



The Hon Catherine King MP

Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government
(/c-king)

[Home \(/\)](#) > [The Hon Catherine King MP \(/c-king\)](#) > [Interviews \(/c-king/interview\)](#) >
Transcript - radio interview - ABC Upper Hunter, Breakfast with Amelia Bernasconi

Transcript - radio interview - ABC Upper Hunter, Breakfast with Amelia Bernasconi

AMELIA BERNASCONI [HOST]: Well, the Federal Government has this week announced it will undertake a 90- day independent review into its infrastructure investment program as to make sure projects in the pipeline are nationally significant and can be funded right through to completion. We're also hearing this morning a multimillion-dollar roads package has been announced. For more on that and the review, we're joined by Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government Minister Catherine King. Good morning.

CATHERINE KING [MINISTER]: Good morning, Amelia.

AMELIA BERNASCONI: Thanks for your time today. Firstly, to the review, can you guarantee that the Muswellbrook and Singleton Bypass projects will still be completed?

CATHERINE KING: Yes, I can. They're obviously part of the important construction work that's being undertaken in the region. The review, really what we're doing is I've got \$120 billion 10 year pipeline that frankly has got projects in it where there is no funding partner, money has been sitting in that pipeline for some time in this case going right back to 2016, and there's not enough money to actually build some of those projects. So, what we're looking at, is projects that aren't under construction, projects that weren't our election commitments, which we are obviously honouring to deliver those. And any comments that I made during election campaigns about bringing projects forward, we're honouring all of those, but really taking a short, sharp look at the pipeline to try and make sure everything in the pipeline can be delivered. The problem I've been left with, really, is that when we left office, there was about 150 projects on the pipeline. Today, there are 800 projects on the pipeline, 497 of those under \$50 million. And it's just very difficult to find headroom, in fact, very little headroom in that. No

provisions made for cost escalations of projects. So, I've really got to try and work my way through project by project, excluding those ones I've just mentioned, and to really get on with it. So, I've got no target, I've got no particular hit list of projects. I really want some independent advice about where projects are up to where it's just going to be impossible to deliver them. Particularly, where we've got there's instances of projects that are billions of dollars short of what would be needed to actually complete them, and state government is saying, well, we're not funding them and we're not interested in this project. So, they've just sat there for ages. So, really, that's what the review is about. It's actually about trying to create more headroom to actually deliver projects rather than them just sitting there as announcements.

AMELIA BERNASCONI: Right. So, everything promised, committed budgeted for previously will go through. I'm thinking of projects like the Merriwa to Willow Tree Road. That was a late addition to last year's budget, I think about \$38 million for that.

CATHERINE KING: Yeah, that's correct.

AMELIA BERNASCONI: So, there's no chance, there's no risk that the government will be backtracking on those sorts of commitments that you've already publicly -

CATHERINE KING: No, no. And I've stood there with the council in relation to that and we're very keen to deliver that with them. We know what a difficulty that has been with the local community, but as I said, it's particularly projects that there's many, as I said, have been sitting on the pipeline since 2016 and it's sort of like there's been no movement on them at all. And part of the reason has been, is there was a lot of focus by the previous government on a bit of grandstanding about the announcement. Very happy to do lots of media on the announcement, but there actually hadn't been any planning work done on the project. And really, it's been meant that they've been very difficult to deliver, particularly where there's no other funding partner and not enough money to deliver the project.

AMELIA BERNASCONI: We're here in the Upper Hunter between the New England and Hunter electorates. And we have been hearing from Member for New England, Barnaby Joyce. There's concerns that if these projects are taken out of regional areas, that will have flow on effects to the local communities, local employment around them as well. What do you say to that? How will you navigate that?

CATHERINE KING: Well, the first thing is we haven't got a specific target, whether it's rural or whether they're city projects or peri-urban projects, a project's got to stack up on its own and be able to be funded and be able to be delivered wherever it is. So, we're not particularly saying that it's rural projects or that it's other targets, but I would say that taking a lecture from Barnaby Joyce in any way, shape or form about this, he's been actually part of the problem that we're facing here. He's part of the problem where I've had an infrastructure project, in the case of Inland Rail, poorly planned, not proper governance structures put in place to deliver the

project, blow out from \$9bn to \$31bn. So really, he's been part of the problem. I hope very much that he'll help be part of the solution to actually make sure that we can actually deliver projects that we're not over-promising and under-delivering, that we're actually making sure every project that's in the pipeline is able to be delivered, is properly funded and that we can get on with the job of actually getting construction jobs out there and getting people home safely and getting our freight to market as quickly as we can.

AMELIA BERNASCONI: Quarter to eight on ABC Upper Hunter. You're hearing from Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government Minister Catherine King. You've also just this morning announced a multimillion-dollar package for roads, looking at particularly Muswellbrook and Singleton councils, receiving around a million dollars each. Where's that come from? Is there anything in particular that that will go towards?

CATHERINE KING: Yes, it will. It's all to go to local government. It's a commitment that we made during the election campaign was to increase funding for regional and rural councils, in particular for local roads. We were very conscious about the terrible weather events we've all experienced. I live in Ballarat. The roads around our roadway are pretty shocking and councils have really struggled to keep up with the maintenance of those. Water is not our roads friends, unfortunately. So, this additional money we're announcing today, the allocations of that \$250 million they come on top of the announcement of the \$500 million in February that already local councils will be aware of. So, it sees, for example, Muswellbrook Shire Council gets an additional \$333,000, bringing their total up to just over \$900,000, from the Federal Government, in this particular program for local roads. And Cessnock Council, their total is around \$1.6 million. And Lake Macquarie Council \$2.7 million and Singleton, as you said, \$1.2 million in total. So, bringing that up really helping those councils, particularly as they're leading, they're all leading into their budgets at the moment, would be, I'm sure, very pleasing for them to know the amounts that are being allocated, and that is specifically, that additional amount is all to go specifically to local roads.

AMELIA BERNASCONI: I'm sure people driving to work this morning will be very pleased to hear that. Minister, thank you so much for your time on the program today.

CATHERINE KING: Really great to be with you.

AMELIA BERNASCONI: Thank you very much.

INTERVIEW

Wednesday 03 May 2023

SUBJECTS: Independent infrastructure review, roads funding package announcement