Dear Dr Schott

As the initiator of the Inland Rail project in 1992 (first presented to Hon John Anderson at a conference he ran at Narrabri in 1992) and as one who has worked on it with supporters for the past 30 years, my main concern is that the Federal Government at the time made the wrong choice when deciding to go ahead.

When looking at a direct Melbourne-Brisbane route, I originally thought of a line much like what is now being built; but it didn't take me long to realise that the faster the line's speed capability, the more value it would add both to the corridor and as a nation-builder. This realisation was helped by my 1978 PhD work that produced a model of the land use and value impacts of transport system changes. Most of Inland Rail corridor is in flat open country so building a high speed alignment would be relatively easy and cheap. So why go for a 19th century alignment when the rest of the world is hurrying to build lines to carry trains at around 400km/h and when a modern approach would deliver strong net benefits to our most productive corridor?

The other thing I realised was that Australia has largely not taken advantage of the potential for rail in its transport network; so I saw that a quality Brisbane-Melbourne route could be just the start of what I called a National Trunk Railway (NTR) that could eventually deliver the benefits of a good railway network to the country as a whole. So the concept became to copy the way the road network was being built and have freeway-equivalent routes serving regions but not going directly into their crowded centres – they are linked with the existing or upgraded road network. So the NTR would have a consistent high standard base route with designated connectors to the main centres but the quality of any connector would be what could reasonably achieved but not detract from the quality of the trunk network. The attached map illustrates.

I gathered support from experts in the relevant fields culminating in Thiess coming on board to locate in detail and cost a consistent high speed route from, say, Seymour to Toowoomba with upgraded links into Melbourne and Brisbane. The main cost of the latter would be the Toowoomba Range and a tunnel from Acacia Ridge to Murarrie to get full access to the Port of Brisbane, both of which I have developed in detail. I later added a direct link into Toowoomba central to provide for an attractive inter-urban passenger route to the only Australian major centre without current good rail access to the capital.

The high speed link we proposed with Thiess would allow intermodal trains to do a round Br-Mel trip in 48 hours (compared with 72 on the current scheme) thus being more attractive and saving on rolling stock, provide quality north-South linkage through Australia's most productive regions, and even allow passenger trains to deliver quality services between Australia's busiest regional areas, and even compete with air on Br-Mel with 7 hour trip times compared with around 5 by air if terminal time and unreliability were included, to say nothing of rail's overall climate-change benefits. Our Thiess related proposal was 140km shorter and estimated to cost $15B compared to around $12B with the accepted scheme. But ours would generate so much traffic as to be commercially viable and able to be built and run privately if necessary. The only government input necessary would be use of its resumption powers for the route reserve.

For reasons beyond our comprehension, the Federal Government of the day chose the low quality option it would fund itself through its ARTC agency. ARTC has shown no creativity in any of its work to date and it is difficult to see why it was listened to in this case.

