



REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AUSTRALIA MNC (NSW) WORKPLAN TASK 3

LOCAL COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE PRIORITIES

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1. Rationale for community consultation

The Australian Government sought advice from regional communities across Australia on priorities for the types of local community infrastructure that could encourage economic development in local communities, through increasing economic investment, improving the job opportunities in regional Australia and enhancing the livability of regional centres. The advice is to assist in planning on the basis of need across all Australian Government portfolios.

2. Setting priorities

There is confusion on national, state or local provision: who funds what area and who should contribute? We need rationalisation and a real definition of responsibilities of each of the three tiers of Government and indeed where we expect the private sector to be involved.

We also need rationalisation and clear priority setting for National and Regional Infrastructure with priority projects based on transparent, evidence-based criteria.

The process to determine Infrastructure priority projects is therefore recommended in the following way:

- Individual regions develop a broad strategic infrastructure plan through statistical, evidence-based analysis, intensive consultation and stakeholder submission opportunities examining competitive and comparative strengths, gaps and impediments;
- A “Shared Vision” and priority areas of infrastructure in the Economic, Cultural, Social and Environmental sectors are determined through this strategic planning/consultation/engagement process;
- Regional Development Australia committees facilitate this process and gain agreement on (evidence-based) strategic projects and make recommendations to Canberra;
- Based on these recommendations, a national priority project list is developed using transparent criteria and analysis; it is then published indicating Governments intent;
- The Regional Development Australia committees, in their Solution Broker role, then drive the endorsed local regional Infrastructure projects with stakeholder seeking Public and Private Funding opportunities as appropriate.

This process should ensure that projects not only address regional priorities but also the overall national agenda.

It would be beneficial also if:

- “Regions” are defined once and applied across all levels of Government;
- There is a regional capacity to use well defined research to guide planning and projects within regions for national consideration.

3. Recent infrastructure reviews

3.1 Southern Cross University (2006)

The NSW Mid North Coast region has experienced strong population growth over the last two decades, and in many areas the provision of essential infrastructure has lagged growing demand. Responsibility for the provision of much of this infrastructure has largely fallen on Local Governments, placing enormous financial strains on some (particularly smaller) Councils.

Southern Cross University was commissioned in late 2006 to report on the Mid North Coast regional infrastructure. The report was designed to establish if there are arguments and/or observations contained in nine major reports (including Local Government Inquiry 2006, National Sea Change Taskforce 2006, and the State of the Regions Report 2005-6) that can be used to:

- Identify the major infrastructure needs (current and projected) for the Mid North Coast region, particularly infrastructure required to facilitate the region's growth;
- Determine regional infrastructure priorities.

The lack of identified specific infrastructure needs and priorities for the Mid North Coast in the reviewed reports was disappointing. However, it appears that many regions in NSW, and probably nationally, are in the same position, having insufficient information regarding current infrastructure, to record and prioritise immediate and future requirements.

Nevertheless, the strong themes of an increasingly ageing population and poor socioeconomic characteristics of the Mid North Coast's population suggest a variety of infrastructure needs. Hence, an overall plan for nurturing and developing the region's economy (to facilitate an increase in the Mid North Coast's gross regional product) through the provision of broadband and vital transport infrastructure; together with the provision of public transport, aged care and health infrastructure; should address the most pressing infrastructure (and many socio-economic) needs for the region.

3.2 AEC: Mid North Coast Regional Economic Profile Report –December 2007

The well-respected consultancy company, AEC, in its Mid North Coast Regional Economic Profile Report –December 2007 provided the following information following its research and consultation throughout the region.

3.2.1 Competitive & Comparative Strengths

The Mid-North Coast's core competitive and comparative strengths relating to existing infrastructure and resources include:

- Abundant agriculture, forestry and fishing resources, with frost-free coastal areas and climate that supports a number of horticulture commodities.
- Education and training support in the region, particularly in the key sectors of agriculture, forestry, marine and tourism.

