



## **MOBILE BLACK SPOT PROGRAM – ROUND 5A DISCUSSION PAPER**

### **AUSTRALIAN TRUCKING ASSOCIATION SUBMISSION 19 JUNE 2020**

#### **1. About the Australian Trucking Association**

The Australian Trucking Association and its member associations collectively represent 50,000 businesses and 200,000 people in the Australian trucking industry. Together we are committed to safety, professionalism and viability.

#### **2. Summary of recommendations**

##### **Recommendation 1**

The Australian Government should allocate the full amount of uncommitted funds from Round 5 of the MBSP to Round 5A.

##### **Recommendation 2**

The Australian Government should implement the proposed design principle to include major regional and remote transport corridors as a priority area for Round 5A of the MBSP.

##### **Recommendation 3**

The Australian Government should commit to incorporating learnings from the inclusion of transport corridors into the design of Round 6 of the MBSP.

##### **Recommendation 4**

The Australian Government should consider new coverage, value for money, use of extension devices and assessment of a group of proposed towers to maximise the delivery of better connectivity on transport routes.

##### **Recommendation 5**

The Australian Government should include mobile phone and data connectivity in the proposed National Service Level Standards for roads, with funding for mobile phone and data blackspots to come from the existing MBSP.

### **3. Introduction**

The ATA welcomes the Australian Government's commitment to the Mobile Black Spot Program (MBSP). The discussion paper for Round 5A highlights that this commitment is worth \$380 million over six rounds. \$80 million was allocated to Round 5, with the total cost to the Commonwealth of committed projects being \$36.8 million.<sup>1</sup>

#### **Recommendation 1**

The Australian Government should allocate the full amount of uncommitted funds from Round 5 of the MBSP to Round 5A.

### **4. Delivering mobile phone coverage on major regional and remote transport corridors**

#### *Proposed design principles*

The ATA strongly supports the proposed design principle to deliver coverage benefits for non-commercial regional and remote areas, with one of the three priority areas to include major regional and remote transport corridors.

Fixing mobile black spots on transport routes is critical from an emergency and safety perspective and will be a requirement before vehicles with higher levels of automation and other technological progress can be fully embraced on Australian roads.

Noting the strong safety grounds for extending mobile phone coverage on transport routes, the ATA also supports the inclusion of high priority natural disaster prone areas, including bushfires, as a priority area.

Connectivity access during an emergency is critical. It can provide access to emergency services, better inform road users of unfolding emergency conditions on relevant transport corridors and ultimately contribute to saving lives.

For technology and higher levels of automation, we cannot predict how technology will change and the things that people will do with it. Ultimately what's important is not trying to predict the future. Instead, we must deliver policies which deliver the right settings, outcomes and platforms from which businesses and the community can maximise the benefits of technological change to achieve gains in safety, connectivity, and economic growth.

A common feature of technological change is connectivity – access to mobile data, and through that access to information and technologies of the wider world. Australia is unique, covering a large geographical area, where mobile data connectivity is not universal.

The intent to address some of these gaps with the MBSP is welcome. Lessons learned should be incorporated into the future design of Round 6, noting that the potential funding allocation under Round 5A will not be able to fix all transport corridor connectivity gaps.

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Government. [Mobile Black Spot Program – Round 5A – Discussion Paper](#). April 2020. 4.

### *Other design considerations*

The ATA supports considerations around new coverage outcomes and value for money to be part of the assessment criteria.

Value for money is important – the ATA supports maximising the impact of increased connectivity on transport corridors. The ATA would support consideration of extension devices to amplify signal on the edges of connectivity and consideration of a grouping of proposed towers, to deliver connectivity on a particular transport corridor.

### *Longer term reform: connectivity standards on transport routes*

In the longer term, the Australian Government is also developing a National Standards Level Framework (NSLF) to describe levels of service that road users can expect to be delivered over time.

The ATA is a long-term advocate of implementing standard levels for roads. In 2013, the ATA launched an independent report by PricewaterhouseCoopers into the road planning, funding and charging system. The report recommended that governments should set defined standards for each category of road.<sup>2</sup>

The ATA submission to the inquiry into National Freight and Supply Chain Priorities recommended that service levels should be set for roads, which would need to include mandating communication and mobile data access standards.<sup>3</sup> Following the inquiry, the resulting National Freight and Supply Chain Strategy National Action Plan recognised improving mobile phone coverage along major freight corridors as an Australian Government priority.<sup>4</sup>

In November 2019, Transport Ministers agreed to develop implementation details on a package of reforms for consultation in 2020. This package would include using the National Service Level Standards Framework for Roads to inform investment planning.<sup>5</sup> These service level standards will be established with road categories that each have levels of service covering the things that road users care about.<sup>6</sup>

The ATA will continue to advocate that the NLSF needs to include mobile connectivity. In the longer term, integrating the NSLF and MBSP would ensure that MBSP funding was spent in the most cost effective and productive way.

The ATA will be strongly advocating to governments the NSLF should include mobile connectivity, with funding for mobile phone and data blackspots to come from the existing MBSP. Addressing gaps on transport corridors through the MBSP would likely reduce the cost of achieving this future public policy objective.

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<sup>2</sup> ATA. [Fix needed for broken road funding and planning system](#). 3 April 2013.

<sup>3</sup> ATA. [Submission to the Inquiry into National Freight and Supply Chain Priorities](#). 26 July 2017. 14. 15.

<sup>4</sup> Australian Government. [Mobile Black Spot Program – Round 5A – Discussion Paper](#). April 2020. 7.

<sup>5</sup> Transport and Infrastructure Council. [Communique](#). 22 November 2019. 4.

<sup>6</sup> Australian Government. [Heavy Vehicle Road Reform Consultation Paper](#). June 2020. 4

**Recommendation 2**

The Australian Government should implement the proposed design principle to include major regional and remote transport corridors as a priority area for Round 5A of the MBSP.

**Recommendation 3**

The Australian Government should commit to incorporating learnings from the inclusion of transport corridors into the design of Round 6 of the MBSP.

**Recommendation 4**

The Australian Government should consider new coverage, value for money, use of extension devices and assessment of a group of proposed towers to maximise the delivery of better connectivity on transport routes.

**Recommendation 5**

The Australian Government should include mobile phone and data connectivity in the proposed National Service Level Standards for roads, with funding for mobile phone and data blackspots to come from the existing MBSP.