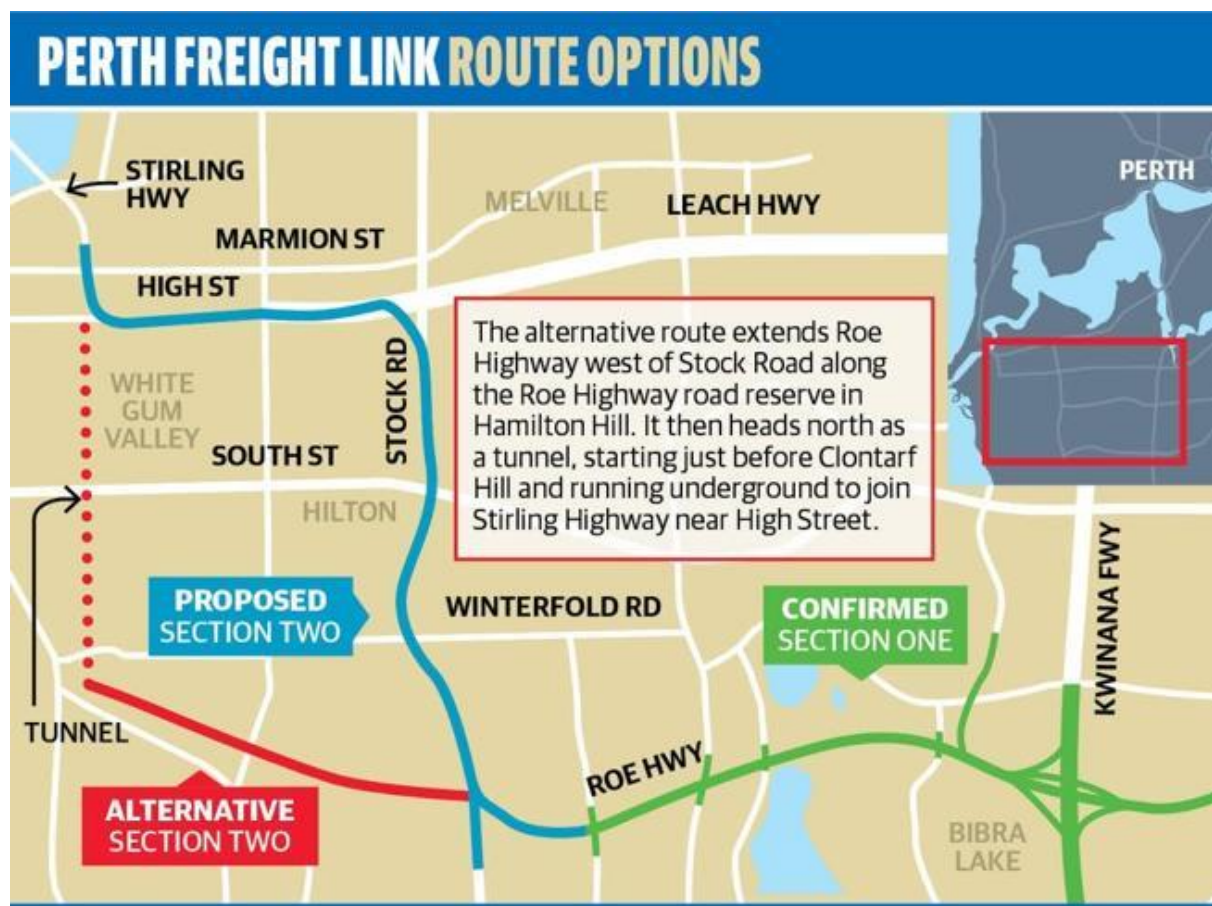


## Roe(d) to nowhere!

On March 11, Western Australia will go to the polls. One of the contentious issues for voters is the construction of the Perth Freight Link (PFL), a \$1.9 billion (using mostly Federal Government funds) heavy-haulage tolled route designed to get freight to Fremantle Port from the industrial areas such as Kewdale and Welshpool. Section 1 of this link is called Roe 8 (a continuation of the Roe Highway) which will cut through the Beeliar Wetlands. Opponents have maintained that this will destroy the habitat of endangered species. The WA Government has recently commenced construction of Roe 8. Section 2 of the PFL, also known as Roe 9, is a tunnel which connects Roe 8 to the Stirling Bridge, the only connection over the Swan river into Fremantle Port. At this stage, no funds have been committed for this section.



Source: Google Images

In November 2015, when Victoria went to the polls, the incumbent Coalition Government signed a contract, only days out from the election date, to construct the East West Link (a tolled tunnel connecting the Eastern Freeway with the Tullamarine Freeway). The Labor Party campaigned on scrapping the project. Labor won the election, the project was halted and more than \$1 billion of taxpayer's money was paid in compensation.

It appears that the WA Coalition Government may be making the same mistake. \$450 million has already been committed to construct Roe 8 whilst the opposition (Labor together with the Greens)

has said they will halt the project and revegetate the area currently under construction if they win the election.

A number of metropolitan councils, known as the Southern Corridor Alliance, together with Labor and the Greens, have suggested that the money could be better spent on constructing a new port to the South of Fremantle in the Cockburn Sound, and ensuring adequate road and rail infrastructure (Fremantle currently has an inferior rail link into the port which runs along the Fremantle foreshore and past million dollar apartments) is built to link the new port with the inland industrial heartlands. Even a yet-to-be released recent report from Regional Development Australia makes no case for the PFL and identifies the new port project as 'essential to the Western Australian economy'. The proposed road and rail network to the new port uses alternative routing and will not need to pass through the Beeliar Wetlands, thereby reducing potential adverse environmental impacts.

The Port of Fremantle reaches its capacity in 20 years so why spent \$ 1.9 billion on infrastructure to connect to a port with a limited lifespan? Is it because the government intends to sell off the port as part of its privatisation drive and the PFL is a way of increasing the sale price? The election in March may decide the fate of the PFL and the future of the Port of Fremantle or alternative ports

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