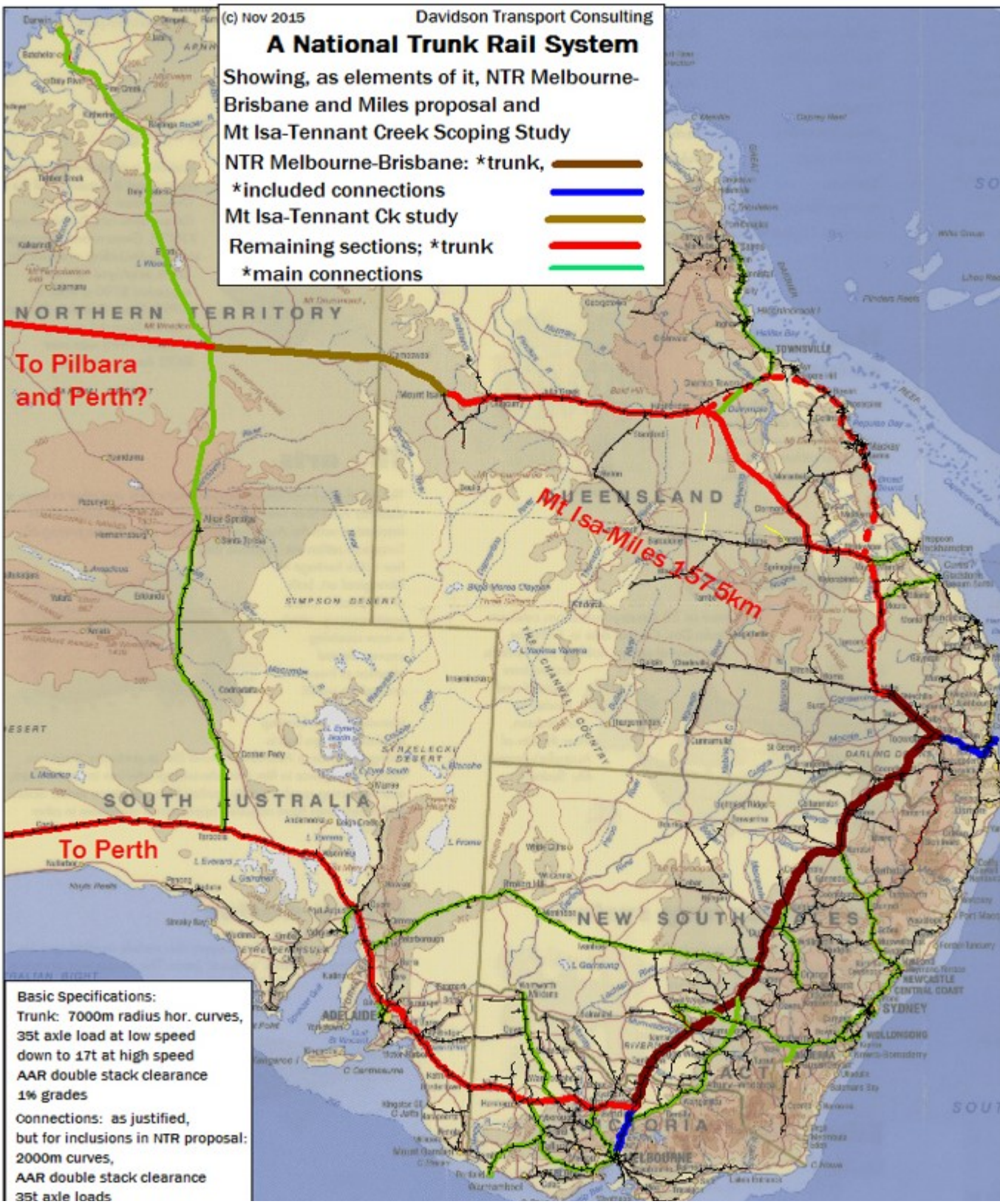
As a lifetime transport planner, this is by far the best thing I've ever proposed, and whilst I'm pleased the idea has been accepted, I'm devastated the Government has chosen to waste a wonderful opportunity to start to develop a railway network that would deliver huge potential benefits to Australia's economy and wellbeing.

Is it too late to rescue? Probably not quite.

If it was immediately decided to build all new work to the high speed standard we and Thiess proposed, the current project arrangements could continue and high speed capability could slowly be delivered along the whole route, with partial benefits of lower operating costs and faster turnaround times and increased regional development increasing over time as more and more of the route achieved high speed standards. Certainly we'd be the first in the world to run VHS and standard freight services on the same track and research would be needed to find how best to do that but when I made this point at a plenary session of a high speed rail conference in Berlin, delegates of large countries like USA, Sweden and Brazil rose quickly in support, suggesting we could profit widely from our research.

I'm trying to keep this Email short as required but, although I am now well-retired, I retain a prodigious amount of the work I and my supporters have done on this matter for 30 years and, although my intellectual property rights have never been honoured, I'd be happy to share this work with your inquiry if requested.

Dr Ken Davidson [redacted]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Davidson Transport Consulting
A National Trunk Rail System
Showing, as elements of it, NTR Melbourne-Brisbane and Miles proposal and Mt Isa-Tennant Creek Scoping Study
NTR Melbourne-Brisbane: *trunk,
*included connections
Mt Isa-Tennant Ck study
Remaining sections; *trunk
*main connections
NORTHERN TERRITORY
To Pilbara and Perth?
QUEENSLAND
Mt Isa-Miles 1575km
SOUTH AUSTRALIA
To Perth
NEW SOUTH WALES
VICTORIA
Basic Specifications:
Trunk: 7000m radius hor. curves,
35t axle load at low speed
down to 17t at high speed
AAR double stack clearance
1% grades
Connections: as justified,
but for inclusions in NTR proposal:
2000m curves,
AAR double stack clearance
35t axle loads