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SB/SKL

23 June 2023



The Hon. Daniel Andrews
Premier of Victoria
Level 1/1 Treasury Place
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002
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Dear Premier

**SWAN HILL BRIDGE – POSSIBLE WITHDRAWAL OF FEDERAL GOVERNMENT
INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING**

Council has been advised that the Federal Government intends to undertake a 90 day review of the Infrastructure Pipeline Program which includes the funding committed by the former Federal Government of \$60 million dollars for the replacement of the Swan Hill Bridge.

Naturally this announcement is cause for great concern for Council and the community who have long advocated for the need to replace the bridge at Swan Hill as it is no longer fit for purpose.

Council has been a key stakeholder in the discussions around the various issues with respect to the replacement of the bridge and has always sought to look for a positive solution by engaging with the Federal, New South Wales and Victorian Governments.

The message is very clear, now is not the time to remove the funding for the Swan Hill Bridge but rather to resolve any outstanding issues and commit the necessary funding to construct a new bridge at Swan Hill.

As you are aware the Swan Hill Bridge is located 340km north-west of Melbourne and is a critical crossing point across the Murray River connecting New South Wales and Victoria, providing a vital transport connection point within a culturally diverse food bowl that plays a significant role in feeding our Nation.

The Swan Hill Bridge is a major piece of regional infrastructure supported by our 22,000 residents and a much wider catchment due to its strategic location for the travelling public with Swan Hill servicing major road connections between Sydney, Adelaide and Melbourne.

Swan Hill Rural City Council and indeed the regions on both sides of the Murray River are experiencing unprecedented growth in traditional industries such as agriculture and horticulture together with the emergence of industry growth in mining and renewable energy.

Our municipality generates economic output of \$3.293 billion¹ consisting of \$695.7 million from Agriculture. Neighbouring NSW communities of Murray River Council and Balranald Shire Council also export millions of dollars agricultural freight through Swan Hill to Melbourne.

The aging single-lane Swan Hill bridge creates a bottleneck for traffic moving, mostly Agricultural freight, through our region, is costing millions in ongoing repairs, and is simply unusable for the higher mass and over dimensional vehicles that local and interstate industries rely on.

Our community needs a new bridge that will promote economic activity and increase freight efficiencies for businesses that rely of this crucial agricultural corridor, along with improved safety, for all users.

Since 1998, Council has formally advocated for a new Swan Hill bridge continually highlighting the need to have all key stakeholders reach a solution which would see the Swan Hill Bridge replaced and we implore you to support the construction of a new bridge sooner rather than later on the basis of the the long-term benefits that the Swan Hill bridge project would bring not only to our community but to Victoria and New South Wales.

The Swan Hill Bridge is a truly regional project, which has been confirmed as the number one priority for communities on both sides of the River and supported by two states and seven Councils through the Central Murray Regional Transport Strategy².

This is unprecedented support but needs to be acted upon through a commitment to overcoming any remaining unresolved issues but more importantly retaining funding committed to the project not taking it away.

Significant work has been undertaken by Transport for NSW, and many others, in preparation for a new bridge design along with an alignment as agreed by our communities.

Council respectfully requests that you make appropriate representations to the Prime Minister and the responsible Federal Minister the Hon Catherine King requesting that:

- **Funding for the Swan Hill Bridge be guaranteed and not removed as a part of the review of the Infrastructure Pipeline Projects review.**
- **The Prime Minister urgently convene a meeting of all relevant stakeholders involved in the Swan Hill Bridge with a view to reaching an agreed position on all remaining issues relating to the project.**
- **Commit your State's portion of funding required for the construction of the Swan Hill Bridge.**

¹<https://app.remplan.com.au/swanhill/economy/industries/output?state=LpAJU1!LpAJUL8rvFKBykncw3w8dudFOIQzrFdqBgZUEyvykIXI27UklvSZZ9h0Or>

² https://www.swanhill.vic.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Central_Murray_Regional_Transport_Strategy_250119_-_No_mark_up2.pdf

It is suggested that the following be involved in an urgent meeting to discuss the Swan Hill Bridge Project

- Prime Minister Anthony Albanese
- Federal Minister Catherine King
- Premier Daniel Andrews VIC
- Premier Chris Minns NSW
- Mayor Les McPhee VIC
- Mayor Chris Bilkey NSW

Together with relevant Federal and State Officers who have been involved in the process to this point of time.

Given the significant importance of this project, Council urges you to support its endeavours to finally determine a solution and that you are prepared to be directly involved in future meetings.

Now is the time for action to complete all of the decision making and to put to use the funds available to construct the bridge not remove the funding?

Council would be delighted to host you in Swan Hill for discussion and inspection of the Swan Hill Bridge.

I am available at any time together with Council's Chief Executive Officer Scott Barber to meet with you to discuss how the reconstruction of the Swan Hill Bridge can finally become a reality.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Les McPhee', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Cr Les McPhee
Mayor