



Boddington residents want to keep the small-town country feel.

LAURA PHILLIPS

Australia's biggest gold mine is within months of opening and the small rural community of Boddington is trying to come to terms with an impending population boom.

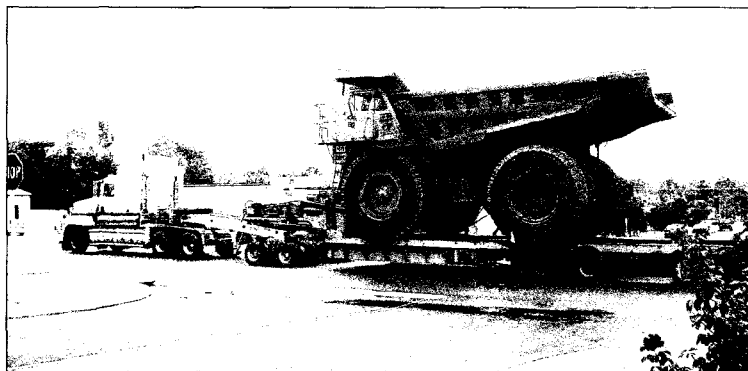
In 2006, when it was announced that the defunct Boddington mine would be reopened, the town's population was in decline. There are now 1500 people in the town and this is expected to double in the next four years.

Shire of Boddington chief executive Gary Sherry said that in the long term, the mine would have a permanent workforce of 650 and about half those people would live in the town.

"The mine has a very strong 'employ local' policy which will ensure that," he said. "Then there will also be a spin-off in the associated industries."

Production at the \$2.4 billion Boddington Gold Mine is scheduled to begin late this year or early next. Built on the footprint of the original Boddington Gold Mine, the operation is expected to deliver 850,000 ounces of gold and 30,000 tonnes of copper a year via open-cut mining from two pits.

The owners estimated that during construction, the mine would contribute \$39 million a year to the Peel economy and \$410 million a year to the WA economy and predicted that during operation, it would produce an



Mining equipment is taken through the town.

estimated \$550 million a year for the Peel economy and \$770 million a year for WA.

"The great thing is it's all long-term jobs," Mr Sherry said. "The gold mine has an estimated reserve of 17-plus years and they expect that to increase as they go through their exploration projects."

He said with Worsley Alumina also expanding, pressure on housing and infrastructure would only increase. Two residential subdivisions had just been completed and another two had planning approval.

"We're about to consider a development that will have about an additional 1000 residential lots next to town," he said.

Six industrial lots worth \$1.2 million are also being developed to meet demand from small businesses. Almost as soon as the gold mine had been announced, the price of real estate in

Boddington went through the roof, Mr Sherry said.

"The minimum house price in Boddington at the moment is about \$300,000, and that is for a very basic house. It's not uncommon for a four-by-two brick and tile house to be about \$500,000-plus," he said.

Rents began at \$300 or \$400 a week and for a big, modern house, Mr Sherry said owners could "just about write their own ticket".

He said there were several community projects in the pipeline, including a new medical centre, day-care centre and administration centre.

"We have a number of rural residential subdivisions secured, to give people lifestyle choices. We don't want to give up all of our small-town country feel as we grow. We're still in lots of ways a small rural shire with a forest environment."

Region a

The Peel region is the third biggest producer of minerals in WA after the Pilbara and Goldfields-Esperance areas.

Peel Development Commission chairman John Cowdell said the biggest bauxite mine in the world was at Pinjarra and last year the shires of Boddington, Murrumbidgee and Waroona had contributed to a total output of alumina from the region valued at \$4.7 billion.

What would be one of the biggest open-cut gold mines in the southern hemisphere was being developed at Boddington.

Peel was also the fastest growing regional economy in the State.

"WA's smallest region is playing a very big part in the future of the State," he said.

The Peel-Yalgorup estuarine system is internationally recognised as wetlands that are an important habitat for migratory birds.

He said the Peel region was different from WA's other coastal regions because of its combination of a diverse economy, including strong mining and agriculture bases and its forest rivers and wetlands.

The commission's chief executive Maree De Lacey said that the region's unique advantages, including its proximity to the capital, good infrastructure, great people, a strong economy and the world-class Peel waterways.

"This also gives us unique challenges, including sea level rise

