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COMMUNIQUÉ

Country Mayors Association of NSW Roads and Transport conference Kempsey 12-14 June, 2024

The Country Mayors Association of NSW (CMA) held our Roads and Transports conference from Wednesday 12 to Friday 14 June and Kempsey Shire Councillors and staff were professional and hospitable hosts.

8-9 April 2024. Attendance was under 50, due to numerous conflicting meetings across regional NSW. The conference was held at the Slim Dusty Centre, a facility that the Kempsey Shire is justifiably proud of, having been born from many donations before becoming a Council responsibility.

Kempsey Shire Mayor made us feel welcome at a special function at the Slim Dusty Centre on the Wednesday evening complete with local food and beverages, which included a guided tour of the museum that showcases the life and music of the iconic Aussie, Slim Dusty. Kempsey Shire Mayor, Cr Leo Hauville (below) conducted the welcome and CMA Deputy Chair and Temora Shire Mayor Rick Firman (bottom right) thanked Kempsey on behalf of the CMA.



For further information, contact Cr Jamie Chaffey on 0467 402 412



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The first speaker on the Thursday morning was the Hon Jenny Aitchison, Minister for Regional Transport and Roads and Member for Maitland. The Minister is a friend of the CMA, having fronted up to the past two consecutive CMA meetings. She is pictured bottom right with CMA Executive Member and Narromine Mayor Cr Craig Davies.



Disaster relief was the first topic that the Minister spoke on. She has read the CMA's disaster funding report, so is well aware of the frustrations of Country Councils. The Minister expressed understanding of the stress Councils are under with the cost of disaster recovery, as

For further in





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well as the speed and complexity of funding claims.

"We are trying to get projects started with payment instalments."

"We need to work together with trust, beyond politics. We are focusing on doing the job right. You will see a significant improvement in processing of funding claims in coming months."

Minister Aitchison touch on a pre-budget announcement regarding funding for transport corridors from Port to REZ projects, with over \$120mil. earmarked. REZ road network funding involves State and Federal Government collaboration.

In Q&A, Minister Aitchison was asked how untied money for potholes could be attained. She responded that the focus needs to be on disaster relief now and for quite some time to come. Mayor of Gwydir Shire John Coulton and Mayor of Forbes Shire Phyllis Miller thanked the Minister for her responsiveness.

Bellingen Shire Mayor Steve Allan told the Minister of the \$6mil investment into the Bellingen Environment Centre but road infrastructure to it still needs funding. Minister Aitchison said "that is a good example of why we need Integrated Transport Plans, incorporating a range of community stakeholders, with consultation. Toolkits are online for Strategic Regional Transport Plans."

Narrabri Shire Mayor Cr. Darrell Tiemens asked if there has been any progress with the reclassification of roads. The Minister explained "We need to look at these requests on individual merit-based terms. The work on the (reclassification matter) from the previous Government remains sealed.

Member for Oxley, Michael Kemp MP spoke as a proud local and was thanked by CMA Executive Mmember and Singleton Mayor Cr. Sue Moore (pictured bottom right). The newest politician in the NSW Parliament, the Nationals MP said that Country Mayors are more than roads, rates and rubbish – they are the heart of regional NSW. We need to be open and communicating to work together. The CMA has lobbied so well on many issues from roads to regional crime. The regional crime inquiry and the funding that began in Moree started with the CMA movement. He listed



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rising figures in juvenile and DV crime in the Mid-North Coast. Cost-shifting and the Red Fleet is another area that he supports the removal of, describing it as ludicrous.

CMA Executive Member and Narromine Mayor Cr Craig Davis said that “the Biodiversity Offset Scheme is designed by city people and does not work in our regions. There needs to be more push back by the Nationals. What more can be done to get our message across, where our regional issues are not being heard in the city?”

Mr. Kemp was receptive and advised to take any opportunity to talk to the National Party and make them aware of your concerns.

CMA Executive Member and Armidale Regional Council Mayor Cr Sam Coupland said “We need to change the model for Local Government. We have had to go for 50% SRV. Can we review the system?” “I am happy to be tied to a position and we need to make it easier for Councils to do their job but I am not aware of a holistic model change on the agenda,” responded Mr Kemp.

Shadow Minister for Regional Transport and Roads and Member for Upper Hunter, the Hon. David Layzell had a prior commitment and spoke remotely.

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The regionally based Shadow Minister said that the Country Mayors Association is a fantastic organisation that brings people together and does important work. He described how he built a road in Ghana early in his construction career that mainly involved constructing buildings.

