



MEDIA RELEASE

victoriantransportassociation_{inc.}

VTA JOINS BATCHELOR'S CALL, GIVE VICTORIA OUR SHARE!

The Victorian Transport Association (VTA) has rallied behind Victorian Transport Minister, Peter Batchelor, who today called on Federal Treasurer Peter Costello to come up with Commonwealth funds for the Deer Park bypass and the Calder Freeway when he is in Ballarat this weekend.

The State Government has announced it is prepared to put \$184 million on the table immediately to go toward the Deer Park bypass, the Calder Highway, its interchanges and access control.

VTA Executive Director Philip Lovel asked, "How much sweeter does the State of Victoria need to make this deal for the Federal Government to act responsibly and come to the table?"

"The combination of mixed messages, finger pointing and sandbagging is nothing short of political skulduggery that is costing our State. It begs the question; does the Treasurer have any respect at all for his own electorate?" Mr Lovel said.

Mr Lovel criticised the lack of cohesion on the part of the Federal Government in relation to Victoria's 541.5 million share of Auslink.

Reports (23/9) have Mr Costello stating that the disputed money would now go, "Back into the hopper – where all states could claim it."

The Treasurer also gave strong backing to State Opposition leader Robert Doyle's 'no tolls' back down – instead a half-price toll policy for the first six years of the tollway's 35 year operating life - stating that "This idea that there is some kind of moral equivalence between what Steve Bracks did and the Doyle promise is ridiculous."

In an interview with Jon Faine a day earlier, (22/9), the Prime Minister stated that, "Victoria will not be duded," in relation to the release of infrastructure funding for the State.

"We are asking the PM what he means by this statement." Mr Lovel said. "In the past fortnight we've heard Peter Costello holding forth on moral conundrums as some sort of justification for what smells very much like backroom deal tactics."

"Is the Treasurer really hanging his fiscal policy towards Victoria on the argument that Robert Doyle's back down is a better broken promise? This fiasco is unabashedly partisan, underhanded and utterly hypocritical."

Mr Lovel drew comparisons to Sydney's M7 extension and the impending development of up 11 toll roads by the end of the decade. Not only have these developments met with support from the Federal Government, they pose a serious challenge to Victoria's pre-eminence as a freight and commercial distribution hub.

"The VTA speaks on behalf of the freight, distribution and logistics industry when we say categorically that we WILL NOT be drawn on the tolls issue, however many overtures are made on that front. The

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tollway is a done deal, there are commercial realities at play, and binding contracts now in place. The tolls issue is a thing of the past, and the Government needs to act NOW, for the future." Mr Lovel said.

"We are still waiting for the Federal Government to deliver on its commitments to Victoria's road funding. Politicking and power plays are holding back vital infrastructure projects. All the while, our roads are becoming more congested and accidents are increasing."

"The Deer Park bypass, duplicating the Calder Highway to Bendigo, realigning the Western Highway between Melton and Bacchus Marsh, Calder Highway access control, Goulburn Valley Highway project, new interchanges on the Calder Highway – these are crucial projects that industry and the community have been bringing to governments' attention for years." Mr Lovel said.

"The Treasurer's attitude displays contempt for Victoria and Victorians. This State is Australia's freight capital. Victoria's share of Auslink funding was allocated not as a political carrot, but presumably out of fiscal realities and economic considerations that recognise its status, and its economic importance to the nation as a whole."

"Where's Mr Doyle now, when he needs to be heard on this issue? We've heard barely a whimper since his tolls backflip."

"Tying up the \$542 million on 'moral' grounds and the 'drip-feed' funding approach adopted by the Federal Government is irresponsible, callous and highly damaging to Victoria and the Victorian community."

"This from a man who aspires to be the next Prime Minister. What we are asking is; where is the leadership? Where is the statesmanship? Where is the consideration of the national good? Mr Doyle and Mr Costello should get over it, and get on with it!" Mr Lovel concluded.

For further information please contact Philip Lovel, Executive Director, VTA on Ph: (03) 9646 8590 or Yossi Klein, Media Liaison, VTA, on 0414 512 062

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