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It is widely acknowledged that the current framework for delivering roads in Australia does not result in appropriate signals to either road users (about the effect of their road use on road expenditures) or to road providers (about the road network that would provide greatest value to road users). This view is clearly expressed by the Ministerial Taskforce for an Economic Framework for an Efficient Transportation Marketplace.

The current institutional and regulatory arrangements for the provision of road infrastructure involve a combination of national, state and local institutions, with limited linkage between usage, revenue or charges and investment decisions. This provides little incentive for road agencies to improve the efficiency with which road infrastructure is provided.

Ministerial Taskforce 2008

According to the National Transport Commission:

Better pricing signals will encourage use of the right truck on the right road at the right price; and investment on the right roads in the right place at the right time.

National Transport Commission 2008

There are several reasons why the existing system of road user charges may not be yielding incentives for governments to deliver an appropriate and efficient level of road infrastructure. Firstly, the Productivity Commission has found that ‘there is a substantial mismatch between road-use related revenues received by different levels of government and their road expenditure responsibilities’ (Productivity Commission 2006, pp. 255) As discussed in Chapter 2, the Commonwealth and State governments collect revenues from road users through a number of means. Local governments do not receive any revenues that are directly related to road usage and so the lack of incentives will be particularly at the local government level.

Secondly, although COAG requires heavy vehicle charges to recover expenditures related to use by heavy vehicles, this link is ‘backward looking’ in that charges are based on past expenditures rather than expenditures required in future to deliver an efficient level of infrastructure (Productivity Commission 2006, pp. 254).

Finally, revenues collected from road users are not hypothecated for road expenditures instead being directed to the consolidated funds of the governments that collect them. So even if road user charges were set to recover an amount required to supply a future efficient level of infrastructure, they may still not send appropriate signals to governments.

4.18 Resources

Structure of funding

The structure of funding to local governments for road networks encourage local governments to take a ‘defensive’ position in terms of allowing access to ‘their’ road networks, rather than permitting the most efficient use of the network. In addition, existing funding regimes may not provide sufficient certainty to permit optimal management of road networks by local governments, including because funding is subject to budget processes and infrastructure grants may not include an ongoing component for maintenance.

As noted in Chapter 2, local governments may fund road expenditures through their own sources (primarily rate revenue) and through grants from higher levels of government, particularly the Commonwealth Government.

These revenues are generally not related to road use. A possible exception to this is that in some States local government grant commissions (which are responsible for recommending the distribution of untied Commonwealth grants between local governments) may recognise differences in heavy vehicle use between local governments and adjust funding amounts accordingly. However, because the total quantum of grant funding is fixed, if one local government receives additional funding for heavy vehicle traffic other local government will have their funding reduced by an equal amount (that is, it is a zero sum game).

Because local governments generally do not receive direct ‘compensation’ for use by heavy vehicles they do not have an incentive to ‘open up’ their road network to heavy vehicles. In fact, the funding arrangements provide incentives for local governments to protect their road assets by restricting access by heavy vehicles.

Strong incentives currently exist to protect or preserve road assets rather than make better use of them. Road agencies can be reluctant to allow increased mass, knowing that this will lead to more rapid deterioration of ‘their’ asset without any assurance that they will receive the revenue required to maintain or enhance it. At the same time, from the perspective of road users, there is no effective mechanism to allow them to choose to pay for a higher level of asset consumption, irrespective of the potential productivity gains.

Productivity Commission 2006

Another problem is that existing funding regimes may not provide sufficient certainty to permit optimal management of road networks by local governments because funding is subject to budget processes.

Because roads currently are financed from general revenues, road agencies effectively compete for funds against other government policy priorities. This creates a level of funding uncertainty and can leave road funding vulnerable as political priorities change and fiscal constraints arise. Unpredictable budget funding can be particularly problematic for managing large road construction projects, most of which last many years. It can also mean that annual road maintenance and rehabilitation expenditure may be vulnerable to budgetary stress.

Productivity Commission 2006

Another potential problem for local governments is that infrastructure grants often only cover capital works with no allowance for ongoing maintenance (Engineers Australia 2005).

Quantum of funding

In addition to problems with the structure of funding, the amount of funding that is available to local governments for the road network may be insufficient.

An accurate value can not be placed on the extent to which local government roads are under-maintained because a full assessment of the local government road network has not been conducted. However, as discussed in Chapter 3, there have been claims that local government roads are ‘under-maintained’ to a value of hundreds of millions of dollars (DOTARS 2006).

As a consequence of insufficient funding local governments may not have the capability to attract appropriate specialists to design road networks or to conduct proper maintenance programs. The high variability in the size and fiscal capacity of local governments underlies the problem – and although funding mechanisms do attempt to ensure a consistent level of capacity among local governments, small size does impose limitations regardless.

