Public gets more time to comment on Majura Parkway

By Megan Doherty
City Reporter

The ACT Government has agreed to extend public consultation on the proposed $250 million Majura Parkway.

It comes as one community group questioned why the prospect of a very high speed train had prevented the alternative of upgrading the existing Majura Road from being explored.

Chief Minister Jon Stanhope announced yesterday a two-week extension for comments on the parkway, with them now to be lodged with the ACT Planning and Land Authority by July 13.

The North Canberra Community Council asked also yesterday for a public meeting to be held about the new road which has been proposed by Roads ACT but so far secured only $30 million in federal funding.

Mr Stanhope said the Government had consulted with a range of stakeholders, including every leaseholder along the route, in developing the draft environmental impact statement.

"Roads ACT presented information on the Majura Parkway at a meeting of the Gungahlin Community Council in May and has been invited to discuss the project with the Pialligo Residents Association and North Canberra Community Council in August," he said.

A draft environmental impact statement has examined the proposed 11.5km parkway, which would be built to the west of the existing Majura Road and connect the Federal Highway in the north to the Monaro Highway in the south.

The draft document says the alternative option of building the parkway along the existing Majura Road alignment had "the least impact on existing developments on both sides of the road and does not have significant ecological, cultural heritage or land management impacts".

"[It] would allow for the gradual upgrading of the existing road thereby reducing the need for large amounts of capital outlay over a short period of time," the report said.

However, the draft document says the major difficulty with following the Majura Road alignment was its impact on the route for a very high speed train, particularly around its last bend before arriving at a possible terminal at the Canberra airport.

The constraining factor was ensuring any development around the airport did not impinge on clearance limits for aircraft which also influenced possible routes.

"As a result this option, was not carried forward for any evaluation," the report said.

North Canberra Community Council chairman Jochen Zeil acknowledged an upgraded north-south road was needed but did not understand why the very high speed train, yet to become a reality, was dictating its route. He said the idea of a very high speed train was to connect cities not airports and any terminal should be in the city, not the airport.

"The environmental impact statement makes it clear that the real reason for the unnecessarily expensive and environmentally damaging major realignment of the parkway is to enable a future very high speed train to connect to Canberra airport. This would support the airport's plan to become Sydney's second airport and a night freight hub," he said.

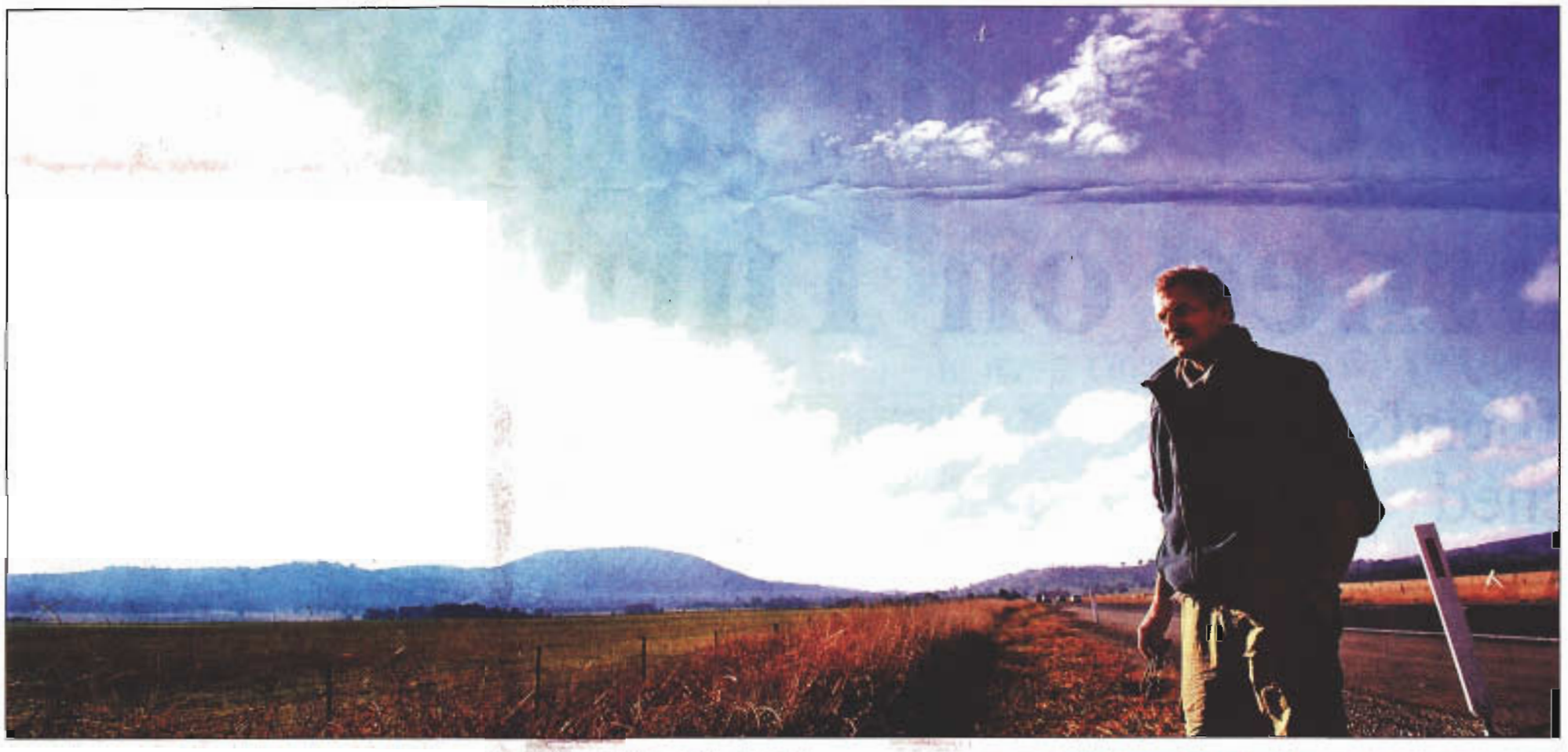
"The community, including NCCC, has consistently argued that these airport business plans will destroy the unique assets of Canberra as a liveable city. It would be better and cheaper to keep to the ACT Government's original plan and upgrade the existing Majura Road route to parkway standard."

