



28 August 2022

Infrastructure and Transport skills must be at forefront of the Jobs and Skills Summit agenda

The importance of infrastructure and transport to the nation's productivity, and therefore its longer-term economic prosperity, means the skills deficit in these sectors must be high on the agenda for this week's Jobs and Skills Summit.

Shadow Minister for Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Development, Senator Bridget McKenzie, said there were critical skills and labour shortages in both the transport and infrastructure sectors, which remain an impediment to the long-term health of the economy.

"Productivity gains require ongoing investment in infrastructure projects such as roads, rail, water, and without the right skills and the right people to get these projects delivered, we will see increasing over-runs and delays in construction delivery," Senator McKenzie said.

Construction wage growth, for example, is already strong so the on-the-ground demand is for the actual skilled workforce to do the job.

"While there will be a focus at this week's summit on maximising opportunities from renewable energy and tackling climate change, improving the efficiencies of our national highways and our rail networks are also key drivers toward achieving a lower emissions economy."

"Any delay in the completion of the Federal infrastructure build will put at risk the new Labor Government's emissions reduction trajectory."

Senator McKenzie said having all state governments at the two-day summit should mean that long-needed training and qualifications harmonisation can be finally achieved.

"Full harmonisation across the states could allow for the ease of movement for skilled workers – it is absurd that you can have a fully qualified tradie in Victoria that cannot work in Tasmania," she said.

Infrastructure Australia has previously estimated a shortage of up to 100,000 roles being unfilled in the sector by next year with 34 of 50 occupations potentially in shortage.

"We are talking well-paid, highly-qualified jobs like engineers, project managers and architects – although there are shortages in all occupation groups," Senator McKenzie said.

Nationals Leader David Littleproud is attending this week's summit and I support his efforts to ensure a regional voice at the discussion table, Senator McKenzie said, as the skills shortage is even more acute in the regions.



Senator the Hon **BRIDGET McKENZIE**

NATIONALS SENATOR FOR VICTORIA

Shadow Minister for Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Development
Leader of the Nationals in the Senate

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“We want to be constructive in any efforts to ensure businesses remain going concerns and strong, and that we improve productivity across the economy.

“A safer, more prosperous, and sustainable Australia should be the goal for all of us.

“But in getting the skills mix right, it is essential that we prioritise the sectors that are most critical to our prosperity and this will be a key test of the success or otherwise of this summit.”

“There are skills shortages across regional Australia, and many of these jobs can be filled by backpackers and short-stayers, but I applaud any moves to give skilled foreign workers longer term job security with a view to making regional Australia a permanent home.”

“We have many success stories already in regional Australia where migrants have come for short-term work stints and now have developed deep roots in our communities.”

Australia’s transport workforce is also experiencing alarming pressures due to an ageing workforce and the ongoing problem of not enough younger people coming into the industry due to a range of factors including onerous regulatory issues, Senator McKenzie said.

“Transport and logistics firms across the country tell the same story – their pool of available drivers is causing serious repercussions for our supply chains.

“Covid 19 exposed how our truckies are so essential to our economy, our productivity, and our well-being.”

While the transport workforce has grown by more than 17 per cent over the past decade, the number of drivers leaving the industry is not being matched by younger new drivers.

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