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Port development South-east plan would strain city

Expanded Hastings to clog roads: report

Adam Carey
 Josh Gordon

A plan to develop a huge container port at Hastings, south-east of Melbourne, could put an impossible strain on the city's roads and busiest rail lines and potentially drive up the cost of imports and exports, an independent report says.

Land in wealthier suburbs including Malvern, Armadale, Toorak and South Yarra would also have to be acquired under the plan to build a new freight rail line to the Tottenham rail yards in the western suburbs.

The Napthine government's long-term plan to expand the Port of Hastings to handle 9 million shipping containers a year risks forcing 1.5 million B-Double trucks or 50,000 freight trains to cross the city annually, the report by Victoria University's Institute for Supply Chain and Logistics contends.

"Given the current road and rail infrastructure and distribution of import/export containers, more than 70 per cent of all containers would have to work their way through the Melbourne metropolitan area to reach Hastings," the institute's Hermione Parsons and Peter van Duyn write in the report, to be launched by the Committee for Wyndham on Wednesday.

This journey of up to 100 kilometres would add to the transport costs of freight and logistics companies, pushing up prices for consumers because of the added distance, the report argues.

It notes that a 2009 study found that about half of all import and export containers passing through

the Port of Melbourne "originated in or were destined for the crescent of industrial land located on both sides of the Western Ring Road between Altona and Laverton in the west and Hume in the north".

The report concludes that Labor's Bay West policy to investigate building a new port between Geelong and Werribee should be put back on the table after the government ruled it out last year.

"Governments have stated the crucial reason for the development of the Port of Hastings is that a deep water port is needed to cater for much larger ships with a draught of 16 metres. In 2014,

Hastings would mean at least an extra 50 to 70 kilometres.

however, many industry experts suggest these mega ships may not come to Australia and Victoria," the report states.

Minister for Ports David Hodggett said Melbourne risked becoming a backwater port to Sydney and Brisbane if it could not cater for larger ships.

"All the advice that I have received from shipping lines, fleet forecasters, stevedores, government departments and the majority of people in the industry, is that larger ships will be coming to Australia and we must ensure that Victoria will not be left behind," Mr he said.

Ships carrying between 8000 and 18,000 containers could be expected to call at Australian ports by 2030, he said.

A well-placed source from the state bureaucracy said both Bay West and Hastings would cost several billion dollars, require significant dredging and carry large environmental risks.

A detailed comparison of both projects shows Hastings would likely cost between \$7 billion and \$8 billion, while the Bay West option would likely cost between \$5 billion and \$7 billion for dredging, land reclamation and construction. According to the assessment, extra travel time to move goods to and from Hastings could cost as much as \$400 per container.

The source said Hastings would mean at least an extra 50 to 70 kilometres on every freight movement.

Although Hastings is often called a natural deep water port, significant dredging would still be needed, with the channel just six metres deep in some places.

That means between 25 and 50 million cubic metres of dredging required. According to the source, the amount of dredging at Hastings might not be significantly less than Bay West.

The source said it would also be easier and cheaper to provide transport links to Bay West, with the Hastings plan requiring a staged upgrade of Western Port highway and a new rail connection via the Dandenong rail corridor.

Labor has promised a new major projects adviser, Infrastructure Victoria, will investigate Bay West as an option for an alternative port. Although it appears to strongly favour the idea of locating a new port in the west, the opposition has yet to fully commit to the idea.



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