"Roads are so important. Road funding and investment programs such as Fixing Country Roads and the potholes programs have been vital," he said.

Shadow Minister Layzell said "We need to look at improving infrastructure, not just putting things back the same way." He cited examples in the Dungog Shire.



"We have to acknowledge that there are fiscal and inflationary pressures. Managing contractors will never be more important than now. Understand their pressures because we can't lose them."

Mayor of Uralla Shire Council Cr Robert Bell said "Truck drivers pay so many levies and we do not see that money coming out to be spent on our roads."

Shadow Minister Layzell emphasised the importance of trucking freight and roads infrastructure to regional economies.

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Morning tea was a special occasion, with Slim Dusty's daughter Anne Kirkpatrick (a singer-songwriter in her own right) unveiling new museum displays and cutting a 97th birthday cake for Slim.



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Celebrating Country Music history with Anne Kirkpatrick was icing on the cake for CMA Members who enjoyed a very worthwhile event in Kempsey.

Official duties done, Anne posed with CMA members for a group shot.



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Acting CEO of the NSW Reconstruction Authority Mal Lanyon APM and Deputy Secretary – Regional and Outer Metropolitan, Transport for NSW Matt Fuller conducted a panel discussion from the stage after morning tea.

The discussion was open and frank, getting a big thumbs up from the attendees.

"It is important for the Reconstruction Authority to listen. It started December 2022, so it is new and evolving to meet needs. Looking at the transition from emergency to recovery, reconstruction is about the latter," Mal said.

Mal and Matt agreed that the RA and TfNSW need to work better together and assured the CMA that they are working to get things done faster for Councils.

Kempsey Shire Mayor Cr Leo Hauville said "Build back better, like our 56 new bridges. That's the way to go."

Matt: "We are building back better, where necessary, such as the land slip case we saw in Kempsey Shire."

Mal: "We are looking at prioritising investment to high risk areas."

Shoalhaven City Council Mayor Amanda Finlay: We've just had our fifth disaster in four years. We appreciate the collaboration we have but we are still waiting for \$15mil and if that does not come in by the end of the financial year, we will be in trouble.

Mal: We accept we need to improve the processing times. We need to shift how we get the money from the Federal Government, so we can release it to Councils faster.

Amanda: Can the Adaption Plans be funded by the Commonwealth?

Mal: The RA will help with them.

Matt: We need open communication to improve our processes.

Ballina Mayor Sharon Cadwallader: We are not cutting down on the red tape. If anything, it has been getting worse. Does the CMA need to advocate more on this politically?

Mal: There is no lack of advocacy. We need to improve and we know that. There will be faster processing in the next month.

Matt: Change is a cultural thing. We acknowledge and that it is needed but it takes time.

Wollondilly Mayor Matt Gould said his council is not disaster declared right now and every council around them has been. Mal said he would look into that.

Gwydir Mayor John Coulton: Councils are ideally placed for determining the cost-effectiveness of betterment versus like for like funding.

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Tenterfield Shire Mayor Bronwyn Petrie: Betterment was the reason for funding refusals from our bushfire damage, including a bridge that was damaged on an important transport road. Re-building what failed is a waste of money.

Mal agreed: We are wasting money.

Matt: We can engage with NEMA and bring diligence and practicality close together.

A southern Council representative offered a road tour to Matt. We (Local Government) are not the enemy.

Matt: We see Councils as partners.

Caption:

CMA Deputy Chairman and Temora Mayor Cr Rick Firman and CMA Executive Member and Forbes Shire Mayor Phyllis Miller are Acting CEO of the NSW Reconstruction Authority Mal Lanyon APM and Deputy Secretary – Regional and Outer Metropolitan, Transport for NSW Matt Fuller



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The Thursday concluded with a bus tour of the new bridges of Kempsey Shire. The most recently completed bridge replacement was officially opened by Minister Jenny Aitchison. Simon Fergusson, a rural-based Kempsey Councillor described the impact of being cut off during recent disasters and the value of the bridge investments. He is pictured below with Member for Oxley Michael Kemp, Kempsey Shire Mayor Cr Leo Hauville and NSW Roads Minister the Hon. Jenny Aitchison. Kempsey Shire's Engineering team look young but have many successful grant applications under their belt but are apparently not available to consult. Their bus replacement tour program is attached.





