Friday, 31 October 2014

**FIXING COUNTRY ROADS: COUNCILS CALLED TO SUBMIT FULL APPLICATION**

Minister for Roads and Freight Duncan Gay today announced selected councils across regional NSW have been invited to submit full applications as part of the NSW Government's $37.5 million *Fixing Country Roads* program.

Mr Gay said 107 *Fixing Country Roads* Expressions of Interest (EoI) council applications had been shortlisted for their capacity to meet the following four program criteria:

1. Improved Access and Productivity;
2. Growth and Economic Benefits;
3. Strategic Alignment and Partnership; and
4. Deliverability and Project Readiness.

"*Fixing Country Roads* will help better connect local and regional roads to state highways and key intermodal sites such as rail heads, grain silos, fuel depots, supermarket distribution centres, abattoirs, saleyards and feedlots," Mr Gay said.

Mr Gay said the funding program would help move regional freight from ‘paddock to port’ more efficiently.

“This is great for regional economies and jobs and also helps to reduce ‘wear and tear’ on roads and bridges,” Mr Gay said.

“It is estimated NSW Labor left a backlog of critical council infrastructure of about $4 billion for roads and bridges alone; notably hundreds of decaying timber bridges across the length and breadth of country NSW.

Mr Gay said, since April 2011, the NSW Government had committed more than $1.5 billion in grants to help country and city councils upgrade and maintain their roads and bridges.

“This is the highest level of funding for local and regional roads in the state’s history, dwarfing Labor allocations in its last four financial years in government by more than 40 per cent,” Mr Gay said.

“The 40 percentage increase is equivalent to an extra $450 million in government grants for council-owned and managed local and regional roads since April 2011.”

Mr Gay said the government recognised even more needed to be done to help regional councils, which were typically characterised by small rate bases but large areas.
“In this year’s state budget we reserved an additional $37.5 million from Restart NSW for a works program called Fixing Country Roads, he said.

“The $37.5 million for Fixing Country Roads is ‘on top of’ the $1.5 billion already committed in grants to councils since 2011 and is additional to the $4 billion allocated in this year’s historic budget for road and freight infrastructure and services for rural and regional NSW.

Mr Gay said in January next year, funding within Fixing Country Roads will be allocated to successful councils based on the recommendations of an independent Assessment Panel.

“The Assessment Panel is made up of representatives from the NSW Farmers Association, Livestock and Bulk Carriers Association of NSW, Local Government NSW, Infrastructure NSW and senior officials from Transport for NSW Freight and Regional Development and the Office of Local Government.”

“This is a prime example of taking politics out of infrastructure funding; not to mention utilising the knowledge and expertise of recognised industry leaders from country NSW.”

Mr Gay said the Assessment Panel met this week and shortlisted council EoI applications will soon be invited to submit a full application for final evaluation.

“This evaluation will include a final cost-benefit appraisal and a focus on delivering clearly defined planning and construction schedules,” Mr Gay said.

“I encourage councils whose EoI applications have been shortlisted to attend the full application information sessions that will be held across regional NSW, including Tamworth, Wagga Wagga, Dubbo, Maitland, Coffs Harbour and Batemans Bay.”

Evaluation sessions have also been organised for councils whose projects have not been shortlisted this year. The objective of the evaluation sessions is to provide feedback to councils about their applications and the assessment process, and encourage them to resubmit their proposals in subsequent rounds of Fixing Country Roads.

Fixing Country Roads builds on significant reforms under this Government such as the formation of Infrastructure NSW, the establishment of the state’s first-ever dedicated fund for infrastructure, Restart NSW, and the development of the state’s first-ever Freight and Ports Strategy.

101 out of 107 eligible regional councils (or 94 per cent of eligible non-metropolitan councils) submitted Expressions of Interest to Fixing Country Roads. This equated to a total of 249 project proposals submissions by regional councils, with 107 proposals invited by the independent Assessment Panel for final applications.

Until the independent Assessment Panel delivers its final funding recommendations to Government in January 2015, projects proposals will remain commercial-in-confidence.

For more information, including the full application forms and the schedule of information sessions, please visit http://freight.transport.nsw.gov.au/

MEDIA: Siobhan McCarthy 0407 791 802