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Media Release

Cobb completion the final piece in state's sealed highway puzzle

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NSW has a fully sealed highway road network for the first time in its history following completion of a mammoth \$195 million project to bitumen seal two Outback highways.

The historic milestone was reached after crews finished sealing the final 3.9-kilometre section of the Cobb Highway near Halfway Tree between Ivanhoe and Wilcannia.

Completion of the 132-kilometre total Cobb Highway sealing work follows finishing of the 153-kilometre Silver City Highway sealing in late 2022.

About 150 workers — including engineers, road workers, trainees, apprentices and contractors — were employed each year on the project which commenced in 2011.

The remote location meant workers had no access to an established base or nearby infrastructure, and they were away from their families for months at a time living in caravans at makeshift camps which were built near highway work sites.

About 700,000 tonnes of crushed gravel and 43,000 tonnes of aggregate was used to build and seal the Cobb Highway while work crews camped on-site to ensure the work was completed, battling the elements and isolation.

Key features of both highway projects include:

- New drainage structures to combat flooding
- A new bridge at Packsaddle Creek
- A new landing strip for the Royal Flying Doctor Service at Shannons Creek
- Close consultation with local Registered Aboriginal Parties to preserve and document culturally-sensitive areas such as those near Mount Manara

Minister for Regional Transport and Roads Jenny Aitchison said:

“The sealing of these Outback highways will improve safety, slash journey times, reduce the risk of fatigue and increase resilience against extreme weather events.

“Importantly, this work also means there will be more reliable access to hospitals, schools and essential services for the communities living in the most remote parts of NSW.

“On behalf of the Minns Labor Government I want to thank all the workers who’ve delivered this project for the incredible legacy they have built for our state.”

Independent Member for Barwon Roy Butler said:

“Prior to being sealed, both highways could be closed several weeks a year due to wet weather and these closures hit residents and businesses hard while cutting access to essential services and isolating interstate road users.

“The sealing of both highways now means the need for road closures has been reduced.

“The highways will also be safer for tourists visiting the Outback who, along with people moving livestock and freight operators, will also benefit from reduced travel times.”

Wilcannia Tourism Association president Bill Elliott said:

“We never thought we’d see the day the Cobb was sealed the whole way.

“It’s felt like a never-ending push to get it done, but it is amazing to have seen this project completed.”

Transport for NSW Works supervisor Kevin Bath said:

“The hardest part is living away from family, but we build bonds while we build the roads and try to make camp life as fun as we can.

“There’s also a great sense of pride amongst the team, working on projects that will directly benefit the communities that we come from.”