



WestNet re-opens rail lines pending review

Local jobs threatened in dispute

RAILWAY workers were told the lines between Toodyay and Milng, and Bunjil to Maya were slated for closure, prior to an agreement being reached between the State Government and WestNet Rail last week.

The agreement means these lines, and the four on which operations were suspended by WestNet Rail recently, will remain open pending a review of the whole network.

Together the State Government and WestNet Rail have determined a process and timeline for the review of the grain rail freight network being undertaken by the Strategic Grain Network Committee.

This process will see the SGNC identify the sections of the rail network to be upgraded over the coming years with the financial support of government.

It is expected investment decisions will be made before the end of 2009 to give the industry clarity and certainty for the future.

WestNet Rail said it had strongly advocated that keep-

ing the maximum volume of grain on rail is in the best interests of the grain industry and the community.

WestNet Rail general manager Paul Larsen said the commitment from State Government will give the grain industry certainty about the future of the Grain Rail network.

"WestNet Rail is pleased with the results of constructive discussion with the Minister's office and looks forward to the SGNC providing clarity to industry about the future Government investment in the network before the end of the calendar year," he said.

"We are particularly pleased with the government's decision to identify the Northam to Albany line as a high priority for assessment as this line is one of the most critical for growers to move their grain to port in a timely and efficient manner.

"We anticipate a clear recommendation from the SGNC on funding for upgrades on the Northam to Albany line in the very near future."

However, in a June 16 mem-

orandum from ARG's group general manager bulk west Ken Potts to all grain staff, workers were told there may be more closures ordered by WestNet Rail.

Mr Potts said the four lines closed during the standoff between WestNet and the government would have a minimal impact on ARG business.

"However, WestNet has also advised us that unless government funding is made available, it will move to close a large portion of the narrow-gauge rail network after 1 November and no later than 31 December 2009," he wrote to staff.

"I know you will be concerned by the announcements, I share your concern."

The SGNC will also review by the end of the calendar year the long term future of other lines that are in need of urgent maintenance.

Mr Larsen said the process in place with government and industry will ensure that the maximum volume of grain remains on rail.

Agricultural Region MLC Brian Ellis has welcomed the

decision to reinstate the service for the 2009-10 year.

Mr Ellis, whose family has grown grain at their Bindi Bindi property for three generations, said the compromise made sense and would provide certainty for producers.

"As a former deputy president of the Moora Shire Council, I am sure that local governments will be relieved that there will be no extra pressure on regional roads, in terms of both traffic and maintenance," Mr Ellis said.

The role of the SGNC will include consideration of the government's possible investment in the network.

The SGNC will provide an interim report to Transport Minister Simon O'Brien by the end of July regarding the full impacts of current service deficiencies.

The committee will also make recommendations on ways in which industry and governments can cooperate to ensure that the needs of immediate and long-term harvests are met.