

Omega transport plan: Linking Victoria and Tasmania

Peter Brohier, National Public Lobby. **Peter Brohier, a retired Melbourne lawyer and founder and convener of the National Public Lobby concept, today called on the Prime Minister and the Premiers of Victoria and Tasmania to adopt the Omega plan before spending billions without an agreed overall transport framework for the specific development of south eastern Australia.**

The National Public Lobby, "NPL" concept aims to raise nationally significant ideas with government that substantially impact on business and the community.

The NPL is a vital component of any modern democracy. It allows community concerns to be put to government in a similar well argued way to that already adopted by industry. NPL, as Future role and contribution of regional capitals to Australia

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a clearing house, provides the necessary efficient balance between often divergent views allowing the parliamentary process access to well-considered argument from a far wider stakeholder base before making final decisions - also having to deal with sometimes largely dispirited and ineffective ideas across a constituency.

In this context, Mr Brohier said,

"Omega is a plan for the movement of both people and freight across south eastern Australia and will take advantage of combining the strengths of Victoria and Tasmania and make better use of existing infrastructure, relatively cheap green field sites and sea crossings.

Integrating state economies...

The scheme will integrate the two states economically through the fair movement of both people and freight meeting the original purpose of federation.

The impact on business and investment and jobs is expected to be substantial. Also the social amenity of living in the two states and will increase dramatically as would the region's interstate drawing potential for new investment, residents and visitors.

Savings would follow. The scheme will reduce the need for costly new projects that push Melbourne into a more comprehensive radial transport network requiring enhanced transport links across or under the inner city

Omega will spread population over two cities by the bay, Melbourne and Geelong and over four centres of population in Tasmania.

Omega is aimed at growing an economy through nation building and not through largely unconnected piecemeal development.

Once the Omega framework is adopted more specific development can be planned.

A number of stages are needed.

The Hume to Hobart by ship.....

Firstly, there is a need to implement the extension of the Hume Highway from Sydney to Hobart via Melbourne. This can easily be done through a shipping connection across Bass Strait operating as part of the highway.

This initiative will allow passengers, vehicles and freight to cross Bass Strait at the same cost as road travel. By using existing federal equalisation schemes across Bass Strait, Canberra would close the only gap in the National Highway system. This will allow better use of Future role and contribution of regional capitals to Australia

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existing road and rail links on both sides of Bass Strait and then on to other parts of Tasmania down to Hobart.

The Howard Coalition's 1996 idea of making Bass Strait part of the National Highway should and can be met right now. This concept sits well with Melbourne national transport hub concept increasing the effectiveness of the spoke or sea link to Tasmania.

The link can also cover highway equalisation of mainland manufactured goods destined for the retail market in Tasmania at a cost to Canberra as low as about \$30 million a year.

Omission of such goods currently acts against free trade principles by unfairly excluding them from existing federal Strait equalisation schemes. Many consumer prices in Tasmania would fall as a result and or savings would be made by Victorian manufacturers who currently meet southbound transport costs.

Apart from covering the movement of these southbound goods, this link is already more than adequately federally funded.

The plan will also dovetail with the Howard Government's AusLink project by offering Melbourne three interstate transport corridors for Victoria and one for Tasmania, both to their respective neighbouring capital cities. This proposal is consistent with the Victorian Government ask of Canberra at the time of the AusLink proposals.

Opening up 261 islands below Melbourne....

This initiative can be opened in weeks and can deliver for the first time fair sea highway access to a region of about 261 islands south of Melbourne. It will bring larger numbers of people through Victoria to Tasmania and back again by increasing surface travel – not just light luggage air travellers or those who have little choice but to seek a sense of ownership by just photographing retail goods for free.

It will substantially lower surface access costs to Tasmania and make Tasmania an everyday travel option rather than the once or twice in a lifetime travel experience.

This link will grow the size of the then combined tourism and consumer market in both Victoria and Tasmania, increasing surface travel, rather than travelling by air over Victoria or not travelling at all.

It will also offer critical mass to nearly every activity needing people in Tasmania and increase the GSP and GST revenue in both states. It will offer an ability to spread overheads and will lower consumer prices. It will use many existing private and publically funded investments far more effectively.

