

The booming Hills population is placing added pressure on the only efficient transport corridor linking the region with Adelaide. The South Eastern Freeway – the first stages of which were opened in the late 1960s – is now dealing with traffic volumes hardly imaginable when design work began in 1962. Surveys show 44,300 vehicles use the freeway between Mt Barker and Stirling every day – an increase of 33% in the past 10 years. The pressure on the road is obvious and the regular delays caused by

that volume along with the inevitable accidents has brought the future of transport in the Hills into sharp focus. And the problem is only going to get worse as Mt Barker's population doubles in the next 15 years. Pressure is mounting on governments – both State and Federal – to address the problem in a timely way. A host of options have been suggested from improved bus services, developing passenger rail from Mt Barker, and building a bypass to remove heavy vehicles from the route.

PRESSURE POINT

WHAT IS THE TRANSPORT SOLUTION?



People power will drive transport change

By Elisa Rose

A transport planning and policy expert believes it's only a matter of time before the region needs a dedicated public transport corridor to cater for population growth.

University of SA senior lecturer in transport, urban and regional planning Dr Andrew Allan said he believed passenger rail or an O-Bahn-style bus route between Mt Barker and the city could be longer-term solutions to freeway congestion.

"I think if there's going to be so many people commuting to central Adelaide and there isn't sufficient local employment to keep people local, they'd need to look at (a transport corridor)," he said.

"And with the population projections for Mt Barker I think that's very much on the cards.

"They have to do something because people don't want to spend any more time than is necessary commuting.

"It's not a long distance so it shouldn't be taking forever and a day to do that trip."

So those sort of political pressures – when people start writing into their MPs and saying this is unacceptable – they can actually start to make a difference

– University of SA senior lecturer in transport, urban and regional planning Dr Andrew Allan

More than 50,000 vehicles traverse the freeway every day and earlier this year the State's peak motoring body, the RAA, said parts of it had reached capacity.

The State and Federal governments have committed \$12m to upgrade existing roads to encourage freight to bypass the Hills, and possible further improvements to that route will be investigated as part of a \$10m study.

But in May SA Freight Council executive officer Evan Knapp said the bypass route – which is about 80km longer – was unlikely to ever remove more than half the trucks from the freeway.

Dr Allan said other ways to reduce congestion on the freeway could include road widening along sections of the route or a dedicated bus lane separate to the outside truck lane.

But those solutions posed issues in themselves, he said, including the cost, bottlenecks at the Heysen tunnels and Glen Osmond intersection and fewer lanes for cars.

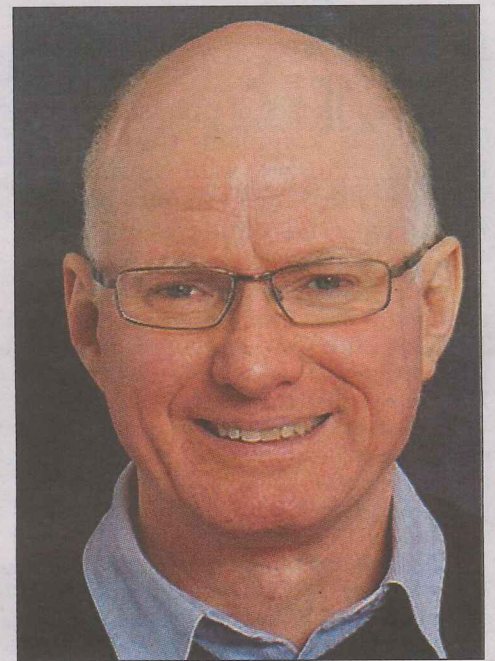
Dr Allan said there were some other simple measures that could be implemented in the short term, including using bigger buses, banning trucks during peak hours to allow dedicated bus lanes, or lowering the speed limit, which would increase freeway capacity because cars could travel closer together.

He said dramatic improvements, like a dedicated transport corridor, were likely to be expensive.

But he said community pressure – not economic reasoning – could be what eventually drove change.

"Increasingly it will be the environmental and social issues that might actually drive that," he said.

"People say, 'well if it's going to cost more it's going to cost more – we need



University of SA senior lecturer in transport, urban and regional planning Dr Andrew Allan.

to have better functionality of the transport between Mt Barker and Adelaide."

"So those sort of political pressures – when people start writing in to their MPs and saying this is unacceptable – they can actually start to make a difference.

"That might be the more convincing reason why they do something about it."

SOLUTION WILL COST BILLIONS



Mayo MP Rebekha Sharkie, standing on the disused railway line into Mt Barker, is pushing both major parties to commit to addressing the growing transport problem at the next election.