4.19 Assessments

There is significant variation in the standard to which local governments perform asset management assessments and planning, both between and within States. The conduct of asset assessments and the development of asset management plans and financial plans are central to the efficient planning and delivery of road networks and integration with other transport infrastructure and land use. The absence of information from rigorous asset assessments and planning could be a factor in the issues identified in Chapter 3 being: restrictions on heavy vehicle access; sub-optimal design of the road network; poor integration with other transport and land uses; and inadequate levels of maintenance.

As discussed in Chapter 2, there are no nationally consistent requirements for local governments to conduct asset assessments or to develop asset management plans and long term financial plans in Australia.⁸ While Some State governments (such as Victoria and Queensland) require local governments to prepare asset management plans, even in these States the quality of these plans may vary substantially from one local government to another depending upon the skills and resources available to the local government.

In the absence of a formal requirement, local governments may lack incentives to conduct asset assessments. Part of the reason is that even if local governments do conduct asset assessment it will not directly result in an increase in funding to fix any problems that they identify. In addition, local governments may conduct a less than optimal level of assessments because a portion of the economic benefits of assessments and resulting road works are likely to be captured by other local government authorities (that is, creating a positive externality that is not factored into decision-making about the conduct of asset assessments).

The absence of information from rigorous asset assessments and planning could be a factor in all of the issues identified in Chapter 3.

- *Restrictions on heavy vehicle access* – if local governments do not have a good understanding of the condition of their road infrastructure they may tend to be overly conservative in restricting heavy vehicle access. For example, a local government may not know how much weight a bridge can bear and may therefore restrict heavy vehicle access on an otherwise sound bridge rather than take the risk that it will not bear the weight.

⁸ However, the Local Government and Planning Ministers' Council (LGPMC) has agreed to an accelerated implementation of nationally consistent frameworks for local government asset and financial management (LGPMC 2009). The frameworks 'aim to provide a consistent reporting mechanism for all local government authorities and a clearer picture for State and Territory governments of the financial and management "health" of local governments' (LGPMC 2009).

- *Sub-optimal design of the road network and poor integration with other transport and land uses* – without the rigor of an assessment management plan, local governments may not have properly considered the future uses of the road network with a likely consequence being inadequate planning and sub-optimal design. A lack of information may also inhibit coordination and integration of planning and related tasks within States (that is, between regions) and across them.
- *Inadequate levels of maintenance* – in the absence of an asset management plan and financial plan, local governments are unlikely to be setting aside enough money to maintain the network. Current short-falls will place an excessive burden upon future generations of rate-payers and tax-payers.

There is no lack of opportunities for investment in the local government road network. However, investment is hampered by lack of expenditure on engineering and economic assessments of the adequacy of local government roads and associated infrastructure (such as bridges). There may be a case for higher levels of government to fund local governments specifically to conduct assessments or for a higher level of government to prioritise and conduct assessments itself.

Chapter 5

Recommended framework

5.20 Introduction

The objective of this study is to identify practical solutions for improving the existing arrangements for road governance in Australia with the aim of enhancing freight productivity, particularly on the last mile of supply chains.

In this chapter a framework is described for addressing the issues with the local road network that were identified in Chapter 3 and having consideration for the likely causes of these issues as identified in Chapter 4.

The framework outlined in this chapter is premised on the road network being nationally integrated and that road classifications and distinctions about ownership are ‘artificial’ concepts that should not interfere with the planning and operation of the road network. Reflecting this, the framework is based upon a multi-level planning process involving all three levels of government.

In the remainder of this chapter, the principles on which the framework is based are described, followed by a high-level overview of the framework and a more detailed description of each of the individual elements of the framework.

5.21 Principles underlying the framework

The framework set out in this chapter is based upon a number of key principles, which are described in this section.

Integration and collaboration

The Australian road network needs to function as a single nationally integrated system for freight to be transported efficiently end to end. In order for this to occur the three levels of Australian government must act with a high degree of collaboration and reflecting the principle of subsidiarity (as described in section 4.16).

Application of the principle of subsidiarity to the Australian road network suggests the following broad allocation of roles for each level of government.

- The role of the Commonwealth Government should be limited to a high-level involvement in planning and prioritising projects in collaboration with the States on freight networks of national significance.
- State governments should have primary responsibility for planning and delivering arterial roads and should have a close involvement in the planning and prioritisation projects in collaboration with local governments on freight networks of State-level significance (including local roads).
- Local governments should have primary responsibility for planning and delivering local ‘access’ roads.

Private sector involvement

In setting priorities for upgrades of freight networks, governments should take into account the views of industry through a transparent and formal process.

Individuals industries will have a strong appreciation of the potential benefits to their industries of individual road projects, but may not have a strong understanding of the costs associated with delivering those projects. In contrast, road traffic authorities are likely to have a detailed understanding of the costs associated with delivering specific road projects, but not the potential flow-on benefits to industry from those projects (Fraser 2008). Prioritisation of road projects should be informed by rigorous cost-benefit analysis taking into account the information available from both road suppliers and users.

