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Dear Minister

*Re: Draft State Infrastructure Plan Submission*

On behalf of the Regional Development Australia (RDA) Townsville and North West Queensland Committee, I write to congratulate the Queensland Government on your focus and interest in addressing the challenges and developing the opportunities associated with infrastructure planning and construction, in particular in our region in Northern Queensland and wish to provide comments in regard to the *Draft State Infrastructure Plan*.

The Townsville and North West Queensland region is arguably the most significant region in Northern Australia. It covers 27% of the population and 15% of the area of Northern Australia. Townsville is the largest city in Northern Australia. From a Queensland perspective, the region covers more than one quarter of the state's area and 5.8% of the population. The region is a significant contributor to both state and national production and Gross Domestic Product in the mining, agricultural, grazing and tourism sectors. The focus on developing Northern Australia and hence Northern Queensland is creating both new needs with additional growth and opportunities to develop infrastructure.

#### **Background to RDA's Interest in the Draft Infrastructure Plan**

Regional Development Australia was established by the Australian Government as a network of 55 Committees across Australia made up of local community leaders who are volunteers to champion the development of long-term sustainable communities. (Refer to [www.rda.gov.au](http://www.rda.gov.au))

The Regional Development Australia Townsville and North West Queensland Committee is an incorporated not-for-profit association and has twelve ministerially appointed members. Funding is provided by the Federal Government. The Committee's purpose is to achieve a prosperous, sustainable, cohesive and liveable region. Our region covers 15 local government areas of Boulia, Burdekin, Burke, Carpentaria, Charters Towers, Cloncurry, Doomadgee, Flinders, Hinchinbrook, McKinlay, Mornington Island, Mount Isa, Palm Island, Richmond and Townsville. (Refer to [www.rdanwq.org.au](http://www.rdanwq.org.au))



## **Comments on the Draft State Infrastructure Plan**

We acknowledge and support the stated challenges and objectives in the Draft Plan. In regard to planning and prioritisation, we recognise the immediate 1-4 year program as being linked with approved and budgeted infrastructure planning and construction.

While we understand that that Queensland Government is seeking solutions for the 5-15 year infrastructure needs and does not wish to be too prescriptive, we encourage the Government to commit to major projects that do require long term planning. Transport corridors, major road, rail, port and airport developments require more than five years for planning and construction. Similarly major social infrastructure like hospitals and schools usually would require more than five years to develop from the pre-feasibility stage to opening. We believe this commitment to major infrastructure projects where growth will occur will provide certainty and business confidence which is at a low point in our region at present.

We believe that councils are major regional partners for the Queensland Government and the champions for their communities. Their financial sustainability usually relies on grants from the Australian and Queensland Governments. A partnership approach which is strategic, long term and outcomes focussed to ensure a well-planned and executed 15 year infrastructure plan could ensure their greater stability and sustainability along with the stability of their direct and indirect employees and communities.

One example of this approach is the development of the *Inland Queensland Roads Action Plan*. 33 Councils, eight Regional Road and Transport Groups and the RACQ along with four RDA Committees felt that there was an opportunity to develop a 15 year vision and plan for strengthening the road network to deliver greater productivity, economic and safety outcomes and have hence engaged with our RDA Committee to produce an *Inland Queensland Roads Action Plan*. It will be ready in draft format this month and will be finalised in coming weeks. Covering approximately 75% of Queensland's area – west of the Bruce Highway and outside South-East Queensland, this Plan will prioritise road projects based on multi-criteria assessment. It will inform the Australian and Queensland Governments on priorities for funding based on evidence. Armed with this information, the Queensland Government will be in a position to fast track the implementation of a 15 year plan to connect mining, agricultural, grazing and other industries to their international and domestic markets. This road network will also importantly also support growth in regional tourism which is so vital to the State.

The following are specific recommendations for consideration in infrastructure planning that relate to RDA's top four priorities – Roads and Transport, Energy, Water and Telecommunications infrastructure.