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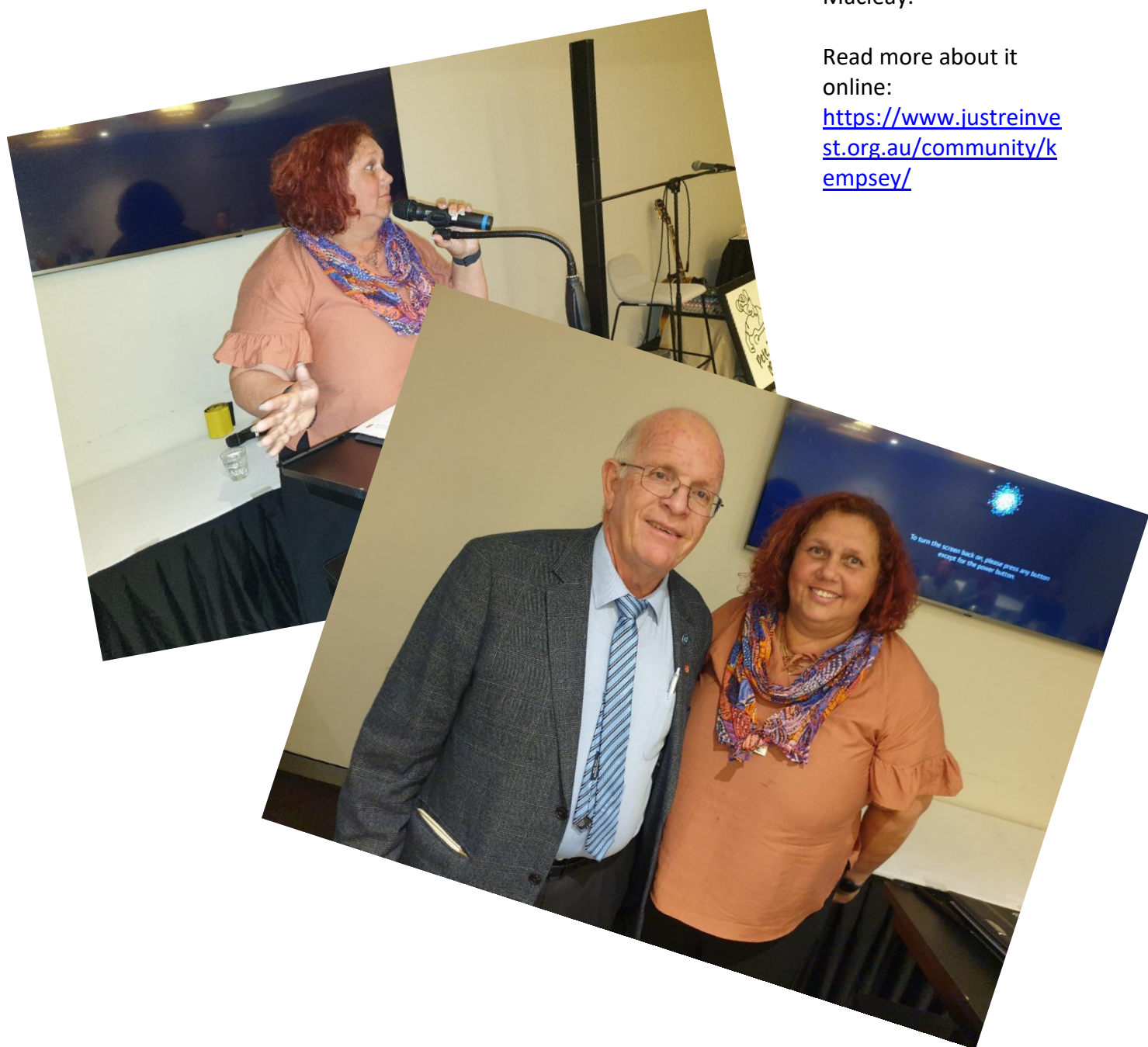
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Kempsey Shire hosted a great conference dinner at the RSL Club, with an inspiring talk by local Aboriginal educator Jo Kelly about the programs she is steering for Aboriginal youth, with Learning the Macleay.

Read more about it online:

<https://www.iustreinvest.org.au/community/kempsey/>



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NRMA Policy Advisor, Jonathan Malota was first at the lectern on the Friday morning. He spoke of the NRMA's enthusiasm to work with Country Mayors, to achieve the best possible outcomes with regional roads for road users and local communities.

