



Western Ring Road Capacity Enhancement

PROJECT LOCATION: Western Ring Road, including the Metropolitan Ring Road

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: Widening of road and operational improvements

Importance of project

The Western Ring Road (WRR) carries 105,000 to 130,000 vehicles per day, of which 13 to 16 per cent are freight vehicles. The road plays a major role in facilitating freight movements between each of the AusLink major national and interregional corridors within Victoria. This role will be further enhanced when the Melbourne Wholesale Fruit and Vegetable Market relocates to Epping in Melbourne's north by approximately 2011.

The WRR also provides an important connection to the Ports of Melbourne and Geelong and serves as a distribution route between metropolitan Melbourne, regional Victoria and interstate locations. Capacity is exceeded during peak periods, and peak periods are extending.

The Western Ring Road provides vital links between Melbourne, the Port of Melbourne, Melbourne Airport, regional Victoria, South Australia and New South Wales through the four connecting AusLink transport corridors. The Port of Melbourne and its import/export task has a major influence on the transport task along the corridor.

The Port of Melbourne is Australia's largest container and general cargo port, handling 39 per cent of the nation's container trade. The Port has 34 commercial berths that handle cargoes ranging from timber to motor vehicles, specialised berths for dry cargoes as well as specialist facilities for liquid cargoes. Grain exports from western and northern Victoria are also shipped in substantial volumes from the Port of Melbourne.

The Western Ring Road is currently experiencing traffic pressures and high levels of congestion during the morning and afternoon peaks. The Victorian Government notes that the corridor strategy recommended that a priority for AusLink should be boosting the capacity of the Western Ring Road.

Freight benefits (capacity, efficiency and reliability)

The project would address capacity constraints on this heavily used link. Extra lanes and enhanced traffic management systems (including ramp metering) on the Western Ring Road would boost freight carrying capacity and improve travel times and reliability, especially during peak travel periods.

Other benefits (safety, amenity and environmental)

Road widening, ramp metering and other transport management initiatives would significantly improve traffic flow and safety by reducing unnecessary merging and weaving traffic. The project would also reduce travel times, particularly for freight vehicles.

Why the Commonwealth should fund this project

The Commonwealth Government acknowledged the importance of the WRR to the national freight network by contributing 90 per cent of the funding for the road's original construction. Victoria has made – and continues to make – substantial contributions to road and public transport projects that support efficient freight movements on the WRR. However, a significant further investment is needed to maintain the efficiency of this crucial freight link.