

Room for a View

29th June 2010

Assessing Ballarat's share of the regional commitments

Much has been made of the recent myriad of announcements about spending on regional development initiatives. Has Ballarat and its region really received a fair share and, if not, what are our local politicians and political aspirants doing about it?

To the extent that these observations direct the spotlight on government, they are not driven by party-politics. The same observations would be made of any government or opposition of any political persuasion in similar circumstances.

All advances by government aimed at elevating economic, social and lifestyle opportunities in regional places must be welcomed; and they are by the Committee for Ballarat. All these advances, however, must be looked at comparatively and realistically in terms of what is actually offered.

Let's take a look at some of the proposed initiatives as they apply to Ballarat and region.

- **SPORT:** The State Government has announced \$1 million in funding for Eureka Stadium with the intent that, at some point in the future the ground will be developed to a standard to attract AFL matches and, we hope to wellbeing for Ballarat and the region's residents. It is a start and is welcomed. The State Government has put \$25 million into the redevelopment of Geelong's Skilled Stadium.
- **ROADS:** There is still no commitment from the State Government for construction of the proposed \$85 million Ballarat West Link Road. This road, at least a major section of it, is an important stimulus for job creation in Ballarat. The State budget included a \$77 million injection to extend the ring road around Geelong from Anglesea Rd to Surf Coast Highway.
- **HEALTH:** This year's State Budget was hailed as providing a "second public hospital for Geelong" with \$33 million provided to buy land for a Geelong southern suburbs health hub and to expand acute health care at Geelong Hospital. It also contained news of a new \$473 million public hospital for Bendigo. While welcomed, the \$13 million support for the Ballarat Regional Integrated Cancer Centre pales by comparison.
- **TRANSPORT:** The \$4.3 billion regional rail link project aimed at delivering quicker regional rail services through suburban Melbourne to Southern Cross Station is also welcomed. When there are no guarantees yet of additional rail services for Ballarat, it

seems that it is really more about a better deal for commuters from places like Hoppers Crossing and Werribee to Melbourne.

- LEADERSHIP: Regional Victorian community leadership programs, such as Leadership Ballarat and Western Region, are delivering strongly for their communities, but are in need of significant and consistent government support. An announcement of \$3.3 million over five years is not nearly sufficient.

Now let's look in more detail at some of these points.

The Developing Regional Leaders funding was listed under the overall strategy of "Investing in Skills and Young People". Community Leadership Programs are not just about young people, although many are involved. They are about emerging leaders, some of whom are already displaying leadership potential in positions they may have held for some years.

The announced program also emphasises that it, "...supports an innovative regional business leadership culture" and will be "...building business leadership skills". Victoria's strong network of existing leadership programs are about community leadership, with obvious benefits for the businesses and organisations from which the participants are drawn. However, they are not specifically about developing business leadership skills.

The funding allocated to leadership is also targeted at Local Government, business and industry organisations, in addition to the community. The \$3.3 million could be spread pretty thinly.

The lack of any commitment to the proposed Ballarat West Link Rd carries significant negative implications for the overall development of the city. Residential growth is running apace across the south-west, west and north-west of greater Ballarat. It represents the impact of the fastest growing population in regional Victoria.

It is imperative that this proposed new transport corridor linking these developments – tying them to business and industrial expansion already announced and proposed in and around the same precincts – proceeds as a matter of priority.

Of course, there was the \$2 million allocated for works on the increasingly clogged Geelong Rd, but it is widely recognised that \$8 million is needed.

These observations suggest much still needs to be done to secure the level of support and commitment a fast-growing city like Ballarat deserves. Those in the pivotal political roles around Ballarat and the region must press harder to secure the level of commitment necessary to deliver for this city and region the economic, social and lifestyle outcomes it requires.

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