- Positioning along the trade route between Brisbane and Sydney, with significant road and rail infrastructure capable of freight carriage and ongoing investment in the upgrade of the Pacific Highway as a dual carriageway.
- Existing and potential to expand air, road, rail, marine and port infrastructure to cater for/ facilitate economic development initiatives.
- Potential for the development of strategically located transport interchanges and industry precincts to facilitate commodity and tourist movement between transport forms and fixed infrastructure.
- Close proximity to premium tourism markets and significant tourism support
- Infrastructure allowing easy access to and from these markets.
- Current and future areas of available and appropriately zoned retail, commercial, industrial and residential development land.
- Current planning activities supporting the retention and protection of productive land and natural resources.
- Significant investment in water management infrastructure in specific areas.
- Positioned adjacent to the major north-south fibre optic corridor.

3.2.2 Gaps & Impediments

Specific gaps and impediments identified that are likely to have an increasing negative impact on the Mid North Coast as the population continues to grow include:

- Current and future capacity constraints of transport network, and lack of alternate routes.
- Current and future telecommunications infrastructure quality and capacity.
- Future capacity of electricity transmission lines and reliance on electricity generation from outside the region.
- Coordination between transport modes and activities, and irregularity of service.
- Current and future capacity of health and aged care infrastructure.
- Current predominance of detached housing encouraging urban sprawl.
- Water availability for urban and industry development.
- Exposure to climate variability (including drought, flood and fire).
- Additional commercial (203 ha) and industrial (225 ha) land required by 2031.
- A lack of understanding of the complexities and difficulties of planning.
- A lack of coordination between different levels of Government, and a lack of alignment between different programs.
- The limited availability of adequate infrastructure funding.

The last dot point is also reflected in the March 2008 Rural and Regional Taskforce Report to the NSW Premier which identifies, amongst other things, priority infrastructure needs but has no funding identified or committed to implement recommendations.

3.2.3 Major challenges

It is important to state within this submission that there are major economic, social and environmental challenges confronting the communities of the NSW Mid North Coast region. These include:

- A relatively weak and shallow economy with few established large-scale industries;
- Relatively high levels of unemployment and underemployment;
- The predominance of low-wage semi-skilled casual service jobs;

- Skills shortages in particular sectors;
- Workforce constraints due to a relatively low participation rate, relatively high over 65 population, and relatively high levels of welfare dependency;
- The rapidly growing needs of an ageing population;
- A significant and disadvantaged indigenous population;
- Pressures on the natural environment from urban expansion and climate change;
- Pressures on the rural/agricultural sector from urban expansion, fluctuating commodity prices, water constraints and climate change;
- Extensive infrastructure deficiencies in areas outside the region's major urban growth centres (including transport, roads, broadband, health and social services, etc); and
- Relatively high levels of population mobility, weakening traditional social support structures.

Addressing the infrastructure deficiencies should also address many of these socio-economic challenges.

4. Mid North Coast RDA consultation – August 2008

4.1 Process and response

A detailed consultation strategy produced by Regional Development Australia, Mid North Coast (NSW) has been successfully implemented. Specific input from over 130 people was received, representing over 200 groups and individuals from a diverse background, including State government departments, the arts, community, industry, education and training, Aboriginal community, business services, economic development bodies, environmental groups, tourism, youth, health, 7 Councils and several previous Regional Partnerships and Sustainable Regions funding applicants. The perceived infrastructure priorities elicited from the community consultation process closely resembled the priorities identified in the 2006 Mid North Coast infrastructure review.

Infrastructure needs were generally considered to be both “hard” and “soft”. A key message was that provision and maintenance of both forms of Infrastructure should be closely linked to economic development needs. Sustainability and environmental issues were also seen as critical considerations.

4.2 Rating of Mid North Coast priorities identified in consultation process

Some submissions from the community listed several infrastructure priorities, some only one.

It was determined that a fair and representative method of allocating the order of priority of infrastructure needs was to grade submissions as follows:

- first priorities at 10 points,
- second priorities at 8 points,
- third priorities at 6 points,
- fourth priorities at 4 points,
- and 3 points each for any further priorities listed.

