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RAIL SEEMS TO BE AN ECONOMICAL AND SENSIBLE OPTION

The recent second Mount Barker public forum of the South Australian Transport Action Group was again well attended and provided some fiery moments.

Transport Minister Corey Wingard, whilst speaking, was heckled by some attendees who were angry at the lack of action. Whilst their frustration is perhaps understandable, SATAG chair John Hill did the right thing in silencing them, out of respect for the minister.

Mr. Wingard did acknowledge the need for a plan, without offering a plan.

The state government's current position is for a new rapid bus transit system.

But how rapid will it be, with the express bus lane shared at peak hours by dozens of school and local buses which stop?

A bus lane will also disrupt other traffic. In effect, there will be one lane for trucks on the South Eastern Freeway, one for buses and one for cars. There are turn right spots on Glen

Osmond Road. How will that work?

The state government rules out charging a toll on heavy trucks at peak hours to discourage them from using the freeway.

Regional Development Australia considered this a prerequisite when proposing a rapid bus transit system in September.

Contrarily, the state government is considering extremely expensive upgrades to Cross Road to make it more attractive to heavy trucks, without first investigating the capacity of the freeway, the source of the truck traffic.

Rail could be part of the solution and extend the life of the freeway by removing some of the load.

We can't change the freeway grade to make it safer for mixed truck and car use or add extra tunnels.

Huge Hills population is certain because of state government rezoning. Without a freeway alternative, the state could ultimately face the massive cost of building another freeway.

Rail seems to me to be an economical and sensible option, given that there is an existing underutilised railway.

The Hills line has only eight train movements per day, compared to over 100 on some suburban passenger lines. An immediate priority is to secure suitable land for future park and ride facilities capable of serving both rail and bus.

It is alarming that the state government is attempting to sell land adjoining previous railway stations at Balhannah and Bridgewater.

The forthcoming state election provides opportunity for the community and councils to advocate.

Adelaide Hills Council acted on Councillor Leith Mudge's motion, passed at its May meeting, for their mayor to write to the State Minister for Transport and Infrastructure to ask for a comprehensive study into a passenger rail service or other rapid transit service.

Mount Barker District Council does not yet have a clear position, but I have Questions on Notice at this week's council meeting aimed at stimulating discussion and positioning.

Above all, concerned residents need to use the election by demanding improvements.

These are my personal views and are not necessarily council policy.