

# Motoring Matters

## *For Every Australian*

### Australian Labor Party responses to AAA's motoring questions

In the lead up to the 2007 Federal Election, the Australian Automobile Association - on behalf of Australia's motoring clubs, their 6.5 million members, their families and all road users - put ten questions to the political parties on important road safety and road infrastructure issues.

#### **1. What is your party's assessment of the state of Australia's road network?**

We are guided by the Auslink Corridor Strategies, the advice of State, Territory and Local governments, and peak bodies on the state of Australia's road network. We will be taking into account those assessments in determining our road funding priorities. It is well known that in 2005, the Infrastructure Report Card produced by Engineers Australia rated the nation's roads as in need of major changes to be fit for purpose and estimated under investment in the order of \$10 billion. Federal Labor is committed to continued funding under Auslink for the national network and the Strategic Regional, Black Spot and Roads to Recovery programs.

#### **2. What is your party's policy on Commonwealth funding of road infrastructure?**

We support the Auslink programs, including funding of the national network based on corridor strategies agreed between the Commonwealth and State and Territory governments. In addition, we support the retention of the Black Spot, Strategic Regional and Roads to Recovery programs.

#### **3. How does your party intend to fund and accelerate major road infrastructure projects?**

We will fund major road projects through the Auslink program, in partnership with State and Territory governments, and the private sector, where appropriate. At the moment it is difficult to accelerate major road infrastructure projects because

there is a shortage of labour and competition for resources is fierce because of the booming mining sector. Construction costs are rising rapidly and it is a case of moving forward as fast as we can given labour, materials and equipment constraints.

The other serious issue that has to be addressed when it comes to turning projects into reality is that of tendering and contract management. In my view, much more can be done to establish true alliances between infrastructure developers and the contracting sector to drive productivity gains. Such alliances must share risk and reward and build relationships that allow for long term commitment to mutually aligned objectives. For example relationships that allow for bundling of projects so that developers can retain a construction workforce for follow-on projects.

This would provide certainty of long-term work for civil contractors and that is a shared benefit which has a dollar value. Better contracting arrangements are particularly important for government infrastructure providers who cannot always recover the costs of construction and who are charged with both the responsible use of taxpayers' money and the timely delivery of infrastructure to meet community needs.

**4. Is your party focussed on the state of regional roads around Australia?**

We strongly support the Strategic Regional program and have already announced funding for the Kingston Bypass south of Hobart in Tasmania and the Bega Bypass on the Princes Highway south of Wollongong on this basis. We will be making further announcements under this program in the coming months. For too long the Coalition has used the Strategic Regional program for porkbarrelling and worthy projects in rural and regional Australia have missed out as a result. We will also encourage local councils to think regionally and pool their resources, also drawing on business, to get more value for money out of the Roads to Recovery program.

**5. What will your party do to keep motoring affordable for Australians, in particular to ensure that fuel prices are competitive and in line with world/regional benchmark prices?**

We will give the ACCC stronger powers to monitor petrol prices and ensure that full competition is occurring in the petrol market.

**6. What is your party's view on the use of alternative fuels in motor vehicles - in particular ethanol?**

When it comes to transport fuels, Federal Labor's first priority is full competition in the fuels market – competition that delivers the lowest possible prices and product choice for consumers. It is also important that we reduce our reliance on

crude oil imports so we support the diversification of transport fuels, including LPG, ethanol and biodiesel, CNG, and emerging fuels like ultra clean diesel made from natural gas and coal. With petrol prices at record highs, alternative fuels tax free until 2011, and various State and Federal government market support programs, times have never been better for them to win a place in the market on their merits. I will be monitoring the progress of the alternative fuels industry to determine whether further policy intervention is warranted in the future.

**7. Does your party have a view and any policy on traffic congestion and its cost to the national and regional economies?**

It is well known that urban congestion costs the nation billions of dollars every year. The best thing the Federal government can do to ease urban congestion is invest in both road and rail freight corridors to take traffic off commuter roads and passenger rail lines and free up State and Territory funds for modern public transport systems.

One of the most successful projects in terms of both productivity and the easing of urban congestion has been the M7 link to the 120 km orbital motorway network around Sydney. Just one trip means an hour more that can now be spent doing chargeable work by an electrician or a plumber or a bricklayer, an hour earlier that a critical pathology result can be delivered, or an hour more that can be spent at home with the family at the end of a hard day's work. And that one hour costs \$6.22 in tolls but results in lower fuel use, lower greenhouse emissions, less noise and air pollution, less wear and tear on vehicles from stopping and starting, fewer road accidents and less stress as a consequence of freer flowing traffic, fewer traffic lights, less travelling time and so on.

These are real productivity and social gains for western Sydney families and communities, and for the businesses who use the M7 corridor to link them with the rest of the city and with regional New South Wales. These are the kinds of gains that we want to continue to achieve in Sydney as well as extend to our other major Australian cities.

**8. What is your party's policy on reducing Greenhouse gas emissions, particularly emissions from private vehicles?**

The best thing the Federal government can do to reduce greenhouse emissions is to invest in infrastructure and adopt international vehicle design and fuel standards aimed at greater fuel efficiency and cleaner exhaust emissions. Projects like the M7 in Sydney not only ease urban congestion and improve transport productivity, they mean greater fuel efficiency and lower greenhouse emissions.

## **9. What is your party doing to ensure motor vehicles are safer?**

Federal Labor will support the adoption of appropriate vehicle design rules – to apply to both imported and locally manufactured vehicles – that demonstrably improve safety for Australian motorists. We have concerns about the stripping of advanced safety features from some imported vehicles and in government we will work with all stakeholders to appropriately address this issue.

Federal Labor will get behind the National Road Safety Strategy with a “zero toll” as the long term goal. While there is a long term trend in reducing the loss of lives on Australian roads we are still a long way from achieving the 2010 target of 40 per cent below the 1999 benchmark.

## **10. What is your party’s policy on driver education and training?**

Federal Labor will continue to work with motoring organisations and other stakeholders on better driver education with a national program to be announced before the 2007 election.

### **Other comments:**

This year’s budget announcement of \$22.3 billion for Auslink 2 from 2009 to 2014 was very welcome.

With the freight task set to double by 2020 and urban congestion already costing the economy more than \$15 billion a year, Federal Labor’s national transport infrastructure priorities will be focussed on three things:

- Productivity gains in our key export supply chains;
- Integration of our roads and rail with air and sea ports, and inland freight hubs, to improve efficiency in general freight movement; and
- The easing of urban congestion in our major cities.