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\$100m PRIVATE FREIGHT LINE Consortium wants heavy rail link in suburbs

A NEW railway linking the southern suburbs to the Adelaide-Darwin line is planned as part of a \$100 million deep-sea port project at Port Stanvac.

Mobil, the Australian Wheat Board and the Australian Barley Board say ``Project Southern Growth'' will boost oil refinery operations, protect grain exports, and give Southern Vales wine producers greater access to overseas markets.

The proposal - details of which were released to The Advertiser yesterday - includes extending the Port Stanvac jetty by 650m and building a terminal capable of storing 100,000 tonnes of grain.

The longer jetty would be in seawater 17m deep and would remove any need for dredging.

But State Government sources have warned of public resistance to ``freight trains in the suburbs'' between Goodwood and Port Stanvac.

However, barley board managing director Michael Iwaniw said the proposal had great benefits for the grain industry and the state.

``It's a much-needed development for the southern suburbs and provides opportunity for other businesses to link up and make use of the railway,'' he said.

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``There is no need for any government money - we are going to fund it ourselves.''

Under the plan, the existing two railway lines - which are broad-gauge and incompatible with standard-gauge interstate rail lines - will be converted to standard gauge by rail and sleeper replacement along the existing 25km rail route between Goodwood and Noarlunga.

The proponents say the upgrade will not result in any disruption to passenger services, which can continue to use the new rail line after having axles adjusted, estimated to cost up to \$20,000 per carriage.

The proposal also throws into doubt Government commitments to build a deep-sea port at Port Adelaide - part of its contractual obligation when Ports Corp was sold to private consortium known as Flinders Ports - for \$130 million last year.

Under the agreement, Flinders Ports will dredge the Port River at Outer Harbor and construct a new berth. Grain handler AusBulk will build a grain terminal.

But proponents of the new scheme say the Outer Harbor option will not provide a deep enough channel to accommodate the 80,000-tonne capacity Panamax-class vessels preferred by the grain trade and will threaten the long-term viability of exports to the Middle East, Japan and China. They say the Outer Harbor proposal will require significant taxpayer contributions but the Port Stanvac option - including the rail link - would be fully-funded by private interests.

Government Enterprises Minister Patrick Conlon said Cabinet would consider the proposal.

However, contractual obligations it had to develop Outer Harbor - inherited through the previous government's sale of the Ports Corp - could present problems. He said the deal with AusBulk and Flinders Ports was ``cobbled together".

``As a consequence of that, we inherited a situation where the major players in the grain industry in South Australia are completely at loggerheads about the future of grain shipping," he said.

Southern suburbs MPs are split on the issue, with Liberal Member for Bright, Wayne Matthew, and Labor member for Kaurana, John Hill, opposed but Liberal Member for Mawson, Robert Brokenshire, and Labor member for Reynell, Gay Thompson, said to be in support.

Liberal backbencher Ivan Venning, who represents Mid North farmers in his Schubert electorate, said the Port Stanvac plan was a diversion to the Outer Harbor proposal. He said it was urgent SA

develop a deep-sea port before the Port of Melbourne was deepened to 14m.

Onkaparinga Mayor Ray Gilbert said the deep-sea port and the associated standardised rail would be ``a great asset" for the area. AusBulk spokesman David Thomas said the best outcome for the grain industry would be to locate the deep-sea port at Outer Harbor.