

2020 NSW Local Roads Conference

Connecting the Dots: Providing Safe and Reliable Road and Transport Infrastructure to the Community

Conference Communiqué

The NSW Roads and Transport Directorate, a partnership between Local Government NSW (LGNSW) and the NSW Division of the Institute of Public Works Engineering Australasia (IPWEA NSW), in holding the 2020 Local Roads Conference, resolved to announce the following communiqué.

The Conference recognises the critical role of local government as a provider of local and regional transport infrastructure in partnership with the state and federal governments.

Local Government is facing unprecedented challenges. While already struggling to keep up with an increasing infrastructure maintenance backlog it is now dealing with the aftermath of bushfires, an ongoing drought and COVID-19.

Local Government is key to driving locally led economic recovery through the delivery of a wide range of road and infrastructure projects via a mix of new funding and accelerated funding. The conference urges Governments to work with Local Government to build a new resilient future for NSW communities.

The Conference calls for continued action from all levels of Government to use the current challenges as an opportunity to deliver safe, efficient and resilient road and transport infrastructure to local communities across NSW now and into the future.

Saving lives on local government roads

Local government plays a significant role in supporting road safety at the community level, with responsibility for almost 90% of the NSW road network, including regional and local roads. Of the 350 lives lost on NSW roads each year, 175 lives are lost on local and regional roads.

The Conference calls for immediate and on-going action from all levels of Government to address the unacceptable level of fatalities, serious injuries and road related trauma on the local road network. The Conference supports the initiative of Transport for NSW and IPWEA NSW to implement a network based safe systems approach to improving road safety across the local road network.

The NSW and Australian Governments are urged to accelerate delivery of Black Spot Programs, Saving Lives on Country Roads, Fixing Local Roads and Fixing Local Bridges programs to allow implementation of a safe systems approach across local roads to drive road trauma downward. Acceleration of this funding will also help Local Government drive locally led economic recovery across NSW and provide for a more resilience future for NSW communities.

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The development of Safe Systems based approaches provides Councils with the opportunity to integrate road safety into the Local Government Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework as part of their suite of strategic planning tools. The Conference urges all Councils to take advantage of the subsidised training in the preparation of voluntary road safety strategic plans provided by IPWEA NSW in partnership with Transport for NSW, and actively utilise this training in managing their local road networks.

The Conference acknowledges that further capacity building in road safety and traffic engineering is required within Local Government and the skills shortage must be addressed. This should include road safety audits for the design of new transport infrastructure, including within new subdivision developments by the private sector. The Conference urges all Councils to take advantage of the continued training provided to conduct road safety audits by IPWEA NSW.

The on-going Road Safety Officer Program is supported and plays a critical role in educating local communities to reduce road related trauma.

Local Government is urged to include high level road safety actions within the adopted Council Delivery Program and Operational Plans and measure performance against those objectives.

However, if councils are to play a greater role in reducing the road toll, greater funding and resourcing will be necessary to achieve this. Clarification of legal roles and responsibilities for Councils as Road Authorities should be undertaken in the context of existing legislation and equitable and sustainable funding model.

The conference recognises that driver distraction and speeding remain significant contributing factors in road crashes. The conference supports the current enforcement to prevent the use of mobile phones while driving and can see the potential value that average speed point-to-point speed cameras offer for all road users, not just for heavy vehicle speed enforcement.

NSW Road Classification Review

The Conference appreciates the update on the progress on the road reclassification review and the transfer of up to 15,000 kilometres of regional roads to the State.

However, following recent media reports highlighting potential funding, LGNSW and IPWEA NSW call on the NSW Government to formally allocate the funding for this transfer in the upcoming budget and provide clear timeline for the transfer. This is an important election commitment and one we warmly welcomed as it will reduce the financial burden on councils and will allow them to redirect additional resources into maintaining the local road network.

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Combining the transfer of regional roads with the Classification Review will ensure equity and transparency in all changes and support the development of an integrated road transport network.

An Independent Panel has been established to make recommendations for consideration by the NSW Government and will commence consultation with local government, LGNSW and IPWEA NSW.

The Conference calls for further extensive engagement with LGNSW, Councils and IPWEA NSW to review the regional roads discussions papers and develop a way forward for both the reclassification of roads and the transfer of up to 15,000km of regional roads to the State.

The Conference urges the NSW Government to ensure that:

- the outcome of the Review will present the best possible outcome for the NSW community.
- the regional roads transferred to the State are maintained and improved through the allocation of an increase level of funding.
- Councils are able to retain the work on roads transferred to the State through Road Maintenance Council Contracts (RMCC) style contract.
- Transport for NSW provides adequate funding to IPWEA NSW to provide the training required to build capacity of the Local Government sector in RMCC contract delivery.
- any change in arrangements do not adversely impact other grants provided to Councils for local and any retained regional roads (eg FAGS grants, regional road grants or other funding programs), or impact the delivery of work under existing RMCCs on the existing state network.
- all individual proposals are the subject of consultation with each council involved and their agreement prior to any changes being made.

The Conference also seeks assurances that any roads not transferred to the State, will remain funded through the Regional Road Block Grant program and that current funding levels are maintained or increased.

Funding levels to maintain local government road assets

The Directorate started in 2006 to investigate the funding gap to satisfactorily maintain the local government road and bridge network in a satisfactory condition. The road asset benchmarking reports have been instrumental to assist NSW Councils to secure in excess of \$500M for Fixing Local Roads and \$500M for Fixing Country Bridges.

The evidence collected by the Benchmarking project suggests that investment in asset management capacity and attention to asset management planning and reporting has improved

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the sustainability of most NSW local councils. Road and bridge funding levels have increased. However, the current funding arrangements are inadequate to deliver safe, efficient and resilient road and bridge infrastructure to the community on an on-going basis into the future and are not sufficient to boost heavy vehicle access and thus economic productivity.

