

**Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation
Committee**

Monday 14 February 2022

**Opening statement from the Secretary of the Department of
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and
Communications**

Good morning.

I would like to update the Committee on key developments in this portfolio since my last statement to the Committee in October.

At that time, I spoke about the work of my Department to deliver \$19 billion of investment across our portfolio last financial year to connect Australians, enrich communities and empower our regions. I also spoke about our work to continue to deliver essential ongoing functions, business as usual activities and COVID-19 response measures.

This includes \$5.2 billion of investment in roads, including road safety upgrades through \$1 billion invested under the road safety program, and almost \$2 billion for rail, including Inland Rail. Our major infrastructure investments also include Western Sydney International Airport.

We have delivered more than 130 programs. \$10.8 billion has been administered by this Department, with an additional approximately \$8.4 billion paid to states and territories under our National Partnership Agreements.

In 2020-21, our total transport infrastructure investment was \$12.1 billion. This was an almost 60 per cent increase above average annual transport infrastructure investment from 2013/14 – 2019/20. This is the largest delivery in history and is up from \$7 billion last year, thanks to hard work and great partnerships with states and territories to deliver through COVID.

Western Sydney International Airport was more than one quarter complete as at 31 December 2021 and remains on track to commence operations in late 2026. Construction has now commenced on the terminal building.

A total of 133km of track for the Inland Rail has been completed as of 31 December 2021. The 104 km Parkes to Narromine section is complete. The Narrabri to North Star section is under construction, seeing another 29km of track becoming operational in November 2021.

Since we last met, my staff have continued to work tirelessly with Ministers, APS colleagues, key industries, unions and state, territory and local governments to support essential freight movements through the additional pressures imposed by the latest wave of COVID-19 as well as recent severe weather events.

Most recently, my Department has been involved in maintaining important supply chains as the transport sector was affected by omicron and then the floods in South Australia.

We meet daily to support the reopening of key infrastructure including road and rail and to coordinate supply chain responses to disruptions to the supply of food to some parts of the country as well

as key water purification chemicals. We are also working with the maritime sector to identify additional shipping capacity.

Given this large workload I restructured the Surface Transport Policy Division at the end of last year, to better support a sustained focus on transport resilience, productivity, emissions and digitisation. I created a new Division of Road and Vehicle Safety to allow a greater focus on road and vehicle safety. The new division is part of the Infrastructure Group, providing a closer alignment of road safety policy with road safety-related infrastructure programs. The Surface Transport Policy Division will remain in the Transport Group.

We have continued to support the aviation industry, as it deals with the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. In December, the government released the Aviation Recovery Framework, a strategy developed with industry to help Australia's aviation sector navigate its way back to a position of strength. Programs supporting regional Australia, such as the Regional Airline Network Support Program, Regional Airports Program and Remote Airstrip Upgrade program have been extended.

In December the new National Road Safety Strategy was launched. Developed by the Australian, state and territory governments and the Australian Local Government Association, the Strategy includes key priorities for action over the next decade to reduce road trauma and identify areas where improvement is needed most.

In January this year the third phase of the Local Roads and Community Infrastructure program commenced. Nearly 200 councils have already nominated their priority projects. Phase Three of the LRCI program provides a further \$1 billion in funding to improve local

road networks and deliver priority community infrastructure projects.

Across all three phases, the LRCI program is delivering a total of \$2.5 billion to local governments, with over 6,900 projects nationwide approved worth over \$1.888 billion, and more to come.

Our regional grants funding programs continue to deliver to regional Australia - to help address the impacts of COVID-19 as well as to grow. Last year two rounds of the Building Better Regions Fund were progressed, making six in total in operation right now across Australia, delivering social and economic benefits through 461 community investment and infrastructure projects in Rounds Four and Five. A seventh round of the Stronger Communities Programme is being delivered to support Australian communities as they recover from the economic and social impacts of the pandemic, with 2,300 applications submitted.

We have successfully transitioned from NSW to QLD as the state service provider for Norfolk Island. The two most significant services provided are health and education, the school and the hospital both successfully commenced operating under the QLD state system from 1 January 2022.

The Department is continuing to deliver the 10 City and Regional Deals agreed to date, which represent a combined investment of \$17.5 billion over the life of the Deals.

The Government has now committed more than \$1.9 billion towards 72 water infrastructure projects, including the Connections pathway, and more than 70 business cases and feasibility studies across Australia as part of the \$3.5 billion National Water Grid Fund.

Construction is underway on multiple projects funded through the National Water Grid Fund, building on the strong foundation of nine water infrastructure projects that are already complete. Since October 2021, the Mareeba-Dimbulah Water Supply Scheme Efficiency Improvement project has been completed providing greater water availability and security; as well as seeing the completion of the Adelaide River Off-Stream Water Storage business case.

I would like to thank the people that are my department, most of whom continue to work from home to support efforts to reduce the spread of COVID during this latest wave, as well as our portfolio agencies for their continued efforts. A strong and well-functioning public service continues to play a key role in Australia's effective response to the crisis.

In response to a request from Senator Sterle, I would now like to table a number of documents relating to program expenditure across infrastructure investment, regional development, local government, cities and COVID response funding for aviation support, targeted road safety projects and local and community infrastructure projects.