

WINGARD 'NO' TO TRUCK TOLL

'BUSES NEED CLEAR LANE'



The success of a rapid bus service between the Hills and Adelaide hinges on removing as many heavy vehicles from the freeway as possible, according to Regional Development Australia.

By Elisa Rose

The State Government's unwillingness to introduce a freight toll on the freeway could jeopardise the effectiveness of a rapid bus service between Mt Barker and the city, the head of the local branch of Regional Development Australia (RDA) fears.

RDA reports into the region's freight and passenger transport issues released last week recommended a charging system trial for trucks to incentivise off-peak travel on the freeway and to give a rapid bus service between the Hills and the city shared priority use of the left lane.

SA Transport Minister Corey Wingard said last week that the State Government had "categorically and consistently ruled out road tolls".

However, Hills, Fleurieu and KI RDA chief executive Damien Cooke said a

toll incentivising off-peak truck travel on the freeway could be the only way to make a rapid bus service work.

"It's really about providing incentives for heavy vehicles that want to or would need to continue to come down the freeway, providing incentives for them to use times other than peak hour," he said.

"That's where we thought some sort of toll or user pays system, which is more expensive during peak hours and significantly cheaper in non-peak hours could work.

"What (the Government) is going to realise is to have the bus rapid transit efficient and effective, they are going to have to reduce heavy transport usage of the freeway during those peak periods.

"What are the alternatives to actually doing that? ... The cost of doing nothing is just completely unthinkable."

SA Freight Council executive officer Evan Knapp said tolls would only be supported by the council if they resulted in a better outcome for the industry.

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He said truck drivers may be more open to a discount-based incentive for off-peak travel down the freeway if distance based charges were introduced in the longer-term to replace petroleum fuel revenue lost when electric vehicles become more commonplace.

The State Government is investigating a bus rapid transit system between the Hills and the city, but Mr Wingard did not respond to questions about which options would be explored and when it would be finalised.

The RDA's proposed rapid bus service would include two routes – one from Mt Barker via Hahndorf and Verdun and another from Bridgewater, via Aldgate, Stirling and Crafers.

It would also save time by using dedicated bus lanes at key intersections, the shared truck and bus lane on the freeway and a potential reversible lane along Glen Osmond Road to increase peak hour flow.

Mr Cooke said the existing 60km/h speed restriction applied to buses between Stirling and the Toll Gate could also be reconsidered.

RDA's rapid bus route concept

- Two separate fast bus routes with limited stops, running every 15 minutes on weekdays:
 - Mt Barker, Hahndorf and Verdun to the city
 - Bridgewater, Aldgate, Stirling and Crafers to the city
- More Park 'n' Rides facilities, including at Verdun
- Priority lanes, including a shared heavy freight and bus lane on the freeway, facilitated by charge-based incentives to encourage off-peak use by trucks.
- Short rapid bus only lanes, which allow buses to skip the queue at key intersections
- Attractive buses with on-board wifi
- The continuation of Mt Barker's on-demand bus service
- Glen Osmond Road upgrades including bus stop indents, priority lanes at intersections, reversible lanes to increase peak hour flows, upgrades to the Glen Osmond intersection and – in the long term – a tunnel between the Toll Gate and the city.