



## **Invest in nation-building infrastructure**

Committees for Melbourne, Perth, Geelong, Ballarat exist to provide leadership on issues that will better equip our cities and nation to deal with pressing current questions and ones in our foreseeable future. We have watched with interest our governments' actions in dealing with the global financial crisis, and influenced that at each available opportunity in our own ways. For the first time on this issue, we are making a joint statement about the direction of stimulus packages. Additional leadership is required.

We applaud nation building initiatives that have recently been announced. These include a bold plan to bring most of Australia to competitive broadband coverage and speed. We also applaud governments' intentions to build road, rail and port transport systems to new levels of efficiency, and which incorporate new balance between public and private, and domestic and freight transport systems. Each of these plans will face its challenges in equitability and benefit/cost ratios, particularly in increasingly difficult economic times and mounting international public debt. Nevertheless, they have our support.

We believe the balance in stimulus packages requires a major shift towards more nation and region building infrastructure. Cash handouts and personal tax concessions are welcomed by some, yet inevitably are short term initiatives with narrow impact and limited coverage. Major infrastructure projects, particularly those designed to build prosperous futures, are sustainable, and are employment and business-activity focused will provide much better returns. Without sustained and balanced business activity we will be unable to create public and private incomes to contribute to sustainable wellbeing. As an example, we believe that a \$10b investment in sustainable energy generation, or additional development of green vehicles, transport links, or water use would have had been a significantly better investment than cash handouts to some sections of our community. Any of these would have provided a longer lasting and more meaningful impact on our capacities to manage our economy and lifestyles for decades to come, rather than a few months or a year.

We are not only focused on physical infrastructure and the economic and lifestyle benefits that can be associated with it. Nor is our focus predominantly on more sustainable physical environments and lifestyles that come with those. They are both important. Social infrastructure has also been under represented in the initiatives.

Our health and wellbeing is partly at the mercy of an ailing health care system, with shortages of medical and other health care staff, hospitals under siege, and a largely hidden issue associated with a rapidly aging population for whom little preparation is evident. We could be investing in responding to those issues with major investment. Some parts of our education systems have had modest boosts for some obsolete buildings, yet other sectors, including the tertiary and higher education systems or industry based training – our engine rooms for skills and future innovation – are under supported. They are not the focus of major initiatives in retraining displaced workers, or continuing to support trainees in the numbers required, or supporting our international student numbers. They could be. Job network providers are facing a difficult period attending to longer term unemployed at the very time when skilled workers are facing

difficult times retaining or finding employment, without a great deal of obvious support. They could be supported with a social infrastructure initiative that helps retain or build those skills that we feel are required in tomorrow's workplaces, and retains their confidence.

We urge national governments to build more infrastructure - physical and social. We will welcome investment that will create jobs in and through more livable cities and regions, better communication, more efficient public and private transport and freight systems, and excellent social infrastructure. We want to provide sound long term bases for sustainable economic activity and lifestyles, and restored long term confidence in our planning for the future.

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