Infrastructure priorities were classified, as appropriately as possible, into 8 overarching major categories, which are listed within the following table in order of priority. The

headings of the eight major categories are shaded in blue and the percentage that each major category received of the total points is indicated under the category heading.

The rows under the major category headings specify the types of infrastructure priorities that make up each major category. The points allocated to these sub-categories are shown as percentages of points that each sub-category received relative to the major category.

Many submissions also identified infrastructure projects specific to the respondent's LGA. The details of these specific projects have been retained for later use, but are not included in this submission. Where possible a broad view was taken and they have been rated and included in the relevant infrastructure categories of this submission.

Type of local community infrastructure	% of category	Timeframe S: Short M: Medium L: Long	Why is this a priority to the community?
1. TRANSPORT (24.5% of total responses)			<p>The Mid North Coast's average weekly household income of \$864 is \$390 (Or 31.1%) below the State average of \$1,254. With substantial distances to travel between rural and coastal areas and major towns, the cost of fuel impacts heavily on household expenditure and has also impacted on tourism into the region, a major contributor to our economy. People have also become more aware of the environmental impacts of fossil fuels and are seeking solutions from the government.</p>
1a) Public Transport	22.5%	S-M-L	<p>Public transport in our region is virtually non-existent. Our community needs an accessible and affordable public transport system for inter-town and inter-regional travel by road, rail and perhaps sea.</p> <p>For youth especially this is a priority as the lack of facilities in this area means youth have to travel to venues without the aid of public transport for education, entertainment and work and they are the most price sensitive in our community. Lack of public transport also impacts heavily on our aged population, making it difficult to access medical infrastructure. It also reduces social interaction in isolated communities.</p> <p>As fuel prices rise, the need to provide local, cost effective transport for rural communities will increase.</p>
1b) Rail	18%	S-M-L	<p>The community seeks strong commitment to support the railway for longer distance transport. Whilst there has been significant funding allocated to major regional highways there has been very little investment made into regional rail infrastructure.</p> <p>Road transport currently carries most commodities to an increasingly congested and polluted city destination. Improved rail systems would encourage rail transport of commodities to and from the city to major country distribution centres, relieve freight transport on the highway, improve safety and reduce greenhouse gas production.</p> <p>Consideration should also be given to a fast train between Sydney and Brisbane to</p>

			drastically reduce travelling time, fuel consumption and decrease road transport.
1c) Timber bridges and local roads	18%	S-M-L	Many local bridges and roads need urgent repair, duplication or replacement. Infrastructure in regional and rural NSW has gradually and significantly declined over the years and local Councils are now the ones left 'holding the baby' and held accountable by people living in those areas. Councils do not have the resources to maintain the local road network at the current standard let alone construct new roads and bridges.
1d) Air travel and airport upgrades	13.5%	S-M	Air transport is important for our tourism industry and also for agricultural and industrial businesses. Access by air is a fundamental and often seemingly undervalued element of infrastructure. There are exciting opportunities for regional airports to expand but maintenance is costly which makes many regional airports marginal and in many cases, unviable. In the decades since the Federal Government handed over ownership of most of the regional airports to councils, there has often been a reduction of services available because councils look too narrowly at the value-add that air access brings and try to recoup airfield operating costs from too narrow a group of people (aircraft operators). It is recommended that the government conduct a review of regional airports with a view to ensuring ongoing maintenance and viability.
1e) Main roads/highways	10.5%	S-M	Despite heavy expenditure on improving the Pacific Highway in recent years, there is still much work to do, and its poor state is affecting the health and safety of our community and other travelers who have to endure heavy traffic density, increased B-double trucks, accident delays and unsafe conditions.
1f) Sea and river transport	10.5%	S-M	Repairing and improving water infrastructure, such as wharves and breakwalls, along with dredging of silted waterways, would encourage the return of sea and river transportation for cargo and passengers, and reduce the density of traffic on the highway. The local marine industry would benefit through a more reliable access point to the ocean which, in turn, would create more employment opportunities.
1g) Rail, road and air synergies	7%	S-M	The transport relationship between road, rail and air needs to be reconfigured.

