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# Decline in rail freight 'a worry'

## Alliance to fight trend

THE Alliance of Councils for Rail Freight Development has confirmed plans for regional discussions and workshops on governance and capacity building in the lead-up to the next state election.

Alliance chair and Mildura Rural City councillor Vernon Knight said that while there had been a number of significant gains in 2008, "we are a long way short of a vision for rail in Victoria."

The plan was hatched during the group's meeting at the Port of Melbourne last Friday - its first for 2009 - when members were given the chance to inspect the interface between sea freight and land-based transport.

"The visit reminded us all of the need for an integrated plan which recognised the need to properly manage the supply chain from producer entry to point of destination," Cr Knight said.

"We were also given some disturbing data in

relation to the decline in the use of rail and the horrendous prospect that virtually all freight will arrive at the Port by road by 2030 unless something happens to change the situation.

"The Victorian freight task is expected to treble in the next 20 years and as a state we will pay an enormous price if we don't act now.

"Aside from the extravagant costs we will bear in relation to fuel and greenhouse gases, regional roads will be impossible and Melbourne will be gridlocked."

"While there are moves to permit the use of B triples, the alliance is strongly of the view that this must not be condoned in the absence of any serious attempt to develop a rail freight alternative."

"The destiny of much of regional Victoria hangs on the outcome given its social and economic implications."

The alliance has already engaged Professor Bill Russell to assist in the coming year's

work given his detailed knowledge of Victoria's transport issues.

Professor Russell was chair of the independent panel, which ultimately rejected State Government plans to build Victoria's toxic waste dump at Hattah.

"As deputy director of Melbourne University's Centre for Governance and Management of Urban Transport, we are confident that Professor Russell can help us put forward new and better models for the development of Victoria's freight policy frameworks," Cr Knight said.

Melbourne University will be asked host a governance workshop to identify the authority needed to ensure that rail options are properly explored and promoted.

"The regional consultations will help us better understand the needs of specific local economies so that their needs get factored into Victoria's long-term freight vision," Cr Knight said.

"We greatly welcome the Victorian Govern-

ment's growing interest in freight and transport and we well appreciate the enormity of the task.

"Our hope is that we can assist their endeavours by engaging our member councils and giving government the best possible advice."

The alliance has over 30 member councils representing all of the state's major producers and their freight networks.

"We will also play a part in striving to build capacity for rail freight by facilitating workshops for Economic Development Officers who need to be alerted to the economic benefits which attach to the use of rail in a properly integrated system," Cr Knight said.

Alliance members have elected Cr Reid Mather, Mayor of the Buloke Shire, as the group's deputy chair, replacing Cr Bryan Small, formerly the Mayor of Northern Grampians Shire, who has now retired from local government.