Private assets plan
Call for business to fund Illawarra infrastructure

EMMA SPILETT

A WOLLONGONG researcher is keen to see the region become the national “case study” for a new infrastructure plan, focused on making long-term private sector investment in assets.

Chief executive of the University of Wollongong’s SMART Infrastructure Facility, Garry Bowditch, is part of the team behind the green paper, “Infrastructure Imperatives for Australia”, released yesterday.

The document sets out a challenge for federal, state and local governments to look at how to deliver better value-for-money infrastructure to the community, in light of rising asset costs.

Mr Bowditch said the Illawarra was facing extremely high infrastructure costs and would benefit from privately funded assets.

“There is a strong sense in the Illawarra that the current infrastructure policy needs serious attention,” he said.

“The region is facing an increasing population with decreasing job opportunities and it can’t rely on the old formula of having the government bail it out; the private sector needs to deploy its huge funding capacity to meet the needs going forward.”

Mr Bowditch believes the formula would also allow the private sector to deliver more innovative infrastructure.

“The [current] government requirements are too prescriptive... they want a road or a hospital with X number of beds,” he said.

“We want to allow the private sector to come up with innovative ideas not only concerned with building new infrastructure but renovating existing infrastructure to make it better.

“It’s about getting back to basics and spending money to ensure it’s what customers want – we want the industry to look at who the customer is and what they value to ensure the right services are delivered.

Mr Bowditch believes the model is critical to ensuring the nation’s future.

“If Australia continues to operate like a short-order cook, the output will not be dissimilar to a beach kiosk – very busy for a short time but in need of a world-class renovation to redevelop it,” he said.

“It hasn’t always been like this but planning long-term is the absolute key to success.”

The SMART team has received support from the federal and NSW governments for the plan. Visit smart.uow.edu.au/index.