

Driverless cars get \$10m but SA rules out power station subsidy



South Australian Energy Minister Tom Koutsantonis.

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After rejecting an offer to keep the state's only coal-fired baseload power station operating because it would have cost tens of millions of dollars in subsidies, the South Australian government is offering \$10 million in grants for companies to develop driverless car technology. The move, which comes less than a fortnight since a statewide blackout, has raised questions about the state Labor government's priorities.

Yesterday, just hours after Transport Minister Stephen Mullighan announced the \$10m grants scheme for the driverless car industry, Treasurer and Energy Minister Tom Koutsantonis warned that the state faced the potential of more blackouts because of its energy mix of more than 40 per cent renewables. "The problem we have is that when wind comes on, it pushes gas generation out ... it's clean energy and reliable, but it can't be dispatched all the time," he said.

As revealed by The Weekend Australian, legal options are being pursued by Premier Jay Weatherill to challenge a ruling by the Ombudsman that his government must release a detailed submission by Alinta Energy to keep the Northern Power Station at Port Augusta operating. The power station closed in May, resulting in electricity price rises of almost 75 per cent. Mr Koutsantonis yesterday maintained the government would not comply with the Ombudsman's ruling to release the document in the public interest. "If I stepped in and paid a coal-fired generator to operate, the very next day I'd have another phone call from every other gas-fired generator in the state saying, 'If you want us to operate you've got to pay us as well'," he said.