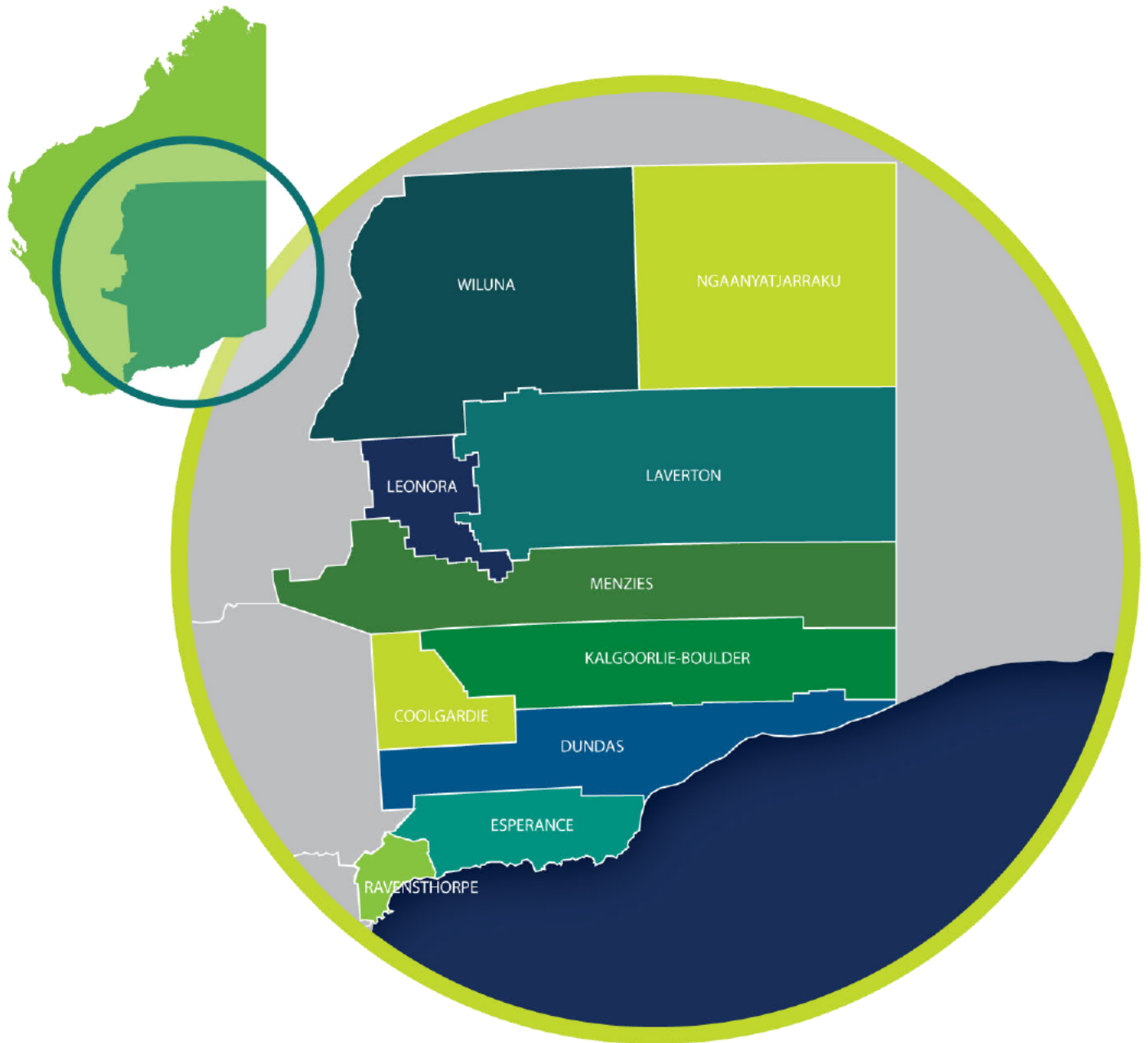




**Consultation on the draft Grant Opportunity Guidelines
National Regional Roads Australia Mobile Program (National RRAMP)
Submission from Regional Development Australia Goldfields Esperance
23 July 2026**

