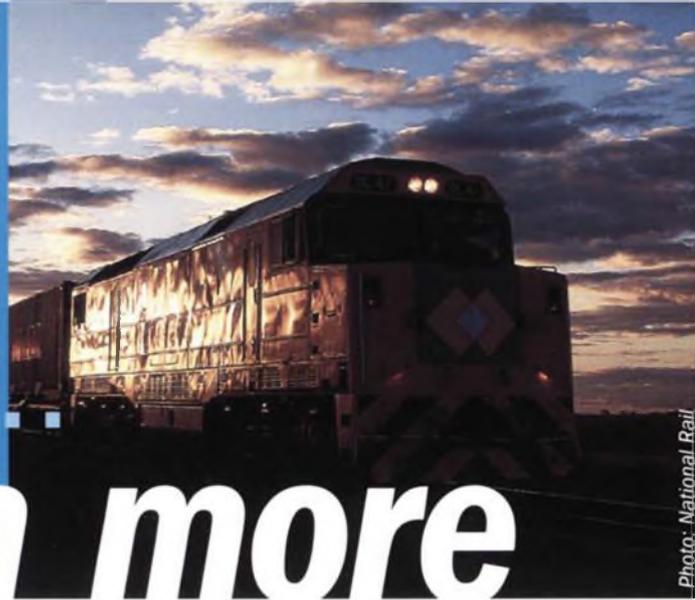


The House of Representatives has nine permanent investigatory committees which together cover most Government policy areas. Many Committees cover more than one portfolio. The House Communications, Transport and the Arts Committee is one.

# Planes, Trains and . . . so much more



If you want to get safely from Point A to Point B anywhere around Australia, then the Chair of the House Transport Committee is probably a good man to have with you.

As well as conducting inquiries into all aspects of rail, air, road and sea transport safety over the last few years, Paul Neville, Member for Hinkler (Queensland), and the Committee he chairs, know first-hand the demands involved in travelling across our vast continent.

In the last 18 months the Committee has conducted public hearings and site visits in State and Territory capitals and further flung destinations in the east and the west. They've been gathering news and views about our transport and communications networks, talking to people in a range of regional centres, including Tamworth, Bathurst, Townsville, Longreach, Kempsey, Geraldton, Albany and Walpole.

While the Committee tends to travel by air and road, you get the feeling that the Chair would like to be visiting all these places by rail if he could.

Certainly lack of rail development and over-reliance on road transport in Australia is an area close to his heart.

It's also an area repeatedly explored by the Committee over the years since its genesis as the Standing Committee on Road Safety back in 1972. That work has been furthered most recently in two reports, *Beyond the Midnight Oil*, the inquiry into managing fatigue in transport (October 2000), and *Back on Track*, the report on progress in rail reform (May 2001).

While it's a common contention that the more freight that is off the roads, the safer those roads will be, the fatigue report essentially proved it.

"At 17 hours of wakefulness the average person driving a vehicle is at the equivalent of a .05 blood alcohol reading; at 24 hours he or she is at 0.1. It's pretty scary," Paul Neville says.

"Especially combined with the tight financial circumstances of the road transport industry.

"The road transport industry is extremely competitive, and running on very tight margins. Truck drivers are under pressure to meet deadlines; pressure from companies that are under financial pressure.

"In that sort of atmosphere you can't just regulate to outlaw risk-taking behaviour. There needs to be an all-out campaign so that the public and industry appreciate fatigue can have the same deleterious effects as alcohol.

Continued on page 20

## The Hinkler connection

Bert Hinkler was one of Australia's great aviation pioneers.

It is really quite appropriate then that a Member for the federal electorate which now bears his name is Chair of the House of Representatives Transport Committee, which covers, amongst many other things, aviation.

But the connection between Bert Hinkler and the Member for Hinkler goes deeper than that. In fact it goes to long before Paul Neville even became an MP. He told the story in his first speech to Parliament in 1993.

