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Dear Dr Michael

**Request for Public Submissions
Combined Comment on WAGR and WestNet Train Management Guidelines and Train Path Policy**

By way of background, Leisure Rail WA Ltd as you maybe aware is a “boutique” rail restaurant and touring business that is proposing to operate regularly scheduled passenger services across portions of the WAGR and WestNet Rail networks. The company has presented its proposed train service plan to both organizations who have been extremely co-operative and helpful in their negotiations, and in the case of WAGR, because of the complexity and priority attached to suburban rail services, the proposed train paths have been developed with the assistance of their operations people.

In the case of Westnet Rail, concept timetables for train paths have been submitted following agreement in principle by WAGR, as obviously clearance through the WAGR system would impact on entry/exit times to Westnet Rail.

There have been two issues that have emerged in the development of the project as far as acceptance of the Proposal from the network authorities in relation to:

- The services being **regularly scheduled** as opposed to the occasional operations of historic or existing tourist/leisure based passenger Operators
- The reintroduction after an absence of many years of locomotive hauled passenger equipment but engineered, configured, maintained and operated to a very high performance and reliability standard

Because the Leisure Rail WA operation is primarily focussed on integrated operations with the domestic, interstate and international tourism markets, issues to do with attractive arrival and departure times, scheduled connections with long distance road coach services and other rail services and guaranteed operating dates are critical to the success of this venture and this is a concept that has been increasingly appreciated in the discussions with Westnet Rail and WAGR so far.

Both organizations have accepted the proposition that industry experience with the regular operation of a locomotive hauled passenger train operation across the narrow gauge network whereby the choice and configuration of motive power and rollingstock has been set up to achieve high power to weight ratios and potential higher track speeds because of lower axle loads and track friendly bogies, in effect means that Leisure Rail WA will be introducing a new class of train. In that context WestNet Rail has asked for our further input in regard to desired track speeds and section running times of these trains on sections of railway such as Avon Yard to Albany and Picton to Manjimup where regularly scheduled passenger trains have not operated for some decades.

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Based on that background the following is provided in regard to both organizations' Train Management and Train Path Policy statements:

TRAIN MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES

3 WAGR Principle Governing the Use of the WAGR Rail Network

The above principle is accepted and fully understood, but it does not make reference to use of the network by regularly scheduled regional passenger services like the Australind, AvonLink etc. Leisure Rail WA's regularly scheduled passenger services while primarily focussed on tourist markets will nonetheless be accessible for use by persons wishing to travel to or from some 21-country destinations such as Albany, Mt Barker, Manjimup, Bridgetown etc.

On that basis it is suggested the statement whilst emphasising the commitment to facilitating third party access should also attach or provide some recognition that after meeting the requirement of the urban rail system it also attaches a very high priority to regularly scheduled train services to regional and country areas operated either by WAGR or other accredited Operators over and above the occasional operations of other Operators.

In other words the Principle Governing Use should attach its first priority to urban passenger services, its second priority to **regularly scheduled** regional and country passenger trains and then to occasional/charter Operators.

WestNet Rail

It is assumed that the WestNet Rail document makes no reference to any similar principle as fundamentally the regional rail network is overwhelmingly used for freight operations. However, with an increasing use of the rail network by WAGR, Great Southern Railway and now Leisure Rail WA, it would seem appropriate that some reference at least be considered in regard to regularly scheduled passenger operations/operators.

We fully accept based on international experience that this can be a very sensitive issue and in the case of the North American and Australian experience it is very clear that the rail system primarily exists to meet the needs of transporting freight.

Our interest in this area which especially covers the area of allocation of train paths, is that as a passenger Operator we would obviously want to negotiate train paths that are attractive to the market, that provide connections with other services and that the timetables on a particular route are identical regardless of the day of the week.

By way of example Leisure Rail WA is proposing a three-day per week (Sun-Wed-Fri) service from Fremantle/Perth to Bridgetown and return. On arrival in Bridgetown the service is to link with the WAGR country road coach service to Manjimup, Pemberton, Walpole, Denmark and Albany in both directions. Leisure Rail WA is also proposing to run the same service on a Monday on long weekends, through school holiday periods and in the peak tourist season - (Mid August to End October).

The service will be used for day return travel as much as it will be for point to point and long distance touring. Accordingly, the departure time ex Perth and arrival time back are also critical from a product development and marketing perspective. Similarly intermediate-stopping times should be consistent.

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In that sense whilst we do know the track owners understand the importance of this, it is nonetheless suggested that there be a recognition of it in the Policy/Guidelines. In making this point we again reiterate that we understand that the viability of the regional rail system is heavily dependent on freight and that major freight customers have haulage programs that in the case of the Mundijong to Picton route have limited flexibility to be changed.

It should be noted however that a properly researched, proven, and marketed passenger train schedule once in place rarely needs any further change as its consistency/permanency is an important marketing tool. In that sense given the permanency of a train path for a regularly scheduled passenger train it in effect becomes easier to work freight train paths around the passenger path to suit altered shipping programs etc.

A case in point applies to the Australind passenger service between Perth and Bunbury where the basic schedule has remained unaltered for the past 8 years or so, despite increasing rail traffic and changed operating patterns over much of the route south of Mundijong Junction.

To some degree WestNet Rail at Section 4.2 - Variation to Existing Train Paths or Additional Train Paths provides an undertaking to negotiate with other Operators seeking agreement to amend their paths to allow WestNet to accommodate a request, but that doesn't necessarily spell out a principle in terms of a consideration to Operators providing regularly scheduled passenger services.

Maintenance Provisions

Both WAGR and WestNet advise that other than for emergency repairs/maintenance they will notify the Operator of the works as soon as reasonably practicable. From a service planning perspective where with international inbound tourists the opportunity exists for them to book up to 12 months in advance, we believe that the notification provision should read that WAGR/WestNet Rail should wherever possible provide the maximum notice possible, especially for major programmed maintenance tasks such as resleepering or rerailling, where the disruption to services may be for an extended period requiring the rescheduling of the service on that day or even transference of that service to another date or time.

Removal of Train Path for Under-utilisation and/or Cancellation of Services Using Scheduled Train Paths

Both track owners have proposed a policy to delete any train path from its schedule if the service using that scheduled train path is not operated for three consecutive weeks.... Elsewhere the track owners make reference to the cancellation of train paths for various reasons including seasonal services.

Given that the Leisure Rail WA service is targeted primarily at the tourism industry, there will be some high versus low season operations. The overwhelming majority of Leisure Rail WA services will however operate to the core timetable, but two services, (Avon Valley restaurant trains and the Southwest Perth to Bridgetown service as described on Page 2 of this paper), are proposed to have increased frequencies at the peak tourist season and/or holiday periods. The periods, (days/times) these would operate are known.

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That would mean that there could be periods extending beyond the period specified where the path is technically under-utilised. However, the nature of boutique rail operations is such that the periods/dates when the conditional or extra path is required can be known as far as 12 months in advance.

On that basis, it is assumed that the above circumstance would be covered but some clarification is sought please as there is also a reference to how many times a path may be cancelled.

Your advice on these matters would be appreciated in due course please.

Yours sincerely

Signed

Robert Santich
Director/Company Secretary