



The Hon Michael McCormack MP

Deputy Prime Minister
Minister for Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Development
Leader of The Nationals
Federal Member for Riverina

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29 OCT 2020

Mayor David O'Loughlin
President
Australian Local Government Association
8 Geils Court
DEAKIN ACT 2600

David
Dear Mayor

Thank you for your letter of 21 August 2020 detailing motions from Australian councils which relate to my portfolio. I note you have also written to the Minister for Regional Health, Regional Communications and Local Government, the Hon Mark Coulton MP, about motions related to his portfolio. Please note Minister Coulton will respond separately.

The National General Assembly of Local Government is an important event, bringing together key stakeholders to share ideas and experiences to improve the productivity of the local government sector. It is unfortunate that this year's National General Assembly had to be cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, I welcome the opportunity to respond to the motions submitted by councils.

I appreciate the time you have taken to bring these matters to my attention and I am pleased to provide you with the enclosed responses to the motions relevant to my portfolio.

Thank you again for taking the time to write to me on this matter.

Yours sincerely

Michael McCormack

Michael McCormack

Responses to the National General Assembly of Local Government Motions

Motion 25, 36 and 44

That Councils call upon

- 1. The Federal Government to recognise an increased uptake in walking/hiking in natural areas nationally would result in financial benefits and improved health and wellbeing for Australians as well as enabling greater economic growth, productivity, social and environmental benefits.*
- 2. The Federal Government in consultation with State, Territory and Local Government authorities, to allocate funding for a fifth round of the Building Better Regions Funding (BBRF) (or alternate funding source) to a national infrastructure project to link up the gaps in existing walking paths/trails in both cities and the regions.*

Response

The Australian Government acknowledges the value of providing funding for walking/hiking trails in natural areas and has provided funding for this purpose including:

- \$10 million under the Regional Growth Fund for the Construction of the Rivers and Ridges Yarra Ranges Trails in Victoria;
- \$3 million for the completion of the Three Capes Track in Tasmania under the Community Development Grants Programme; and
- \$1.45 million to complete the Brisbane Valley Rail Trail in Queensland under the Building Better Regions Fund (BBRF).

The Government is providing an additional \$200 million for round five of the BBRF, including \$100 million for tourism related infrastructure projects, and a further \$22.7 million for another round of the Stronger Communities Programme. These programs provide funding for a range of locally-driven projects that aim to strengthen our regions, their economies and the vibrant communities which characterised them.

The BBRF may be an appropriate program for the Australian Local Government Association members to consider when seeking funding for the projects to better connect existing walking paths/trails across regional Australia. It is a highly competitive grant program, with the volume and value of grant applications regularly exceeding available funding within all BBRG grant rounds. To date, across the Four Rounds of the BBRF, 20 projects have been funded to construct or enhance bike/walking recreational trails to a combined total of just over \$13 million.

Motion 28

That Councils commend the Federal Government for Blackspot and Road to Recovery Programs and urge that those valuable programs to be continued.

Response

The Roads to Recovery program forms a key partnership between the Australian Government and local government in delivering the vital infrastructure required to grow and strengthen our economy. The Australian Government demonstrated its ongoing commitment to this important partnership by removing the sunset clause for the Roads to Recovery program in the *National Land Transport Act 2014*, meaning no new legislation will be required for the continuation of the program.

As part of the Local and State Government Road Safety Package, the Australian Government has committed an additional \$100 million per year to the Roads to Recovery program from 2019-20, bringing the total commitment to the program from 2013-14 to 2023-24 to \$6.2 billion, and an ongoing commitment of \$500 million for each year following.

Road crashes are a major cost to Australians every year. Black Spot projects target those road locations where crashes are occurring. The Black Spot Program reduces the risk of crashes by funding measures such as traffic signals and roundabouts at dangerous locations.

The Australian Government is investing an additional \$50 million a year to the Black Spot Program from 2019–20 through the Local and State Government Road Safety Package, bringing the total funding to \$1.1 billion from 2013-2014 to 2023-24, with an ongoing commitment of \$110 million for each year following.

