

## Roe 8 fails the tests of responsible 21st-century infrastructure planning

Written by Peter Newman, Professor of Sustainability, Curtin University

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The [Beeliar Group](#) of professors formed recently to oppose the building of a new highway, called [Roe 8](#), through an important wetland and woodland regional park in Perth's southern suburbs. They have joined a very active [ca](#)  
[mpaign](#)  
, adding substance to the  
[passion](#)  
of community  
[activists](#)

A [statement](#) by the Beeliar Group explains:

The government's Roe 8 actions demonstrate the desperate need for scrutiny. They are destructive first steps in a [poorly conceived Perth Freight Link](#) that will lock in a Fremantle container port for 50 years, when a new [harbour at Kwinana](#) was clearly needed and already underway.

The [environmental assessment process](#) was over-ridden and the conditions associated with construction are constantly being disregarded. Important Aboriginal sites and health impacts were not taken into consideration.

The Roe 8 project illustrates all that is wrong with how we are planning and managing infrastructure in our cities. The Beeliar Group suggests the lack of [transparency and accountability](#) for the project points to a government that has lost its sense of responsibility. It's probably also a result of [federal government intervention](#) that upset proper processes of planning.

The highly politicised and [compromised process](#) is similar to other big road projects across Australia such as [East West Link](#) in Melbourne and [WestConnex](#)

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in Sydney. All arose from the Abbott government's [interventions](#) in transport infrastructure.

These interventions were highly unusual. The Commonwealth normally assesses and funds but does not suggest specific projects. The desperate activism associated with these three projects suggests we need to avoid such top-down planning.

### What's the alternative?

How do we depoliticise infrastructure planning and delivery? What is happening around the world on major infrastructure projects? And what principles and processes can help create infrastructure that satisfies long-term responsibilities?

The problem with freeways is that they create an ever-increasing dependence on cars and trucks. As soon as they are finished, [induced demand](#) leads to [more congestion](#) and the need for more highway capacity.

[At least 22 cities](#) have now removed freeways. This has happened especially in areas where freeways do most damage – as in the central and inner city, where urban fabrics are built around walking and public transport. Or sometimes freeways are stopped when they have severe impacts on major public open spaces, as Roe 8 does.

Copenhagen [abandoned](#) its American-style freeway plans when it was clear much-loved lakes would be filled in. River frontages in most cities are no longer seen as places to put corridors of bitumen. And hanging over all new infrastructure is the shadow of climate-change responsibilities.

### Restoring principled planning

How should we proceed in our cities to provide 21st-century mobility?

There are two key principles: the economics of infrastructure should be the basis of assessing

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value; and partnerships are needed to create value from infrastructure.

### Economics

Three core factors create value in a transport infrastructure project: accessibility, amenity and [agglomeration](#)

. Each creates economic value and can be measured – though the really big value happens when they occur together.

In my experience, new urban rail projects generate the most economic value. Road and rail projects that unlock value in freight delivery are also important.

In contrast to Roe 8, building a new outer [harbour at Kwinana](#) and redeveloping Fremantle harbour would solve current issues and look to be

[very good economics](#)

. The new harbour would create 11,000 direct jobs and A\$13.9 billion (net present value) in gross regional product over 20 years. Redeveloping the old harbour would generate 7,265 direct jobs and \$4.4 billion.

A range of other benefits would flow on from these projects. These include not having to clear [environmentally sensitive bushland](#) and removing the negative impact of container trucks from the city and suburbs.

### Partnerships

The kind of value creation outlined occurs through partnerships between government agencies, the private sector – which usually owns the land and builds the projects – and local communities.

True economic value is created when they put their money, powers and abilities together into

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one project pot that delivers accessibility, amenity and agglomeration. This did not happen on Roe 8 – it fails on all three parameters – but potentially can happen on the outer harbour.

In the 21st century we need new processes to build these partnerships. The creation of [Infrastructure Australia](#), which cut across government agencies and enabled close partnerships with private sector expertise and finance, was a major step forward. It has been [copied around the world](#).

[Infrastructure NSW](#) followed. It has boosted the state's infrastructure, particularly by creating public-private partnerships. The model's potential benefits for other states has led to a [proposal for Infrastructure WA](#).

Such bodies are able to tackle major infrastructure assessments and help develop new ways of creating value through partnerships. However, they need to involve local communities if they are truly going to create local amenity as well as accessibility and agglomeration benefits.

As an example, public transport has developed a market in cities due to its speed and spatial efficiency. But this can only be funded if land developers are brought into partnership with transport providers and government planners as well as local communities. Unlocking the value of land and of reduced car dependence depends on creating such partnerships where governments alone cannot do it.

This is the basis of what we call the [Entrepreneur Rail Model](#) for creating and delivering new transport value in cities. This model can help considerably in developing the passenger transport side of the Roe 8 plan rather than an old freeway concept.

Freight needs similar partnerships. A suggested alternative to the Roe 8 and Perth Freight Link is a new set of road and rail links around the city to a new port at Kwinana. The local council and community have strongly [embraced this](#).

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Some facilities have even been built already. This includes a large intermodal terminal as the site has the potential to take large container ships that no other Australian port can manage, then link across the nation through rail lines. This is why the project has been called the [Indian Ocean Gateway](#)

Such a project would [create huge economic value](#). It cannot be developed, though, without forging new partnerships with the private sector to unlock the possibilities for private finance and public good.

Infrastructure solutions for cities in the next 50 years cannot just continue to be rolled out as they were in the past 50 years. It will be especially dangerous if politicians intervene in favour of old solutions that do nothing to create value.

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