Provision of appropriate incentives

Governments should have the appropriate financial incentives to provide the road network that is required by industry. Achievement of this principle could be met:

- through the establishment of a road pricing system that is designed to compensate each level of government for the costs of meeting future demand for the road network; and
- tying a portion of grant funds paid to lower levels of government to the achievement of performance standards to help to ensure better prioritisation and outcomes by lower levels of government while allowing grant recipients flexibility to deliver the road network in a way that reflect local circumstances.

Transparent decision-making

The reasons behind decisions on funding and prioritisation should be highly transparent between the three levels of government reflecting the need for a high degree of collaboration. This will help to avoid decision-making that is based upon political imperatives as opposed to independent and rigorous cost-benefit analysis.

5.22 Overview of the framework

Currently, responsibilities for planning, funding, maintaining and operating, and regulating road infrastructure are shared between the three levels of Australian government. The extent to which these complex intergovernmental arrangements inhibit effective planning and funding of the Australian road network appears to vary from State to State. Generally, the stakeholders that were consulted reported good collaborative arrangements with other levels of government within their jurisdictions. Nevertheless, there are some jurisdictions where collaboration has been less effective. A consequence of this for transport operators is that their experience of the road network may be disjointed, circuitous or slow and this has an adverse effect on the productivity of freight movements.

Centralising all responsibilities for roads with one level of government is not supported by stakeholders consulted in this project, would be contrary to the principle of subsidiarity, and likely to lead to diseconomies of scale. However, it is apparent that the three levels of government need to work together more effectively in order to deliver road infrastructure that forms part of important supply chains. The framework described in this chapter aims to achieve that, while meeting the principles described in the preceding section.

Under this framework we recommend drawing together existing governance arrangements already operating in Australia including the following.

- *COAG National Agreements* – Development of a ‘National Road Transport Agreement’ or a ‘National Land Transport Agreement’ similar to the six National Agreements already agreed by COAG for other areas of government service delivery. This Agreement would establish mutually-agreed objectives, outcomes, outputs and performance indicators that would guide Commonwealth and State governments in service delivery across the transport sector, and clarify the roles and responsibilities of the respective governments.
- *An enhanced National Land Transport Network* – The existing network would continue as a single integrated network of land transport linkages of strategic national importance funded by Commonwealth and State Governments. This network would be complemented by an identified network of arterial and local roads that are critical to supply chains within each State with direct links into the National Land Transport Network. Such a combined national-state-local network would act as a focal point for the three levels of government to work together identify upgrade and maintenance priorities across an integrated network of transport infrastructure.
- *Enhanced collaboration between State and local governments based upon the best of the arrangements operating in Victoria, Queensland and Western Australia* – The road traffic authorities in these three States appear to have good collaborative arrangements with the local governments in their respective jurisdictions. The arrangements in these States, with some enhancements, would make a good foundation for arrangements in other jurisdictions.

Under the recommended framework, these existing governance arrangements would be complemented by the following measures.

- *A formalised process for private sector involvement* – A transparent and formal process for the freight industry to have input into the planning processes of the national and state bodies is considered to be warranted recognising that the freight industry is a core ‘customer’ of the road network and is well-informed about the potential benefits of road upgrades.
- *An allocation of funding earmarked for conducting asset assessments and for road maintenance* – Assessments and maintenance of local roads appear to be two areas of work that receive insufficient funding. Consideration should be given to either an additional pool of funds for local governments that can only be used for assessments and maintenance or tying some a proportion of the identified road grants to expenditure on these activities.
- *‘Tying’ a portion of grant funding to the achievement of an appropriate performance standard* – Local governments have considerable discretion over how they spend the majority of grant funding that they receive from the Commonwealth Government. Tying a portion of grant funding to the achievement of appropriate performance standard for the road network would help improve accountability and focus attention on appropriate priorities for the road network.

In time, the framework would be enhanced by national reforms that are already under consideration.

- *COAG road pricing reforms* – A key problem with the existing road governance arrangements is that local governments do not receive a source of revenue that is related to use of the local road network by heavy vehicles. Because of this, local governments do not have incentives to improve access to the road network by heavy vehicles and in fact are more inclined to restrict access because they are not compensated for damage caused by heavy vehicles.
- *Introduction of a nationally consistent framework for local government asset and financial management* – This is an initiative of the Local Government and Planning Ministers’ Council. Better information on the condition of the local road network may help to address problems of inadequate maintenance, sub-optimal design of the network and conservatism on access by heavy vehicles to the road network. Efforts should be made to monitor and support this work and to ensure that the frameworks are developed with consideration for the needs of maintaining the local road network.

