

# South Eastern Australian Coast

## Response to Government:

### Fire Emergency

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## South Eastern Australia Transport Strategy (SEATS) Response to Government

Local governments in South Eastern Australia affected by the December / January 2020 bushfires have endured a civil emergency of unprecedented proportion. Over 1500km of road have been burnt, over 50 bridges destroyed from the Shoalhaven to East Gippsland and inland to Snowy Monaro. Local economies are significantly impaired due to major highway and escarpment crossing closures and the loss of business. The effect on the service industry will be felt through plummeting tourism numbers so small businesses have been severely impacted.

SEATS Members representing the hardest hit areas met February 20<sup>th</sup> / 21<sup>st</sup> 2020 on the Bass Coast and reviewed direct reports of fire damage impact to transport infrastructure. SEATS were able to quantify this information into meaningful data sets enabling greater insight into recovery goals. We support the greater principle of “Resilience” in our recovery efforts. It is our desire to seek prioritised funding into 4 distinct areas and this document provides support for this.

### From SEATS Chair – Cr. Marianne Pelz (East Gippsland)

SEATS support prioritisation of funding for 4 distinct areas of transport infrastructure:

- Bushfire Bridge Replacement Program
- Mobile Telephony on Major Roads
- Princes Highway Upgrade
- Road and Power Disruption

Working with State and Federal Government SEATS are making the case for cross border cooperation with all parties ensuring a rapid and responsive plan is affected.

The devastation to local businesses and service providers including farming and forestry due to road closures shall not be ignored. This impact will be felt for a generation and we owe it to the people of the South East Australia to ensure the resilience of transport infrastructure.

### **Abstract**

“The inquiry acknowledges climate change, the broader impact of our summers getting longer, drier and hotter and is focussed on practical action that has a direct link to making Australians safer.

“That’s why we need to look at what actions should be taken to enhance our preparedness, resilience and recovery through the actions of all levels of government and the community, for the environment we are living in.

“The overwhelming majority of the actions to protect Australians from bushfires are undertaken at a State level. Everything from resourcing our fire services and hazard reduction, to land clearing and planning laws. Even the declaration of emergencies, the areas that are designated to receive payments and in most cases the assessment and delivery of those payments, even when they are funded by the Federal Government, are all undertaken by the States”.

*MEDIA RELEASE - 20 Feb 2020*  
*Prime Minister*

# Request for Infrastructure Funding: Bridge Replacement Program

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## Brief to:

**Deputy Prime Minister Hon. Michael McCormack MP - Parliament of Australia**

Minister for Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Development

**Hon. Jacinta Allan MP – Parliament of Victoria**

Minister for Transport Infrastructure

**Deputy Premier Hon. John Barilaro MP – Parliament of New South Wales**

Minister for Regional New South Wales, Industry and Trade



## Background

The South East Coast of Australia has just experienced a significant fire event that has stressed vulnerable components of the transport infrastructure network. Throughout regional inland and coastal areas much of the bridge infrastructure has been established through legacy construction – specifically wooden. The vulnerability of this infrastructure has been exposed through recent fire events. Servicing deeply regional isolated communities, these bridges allow for the free movement of people and goods and in so doing reduces significantly the risk of communities being cut off.

## Current Situation

Across the foreground from Cairns to Kangaroo Island, many bridges on the transport infrastructure local roads networks have been destroyed. Most of these bridges were of timber construction, but not all.

Within the SEATS region some 50 bridges have been destroyed, severing communities, disrupting economic activity and rendering community confidence and safety in tatters. To just replace these wooden bridge structures without upgrading to concrete and steel seems inappropriate and irresponsible.

## Issue

Wooden transport infrastructure has proven to be extremely vulnerable during fire emergencies and should not be considered in the future recovery effort. Future bridge builds must consider the vulnerability to bushfires and be able to withstand a fire emergency.

