject to safety and any bridge strengthening requirements.

So could the solution to the current movement of logs into Hobart be to use Karanja as a railhead? However, Tasrail have costed upgrades for the Derwent Valley Railway based on a freight carrying option at $60 million. This cost clearly includes bridge strengthening and related work. This might restrict the Derwent Valley Railway to being used for a tourist rail venture which would cost around $4mto be suitable for a passenger only operation

Back in 1991 the Bureau of Transport and Communication (BTCE) study *The Future of the Tasmanian Railway System* looked at the economic and social options open to Tasrail and the Federal government .It found that on a social cost benefit analysis retention of the rail system(as opposed to closure) was beneficial. It found that if road took over the rail task there would be an increase in traffic frequency, noise, vibration and pollution.The floods cutting the Kimberley bridge in the recent floods with temporary transfer of rail freight to road indicates the impact of such a change

Any large increase in road freight traffic has cost implications for repair of the pavement of the National Highway. The BTCE in particular noted the rapid pavement failure in the case of the Lyell Highway and the Fenton main road when ANM switched from railing logs on the Derwent Valley Railway from Maydena to road transport instead.

The views of the BTCE were included in the *Report of the Public Inquiry into the Modal Split of Bulk Traffic between Road and Rail in Tasmania* 1991 (LIvermore Report} which emphasised that log traffic was a crucial part of Tasrail’s freight task.

In 1997 a Senate Committee recommended that, before proceeding with the sale of Tasrail the government should develop a coherent land transport policy framework taking into account the financial ,economic and social and environmental goals recommending mid and long term investment programs for road and rail in all major corridors.The Freight Strategy Plan outlined by Alan Garcia at an April forum on behalf of Minister Hidding is clearly a welcome step in this direction.

In the end rail has to be competitive with road and this should involve opening up unused lines , such as Wiltshire,the NE Line and the Derwent Valley to private operators and assisting tourist rail operators like the Derwent Valley Railway to develop a niche business.

Given the cost of upgrading the Derwent Valley Railway to carry freight such as logs that route is not likely to appeal to the Tasmanian Government. The one truck per hour on Macquarie Street and the 180,000 tonnes per year in export containers is the only current logistical solution open to Majestic Containers Australia

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The views expressed do not necessarily represent the Tasmanian Logistics Committee of which the contributor is a member.

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