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Organisation: Snowy River Shire Council

Contact person: Joseph Vescio

Postal address: P.O. Box 143 Berridale

State: NSW

Postcode: 2628

Country: Aust

Email address: joseph.vescio@snowyriver.nsw.gov.au

Telephone: 02 64511195

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Author(s): JV

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Issues Paper 1 — Australia's Future Infrastructure Requirements

Issues Paper 2 – Public Private Partnerships

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Water Infrastructure

Transport Infrastructure

Climate Change

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This submission has been prepared by Snowy River Shire Council.

Snowy River Shire is situated in the South East corner of New South Wales, 150 kilometres south of Canberra and approximately half way between Sydney and Melbourne. It is located on the Southern Tablelands with an area of 6059 square kilometres. Much of Snowy River Shire is subject to snow, ice and high winds during the winter months. Although average annual precipitation in the mountains is high, most of our Shire lies within the rain shadow of the ranges. Periodic drought is a feature of the area

According to a study by SGS Economics and Planning developed in October 2005, for the Snowy River Shire Council, there are several population groups within the shire. They include:

- Permanent residents (living in the shire all year round)
- Seasonal residents that own property in the shire and occupy it at weekends or during the winter or summer seasons
- Seasonal workers that come to work in the shire, mostly in the winter season
- Visitors (tourists) that stay in holiday accommodation or with friends/relatives. The peak visitation periods for this group is winter, Easter and Christmas/New Year

The study identified, when looking at these groups, that each of them requires provision for accommodation, generates employment and requires local government and other infrastructure and services.

With a permanent population in Snowy River shire at just under 8,000 and ageing snow scheme infrastructure in many places within the shire servicing such a diverse population there is constant pressure on Council to meet community needs.

Seasonality issues also require council to significantly increase spending on both infrastructure and services to cope with the increased demand caused in many cases by non rate paying residents. An example of additional infrastructure requirements due to seasonality is the Jindabyne Treatment Works. This facility was built to cope with a seasonal high population in excess of 10,000. However, the facility was effectively paid for by the ratepayers of a town with a permanent population of around 3,000.

A large proportion of Kosciuszko National Park lies within the boundary of Snowy River Shire. Included are the villages of Thredbo, Perisher and the Department of Environment and Climate Change housing at Waste Point. Each of these areas house both permanent and transient residents. According to the ABS Census 2006 there were 447 residents in Thredbo and 136 residents in Perisher identifying those locations as being their place of usual residence. The permanent and transient populations within the National Park make use of the shire's facilities and place demand on council's resources. A significant number of those who reside in these areas are also eligible to vote in Local Government elections and hence have some influence over the make up, priorities and direction of the council. However, council receives no rate

based income from dwellings and businesses within the Park area. This money instead is lost to the local community through economic leakage in the form of income to the State Government.

There are specific infrastructure issues that may be addressed through funding and would thereby be able to improve the quality of life of the community within the shire. The following are some of the many infrastructure challenges confronting the shire

Health

Social infrastructure such as health is vital for the physical and emotional wellbeing of community. There are some serious health infrastructure gaps within Snowy River Shire in comparison to its neighbours. This places pressure on the whole community.

- Limited general medical services
Snowy river shire has no hospital or Multi Purpose Service facilities despite having a population influx in winter of up to 20,000 people. There is therefore an over reliance on ambulance and helicopter retrieval services.

There is only part time outreach service provided by Cooma Community Health to the Snowy River Community. The lack of allied health services only perpetuates the difficulty in accessing and retaining other medical professionals in the area and increases pressure on existing local GPs and to some extent Cooma hospital. With a road travel time of approximately 45 minutes from Jindabyne and more than an hour from Thredbo to Cooma this also increases pressure on emergency services and Cooma's emergency department even in the summer months.

A recent Health One initiative which was proposed for Jindabyne appears to have been shelved with no alternative on the drawing board. Meanwhile neighbouring shires such as Bombala have both a hospital and a Multi Purpose Service (at Delegate) with a lower permanent population and no population influx and in fact it could be argued that the population is actually in decline. This strongly contrasts the situation that exists in Snowy River Shire.

While transport is discussed later in this paper there is a need to point out that the combination of health and transport infrastructure gaps means that residents on low incomes are pressured to use their own means of transport to access health care and with an increase in fuel costs and a tendency now to charge full fees at most GP services within the shire community members are further financially disadvantaged.

- Youth health
The current permanent population of Snowy River is close to 8,000 and with the collective school population in Jindabyne alone tipped to be around 800 by 2010 it is anticipated that there will be further increases in demand for allied youth health services. There are no youth specifically trained case workers, social workers or other allied (youth) trained professionals in the Snowy River shire area.