Each elements of the recommended framework is discussed in more detail in section 5.23.

5.23 Elements of the framework

National Agreements

It is recommended that COAG enter into a ‘National Road Transport Agreement’ or ‘National Land Transport Agreement’ to establish mutually-agreed objectives, outcomes, outputs and performance indicators that will guide Commonwealth and State governments in service delivery in the road sector, as well as clarify the roles and responsibilities of the two levels of government.

Such an agreement would have a similar structure to the six National Agreements already agreed by COAG for other areas of government service delivery⁹. These National Agreements are the currently accepted approach for collaboration between the Commonwealth and State governments on nationally significant policy and financial relations.

Entering into a National Agreement for roads would be consistent with the principles of improving collaboration and integration between the Commonwealth and State Governments, linking funding to the achievement of performance and improving transparency of decision-making and prioritisation through mutually agreed objectives.

Prior to 2009, the Commonwealth Government used over ninety Specific Purpose Payments (SPPs) as the primary vehicle to help fund functions that are the constitutional responsibility of the States but in which the Commonwealth has a strong policy interest. From 1 January 2009, federal financial relations were significantly reformed with the implementation of a new Intergovernmental Agreement on Federal Financial Relations (IGA).

⁹ The National Agreements are in the areas of healthcare, education, skills and workforce development, disability, affordable housing and Indigenous reform.

The objective of the IGA is to provide a robust foundation for Commonwealth and State governments to collaborate on policy development and service delivery, and facilitate the implementation of economic and social reforms. The IGA has reduced the number of SPPs, improved collaborative working arrangements, simplified performance reporting requirements and reduced administration and compliance overheads.

The new IGA includes National Agreements in the areas of healthcare, education, skills and workforce development, disability, affordable housing and Indigenous reform. Each Agreement defines the mutually-agreed objectives, outcomes, outputs and performance indicators that will guide Commonwealth and State governments in service delivery across a particular sector, and clarifies the roles and responsibilities of the respective governments.

Under the IGA the Commonwealth is less reliant of prescriptions on service delivery in the form of financial or other input controls which inhibit state service delivery and priority setting. This gives the States greater flexibility to direct resources to areas where they will produce the best results in each State. However, States are also more accountable to the public through new reporting arrangements, with the performance of each jurisdiction being assessed by the independent COAG Reform Council.

In addition to funding provided under each National Agreement some amount of National Partnership payments may provided to the States with the aim of providing incentives for improved service delivery. These payments may be used to deliver specific outputs or projects; assist the implementation of reforms; or reward jurisdictions for undertaking nationally-significant reforms.

National Land Transport Network

It is recommended that the existing National Land Transport Network continue as a single integrated network of land transport linkages of strategic national importance funded by Commonwealth and State Governments. However, under the framework this network would be complemented by an identified network of arterial and local roads that are critical to supply chains within each State with direct links into the National Land Transport Network.

Such a combined national-state-local network would be consistent with the principle of improving collaboration and integration by acting as a focal point for the three levels of government to work together to identify upgrade and maintenance priorities across an integrated network of transport infrastructure.

Because freight is transported across State borders, planning of the road network also needs to operate smoothly between State borders. For this reason, there is a valid role for the Commonwealth Government in identifying a network of transport infrastructure of national significance and working to ensure good planning outcomes and consistency across State borders. Such a network has been identified and is overseen by the Commonwealth Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government.

The National Land Transport Network is a single integrated network of land transport linkages of strategic national importance, which is funded by Federal, State and Territory Governments. The National Network is based on national and inter-regional transport corridors including connections through urban areas, links to ports and airports, rail, road and intermodal connections that together are of critical importance to national and regional economic growth development and connectivity.

DOITRDLG 2009e

To complement this network it is recommended that the road traffic authority in each State be responsible for coordinating identification of a network of arterial and local roads that are critical to supply chains within the State with direct links into the National Land Transport Network.

Identification of the network should be done in conjunction with the Commonwealth and local governments and the private sector. Such a combined national-state-local network could act as a focal point for the three levels of government to work together identify upgrade and maintenance priorities across an integrated network of transport infrastructure. Under this cooperative approach funding by each level of government would be directed to projects with the greatest pay-offs.

In identifying a State-level network, some reclassification of roads from local roads to arterial roads (which are the responsibility of the State governments) may be warranted. Reclassification would be particularly warranted where local roads form part of important freight routes that, under the principle of subsidiarity, are the legitimate responsibility of the States to provide. It is understood that the State road traffic authority in Western Australia routinely reclassifies roads between State and local responsibilities according to set criteria (pers. comm. MRWA, 29 June 2009).

