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DH/SB

17 July 2023



Ms Gardiner-Barnes, Mr Mrdak & Mr Waldock
Land Transport Infrastructure Division
Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications
and the Arts
GPO Box 594
Canberra ACT 2601

Dear Ms Gardiner, Mr Mrdak & Mr Waldock

INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT PROGRAM STRATEGIC REVIEW – NEW
SWAN HILL BRIDGE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Swan Hill Rural City Council welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the strategic review of the Federal Government's Infrastructure Investment Program (IIP), which was announced by the Hon Catherine King, Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, in May 2023.

Council's focus is on the funding allocation of 60 million dollars for the proposed new Murray River bridge at Swan Hill, on the border of Victoria and New South Wales. This funding was originally allocated under the Program in 2019 and Council seeks the Federal Government's support for the retention of the funding to ensure that this vital piece of infrastructure is ultimately constructed, having been considered for many decades.

Council commends the Federal Government for undertaking the review of the IIP and believes the review should give certainty of funding for key infrastructure - such as the *Swan Hill Bridge*. The Infrastructure Investment Program can then be developed in consultation with the States and Territories and supported with a funding allocation commitment, protected from future budgetary reviews.

Council believes that the Federal Government must continue to invest in significant Infrastructure Projects to allow for the ongoing recovery of the nation's economy following the COVID pandemic and natural disasters, and toward a future of renewable energy. The financial investment in the Swan Hill Bridge will prove to be beneficial to the region, and the nation, in the longer term assisting in increased economic prosperity via more efficient transport routes, and other more efficient vehicle and equipment movements.

BACKGROUND:

Swan Hill Rural City Council covers a vast expanse of land mass in North West Victoria (over 6,000 square kms) and has a population increasing toward 22,000 people, with Swan Hill as the largest population centre and smaller communities spread across the Municipality.

The Municipality is located on the Murray River, with Swan Hill acting as a large Regional Service Centre for people in both Victoria and New South Wales, servicing industries, communities and visitors alike.

Swan Hill Rural City Council is located in a pivotal location for the transport industry when accessing Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide (refer to attached maps) with both road and rail connections that are important to the nation's supply chain.

According to REMPLAN's independent statistics, the Municipality has around 10,500 jobs and seasonally sees this figure grow much higher, as the horticulture and agriculture industries seek workers to undertake the labour intensive work. Agriculture comprises of 20.33% of the total economic output valued at \$3.02 Billion.

In NSW, neighbouring Balranald Shire Council and Murray River Council, also have their regional prosperity in need of this bridge. These Councils produce significant agriculture through almonds, annual crops and livestock. A significant Almond Processing Plant (Australian Farming Services) is currently under construction near the Swan Hill Bridge on the NSW side, along with a well-established Transport Freight Company (Pickering Transport), and large mining operations (mineral sands) starting up around Balranald (Iluka Resources) which will transport materials to port at Melbourne.

The Swan Hill Rural City Council Municipality is on the cusp of significant growth in the areas of manufacturing, mining (rare earths) and renewable energy, which will provide additional employment opportunities together with population growth over a sustained twenty year plus period.

The expansion of both traditional and emerging industries will provide an economic boom for our Municipality, as well as the Balranald Shire Council, Murray River Council, and the Murray River Group of Councils (comprising of Mildura Rural City Council, Swan Hill Rural City Council, Gannawarra Shire Council, Loddon Shire, Campaspe Shire Council, and Moira Shire). Furthermore, the Federal and State Governments will benefit financially from the regions projected prosperity. To achieve this growth requires the Federal and the State Governments commitment to investing in key infrastructure projects such as the Swan Hill Bridge.

The Federal Government has identified a number of the mining projects in our region to be of national significance and Council believes that it should be supporting these projects by significantly investing in the infrastructure projects required to ensure that all opportunities presented are realised.

Swan Hill is a key tourism destination along the Murray River and caters for over 500,000 visitors per annum. In order to travel across our region, access to modern and safe bridge crossings is required. Currently, the Swan Hill Bridge cannot be regarded as being fit for purpose.

SWAN HILL BRIDGE:

The Swan Hill Bridge was constructed in 1896 and is struggling to accommodate the increased capacity of today's trucking industry when it comes to moving goods and produce freight.