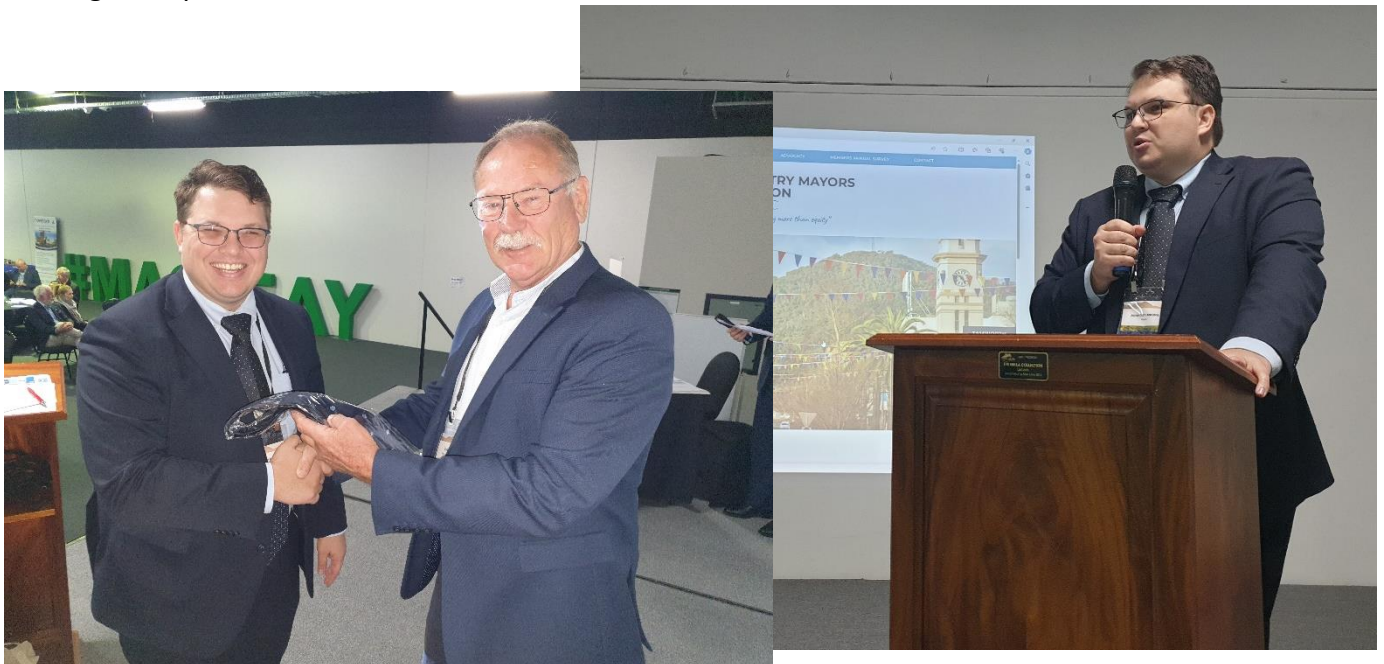
Mr. Malota condemned the standard of regional roads. He said NRMA members are calling for improvements, adding that there is a \$2.35 billion backlog in road funding for regional roads p.a. compared to \$468mil. in metro areas. "The fact is road funding is not enough," he said. He detailed the road toll figures and the importance of road safety and road quality.

The NRMA's current and emerging data collection resources was described and he offered to share the data with the CMA and regional Councils, within a formalised relationship. "We want to work with Councils."

Mr. Malota explained that since 2000, all new cars have had a sim card that sends data back to the vehicle manufacturer and NRMA pays a lot of money for that data.

Uralla Mayor Robert Bell asked "can we get this data before it goes to the press, so we can be across it?"

Mr. Malota said Government inefficiencies should be redressed, not tolerated. "Government Departments need KPIs, such as a maximum 30 days to provide an outcome from an application for funding or request further details."



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BusNSW Industry Development Manager Philip Whipp, spoke next and like the industry he represents, he covered a lot of ground. BusNSW is the peak body representing the bus and coach industry in New South Wales and Philip Whipp has been with the organisation since 2016. Prior to that, he held coach company management roles since 2004.

Mr Whipp provided a comprehensive overview of the NSW bus industry, such as the 26,000 accredited bus drivers in NSW – a drop of 11% since Covid. There is a concerning shortage.

There are 660 contracts in regional NSW, which expire in 2026. TfNSW will negotiate with BusNSW regarding the new contracts.