Motion 53

To assist in tackling rising emissions from transport, Councils call on the Federal Government to reverse this rise in the transport sector through:

- a. Promotion and support for a shift to electric cars, buses and trucks, and rail electrification, powered by renewable energy; solar, wind, hydrogen;*
- b. Adoption of electric vehicle targets & further expanding charging facilities;*
- c. Mandatory greenhouse gas emission (GGE) standards for cars and other vehicles;*
- d. Promotion and support for active transport – walking and cycling.*

Response

The Australian Government's goal is to encourage cleaner, more affordable cars that use less fuel, as this means cheaper bills for families and is better for our health and the environment. New vehicle technologies will help, while also offering greater choice and safety for Australian motorists. However, uptake must be driven by consumer demand, rather than regulation that will restrict consumer choice.

The Government will not introduce a mandatory fuel efficiency standard that could increase the upfront cost of new vehicles for Australians. The Government wants a sensible approach that places fuel savings for the community front and centre, but ensures the vehicles that Australians value remain in the market. Vehicle manufacturers, through the Federal Chamber of Automotive Industries, have also recently introduced a voluntary fuel efficiency standard for its members, which account for 99 per cent of light vehicle sales in Australia, from 2020.

On 25 February 2019, the Government announced it would develop a national strategy to plan and manage the transition to new vehicle technologies and infrastructure. This strategy is part of the Government's Climate Solutions Package, a \$3.5 billion investment to deliver on Australia's 2030 emission reduction targets. This strategy will build on existing Government support for new vehicle technologies, which includes:

- \$74.5 million for the Future Fuels Package to help businesses incorporate vehicles that use electricity, hydrogen or biofuels into their fleets;
- \$24.9 million for a Freight Energy Productivity Program that aims to increase the use of new truck technology to improve fuel efficiency and increase productivity in the road freight sector;

- \$21 million of funding for charging infrastructure from the Australian Renewable Energy Agency to roll out ultra-fast charging sites through two networks along Australia's national highways;
- Up to \$1.1 billion in finance available from the Clean Energy Finance Corporation to assist uptake of low and zero emissions vehicles; and
- \$25 million for the Future Battery Industries Cooperative Research Centre.

Motion 69

Councils call on the Federal Government to provide sustainable funding that will allow Councils to strategically plan for the maintenance, to all-weather standard local roads, that form essential 'first and last mile' links in modern logistics chains for agriculture and other time-sensitive goods. Further, that such funding be based on the productivity benefits of improved logistics together with an assessment of the benefits of a shift to rail, in particular to the Inland Rail project.

Response

The 2020-21 Budget confirms the Australian Government's steadfast commitment to supporting and working with the local government sector, delivering a record investment in and via the sector.

Councils will receive a further \$1.24 billion in untied funding this year via the Financial Assistance Grant program, on top of the \$1.32 billion pre-payment paid in May 2020. This funding is untied in the hands of local governments, which means it could be allocated to council's local priorities.

Funding is also available to state/territories and local governments through the Government's Bridges Renewal Program (BRP). The Program provides funding for the upgrade and replacement of bridges that will enhance access for local communities or higher productivity vehicles. The Government is providing \$676 million in funding to the BRP from 2015-16 to 2023-24, with an ongoing commitment of over \$550 million from 2024-25 to 2029-30.

Conversely, the Heavy Vehicle Safety and Productivity Program (HVSPP) is an Australian Government initiative to fund infrastructure projects that improve the productivity and safety outcomes of heavy vehicle operations across Australia. The Government is providing \$538 million from 2013-14 to 2023-24, with an ongoing commitment of over \$400 million from 2024-25 to 2029-30. While no date has been set for the opening of either BRP Round Six or HVSPP Round Eight, interested parties are encouraged to monitor the Department's Website at www.investment.infrastructure.gov.au.

Motion 82

That further funding be allocated to rural and remote Councils to address upgrade of aerodrome facilities to support linkages between larger international ports and rural and remote areas.

Response

Through the Remote Airstrip Upgrade Program, the Australian Government has provided \$62 million for almost 300 projects since 2013 to enhance the safety and accessibility of airstrips in remote areas of Australia. Applications for round eight of the program are open until 12 November 2020, with local governments in this round able to apply for 100 per cent of their eligible project costs for small projects of \$150,000 or less.

The \$100 million Regional Airports Program also supports airport infrastructure upgrades to improve safety and access in regional Australia. In June 2020, the Government announced 61 projects at a cost of \$41.2 million as part of round one of the program. A second funding round is anticipated later in 2020.

