

DR23/004 2022 NSW LOCAL ROADS CONGRESS DELEGATE REPORT

S004-T00019

Delegate: Amber Schutz, Tubby Harrison - Councillors
Attachments: Nil
Outcome: 7 Connected and Accessible Places
Focus Area: 7.1 Work in partnership to provide an integrated transport network
Delivery Program Link: 7.1.1 Advocate for improved transport links, services and infrastructure
Operational Plan Link: 7.1.1.1 Partner with peak bodies to advocate for improved and on-going funding programs for local transport infrastructure

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This delegate report provides Council with an overview of the 2022 NSW Local Roads Congress which had the theme *Putting Policies into Practice*.

Clr Amber Schutz and Clr Tubby Harrison were Council's delegates at the Conference and present the following report.

The Congress Communique is included as an attachment with this report.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Delegate Report on the 2022 NSW Local Roads Congress be received and noted.

BACKGROUND

The NSW Local Roads Congress was held on Monday 6 June 2022 at NSW Parliament House bringing together Local and State Government representatives, engineers, and transportation experts to discuss the latest developments in road infrastructure and transportation policy.

The conference opened with a keynote address by the Hon. Wendy Tuckerman, MP, Minister for Local Government, followed by a President's welcome by Grant Baker. Mr Baker spoke on the importance of identifying the barriers to local government from fully accessing funding. He touched on the Fixing Country Bridges program as well as the difficulties in attracting staff to local government to deliver Capital Works Programs.

In the Keynote Address, Hon. Sam Faraway, MLC, Minister for Regional Transport and Roads discussed the recent flooding and the cost impact repairing the road network. He stressed that rapid response was essential to recovery and that if we want to build back better then we must build resilience into the infrastructure. That future construction should include reliable access to critical infrastructure and that re-building infrastructure on a like for like basis was not a sustainable option. He summed up by saying Local Government needs security around the funding models for infrastructure, preferably with repeating programs.

Will Barton, Board Member IPWEA NSW and ACT spoke on reflections back to the Local Roads Congress 2021. He started with a comment that in the December 2005 communique had a clear influence on current policy. The previous year's communique asked if councils were fit for the future in their asset management strategy, and did they have the ability to manage the development of infrastructure that was resilient to natural disasters and climate change. He commented that while we have had good progress, the funding models still needed work.

Wendy Machin, Chair of Regional Road Transfer and NSW Road Classification Review presented an update of the Regional Roads Classification Review. Regional Councils were eligible to apply for some of their roads to be reclassified to State Roads, Regional Roads or Local Roads. The funding for this program is provided by the State Government. Each road required its own application and there was a staged application process, September 2020 – Nominations, November/December – Priority Round, September 2021 to February 2022 – Full Application Round. Lessons learned by the panel included the following:

- improving how they manage the process.
- data collection
- Including webinars and mapping tools to make it easier and more streamlined,
- That there was a high volume of applications
- The need to develop strategies to lighten the load on councils.
- Using satellite information to see surrounding industries.
- The use of Smarty Grants
- The importance of how to develop roads that cars can read, the impacts on EV's on the network and ensuring internet connectivity across the road network.

The panel commended Councils on their thorough applications and intended to finalise applications with the minister in late 2022.

Cr Alan Tickle, Deputy Mayor of MidCoast Council shared a Council's Perspective on the Road Classification Review. He noted that Regional Councils have a lower population density, this makes funding the maintenance and construction of infrastructure less sustainable for them given the current funding models. Reflecting on Mid Coast's experience, he questioned the ethics of State Government passing assets to Councils with no consultation. In summary, he commented that we all serve a common purpose, which is to serve the community, and all decisions should be made through this lens across all levels of government.

After lunch the Hon John Graham, MLC Shadow minister for roads presented a Keynote Address on the Oppositions Analysis of budget and priorities for road infrastructure. The following years forecasted budget is predicted to have less money than previous years for infrastructure and there needs to be more of a focus on improving and developing local roads and less on mega projects. Minister Graham encouraged Councils to be better network managers, to use existing data and research to map priority transport routes and to publish this data to transport providers on online portals. Council Engineers can use this portal to map and approve heavy and oversized vehicle routes. The Minister summed up by saying that a productive operator is a safe operator and that the more complicated we make the process for them, the more expensive that process is.

Sal Petrocetto, CEO National Heavy Vehicle Regulator continued Minister Graham's point by speaking on the cost implications for transporting goods on substandard local roads.

Tony Lickiss, Director of Assets and Infrastructure Services for Kyogle Council spoke to the Fixing Country Bridges program. His Council has 310 bridges, with 94 of them being replaced as

part of the program. Some of the challenges they faced as part of the program and lessons learned include the following:

- Timber is unsustainable moving forward, for durability, procurement and cost reasons.
- They had challenges with the administration of the program and called for qualified and experienced technical staff to be included in the State government management team.
- The 2 year grant timeframe made the program very challenging to deliver as there were not enough contractors prepared to take on the workload required. Director Lickiss suggested longer timeframes for large amounts of grant funding as it has significant disruption to local economies.
- Kyogle Council developed a standard bridge design and details, which allowed them efficiencies in staff time, procurement, and production.
- They made a decision to pre-buy all the steel before the supply chain problems, caused by Covid effected the market. This saved significant time.
- Early involvement by local Councils when State Government are writing grants would allow valuable input which may save time in the future. He asked State Government to stop assuming what Councils want or need.
- Giving Councils money without micromanaging the program will allow savings in administration costs. Performance criteria could be set as conditions.
- It is unsustainable to make Councils compete for grant funding.
- A universal set of conditions for grant extensions would streamline the process.
- The rise in building costs required applications to vary the grant amount, these applications were too slow to keep up with the program. Fixed criteria for approvals would streamline this.

Joshua Devitt, Manager Roads and Transport Directorate spoke to the local government capability dilemma and a way forward. He predicts a shortfall of 70,000 engineers by 2023. Stressing that all levels of government will need to find efficiencies in the way they do things he identified a number of things Councils could do to attracts staff. These included:

- Higher wages
- Upskilling existing staff into other areas
- Enabling working from home for parents, and metropolitan staff.
- Encouraging local school children to work in required fields.
- Taking meaningful steps to ensure barriers to employment are addressed.
- Cultivating supportive and positive work cultures
- Working with Universities on Cadet programs
- Resource sharing with other Councils.

The Congress was concluded by a panel comprising of Wendy Machin, Sal Petrocitto and Cr Alan Tickle, who took questions from delegates. Most of the discussion centered on the forecasted labor shortage and strategies to mitigate this.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the NSW Local Roads Congress 2022 was a highly successful and informative event, providing a platform for delegates to network and learn about the latest developments in local road infrastructure and transportation planning. The congress highlights the importance of local roads in connecting communities and supporting economic growth, and demonstrates the ongoing commitment of the transportation industry to improving the quality and safety of local roads for all road users.