



Sharon Grierson MP
Federal Member for Newcastle

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PRIVATE MEMBERS BUSINESS

INFRASTRUCTURE

Ms GRIERSON (Newcastle) (7.15 p.m.)—I congratulate the member for Oxley for bringing this important motion before the House, a motion that notes that ‘infrastructure planning provides the platform for regional economic growth’. My electorate of Newcastle is a great engine of economic growth in New South Wales and a significant driver for the national economy. The trade value of all exports out of the port of Newcastle, the largest coal-exporting port in the world, in the 2007-08 year was \$10.3 billion—a \$2 billion increase on the previous year. Newcastle’s regional airport, the fastest growing regional airport in Australia, contributed half a billion dollars into the regional economy, with \$150 million specifically into tourism, according to the latest data. Almost one in every 10 jobs in the Newcastle-Hunter region is involved in manufacturing, another major source of our regional exports. But we can achieve more. It is strategic infrastructure planning and delivery of freight and passenger links that will keep the people and goods moving efficiently around our region, our nation and the world, maximising the potential of our region by linking our roads, rail, ports and airports and providing the platform for economic growth.

Earlier this year I hosted Newcastle’s 2020 summit in conjunction with the University of Newcastle. Under the leadership of co-chairs Karen Howard and Graham Sargent, the infrastructure group agreed that our region needs to speak with one coordinated voice when it comes to infrastructure priorities and planning. As a result, I met with the co-chairs and other stakeholders last week to discuss the private submission that will go through to Infrastructure Australia. We discussed the nation-building infrastructure priorities for our region: maximising the coal chain; maximising freight links to regional, national and international routes; maximising the connectivity and movement of people within our region, through our region and out of our region; taking steps that will lead to the formation of a new and modern east coast freight centre that meets the expanding needs of the Newcastle, Hunter and Central Coast communities, takes pressure off Sydney and assists our trade exposed industries to better find emission efficiencies in a Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme world; securing efficient, reliable energy to the region; and maximising IT connectivity to support all sectors of our economy—particularly our research institutes and the numerous small and medium enterprises now reliant upon high-speed broadband.

I make particular mention of the importance of taking steps towards creating a new entry and exit point for the state of New South Wales. If we are going to cope both with infrastructure bottlenecks in Sydney and with the growth of my region, then making freight and trade routes more efficient makes good economic sense. Newcastle is well placed to be a major additional freight and logistic hub for the state of New South Wales.

I take this opportunity to congratulate the Australian Rail Track Corporation, ARTC, for their infrastructure work in the Hunter Valley and thank them for the update and briefing that they gave to me last week. There is much work to be done in our region, but I congratulate the Hunter Business Chamber and the Hunter Economic Development Corporation for their leadership in infrastructure planning and look forward to tabling their private submission, when completed, in the House in the near future.

The motion before us also notes that 'the changing social and demographic environment in major regional centres presents significant economic and development challenges'. This has been particularly evident in the city of Newcastle casting off its industrial image and moving towards a new modern vibrancy. This transformation was greatly assisted by the previous federal Labor government's Building Better Cities program, but sadly the Howard government that followed was more interested in regional rorts and pork-barrelling than in investing in securing the long-term prosperity of regional Australia.

The motion notes also that 'the rapid growth in many regional centres has placed the nation's infrastructure network under significant pressure'. This is very true of my region. Population growth between the census of 2001 and that of 2006 was four per cent or more in the Newcastle, Paterson, Hunter and Charlton electorates. However, booming areas like Thornton in my electorate have not been well served by transport or communications infrastructure. The infrastructure lag is dramatic, inconvenient, discouraging and definitely loss-creating. The last 12 years under the federal coalition government have been ones of missed opportunity for the nation to invest in the future beyond the mining boom, particularly into our regions.

The motion supports the government's agenda of creating a stronger and more participatory regional development structure through the establishment of Infrastructure Australia, Regional Development Australia and the Major Cities Unit. Newcastle is included in the Major Cities project. I look forward to an upcoming meeting with Minister Albanese to acquaint him with the General Property Trust proposal for revitalising the almost dormant retail heart of my city, Newcastle. I support the government's commitment to regional development and the delivery of regionally significant infrastructure, and I commend this motion to the House.