

# Council happenings . . .

with Mayor  
Glenn Wall

## **RTA Regional Road Funding.**

The Roads and Traffic Authority has announced the funding available to councils in 2007/08 for maintaining some 18,600km of Regional Roads throughout NSW.

The Government has increased the total of Block Grants for the maintenance of Regional Roads in 2007 / 08 to \$121.7 million, which is up from the \$119.1 million of last year. The REPAIR Program for rehabilitation projects has been increased from \$23.5 to \$24.7 million, and this requires matching funding from Councils.

The total allocation of \$146.4 million represents a total increase of \$3.2 million or 2.2% above last year, which falls short of the annual CPI estimate of 2.75% and well short of the overall increase in the State road budget of 9%.

Sadly, since 1995 when Regional Roads were transferred to councils, annual RTA funding has usually only been increased according to the CPI at best. In that time the NSW Budget has almost doubled to \$44 billion with annual increases of about three times the CPI.

The funding available to this Council for 2007/08 will be approximately \$815,000 for the Block Grant and \$165,000 for the REPAIR Program. Unfortunately, this represents about half what is needed for a proper job.

The overall increase across the State of only 2.2% falls well short of known wage increases of approximately 4% and increases in general costs and materials of around 7%.

Years of neglect from successive NSW Governments and inadequate funding has left our main roads in a run down condition and this situation will prevail under the present policies of the NSW Government.

At least they are keeping their election promise of providing an extra \$60 million over three years on a 50:50 basis to assist councils upgrade timber bridges on Regional Roads, and Dungog Shire will make application under this program.

## **Elections "At what cost to the Community".**

An editorial in today's paper highlights the State Government's announcement that local councils will in future have to bear the full cost of conducting local government elections. 1999 was the last year in which Councils were able to manage the elections using local community resources at minimal cost to ratepayers.

The NSW Electoral Commission took over this responsibility for the 2004 elections and councils experienced significant extra costs. This latest move threatens to double those election costs for all councils in NSW. The recent by election to elect one councillor cost this council an outrageous \$40,000.

The next Local Government election is to be held in September 2008 and we will have to reallocate funds from other crucial areas to cover expected costs of at least \$80,000. In order to contain costs Council will need to consider various measures such as reducing the number of polling booths.

This is another classic case of cost shifting from the State Government that has been passed on to NSW communities at a time when councils are experiencing significant financial pressures. The implications for ratepayers are that scarce funds will be directed away from the provision of essential services.

Council will correspond with our Local Member, the Hon. George Souris and the NSW Local Government Shires Association seeking representation that the NSW Government reconsider this blatant impost upon Councils and local Communities. I would urge all those ratepayers that have concerns to raise the issue with our Local Member, Mr. Souris.

25 July 2007