Media Release

Princes Highway Needs $550 million Fix

An Alliance of 17 municipalities from Geelong to Mount Gambier has joined forces to push for funding to duplicate and upgrade the Princes Highway from Waurn Ponds to South Australia.

Safety for all users of the highway and constraints to regional economic development form the main argument for the required $550 million upgrade.

G21, the Geelong Region Alliance launched the campaign to Federal, State, business and community members in Winchelsea as one of three launches held along the highway. Other launches were held near Warrnambool and Mount Gambier in South Australia.

Speakers at today’s campaign launch in Winchelsea included Cr Rose Hodge, Mayor of Surf Coast Shire, Cr Warren Riches, Mayor of Colac Otway Shire and Rob McHenry, Executive Officer of G21.

SPEECH EXCERPTS:

Surf Coast Shire Mayor Cr. Rose Hodge launched the push saying “there is no doubt that the Princes Highway is absolutely vital to the South-West of Victoria. Our number one aim is to secure the estimated $550 million needed to fix the highway by getting it recognized by the Federal Government as an AusLink road.”

“This will mean the highway will be eligible for funding from 2009 on a shared arrangement with the Victorian Government. At the moment, the Victorian Government is committed and has made a number of requests since 2002 to get the highway listed.”

Cr Hodge said “the best way to get results for our communities was to join forces in an alliance of Councils represented by the G21 Geelong Region Alliance, the Great South Coast Municipalities Group and the South-East Local Government Association.”

The group launched a Position Statement calling for AusLink funding to duplicate an “M” class dual highway from Waurn Ponds to Winchelsea and Winchelsea to Colac.

The group is also seeking funding commitments to upgrade overtaking lanes, and the sealing of road shoulders between Warrnambool to Portland and Portland to Mount Gambier.

Cr Hodge said there shouldn’t be any surprises that we are seeking a result. “This is not a new request as it was made nearly five years ago in September 2002 when the then State Transport Minister Peter Bachelor requested it be included as a Road of National Importance – the funding program prior to AusLink. We also know letters were again sent by the Minister in September 2006 but we haven’t heard anything yet.”
Cr Hodge said “We believe the Commonwealth is close to announcing AusLink Mk II and it is expected to increase to $19 Billion. It is an election year and we know there is a large Australia wide demand for roads funding just like ours. For example, we believe South-east Queensland is talking about needing $10 billion!”

The meeting heard that the estimated cost of $550M might sound significant but so too are the lost opportunities and costs if it doesn’t go ahead.

Colac Otway Shire Mayor Cr Warren Riches told the meeting “The Princes Highway directly services a population of over 350,000 people, 34 cities, towns and communities. It also indirectly services over 100 communities towards the coast and inland to the Hamilton Highway.”

Cr Riches told the meeting that there is no doubt the region is experiencing strong economic growth but this growth will be unsustainable without investment in improved infrastructure.

Cr Riches said “The provision of efficient and safe road access is a major factor to the growth experienced by other regions. When road infrastructure and upgrades are completed – growth and development follow.”

Traffic volumes are expected to increase significantly over the next seven years with commercial transport volumes alone expected to increase by 25%.

Cr Riches said “Imagine 10,000 vehicles travelling each day on the highway between Geelong and Colac – this is a huge 66% increase on today’s figures.

Imagine 5000 vehicles travelling between Colac and Warrnambool – another 66% increase on today’s figures.

Now imagine 6,000 vehicles travelling between Warrnambool and Port Fairy – and 3000 vehicles between Port Fairy and Portland every day. Both these counts means 25% and 20% additional vehicles on these respective parts of the Highway.

Cr Riches went on to say “These figures aren’t ‘imagination’ – they are going to happen and within 7 years. This is why it is critical to get the funding commitments now so work can start as soon as possible in 2009.”

The alliance of Councils believe increased traffic volumes will place even more pressure on the dubious safety performance of the road and quoted the Royal Automobile Club of Victoria who recently completed reports that declare “safer roads have the potential to save as many lives as safer vehicles and improved driver behaviour combined”.

The alliance produced a report showing that accidents on the highway are increasing. Since 1993 there has been a 1.93% increase every year in road fatalities on the Highway.

These figures are in contrast to the trend for Victoria, which has seen nearly 1% reduction every year in fatal accidents.

Cr Riches said “the safety performance of the highway is going the wrong way and is nearly 3% different to what is happening State wide.”
He said “All things being equal, we can expect an average of **FIVE** people to die on the Princes Highway West every year. A further 36 people will suffer serious injury every year. “

“At this rate, in ten years time we expect in excess of 50 people will have died on the road with more than 360 suffering serious injuries. Using Federal Government figures we estimate the economic cost of these deaths and injuries will be $342M.”

Cr Riches added “But it’s not just about dollars, people and their direct and extended family and friends suffer ongoing consequences. The proposed Princes Highway improvements will reduce the incidence and severity of road crashes and the associated trauma to individuals.”

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