

REF: 1434/23
SB/SKL

23 June 2023



The Hon. Anthony Albanese MP
Prime Minister
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Prime Minister

**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.

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.

Council is extremely alarmed by the decision to review the previously committed \$60 million funding which was allocated by the former Federal Government in 2019 for the construction of a new bridge in Swan Hill. The potential loss of this funding would be irresponsible and detrimental to communities on either side of the Murray River, damaging our local economy,

our agriculture and freight industries which will produce an ongoing major negative impact on our region.

Since 1998, Council has been formally advocating 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 long-term benefits that the Swan Hill bridge project would bring not only to our community but to Victoria and New South Wales.

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.

This is presenting exciting opportunities for our community and makes it even more important to have the support of all levels of Government to make a final decision to construct a new Swan Hill Bridge.

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 Strategy¹.

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 municipality generates economic output of \$3.293 billion² 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.

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.

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 ensure that:

- **Funding for the Swan Hill Bridge be guaranteed and not removed as a part of the review of the Infrastructure Pipeline Projects review.**
- **A meeting of all relevant stakeholders involved in the Swan Hill Bridge be urgently convened with a view to reaching an agreed position on all remaining issues relating to the project.**

¹ https://www.swanhill.vic.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Central_Murray_Regional_Transport_Strategy_250119_-_No_mark_up2.pdf

² <https://app.remplan.com.au/swanhill/economy/industries/output?state=LpAJU1!LpAJUL8rvFKBykncw3w8dudFOIQzrFdqBqzUEyvykIXI27UklvSZZz9h0Or>

- **The Victorian and New South Wales State Governments' commit their portion of the funding required for the construction of the Swan Hill Bridge.**

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.

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?

For our rural communities, \$60 million is a lot of money. It may appear small and insignificant when compared to city projects, but it means a lot to our people.

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