- **Mental Health**

While a mental health unit exists within Cooma Community Health it is intended for patients with a defined mental health disorder and is not intended as a preventative care measure. This is only achieved through the use of private psychologists in the region. While the community welcomes the recent initiative to charge up to 8 consultations to psychologists back to Medicare there are not the skilled practitioners in the region to cater to the potential demand for services. There are also no youth specific psychologists offering preventative care support and with two high schools in Jindabyne it is envisaged that demand for such services will increase.

The influx of seasonal workers and visitors to Snowy River brings with it increased reports to Health professionals of mental health conditions. The currently under resourced Mental Health team located in Cooma are under increased pressure during the winter months with incidence of psychotic episodes increasing due to drug consumption and the nature of some members of the seasonal winter population.

Water

The Snowy River community has made a significant contribution to the National wealth via the Snowy Mountains Scheme. Many long term residents were relocated. Properties that had to be sacrificed for the scheme now stand to make Snowy Hydro Ltd a substantial sum of money in the form of new developments. None of these profits are anticipated to flow back to the community which is also affected by Snowy River water flow reduction and loss in livelihood. While the community recognise that the diversion of flows was originally in the national interest the Snowy Hydro in its more modern corporatized structure is focused on commercial gains and not on community interests.

The Snowy Hydro administration is also located outside the shire reducing other potential economic benefits to the community. Snowy River Shire does not therefore believe the community has been adequately compensated for its losses. Accordingly, it is felt that to assist the rural community that a water reticulation plan should be developed across the plain thereby addressing some of the dislocation issues emanating from the Snowy Mountains Scheme.

Education

While the primary and secondary education infrastructure within Snowy River is now improving there are limited support services for post secondary students. There are no study centres or library facilities within the shire. This means that there are no facilities that can be used by the broader community for education and training purposes outside the existing part time TAFE outreach facilities currently located at the Jindabyne Sport and Rec campus. It is important for the community to be supported while they continue to study at a post secondary level and Snowy River Shire has a high number of skilled

professionally trained people who seek further education. A library facility and study centre would enable HSC students, external university students' and those undertaking studies for further professional development etc additional facilities to use for study purposes and to assist them to broaden their education.

There are also a growing number of older residents who are seeking to undertake leisure or non academic courses and the loss of the Monaro Community College has reduced opportunities for this group to access educational enrichment. A community library/study facility would enable older people to gain access to resources while also benefiting from socialisation with others in their age group.

The Illawarra TAFE Cooma campus is the closest option for many wishing to undertake any post secondary studies. While there is part time outreach offered at Jindabyne it is restricted in course options and does not include study areas such as Tertiary Preparation Certificate (TPC). This is an important option for some school leavers who find that studies in a conventional school environment post year 10 to be too restrictive or that it might not fit their needs. The TPC provides an opportunity to complete secondary education in a more flexible environment. Unfortunately the TPC is only available in Cooma in a limited form. There are no real elective options, no options in science for example and it does not lend itself to any degree of flexibility. Ideally a student should be able to enrol with NSW TAFE, be supported by Cooma campus and be given access to subject choices that can be delivered in a variety of ways including through video technology. A study centre located in Jindabyne could enable students learning options in a remote classroom that is delivered out of Ultimo campus or even from Cooma.

Education infrastructure provides the opportunity for economic and social capacity building. Plus it is a potentially viable 'export' industry. Further to the current needs there is an opportunity to build on education as a sector in the region and to create an industry. Talks have commenced with Universities in Canberra with the aim of encouraging outreach service delivery in the Snowy Mountains. With suitable technology and other supporting infrastructure a young person living in the Snowy Mountains would not need to travel on a regular basis to a campus at Canberra. Given the two hour travelling time each way to Canberra students do not have the option currently of living in the family home while they study. They are forced to relocate which in turn puts a significant financial burden on families who then need to support two households. As students are not eligible for Austudy (independent allowance) unless their earnings reach a level of around \$18,000 (or if they meet the age requirements) many rural teenagers do not meet the criteria and are also forced to relocate without a base income leaving families with few options. They either cannot study, need to defer or need to be supported until they are self sufficient which can be challenging given the average rural wage.

Renewable Energy

Aging infrastructure needs to be evaluated in the context of its ability to meet renewable energy targets. Some shire infrastructure could be retro fitted with suitable eco efficient systems in order to assist council in meeting those targets. Currently this is not possible due to financial constraints. Financial incentives or grants could enable council to meet these objectives.

There is also a need to become leaders in the community in relation to adopting sustainable approaches that can take the community into the future. A demonstration site doubling as a council building could be a useful educational tool assisting the community with gaining a better understanding of the importance and value of emerging green technologies.

The council has already been involved with assessing wind farms within the shire through its planning role and while this is an important initiative light commercial and domestic applications for green technologies need to be demonstrated and is an important tool in the community education process. Solar, geothermal and other new and emerging technologies could be trialled in the light commercial or domestic context with council leading the way.

