2.4 MIDLAND FREIGHT RAIL REALIGNMENT

(Midland and Guildford) (Executive)

KEY ISSUES

- The Department for Planning and Infrastructure (DPI) is conducting a 'Midland Freight Rail Realignment Definition Study' to consider a preferred alignment for the potential relocation of the freight rail line that currently runs through the Midland regional centre.

- Options for the realignment of the freight rail line have been considered over the past 9 years (and in more detail in the current study) and Council's views on a preferred alignment are now sought for communication to the DPI and Western Australian Planning Commission.

- Council has previously supported the retention of long-term options for realignment of the freight rail line, given that it creates a major barrier to the integration of development of the regional centre.

- Options for the new alignment considered at a recent workshop were not supported by City and Midland Redevelopment Authority (MRA) staff, as they are considered to have the potential to create problems for the development of the Hazelmere industrial area, impose unacceptable restrictions on development of MRA land and pose significant engineering problems for the construction of grade separated crossings of the proposed Lloyd Street extension.

It is recommended that Council:

Support the identification of an option for the realignment of the Midland freight rail line, with a preference for an alignment that follows the Roe Highway as closely as practicable;

Request the Department for Planning and Infrastructure to carry out further consultation with the community regarding realignment options.

BACKGROUND

In 1997 the realignment of the Midland freight rail line was identified during the Midland Charrette as a proposal to remove a major barrier to the integrated redevelopment of the Midland regional centre. In that year, the Ministry for Planning commissioned a study to identify a route approximately aligned with the Roe Highway, which was costed at approximately $22 million.
Further studies carried out in 2003 identified an alternative route (the 'green' route) following the approximate alignment of the proposed Lloyd Street extension through Hazelmere.

At its meeting of 3 November 2004, Council resolved to advise the WAPC that:

1. The Council is a strong supporter of the Midland Freight Rail Realignment and is of the view that the project should proceed, notwithstanding the outcome of the cost-benefit analysis undertaken on behalf of the DPI. The benefits to be derived from the project are not solely economic but include many social and environmental benefits which are difficult if not impossible to quantify. As a result many of these benefits have not been considered as part of the cost-benefit analysis which forms the basis for the current recommendation contained within the KHRIM study.

2. Due to the concerns raised by many of the landholders in Woodbridge, a recommendation should be added to the report to require that noise mitigation measures be undertaken in Woodbridge as outlined in the feasibility study, and such measures should be accorded a high priority.

The reasons given for this resolution were:

1. The Midland town centre and the Midland Redevelopment Authority Area are identified as a Strategic Regional Centre, with considerable government expenditure planned for the redevelopment of these areas in the near future. This investment would be undermined by the continued presence of freight rail traffic through the centre of Midland.

2. The long term benefits of the freight rail realignment for furthering the vision of Midland as a major activity centre should take precedence over short term quantifiable costs associated with the project, particularly given the likely increase in the freight rail traffic as outlined in the KHRIM study.

In 2005, the Kewdale Hazelmere Master Plan was adopted by the Western Australian Planning Commission, including a proposal to adopt the green route, which was released for public comment. Over 300 public submissions in support of the realignment were received. The finally adopted report recommended that:

"Freight rail realignment be supported as a strategic long-term planning initiative"; and to

"Undertake planning and concept design to confirm rail alignment and identify land requirements prior to pursuing a 'Railways' reservation in the Metropolitan Region Scheme".

In December 2005, the DPI commenced the 'Midland Freight Rail Realignment Definition Study' to:

- Investigate and confirm route alignment and concept design for the new alignment; and

- Prepare detailed plans and define land requirements to form the basis for an MRS amendment to 'Railways' reserve.
A Council briefing was held on 31 May 2006 to outline the major issues involved in the current study and to provide substantial background to this report.

REPORT

Rail freight through Perth is expected to approximately double over the 20 years between 2000-2020. Freight rail movements through Midland are expected to increase from the current level of approximately 150 movements per week to approximately 300 movements per week over the same period.

The freight movements present a major impediment to integrated development of the Midland regional centre, interrupt the flow of traffic and create a serious amenity problem for the local community, particularly noise and vibration affecting the residential area of Woodbridge.

In light of the above studies, the need to determine a preferred alignment of the freight rail line has been identified and the current study is intended to recommend a preferred option.

At a stakeholder workshop conducted in March 2006, 4 realignment options (plus a fifth option of retaining the existing alignment) were identified and scored using a multi-criteria assessment, based on social, economic and environmental criteria. (Details of each of the alignments and the results of the multi-criteria assessment were presented to Council at the Briefing Session and are available at Councillors' request from the Executive Manager Strategic Community Planning).

