

Issue

The Geographical nature of agriculture in NSW determines that efficient and effective road and rail infrastructure is essential for doing business in rural NSW. The standard of infrastructure in NSW has been allowed to degrade over a period of time and considerable investment is now required to bring it up to a suitable standard.

Background

Rail lines

- A State Government audit report of the lines by engineering firm GHD Ltd estimated that \$168 million would be required to upgrade the network over a seven year period. Other reports such as GIAC (2003) and the NSW Farmers Association Green Paper (2002) show that the cost of upgrading the network could be as high as \$350 million.
- The NSW Farmers Association has been working with other participants in the grain industry in an effort to develop a funding package which will deliver long term efficiency and security to the grain rail network and which will reduce the burdens currently being placed on Governments and other stakeholders.

North South Rail corridor

- The Federal Government commissioned a report that was released in June 2006 outlining four different options for the Brisbane to Melbourne rail route. Costs and benefits of each option were presented.
- It was stated that the current network would reach capacity by 2019 and that any construction of a new network would have to be completed by this date to prevent any deterioration in rail services.

Local Roads

- Local councils are responsible for 162 270 kilometres of roads in NSW or 88 percent of the total road network.
- Funding is provided by the Federal and State governments and through Councils' own funding streams. The local rural roads allocation in the 2006/07 budget was \$144 million, the same as the amount provided in 2005/06
- Current conservative estimates suggest that local government in NSW faces a \$150 million per annum backlog in funding to address the specific problem of local roads, regional roads and bridges reaching the end of their economic life and replacement and maintenance being beyond their capacity.
- Based on an estimate of \$4,500 maintenance cost per lane kilometre to keep road conditions below an acceptable roughness level of 110 NRM¹, the total cost for all local council roads in NSW would be \$730 million.
- Commonwealth Grants Commission's Identified Local Roads Component of Financial Assistance Grants in 2006/07 totaled \$150.2million. The RTA has allocated approximately \$255 million to local councils for development and maintenance of classified roads each year for the last 3 years. Total State and Federal funding is therefore about \$405 million.

¹ cited on the Austroads website <http://www.algin.net/austroads/> [accessed on 17 October]

- In 2003/04 Councils reported that approximately 6 percent of their own funds were used for regional roads expenditure. Based on this approximately \$40 million would come from local Government resulting in a short-fall of approximately \$285 million.

Timber Bridges

- There are 2,242 timber bridges on non-urban sealed and non-sealed roads in NSW. Following the announcement on 28 October 2006, 285 of these would be eligible for upgrading under the \$60 million timber bridges partnership program.
- Under the Higher Mass Limits program, certain heavy vehicles fitted with road friendly suspensions are permitted to travel along certain roads. Currently the extent of these roads is limited because of pavement quality and bridge capacity. Replacing or upgrading bridges will allow larger vehicles on rural roads, improving the efficiencies of the transport sector and reducing the number of vehicles on the roads.

Road Underpasses

- Stock crossing roads represent a significant safety concern for motorists and farm operators involved in crossing the stock. While all measures are taken to ensure stock crossing are carried out in a safe manner a more attractive solution is to not have the stock cross the road but rather travel over or under the road to avoid disrupting traffic.
- Dairy farms with property located on either side of a busy road can be required to cross cattle twice a day. Each crossing may take between 5 to 30 minutes.
- The Victorian Government currently runs a stock underpass program. A total of \$10 million has been made available under the SOURS Program. From 11 July 2006, grants of up to \$33,000 are available for approved underpasses on the following basis:
 - for an underpass costing up to \$60,000, 50 percent up to a maximum of \$20,000
 - for an underpass costing over \$60,000, 33 percent up to a maximum of \$33,000

What the Association is seeking

Rail lines

A commitment from the NSW Government to assist the grain industry in implementing a long term, joint funding package to upgrade the NSW restricted rail branch line network.

At this stage the Association is seeking a one off funding commitment of around \$70 million from the NSW Government plus the provision of second hand rail sleeper plate material from the Sydney metropolitan network.

Inland Rail

Funding allocation from the State Government to progress the development of the Inland Rail Corridor between Brisbane and Melbourne through Moree and Toowoomba.

Local roads

Increased funding available to local councils for maintenance and upgrading of local roads.

Timber Bridges

Allocated funding in the 2007/08 budget for \$60 million over three years to fund a timber bridge replacement program.

Road Underpasses

Assistance to cooperatively fund the development of 50 road underpasses for dairy farmers in NSW.