Climate change will affect much of the tourism and agricultural industries in Snowy River Shire and for that reason assistance is needed in the area of research and innovation so the community may be able to look at diversification options before the situation becomes critical. Council does not have the funds to undertake such work but would welcome support from government to enable such work to be undertaken within the shire.

Transport

Access to transport for residents of the shire is largely restricted to private vehicle except for community transport eligible clients. This means that people can neither move freely between centres such as Jindabyne and Cooma nor to locations such as Canberra. This limits access to many areas and services. Transport disadvantaged people in the shire include young school leavers and older people. With a lack of local health services and also training options these groups remain the most isolated in the region. Apprentices and young job seekers for example must travel in order to meet their various obligations. This becomes a stressful experience and often places increased burdens on families who are unable to fund an extra car to enable a young person to move freely throughout the broader community. The absence of bus services except for winter periods means that there is no second option for many.

With the withdrawal of air services to the Snowy Mountains in the first half of 2008 there has been an increased burden on private vehicles in and out of the region. With fuel costs increasing and no other option for travellers there is a potential negative economic benefit to the broader community. With no current options for rail travel with no useable infrastructure in place air services provided real opportunity not only for travellers but also business commuters and other people wishing to get to Sydney and beyond. Until the cancellation of air services a visiting paediatric specialist who provided

additional support to families in need was able to fly into the region on a regular basis while still maintaining a Sydney practice. Local business people including some self employed consultants had chosen to live and work in the region on the basis of the positive lifestyle coupled with their access to easy transport back to Sydney. The demise of the air service has provided a disincentive for some business people to use the Snowy Mountains as a work location.

Incentives for new entrants into regional air service provision is important as it helps to stimulate the economy, provides more options for people and takes pressure off the road networks. Small councils do not have the funds or the political clout to lobby for a broad review of regional air services and the significance of those services in the rural context. Small airline companies are not sufficiently encouraged to continue to provide these important services and it will take a whole of government approach to assist in improving the future prospects of such services.

At a regional youth forum held in the region in April 2008 transport became a key issue for all young people present at the forum. While there was a recognition that transport cannot necessarily be 'on tap' for the community there was some suggestion that even a weekend service or a once a week service on a Saturday would allow young people to move around the community and help to reduce that sense of isolation many of the young people suggested that they experienced. Ideally regular public bus services available to the Snowy River community would allow for the flow of people around the community but any public bus service even on a weekly or monthly basis could provide some much needed support. .

One option for young people across the region could be to have a mobile youth bus that could travel to small towns on a regular basis and would provide a range of formal and informal activities that would enable young people to connect with one another and would reduce the issue of isolation. A youth worker could take the bus to a location identified on a timetable and use the existing halls or other infrastructure in each of the towns. The bus would contain various resources such as musical instruments, art supplies or CD players etc and would be a similar concept to that used with mobile preschools.

The cycle path along the foreshore in Jindabyne is well used but does not connect the community. This creates a degree of isolation for those residents who have no access to transport and as there are little or no retail services within these villages' people can be quite restricted and are forced to drive to and from the township on a very regular basis. Therefore there may be an opportunity in terms of planning the future whereby the path way could be significantly expanded and a focus on cycle and foot access increased. This would in turn link the villages around the lake and enable residents to flow more freely into the township.

Economic Development

There is a need to move away from the significant reliance on the winter season as a means of deriving an income for many businesses within the shire. Climate change poses a significant threat to local ski industry and to the communities that currently depend upon it. The community needs to shift its focus to more sustainable economic opportunities that will help to ensure the communities long term viability.

Unfortunately there is no business support service within the shire. This means that approaches such as those used within the 'economic gardening' model are not currently an option. So, businesses face challenges due to climate change, the need to diversify and embrace advancements in technology and yet cannot get support services enabling them to grow or to explore and develop diversification options.

It is imperative from an economic point of view to provide the business community (both the tourism and agricultural sectors) with the training and knowledge required in order to maintain and/or expand their business interests. Yet, the council is not equipped to be able to provide such a service without financial assistance and expertise. Snowy River Shire Council would like to be able assist by exploring the option of trialling the economic gardening model in the area in the same way that other councils have but cannot do so without the relevant human and financial resources.

Telecommunications

- Broadband capability in rural areas.

Like so many regional areas in Australia, there is a patchwork of ADSL and Next G broadband services currently available to some parts of the Snowy River Shire. ADSL services operate in the two larger townships of Jindabyne and Berridale, whilst the mountainous terrain restricts many rural areas to poor or no Next G wireless access, preventing many rural families accessing broadband services.

- Mobile phone service (black spots)

Mobile phone reception can still be unreliable on the main regional highways, with "blackspot" areas or no mobile phone reception common on many of the region's rural roads. Smaller communities within the Shire, plead with Telstra to improve their Internet and mobile phone services. Telstra have indicated with their current funding priorities and the Federal Government broadband initiative stalled, it may be some years before the Shire residents have equitable access to reliable, high-speed broadband services.