The Territory Government has signed the bilateral agreement with the Commonwealth for the implementation of the AusLink National Land Transport Plan 2004-2009.

The agreement’s stated aims are to assist national economic growth, development and connectivity by contributing to the development of an integrated National Network. In the Northern Territory, the AusLink National Network includes the Stuart, Victoria and Barkly highways, East Arm Port access roads, and the railway.

Infrastructure and Transport Minister Dr Chris Burns said the agreement represented a mixed bag for the Territory.

“On the one hand, funding for capital works over the five years has increased to $74.77 million from $49.34 million in the previous five years,” Dr Burns said.

“On the other hand, funding for road maintenance is being cut: from $18.81 million in 2004/05, to $16.9 million in 05/06, $15.59 million in 06/07, $14.29 million in 07/08, and $14.29 million in 08/09.

“I am particularly disappointed that the Commonwealth has made no provision for cost increases over the five-year program.

“For example, the $27.3 million project to extend Tiger Brennan Drive and upgrade access to East Arm Port is 50:50 funded by the Commonwealth and the NT Government.

“However, the Commonwealth’s contribution is capped at $13.7 million.

“Since the project was announced in June 2004, there has been an increase in road construction costs of around 40 per cent.

“Simple arithmetic shows that, to date, an extra $11 million will be needed to complete the project.”

Dr Burns was also critical of the Commonwealth’s decision to tie AusLink funding to the Federal Government’s controversial Industrial Relations agenda.

“We have held extensive negotiations with the Commonwealth, but it has not budged on the issues, leaving the Territory no option but to accept the Commonwealth’s terms in order to access AusLink funding,” Dr Burns said.

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