### **Transport**

#### **Roads**

In the Townsville and North West Queensland Region, we recognise and appreciate the investment into the Bruce Highway. The following roads are examples of those that carry freight and tourists with potential growth and require upgrades for productivity and safety.

1. Flinders Highway
2. Barkly Highway

3. Gregory Developmental Road
4. Kennedy Developmental Road including the Hann Highway
5. Herveys Range Developmental Road
6. Wills Developmental Road
7. Burke Developmental Road
8. Torrens Creek to Aramac Road
9. Croydon to Richmond to Winton Road
10. Donohue Highway
11. Cloncurry to Dajarra
12. Camooweal to Gregory Road

The above-mentioned *Inland Queensland Roads Action Plan* will soon provide more data on roads within our region and the greater inland Queensland region.

### **Rail**

The Townsville Eastern Access Rail Corridor (TEARC) is critical infrastructure for growing exports out of northern Queensland. The Port of Townsville is now the largest exporter of live cattle and growth is expected to continue. Likewise the port offers the fastest sailing time from Australia to China and hence with growth in exports to China the port will become even more significant. We recommend that the TEARC be specifically listed as a 5-15 year opportunity and that planning be fast tracked to 2016 to create employment opportunities in the Townsville area which is suffering higher than state and national unemployment.

### **Ports**

We support the expansion of the Port of Townsville to cater for increasing exports of live cattle and development of new routes connecting northern Queensland to China and other international ports. We also support the development of new opportunities at Karumba Port to support regional economic development in the Gulf communities.

### **Water**

Access to water is the major enabler of sustainability and economic growth in our region. We recommend the development of a Northern Queensland Water Investment Plan to promote and encourage investment into the sector. The Townsville and North West Queensland Region has urgent needs to address water security for communities such as Townsville, Mount Isa and Cloncurry as well as requirements for industry and agriculture. We encourage the Queensland Government to work closely with Councils and to financially support pre-feasibility and feasibility studies for water security and industry/ agricultural expansion. In Northern Queensland there is the opportunity to work closely with the Australian Government on this planning and construction.

### **Energy**

Access to affordable energy, and electricity in particular, will be a key enabler of economic growth in our region. We recommend the development of a Northern Queensland Energy Investment Plan to promote and encourage private sector investment into the sector. The Townsville and North West Queensland Region is well-placed to support investment into renewable energy such as biofuels, ethanol, solar and wind farms.

## **Telecommunications**

We congratulate the Queensland Government on supporting the Australian Government Mobile Blackspot Program both now and into the next two years. We agree with your identification of opportunities for strengthening telecommunications infrastructure in rural and remote parts of Queensland and other opportunities for development. We recommend on-going close collaboration with the Australian Government and regional councils in regard to improving mobile and broadband telecommunications infrastructure to ensure the delivery of services to communities and sustainability of rural and remote businesses.

I wish to thank you for this opportunity to make a submission and once again congratulate you on addressing our infrastructure needs to ensure greater, resilient communities across Queensland.

I would be pleased to expand on any comments or answer any questions you may have and can be reached on 07 4410 3655 or at [ceo@rdanwq.org.au](mailto:ceo@rdanwq.org.au). My RDA Committee and I look forward to further engagement in the development of Northern Queensland infrastructure.

Yours sincerely



**Glenys Schuntner**

Chief Executive Officer

Regional Development Australia Townsville and North West Queensland Committee

Cc: The Hon Coralee O'Rourke, Minister assisting the Premier in Northern Queensland  
Mr Andrew Cripps, Member for Hinchinbrook  
Mr Aaron Harper, Member for Thuringowa  
Mr Robbie Katter, Member for Mount Isa  
Mr Shane Knuth, Member for Dalrymple  
Mr Dale Last, Member for Burdekin  
Mr Scott Stewart, Member for Townsville