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An Australian Government Initiative



GOLDFIELDS ESPERANCE

Table of Contents

1. Introduction and organisational role	2
2. Summary of recommendations	3
3. Support for the Program and its remote-weighted funding model	3
4. Eligible Roads: do not exclude remote and unsealed corridors	3
5. Road nominations: recognise regional and local knowledge	4
6. Priority corridors in Goldfields Esperance	4
7. Eligible Strategic Locations: broaden the types and close the between-location gap	5
8. Network resilience and back-up power	5
9. Coordination with road-sealing works ('dig once')	6
10. Ensuring remote and First Nations corridors are not left behind	6
11. RDA Goldfields Esperance as a regional delivery partner	6
12. Conclusion	7

1. Introduction and organisational role

Regional Development Australia Goldfields Esperance (RDA Goldfields Esperance) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft Grant Opportunity Guidelines for the National Regional Roads Australia Mobile Program (the Program). RDA Goldfields Esperance is part of the national Regional Development Australia network funded by the Australian Government, providing an evidence-based regional voice to government, identifying regional priorities, and facilitating collaboration between local, State and Federal stakeholders.

We recognise that eligibility to apply for funding is limited to Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) and Mobile Network Infrastructure Providers (MNIPs). RDA Goldfields Esperance is not an applicant. We make this submission as a regional stakeholder with a direct interest in ensuring the Guidelines are designed so that the corridors where coverage is most needed, and where the safety and economic returns are greatest, are captured by the Program.

The Goldfields Esperance region covers approximately 955,276 square kilometres, one of the largest and most remote regions in Australia, spanning ten local government areas from Kalgoorlie-Boulder and Esperance to remote communities such as Wiluna, Laverton, Leonora and the Ngaanyatjarra Lands. It is home to around 58,000 residents, supports close to 38,000 jobs, and generates approximately \$39.9 billion in annual economic output, underpinning nationally significant mining, critical-minerals, agriculture and renewable-energy supply chains. Our road network carries some of the largest and most demanding freight tasks in the country, including quad road trains, oversize mining-equipment haulage, and continuous fuel and consumables movements over distances of up to 1,700 kilometres, across corridors where mobile coverage is absent for hundreds of kilometres at a time.

This submission is grounded in the *RDA Goldfields Esperance 2026-27 Regional Priorities Briefing Paper* and the *Goldfields-Esperance Digital Plan* (2025, developed with nbn local). RDA Goldfields Esperance strongly

supports the Program and the Government's \$30 million investment over three years to 30 June 2029 to deliver multi-carrier coverage on regional and remote highways and major roads.

2. Summary of recommendations

1. **Retain the higher funding rates for remote and very remote sites** (85 to 100 per cent of Total Project Cost). These are essential to attract investment on low-commercial-return corridors that carry high safety consequences, and are the settings most relevant to our region.
2. **Ensure the Eligible Locations Database does not exclude remote and unsealed corridors.** Relying on the OpenStreetMap 'Trunk'/'Primary' classification risks omitting exactly the remote roads, including partly unsealed corridors such as the Great Central Road, where coverage gaps are longest and the safety case is strongest.
3. **Recognise Regional Development Australia committees and local governments in the road-nomination process** (Section 5.2), either as eligible nominators or through a defined regional-evidence channel, so on-the-ground knowledge informs the Database.
4. **Broaden the Eligible Strategic Location types and address the coverage gap between locations.** Add roadhouses and fuel stops, remote-community and pastoral access junctions, and known crash sites; and recognise that a point-based model with a 500-metre radius leaves long high-risk stretches uncovered in very remote regions.
5. **Strengthen the resilience and back-up-power standard for very remote and disaster-prone sites,** beyond the 12-hour minimum, and ensure that 'where technically feasible' does not become a loophole.
6. **Coordinate the Program with committed road-sealing works ('dig once'),** beginning with the Outback Way, so telecommunications enabling works can be installed during construction.
7. **Guard against remote and First Nations corridors being left behind** under a non-competitive, industry-driven model, and set the jurisdictional funding cap so that Western Australia's scale and remote road network are not disadvantaged.
8. **Engage RDA Goldfields Esperance as a regional delivery partner** for road nominations, State and local-government endorsements, and the public-policy and economic evidence that applicants must address under Section 6.

