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Saudis invested over \$4 billion in Australia in 2012, and Kuwaitis invested \$1 billion dollars.

However Mr Scott hopes the inquiry will also consider cultural links.

“Anything that builds an understanding between the Middle East and Australia is to our advantage and their advantage,” he said.

Professor Fethi Mansouri of Alfred Deakin University has told the sub-committee these cultural links should not be overlooked in favour of a traditional focus on trade alone.

“Australia is ideally placed to strengthen its current relationships with the Middle East to even higher levels. The existence of a vibrant Australia-Arab community is a significant asset that is not often tapped into in the most optimal manner,” he said.

The inquiry is especially keen to hear from Australian and Middle Eastern businesses with existing links to the region, or those seeking to break into the Middle Eastern or Australian markets.

“The sub-committee wants to find out from business what are the barriers and impediments to future trade and investment with Middle Eastern countries,” Mr Scott said.

They also want to hear about areas of potential growth, such as the market for higher quality food in the region because of the growth in the wealth of the middle class.

Deakin University has already made a submission to the inquiry suggesting that establishing more centres at Australian universities which specialise in Middle East studies would fuel education exchange with the region. ■

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Land corridors vital for future growth



Concerns have been raised over whether enough is being done to protect land corridors needed for future infrastructure projects such as high speed rail.

The House of Representatives Infrastructure and Communications Committee is examining how infrastructure planning and procurement can be improved to meet the demands of a growing population, particularly in large cities.

In its submission to the inquiry, the Australasian Railway Association said a number of transport corridors, including land needed for east coast high speed rail, are not sufficiently protected.

It cited examples in states such as Queensland, where corridors are being designated for future rail lines which will provide access to key mining regions.

“All projects are designed to protect the land that is needed to deliver future infrastructure projects,” the submission said.

According to the association, Australia’s rail network is the sixth largest in the world, with 45,000 km of track.

Late last year the opposition introduced a private member’s bill to federal parliament which would preserve a corridor for the future construction of a high-speed rail link between Brisbane and Melbourne.

At the time Minister for Transport Warren Truss said he planned to consult with various states over how to move forward with the preservation of land.

The association has also called for a greater focus on improving the capacity of passenger rail networks in cities to combat urban congestion and pollution.

It said a recent report into public transport showed that in Brisbane and in Perth rail requires 57 per cent and 38 per cent less investment funds than road to achieve the same reduction in congestion.

“If no action is taken to invest in public transport, by 2031 the annual cost of congestion is expected to reach \$5.5 billion per annum in Brisbane (currently \$2 billion) and \$3.8 billion per annum in Perth (currently \$1.4 billion),” it said.

“Most important, congestion will retard productivity, which is fundamental to the economic health of not only our cities but also the nation.” ■

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