In some circumstances the most appropriate solution might be for State government authority to assume roads responsibility for a defined regional area, while leaving local government jurisdictions in place to undertake other local government functions in those areas. This is the approach recommended by the Local Government Shires Association of NSW (LGSA) in the face of difficulties experienced by some councils in remote parts of the State:

The NSW Government assume responsibility for all regional roads in rural shires since such councils do not have the financial capacity and asset management systems to maintain and renew them.

LGSA 2006

There, concerns related not only to financial resources but also the difficulties of finding suitably qualified engineering and other key staff in remote areas to undertake maintenance and assessment tasks.

National network planning

Under the national framework described above, each owner of an element of the network would be expected to have a network management plan aimed at ensuring the asset was meeting identified needs. The asset management plan for each significant segment would cover:

- . target condition or performance standard
- . expected future use
- . maintenance and capital program to achieve target given expected use.

At present there is no formal Australia wide requirement for network or asset management plans in relation to roads. The Local Government and Planning Ministers' Council has however agreed a nationally consistent framework aimed at improving asset management performance by local governments (LGPMC 2009a) that would need to be taken into account in developing Australia wide consistency in funding for road asset performance. The development of a national approach does not however imply moving to a single national standard for roads – provision for significant local variation will be necessary given the diversity of local conditions, road use patterns, climate and geography in different parts of Australia.

Intergovernmental payments for roads should take account of the extent to which performance standards in such plans are met (see below).

A fundamental driver of better governance is transparency: it improves accountability, encourages greater involvement from industry and community, and enables performance claims to be scrutinised. Road network plans should therefore be freely available online from the relevant jurisdictions.

Enhanced collaboration between State and local governments

The State road traffic authorities in Victoria, Queensland and Western Australia have strong collaborative relationships with local governments in their respective jurisdictions. The arrangements in these States, with some enhancements, would make a good foundation for arrangements in other jurisdictions and would be consistent with the principle of improving collaboration and integration between State and local governments. These arrangements include the following.

- Identification of a network of arterial and local roads that are critical to supply chains within the State (as described in the previous section). Ideally, the network in each State would directly link into the National Land Transport Network. The road traffic authority in each State would be responsible for coordinating identification of this network in conjunction with the Commonwealth and local governments and the private sector.
- Regular meetings between senior representatives of the road traffic authority and the local government association in each State to address any issues in a non-adversarial way. Such meetings are currently held quarterly in Victoria and Western Australia.
- Formation of a 'Road Alliance' (as it is termed in Queensland), which would be a State-level body with representatives from the State road traffic authority and local government representatives from each region of the State. The Road Alliance would over-see the management of the State-level network, including high-level identification of priorities for upgrades and determining funding allocations amongst the Regional Road Groups (see below) across the network.
- Formation of multiple 'Regional Road Groups', which would report to the Road Alliance and consist of representatives from the State road traffic authority and each of the local governments that make up a region. Each of the Regional Road Groups would be responsible for conducting asset assessments for their regions, developing investment strategies, preparing regional works programs based on medium to long-term road network priorities and delivering regional road outcomes.

- Flexible arrangements between State and local road traffic authorities in each regional area for allocating funds to priorities for road expenditures on the network in order to improve transport productivity. Under this cooperative approach funding by each level of government would not be strictly allocated on the basis of ownership with the result being that local government may spend their money on State-owned parts of the network and vice versa.
- A legislative requirement for local governments to establish formal road management plans and making access to a statutory defence against claims of negligence contingent upon local governments being able to demonstrate the achievement of performance standards for maintenance and repair of road infrastructure.
- Sharing of resources between local governments within Regional Road Groups, including machinery (for example, road graders) and human resources (such as engineering specialists). Over time, procurement arrangements might be centralised within the State traffic authority or individual Regional Road Groups to take advantage of economies of scale.

Private sector involvement

The involvement of the private sector in road network planning does not appear to have been well formalised in Australia. It is recommended that a transparent and formal structure be implemented for the views of the private sector to be considered by governments in the planning of road transport networks. This role would encompass not only maintenance and upgrade proposals, but also designated of freight routes (both new routes and declassification) and broader network issues.

The freight industry does have some power to influence the design and prioritisation of the road network, but this is generally through informal and non-transparent means such as lobbying efforts. The lack of a formal mechanism appears to be an important oversight given that the freight industry will be well-informed about bottlenecks in the road network and scope for improving freight productivity based upon prioritisation of development of the road network. The freight industry will have a strong appreciation of the potential benefits of any road projects, whereas road traffic authorities may have a greater focus on just the costs involved for government (Fraser 2008).

The Victorian Government appears to have collaborated effectively with industry on road infrastructure needs. However, this appears to have been largely achieved through relatively ad hoc arrangements with individual industries. For example, the timber industry has been assisted with grant funding for road upgrade priorities based upon the projects suggested by industry (pers. comm. VicRoads, 14 July 2009). The Victorian dairy industry has also received some funding support to assist farm gate access for larger vehicles (pers. comm. VicRoads, 14 July 2009).