A Bus Industry Taskforce was established in May 2023. Four reports and 58 recommendations resulted. Major reforms expected, including bus driver training. There were recommendations pertaining to Local Traffic Committees in Councils.

Rural and Regional bus contracts - \$500mil p.a. funded by the NSW Government.

Cashless, tap and go ticketing system has been trialled in Bathurst and Dubbo but further rollout timeframe is not known.

3,000 zero emission buses are being introduced but the transition will be slow (not likely to be completely rolled out until the 2040s). With a bus expected to have a life of 26-28 years, road maintenance funding is vital to bus operators.

The location of temporary or informal bus stops, such near a farm gate, should involve consultation with Local Councils, according to TfNSW.



Questions related to zero emissions transition and Philip said that it could happen quicker than 2047 in regional areas but did not know if electric buses would impact routes.

Philip Whipp from BusNSW was thanked for his presentation by CMA Executive Member and Tamworth Regional Council Mayor Cr Russell Webb.

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CEO of Road Freight NSW Simon O'Hara spoke next and had to address the conference remotely. Simon O'Hara is the current CEO of Road Freight NSW, an arm of the Australian Trucking Association. He has years of experience in transport and is admitted as a solicitor in NSW and the High Court of Australia. He has been steering the State's peak trucking industry body since May 2016. Previously, Simon has held leadership roles in a range of corporations and union type organisations. He has developed strong relationships with Transport for NSW .

Mr. O'Hara said that road transport has faced interesting times, particularly through and post Covid. He described the companies that have a strong relationship with Road Freight NSW, such as Blue Scope Steel. RF NSW has advocated for greater respect for truckies and what they do. There's a complete lack of rest areas in metropolitan NSW.

Inflation rates are coming down but interest rates are not. The demand on the industry has dropped since Covid, especially in the past six months. The demand of agricultural commodities remains strong and road freight is vital to meeting that.

There are drivers leaving the industry and the shortage of drivers is a challenge. Country roads need to be upgraded. They are an issue for truckies. As are the fees and surcharges at ports.

We are seeing a lot of cost increases and country drivers need to make a living.

"I grew up on a farm near Nullamanna (North of Uralla) for a time during the 70's and early 80's during drought and lived in country towns as well as the city so I understand how, in NSW there is a great deal of focus on metropolitan Sydney. Country Mayors are an important voice and I welcome working with you all!"





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Business Development Manager for Newpave Asphalt, Peter Gellert was a sponsor of the conference. Mr Gellert is proud of the electrical engineering advances he has contributed to the Australian-owned and operated. Established in 2013 in the Hunter region, Newpave has become experts in asphalt manufacturing, construction, testing, haulage, traffic management, profiling, stabilisation and spray seal. Peter has developed a high-tech National Association of Australian State Road Authorities accredited 'roughness' assessing vehicle, an efficient road condition evidence gathering tool.



Mr. Gellert expressed his appreciation for the work of country Mayors and the genuine passion they have for their respective patches.



Mr. Gellert described his electronics background, which led to the road testing and monitoring equipment he has developed. He then detailed what exactly goes into the asphalt and spray seal that his company produces and the processes involved.

His presentation is attached.

Peter Gellert was thanked for his contribution by Kempsey Shire Mayor Cr. Leo Hauville.

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The final speaker at the conference was UGL Regional Linx Network Operations Manager, Mitch Scealy. UGL Regional Linx manages all infrastructure and maintenance on the Country Regional (rail) Network in NSW. This network ensures the safe movement of people and goods throughout the regions of NSW, and links Sydney with many important regional centres.

Based in the Central West, Mr Scealy has rail tracks in his blood. His father has been working in the railways for 50 years. The rail infrastructure that UGL Regional Linx is responsible for includes the historic landmark train stations in our regional centres. It also faces challenges with infrastructure that is no longer used, such as the Sunnyside timber rail bridge in the Tenterfield Shire, which Mayor Bronwyn Petrie asked about.



Unfortunately, Mr. Scealy said that the heritage listing of the Sunnyside bridge and other such structures can mean it is difficult to address concerns, regardless of how dilapidated they may be.

Mr Scealy said that UGL Regional Linx looks forward to building its relationship with the Country Mayors Association of NSW into the future.

His presentation is attached.

He was thanked by CMA Deputy Chairman and Temora Shire Mayor Cr Rick Firman, who was MC for the conference.



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The CMA Executive looks forward to our 9 Aug. 2024 meeting at NSW Parliament.



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