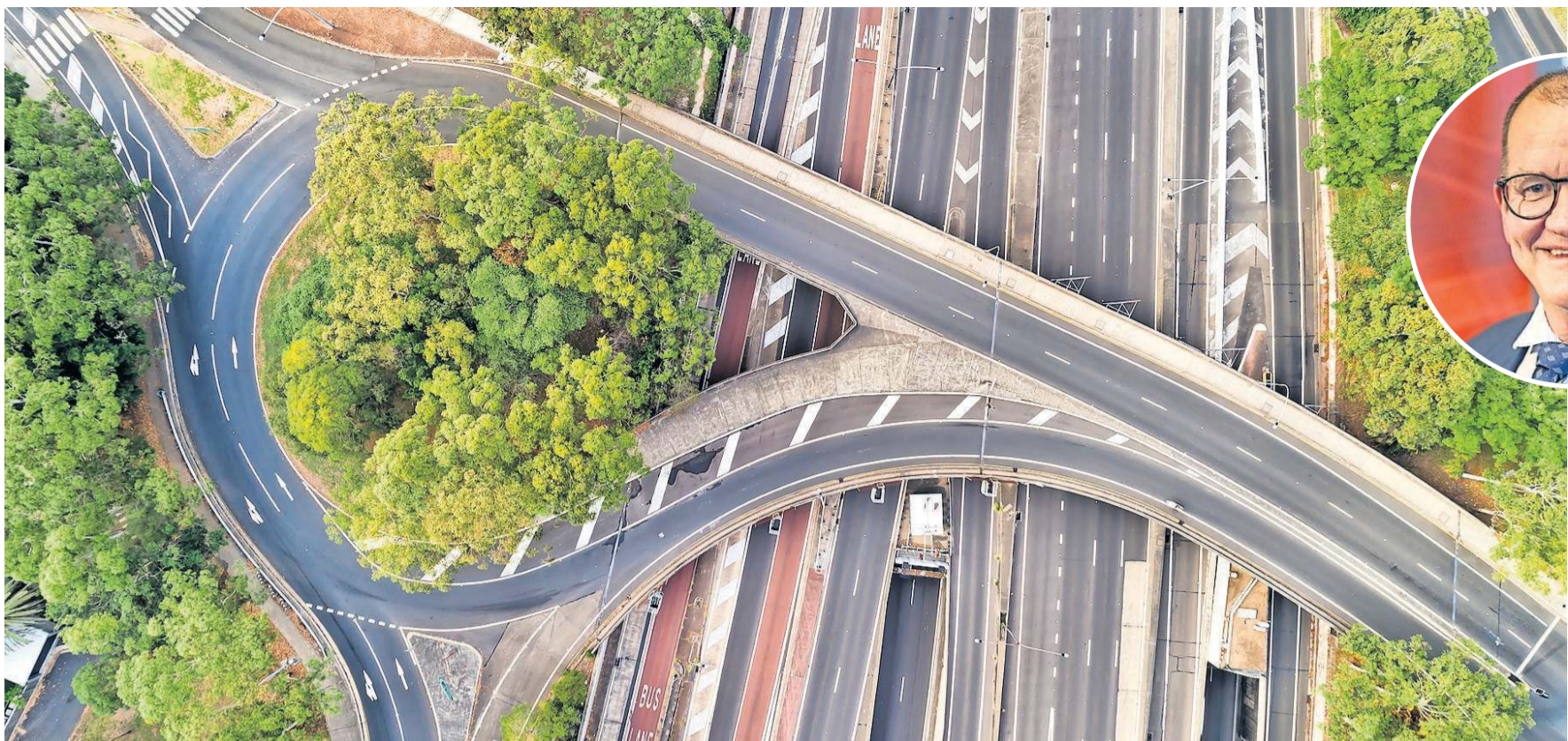


New era of sustainability in our roads sector



Roads Australia chief executive Michael Kilgariff says the organisation is focusing on ways to reduce sector emissions.

‘Convergence’ key to a greener future

Roads and infrastructure generally have been key elements in the economic recovery plans laid down by governments around the country as a means of accelerating out of the COVID-induced slowdown.

