

## REGIONAL CITIES WELCOME BUDGET INFRASTRUCTURE SPEND

6 May 2014

The peak group representing Victoria's ten largest cities outside of Melbourne, Regional Cities Victoria (RCV), has welcomed announcements made in today's State Budget.

RCV comprises the regional cities of Ballarat, Bendigo, Geelong, Horsham, Latrobe, Mildura, Shepparton, Wangaratta, Warrnambool and Wodonga.

"In our budget submission, Regional Cities Victoria called for a commitment from the State Government to the infrastructure needed to build Victoria's state of cities," RCV Chair, Cr Michael Neoh, said.

"Today's announcements foreshadow significant spending on key road, rail and community infrastructure projects in the regions."

"\$730 million has been committed to maintain, restore and improve Victoria's regional road networks, including major links such as Princess Highway West and the Calder Highway redevelopment."

"More than 25 per cent of Victorians live in regional areas and country communities. Ensuring that transport links, especially major roads, are safe and accessible is critical."

The announced divestment of Rural Finance Corporation (RFC) will result in a net \$400 million return to government to be preserved for infrastructure spending in regional areas. Of this, \$220 million has been committed to funding the Murray Basin Rail Project, a rail standardisation link between Mildura and Geelong.

"This link will improve freight efficiency between northern Victoria and Melbourne's transport hubs, also removing freight from roads in the regions."

"The government has rededicated itself to funding the second tranche of the Regional Growth Fund. \$400 million has already been spent since 2010, with a further \$100 million in anticipated expenditure this year and \$500 million over the four years after that."

"RCV has identified expanding export markets for agricultural goods as a major opportunity for businesses in regional cities. We have been working with the government to inform the \$35 million Food and Agriculture into Asia Strategy announced in the budget that will assist to deliver the government's objective of doubling the state's agricultural production by 2030."

There are a number of major projects which have been announced today across RCV member cities that will benefit the regions, but also the state, including:

- \$73 million for the Shepparton courts precinct development
- \$73 million for the Latrobe Regional Hospital
- \$50 million for the Great Ocean Road Upgrade
- \$30 million for the Ballarat West Employment Zone
- \$15 million for the Bendigo Aquatic Centre

RCV has already welcomed announcements made prior to the budget including Stage Two of the East West Link and \$40 million to deliver free Wi-Fi on some V/Line services and improvements to mobile phone blackspots.

“We re-state our desire for improved passenger rail services, especially an increase in the frequency of services to and between regional cities,” Cr Neoh concluded.

ENDS

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