



# Q&A: MINISTER FOR INFRASTRUCTURE AND TRANSPORT

*inspire* spoke to Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Infrastructure and Transport Michael McCormack about infrastructure investment and regional development in Australia ahead of his appearance at IPWEA's Asset Management Congress.



**Michael McCormack**

Deputy Prime Minister and  
Minister for Infrastructure  
and Transport

An additional \$80 million was committed in this year's budget for the National Water Infrastructure Development Fund.

The Budget also included a new initiative, which we are calling Roads of Strategic Importance (ROSI), investing \$3.5 billion over the next decade to ensure key freight routes efficiently connect agricultural and mining regions to ports, airports and other hubs.

The ROSI initiatives will be in addition to funding in each state and territory under our continuing programs: Black Spots, Bridges Renewal and the Heavy Vehicle Safety and Productivity Programs. **inspire: Many councils outside metropolitan areas struggle to attract the skilled public works engineers who are needed to deliver vital infrastructure. How can the government help attract more people to these areas?**

**McCormack:** As you can imagine, I travel extensively as Deputy Prime Minister. Through face-to-face conversations with locals, I am very aware of the problems in attracting sufficient numbers of skilled people to some regions.

This is also being raised through the Regional Development Australia (RDA) network of committees. Officers in my department have recently been speaking with a small reference group of RDAs who are exploring this issue. My colleague, the Minister for Regional Development the Hon Dr John McVeigh, and I are keenly monitoring these discussions. I am also aware of a thought-provoking recent report, [The Missing Workers](#), published by the Regional Australia Institute in May.

**inspire: How will regional communities benefit from the government's decentralisation initiatives?**

**McCormack:** New jobs in regional Australia mean local businesses, schools and sporting teams can all benefit. Where we can reasonably decentralise government jobs outside of Canberra, central Sydney and Melbourne, we should do so.

I am pleased that the Nationals' advocacy has prompted a serious policy debate in parliamentary circles, with the Select Committee on Regional →

**inspire: What are your priorities as Minister for Infrastructure and Transport, particularly with regards to rural and regional communities?**

**McCormack:** Our government's overarching goal for Australia, including rural and regional Australia, is to support jobs and promote economic growth.

On average, about 900 people found work every day over the past year and employment is now at a record high of just over 12.5 million. While this is a great result, we need to ensure it continues and the benefits are felt by the third of Australians who live, work and raise their families outside our capital cities, as I do.

So the government that Malcolm Turnbull and I lead is increasing our investment in rural and regional

Australia, with more than 500 initiatives contained in the May Budget. This includes more than 100 new programs focused on creating jobs and supporting economic growth in Australia's regions.

I know that when the regions do well, Australia does well, and more people are calling regional Australia home each year.

**inspire: What are some key ways the Federal Government is supporting regional infrastructure?**

**McCormack:** We are investing heavily in the regions, with a focus on economic development.

For example, we have committed to building new water infrastructure, like the \$352 million Rookwood Weir in Queensland and the \$385 million Myalup Wellington project in Western Australia.





Development and Decentralisation's report on [Regions at the Ready: Investing in Australia's future](#) published in June.

However, we have not been waiting, but acting. Since the Coalition was elected, we've moved government jobs to many regional centres, including Toowoomba, Shepparton, Orange, Wagga Wagga, Gosford and Armidale, and more decentralisation initiatives will be announced throughout 2018.

**inspire: What do you see as the Federal Government's role when it comes to funding for the regions?**

**McCormack:** In addition to our wide range of investments in transport and water infrastructure, we are backing local leadership through initiatives such as the Building Better Regions Fund and the Regional Growth Fund.

The 2018-19 Budget added \$200 million to the Building Better Regions Fund for a third round of projects in the coming financial year.

Tourism will be a focus of this round, with up to \$45 million from this new funding earmarked for tourism-related infrastructure projects, building on our successes in this sector.

And we are investing \$272 million in the Regional Growth Fund that will co-fund transformational projects in our regions. There were more than 300 applications for this funding, and we expect to announce successful applicants later this year.

**inspire: What kind of benefits should local governments and communities in regional areas expect from the Inland Rail project?**

**McCormack:** The Inland Rail runs north to south through my electorate, joining the existing east to west line in Parkes. I can see directly how our more

than \$9 billion commitment is starting to benefit local communities, supporting regional businesses such as Calvani Crushing and Ausrock Quarries, who are supplying a total of \$6.9 million in ballast and capping in my area.

In addition, substantial long-term freight and logistics hubs are being developed at key points, which is very encouraging for these communities. As is the prospect of more efficiently connecting farms and other regional businesses to key trading ports – taking advantage of our great success in negotiating a string of free trade deals.

**inspire: Why is the Australian Government's \$75 billion investment in transport infrastructure described as a 'pipeline'?**

**McCormack:** Firstly, I think it is important to let that number sink in, as \$75 billion over the next decade is a massive investment in infrastructure by any measure. However, the concept of a pipeline is also important, which we are supporting through the transition of our Infrastructure Investment Program to a rolling program.

The pipeline and rolling program approach recognises that major infrastructure projects take many years to plan, design and deliver. New projects will be added to the pipeline over time as further priorities are identified through continuing analysis and engagement with State and Territory Governments and the private sector.

This is a shift from the Australian Government's historic approach, as an ATM for individual projects promoted by the states. Our new, more structured approach to governance gives certainty to business and the community through a rolling pipeline of projects that can be replenished over time. 

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