			Regional towns, where there is a confluence of railway and road trucking routes, would provide an excellent opportunity for refuelling as well as freight transit depots.
2. INDUSTRY AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT (22.5%)			Growth of industry in the Mid North Coast is severely restricted by the lack of skilled workers. Coupled with an unemployment rate 90% higher than the national average, and a decline in traditional industries, there is a clear need for government intervention.
2a) Tertiary trades education and facilities; skills and workforce development	35%	S-M-L	<p>Labour market and workforce issues are the lifeblood of successful regional development (and social inclusion objectives) and need to be more clearly and effectively linked. Skilled workers and industry rate lack of education resources as dominant reasons for not relocating to regional and rural areas. With both the state and federal government realising that education is a major factor for all regional areas, there has been the push for Australian Technical Colleges and Trade Schools to be developed. Both these initiatives are excellent ideas and will assist some areas which have not have these resources. Yet Trade schools only support VET training for years 11 and 12 and do nothing to pick up the youth and the mature-aged unemployed who fall through the cracks. They also do not adequately address critical skill shortages in regional areas. The government should be providing long term funding to its current education providers, such as TAFE, and ensuring skills programs are available to all age groups.</p> <p>Consideration should be given to the relationship between vocational education programs and private sector investment programs, and how the two funding streams can be linked where appropriate.</p>
2b) Business services	15.5%	M	<p>The high level of unemployment on the Mid North Coast makes it paramount that we stimulate business to increase capacity in business in a holistic way. Priority needs to be given to projects/facilities that deliver substantial and multiple community benefits, and that have a broad impact on facilitating enterprise, growing economic activity and expanding employment.</p> <p>We must ensure that the focus of future development efforts is on those industry</p>

			sectors that enjoy a genuine competitive advantage, have the greatest potential to thrive in this region and will support the growth of “high value” employment.
2c) Creative industry development	13%	S	A very high proportion of the Mid North Coast population works in the Creative Industries sector. They work in small teams who collaborate. There needs to be better networks and shared facilities to encourage growth and prosperity in this sector.
2d) Decentralise industry and government agencies	10%	M	As more Australians find work in service industries, more jobs move from the country to cities that – if water shortages are a guide – already exceed their carrying capacity. Employment in provincial cities can and should be fostered by locating more government agencies in rural and regional Australia. Develop and create economic zones with incentives to industry to move from metropolitan areas, such as tax benefits and subsidies.
2e) Scholarships/support for students from disadvantaged or Aboriginal background	7%	S	Often clever people come from economically disadvantaged families and will not consider further education & training because of the hardship for their families or the cost is impossible for them to bear at that time in their lives - provision of scholarships or other financial support benefits the entire country in the long run. Scholarships should also be available for Aboriginal people skilled in sport, music, and creativity.
2f) Industry development other: ○ intervene in zoning regulations and lessen processing delays; reduce regulatory burden	19.5%	S-M-L	There is a great deal of land capability and private investors ready to develop but the processing times for planning applications are extensive, protracted and frustrating. Councils have identified areas for such development to occur but the zonings are (still) not in place. Is there a role here for Federal Government intervention? There is a high regulatory burden in the development of major infrastructure projects in a time of uncertain capital markets and a conflicting and uncertain legislative environment. There is also a need to increase urban density and decrease rural spread which encroaches on agricultural land and increases the need for additional infrastructure.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ increase employment land, ○ provide infrastructure and employment in Aboriginal enterprises, ○ shared use facilities, ○ regional industry networks 		<p>M-L</p> <p>S-M</p> <p>S-M</p> <p>S-M</p>	<p>Scarcity of employment land is inhibiting local industry growth and impeding relocation of companies to the region.</p> <p>The region has a high population of Aboriginal people; many are unemployed. There are strong opportunities for enterprise development and training in landcare, arts, agriculture and aged care.</p> <p>Enable growth through value-adding to local produce, and establishing co-operative art centres.</p> <p>Infrastructure should also include the ephemeral area of 'networks' and as such should also fund regional networks such as the establishment and development of Regional Industry Associations.</p>
<p>3. SOCIAL AND RECREATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE (21%)</p>			<p>Increase infrastructure and assets at the community level to provide increased access to facilities for all regional towns and communities.</p>
<p>3a) Sport and recreational infrastructure, considering the needs of youth, the disabled and tourism</p>	<p>31.5%</p>	<p>S-M-L</p>	<p>Lack of sporting facilities have made it difficult to develop programs which contribute to community cohesion as sport is a major vehicle in this region in which community activity can occur. Lack of sporting activities, especially for youth, makes our community vulnerable to criminal behavior and contributes to the exodus of youth from our region.</p>
<p>3b) Cultural capital infrastructure</p>	<p>21%</p>	<p>S</p>	<p>Funds to develop cultural infrastructure to support the massive population growth in this region, and to enable us to maintain our unique cultural identity in the face of fast paced growth.</p> <p>Often older Council buildings have been used to house our cultural assets as museums and galleries are our built tourist attractions. Regional NSW is suffering from the need for communities to comply with new government regulations and councils are struggling to financially support these improvements.</p>