There are load limits placed on the Swan Hill Bridge impacting the transport capacity of the region and in particular, today's heavy transport vehicles. These vehicles are severely impeded in crossing the Murray River at Swan Hill, often facing traffic delays and size limitations. The roads leading to the bridge permit truck sizes, however they are unable to cross over the current bridge. Trucks have no choice but to decouple and re-couple trailers so as to cross the Murray River.

The construction of a new bridge at Swan Hill would provide enhanced access to the intermodal rail hub at Ultima and afford increased opportunities to put produce, materials, minerals and goods on rail to be transported to Melbourne ports, and in the longer-term connectivity into the overall rail network in the Murray Darling Basin and beyond.

The bridge is no longer fit for purpose to service existing and expanding horticulture and agriculture sectors along with emerging industries. It is in urgent need of replacement, to cater for both the demands of industry and visitors now and into the future.

The ongoing maintenance of the bridge is a financial burden on the New South Wales Government and allocation of funding would be better spent by both the Federal and State Governments on the building of a new bridge at Swan Hill.

The Murray River Group of Councils, which represents six Victorian Councils, identified through its Transport Portfolio that the Swan Hill Bridge replacement was the next priority Murray River crossing after the recently completed Echuca Bridge, and this priority remains. This further reinforces the need for action on the Swan Hill Bridge.

The Murray River Crossing Investment Priority Assessment 2018 listed the Swan Hill Bridge as first in the short-term projects, this reinforces the many studies undertaken over an extended period of time that points to the significance of the Swan Hill Bridge and the urgent need for its replacement.

The Central Murray Regional Transport Forum, represented by two states, six Councils and one region, delivered a Strategy in 2019, which also identifies the Swan Hill Bridge as the top priority regional project.

Mildura, Robinvale, Echuca, Yarrawonga and Albury-Wodonga all have modern bridges, sadly Swan Hill does not and there is undeniable evidence to indicate that Swan Hill needs a new bridge urgently.

Council has provided copies of letters of support from other Local Government Authorities and key stakeholders as a part of this submission as a further demonstration of the commitment of the region to having a new bridge at Swan Hill built.

There has been considerable investigation undertaken into the replacement of the Swan Hill Bridge, involving all levels of Government, key Government Departments and the general community over many years.

Swan Hill Rural City Council has been a key stakeholder in the ongoing discussions with Federal and State Governments, steadfast in its determination to seek a successful outcome and the retention of the allocated funding from the Infrastructure Investment Program.

The Federal Government, by agreeing to secure the funding commitment for the Swan Hill Bridge and a definite timeline for the funds to be spent, could then assist the Council to further advance the discussions with the Victorian and New South Wales Governments to a resolution on the construction of the new bridge.

Council believes that a determination on the remaining points of discussion is close and that all of this effort should not be wasted but rather all parties should be able to move forward with certainty around funding and project timelines.

CONCLUSION:

The Swan Hill Bridge is in urgent need of replacement, and has been for many decades, and now is not the time to consider the withdrawal of the Federal Government funding under the Infrastructure Investment Program but rather a time for commitment to investing in our region's future through the retention of the funding.

Council believes that the replacement of the Swan Hill Bridge is beyond politics and that it is urgently needed, and has demonstrated its ongoing commitment on behalf of the community to work with all key stakeholders towards the construction of a new bridge at Swan Hill.

By recommitting its investment in the Swan Hill Bridge Replacement project the Federal Government will be making a strategically sound decision and will have clearly demonstrated its commitment to one of the nation's most significant economic regions.