Relocating shipping..... Future role and contribution of regional capitals to Australia
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The second stage will involve a relocation of passenger shipping to Stony Point near Hastings, on Victoria's Westernport Bay – currently at the end of a Melbourne suburban rail line.

Freight can then be relocated to the port at Hastings nearby and funded by the sale of valuable development land in or around the docklands region near Melbourne.

International freight and freight from Tasmania, if brought through this Westernport region, offers the option of substantial benefits of shorter routes by sea without adversely impacting on Port Phillip Bay.

Linking Stony Point to northern Tasmania could reduce travel times across Bass Strait from 9 hours to about 6.5 hours each way, and more over time, as even faster ships are used.

For passengers and vehicles, the Stony Point option is consistent with recommendations of joint paper by officers of the Victorian, Tasmanian and Commonwealth Governments.

About one quarter of the freight in the Port of Melbourne relates to Tasmania.

The Hastings port option will reduce the need to dredge the shipping channel in Port Phillip Bay again within the next 10 years.

A ring road and a circle line ...

The third stage would be that on the Victorian side, a full ring road and circle rail service around Geelong and Melbourne could be established by closing the Doncaster-Greensborough gap in the existing Melbourne ring road and connecting existing road and rail over the heads at Port Phillip Bay by a bridge. This route will also incorporate links to air and sea terminals nearby the ring road and circle rail.

This will reduce the focus on the need for further radial road and rail systems and turn population and traffic towards the Mornington and Bellarine peninsulas. It will also save prime agricultural land to the east of Melbourne from unnecessary housing development. Development can occur in a similar fashion to that on either side of the Sydney's harbour heads.

A substantial bridge across the heads....

The bridge and its connectors will allow freight from the east of Melbourne, including Hastings, and traffic from Stony Point to cross the heads by either road or rail to the Western road and Hume Highway eliminating the need to move this freight across Melbourne.

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The bridge has been described by experts as technologically, a piece of cake, and in the light of a growing Victoria, a “marvellous idea and anybody who says that it isn’t is really stupid.” With added population in the bay region, commuter ferry services across the bay could also increase over time.

A bridge, such as that proposed, could be built with minimal impact on the Portsea area. Freight travelling through Melbourne can reduce increasing the liveability of Melbourne. Environmental benefits will result.

Fireworks on New Year’s Eve

Melbourne would have as its major icon a significant national bridge, constructed largely of steel, with the potential to rival Sydney’s harbour bridge. On New Year’s Eve it could attract low cost world publicity if used as a prop for a fireworks display in the same time zone as Sydney.

Construction of a steel bridge will boost manufacturing across Victoria.

Geelong, a steel workers town hit by a manufacturing downturn, will be boosted and as amenities of living in a region with an easy link to the Bass Strait islands and Tasmania and regions to the east and west of the bridge will be boosted by greater surface traffic flows. Freight will be largely confined to traffic corridors and away from residential areas. Land use will increase near the circle rail and full ring road. Existing radial rail links can integrate into the circle line.

The plan will facilitate the suggested cross Victoria transport link without the need to transit Melbourne. The surf coast route to and from Mornington and towards Gippsland will open up.

Commuter traffic on both road and rail can increase with faster circle line trains and by improving the two way use of existing roads and rail linking Melbourne to the Mornington and Bellarine Peninsulas.

No third airport needed ...

The plan will eliminate the need for a costly third airport in the south east of Melbourne as access from this region to existing airports can be via the new bridge and rail interchanges where radial rail lines cross the new circle rail network.

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Bus services, based on circular routes from key railway stations along the circle rail line can assist in more localised travel. Unlike radial services, travel on the circle line can occur in either direction evenly in both directions throughout the day.

As Adelaide was assisted by the Commonwealth to ease transport flows by linking its airport and seaport to a route linking its three interstate transport corridors, Victoria should expect that Canberra would be a substantial contributor to support better Melbourne linkages to Sydney, Adelaide and now Hobart by road and rail.

Omega combines the best of integration between public transport and road use. It will boost the state economy by increasing the amenity of living near two major cities by the bay with open access to a nationally significant Tasmanian holiday playground at its doorstep.

Freight travel times will decrease making south-eastern Australia a most attractive location to do business.

Based on its geographical location Sydney can reasonably only justify two interstate transport corridors but Melbourne can justify three.