It should be noted that the freight industry was not consulted during the preparation of this report. As a consequence views of the private sector on the preferred the form of involvement in road planning has not been canvassed. However, some comments have been gleaned from public available documents.

- In a submission to Infrastructure Australia, the Australian Livestock Transporters Association (ALTA) advocated assessing key elements of the road network from an industry perspective¹⁰ and therefore identifying and involving industry stakeholders from the start to the finish of the network (Fraser 2008).
- The Australian Road Forum (ARF) notes that there is a number of industry groups involved in the road network (for example, engineers, motorists, road builders, researchers, and equipment suppliers) but they have never been together as an industry. The ARF has indicated that it would be supportive of:
 - industry-appointed advisory committees as a mechanism for consulting with governments;
 - active consultative committees established for specific purposes with clear end-points;
 - a minimum number of standing committees; and
 - government servicing being kept to a minimum (ARF undated).

Irrespective of the precise form of industry involvement in road planning some general principles should be observed in the interests of transparency.

- There should be one central entry point for lodgement and consideration of submissions on expenditure priorities for each jurisdiction.
- Cost benefit analysis in all submissions to the government should be on a consistent basis and in line with a set of approved guidelines.
- To the extent possible, all submissions should be publicly available.

Funding arrangements

It is recommended that a portion of grants paid from the Commonwealth to the local governments be restructured to allocate a pool of grants for expenditure on asset assessments and maintenance and to tie a portion of grant funding to the achievement of appropriate performance standard for the road network.

This would help to address the principle of ensuring that local governments have appropriate financial incentives to provide the road network that is required by industry and may help to address problems with the design and condition of the local road network by raising the priority of assessments and maintenance and ensuring the achievement of appropriate standards.

The underlying principle, consistent with other COAG initiatives, is that funding should be linked to outcomes achieved.

¹⁰ That is, consider all bottlenecks at the network level from the perspective of individual industries as this allows the effects of multiple individual infrastructure bottlenecks to be assessed for a particular industry (Fraser 2008).

Funding for asset assessments and maintenance

Currently, local governments have considerable discretion over how they spend the majority of grant funding that they receive from the Commonwealth Government, being general purpose grants and identified road grants. Local governments are not required to spend these funds on any specific purpose or provide any performance reports in order to obtain the funds. Of Commonwealth funding that is ‘tied’, local governments are generally required to spend the funds on particular projects.¹¹ That is, the funding is not generally available for conducting asset assessments and road maintenance across all local roads within a jurisdiction.

There is some evidence that insufficient expenditure is being directed by local governments to conducting assets assessments and undertaking maintenance (refer to Chapter 3). In part this may reflect an overall inadequacy in total funding available to local governments for these tasks.

However, it could also indicate poor prioritisation of the funding that is available to local governments. For example, there is evidence that local governments are undertaking a much wider range of functions than they used to, either voluntarily or as a consequence of cost-shifting by other levels of government (Productivity Commission 2008).

If the primary reason behind inadequate expenditure on asset assessments and road maintenance is one of poor prioritisation this may be addressed by tying a portion of grant funding to these tasks. If the problem is one of inadequate funding, then an additional pool of funding may need to be created specifically for these purposes.

Bids for access to any pool of funds be set aside for local road upgrades would be likely to well exceed the funds available; a priority setting mechanism will be needed to assess the relative merits of those bids. As noted previously, assessments of roads provide essential information that would accompany any bids; industry input on priorities would also be a desirable feature and assisting in ranking projects for allocation of funding.

Following COAG reforms, as road pricing becomes more sophisticated and road usage is measured more accurately (see later in this chapter and at Attachment A) the linkages between road user charges and funding for road upgrades will become easier to determine.

It is noted that local governments in some jurisdictions are already preparing asset management plans quite effectively (particularly in States that have introduced mandatory requirements for local governments to do so such as Victoria) and have disclaimed the need for a specific source of funding from a higher level of government. However, even in States where the preparation of asset management plans is mandatory there may be considerable variation in the quality of these plans and a specific source of funds may help to improve the overall quality of plans.

Performance reporting

There is considerable scope for improving accountability by local governments for the disbursement of grant funding provided by the Commonwealth Government, particularly the identified road grants which do not currently need to be directed towards road expenditures.

¹¹ For example, under Roads for Recovery which is used to repair and upgrade specific road sites, and the Black Spot program which aims to address road accidents at specific road sites.

Tying a portion of funding to the achievement of performance standards may help to ensure better prioritisation and outcomes. However, it is noted that local governments in some jurisdictions already have strong incentives to demonstrate the achievement of performance standards for maintenance and repair of road infrastructure as this is necessary to access a statutory defence against claims of negligence. For example, under the Victorian *Roads Management Act 2004* each local government is required to produce road management plans and a statutory protection against negligence may be provided to a local government if it can demonstrate that it has met the standards set out in the road management plans (VicRoads undated).

