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Federal budget expectations for the Hunter

Business Hunter hopes the federal budget, due to be handed down tomorrow, delivers a continuation of funding for projects committed in previous budgets and in the election leadup.

Business Hunter CEO, Bob Hawes, said the government had invariably described this as a responsible budget that is responding to the challenging economic headwinds they are forecasting.

“The government has positioned persistent high inflation as the primary influence on this budget, so we’re not expecting to see any major new infrastructure spending programs,” said Mr Hawes.

“However, we do hope to see a continuation of focus and support for key infrastructure projects committed in previous budgets including the M1 extension to Raymond Terrace, the Singleton and Muswellbrook by passes, the Newcastle Inner City by pass, the runway works at Newcastle Airport and crucially, commitments to a range of new energy economy initiatives.”

“There’s also a list of significant projects that were promised in the election campaign including funding for investigations for high-speed rail, expansion of the terminal facilities at Newcastle Airport and upgrades to Mandalong Road that will be anticipated.”

“As the region continues to grow, we are witnessing increasing pressure on infrastructure and attention to these areas is crucial if we are to realise the growth ambitions of the region and its communities. It’s important that these projects remain on the agenda and are time banded so we have certainty of their delivery.”

In addition to maintaining momentum on infrastructure projects, Business Hunter hopes the budget will help to provoke change in the availability and suitability of the labour force.

“The business community is still expressing immense anguish over labour shortages. The Skills Priority List released earlier this month offers sobering insight, with one third of Australia’s occupations facing critical shortages and our worst labour market conditions since the 1970s. The list details some 286 occupations facing shortages including child carers, construction workers, retail workers, motor mechanics, chefs and electricians.

“We hope to see continued momentum on commitments that seek to fully engage the workforce including cheaper childcare, fee-free training, apprenticeship/traineeship wage subsidies, visa processing and the permanent migration cap.”

“While labour shortages aren’t an easy fix, it is important that government recognise the challenges and that this is reflected in the budget context and the policy and funding settings that follow.”

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