### SEATS seek:

**SEATS makes an urgent request of the Australian Government, in conjunction with the various State Governments, through their road infrastructure agencies, to offer a special “Bushfire Bridge Replacement Program” to enable resilience to be built into regional road networks and thereby stimulating additional work in the fire affected regions that will provide increased safety and confidence to local government and their communities into the future.**

# Request for Infrastructure Funding: Mobile Telephony on Major Roads

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## Brief to:

**Deputy Prime Minister Hon. Michael McCormack MP - Parliament of Australia**

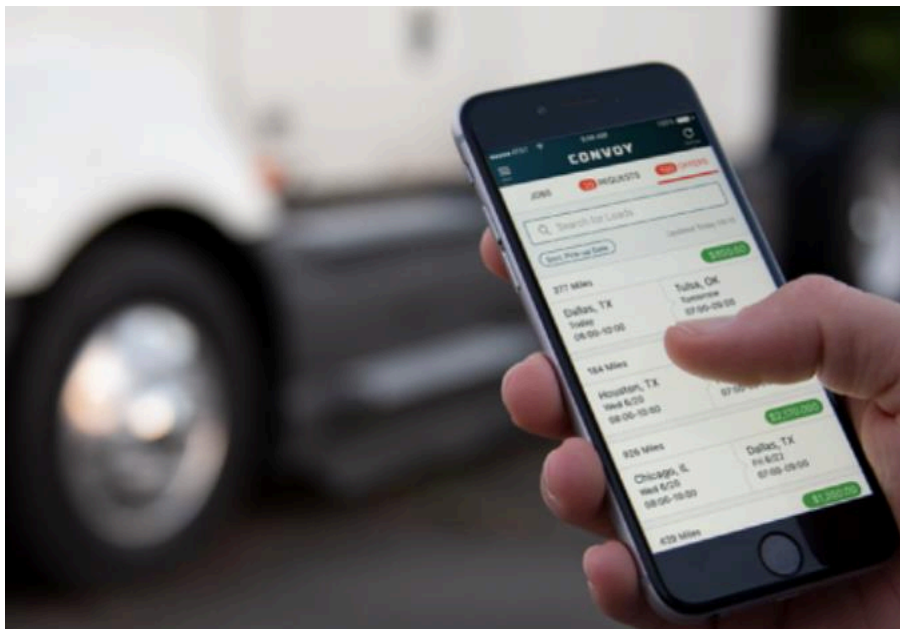
Minister for Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Development

**Hon. Jacinta Allan MP – Parliament of Victoria**

Minister for Transport Infrastructure

**Deputy Premier Hon. John Barilaro MP – Parliament of New South Wales**

Minister for Regional New South Wales, Industry and Trade



## Background

The road freight transport industry is now 100% reliant upon the management of data during every stage of their supply chain. This data requirement covers inter alia GPS location services, route and journey planning, regulatory compliance certificates, financial transaction services.

## Current Situation

In times of emergency, communications are essential to support the incident, emergency services and other commuters. This Motion/request is that for the travelling community driving along the highways that they need 95% coverage for voice and telemetry so that in times of emergency the first responders also have a greater chance of coverage.

The SEATS areas coverage for mobile telephony is poor:

- Ulladulla-Batemans Bay
- Moruya – Narooma
- Eden - Cann River
- Omeo
- Buchan
- Tubbut
- Goongerah
- Bonang

## Issue

With business now run on digital platforms, productivity and effectiveness becomes impaired due to mobile telephony blackspots

### **SEATS seek:**

SEATS strongly request the Australian government ensure that within 5 years all national and state highways achieve a 95% mobile telephony reception coverage and that the rollout commence on the Monaro Hwy and the Princes Hwy between Sydney and Melbourne

# Request for Infrastructure Funding:

## Princes Highway Upgrade

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### Brief to:

**Deputy Prime Minister Hon. Michael McCormack MP - Parliament of Australia**

Minister for Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Development

**Hon. Jacinta Allan MP – Parliament of Victoria**

Minister for Transport Infrastructure

**Deputy Premier Hon. John Barilaro MP – Parliament of New South Wales**

Minister for Regional New South Wales, Industry and Trade



## Background

GHD were commissioned by the Australian government in conjunction with the State Governments of NSW, Vic and SA to consider and recommend improvements to the Princes Highway network between Wollongong and Port Augusta. This report, which attracted substantial input from within the SEATS region, was delivered to Federal Government in December 2019.

## Current Situation

The Princes Highway and Monaro Highway through NSW and Vic, and especially through the Local Government Areas of Shoalhaven, Eurobodalla, Bega Valley, East Gippsland, Snowy Monaro, experienced bushfires that severed transport corridors and significantly disrupted freight connectivity to regional communities and metropolitan centres.

