

MEDIA RELEASE

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Funding partnership drives transport vision in remote Roper Gulf communities

A \$2.31 million plan to unlock the economic and social potential of the remote communities of Ngukurr and Numbulwar will be realised after Roper Gulf Regional Council secured the funding needed to proceed with the ambitious project this month.

Road transport delivers the majority of freight to Ngukurr and Numbulwar – 320 kilometres and 480km west of Katherine respectively – and both communities have been identified as growth towns by the Northern Territory Government.

As part of the Council's push to develop freight infrastructure, both communities will receive purpose-built facilities that include sealed heavy vehicle routes, undercover lay-down areas for loading and unloading, and dedicated parking.

The project has been funded by all three tiers of Government, a partnership that reflects the importance of adequate freight and transport infrastructure to regional economic development.

The NT Government contributed \$1m through its Regional Economic Infrastructure Fund, while the Federal Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development will add \$999,500 to the project as part of its National Stronger Regions Fund (NSRF).

The Council has committed more than \$300,000 to ensure the Growth Centre Transport and Freight Hub Project becomes a reality.

Director of Council and Community Services Sharon Hillen said the project meant supplies vital to the operation of both communities would no longer have to be unloaded in "dustbowls" or "a paddock of mud".

"Right now, we have heavy vehicles manoeuvring into these towns without adequate heavy vehicle infrastructure, and that includes when they are unloading freight in dustbowls or a big, open paddock of mud, depending on the season," she explained.

She added that the facilities would help improve local area traffic management and safety in Ngukurr and Numbulwar, as well as open the door to more regular freight deliveries.

"The heavy vehicles are interacting closely with the public at the moment," Mrs Hillen said.

“It means we have vehicles, kids, forklifts and dogs; everybody interacting, because there are no formal lay-down areas, formal access or formal car parking, which the freight industry requires.

“We worked with the freight industry on this, and we had some freight companies say they would actually provide greater services to these remote destinations if they had more formal freight depots there.”

Chief Executive Officer Michael Berto said it was hoped the new infrastructure would give Ngukurr and Numbulwar more opportunities to develop, and attract much-needed investment from the private and public sectors.

“This project is necessary for the growth of the region, and reflects the needs of residents and businesses in Ngukurr and Numbulwar,” he said.

“Council is doing everything it can to overcome the tyranny of distance and provide every opportunity for our communities to reach their economic potential.”

The project is expected to create eight full-time equivalent jobs during the construction phase, but Mr Berto said he believed the opportunities for new small businesses and the upskilling of locals offered the greatest promise.

“These hubs will provide opportunities for Indigenous Territorians in our remote communities to learn new skills they can use to strengthen the capacity of the local workforce, but I think we will also see plenty of small businesses start up as a result of the project.

“Once the infrastructure for heavy vehicles is in place, there is nothing stopping someone in Numbulwar buying a water truck and putting their hand up to tender for work in the region, for example.

“The more skills and small businesses we can attract to these communities, the more sustainable they will be.”

Mrs Hillen said the fact both the Federal and Northern Territory Governments were prepared to contribute almost \$2m to the project was recognition that economic development in remote communities was not possible without the facilities required to support it.

“This is the beginning of Government’s recognition that there are many infrastructure projects that aren’t sexy, that aren’t what everybody else wants, but are what every town needs,” she said.

The project is scheduled to be completed by November 2018.

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For further information, please contact the Communications Co-ordinator on 0419 891 666 or at roper.governance@ropergulf.nt.gov.au.