However, requiring performance reporting for ‘the sake of it’ is not desirable. In designing a performance reporting regime care should be taken to ensure that: the performance reports provide meaningful and comparable information; and the effort required to prepare the reports is in proportion with the funding that it relates to.

The design of the performance reporting regime will need to strike an appropriate balance in setting standards. Setting standards at too low a level will result in under-investment in desirable infrastructure. Too high, and the funding agreement runs the risk of unfairly penalising jurisdictions that are unable to meet the standards. The performance regime should be reviewed regularly (as are other COAG agreements) and the standards revised in light of experience.

Although the overarching principle of linking funding to performance and outcomes is a key element of the framework, there needs to be recognition that from time to time unforeseen events can affect performance, and allowance should be made for such events.

Reform of road pricing

A key problem with the existing road governance arrangements is that local governments do not receive a source of revenue that is related to use of the local road network by heavy vehicles. Because of this, local governments do not have incentive to improve access to the road network by heavy vehicles and in fact are more inclined to restrict access because they are not compensated for damage caused by heavy vehicles.

The framework described in this Chapter would be enhanced by the road pricing reforms that are being considered by COAG. COAG has endorsed a three phase road reform plan which is in part aimed at more closely aligning revenues raised from road users with the costs of supplying the road network. These reform initiatives are described in more detail in Appendix A.

Nationally consistent framework for asset assessments

The Local Government and Planning Ministers’ Council (LGPMC) has agreed to an accelerated implementation of three nationally consistent frameworks for local government asset and financial management (LGPMC 2009). Development of these frameworks will complement the other initiatives proposed in this report.

Efforts should be made to monitor and support this work and to ensure that the frameworks are developed with consideration for the needs of maintaining the local road network.

Presently, there are no nationally consistent requirements for local governments to conduct asset assessments or to develop asset management plans and long term financial plans in Australia. As a consequence, there is a high degree of variability in the standard to which asset management plans are prepared by local governments, if at all. Better information on the condition of the local road network may help to address problems of inadequate maintenance, sub-optimal design of the network and conservatism on access by heavy vehicles to the road network.

Efforts are being made through the LGPMC to introduce nationally consistent framework for the development by local governments of asset management plans and long term financial plans in Australia. Towards this end, the LGPMC has released a Local Government Sustainability Framework, which is comprised of three sub-frameworks for: assessing local government financial sustainability; asset planning and management; and financial planning and reporting.

The frameworks 'aim to provide a consistent reporting mechanism for all local government authorities and a clearer picture for State and Territory governments of the financial and management "health" of local governments' (LGPMC 2009).

The asset planning and management framework appears to be at a quite preliminary stage of development. The framework document for asset planning and management establishes some key principles (which are primarily aimed at providing States with flexibility in implementing the national approach) and some proposed elements for a national asset management framework.

Efforts should be made to monitor and support this work and to ensure that the frameworks are developed with consideration for the needs of maintaining the local road network.

Appendix A

Reform of access pricing

A.2 COAG road pricing reforms

COAG has endorsed a three phase road reform plan which is in part aimed at more closely aligning revenues raised from road users with the costs of supplying the road network. The actions of relevance to this study in each of the three phases are summarised in Table A.1.

The reforms contained in phase one of the road reform plan were aimed at improving institutional arrangements to provide a foundation from which to make further reforms to pricing frameworks. This is in recognition that the institutional settings in which direct user road charging operates will have an effect on the resulting net benefits (Productivity Commission 2006).

Phase two will involve an evaluation of incremental pricing schemes to provide a more direct link between road usage charges and revenue channelled to road providers. Phase three will evaluate mass-distance location based charges. The remainder of this section provides more detail on these two pricing schemes.

Incremental pricing schemes

Under an incremental pricing scheme heavy vehicles would be able to pay a higher or incremental charge to operate at mass levels higher than the current regulated limits (NTC 2009a). The incremental charge would reflect the additional costs (over the base heavy vehicle charging scheme) caused by the heavy vehicle as a consequence of extra road damage caused by carrying weight above the base mass limit.

According to the National Transport Commission, an incremental pricing scheme could improve freight productivity because it could allow more freight to be moved with fewer trips (NTC 2009a). Transport operators have expressed to the National Transport Commission ‘reasonably strong interest’ in accessing additional mass (NTC 2009a).

Implementation of an incremental pricing scheme is considered to ‘an important first step’ towards the development of a mass-distance location-based (MDL) charging scheme (discussed below) (NTC 2009a).

In January 2009, the National Transport Commission released a feasibility study into incremental pricing, consistent with phase two of the COAG road reform plan. The Commission has identified some barriers to feasibility but considers that some of these issues can be resolved in the short term with policy development, while others may require further infrastructure investment and/or research (NTC 2009a).

