

10/05/2016

p.5

Warragul Gazette

Roads commitment is welcome news

by Keith Anderson

Funding for road works announced in the federal budget have been widely welcomed in Gippsland.

The government committed to extend the Roads to Recovery and Bridge Renewal programs and has removed the freeze on increase to Financial Assistance Grants to municipal councils.

Member for McMillan Russell Broadbent said Baw Baw Shire Council would get \$2.9 million of the \$13.7 million Roads to Recovery allocation to the electorate for the 2016-2017 financial year.

The program assists councils undertake essential roads repairs and upgrades.

Mr Broadbent said nationally \$560 million a year would be provided in each of the next three years for Roads to Recovery, Bridge Renewal, the Heavy Vehicle Safety and Productivity Program and road Black Spot removals. Committee for Gipps-

land chief executive officer Mary Aldred said there were some major road projects funded in the budget that were crucial to Gippsland.

"These included a \$500 million contribution towards upgrading the Monash Freeway that Gippsland relies on to move freight and for residents that travel to Melbourne and the suburbs for work and other reasons".

Also welcome was the Rural and Regional Roads package of \$345 and \$23.9 million for further duplication of the Princes Highway between Traralgon and Sale, Ms Aldred said.

Regional Cities Victoria, that represents the 10 largest regional cities in the state including La Trobe, also gave broad support to some of the key Budget measures for regional and rural areas.

Among the measures backed by RCV was the removal of the freeze on Financial Assistance Grants to councils that

had applied since 2014 and on which non-metropolitan areas were more dependent and "had been doing it the toughest".

Baw Baw shire chief executive Helen Anstis said this would re-instate \$250,000 of annual grant revenue currently absorbed by ratepayers.

It also welcomed extension of Roads to Recovery and Bridge Renewal programs and the government's pledge to provide ongoing funding of the National Stronger Regions Fund.

The Victorian Farmers Federation gave "full credit" to the Government's \$345 million to upgrade rural highways as part of \$565 million for Victoria's rural and regional infrastructure projects.

The Australian Local Government Association praised the confirmation that Roads for Recovery would continue beyond 2018-2019 and increase by \$50 million a year after then.

However, it stated more is need to address a \$1.2

billion annual funding shortfall to maintain local roads and support national productivity improvements.

President Troy Piekard said investment in infrastructure at all levels of government should be a priority for all parties in upcoming election campaigns.