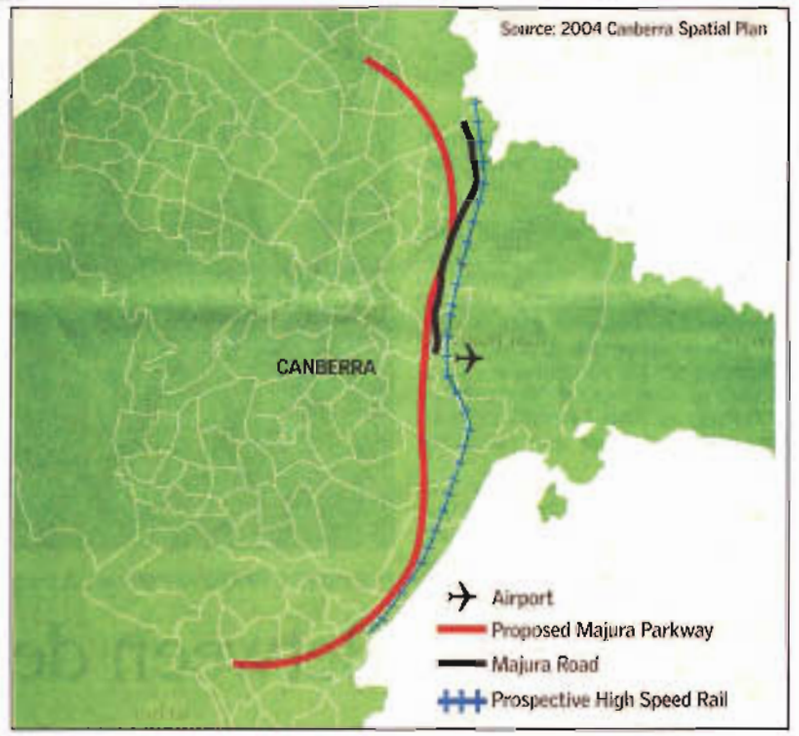
However, Roads ACT director Tony Gill said upgrading two-lane Majura Road to a four-lane parkway standard would not be practical or necessarily cheaper or more environmentally sensitive.

He said following the Majura Road alignment would mean the Woolshed Creek fossil site on Fairbairn Avenue would be affected and the Molonglo River would have to be crossed at a wider point, affecting water skiing.

Mr Gill said the planning of the Majura Parkway had been guided by the Territory Plan and by the 2004 Canberra Spatial Plan which identified transport routes, including for a very high speed train.

"Some years ago when we were starting the planning for the Majura Parkway, planning authorities asked to ensure the design of any future parkway road didn't preclude a potential high-speed rail link, even though there is no current project for such a link, but allowing for space for such a link in the future. And we've basically taken that comment on board," he said.



STRANGE: Jochen Zeil says the idea of a very high speed train is to connect cities not airports. Photo: MARINA NEIL

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