



MEDIA RELEASE

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The South Australian Government has been warned that any “strong” infrastructure spending to be announced in the State Budget must take into account the needs of regional and rural South Australians as the State looks to improving the economy of SA.

The warning comes from Paul Henley, the Convenor of the South Australian Regional Rail Alliance, which is seeking to improve the State’s regional economy built on the backbone of refurbished and re-built regional rail infrastructure.

Mr Henley said the State Government had to look beyond metropolitan boundaries if the State was to prosper.

“The Premier and the Treasurer need to be reminded that South Australia is a region of some 980,000 square kilometres - but the billions spent on infrastructure occurs almost exclusively in the metropolitan area which, at some 410 square kilometres, represents less than half of one percent of the State’s land mass,” Mr Henley said.

“Spending on the Government’s ‘hero’ project, the Global Link, is good as far as it goes, but it does not address the needs of rural and regional South Australians who would benefit from regional rail public transport services, and rail-freight capability elsewhere in the State.

“Of course, the Government will also point to its spend on the Northern (road) Connector, but that serves effectively only a small sector of Northern Adelaide.”

In the first instance, rail public transport services need to be extended to Murray Bridge, Mount Barker, the Barossa, the Fluerieu Peninsula, the Mid North and the Iron Triangle, Mr Henley said.

“Looking further afield, effective rail services also need to be re-established to the South East and parts of the Eyre Peninsula, the Murraylands and the Riverland.”

Mr Henley said a lot of so-called experts used unfounded economic scare tactics to push away regional rail refurbishment.

“Recent claims on radio from a so-called infrastructure ‘expert’ that train lines would cost more than \$5m per kilometre to rebuild is just simply laughable,” Mr Henley said.

“The Victorian Government is currently rebuilding 1000 kilometres of rail infrastructure for \$440 million, across rural land very similar to SA.

“If the Victorians can refurbish their rail infrastructure for just a small fraction of the cost floated by local ‘nay-sayers’, why can’t the SA Government?” Mr Henley asked.

He reminded the Premier that rural rail refurbishment would also be truly 'region building', providing many hundreds of jobs during construction, and many thousands of regional and rural jobs into the future.

"This at a time when Adelaide grapples with its desire not to become another Melbourne or Sydney where existing amenities are being crushed by over-population.

"The State should learn from the eastern states' bitter experiences and build a stronger more durable economy spread over larger areas of SA."

Mr Henley also said reinvigorated rural and regional rail services would make travelling across the State safer and reduce rural road maintenance.

"Rural and regional roads were never built for the volumes of road freight currently using them and major (and minor) roads are crumbling.

"SA does not need more roads - we need to get as much freight as possible onto trains to preserve and maintain existing roads in good order - and to reduce road crashes, injuries and fatalities.

"Will the Premier stand up for rural South Australians and put money into regional rail?"

"Time will tell - but funding to begin this process needs, as a matter of urgency, to be put into the upcoming State Budget," Mr Henley said.

FOR FURTHER DETAILS AND COMMENTS, PAUL HENLEY IS AVAILABLE FOR INTERVIEW BY PHONING 0409 699 685.