



# MEDIA RELEASE

## Roads, rail and jobs boost for Regional Cities

**1 May 2018**

Regional Cities Victoria (RCV) Chair Margaret O'Rourke has welcomed the Andrews' Government's fourth State Budget, which provides significant investment in infrastructure and jobs in regional Victoria.

"RCV's State Budget submission highlighted the need for investment and innovation in business growth, tourism, and transport connectivity to help realise the potential of regional Victoria," Cr O'Rourke said.

"Key announcements in today's State Budget show that our message has been heard."

Regional businesses will benefit from a payroll tax cut down from 3.65 per cent to 2.425 per cent, and the increased threshold of \$650,000, up from \$625,000. Other business growth initiatives include:

- \$16.1m for The Growing Agriculture Exports, Farming and Tourism initiative
- \$16m for Bendigo GovHub
- \$13.5m for small business support, including digital economy roadshows in regional Victoria
- \$1.7m for a regional Centre of Excellence in the Mallee
- \$700,000 for the Driving Gippsland Food and Fibre Agenda
- \$600,000 for the Food Next Door program in the Mallee region
- \$300,000 for Wangaratta Digital Hub
- \$300,000 for Wodonga Business Innovation Cluster
- \$50,000 for a Premium Produce Business Case in the Central Highlands

RCV also applauds the increased funding allocated to regional roads.

"Regional roads are the basic infrastructure that underpin commerce and tourism, and connect families and businesses," said Cr O'Rourke.

"RCV contributed to the Inquiry into the Management of Country Roads and it's great to see the emphatic response to our call for increased and sustained funding for VicRoads."

Today's State Budget provides \$941m for regional roads, including:

- Establishment of Regional Roads Victoria (based in Ballarat)
- \$333m boost to road maintenance
- \$100m Fixing Country Roads fund for grants to rural and regional councils to fix their local roads.
- \$98m for planning and pre-construction of new bypasses on the Western Hwy at Beaufort and Ararat; \$40m to upgrade the Princes Hwy West between Colac and the South Australian Border.
- Upgrades to key sections of the Calder Hwy, Hamilton Hwy and Kiewa Valley Hwy
- Upgrades on the Shepparton Alternative Route to improve safety and access for heavy vehicles.

Transport and digital connectivity have been a long-standing strategic priority for RCV. The State Budget features \$11m allocated to removing mobile blackspots, and investments in regional rail, including \$313m



for Stage 2 of the Shepparton Line Upgrade, to enable nine services a day to and from Shepparton; in regionally produced new rolling stock; and track and signalling upgrades.

Importantly, the \$50m for planning for the airport rail link provides a significant opportunity for connecting regional centres with a fast rail network. Reducing commuting times between regional centres, and into Melbourne, will transform regional living and regional economies.

Cr O'Rourke also acknowledged the investments made in the regional visitor economy. "Tourism is a vital sector for regional economies and we were pleased to see funding for tourism infrastructure and initiatives across the state, including Stage 2 of the Shipwreck Coast Masterplan and the Geelong Convention Centre; the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing; the Silo Art Study in the Mallee; and the Murray River Adventure Trail."

However, RCV is disappointed that there was no dedicated, competitive fund for tourism infrastructure. "The Regional Tourism Infrastructure Fund highlighted the wealth of opportunities for regional tourism. There are many more exciting projects that would encourage tourism and enhance liveability across regional Victoria. RCV would like to see more support for these initiatives."

**Media Contact:** Joe Fennessy (0499 500 086)