Many communities are located on the coast with only the same singular road in and out. The highway connections are vital to be maintained for the safety of communities and responders alike.

Additionally, the 60-kilometre stretch between Cann River and the border town of Genoa was badly hit. The closure of East Gippsland's main arterial road cut off access to small communities, but residents, business owners and relief, recovery and supply services were allowed to access the highway between Orbost and Cann River.

The highway is the only route to many towns in the SEATS region. Major closures of the highway from Orbost to the NSW border; Eden to Nowra had major implications for freight and tourism from December through to February. This also trapped many people on the highways and put their life in danger from fires, lack of food/water and sanitary facilities.

SEATS acknowledge Infrastructure Australia and their updated Princes Highway Priority List.

## Issue

The economic devastation to local businesses and freight due to the closure of the Princes Highway between Orbost and Nowra is meaningful.

### **SEATS seek:**

SEATS strongly requests that the governments of NSW and Victoria combine with the Australian government to roll out as a matter of urgency those elements of improvement within the local government areas of Shoalhaven, Eurobodalla, Bega Valley and East Gippsland that can be planned, designed and delivered over the next 5 years to be packaged up into a “Princes Highway Resilience Program” to deliver a highway network that will provide safer connectivity for the communities in this part of Australia in all weather and environmental conditions.



# Request for Infrastructure Funding: Road and Power Disruption

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## Brief to:

**Deputy Prime Minister Hon. Michael McCormack MP - Parliament of Australia**

Minister for Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Development

**Hon. Jacinta Allan MP – Parliament of Victoria**

Minister for Transport Infrastructure

**Deputy Premier Hon. John Barilaro MP – Parliament of New South Wales**

Minister for Regional New South Wales, Industry and Trade



## Background

This is also about roads, & other utilities not just electricity. It is about creating a robust fire break around roads & utilities. In most cases it was NOT the flames that closed the road or severed electricity lines but fallen trees.

The ongoing development of the regional power grid is crucial for economic development of industry and the support of local communities. This power grid should be seen to be resilient sufficient to endure harsh climatic changes, as we have just experienced with the recent bushfire emergency.

## Current Situation

During the recent bushfire events along the NSW south coast/southern tablelands and extending into Gippsland, the various major road arteries were closed to traffic therefore causing severe disruption to transport supporting local communities, emergency management and residents and tourists.

The major cause of the road closures was trees falling across roadways and power lines and creating dangerous situations for the travelling public and severing power supply

## Issue

The grid assets are vulnerable and our community and economy suffer during bushfire emergencies. As well legislation prevents the clearing of adjacent trees & vegetation. Multiple government agencies are involved in the regulatory approval process.

### **SEATS seek:**

SEATS strongly urge the various road, electricity supply and telecommunication agencies to provide easement buffers around all assets to provide continuity of the availability of assets to regional communities in all weather and environmental conditions. State agencies should review and amend policies that impinge on this outcome being achieved.

## About SEATS

SEATS – was created by a group of Victorian (VIC) and New South Wales (NSW) Local Government Councils, from Wollongong to La Trobe including inland Councils, concerned with the poor transport infrastructure in South Eastern Australia.

Their initial focus was on the need to improve road funding across the Region, recognition of the Princes Highway as a National Highway and to encourage a Very Fast Train through Gippsland.

SEATS pride itself on providing a non-party political and non-parochial forum to promote transport improvements and solutions within our region to all levels of Government.

SEATS members urge all levels of government to base future transport infrastructure planning decisions on an understanding of the entire network. Such an approach will maximise the economic and social connectivity of the entire transport network.

## SEATS Executive Committee

Chair:	Cr. Marianne Pelz	(East Gippsland)
Deputy Chair:	Cr. Marianne Saliba	(Shellharbour)
Treasurer:	Cr. Graeme Middlemiss	(La Trobe)
Secretary:	Cr. Keith Cook	(Baw Baw)
Executive Committee:	Cr. Anthony Mayne	(Eurobodalla)
Executive Committee:	Cr. Patricia White	(Shoalhaven)
Executive Committee:	Cr. Clare Le Serve	(Bass Coast)
Executive Committee:	Greg Pullen	(Shoalhaven)
Executive Officer:	Andrew Martin	

March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020

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