



Rudd pressed on urban issues

John Breusch

Capital city lord mayors have urged Prime Minister Kevin Rudd to set up a special unit within the federal bureaucracy to provide better co-ordination of urban issues such as transport, telecommunications and housing.

The proposal was put to Mr Rudd yesterday at a meeting with the lord mayors in Canberra.

Adelaide Lord Mayor Michael Harbison, who led the delegation, said the unit should first focus on social inclusion issues, such as homelessness, alcohol abuse and housing affordability.

But he said broader infrastructure matters should also be looked at. Funding decisions would ultimately rest with Infrastructure Australia.

Mr Harbison said the hour-long meeting specifically discussed the support capital cities could give to the introduction of a national broadband network.

"For example, as a result of today's meeting, the capital cities will be advertising to inform prospective tenderers for the broadband tender that the capital cities

want to talk to them, talk about the infrastructure which capital cities have available across the nation to possibly participate in and contribute to a broadband roll-out and that we have large and extensive – but largely under-capacity – fibre networks," he said.

The mayors steered clear of discussing specific transport projects.

Mr Harbison said that although Mr Rudd was well aware of the economic benefits of investing in road, rail and ports, "that's a very big topic and we were keen not to get bogged down in it".

Sydney Lord Mayor and NSW state government MP Clover Moore said she would like to see "tripartite arrangements" between the commonwealth, state government and the City of Sydney to develop services in areas such as affordable housing and homelessness.

"The biggest issue for Sydney is the need to invest in new public transport, which will lead to major economic development gains as well as significant reductions in greenhouse gas emissions," she said.

"This is an issue of national

significance, with a direct impact on Australia's economy and our ability to achieve post-Kyoto emission targets."

The 2020 Summit last weekend called on Canberra to lead a "national sustainable cities program [that] could lead a nationally consistent approach to urban and regional planning which drives water efficiency and reductions in emissions".

The summit's final report said: "This could be supported by the implementation of tax and other policies that encourage the use of public transport relative to other modes of transport."

A spokesman for Mr Rudd said the Prime Minister would consider Mr Harbison's proposal.

"Discussions at the meeting focused on the issues of transport, homelessness, infrastructure, sustainability and drugs and alcohol," the spokesman said.

Mr Rudd said he believed local governments were a key source of policy innovation with regard to "some of the most difficult practical challenges Australia faces".



At yesterday's meeting, from left, Hobart's Rob Valentine, Melbourne's John So, Adelaide's Michael Harbison, Kevin Rudd, Local Government Minister Anthony Albanese, Darwin's Garry Lambert, Brisbane's Campbell Newman and Sydney's Clover Moore.

Photo: AAP