3. Support for the Program and its remote-weighted funding model

RDA Goldfields Esperance supports the Program's objectives of improving safety, strengthening economic growth, improving social connectivity, and supporting regional development, and its focus on multi-carrier coverage where today there is no coverage or only a single carrier. We particularly support the tiered funding model in Section 3.1, which provides 85 to 100 per cent of Total Project Cost for sites in remote and very remote areas. In our region, the corridors that most need coverage are also the least commercially attractive to build and operate, and without these higher rates, and the option to fund up to 100 per cent for three-carrier and remote two-carrier sites, investment simply will not reach them. We recommend these settings be retained in the final Guidelines. We also welcome the treatment of additional resilience measures as a value-with-relevant-money consideration under Section 8.1.

4. Eligible Roads: do not exclude remote and unsealed corridors

Under Section 5.2, Eligible Roads are highways and major roads outside Major Urban areas with existing coverage from no or one national MNO, identified using the OpenStreetMap 'Trunk' and 'Primary' road-hierarchy classification. RDA Goldfields Esperance supports an evidence-based approach, but cautions that this classification will, in remote Australia, tend to omit precisely the roads where the Program can do the most good.

Many of our highest-consequence corridors are remote and partly unsealed. The Great Central Road, the Western Australian section of the Outback Way, of which roughly 736 kilometres remains unsealed, carries a continuous 460-kilometre stretch with no mobile signal and is the sole land access for around twelve remote Aboriginal communities, yet a substantial length of it may not be classified as 'Trunk' or 'Primary' in OpenStreetMap. Roads such as Wiluna North Road face the same risk. If eligibility is set by that classification, the corridors with the longest coverage gaps and the gravest crash-survivability risk could be screened out of the Database at the very first step.

We therefore recommend that the department cross-check the OpenStreetMap-derived list against the National Audit of Mobile Coverage and State road-network and crash data before publishing the Database; that remote roads which are the sole access to communities, or which carry significant freight or tourism, be included even where their OpenStreetMap class is lower; and that the road-nomination pathway be made genuinely accessible (Section 5 below) so gaps can be corrected quickly.

5. Road nominations: recognise regional and local knowledge

Section 5.2 allows a road to be added to the Database on request from a State or Territory government, or from an applicant or a parliamentarian with State or Territory endorsement, assessed against factors including use by travellers, freight and emergency services, casualty crashes over the most recent 12 months, strategic importance, proximity to urban areas, emergency and disaster use, and tourism and local-economy benefits. RDA Goldfields Esperance strongly supports these factors, which map closely to the evidence our region holds.

However, the bodies best placed to identify high-value remote roads, namely Regional Development Australia committees and local governments, are not among those who can nominate a road. In a region of our scale, this risks under-nomination of the corridors that most need coverage. We recommend the Guidelines either add RDA committees and local governments as eligible nominators, or establish a clear channel through which our corridor-level evidence is provided to, and considered by, State governments and the department. In the meantime, RDA Goldfields Esperance will work with the Western Australian Government to nominate the corridors below well ahead of the deadline for road-nomination requests (three months before the application period closes), and we ask that the department engage with us on that evidence.

6. Priority corridors in Goldfields Esperance

The following corridors should be captured in the Eligible Locations Database. Each is a highway or major road of regional and national significance with substantial, safety-critical coverage gaps, and each presents a strong case against both assessment criteria in Section 6 (public-policy and economic benefits).

