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The Hon Catherine King MP
Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government
The Hon Chris Bowen MP
Minister for Climate Change and Energy

NetZero@infrastructure.gov.au

6 August 2024

Dear Minister King and Minister Bowen

Re: Recommendations to inform the 'The Federal Government's Transport and Infrastructure Net Zero Roadmap and Action Plan'.

The ten Member Councils of the Hunter Joint Organisation (JO) welcome the opportunity provided by the Federal Government to provide feedback on the Transport and Infrastructure Net Zero Roadmap and Action Plan, developing a net zero plan for the transport and transport infrastructure sectors.

The Hunter Joint Organisation is the statutory local government entity established by the NSW Government, through the *NSW Local Government Act 1993*, to support the ten member Councils of the Hunter Region to work together for better rural and regional outcomes, and to enhance the way local and state governments work together to plan and deliver important regional infrastructure and investment.

Member Councils of the Hunter JO include:

- Cessnock City Council
- Dungog Shire Council
- Lake Macquarie City Council
- Maitland City Council
- MidCoast Council
- Muswellbrook Shire Council
- City of Newcastle
- Port Stephens Council
- Singleton Council
- Upper Hunter Shire Council

The core statutory functions established by the NSW Government for the Hunter JO include:

1. Strategic planning and priority setting
2. Intergovernmental collaboration
3. Shared leadership and advocacy

The Hunter Region is the largest regional economy in Australia, driving around 28% of regional NSW's total economic output, of which coal exports contribute around a third (\$24 billion) and approaching a population of one million people by 2040. The ten Mayors of the Region, through the Hunter Joint Organisation, are strongly aligned in recognising the economic challenges facing the region, and on the priorities and actions needed to evolve the Hunter's economy toward net zero.

This includes the importance of creating a globally connected region whose residents enjoy transport infrastructure and systems that enhance their economic and lifestyle opportunities.

From a transport perspective, successfully evolving the Hunter to a net zero economy will require:

- Integrated public transport linking key services and centres
- Public and private transport systems that operate on a net zero basis
- A regional network of safe, connected and convenient cycleways and walkways that are accessible to all residents and visitors
- Equitable and competitive digital communication technology that supports new work practices that are less dependent on the physical movement of labour (e.g. work from home), and which supports the growth of new industries and innovation that will directly support the region's economic evolution.

Through the [Hunter JO Strategic Plan 2032](#) the Mayors have identified “*an economy that continues to grow and evolve as a powerhouse of the state and national economies, providing high quality jobs*” as a core shared priority. More specifically, in regard to the Transport and Infrastructure Net Zero Roadmap and Action Plan, our plan identifies the following strategic directions:

1.4 A region that is built around sustainable transport outcomes.

1.4.1 Embed the direction of net-zero in all our connectivity strategies to provide a pathway and level of confidence to investors and community to support the transition to more sustainable transport outcomes.

1.1 Within the region there is a robust integrated transport solution that underpins the experience/liveability and productivity of its residents and visitors comparable to its global peers.

3.1.1 Support a clear, place-based, integrated whole-of-government policy and planning approach to drive the region's economic evolution and jobs of the future.

4.4 Supporting our region to be on the path to net zero emissions and paving the way with smart innovative solutions that increase liveability.

In line with these strategic directions the Hunter JO welcomes the Federal Government's Transport and Infrastructure Net Zero Roadmap and Action Plan and provides the following priorities and opportunities through which to activate the strategic planning and implementation of actions needed to drive the broad scale evolution and diversification of the Hunter's economy in relation to transport connectivity.

Our recommendations encourage the implementation of the plan to:

1. Lead collaboration with state and local government to drive the development and delivery of place-based integrated regional transport strategies, to align government priorities and delivery efforts in a way that supports Regional Australia's transition toward net zero, attract investment, create new jobs and maintain and improve liveability in Regional Australia.
2. Invest in the development and delivery of Regional Electric Vehicle (EV) Strategic Plans to support Regional Australia more confidently and rapidly transition to EVs, by:
 - a. Prioritising the location and type of new EV charging infrastructure to provide a coordinated and more accessible network, particularly in rural and remote areas, to support increased uptake and visitation of EVs.
 - b. Directly supporting regional councils to lead their communities' transition to EV's by electrifying their own corporate fleets and plant, including mechanisms through which this could be delivered in a collaborative manner

within and across regions (e.g. policy alignment, regional monitoring, procurement incentives).

3. Work with key regional government and industry stakeholders – including the Port of Newcastle, Newcastle Airport, producers and logistics companies – to optimise freight systems to *avoid* unnecessary freight movements, *shift* to lower emissions modes of transport, and *improve* efficiency in the movement of goods. This could be achieved by upgrading and maximising the use of existing rail networks and increasing the distribution of intermodal hubs throughout the Hunter Region.
4. Invest in the planning and delivery of broadscale community cycling strategies and infrastructure in regional communities as a core mechanism for providing safe alternatives to light vehicle use, especially with the growth of e-bikes, to meet the net zero transport goals.

An example exists in the Hunter region where five councils have a coordinated concept plan for a 100km cycle path from the Hunter Valley to the business district of Newcastle and Lake Macquarie (called Shiraz to Shore), however Commonwealth or State Government investment is required to prioritise this initiative. Added benefits of cycle infrastructure include increased preventive health strategies, enhanced recreational opportunities, social connectivity, and improved environmental outcomes.

5. Support and encourage investment in equitable and competitive digital connectivity and the elimination of mobile black spots across the region to ensure community access to core health and education opportunities, and to enable business development, growth and innovation that is not dependent on the traditional physical transport of labour.

The Business Case and case for change to improve digital connectivity in the Hunter and Central Coast regions - <https://dssn.com.au/connectivity-report/>

I encourage you to consider our recommendations to inform the focus and scope of the Transport and Infrastructure Net Zero Roadmap and Action Plan and would welcome the opportunity to further discuss our ideas with Federal Government, given the enormous opportunities and impacts facing the Hunter region and NSW economies more broadly.

Should you have any further queries please don't hesitate to contact Kim Carland, Advocacy and Government Relations Lead, Hunter JO at kimc@hunterjo.com.au or on 0460 034 614.

Yours Sincerely



Cr Sue Moore
Chair Hunter Joint Organisation