"In 1982, in conjunction with history and aviation buffs Lex Rowland and Tom Quinn, we were commissioned by the Bundaberg bicentennial committee to investigate the removal of Bert Hinkler's house from Southampton in the United Kingdom to Australia as a bicentennial project," Mr Neville said.

"Fortuitously, but not without some difficulty, we were successful.

"The house was painstakingly dismantled brick by brick, loaded into two 20-tonne containers and, on 20 June 1983, transported to Australia. It was rebuilt to the original architect's plans in what is now Bundaberg's botanical gardens. It has become a repository of priceless Australian aviation memorabilia. Replete with exquisite 1920s decor, it captures the mood of a man who excited the world with his daring solo flights in the 1920s and the 1930s.

"It is a living memorial to the indomitable spirit of Hinkler, who ranks with Charles Kingsford Smith as Australia's greatest pioneer aviator."

But the coincidence doesn't finish there.

"It was out of this process that Tom Quinn and others were possessed to suggest that one of the new seats in the 1984 [federal electoral] redistribution be named after Bert Hinkler."

That suggestion was adopted, with a new seat in Queensland named for the aviation pioneer. Nine years later Paul Neville was elected as its Member.



Continued from page 19

"There needs to be a culture of safety and, importantly, the infrastructure there to support that.

"In NSW you have the Safety-Cam system, which has gone some way to picking up truck drivers who are pushing the boundaries. But there need to be more and better places for drivers to pull over; regular stops. We need 2,000-3,000 more of those around the country. If it's on the western side of the road there needs to be trees to provide shade on the vehicles. While it's improving, more needs to be done.

"There are computer programs now for managers and schedulers to calculate limits – where the fatigue lines are, given how many hours you've worked, how many days or weeks you've worked, how many breaks you've had and where. These things need to be used. The whole industry regards log books as a joke."

The other area of infrastructure which would help is, of course, rail.

If Paul Neville has a frustration with the parliamentary committee system, it's a natural

disappointment that some of its recommendations are not adopted.

"Many committees, especially in the areas of small business, health, communications, transport and family matters, have had quite a profound effect on public policy," he says.

"Government responses vary from Minister to Minister, and often depend on the mood on the issue – where it is in the Government's priorities – and whether it's a tight part of the economic cycle.

"An example is our rail report, *Tracking Australia* (August 1998), which recommended \$250 million for three years and then \$200 million a year for the next decade to upgrade the basic infrastructure.

"In the great scheme of Australian budgeting that's not a lot of money; but it's a lot of money for rail. That recommendation hasn't been accepted.

"70% of freight from Sydney and Melbourne to Perth – the east-west corridor – is carried on rail, but in the north-south corridor it's just 10%. So there's a lot of room for improvement. There has to be some annual

commitment from the Federal Government to lead that improvement. Indeed, we think it's time for them to declare a national interstate track. (see *separate story, page 1*)

"In a non-financial sense there is one other area that needs to be improved – access arrangements.

"There is this perception that once the last link was completed, once we had this four-foot-eight-and-a-half-inch line from Brisbane to Perth, that the job was done.

"Far from that, there were still something like 23 different operating codes, 14 radio codes, non-uniform signalling, and different States all had different attitudes about what they were going to charge for access. There was never one highly-efficient way of transporting freight by rail across the nation, and there still isn't.

"We need a simple uncomplicated system of access. Whether the States cede that to the Commonwealth, or they very clearly allow the Australian Rail Track Corporation to be able to set the rules, you just can't have people

## Radio inquiry quizzes industry chiefs

The latest move in the House Communications Committee's investigation into the adequacy of radio services in regional Australia was two days of public hearings in Brisbane with industry heavyweights, including ABC Managing Director Jonathan Shier (pictured, right).

As well as the ABC, the Committee quizzed the main players in commercial radio, including:

- Ace Radio Broadcasters Pty Ltd (the licensee of nine radio licences in Victoria);
- DMG Radio Pty Ltd (DMG owns and operates 57 AM and FM commercial stations in non-metropolitan Australia; an AM commercial station in Adelaide; and an FM commercial station in Sydney);
- RG Capital Radio Ltd (the second largest regional radio operator in Australia, providing 28 commercial radio services to 17 non-metropolitan markets. RGCR services are listened to by 1.35 million people in regional Australia each week); and
- Broadcast Operations Group.



