

## MUCHEA-FREMANTLE LINK

# Truckies to pay the toll for \$1.6b highway

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Trucks will be charged a per-kilometre toll along 85km of highway from Muchea to Fremantle Port to pay for a 13km road link the Barnett Government claims will take 500 trucks a day off Leach Highway by 2031.

The cash-strapped Government yesterday said it would find an extra \$591 million to fund WA's first toll road.

Part of that will be paid back from the heavy vehicle charge when the Perth Freight Link — which includes the controversial Roe Highway stage 8 extension through the environmentally sensitive Beelihar wetlands — opens in 2019.

Documents released by the Government yesterday reveal all trucks longer than 3.2m would be subject to the per-kilometre charge, likely to be imposed by GPS trackers installed in trucks.

The project will cost nearly \$1.6 billion in total, with \$925 million pledged by the Abbott Government and \$59 million already committed to upgrades of High Street in Fremantle.

The project, which the Government says will bypass 14 sets of traffic lights and slash 9½ minutes off travel between Kwinana Freeway and the port, involves:

- Construction of Roe 8 through the wetlands to Stock Road.
- Upgrading Stock Road from Coolbellup to Leach Highway at Willagee.
- Upgrading Leach Highway and High Street through Fremantle as well as the south end of Stirling Highway.

Taken with the \$1.2 billion Northlink, or Swan Valley bypass, project and the \$1 billion Gateway project around Perth airport, Transport Minister Dean Nalder said the works would result in an 85km freight corridor from Muchea to the port, with 58km to be intersection-free.

“Given we are creating a freeway system that will run from Stirling Bridge all the way to Muchea, we are looking to defray the cost over the whole extent of that freeway system,” Mr Nalder said.

“This needs to be a win-win for industry.”

Federal Finance Minister Mathias Cormann said the pro-

ject would bring tangible benefits for business.

“It is a matter here of sharing some of the costs,” he said.

Shadow transport minister Ken Travers said the Government was guilty of breaking a clear promise not to introduce toll roads.

The Government insisted the cost of any charge would be lower than the benefits from shorter travel times, fuel, maintenance and crashes.

Although details are subject to further modelling and consultation, Mr Nalder said early work indicated the road would deliver 45¢ a kilometre per vehicle of savings. Preliminary modelling suggested two-thirds of that benefit would be paid in user charges, suggesting a toll of 30¢ a kilometre, though no figure has been set.

Mr Nalder acknowledged the Roe 8 section of road through the environmentally sensitive Beelihar wetlands would be contentious but said the environmental impacts would be managed.

The Government will award two tenders — for the Roe 8 section and Stock Road to Fremantle

section — and hopes construction will start in early 2016.

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**Road map: Colin Barnett, Senator Mathias Cormann and Dean Nalder after the announcement.** Picture: Bill Hatto