

OPENING REMARKS

LAUNCH OF “INFRASTRUCTURE 21:

FROM INCREMENTALISM TO TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE”

The Honourable Anthony Albanese MP, Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government.

The Honourable Pat Conlon, South Australian Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Energy.

The Honourable Bruce Billson MP, Federal Member for Dunkley, Shadow Minister for Sustainable Development & Cities.

Infrastructure 21 partners: the Australian Government, in particular the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government; Telstra, in particular Telstra Wholesale; National Australia Bank, in particular nabCapital, and KPMG. KPMG is also our generous host today.

Ladies and Gentlemen welcome to the launch of “Infrastructure 21: From Incrementalism to Transformational Change”.

Let me start by thanking our partners who have showed an enormous community spirit and vision supporting this initiative. Let me also thank the Chairs of the various working groups and the participants who have given up so much of their time to make this Infrastructure21 report such a valuable community resource.

When we decided on the theme for the Infrastructure Summit, we could not possibly have known how much “transformational change” awaited us in the days and weeks to follow.

But the global economic meltdown has made the work of the summit more relevant, not less.

It has made our call for greater national focus on our infrastructure deficit more prescient than ever.

To truly address Australia’s infrastructure challenge, we need a higher standard of leadership – in federal, state and local governments, but also in the corporate and finance sectors.

In his inaugural address six weeks ago, President Barack Obama called on his country to “put away childish things” in the face of an unprecedented economic crisis.

These words ought to reverberate here, too.

Left, right or centre, leaders, commentators, and economists the world over understand that the three critical ingredients to meet this economic challenge are: urgency; leadership; and common-sense.

Every week lost to political or bureaucratic in fighting, indecision or short-term thinking threatens to extend and exacerbate the impact of the downturn. It also diminishes already-dwindling confidence.

Outdated ideologies and sound-bite politics need to be discarded in favour of action that is bold enough and big enough to match the scale of the problem it addresses.

If ever there was a time for bipartisanship, this is it.

It did no service to the Australian people, and it did not reflect well on this country's political leadership, to see the stimulus bill subject to the old kind of politics I can only hope that all sides of politics embrace a new and better approach – and nowhere is this more important than in the area of infrastructure.

As this report outlines, there is a broad consensus that Australia has in many ways squandered an historic opportunity presented by prolonged economic growth.

We had failed to make long-term economic investments.

We had let our national infrastructure fall into disrepair.

We neglected to look over the horizon, buoyed by the belief that the economy was locked in an endless cycle of prosperity.

Not before time, this report lays out the challenges and begins to spell out the solutions that will meet them.

Successive governments have not made the task any easier by short-sighted policies and a deficit of vision that is truly bipartisan.

That is for the history books.

Our leaders today, however, do not have the option to fail.

Our report is a resource; it is a valuable roadmap.

But, Minister, I urge your Government to think and act boldly in the face of this economic challenge.

I urge all sides of politics to take hold of the infrastructure challenge laid out in this report, and find the bipartisan political will to lay the foundations for a prosperous, sustainable future.

Minister, thank you for your support of this initiative and for giving up your time to be with us again today.

Michael Roux
Chairman
Australian Davos Connection