Photo: ABC

Also questioned about the regulatory structure for radio licensing was the Australian Broadcasting Authority, including its Chairman, Professor David Flint.

**For a transcript of the hearings**

Visit: [www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/cta](http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/cta)



having to go through five or six jurisdictions to transport freight around the country. We've got to flush that out of the system.

"Hopefully our work can have some influence there."

The Transport Committee's research on fatigue showed it wasn't just roads where tiredness and the impacts of financial and infrastructure problems were an issue.

"Just look at some of the current problems that have been encountered by Ansett and to a lesser extent Qantas. We went through their terminals at the midnight hours, watching how they serviced aircraft and the implications of fatigue on those guys. We came to the conclusion that a fatigued licensed aircraft maintenance person is potentially as dangerous as a fatigued pilot. If you make an error on sensitive instrumentation, it could be devastating.

"The commercial fact is you've got to get the plane serviced between when they come in at, say, nine o'clock at night and when they leave at six o'clock in the morning. So rosters just have to be devised to make that work. Some of these guys do 12-hour shifts. That in itself is not a danger, provided you are having adequate breaks and adequate sequential days off. Usually it's four days on and four days off, but the problems arise when you get a pattern of overtime use, and the days-off sequence is broken."

The same problem applies to sea transport, with economic pressures leading to incredibly quick turn-around times in port for ships.

"Crew aren't in port for two or three days to go and relax any more," Paul Neville says.

"The Exxon Valdez report showed a wrong turn of the wheel triggered the worst catastrophe at sea since the Second World War. It was an error of judgement – the pilot was probably just tired.

"With an enormous amount of shipping now passing through the Great Barrier Reef region, it's a real issue."



Paul Neville, Chairman of the House Transport, Communications and the Arts Committee (left) at Triple J studios in Sydney as part of the regional radio inquiry. Photo: ABC

Train photos courtesy of National Rail  
Plane photo courtesy of CASA

## The Arts

Responsibility for the Arts portfolio was transferred to the Communications and Transport Committee after the 1998 federal election.

With a background as the Queensland State Secretary for the Arts Council of Australia (1963-66) and a professional theatre supervisor (1967-81), it was an area with which Committee Chairman Paul Neville was immediately comfortable.

The Committee is currently reviewing the operation of *Art Indemnity Australia*, a Commonwealth Government program under which the Government carries the financial risk (by acting as insurer) in the event of loss of, or damage to, significant cultural exhibitions.

It is argued that without this program the high cost of commercial insurance for major touring exhibitions would make many exhibitions unviable.

"These days you've got exhibitions worth hundreds of millions if not billions of dollars," Paul Neville says. "There's a huge risk of malicious damage, fire damage, water damage, accidental damage. Given the size and nature of these exhibitions it's now beyond the capacity of the galleries to cover the risks themselves, so governments have had to get involved. It's a big problem.

"We're talking to Directors and Assistant Directors of Galleries, and the people in charge of indemnity planning, to work through the issue."

Despite Paul Neville's natural interest, the Committee's Arts responsibilities often find themselves playing second fiddle to the other portfolio areas.

"When we go anywhere on a transport or communications inquiry we endeavour to visit an art gallery or museum in that city. We try to incorporate that into our programs," Paul Neville says.

As for future inquiries, he has an idea in mind.

"I would very much like to do an inquiry into touring. I'd like to test that area. I'm not sure that's moved on much over the past few years.

"I've got a feeling we should be going back to opera and ballet companies having a second company that can tour. There's a feeling that the Australian Opera and Australian Ballet are very capital-city centric, and I wonder whether their charters should be extended to have second companies.

"The other part of that is having a touring mechanism. Should there be some mechanism whereby a dedicated organisation in each State organises the itineraries and transport and accommodation and the like, so that each of the companies then follow an organised network?"