3c) Walkways and cycleways; particularly near waterways and to connect towns	20.5%	S-M	Walkways and cycleways should be developed to maintain the natural environment and educate users in the environmental and health benefits of riding bicycles versus driving. Prioritise the construction of a coastal path, along the entire coastline of the area Construct cycleways not only throughout the cities, but linking our out-lying small villages with the coast.
3d) Community halls, public places, multi use parks and buildings, showground upgrades, public land	20%	S-M	Support deterioration of infrastructure – not just new infrastructure. Establish multi use parks – skate park, performing arts, ampi-theatre, walking trails, viewing platforms, exercise equipment. Community halls and upgrades are required for local community wellbeing, emergency services, entertainment and social inclusion. They support the core of the rural community social fabric and will become in greater demand as fuel cost increase and travel becomes a financial burden instead of a recreational activity for low income families. No public land should ever be sold. We will need every inch of it.
3e) Access to welfare and support services and infrastructure	7%	S-M-L	Provide multi-use buildings for all groups that deliver community services.
4. WATER AND UTILITIES (12%)			We are blessed with (usually) abundant water in this area, but should not take it for granted. Act on climate change; generate clean power. Not because we (in Australia) really make any difference, but because if we don't act, we have no right to try and influence the rest of the world. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influences and impacts on private investment • Impacts regional populations and development • Environmental impacts and significance
4a) Water and sewerage; including off stream water	57%	S-M-L	It is important to ensure that water infrastructure needs are forecast through federal, state and local plans.

including off stream water storage, grey water treatment, stormwater and village sewerage			<p>Assist with water supply issues during drought.</p> <p>Reduce pollution and river contamination issues and maintain adequate environmental river flows.</p> <p>Subsidise water tanks for all dwellings to reduce the demand for reticulated potable water.</p> <p>Create pipelines to recycle treated grey water for agricultural and horticultural use.</p> <p>Install solar-powered pumping stations.</p>
4b) Local clean power generation incl. natural and coal seam gas, hydroelectricity and solar	43%	S-M	<p>One of the key elements in commercial, industrial and community infrastructure is the availability of energy. Electricity generation within the region improves reliability of electricity supply. There is a need to implement all alternative sources of renewable energy - including solar, wind, wave, geothermal hot rocks, as well as natural and coal seam gas.</p> <p>The region has supplies of coal seam gas within close proximity but government financial assistance is required for local authorities/groups to become administrators of the reticulation and distribution of gas throughout the region as it is not financially viable for private enterprise alone to distribute gas in regional areas, hence the focus on capital cities. The availability of gas would supply residents, make existing businesses more competitive, provide employment opportunities and encourage other industries to the area.</p> <p>Government should ensure the regulatory guidelines (such as competition policy) are not too onerous.</p> <p>Disincentives for the coal seam gas industry can be removed if ETP's are not required for gas produced during exploration, but commence only when the field is in commercial production. The uncertainties around ETP's and power pricing are causing delays to investment decisions.</p> <p>There are technology developments in the trucking industry making possible liquefied natural gas (LNG) as a potential fuel alternative for road based trucking in lieu of diesel or LPG.</p>
5. HEALTH SERVICES (7.5%)			<p>The region is suffering critical shortages of health infrastructure and services. This crisis will be compounded as our population is rapidly aging. On average the Mid-North</p>

