

Fund won't be used for bailout: Albanese

3-October-08 by AAP

A fast-tracked \$20 billion Building Australia fund will not be used to bail out underperforming state governments, federal Infrastructure Minister Anthony Albanese says.

At a Council of Australian Governments (COAG) meeting in Perth yesterday, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd agreed to speed up the government's infrastructure plan by three months.

Infrastructure Australia will now present its audit and priority list to government by December. The government says it will introduce legislation to create the \$20 billion Building Australia Fund in the next few weeks.

Mr Albanese said the government could allocate funds as soon as next May's federal budget.

He said the fast-tracked plan would give Australia an economic boost during the difficult financial times, by freeing up bottlenecks in rail, port and other infrastructure.

Opposition Leader Malcolm Turnbull is concerned about the the \$20 billion fund.

"The big concern we have with Kevin Rudd's infrastructure funds is that they will just be used as a slush fund to bail out flailing state Labor governments who have infrastructure problems that they've allowed to accumulate, and in many cases where they have infrastructure projects which are being very poorly managed," he told ABC Radio.

Mr Albanese dismissed the concerns, saying projects would be analysed by the independent, Rudd government-created Infrastructure Australia, chaired by business heavyweight Sir Rod Eddington.

"It's important to recognise that many of the projects that Infrastructure Australia is giving consideration to go across state boundaries.

"They are truly nation building projects and that's why it is important that this cost benefit analysis be undertaken by Infrastructure Australia and they be able to make the recommendations to the government."

Mr Albanese called on the opposition to support Building Australia legislation when it comes before the Senate, saying he was concerned that opposition infrastructure spokesman Andrew Robb had flagged opposition to the fund.

"The opposition should get out of the way and support Labor's agenda," he said.

"They had nothing to say about infrastructure for 12 long years.

"Now that the commonwealth is getting on with the business of nation building ... they are sniping at the sidelines."