

2021 NSW Local Roads Congress

Reconnecting the Dots in Community Recovery

Congress Communiqué

The NSW Roads and Transport Directorate, a partnership between Local Government NSW (LGNSW) and the NSW Division of the Institute of Public Works Engineering Australasia (IPWEA NSW and ACT), in holding the 2021 Local Roads Congress, resolved to announce the following communiqué.

The Congress recognises the critical role of local government as a provider of local and regional transport infrastructure in partnership with the state and federal governments.

Local government is key to driving locally led economic recovery through the delivery of a wide range of road and infrastructure projects via a mix of new funding and accelerated funding recognising the direct economic uplift from construction and the second order uplift from increased economic activity enabled by improvements to the local road network. The Congress urges the Federal and NSW Government to work with local government to build a new resilient future for NSW communities.

The Congress calls for continued action from all levels of government to leverage the current challenges as an opportunity to deliver safe, efficient and resilient road and transport infrastructure to local communities across NSW, now and into the future.

Saving lives on local government roads

Local government plays a significant role in supporting road safety at the community level, with responsibility for almost 90% of the NSW road network, including regional and local roads. In 2020, 300 lives were lost on NSW roads, compared to 350 in 2019. The number of fatalities has decreased to below 300 in 2020, but further action is required to meet the targets set in the NSW Road Safety Plan.

The Congress calls for immediate and on-going action from all levels of Government to address the unacceptable level of fatalities, serious injuries and road related trauma on the local road network.

The draft National Road Safety Strategy acknowledges the role of local government in delivering key actions under the Strategy. The Congress acknowledges that whilst local government has increased its capability with respect to road safety, further capability development is required and it remains under-funded to deliver this task.

The Congress calls for increased funding for maintenance and road safety improvements.

Councils also need ongoing support to incorporate a Safe Systems approach within their strategic transport and infrastructure plans (aligned with the National Road Safety Strategy 2011-20, the NSW Road Safety Plan 2021 and the IPWEA NSW Guidelines for Road Safety Plans 2019).

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The Congress acknowledges that further capacity building in road safety and traffic engineering is required within Local Government and the skills shortage must be addressed. This should include road safety audits for the design of new transport infrastructure, including within new subdivision developments by the private sector.

NSW Road Classification Review

The Congress appreciates the update on the progress on the Road Classification Review and the Regional Roads Transfer of up to 15,000 kilometres of regional roads from councils to the State.

The Congress calls for further extensive engagement with LGNSW, councils and IPWEA NSW and ACT to review the report on priority roads (not yet released) and develop a way forward for both the reclassification of roads and the transfer of up to 15,000km of regional roads to the State.

The Congress urges the NSW Government to ensure that:

- the outcome of the Review will present the best possible outcome for the NSW community.
- the regional roads transferred to the State are maintained and improved through the allocation of an increased level of funding.
- councils are able to retain the maintenance work on roads transferred to the State.
- any change in arrangements does not adversely impact other grants provided to Councils for local and any retained regional roads (e.g. . Financial Assistance Grants, regional road grants or other funding programs), or impact the delivery of work under existing RMCCs on the existing state network.
- all individual proposals are the subject of consultation with each council involved and their agreement prior to any changes being made.

The Congress also seeks assurances that any roads not transferred to the State, will remain funded through the Regional Road Block Grant program and that current funding levels are maintained or increased.

Rebuilding local infrastructure and local communities

The long-term drought, widespread flooding and devastating bushfire season require a re-evaluation of our current practices to make our organisations and public assets more resilient to natural disasters. This will assist in keeping roads open to make sure emergency services can reach the community, and a shorter period required to reopen roads after a natural disaster.

The Roads and Transport Directorate is working with councils to capture lessons learned from the current recovery efforts and suggested improvements in current work processes.

Many councils have seen multiple natural disasters in a short period of time. The current frequency of natural disasters warrants a review of funding levels and funding arrangements to release the burden on local government.

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Current procurement requirements, including levels set for open tenders, increase the administrative burden on councils and lengthen the time required to deliver repair and recovery works. Current delivery targets warrant a, temporary, adjustment to the tender requirements while retaining good governance and oversight mechanisms.

Damaged highways and local transport links will need to be rebuilt to a higher standard (betterment) so that they are more resilient to natural disasters, ensuring the transport network provides improved access for first responders while ensuring residents can evacuate with the assurance that the road network will be safe and effective at times of crisis.

Emergency response plans, including the identification of upgrades to existing critical public infrastructure, will increase resilience for future natural disasters.

The Congress notes the high cost of NSW Government emergency services arrangements to local government and the adverse impact this is having on councils' ability to provide core local government services to NSW communities.

To further the outcomes of this Congress, the Congress calls on governments to take the following measures:

NSW Local Government

The Congress calls on councils in NSW to:

Progress the Congress Communiqué by writing to the relevant Ministers and their local NSW and Australian Government MPs seeking their support for the Congress outcomes.

Continue to improve asset management performance and road safety outcomes by:

- incorporation of a Safe Systems approach within each council's strategic transport and infrastructure plans (aligned with the National Road Safety Strategy 2011-20, the NSW Road Safety Plan 2021 and the IPWEA NSW Guidelines for Road Safety Plans 2019).
- building capacity within the local government industry by supporting ongoing training and knowledge sharing.
- supporting the employment of better techniques and the importation of proven technology to better meet our community's needs through improved engineering and construction methods.
- developing robust workforce strategies to ensure the skills and capacity exist to plan, deliver and maintain local roads now and in the future, including cadet and apprenticeship programs at a professional and operational level.
- preparing disaster preparation and recovery plans to make local infrastructure and local communities more resilient to natural disasters.

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NSW Government

The Congress calls on the NSW Government to:

Develop a sustainable funding model for Local Government in NSW

This will include implementation of a system to:

- review existing funding programs to give consideration to improving community resilience and supporting capacity building within local government.
- optimise application processes for project funding to reduce the administration burden on local government, including a review of current procurement requirements.
- support building capability and capacity in local government, to strengthen long-term workforce capabilities, especially in rural and regional areas.
- support councils with funding and resourcing to help equip them to address the road safety challenge on local roads.
- remove the requirement for local government to contribute funding to emergency services.
- Implement a broad based property tax to replace the ESL on both local government and insurance policies.
- move the ownership of all emergency services infrastructure to the NSW Government.
- further review emergency services arrangements in NSW in consultation with LGNSW, councils and IPWEA NSW and ACT.
- further review the natural disaster relief funding arrangements to local government in NSW.
- prepare disaster preparation and recovery plans to make state owned infrastructure more resilient to natural disasters.

Australian Government

The Congress calls on the Australian Government to:

Find equitable and sustainable ways to maintain and increase current funding for infrastructure investment and long-term asset maintenance.

This will improve the current system by:

- increasing funding for and permitting betterment in the replacement or restoration of damaged assets to a more resilient standard following a natural event.
- review existing funding programs for transport to give consideration to improve resilience to natural disasters and adaptation to climate change.
- developing policies to respond to and benefit from new technologies to maximise the safety benefits of driving aids currently available in vehicles to save lives on our roads.

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Further enquiries:

Grant Baker, President IPWEA NSW and ACT - 0418112855

Cr Linda Scott, President, Local Government NSW – 02 9242 4000

William Barton, Vice President IPWEA NSW – 0407781745

Arjan Rensen, Manager Roads and Transport Directorate – 0420 531 500

Kelly Kwan, Executive Manager – Advocacy, Local Government NSW – 0404 071 593