


BUSINESS BEAT

Bay West a game changer



THE modern version of the famous old saying "all roads lead to Rome" could very well be all Victoria's public transport links lead through Geelong.

Right on our city's doorstep is the state's major arterial that links to other major highways in and around Melbourne, an airport with enormous potential and Geelong being the key hub for Victoria's freight rail network to western Victoria and South Australia.

All that transport infrastructure already in place makes Geelong the ideal location to build Victoria's second container port.

Bay West — located between Geelong and Werribee — and Hastings have been identified as the preferred locations to complement the Port of Melbourne.

This is a substantial project that will require extensive planning before the first ship is docked. But deciding on the lo-



RIGHT SOLUTION: Jim Riordan says Bay West offers big savings.

Picture: ZOE PHILLIPS

cation and starting the process in the next 12 months is imperative.

This is a major piece of infrastructure that will take more than a decade to build — but one that will have a significant impact on the state's economy for the next 100 years.

In the first half of this year Infrastructure Victoria is due to present its report to Victor-

ia's Special Minister of State, Gavin Jennings, detailing when — and under what conditions — a second container port will be required.

There are pros and cons for each location. Of course, environmental impact will be an important part of the process.

But there's no doubt Bay West, if successful, presents enormous economic opportunities for the wider Geelong

region for generations to come.

If Bay West is chosen, the new port would be in a unique position of having all four forms of transport — road, rail, air and sea — in close proximity to each other.

All the city's key lobby groups are backing this project and meet regularly as part of the Geelong Port-City Coordinator Group.

It would create hundreds of

jobs directly involved with the port but also indirectly through the spin-offs it creates.

Avalon Airport will have the capacity to handle bulk quantities of goods either coming off a ship that need to be transported elsewhere, or being flown in to be loaded into containers and sent to all parts of the globe.

Avalon CEO Justin Giddings said the airport's runway has been strengthened to allow it to handle larger aircraft.

Melbourne is Australia's largest container port, handling about 40 per cent of the country's container trade.

Geelong is Victoria's largest specialised bulk goods port and handles more than 10 million tonnes of cargo each year, worth about \$8 billion.

A key factor in Bay West's favour is that more than 80 per cent of Victoria's exports come from western Victoria and the northeast of the state.

Having two ports on the western side of Port Phillip Bay in close proximity would allow for more regional Victoria products to be exported directly from Geelong overseas or packed into containers and transported directly to Melbourne and interstate.

If Hastings is chosen, the freight costs for companies in the Geelong region would increase, creating a significant detrimental economic impact for regional businesses.

Riordan Grain Services managing director Jim Riordan said his company would save about \$2 million a year shipping via Bay West rather than Hastings.

That's a lot of money, which the company would look to re-invest into growing its own business — and no doubt many others would follow suit.

As Mr Riordan said: "Someone's just got to put a circle around the piece of dirt so it's secure for the next 50 years and say 'that's it' (the new port)."

Whichever way you look at it, a Bay West solution stacks up. A decision favouring Bay West will create an important economic building block from which many existing industries can grow and many new industries will emerge.

It's a regional game changer which Geelong is clearly best positioned to maximise.

Bernadette Uzelac is Geelong Chamber of Commerce CEO. Follow the Chamber on Twitter @GeelongChamber