Mass-distance location-based charges

There are two components to mass-distance location-based charges. The first component is mass-distance, which measures the distance travelled by heavy vehicles in a specific time period (Productivity Commission 2006). The second component is location-based charging under which charges for heavy vehicles would vary by road type and could potentially vary by time as well to take into account congestion costs.

The introduction of these charges will be considered as part of the third phase of COAG reforms.

Table A.1

COAG'S ROAD REFORM PLAN

Phase	Action	Completion date
Phase I (2007-08)	• Implementation of National Guidelines for Transport System Management for project development and appraisal.	• Jul 2007
	• Implementation of revised heavy vehicle pricing determination formulation and cost estimation and allocation processes.	• Dec 2007
	• Continued implementation of agreed regulatory reforms, including Performance Based Standards.	• Dec 2007
	• Independent review of externalities of heavy vehicle road use and policies for abatement.	• Jul 2008
	• Independent review of heavy vehicle road use and costs to refine PAYGO, improvement investment decision making and provide an information base for examination of location-based charging.	• Jul 2008
	• Review of Community Service Obligations to inform future charging arrangements.	• Dec 2008
	• Detailed review, including trials (building on the Intelligent Access Program) to assess the impact and feasibility of incremental pricing schemes.	• Dec 2008
Phase II (2009-10)	• Evaluation study of incremental pricing schemes.	• Jul 2009
	• Each jurisdiction to consider examining alternative institutional arrangements to better link road freight revenues to investment and enhance decision-making.	• Jul 2010
	• Reviews of road freight infrastructure regulation under general annual best practice regulation review cycles.	• Jul 2010
	• Implementation of Phase I and Phase II work programs subject to cost-benefit analysis and COAG consideration	• Dec 2010
Phase III (2011-14)	• Feasibility study of mass-distance location-based charges.	• Dec 2011
	• Possible implementation of Phase III work subject to cost-benefit analysis and COAG consideration.	• Dec 2014

Source: COAG 2007

Appendix B

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Appendix C

Stakeholder consultation list

Table 5.1

STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION LIST

Organisation	Name	Title
National Transport Commission	Mr Nick Dimopoulos	Chief Executive
National Transport Commission	Mr Paul Sullivan	General Manager, Strategy and Communications
National Transport Commission	Mr Matthew Clarke	Senior Manager, Economics
National Transport Commission	Mr Ian Hunter	Chief Planning and Development Officer
Infrastructure Australia	Mr John Austen	General Manager Planning
Australian Livestock Transporters Association	Mr Luke Fraser	Executive Director
Roads and Traffic Authority NSW	Mr Michael Bushby	Chief Executive Officer
Roads and Traffic Authority NSW	Mr Paul Duignan	General Manager, Compliance and Freight Strategy
Roads and Traffic Authority NSW	Mr John Statton	General Manager, Infrastructure Asset Management, Network Management
Roads and Traffic Authority NSW	Mr Sean O'Shannassy	Lead Policy Officer, Intelligent Heavy Vehicles and Access Management
Local Government and Shires Association of NSW	Mr Shaun McBride	Strategy Manager – Finance, Infrastructure, and Planning Policy and Research
Local Government and Shires Association of NSW	Mr Richard Connors	Senior Policy Officer – Roads and Transport Policy and Research
Local Government and Shires Association of NSW	Ms Sascha Moege	Senior Policy Officer – Policy and Research
VicRoads	Mr Gary Liddle	Chief Executive
VicRoads	Mr Lachlan McDonald	Executive Director – Intergovernmental Relations
VicRoads	Mr Robert Freemantle	Executive Director – Network and Asset Planning
Municipal Association of Victoria	Mr Rob Spence	Chief Executive Officer
Municipal Association of	Ms Kate Owen	Director – Research and

Organisation	Name	Title
Victoria		Policy
Municipal Association of Victoria	Mr Owen Harvey-Beavis	Economic Data and Policy Development Manager
Department of Transport and Main Roads (Queensland)	Ms Karen Peut	Executive Director – Strategic Asset Investment Management
Department of Transport and Main Roads (Queensland)	Mr Les Dunn	Executive Director – Investment Analysis and Evaluation
Department of Transport and Main Roads (Queensland)	Mr Neil Dawle	General Manager – Organisational Positioning and Stakeholder Relations
Department of Transport and Main Roads (Queensland)	Mr Charlie Moore	Manager – National Reform
Department of Transport and Main Roads (Queensland)	Ms Kathy Courier	Principle Advisor – Strategic Directions.
Local Government and Shires Association of Queensland	Ms Simone Talbot	Manager – Roads Transport and Infrastructure
Main Roads Western Australia	Mr Bob Peters	Manager – Road Asset Planning