Motion 89

Councils call on the Federal Government to expand and increase the funding of the Roads of Strategic Importance initiative (ROSI) by focusing on rural regions hit by the 2019/2020 bushfires and floods. This funding will enable fire and flood ravaged communities to upgrade freight and road corridors to fund bridge and culvert upgrades, road sealing, strengthening and widening, creating a more reliable and safer road network and facilitate tourism opportunities which will assist the economic recovery of fire and flood ravaged rural communities. This will assist Council's work with isolated communities. East Gippsland Shire Council nominates the Princes Highway as roads of strategic importance that require that should be the focus of this funding.

Response

Through the 10 year \$100 billion transport infrastructure pipeline, the Australian Government is already investing in road upgrades in regional Australia, including the Gippsland region. A focus of the program in the Gippsland region is upgrades to the Princes Highway, including the duplication of the highway between Traralgon to Sale and upgrades from Sale to the New South Wales border.

On 6 July, the Government announced further funding for road infrastructure projects in Victoria, including an additional \$70.6 million to complete the duplication of the Princes Highway between Traralgon and Sale.

Motion 115

Councils call on the Federal and State Governments for increased funding to plan for and ease congestion in and across growth areas.

Response

The Australian Government has funded the Urban Congestion Fund (UCF), a \$4.8 billion program to address pinch points and congestion in our major cities and suburbs.

The UCF projects will help commuters get home sooner and safer by:

- reducing travel times
- reducing vehicle operating costs
- delivering a more reliable road network for commuters and freight
- encouraging greater use of public transport through upgrading commuter car parks
- addressing local bottlenecks.

We are working to ensure that state governments and local councils carry out the planning and delivery as quickly as possible.

Motion 116

Councils call on the Federal Government to seek action to remove redundant aerial service authority cables in road reserves to improve visual impact.

Response

The Australian Government acknowledges community concerns about the visual impact of redundant aerial service authority cables in road reserves. However, infrastructure relating to aerial service authority cables is a matter for state and territory governments.

Further information on the management and maintenance of this infrastructure are best directed to state governments.

Motion 124

Councils call on the Australian Government

- *Commit to the creation of a Federal public transport funding stream for the states.*
- *Invest in research to build technologies in the area of low and zero carbon public transport infrastructure for Australian cities and towns.*
- *Commit to Australian built public transport rolling stock and associated infrastructure.*
- *Jointly fund rail infrastructure and bus acquisition programs with the states.*

Response

The Australian Government provides a range of targeted initiatives and incentives to support public infrastructure throughout Australia. Local governments may wish to use contributions from the untied funding provided under the Financial Assistance Grant program to commit to these priorities. Further, local councils can also consider grant funding opportunities from the Infrastructure and Regional Development portfolio.

Motion 145

Councils call on the Australian Government to increase the opportunities and levels of funding provided to local government for the delivery and management of transport infrastructure to local communities.

Response

In addition to existing infrastructure investment through the 10 year, \$100 billion infrastructure investment program, the 2020-21 Federal Budget measures includes direct support for local government. The 2020-21 Budget confirms the Australian Government's steadfast commitment to supporting and working with the local government sector, delivering a record investment in and via the sector.

Councils will receive a further \$1.24 billion in untied funding this year via the Financial Assistance Grant program, on top of the \$1.32 billion pre-payment paid in May 2020. This funding is untied in the hands of local governments, which means it could be allocated to council's local priorities.

The additional \$1 billion for the Local Roads and Community Infrastructure Programme, on top of the \$500 million committed in May this year can be spent on locally determined priorities, which may, at the discretion of the individual council, be allocated to the maintenance of local infrastructure.

As part of the Local and State Government Road Safety Package, the Australian Government has committed an additional \$100 million per year to the Road to Recovery program from 2019-20, bringing the total commitment to the program from 2013-14 to 2023-24 to \$6.2 billion.

Motion 153

Councils call on the Australian Government to review the current responsibility for managing Australian national rail corridors including, but not limited to, undertaking a review of the Australian Rail Track Corporation (ARTC) Charter with a view to mitigate the risks to public safety (including fire and flood).

Response

The Australian Government is invested in ensuring effective management of the Australian system of rail corridors including ensuring safe operations and practices. The management of public safety, including risk of fire and flooding, in relation to the rail network is a whole-of-government responsibility. The Australian Government continually works with governments, rail track operators and other stakeholders to ensure legislation and operations support compliance with relevant safety standards.

The Government is committed to regular review and consideration of legislation and standards which support the safe operation of Australia's rail network. The Government will continue to work closely with stakeholders with a focus on public safety.