The four options essentially were for alignments running either adjacent to, or just to the east of the proposed Lloyd Street extension through Hazelmere.

Major disadvantages with each of the options were identified as:

- Restrictions on the development potential of land adjacent to the proposed Lloyd Street alignment;
- Interference with land holdings in the north of the area under the control of the Midland Redevelopment Authority;
- Severance of land under the control of the Westralia Airports Corporation;
- Creation of crossings of Lloyd Street that would require grade separated crossings with substantial engineering costs;
- Restriction on east-west access in the Hazelmere industrial area and limitations on access to Lloyd Street.
- The need for acquisition of land in Bellevue including the Midland Military Markets.

As a result of the assessment, the option of retaining the current alignment was considered to be preferred, although the difference between this option and others became more marginal as economic criteria were reduced in importance. It is also recognised that the retention of the freight rail line through the Midland regional centre places major constraints on important future development including the new
Swan Districts Hospital and would entrench a major barrier within Midland that prevents the comprehensive integration of development on each side of the rail line.

The City has been requesting that an alignment closer to the current alignment of Roe Highway should be considered and this was confirmed at the workshop. No detailed assessment of this alignment option has been carried out. Such an alignment would also create substantial engineering costs, but would not impose the same constraints on Lloyd Street or the future development of the Hazelmere industrial area or MRA land holdings.

The conclusions of the workshop were:

- That DPI advise WAPC that a number of key stakeholders have concerns about the alignment options and associated expenditure on a new alignment (low benefit-cost ratio).
- Stakeholders recommend that WAPC give further consideration to an option that proposes the consolidation of Roe Highway and the rail corridor.
- Need to consider the costs, benefits and long-term capacity of the existing rail line with noise attenuation and grade separation.
- Stakeholders recommend that WAPC make a decision as a matter of urgency to provide clear planning direction for the future.
- Rail operators do not oppose the realignment options presented, provided all relevant engineering design standards are met.
- If there is to be further and future discussion, the indicative cost of Option 2 should be reviewed and confirmed.

**Conclusion**

It is clear from the previous Council resolution that the Council wishes to retain the option of relocation of the Midland freight rail line and there is also considerable local support for the realignment. It is not clear, however, whether the local public support is based on a desire merely to have the line removed from its present location, or on a genuine understanding of the implications of an alternative alignment. It is one thing to support a major infrastructure project that would provide substantial benefits for Midland, but another thing to consider the costs of the realignment and whether the proposal is viable or politically acceptable.

Before any preferred alignment is adopted however, there is a need to consider other options, as those presented to the stakeholder workshop have substantial negative implications for the future development of the area and were not generally supported.

Since the initial estimate of costs for the rail realignment, it is understood that the construction cost to realign the rail line is in the order of $80 million. It is considered unlikely that these funds would be made available in the foreseeable future and therefore important that any proposed alignment that is reserved is in the right location so that development of the Hazelmere industrial area, the MRA land and the design and construction of Lloyd Street can continue in the meantime.
It is also considered necessary for further public consultation to occur as there is a need for the community to be fully cognisant of the implications of realignment and the potential costs and benefits of an alternative alignment.

ATTACHMENTS

Nil

STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS

The realignment of the Midland freight rail line has substantial strategic implications for the Midland regional centre and future development of the Hazelmere industrial area. In relation to the City's Corporate Plan, the Council's position relates strongly to Key Result Area 1 - Leading the City of Swan, in particular Strategy 1.1.3: "Influence public planning, policy and laws to best achieve community outcomes" and Key Result Area 2 - Developing the City, in particular Objective 2.3: "Increase economic activity that enhances future growth and development, and productivity of the City".

STATUTORY ENVIRONMENT

Any proposed re-alignment of the freight rail would need to be reserved under the Metropolitan Region Scheme.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no immediate financial implications for the City, however a decision to re-align the freight rail line would free up land in the Midland regional centre for substantial development. Conversely, the cost to the State government of the realignment is likely to exceed $100 million.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Council resolve to:

1) Advise the Western Australian Planning Commission that it strongly supports the realignment of the Midland freight rail line as a strategic planning initiative that will deliver considerable long term benefits to the Midland regional centre.

2) Further advise the WAPC that it considers an alignment following Roe Highway should be investigated as an alternative to those alignments already considered and that such an alignment is considered to avoid or minimise conflicts with the future development of land in the Hazelmere industrial area and the high costs of grade separated crossings of the future Lloyd Street extension.
3) Request the WAPC to carry our further public consultation on realignment options and recommend that the Midland Reference Group is an appropriate forum to canvass the views of local community stakeholders.

CARRIED