

## Expansion of Greenbushes mine in WA prompts calls for abandoned rail line to re-open

ABC South West WA / By Jacqueline Lynch, Sebastian Neuweiler

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In the towns surrounding the world's largest lithium mine in Western Australia, residents are no strangers to the rumble of trucks along the highway.

But with a major expansion planned at the Greenbushes mine, locals have ramped up calls for an abandoned railway to be reopened amid fears extra trucks on the road would hamper tourism and put too much pressure on the highway.

Almost 3 million tonnes of lithium concentrate are expected to be extracted from Talison's mine each year after the expansion, putting an extra 140 trucks a day on route between Greenbushes to Bunbury.

There is widespread support from the community for the expansion.

But Kirup resident Louisa Warburton-Rees said the extra trucks would be too many.

"The trucks damage the roads, so they're constantly being upgraded [and] that costs money and it's dangerous for people on the roads driving cars and people crossing the road," she said.

"It impacts local businesses as well."

The old railway has been closed for about 15 years.

It neighbours Ms Warburton-Rees' property and although she said she was angry when she first found out the trains might run again, she had come to accept it.

"Picking between rail and trucks, I'd pick trains," Ms Warburton-Rees said.

The train also passes next to Gary Rutter's home.

But as the co-owner of the Lady Marmalade cafe on South Western highway, Mr Rutter said he would rather deal with trains passing by his house than see an increased number of trucks on the road.

He said he was concerned more trucks would deter people from stopping in towns like Kirup and slow tourism in the region.

"Worst-case scenario we may have to look at taking the business somewhere else," Mr Rutter said.

"Having the massive amount of road trains going through constantly will, I think, just destroy what people are after when they want to go to the local coffee shop."

Both the State Government and Main Roads insisted South Western Highway could handle the increased road traffic.

But Regional Development Minister Alannah MacTiernan acknowledged the rail proposal was important to the local community.

### Who will pay?

A feasibility study, conducted by Talison, the South West Development Commission and Arc Infrastructure is underway to assess the viability of the rail line.

If it is proved to be a valid option, the question of who will pay for it will remain.

The State Government estimated re-opening the rail-line would cost \$130 million, which Ms MacTiernan said was a big ask given there was no money in the budget.

"If we were to go down that path, we would be expecting some industry contribution and some contribution from the Federal Government to

make this work," she said.

A Talison spokesman said the company would continue to work with the Government on the project.

## **Tourism the key to re-starting the train?**

In the town of Balingup, some residents are calling for a tourist train to run on the same line, which chair of Balingup Rail Group Malcolm Lee said could be the key to getting the multi-million-dollar project over the line.

"As far as a revenue operation is concerned it's a very doable proposition, it's not out of the ball park by any means," Mr Lee said

"The time has come to become a lot more reasonable about what you inflict on your communities."

The manager of the Balingup Visitor's centre Lela Scarrott agreed and said a railway would open new tourism opportunities for the South West.

"There's so much potential to grow tourism and to bring more people down here," she said.


"Let's have a plan of action and let's encourage tourist operators to invest down here."





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# Rail boosts hope

**TARI JEFFERS**

The reopening of a rail line from Greenbushes to Bunbury would provide an economic boost to the region and improve road safety.

The State Government has allocated \$3.8 million for a feasibility study into upgrades and new infrastructure at the Bunbury Port and Kwinana Bulk Terminal, to support the export and downstream processing of lithium concentrate in the South West.

Lithium mineral concentrate is transported from Greenbushes by road and the aim of the feasibility study is to assess the viability of a rail-based supply chain.

Bridgetown-Greenbushes shire president John Nicholas said he had been surprised about the notification of the study but a \$3.8 million input for a \$100 million investment was worthwhile.

"We'll all be waiting with bated breath about the outcome of the study and the potential of

reintroducing a rail line," Cr Nicholas said.

"Anything that takes the large trucks off the road and reduces traffic is welcome.

"When the Greenbushes mine is fully operational, there will be an increase in the number of trucks on the road, so a rail solution would make our roads safer."

Cr Nicholas said while the Bridgetown-Greenbushes community benefited from a rail solution, he hoped the feasibility

study addressed social issues further down the line.

"Areas like Donnybrook will be affected, as the rail line goes right through town right next to the playground," he said.

Cr Nicholas said an upgraded rail line could also open up potential for other uses, including the region's tourism.

The South West Development Commission is co-ordinating the

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## Lithium rail to boost region

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overall study, which will investigate port solutions, the rail line and mine-end loading.

"A pre-feasibility study has been carried out and what that found was the projected tonnages of lithium concentrate to be transported from Greenbushes supported the case to consider rail as a transport option," commission chief executive Mellisa

Teede said. "The lithium industry is an economically significant resource sector for WA. We want to look at how we can support a first-class supply chain to allow the industry to grow alongside community expectations that amenity is maintained."

A rail-based solution for lithium transportation would include new loading facilities at Greenbushes and the reactivation of the rail line between Greenbushes and Picton.