Federal MP Rebekha Sharkie intends to make the region's growing transport problems an election issue.

With the next Federal election due before the middle of next year, Ms Sharkie wants both major parties to agree to developing a comprehensive transport plan to cope with the region's booming population.

"We need a commitment with a B in front of it, not an M," she said.

"This issue is going to take billions to solve, not millions.

"If you think we've got problems now then just wait a few years."

Ms Sharkie said three issues needed to be addressed - heavy vehicles heading to the northern suburbs, local job creation schemes to reduce commuter pressure on the freeway and improved

public transport. "A serious study specific to the Hills is needed," she said.

"Both major parties must make a financial commitment to address public transport and freight.

"We know where the population is headed.

"This is not just the population in Mt Barker but in other Hills towns such as Nairne, Strathalbyn and Meadows.

"This is a legitimate request.

"There has been significant funding from State and Federal governments in recent years but there is a huge backlog of regional road infrastructure for SA which needs to be addressed.

"SA has not had its share of regional infrastructure spending for a long time.

"We can't wait 20 years and I want to see the money in the budget cycle, not in the forward estimates where it can drift off."

BY THE NUMBERS

Mt Barker's population growth

2019 - 36,477

2030 - 49,281

2040 - 60,862

2050 - 69,673

FREWAY USE

Crafrers to Stirling

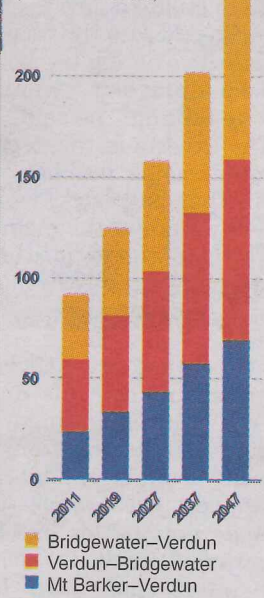
53,400 vehicles per day, including 5200 trucks and buses

Stirling to Mt Barker

44,300 an increase of 33% between 2011 and 2019

Daily traffic

250
(Thousands of vehicles)



Double stacking trains around Hills essential

By Elisa Rose

The chair of the SA Transport Action Group fears Adelaide could be cut off from the national freight rail network - sending more trucks down the freeway - if a rail bypass is not built around the Hills.

Crafrers resident John Hill has 25 years experience working in road and rail freight and supply chain and believes Adelaide's existing freight line could become unviable and close down if the new Inland Rail project across the eastern States creates a more viable rail link between Melbourne and Perth.

He wants to see a re-evaluation of road and rail bypasses around the Hills, saying it needs to take into consideration emerging and new train technology as well as the potential consequences of not building a bypass.

Mr Hill, who is a former

managing director of NT Freight Services and former deputy general manager of SA Co-operative Bulk Handling, said most freight that travelled along the existing line from Melbourne to Adelaide was destined for Perth.

But with double stacking not an option on the Adelaide line and a slow, winding descent into the city through the Hills, he believes the extra distance it would take to re-route freight via Parkes and Broken Hill in NSW - along the planned Inland Rail line - could be overcome by the ability to double stack.

Unviable service

"We're at risk of all the Melbourne to Perth freight being advantaged to go via Parkes and bypass Adelaide," he said.

"That means that you're left with about 20% freight coming to Adelaide."

Mr Hill warned that could make the existing freight rail service to Adelaide unviable.



John Hill has 25 years experience working in road and rail freight.

"If you're just left with Adelaide freight only to compete with road - they haven't got the volumes and they're single stacked," he said.

In 2020 the State Government's GlobeLink proposal - which would have re-routed both rail and road freight around

the Hills and created a new freight airport at Monarto - was dropped because a study found it wasn't viable. But Mr Hill said he wanted the Government to revisit road and rail bypasses, without the airport.

"We disagree that it's unviable because we think we've found cost reductions," he said.

"And we also think there hasn't been anywhere near enough notice of the cost implications of not doing it - like hundreds of millions of dollars spent on every intersection in Adelaide for example.

"... There's new technology, there's better ways other than tunnels ... also you can make use of existing rail track alignments.

"... A lot of things have changed and things haven't been taken into consideration, that's what we feel.

"They'll be able to get trucks off the road by having a double stacked rail service.

"So you reduce the amount of road damage that's going to happen, whereas going the other way there will be more road damage rather than less.

"The difference between the two could be quite big."

Earlier this year the RAA said parts of the freeway were already at capacity - a problem that is only likely to intensify with Mt Barker tipped to become SA's second biggest city over the next two decades.

Mr Hill said the region needed to encourage more public transport use by developing more Park 'n' Rides and by expanding public transport services - both road and rail.