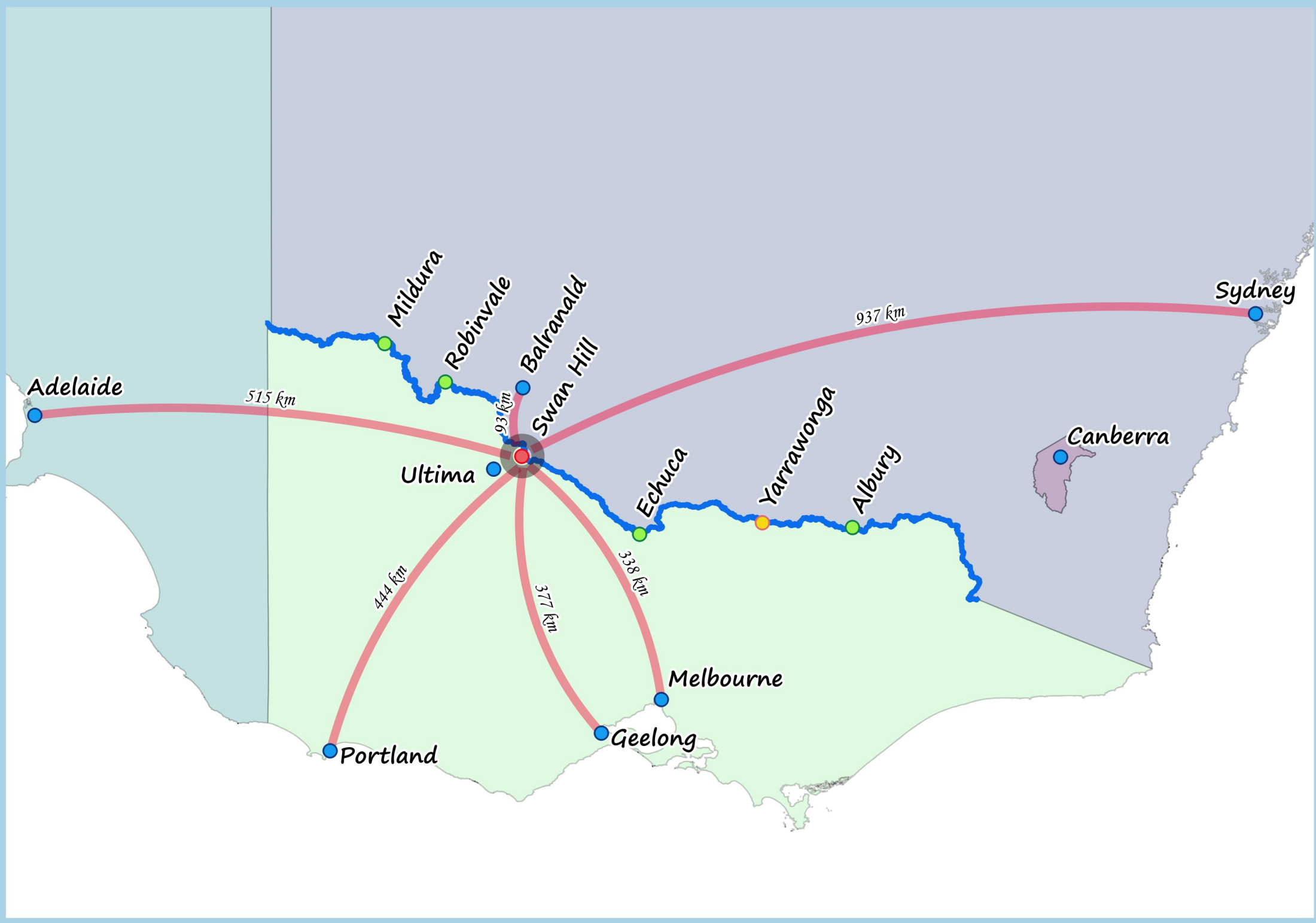
The return on the investment from the Federal Government will be significant in terms of productivity, economic growth, employment growth, increased business opportunities and regional expansion.

Council respectfully requests that you make a favourable recommendation to the Minister for the retention of the funding for the Swan Hill Bridge replacement under Infrastructure Investment Program. Swan Hill Rural City Council, along with neighbouring Councils and local industries, would welcome an opportunity to speak in support of the Swan Hill Bridge Project if provided the opportunity.

Yours sincerely

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

Cr Les McPhee
Mayor
Swan Hill Rural City Council



*Swan Hill Timber Truss Vertical Lift Span Single Lane Bridge
Priority Replacement*

Map based on the following report

*Murray River Crossing Investment Priority Assessment – January 2018
Published Jointly by NSW and Victorian State Governments*



Swan Hill Bridge

RMS Bridge No.: 3215

Local Government Areas: Murray River Shire (NSW), Swan Hill Rural City Council (VIC)

Roads: Moulamein Road (NSW), C246 McCallum Street (VIC)

Town: Murray Downs (NSW), Swan Hill (VIC)

Population (2011): 374 (NSW), 10,431 (VIC)

Bridge Description

Bridge Type: Allan-truss, lift-span

Materials: Timber, steel

Construction Year: 1896

Bridge length: 116m

Load limit: GML

Age: 119 years

Asset Maintenance Plan

Condition: Poor

Maintenance plan: Temporary truss & pier support system.



Murray River Crossings Investment Priority Assessment – January 2018