Corridor	Indicative length / gap	Public-policy and economic case (aligned to Section 6 criteria and the road-nomination factors in Section 5.2)
Great Central Road / Outback Way (Laverton to the NT border)	About 872 km WA section; about 460 km (Cosmo Newbery to Warburton) with no mobile signal	Safety: the sole land access for approximately twelve remote Aboriginal communities, where the nearest emergency help can be many hours away, and a long-recognised crash-survivability risk. Economy: gold, nickel, rare-earths and iron-ore deposits, pastoral leases and a growing tourism drawcard. With \$678 million secured to seal the remaining Great Central Road and major construction expected before the end of 2026, this corridor is a prime candidate for coverage installed alongside the earthworks.
Eyre Highway, Nullarbor (Norseman to the SA border)	Part of the 1,668 km Norseman to Port Augusta National Highway 1	Safety: the 2024 triple-fatality crash near Yalata, and extensive multi-hundred-kilometre coverage gaps on the only sealed east-west road link. Economy: continuous interstate freight and fuel haulage, and heavy grey-nomad and touring traffic. Emergency and disaster use: the March 2024 flood-driven freight surge, when the Trans-Australian Railway was cut, demonstrates its national supply-chain role.

Corridor	Indicative length / gap	Public-policy and economic case (aligned to Section 6 criteria and the road-nomination factors in Section 5.2)
Goldfields Highway (Wiluna to Meekatharra and Northern Goldfields)	Staged; sections still unfunded	Safety: a lifeline for Wiluna residents and Aboriginal communities, with long unserved stretches between townships. Economy: mining, pastoral and future critical-minerals freight.
Coolgardie to Esperance Highway	Kalgoorlie-Boulder to the Port of Esperance	Economy: the primary corridor moving grain, nickel and mineral exports to the Port of Esperance. Safety and tourism: main route for Esperance-district communities, with strong seasonal touring peaks and intermittent coverage.
Great Eastern Highway (Kalgoorlie-Boulder toward Perth)	National freight corridor	Economy: the principal road link between the Goldfields and Perth, carrying heavy freight and oversize mining equipment. Safety: known blackspots between townships.
Wiluna North Road	Shire of Wiluna priority	Safety and economy: essential access to emerging critical-minerals projects and remote communities where any incident carries long emergency-response times. (Note: may fall outside the OSM 'Trunk/Primary' classification; see Section 4.)

RDA Goldfields Esperance can provide corridor-level coverage evidence, freight and crash data, community information and mapping to support the department's determination and any State nomination.

7. Eligible Strategic Locations: broaden the types and close the between-location gap

Section 5.2 limits Eligible Strategic Locations to rest areas and truck stops, campgrounds, service centres, EV charging stations, tourist sites and public toilets within 500 metres of an Eligible Road. Two refinements would materially improve the Program's reach in regions like ours.

First, the list omits location types that are the natural coverage anchors on our corridors. We recommend expressly including roadhouses and fuel stops (which may not clearly fall within 'service centres'), access junctions serving remote and First Nations communities and pastoral stations, heavy-vehicle fatigue-management stops, and known crash sites and high-consequence blackspots identified by Main Roads WA, police and local operators.

Second, and more fundamentally, a point-based model with a 500-metre radius delivers coverage only at discrete stops. On a corridor with a 460-kilometre signal gap, coverage at a rest area does not help a driver who rolls a road train 150 kilometres away, which is where most serious incidents occur. We recommend the Program, at least in very remote and disaster-prone areas, allow for a denser network of Strategic Locations and consider corridor-segment coverage rather than isolated points, so that the safety objective is met along the length of the road and not only at its stopping places.

8. Network resilience and back-up power

Section 5.1 requires, where technically feasible, an auxiliary back-up power supply providing a minimum of 12 hours of back-up. In the Goldfields Esperance region, bushfire and flood events routinely isolate communities and cut corridors for days, not hours. Recent fires in Fitzgerald River National Park and the Norseman complex, and the 2022 flooding that made eight of the region's councils eligible for Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements, all show that coverage which fails during an emergency fails when it is needed most. A 12-hour standard may be insufficient precisely when the Program's public-policy benefits are greatest.