He said a freight rail bypass could help achieve that by freeing up the existing line for a passenger service.

"A train can move 650 people unhindered, they're not going to get caught up in anything like the same extent of traffic problems and you can extend it beyond Mt Barker," he said.

Minister on board with buses

PASSENGER TRAINS ARE NOT THE SOLUTION: WINGARD

By Nick Grimm

The State's Transport Minister has ruled out creating a passenger rail service from the Hills to Adelaide, but says investigations to improve the region's bus connectivity to the city are under way.

Corey Wingard told *The Courier* last week his department believed creating a passenger rail service would cost from \$5b to upgrade an existing track up to \$12b to create a new track.

"I asked across the board – if we were to use the existing track or if we were to do something new – what sort of figures are we talking?" he said.

"The experts in the department ... put together some numbers and they put us in that ball park, which is just not where we are at the moment.

"The potential for it to be an 80-minute trip (using the existing track) just wouldn't draw more people across to rail."

But because rail had been ruled out, Mr Wingard said his department was currently investigating whether a rapid bus transit system from Mt Barker to the city could be created.

He said those investigations could include options for buses to avoid the freeway's heavily trafficked roads and the intersection with Glen Osmond,



State Transport Minister Corey Wingard says a passenger rail service to Adelaide is unviable, so his department is investigating ways to improve the bus network.

Cross and Portrush roads, such as:

- An O-Bahn track and tunnel system similar to the one servicing Adelaide's north-eastern suburbs,
- Dedicated bus lanes along the freeway and other roads,
- Bus priority at intersections and traffic lights, and
- Options for new Park 'n' Rides along the freeway route.

Mr Wingard said the study would also

look at improving amenities on buses and at bus stops, such as installing wi-fi or charging ports for mobile devices, to make them more appealing to users.

"The initial planning works are being done on that," he said.

"We hope to have something by the end of the year which we can look at and then work out what are the next stages going forward."

Mr Wingard said his department



We want to look at how we can get high-productivity vehicles – the A-triple trucks – around the back to get freight off the freeway

– Transport Minister Corey Wingard

would engage with local councils and the Hills' Regional Development Board as part of those investigations.

He also said a two-year, \$10m study – jointly funded by the State and Federal governments – would explore ways to remove freight from the freeway. The focus of that study would be to create a bypass route, likely by upgrading existing roads from near Murray Bridge to northern Adelaide via Truro to make them more attractive to truck drivers.

The State and Federal governments are already investing \$12m into improving those roads, but the SA Freight Council believes it will cost far more to make it a viable route alternative for heavy vehicles.

Mr Wingard agreed more expenditure was required and said the study would inform future upgrades to the route.

He said a \$202m project – which includes \$161.6m in Federal Government funding – to create a bypass around Truro would begin next year and the Murray Bridge-Truro route was next in line.

"We want to look at how we can get high-productivity vehicles – the A-triple trucks – around the back to get freight off the freeway," he said.

"Working with the Feds, we've got (the Murray Bridge-Truro route) on the Infrastructure Australia list and the Federal Government is really keen to talk to us about it.

"... By building this network and allowing companies to use bigger trucks ... we will get freight off the freeway."

Glen Osmond Road tunnel and O-Bahn options

By Nick Grimm

Upgrades must be made to both the region's public transport services and State's road freight routes to remove heavy vehicles from the freeway, according to the head of the local Regional Development Australia (RDA) branch.

RDA Hills, Fleurieu and KI chief executive Damien Cooke said his organisation was in the process of developing a series of recommendations for improving both networks.

Those recommendations, which will be handed to the State Government, were headlined by the proposed creation of a rapid bus transit system between Mt Barker and Adelaide.

That could include dedicated bus lanes on the freeway or the creation of a new O-Bahn bus corridor along a similar route.

"That system would remove buses from most of the freeway, but they would still be hampered by traffic constrictions between the Tollgate and the Adelaide CBD," Mr Cooke said.

He said the options for dealing with those issues could include:

- A Glen Osmond Road tunnel/O-Bahn system,

- Bus queue lanes at key intersections,
- Reconfiguring the intersection of Glen Osmond, Cross and Portrush roads.

The amenities both on the buses and at bus stops needed to be improved in a bid to attract people to bus services, Mr Cooke said. "Buses need to become either a better option or as good an option for people as driving in their own cars," he said.

He also said his organisation would support a study investigating the viability of a passenger rail service.

Mr Cooke said the Government must invest more money into creating a route for heavy vehicles to bypass the freeway.

