

# Rail waits for sleeper money

By COLIN BETTLES

WESTNET Rail general manager Paul Larsen says his company and the industry is not planning to stop train operations on any lines until the status of about \$200 million of government money for resleepering is clarified.

Mr Larsen said he was confident the Federal Government understood the importance of WA's rail network to the grains industry and the State Government was not far behind.

He said he was hopeful about, and waiting the outcome, of the Federal Government's review of WA's grain transport network.

The review is analysing the State Government's request for the Federal Government to contribute to the resleepering program.

Mr Larsen said Westnet Rail's alternative plan would most likely result in grain train operations to be stopped in the next 12 months if the \$200m was not approved.

He said train operations would

cease in a year on large sections of the narrow gauge network, putting a lot of grain into road transport in a short time, if the industry had to fund the resleepering.

"The Australian Rail Group and CBH are living on a month to month agreement in absence of certainty around the future of the network," Mr Larsen said.

"Having driven on country roads recently and being forced to pull over to the side on narrow roads because of the trucks carting grain, I understand how critical this funding is to everyone, not just those in the grains industry."

Mr Larsen said some of the recent public criticism aimed at the rail network's inefficiencies was unjustified.

He said WA's tracks and trains were designed to carry grain to ports over 12 months and not in a condensed timeframe immediately after harvest.

"Hopefully the Federal Government will see the rail funding

as a sensible investment and the State Government will follow," Mr Larsen said.

Consultant KPMG has been appointed to do the review with grain sector specialist SAHA International.

Review members have talked with all levels of government and key industry stakeholders.

They have also spent considerable time with CBH, Westnet Rail and ARG staff in the past month.

This review will analyse preliminary findings from the Grain Infrastructure Group to identify obstacles that prevent the WA grain freight industry from being productive and efficient.

The Federal and WA governments have agreed to fast track the review.

Mr Larsen said there was no truth to suggestions the rail network was being sold after Westnet Rail parent company Babcock and Brown had gone into receivership.

