

PRESS ARTICLE

Title:	“User pays the way for infrastructure”
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THE national body overseeing Australia's future needs for roads, rail, ports and bridges says user charges will have a larger part in paying for infrastructure projects.

Infrastructure Australia released its fourth annual report of national infrastructure priorities and performance to the Council of Australian Governments yesterday.

The report said some decisions to build capital projects would be difficult and unpopular, such as the wider application of user charging.

The charges were likely to be unavoidable as governments, federal and state, struggled to pay for capital projects when their budgets were under pressure.

It would get worse as the nation's population ages.

“We cannot escape the fact that the maintenance, operation and expansion of our infrastructure networks have to be paid for,” said the Progress and Action report.

“There are no free lunches.”

The Infrastructure Australia chairman, Rod Eddington, said

governments, industry and the community had to assess ways to build appropriate, well-functioning infrastructure at the least cost to the nation, while providing the greatest public benefits.

“The results of not doing enough are traffic congestion, poor access to our export gateways, missed economic opportunities and lower quality of life,” he said.

The body also released its updated priority list of national projects. Four of the 42 projects submitted to Infrastructure Australia this year are on the recommended ready-to-proceed list.

They are the Brisbane cross-river rail project, two upgrades of the Monash Freeway in Melbourne, the Melbourne Metro stage one plan and 300 kilometres of corridor upgrades along the Pacific Highway in northern NSW.

Five projects are recommended for development funding: the Port Botany and Sydney Airport transport improvement plan, integrating Sydney's motorway network for user

charging, transforming the Pilbara in Western Australia, the East West road link and the Western Interstate freight terminal, both of which are in Melbourne.

The Infrastructure Minister, Anthony Albanese, said total public and private investment in the nation's roads, railways, electricity generators and water storage facilities was 40 per cent higher than during the last full year of the Howard government in 2007. But the job was far from done as infrastructure investment mattered in the competitive 21st century.

“All governments will need to step up the pace of regulatory and institutional reform,” he said in a statement.

Infrastructure Australia said another pressing issue was the skills development of workers, to boost the number of tradespeople and increase the small pool of professionals with the expertise to properly structure plans and projects.

Skills shortages threatened to drive up project costs, and cause delays where key workers were lost to a project. AAP