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**NATIONAL LOCAL ROADS AND TRANSPORT CONGRESS
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Good morning ladies and gentlemen.

I would like to start by acknowledging the ALGA Board and the many Councillors who have travelled from their home towns around the country to attend this important forum. It's certainly been a big week for elections of presidents. Although it may not have generated quite as much public interest as events in the United States, the presidency of the Australian Local Government Association is similarly critical role. On behalf of the Australian Government I would like to congratulate Mayor David O'Laughlin on your appointment as President. I am confident you will do a terrific job – just like outgoing President Troy Pickard.

In my job as Minister for Infrastructure and Transport, and as the Member for the coastal electorate of Gippsland, this year's congress theme: Local Infrastructure, Developing Regions hits close to home. Nationally, local government has responsibility for approximately 670,000 km of local roads. In my own electorate three councils, East Gippsland, Wellington and Latrobe City, maintain a total of 6,555 kilometres of sealed and unsealed roads.

When I was growing up my father was a plumber in the South Gippsland city of Sale and he crisscrossed the region to service his customers. So, I know firsthand how important safe, well maintained local roads are in keeping communities connected not only to each other but also to the national network. Having said that - I would like to highlight my commitment to road safety – having safer drivers in safer cars on safer roads. A passion also shared by many of you here - including David Bobberman from Austroads.

In the twelve months to September this year, more than 1,200 people have died on our roads - and serious injuries also appear to be increasing. This is simply not acceptable. Last week I was in Perth and chaired a Forum of Road Safety Ministers with my State counterparts - to look closely at the current trends and find opportunities to collectively reduce deaths and serious injuries. The Council agreed that as a priority - further work must be carried out in the first half of 2017 to identify stronger actions and outcomes for the next National Road Safety Action Plan – which is due to commence in 2018.

Of particular note, the Council agreed on the critical need to address the disproportionate amount of road trauma that continues to unfold in regional and remote areas. In fact - two thirds of road deaths occur on regional and remote roads. And in Western Australia the highest concentration of road deaths is in the Wheatbelt. So during my visit to WA last week – I went there. I dropped into the local Kulin school – and the kids there are learning about the importance of keeping family and friends safe on the roads.

It's the discussion we all need to be having – and I welcome ALGA's contribution to important national discussions. At a local level, the Australian Government will continue to support Councils to provide safe and efficient transport networks. As they say...all journeys begin on a local road... And one of the most important programmes for local government and one that has delivered so much over the years is Roads to Recovery.

We acknowledge that for many Councils, the largest expenditures are around local roads and bridges. Roads to Recovery was introduced by the Coalition Government over a decade ago in recognition of the growing backlog in local road maintenance and the challenges facing local Councils. This programme is a valued partnership between our governments that continues to deliver at the local level. We listened to the concerns of ALGA and individual Councils, as well as transport industry members and individuals, regarding funding levels and the extension of the programme.

And I am pleased to say that we not only listened, we acted.

From 2014-15 to 2018-19 the Government will provide \$3.2 billion. As a result of our initial double funding for 2015-16 – we announced an additional \$1.1 billion. So this means Councils will receive the equivalent of more than four additional year's funding over this period. Even with this significant funding boost, the minimum amount of money Councils must spend from their own budgets in order to receive Roads to Recovery funding has not changed. We have amended the legislation so there is no longer a completion date. All that would be required to take it past our five-year extension to 2019 would be an appropriation by the Government of the day. Further to this – in the 2016 Budget – the Turnbull Joyce government announced another extension to the Roads to Recovery Programme - \$50 million each year from 2019-20 onwards. This brings the annual commitment to \$400 million.

We have also introduced the \$360 million Bridges Renewal Programme to assist Councils to repair and upgrade bridges. And of course we are continuing the Black Spot Programme which makes an important contribution to reducing the national road toll under the National Road Safety Strategy and Action Plan. The Black Spot Programme, targets crash-prone locations to reduce the risk of crashes by funding measures including traffic signals and roundabouts. We have committed \$500 million to the Black Spot Programme from 2014-15 to 2018-19. This includes an additional \$200 million over two years from 2015-16 to improve road safety across the nation. We also broadened the programme's eligibility criteria to assist local communities to compete for the additional funding. I am pleased to advise you that around 61 per cent of Black Spot funding in 2015-16 and 2016-17 has ultimately been approved for road safety projects in rural and remote areas. I also would like to reaffirm that the Turnbull Joyce Government extended the Programme and budgeted \$60 million per year from 2019-20 onwards.

Changing tack, I'd like to talk a little about the Government's investigation of road pricing as a long term reform option. Funding infrastructure at appropriate levels is always a challenge for governments. In December 2015, COAG agreed that governments would investigate the costs and benefits of extending direct user charging to all vehicles. The Government has been working closely with States and Territories through the Transport and Infrastructure Council over the course of 2016 to explore this issue. While the concept of road pricing is not new, we are in the early phases and there are many complex issues still to be worked through. What is clear though is that our current governance, taxation and institutional arrangements for the funding and provision of roads are not sustainable in the long term.

Greater transparency and efficiency in road funding and investment arrangements has the potential to deliver major benefits for road users and the community. It also has the potential to address fairness issues that arise with our current system. In regional areas, for example, Austroads has identified that an average \$1700 per capita is required for roads from funds specifically raised by local governments. This is compared to an average \$200 per capita raised by local governments in urban areas. For regional areas, this means there is less money to spend on other services. It will be essential that reforms ensure costs are fair on road users, including those in regional areas who are often required to travel significant distances to access jobs and services. Investigation of these issues is continuing and, along with state and territory governments, will require the ongoing input of ALGA.

I'd like to talk about the link between investing in local infrastructure and the opportunities that can be opened up for regional development. I have spoken many times about the Government's record \$50 billion infrastructure programme. To provide local examples - we are investing in major game changing projects like the Toowoomba Second Range Crossing and the Melbourne to Brisbane Inland Rail. I will be having more to say on the Second Range Crossing later today - with works getting underway. Both of these projects will deliver tremendous benefits to the city and surrounding communities.

And on that note, you will also have heard myself and other Ministers say that to really build for the future there is a need for private investment and innovation. An excellent example is the Brisbane West Wellcamp Airport - Australia's largest privately built airport - and the surrounding business park. There are weekly international flights due to begin later this month with Cathay Pacific flying freight direct to Hong Kong - carrying fresh produce including chilled beef. This is the first time that a 747 scheduled freighter service has run out of a regional centre. Local businesses and agricultural producers from Toowoomba, the Darling Downs, and Moree Plains regions will have better access than ever before to supply the restaurants and markets of Asia.

During the election campaign, the Coalition committed to including Brisbane West Wellcamp Airport into the aviation Regional Package - and I have written to the Queensland government to make this official today. Adding the airport to the regional package will provide for no restrictions on capacity entitlements allowing this local airport to grow in the future.

In closing, it would be remiss not to mention the Government's new \$200 million Regional Jobs and Investment Package to boost local economies and create jobs. The Regional Jobs and Investment Package is in addition to the new Building Better Regions Fund which will focus on infrastructure and community investments outside major capital cities.

Now I know you have had a productive couple of days, so while I have really only scratched the surface of the Government's initiatives - I would like to wish you well for the remainder of the Congress.

Thank you.