Opening up Tasmania like Switzerland

With Tasmania locked away for decades by largely inadequate interstate transport links, this plan will boost the Tasmanian economy substantially. Federal improvements in Canberra’s Bass Strait freight equalisation scheme recently announced will increase Tasmanian exports through Melbourne. Use of all Tasmania’s ports can also increase as would other ports on the Victorian coast.

Funding of the plan will be big numbers but relatively cheap

Regarding funding - much of the Tasmanian link federal funding is already in place. Some costly cross Melbourne city links and road and rail improvements may prove unnecessary and save Canberra further expenditure.

The link across the heads, including road and rail connections, may cost about \$20 billion, the Doncaster - Greensborough link about \$15 billion and say another \$30 billion for necessary upgrades and links to airports - the total cost, \$65 billion.

With the total cost of government borrowing for infrastructure that can return substantial revenue, possibly currently as low as 2.5 %, the cost of this two state solution at \$65 billion is about equivalent to the value of total investment in just one inner city Melbourne municipality. Future role and contribution of regional capitals to Australia

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The proposal does not take into account any role of the private sector nor government's ability to borrow progressively to meet framework targets, nor the increased revenue to government from growth in the economy over two states and savings from infrastructure proposals that can be discontinued if Omega were adopted.

With billions of dollars invested in both Victoria and Tasmania, \$65 billion is a relatively small amount to expend to set in place a framework to positively change two whole state economies for decades to come.

If total investment in Victoria and Tasmania were a valuable house, the amount to be expended on Omega would be like making an affordable minor renovation.

Such limited expenditure, when compared with the billions and billions already invested by both the public and private sectors in the two states, is virtually immaterial when compared with the obvious benefits across south eastern Australia.

Better to have proactive planning that ticks all the boxes....

It is time this nation stopped the academic pursuit of more localised plans. Postponement of approval of the Omega framework will add further costs if interest rates rise and more cross city infrastructure is introduced.

Omega is a framework that reflects timely national policies having economy wide benefits. Omega will put people where they want to live, in the style they want to live, between the bay and the sea and offer a combination of public transport and road transport alternatives that can be connected with existing services.

Omega will restore Australia to be a forward focused economy with strategically planned cost effective transport links not, largely more costly, reactive ones. Omega is a very real solution to Melbourne's population, environmental, and traffic difficulties and the need to balance this against the need for economic growth. It makes provision for substantial but largely unobtrusive growth.

The positive economic impact across Tasmania can be considerable. Over time many inter-island ferry links may be established. If Switzerland can open its borders, so can Tasmania, the "Switzerland of the South".

Omega will set the stage for the next century and beyond and its application can start right now with the link to Tasmania already promised and largely already funded.

Omega ticks all the transport boxes."

Peter Brohier Convener NPL

"Mr Brohier has been a very strong advocate for a better deal for people on Bass Strait. I think he has done a terrific job over the last few years. Through his efforts he is probably more responsible than anybody else for the introduction of the vehicle subsidy, I would think." **Paul Lennon**, a former Premier of Tasmania, Hansard 12 April 2002 *"Peter, you can, and should take personal credit for the improvements in Bass Strait fare equality. The campaign you and the National Sea Highway Committee have waged over many years has succeeded in delivering better fares for Tasmanians. Peter, I thank you for your hard work on behalf of this State. All Tasmanians must salute you for your achievements."* **Bob Cheek**, MHA, a former Liberal Leader of the Opposition, Tasmania *"Senator Barnett, I and a few others met with the restaurant and catering representatives of the Australian Hotels Association-tourism and hospitality being a growth area in our home state because of the Bass Strait Passenger Vehicle Equalisation Scheme initiated by the Howard Government".* **Senator Abetz**, Hansard 6th December 2004 *"Senator Colbeck said the scheme, combined with the Spirit of Tasmania ferries, was the next best thing to a highway link with the rest of Australia. He said the figures confirmed that without the decision to*

*introduce the scheme, the ferries would not be the success they have been.” **The Mercury**, 13th July 2004* Van Diemen’s Reborn Land “Tourism is soaring, the economy is growing (the forecast is 3.5% next year), unemployment is falling and Tasmanians are no longer leaving home. Introduction of two daily ferry services from Melbourne in 2002, have fed the rush” **The Economist**, 17th January 2004

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