



More money for grain freight network

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TRANSPORT Minister Simon O'Brien and Westnet Rail celebrated last week's announcement to invest in the grain freight network in Katanning by helping clip in a silver sleeper.

The investment package includes \$178.8 million for rail, which has unlocked \$135 million in Federal funding as well as \$118 million for road upgrades, plus \$14.6 million so rail is competitive with roads, and a \$500,000 rail study.

In the Great Southern, the funding means the line from Avon to Albany via Narrogin, Wagin and Katanning will be re-sleepered, as well as the Hyden and Newdegate lines to Wagin.

The tier three lines from Nyabing and Gnowangerup will not be upgraded and remain in "care" mode.

There has been no road funding

for the lower Great Southern, including Chester Pass Road, which requires a significant upgrade.

In essence, the funding package would mean lower freight costs for farmers and fewer heavy vehicles on narrow country roads, Mr O'Brien said.

The 1390km rail project will involve laying 80,000 steel sleepers and replacing 100,000 wooden sleepers.

Member for Agriculture Region Jim Chown said the benefits included efficiency gains for train traffic, allowing faster speeds and a longer life span for steel sleepers of up to 40 years.

The rail project includes three phases – the Great Southern Railway, which has started, followed by 275km along the Hyden, Newdegate Wagin line and then 550km for the Kwinana north zone to Dalwallinu.

Westnet Rail chief executive

Paul Larsen said the re-sleepering project wouldn't affect transport of harvest.

He said they could now plan long-term. "Having certainty around the rail network stimulates other investment that goes into the supply chain to move the grain," he said.

"The re-sleepering work will also help stimulate economic activity in regional towns."

Not everyone is happy, especially those in tier three line areas.

Corrigin shire president Lyn Baker said that while the shire was happy to receive funding for major roads, it was the feeder roads that would be a problem.

"But the main issue is the cost of ongoing and long-term maintenance of the roads, which will fall back on local government," she said. "We may have to consider closing roads if we can't keep them safe."



Brian Ellis, Paul Larsen, Jim Chown and Transport Minister Simon O'Brien in Katanning last week.