We recommend a higher minimum resilience standard for very remote and disaster-prone sites, for example solar-and-battery configurations sized for multi-day autonomy, and that the 'where technically feasible' qualifier be applied transparently so it does not become a routine exemption. Consistent with Section 8.1, stronger resilience should be explicitly rewarded in the value-with-relevant-money assessment, and funded infrastructure should be designed to complement emergency-connectivity arrangements such as STAND and Temporary Emergency Management Solutions.

9. Coordination with road-sealing works ('dig once')

The single largest value-for-money opportunity in our region is to align the Program with committed road construction. In 2026, \$678 million was secured to seal the remaining Great Central Road, completing the Outback Way, with major construction anticipated before the end of 2026. Trenching, power and site access are the most expensive elements of remote deployment, and installing conduit, backhaul and power provisioning while the corridor is already open for earthworks would sharply reduce future coverage costs and avoid duplicated works.

We recognise the Program requires shovel-ready projects with site approvals and State and local-government endorsement, which takes time to assemble. We therefore recommend the department actively coordinate with State road agencies and major sealing programs so that, where a corridor is being constructed or upgraded, telecommunications enabling works and the necessary approvals can be brought forward to align with the construction window. RDA Goldfields Esperance can help broker that coordination in our region.

10. Ensuring remote and First Nations corridors are not left behind

Because the Program is a non-competitive, rolling process driven by applicant-nominated, shovel-ready projects, there is a risk that MNOs and MNIPs will naturally bring forward the most commercial sites first, and that the most remote corridors, including those serving First Nations communities, are nominated late or not at all. The jurisdictional cap of one quarter of available funding per jurisdiction in the first eight months (Section 3.4) adds a further consideration, because applied as a flat share it may disadvantage Western Australia, which has by far the largest remote road network and some of the nation's most significant coverage gaps.

We recommend the department monitor the geographic and remoteness spread of funded projects and report on it; actively encourage applicants toward remote and very remote corridors and those serving First Nations communities; set or review the jurisdictional cap with regard to the length of eligible remote road network and safety need, not population alone; and coordinate with the Western Australian RRAMP Pilot so the national and State programs together close the region's gaps. Many of the corridors nominated above are the sole land access for remote Aboriginal communities, and coverage investment should be planned in genuine partnership with Traditional Owner organisations, in particular the Ngaanyatjarra Council, and aligned with the Outback Way Beyond Roads Activation Plan and Closing the Gap.

11. RDA Goldfields Esperance as a regional delivery partner

Applications under the Program must address public-policy and economic benefits (Section 6) and carry endorsements and letters of support from the relevant State and local governments (Sections 5.1 and 7.2). RDA Goldfields Esperance is well placed to help applicants and governments assemble that evidence for our region: corridor-level safety, freight, tourism and community data from the *Goldfields-Esperance Digital Plan* and our Regional Priorities work; coordination of local-government endorsements across our ten LGAs; and engagement with Traditional Owner organisations. We already play a comparable coordinating role for the Outback Way alongside RDA Northern Territory, RDA Far North Queensland and the Outback Highway Development Council, and we would welcome working with the department, the Western Australian Government and industry as the Guidelines are finalised and the Program moves to implementation.

12. Conclusion

RDA Goldfields Esperance commends the Australian Government for the National RRAMP. To realise its objectives in regions like ours, the final Guidelines should ensure remote and unsealed corridors are captured in the Eligible Locations Database, make road nomination accessible to those with the best regional knowledge, broaden Strategic Locations and address the gaps between them, require genuine resilience, seize the 'dig once' opportunity, and actively ensure remote and First Nations corridors are not left behind. We would be pleased to provide corridor evidence and mapping, to assist with road nominations and endorsements, or to meet with the department, and we thank you for the opportunity to contribute.

Yours sincerely,

Sharon Henderson

Chief Executive Officer

Regional Development Australia Goldfields Esperance

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Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners and Country

Regional Development Australia Goldfields Esperance acknowledges First Nations peoples as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of Australia. We respect and celebrate the inherent strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and their commitment to the land, waters and their communities. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present.