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**Opening Address, Monday 19 November**

**NGAA Chair, Mayor Glenn Docherty**

Good morning all and welcome to the National Growth Areas Alliance 2018 National Congress.

Thank you George, and thank you to our host Councils: Camden Council, Campbelltown City Council and Wollondilly Shire Council.

Often heard emanating from the back seat of the car, ‘Are we there yet?’ is a familiar question to the five million people who live and work in Australia’s fast growing outer suburbs.

In the last 10 years, the city limits of Australia’s mainland capitals have been extended time and time again. The distances that some of our neighbourhoods extend to reach 60 or 70 kilometres from the CBD. Many Australians, and many decision-makers in Canberra, would be astounded by the distance, and be surprised by the vitality, dynamism and diversity of our neighbourhoods – if they visited regularly.

As an Alliance, it is important to assess our progress. Are we there yet? ‘There’ being a place where local government is recognised as having a key leadership role in the development of our cities and communities. A place where infrastructure – from roads to rail, hospitals and sports grounds – are well planned, well maintained and well-funded.

Most importantly, it is a place where the millions of people who choose to make their lives in our neighbourhoods can enjoy the same quality of life that other Australians do. The same opportunities to have happy, healthy and safe lives, to raise families, pursue careers, grow businesses and build their dream homes.

Over the last decade, the National Growth Areas Alliance has maintained a consistent call for improved funding for infrastructure in growth areas. We have suggested this in several ways – a per capita amount, a National Urban Investment Fund and a Growing Outer Suburbs Co-Investment Fund are some examples.

While a dedicated and substantial funding mechanism specifically for growth areas remains elusive, we have helped secure streams of funding for a range of programs and initiatives. These include the Suburban Jobs Program, the Liveable Cities Program, the Regional Development and Building Better Regions Funds and many more.

Over the last decade we have also built a sound and substantial evidence base about the particular challenges and opportunities afforded by rapid and sustained population growth.

It all started with a scoping study in 2007 which identified the unique situation of growth areas, and was followed up with an in-depth study of the cost benefit analysis of investment in growth areas.

We have gone on to provide specific research and advice to Government on growth area infrastructure needs, options for dedicated funding mechanisms, our changing demographics and economies, and the type of projects that have the capacity to transform our suburbs and cities.

We have also mobilised and galvanised a national community who experience the challenges and charms of the fast growing outer suburbs every day. From our Voices of the outer Suburbs project through to our Fund our Future campaign that saw over 100,000 emails sent to politicians and on to National Nightmare Commute Day which successfully put our residents and their daily experience in the national spotlight, our Alliance plays a vital role in bringing to Government’s notice the real life experiences of our communities.

So, ‘are we there yet’?

I can say we are certainly on our way, but the distance we need to travel is increasing at a rapid rate.

We fully support government efforts to plan for the future. But they also need to put the effort into catching up with the 5 million people who already live in the outer suburbs.

Our communities are big. They are dynamic and diverse, with enormous potential to be Australia’s cultural and economic powerhouse.

With the strength of our united voice, we can continue to influence and guide the federal policies that matter so much to us as councils, and to every one of our residents – better transport, more community facilities and services, investment incentives for new industries to create jobs and a deliberate effort to recognise and celebrate the value of our fast growing outer suburbs.

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