



The plan is to start with a comprehensive audit of adequacy and capacity.

Photo: ERIN JONASSON

Albanese's fix-it brief

Infrastructure

Annabel Hepworth

Anthony Albanese was named yesterday to become the first federal minister for infrastructure, vowing the incoming Rudd government would tackle capacity constraints and ensure infrastructure development was well co-ordinated.

Business groups welcomed the announcement of the dedicated ministry and urged the government to make a priority of setting up a promised new commonwealth agency to help address a multibillion-dollar shortfall in energy, ports, road, rail and water infrastructure.

Mr Albanese's portfolio will also include transport and regional development – areas held by outgoing deputy Prime Minister Mark Vaile, who has been the Minister for Transport and Regional Services.

New MP Gary Gray, who was the ALP's national secretary from 1993 to 2000 and later worked for Woodside Energy, has been

appointed parliamentary secretary to the portfolio.

"We have said repeatedly that a core part of the nation's future productivity challenge is to advance skills and to advance infrastructure," prime minister-elect Kevin Rudd said yesterday.

"... It is the first time the nation will have a department of infrastructure."

An immediate priority for Mr Albanese, a Sydney-based MP, is likely to be the establishment of Infrastructure Australia, a statutory authority that will plan and co-ordinate delivery of infrastructure, helping to address backlogs.

The authority is expected to conduct a comprehensive audit to look at the adequacy and capacity of significant assets, which will be used to then develop a priority list of assets.

This would address concerns that the commonwealth has had to rely on information from state government bodies.

Earlier this year, the states produced a series of audits on their infrastructure as part of a deal agreed to by the Council of

Australian Governments. But a Business Council of Australia reform blueprint criticised these audits as providing "little useful information".

Mr Albanese said that having a devoted ministry would ensure co-ordinated and integrated planning was "at the very heart of infrastructure development".

"The creation of Infrastructure Australia will be an important step towards addressing the capacity constraints identified by the Reserve Bank," Mr Albanese said.

He is also likely to have a key role in overseeing the big-spending infrastructure pledges made by federal Labor, which includes a \$2 billion plan for Sydney's orbital motorways.

Infrastructure Partnerships Australia chairman Mark Birrell said it was important to "have a strong voice in the federal cabinet, backed up by expert advice".

Former ALP roads spokesman Martin Ferguson, a former president of the Australian Council of Trade Unions, will take responsibility for resources and energy.