The 2019 Benchmarking reports have identified the need for ongoing focus on and funding for asset management capacity building, through formal training and opportunities for graduate rotation programs and cadetships.

The increasing severity of natural disasters and condition of the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA) require a higher level of asset management reporting on road condition and function. Councils will need additional engineering expertise and financial support to achieve this.

The Conference acknowledges the investment of an additional \$500M by the Australian Government through the Local Roads and Community Infrastructure Program and urges Councils to:

- focus this funding on addressing the fundamental local road transport needs as part of the locally led economic recovery.
- ensure the expenditure of these funds within the 2020-21 financial year to re-affirm the agility of Local Government as a direct partner with the Australian Government.

The Conference also acknowledge the \$1.2B investment by the Australian Government to spend on local infrastructure priorities, drought and bushfire relief.

The Conference urges the NSW Government to accelerate the roll-out of the \$500M Local Roads Program and the \$500M Local Bridges Program.

The Conference also urges the NSW Government to bring forward the announcement of grants for the 2021-22 to not later than 31 December 2020 to enable Councils to plan for the delivery of the works within that financial year.

Disaster recovery

The long-term drought, widespread flooding and devastating bushfire season require a re-evaluation of our current practices to make our organisations and the road and transport assets more resilient to natural disasters. This will assist in a shorter period required to reopen roads after a natural disaster and to keep roads open to make sure emergency services can reach the community.

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Damaged highways and local transport links will need to rebuild so that they are more resilient to natural disasters. Improved resilience of the road network will improve access for first responders while ensuring residents can evacuate with the assurance that the road network will be safe and effective at times of crisis.

Local government has responded to the NSW Independent Bushfire Inquiry and Commonwealth Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements and has suggested changes to the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA) disaster funding arrangements.

The Roads and Transport Directorate will work with Councils to capture lessons learned from the current recovery efforts and suggest improvements in current work processes to the NSW Independent Bushfire Inquiry and Commonwealth Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements.

There are potential synergies between improving road safety on local and regional roads and improving resilience to natural disasters.

The Conference also note the high cost of NSW Government emergency services arrangement to Local Government and the adverse impact this is having on Council's ability to provide core Local Government services to NSW communities.

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To further the outcomes of this Conference, the Conference calls on governments to take the following measures:

NSW Local Government

The Conference calls on Councils in NSW to:

Progress the Conference Communiqué by writing to the relevant Ministers and their local NSW and Australian Government MPs seeking their support for the Conference outcomes.

Continue to improve asset management performance by:

- using the findings of the report to advise Council and local communities on the funding, performance and conditions of local assets.
- continuing to work with the Office of Local Government and the NSW Auditor General to improve the transparency and consistency of infrastructure measures within the Integrated Planning and Reporting framework.
- incorporation of Safe Systems approaches within each Council's strategic transport and infrastructure plans (aligned with the National Road Safety Strategy 2011-20, the NSW Road Safety Plan 2021 and the IPWEA NSW Guidelines for Road Safety Plans 2019).
- building capacity within the Local Government industry by supporting ongoing training and knowledge sharing.
- supporting the employment of better techniques and the importation of proven technology to better meet our community's needs through improved engineering and construction methods.
- developing robust workforce strategies to ensure the skills and capacity exist to plan, deliver and maintain local roads now and in the future, including cadet and apprenticeship programs at a professional and operational level.
- using the findings of the benchmarking report to advise Council and local communities on the local funding, performance and conditions compared to the State and Regional averages.

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NSW Government

The Conference calls on the NSW Government to:

Develop a sustainable funding model for Local Government in NSW

This will include implementation of a system to:

- work with the Australian Government to fully fund the \$3 billion annual Road Safety Fund recommended by the Inquiry into the National Road Safety Strategy. A fund of this size could help resource councils to contribute to other aspects of the Safe Systems approach beyond the Safer Roads component.
- review existing funding programs to give consideration of improving community resilience
- optimise application processes for project funding to reduce the administration burden on local government.
- support cadetships and graduate rotation programs for civil engineering across all government projects, in order to ensure the long-term workforce capabilities, especially in rural and regional areas.
- increase the existing Regional Road Block Grant allocations to reflect increases in the construction cost index which is well above CPI.
- support Councils with funding and resourcing to help equip them to address the road safety challenge on local roads.
- support Local Government in the development of skills and ability to undertake contract road services for TfNSW under Road Maintenance Council Contract arrangements.
- consult with Local Government to identify and fund regional freight routes.
- improve systems for the sharing of data in a timely way regarding crashes and road closures.
- remove the requirement for Local Government to contribute funding to emergency services.
- move the ownership of all emergency services infrastructure to the NSW Government.
- further review emergency services arrangements in NSW in consultation with LGNSW, Councils and IPWEA NSW.
- further review the natural disaster relief funding arrangements to Local Government in NSW.

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Australian Government

The Conference calls on the Australian Government to:

Find equitable and sustainable ways to maintain and increase current funding for infrastructure investment and long-term asset maintenance.

This will improve the current system by:

- reviewing the formula for the distribution of identified roads grants, and end cost-shifting by state governments.
- increasing funding for the replacement or restoration of damaged assets to a more resilient standard following a natural event.
- review existing funding programs for transport to give consideration to improve resilience to natural disasters and adaptation to climate change.
- developing policies to respond to and benefit from new technologies, for instance to manage the impact of the introduction of alternate powered vehicles and to maximise the safety benefits of driving aids currently available in vehicles to save lives on our roads.

Australian Local Government Association

The NSW Conference seeks the support of ALGA to deliver the NSW Roads Conference outcomes.

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