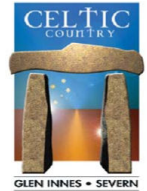




GLEN INNES SEVERN COUNCIL

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SUBMISSION TO INFRASTRUCTURE AUSTRALIA

AUSTRALIA'S FUTURE INFRASTRUCTURE REQUIREMENTS

This submission is made on behalf of the residents of the Glen Innes Severn Local Government Area.

Local Government Context

There are clearly a lot of issues facing Local Government Areas in rural areas. Such areas, have lower population densities, but are important hubs for the production of primary products. Under our democratic system, population density drives political representation, and the land, particularly where it is used for primary production, is not adequately represented. Hence, urban areas are able to attract a high political focus, greater in proportion than their geographic size.

In areas, such as our local government area, due to limited population size and a combination of long standing rate pegging, revenue sources are inadequate to maintain basic infrastructure.

Roads and bridges, community and communications infrastructure are all needed to support our primary production base, and to make it possible to attract and retain people in rural areas.

Amalgamation of local government in rural areas is not necessarily the answer, because for most areas, combining similar sized councils together does not improve the community of interest, or add to appropriate economies of scale due to the distances involved.

The ultimate answer is in having equitable funding systems that recognise the true needs of rural communities. Local Government provides important infrastructure that supports local communities, and is at the beginning or end of national transport routes. Hence, the whole system works in an integrated fashion, as inadequate infrastructure at the local community end impacts the whole transport system.

The **Financial Assistance Grants** are a case in point. After the formulas are run for particular areas, based on a needs basis, the funding required for individual Local Government Areas is determined. Next, this is reduced, based on the actual total amount of money available to distribute. For our own Local Government Area, we end up with a funding shortfall through the FAG's grant process of around \$2 million. The addition of this funding shortfall would make a considerable difference in supporting local infrastructure.

We also have the Roads to Recovery Funding, as a direct contribution by the Federal Government to the maintenance of road infrastructure. For our LGA, this equates to about \$550,000 per year. Under current funding arrangements, we are seeing our road and bridge network rapidly deteriorating. Supplementation of **Roads to Recovery** funding would make a big difference to LGA's such as our selves.

The Australian Local Government Association has also been promoting the concept of Federal funding of a **community infrastructure fund**. This is highly applauded as a fund to support infrastructure, other than road, such as buildings and public amenities, so necessary for rural communities.

Local Government in rural areas is therefore in a strong position to improve on local infrastructure through increased funding. Whilst, individual projects may not be high profile items, collectively, the improvement to local infrastructure will have enormous benefits to the local economies. With out this infrastructure, the national economy will be impacted.

National Roads

The case has been put for increased funding of our local road network. In addition, the highway network that our community feeds onto is vital. To this end, increased funding for the maintenance of the New England Highway is essential. The New England Highway forms a local transport and through transport corridor linking Sydney with Brisbane and other regional centres. The New England Highway is also an alternative route to the Pacific and Newel Highways.

Particular support is given to the upgrade of the New England Highway. The priority areas of the Bolivia Range and the bypass of Tenterfield, whilst not in our local government area, is highly supported.

The Gwydir Highway forms an important east west link between the coast and inland areas via Glen Innes. We are seeing increased heavy transport usage of this highway. The section between Glen Innes and Grafton has no overtaking lanes, and the 20km climbing section on the Gibraltar Range is dangerous without passing bays.

Rail

The importance of appropriate rail corridors is becoming more important given the global finite supply of fuel, and climate change issues from green house gases. In addition, the heavy reliance on long distance truck transport has many community impacts, regarding impacts on roads and road safety.

The development of an **Inland North South Rail Corridor** is fully supported, as the above issues will only get worse. Particularly, a corridor that is truly focused on connecting Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane, with a link to the west.

The New England Local Government Group presented a response to the Federal Government following the North South Rail Corridor Study. That submission has raised a number of issues that have never been adequately commented on. It is so important that any new rail infrastructure be fully integrated, and have very clear objectives as to what it is trying to achieve. It is believed that despite the very detailed North South Rail Corridor Study Report, that the actual objectives have not been fully developed, nor did that report fully explore a connection to Brisbane.

In the meantime, the Australian Transport and Energy Corridor group are able to make ad hoc and opportunistic proposals, without the solution to link into Brisbane having been properly thought through, or the impacts on the NSW rail system.

The New England Local Government Submission is attached.

Communications

The inconsistency with communication in rural areas is still, despite all the promises of 3G networks, inadequate.

A fund needs to be set up to facilitate the provision of **towers** in rural areas, strategically placed to attract various telephone companies to provide a complete mobile phone network.

The networking for **high speed broadband** is essential in rural areas. Communications infrastructure, among other things is able to break down issues to do with isolation and support decentralisation. In Glen Innes, we have a number of significant private and government businesses able to be here because of broadband availability in town. This network has to be extended across rural areas.

Health

Health facilities in rural areas are critical. Glen Innes is on the junction of two important highways and has an increasing aging population. Glen Innes desperately needs a modern and efficient hospital to attract and maintain appropriate health services. Infrastructure funding is needed for this to occur.

In conclusion, I commend the Australian Government for undertaking this infrastructure review. Whilst, I am sure many of the submissions will raise similar issues, it highlights the importance of bread and butter issues to local communities, and in turn to the Australian economy.

Local Government is well placed to efficiently improve on our local infrastructure, and trust that Local Government will be recognised as being able to support Australia's infrastructure.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steve Toms". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Cr Steve Toms
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12 October 2008