Upgraded corridor

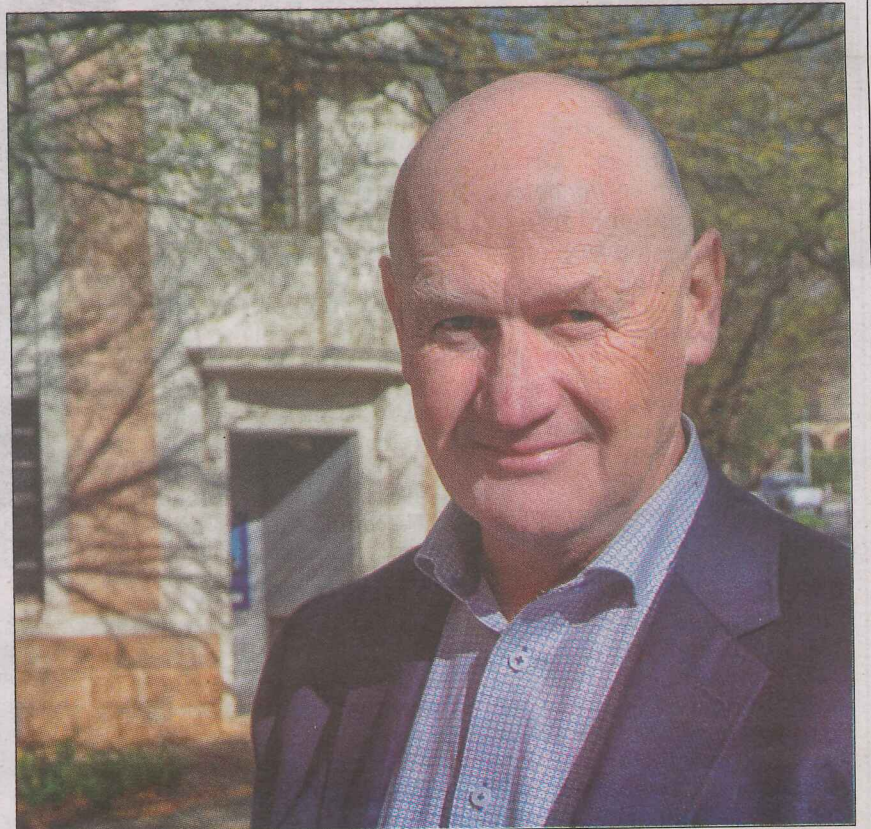
But he said that the trucks which must drive through Adelaide should be diverted to Cross Road instead of along Portrush Road.

"That way they intersect with South Road and, by extension, the upgraded North-South Corridor," he said.

"That would reduce wear and tear on the trucks and the roads and increase fuel economy because trucks will be essentially going from one highway to another."

Mr Cooke said there should also be consideration to upgrade the State's freight rail network to allow double stacking.

