



Review of grain rail transport system to be undertaken

Closure rumour denied

Josh Burrows

IN RESPONSE to Agricultural Region MP Brian Ellis's question in Parliament last week on the future of the rail transport system, Transport Minister Simon O'Brien said he was exploring opportunities for the system to be extended in the Mid West.

Mr O'Brien said he aimed to lift standards and improve the overall network by looking for new partners to invest in extending the region's rail line.

Shadow Minister for Infrastructure Alannah MacTiernan said this could open up the possibility for mining companies to help fund a new rail line which could ship both mineral and grain products.

"There's no doubt there's an opportunity to build a new rail line

in Geraldton," she said.

Replying to the media interest surrounding the possible closure of the State's grain rail infrastructure, Mr O'Brien said he would not support the rail system closing or being downgraded.

Although the network is operated by WestNet Rail under a 49-year lease agreement, entered into by the Government in 2000, Mr O'Brien said WestNet does not have the final decision to close the grain rail lines.

He said that decision is the State Government's to make.

According to Mr O'Brien the network was not to blame for problems

encountered by Co-operative Bulk Handling.

He said the combination of CBH's new business model (which has seen a reduction in rail use to move grain), a new deregulated grain market and a bumper season, has created unforeseen problems for CBH.

Mr Ellis, whose family have been grain producers for three generations, said he has a practical, hands-on, understanding of regional grain transport issues.

"Given the rumours of closures and downgrading, I asked Transport Minister Simon O'Brien to clarify the Government's intentions regarding the rail infrastructure," he said.

"The Minister has advised that he has already been speaking to the Federal Government about funding contributions, and I will be asking a further parliamentary question regarding the outcome of his meeting in the near future with Federal Minister Albanese."

This Sunday Mr O'Brien is scheduled to meet the Federal Transport Minister Anthony Albanese.

Ms MacTiernan said the Mid West region is partially buffered from the possibility of losing grain rail infrastructure because of our strong mining sector.

"The lines in Geraldton are not under threat because there's a combination of mineral and grain product shipped on them which allows network

owners to cherry-pick," she said.

Parliamentary Secretary for regional development Gary Gray said the WA grain industry was crucial to the State's economy and the Government was committed to developing the best infrastructure solutions for the future.

In light of this a review is to be undertaken of the grain transport network in Western Australia.

He said the review would help determine ways to improve the effectiveness of the network.

The review will be undertaken by KPMG in partnership with SAHA International, who would consult all levels of Government and industry stakeholders.



Transport Minister Simon O'Brien.