

Connecting our People and Places

Increase road funding to rural councils

South Gippsland has an extensive road network which is relied upon for transport, tourism and freight. We have over 800km of sealed roads that are managed by Council – equivalent to the distance between Melbourne to Sydney - and over 1300km of unsealed roads which is the distance between Leongatha and Port Augusta. This doesn't include roads such as the South Gippsland Highway or the Bass Highway which are managed by Regional Roads Victoria.

As well as everyone's right to safe travel on roads that meet our communities needs, our roads also play an integral role in the economic prosperity of our region and are pivotal for our agriculture and tourism sectors. In fact, South Gippsland is a key part of Australia's food production system and relies heavily on our local road network to service a wide variety of farms including around 400 dairy farms, one of the highest concentrations in Australia and a critical part of the nation's export economy.

Unfortunately, the relationship between rural councils' rate base and road responsibilities is unbalanced, and the asset renewal gap is continuing to grow. This disparity was highlighted in the *'Potholes and Pitfalls: How to Fix Local Roads'* report recently released by the Grattan Institute.

On top of this, the speed of asset deterioration is accelerated by severe weather events. In South Gippsland this includes more regular and violent storms and tidal surges, which are impacting our roads. Council also faces the challenges of rapidly increasing material costs within a rate-capped environment. The ability to do more with less is simply not possible when it comes to maintaining our roads.

Improving our roads is a top priority for our community. We recently asked our community *'What would make South Gippsland a better place to live, work and play?'* and 31% of respondents said road improvements. A further 23% ranked roads as their number one priority for South Gippsland.

Council understands the important role our roads play in our community. Each year around \$16.5M is allocated to road renewal and maintenance in Council's budget. However, this is simply not enough.

Our Request

South Gippsland Shire Council is calling on the Australian Government to:

- Commit to \$500 million per year in funding (ongoing) for the *Local Roads and Community Infrastructure Program*.
- Restore Financial Assistance Grants to at least one percent of Commonwealth taxation revenue.

We are also calling on the Victorian Government to:

- Expand and commit to ongoing funding through the *Rural Roads* support package.
- Re-instate the *Fixing Country Roads* program.