			Coast resident (42.0 years) is older than the State (37.6 years). This is a reflection of the trend of retirees migrating to the region.
5a) Hospitals, aged care, respite care and other health infrastructure	70%	S-M-L	<p>Rural and regional hospitals are under increasing pressure to meet the demands of a growing and ageing community with the need for better services, more beds, shorter waiting lists for surgery and experienced staff.</p> <p>There is an imperative need for infrastructure funding to be available for specialist and general practices to access, including for populations over 20,000.</p> <p>It is imperative to ensure that the government provides adequate funding to support hospitals, aged care facilities and other allied health facilities.</p>
5b) Increased GPs, medical specialists, dentists, health training and mental health services	30%	S-M	<p>There is a real and urgent need for GPs, medical specialists and mental health services in this region. Dual diagnosis issues are also a priority.</p> <p>Most doctors in regional areas have closed books. Even so, the waiting time to see a regular practitioner can be from one to three weeks. Dental services are often not available in smaller centres and there is often a wait of months in medium sized towns. Better health services are considered by many as the number one issue in rural and regional centres due to the distances that are required to be travelled by patients, particularly for older and disadvantaged people. To further add to the problem, most areas are seeing an increase in their aging population creating an even more dramatic increase in the service requirements. Access to specialists is a constant concern for rural and regional people as only a few specialists are actually located in the regions. Whilst there are the few specialists who regularly fly into the regions for a couple of days, the situation is still inadequate as well as being highly expensive and inefficient. This can create long waiting periods with bookings ahead in more than 6-12 months in some cases. The only other alternative is for patients to drive or fly to the cities to seek treatment and the associated costs with this are a major burden on struggling rural and regional families and can take loved ones away for an extended period of time.</p>
6. COMMUNICATION (6%)			Fast, reliable and cost effective communication is a necessity for our contemporary lifestyles and work practices and allows regions to be globally competitive. Improved

			communications creates an opportunity for 'city-based' people to consider a move to regional areas to run their business.
6a. Broadband	70%	S	Current regional internet services are well below city and international standards. Regions need affordable, reliable and accessible high speed broadband.
6b. Other: mobile networks, video conferencing	30%	S-M	Currently mobile services are often only available within 5 kilometres of towns and there are several blackspots on highways and in rural areas. Complete mobile coverage is important for safety, accessibility and business development.
7. ENVIRONMENT (4%)			
7a. Land care and water care, including erosion control, revegetation of past farmland, adapting to climate change	100%	S-M	Environmental degradation is inhibitive to regional growth. People are looking for a cleaner and greener place to reside. Land care offers landholders an opportunity to repair and enhance private property. But who will restore and enhance public land? There is an opportunity to engage with the Indigenous community by providing meaningful employment that is culturally appropriate. Providing habitat, protecting water quality, and helping to rehabilitate a natural system will help water based industry and tourism which are core employers in the North Coast economy. This will have a positive effect on maintaining sustainable employment in the surrounding catchment and its villages. With more people using the beach environment, care must also be taken to ensure it is maintained.
8. PLANNING (2.5%)			
Broad and comprehensive regional planning	70%	S	Regions need well defined research to guide planning and projects Without an inclusive, iterative and clear regional planning process it is virtually impossible to identify what the infrastructure priorities are. Reliable and accessible regional data is a fundamental necessity, as is relevant and robust regional planning. Without either, regional development cannot be anything other than haphazard.
CBD Master plans; pedestrian and mobility plans	30%	S	Improve the attractiveness of retail centres; provide safe, convenient and connected pedestrian routes which will encourage people to walk rather than use their cars.