Billions of dollars have been committed to help create employment and also to prepare the country for the predicted population growth and the enormous rise in the national freight task over the coming decades.

It is a perfect opportunity to align economic needs with community expectations and new technologies to ensure that what is built – and how it is built – in the next few years achieves new levels of efficiency and sustainability, according to Roads Australia chief executive Michael Kilgariff.

“People don’t have to be convinced environmental sustainability is important,” Kilgariff says, “and sustainability also extends beyond its immediate environmental aspects. It feeds into the industry’s financial sustainability and even to its workforce.”

“While governments don’t necessarily design infrastructure projects, they can have a positive influence on the reduction of emissions during construction and, therefore, on sustainability and subsequent mobility by setting project parameters that help contractors to pursue more sustainable methods,” he says.

“RA has been focused on bringing governments and industry together to develop a positive framework around procurement which recognises the growing focus around transport and transport infrastructure in terms of emissions. Pursuing more collaborative approaches to contracting will

help to drive better sustainability outcomes, but it will also deliver a suite of productivity and community amenity benefits.

“This month, we also released a substantial report, *The Journey to Net Zero – Inspiring Climate Action in the Australian Transport Sector*, developed through an industry-first partnership RA instigated including other peak bodies and industry partners. Through a series of case studies, the report highlights practical actions we can take to reduce emissions in the design, construction and operation of transport infrastructure.

“It includes recommendations around improving the uptake of recycled materials in construction, whole-of-life assessments in decision making, embracing a circular economy mindset and focusing on placemaking to ensure that transport infrastructure enhances quality of life.”

Kilgariff also points to how the future of transport is inextricably linked with questions around energy and technology.

“There is convergence going on across all sectors. Industry can’t just take the view that we are all just operating in a silo where we can all continue to do our own thing. We need to adjust to what’s going on elsewhere.”

Governments also need to be focused on this convergence aspect.

“Regulation needs to evolve to account for what’s going on across other sectors. That’s not to say the discussion isn’t being had but, at the moment, too many of our regulations are geared up to something that may have existed 10 years ago,” he says.

“Our focus is on leading the evolution of Australia’s roads, integrated transport and mobility. And how we can establish ... greener places for the community.”

Michael Kilgariff

Kilgariff highlights how construction of infrastructure around the country would also benefit from a more orderly flow of major projects. A co-ordinated national project pipeline could help overcome continuing workforce shortages, allowing contractors to more effectively plan their work.

“We’ve had an enormous number of infrastructure announcements, with what we term the ‘construction Everest’ coming, and the industry is now wondering how it will be done and by whom,” he says. “Infrastructure Australia recently estimated there is currently a shortage of 70,000 workers in infrastructure construction and that, in a few years, there will be 100,000 jobs not filled in the sector.”

“One urgent priority is to bring more women into the industry, across both operational and

executive roles. If we want to attract and retain outstanding professionals – particularly school leavers and graduates – then we have to be able to demonstrate an industry that is welcoming, inclusive and which values diversity.

“That means not only putting a spotlight on the opportunities for women in our sector, but also for new migrants and Indigenous communities.”

“This is a big focus for RA, through our Fellowship and Emerging Leaders programs, both of which connect younger industry participants with today’s senior industry leaders and help them to build their own empowering professional networks.”

Kilgariff says that RA’s focus is on enhancing integrated transport systems, and this means not merely examining how different transport modes connect with each other, but just as importantly, looking at how the system connects communities and enhances quality of life outcomes.

“While RA is proud of our role as the ‘roads champion’, the name Roads Australia may not entirely reflect our membership and policy focus. Our focus is on leading the evolution of Australia’s roads, integrated transport and mobility. And how we can establish and maintain thriving, greener places for the community,” he says.

“Today’s world is more complex, more interconnected and less inclined to simply accept the top-down imposition of policy solutions. RA is focused on driving a genuine engagement between governments, industry and the wider community about how transport infrastructure and services can be more sustainable, in environmental, economic and social terms.”



Connecting government, industry and community to enhance transport

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