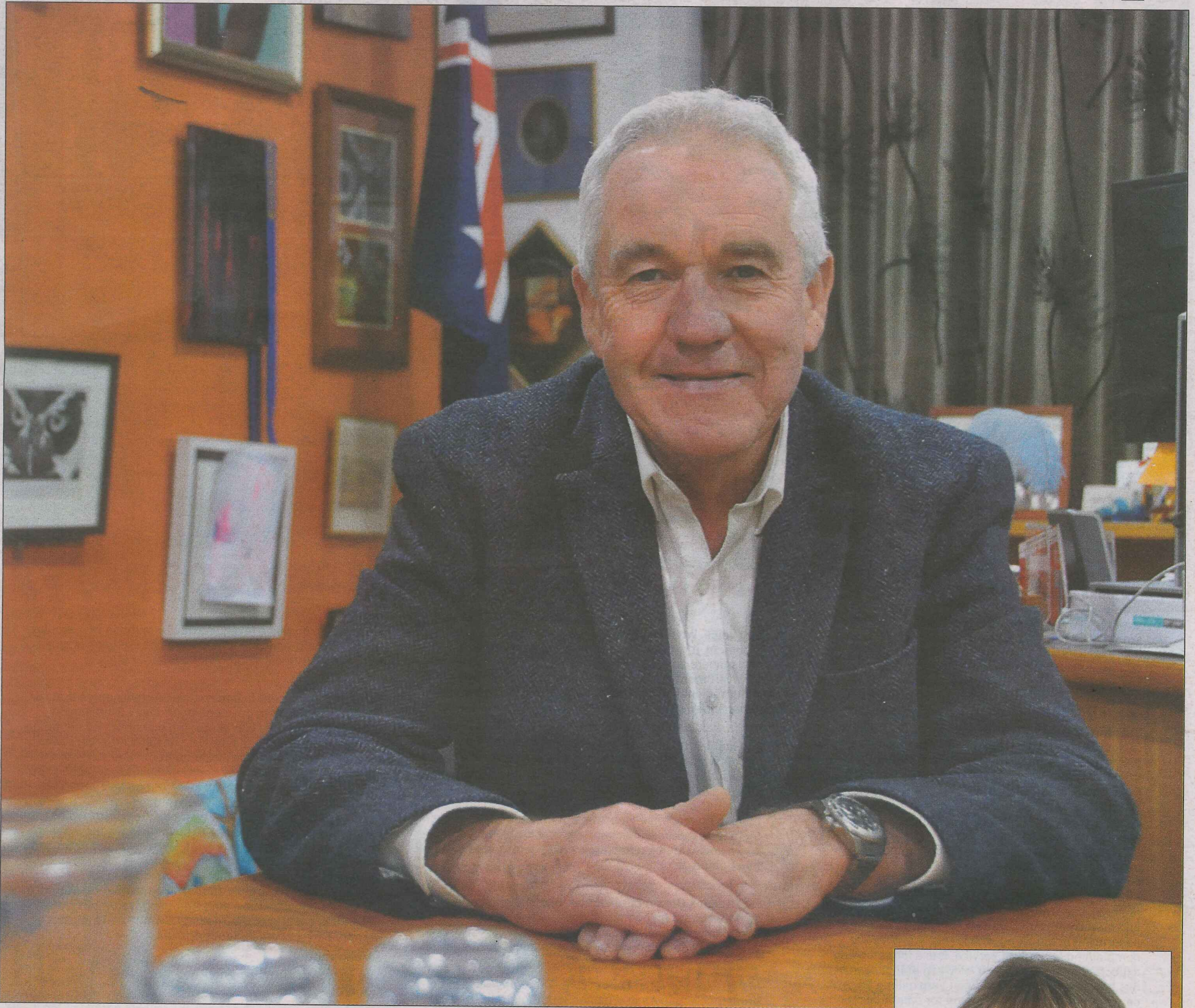
"Every avenue to divert freight away from the freeway needs to be investigated," he said.



Local Regional Development Australia branch chief executive Damien Cooke is calling for upgrades to the region's public transport and road freight network.

COUNCILS CALL FOR IMPROVED

Government leadership



Mt Barker Council chief executive Andrew Stuart and Adelaide Hills Mayor Jan-Claire Wisdom, right, are calling on the State Government to commit to "holistic" transport studies to improve the freeway.

By Nick Grimm

Local council leaders believe the State Government must undertake "comprehensive" studies in a bid to fix the freeway's traffic woes.

The Mt Barker Council has renewed its calls for extensive investigations into creating a fast rail commuter train as well as better, more frequent bus routes to help deal with traffic issues along the freeway.

Its neighbor, the Adelaide Hills Council, recently wrote to Transport Minister Corey Wingard asking his department to investigate the "economic, environmental and community wellbeing" benefits of passenger rail to service the region.

Mt Barker chief executive Andrew Stuart wants the State Government to acknowledge the issue and commit to conducting a study that looked at "all options".

"We looked to State and Federal governments for leadership in these situations, and we think more can be done in this space ... it has to be," he said.

"It could be dedicated bus or truck lanes or routes, it could be rail corridors or it could be a combination of both.

"But the study needs to be holistic, it needs to consider all options and needs to be up-front about all of the potential costs and how improvements could be achieved."

Those comments were backed by Adelaide Hills Mayor Jan-Claire Wisdom.

"We'd like to see a comprehensive study that looks into rail transport and other rapid transit options to find out what the best solution is for both now and the longer term," she said.

"We welcome recent improvements to the freeway, especially the third lane between Crafers and Stirling, which has made it much safer to enter

and exit the freeway there. But much more needs to be done to meet current and future community and industry transport needs."

Mr Wingard recently said a passenger rail service was not an economically viable option, but Mr Stuart said he does not believe that argument stacks up.

"Something might not be viable in the financial sense, but it could be viable in terms of regional economic development and for the communities it impacts," he said.

"It might not receive financial 'pay back', but it could receive pay back ... creating happier, better connected communities."

Both also said heavy vehicles needed to be diverted to a drastically upgraded route - such as the Monarto-Truro route - to bypass the freeway and suburban Adelaide.

"A road bypass would also reduce the number of heavy freight trucks on the



freeway and get them to freight hubs without going through the metropolitan area," Dr Wisdom said.

"This would increase safety on the freeway, reduce truck breakdowns, and take some of the strain off suburban feeder roads such as Cross, Glen Osmond and Portrush roads."