

Tuesday 19 September

Broad based budget seeks to steer a steady course

The peak voice for the region, **Business Hunter**, has welcomed investment in energy and housing in the first budget of the Minns State Government, which are key priorities for the region.

There are large commitments and investments in housing and the new energy economy, which will assist businesses in getting the workers they need and contribute to energy supply reliability and pricing certainty," said Business Hunter CEO, Bob Hawes.

Mr Hawes offered that while there were no substantial and specific new measures to support business in this budget, there were also no new business taxes, honouring the government's election promise.

"It's not a business budget, rather a broad-based budget with a strong social infrastructure overtone, which will no-doubt generate flow on benefits to businesses in the region. It also addresses the issue of public sector wages growth and deteriorating economic conditions, which should translate to an uplift in spending and bolster business and consumer confidence," said Mr Hawes.

Importantly, most regional infrastructure priorities that Business Hunter has campaigned for, together with local MPs and its members have been maintained, despite concurrent infrastructure reviews being undertaken by both the Commonwealth and the NSW Government.

"It's pleasing to see continued commitment for the major roads projects we had been advocating for, including the M1 to Raymond Terrace, Hexham Straight, Newcastle Inner City Bypass, Singleton Bypass and Muswellbrook Bypass," Mr Hawes said.

"We also welcome the continued investment in health infrastructure upgrades across the region. However provision for stage 2 of the John Hunter Health and Innovation Precinct has not been singled out and we will continue to advocate for funding for this important project in the future," offered Mr Hawes.

"There also does not appear to be provision for any capital works or development initiatives on the Hunter Park site. We appreciate this is a complex project and hope that more definite plans and commitments will emerge following the wider precinct Broadmeadow planning review," said Mr Hawes.

Having campaigned heavily for support to accelerate the energy transition, Business Hunter welcomed the investment in energy including \$1 billion seed funding for the NSW Energy Security Corporation, \$800 million to accelerate the delivery of REZ infrastructure and \$5.2 million to establish the Regional Future Jobs and Investment Authorities to work with traditional energy intensive communities such as the Hunter.

In addition, Business Hunter also welcomed the \$1.4 billion commitment to replace the aging regional rail fleet, which could support increased opportunities in regional manufacturing, aligned to the State Government's pre-election commitment of a Hunter-based Manufacturing Centre of Excellence.

"Whether it's in train manufacturing or supporting additional infrastructure enabling works across the rail network, the Hunter is ideally suited and equipped to support the regional train fleet replacement project," said Mr Hawes.

Key highlights:

Housing

- **\$1.5 billion** from the new Housing and Productivity Contribution to deliver enabling infrastructure in key growth areas, including the Central Coast, Lower Hunter and Illawarra Shoalhaven.

Transport

- **\$1.4 billion** to replace the aging regional rail fleet.

Roads

- **\$1.4 billion** over four years to continue planning the Pacific Motorway (M1) extension to Raymond Terrace (state and federally funded) and commence early works construction on the widening of Hexham Straight.
- **\$265.8 million** over four years to continue planning, design, and commence pre-construction of the Muswellbrook bypass (state and federally funded).
- **\$156.3 million** over four years to improve safety and travel times on Nelson Bay Road, including commencing work on a 1 km section of the existing road from Salt Ash to Bobs Farm.
- **\$36.6 million** to continue construction of the New England Highway upgrade between Belford and the Golden Highway.
- **\$19.8 million** to continue planning and commence preconstruction of the Singleton Bypass to deliver safer, more efficient journeys for thousands of motorists every day (state and federally funded).
- **\$9.7 million** million to continue construction on flood immunity works on the Golden Highway at Mudies Creek (state and federally funded).
- **\$15.0 million** to plan the duplication of the Thornton Rail Bridge, under the Regional Roads Fund. (New funding)
- **\$12.1 million** to continue early works activities for the New England Highway Muswellbrook Bypass (NSW and Australian Governments funded).

- **\$10.0 million** for the Port Stephens Council to commence planning and early work for upgrades to a number of roads across Port Stephens under the Regional Roads Fund.
- Continuing planning works to deliver the Nelson Bay Road Upgrade.

Tourism/Visitor economy

\$602,421 for the Hunter Valley Visitor Information Centre Park.

Education/Skills/Training

- The new Medowie High School.
- Gillieston Public School Redevelopment.
- Hunter River High School Upgrade.
- Irrawang High School Upgrade.

Regional Workforce

- **\$6 million** to support regional community newspapers to improve the long-term sustainability of regionally focused media.
- Doubling of the incentive payments for healthcare workers moving to regional and remote areas from \$10,000 to \$20,000.
- **\$572.3 million** to ensure 1,112 nurses and midwives, whose positions were funded only temporarily until June 2024 will be made permanent, with hundreds of these positions in rural and regional New South Wales.

Media enquiries: Sheena Martin 0408 733 386