

2017 Local Roads and Transport Congress Communiqué

Over 200 delegates from councils across Australia met in Albany, Western Australia on 7 -8 November 2017 at the eighteenth National Local Roads and Transport Congress.

The Congress focused on transport challenges and opportunities of today and tomorrow including the expected growth in freight transport, urban congestion, the adoption of new technologies, further efforts in road safety and the need for significant transport funding reform.

Delegates called on states, territories and the Commonwealth to recognize that local government is responsible for more than 73 percent of Australia's road network estimated to be worth more than \$180 billion, and that local roads and bridges are critical to the mobility of all Australian communities. These roads provide access to property, homes, local business, schools, hospitals and provide essential links between local communities, regional and state roads and major national freight routes and must be fit for purpose, delivering an appropriate level of service, if they are to adequately support the social, economic and environmental outcomes of every community across Australia.

The Congress noted however, that local government collects just over 3.6 percent of national taxation and spends more than \$7 billion annually, or more than 20 percent in every dollar of local government revenue raised, on maintaining and renewing local roads and transport. Research shows that around 60 percent of local governments roads and transport assets are generally in good condition, but despite local government efforts, it is estimated that more than 11 percent of local road and transport assets are in poor to very poor condition. Without additional funding this situation will continue to deteriorate.

Delegates welcomed the Commonwealth Minister for Transport the Hon Darren Chester who acknowledged the important role that local government plays in managing local roads across the country. Minister Chester also stressed the importance of working together on improving the productive capacity of our nations freight transport, the importance of addressing urban transport challenges and improving safety on our roads. He also announced the opening of Round 2 of the Building Better Regions Fund.

The Congress noted Minister Chester's desire to redouble efforts to improve road safety outcomes, particularly on regional, rural and remote roads and his request that safety be given greater priority in road projects. The Congress shares the Minister's concerns about reducing the trauma of road crashes which have such a significant impact on local communities.

The Congress welcomed the Government's continued commitment to the Roads to Recovery Program which is set at around \$350 million per annum and is expected to

increase to \$400m in 2019–20. The Congress also applauded the Government's commitment to the Bridges Renewal Program and Road Safety Black Spots funding and called for the Black Spot funding to be doubled and made permanent. However, recognising the extent of the backlog in infrastructure spending, delegates urged the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) to advocate for an increase in R2R program funding to \$800 million per annum, indexed to maintain its real value.

The Congress welcomed a presentation on the Government's Inquiry to develop a National Freight and Supply Chain Strategy noting that the national freight task is expected to grow by 50 percent over the next two decades as our nation's population increases. Delegates also discussed the work on road user charging and noted the importance of ALGA work in the area.

The Congress noted the critical importance of improving the nation's road freight routes and the excellent work done by CSIRO and many regional groups of councils in the development of detailed Regional Transport Plans. The Congress urged the ALGA to continue to advocate for a Local Government Freight Strategy starting at \$200 million per annum over 5 years to invest in reducing bottlenecks and capacity constraints and other first and last-mile solutions that will improve heavy vehicle access on local roads.

Delegates welcome a presentation on intelligent transport infrastructure and its role in transforming mobility in the future. Delegates asked ALGA to more fully explore the implications of technology and intelligent transport on local governments and communities and supported council participation in national trials.

Delegates discussed the challenges facing regional airports and airstrips, many of which are owned by councils. The Congress acknowledges the importance of regional airports as essential infrastructure assets that help keep communities connected and facilitate the delivery of essential services and drive economic growth. The Congress supported continued work by ALGA with the Australian Airports Association on strategies to secure the future of important regional airports.

The Congress noted that the 2018–19 Federal Budget was an opportunity for the Government to focus on addressing some of the long term structural challenges facing local communities, particularly in managing community assets such as buildings, sport and recreation facilities, stormwater and waste water assets. Delegates expressed their support for continued ALGA advocacy for a Community Infrastructure program of \$300 million per annum.

Delegates expressed support for ALGA in its ongoing advocacy on behalf of the sector and welcomed the ALGA President's outline of the Association's Federal Budget Submission and priorities in the lead-up to the next Federal election.