

Fact Sheet

Essential Public Assets - defining function, standards for works and alternate solutions

November 2025

This fact sheet is for local councils and state agency asset owners. It details information on the essential public assets function, application of engineering standards, and use of alternate solutions for the restoration of essential public assets under the Essential Public Assets Restoration Disaster Grants Program Guidelines (the guidelines).

Restoration and reconstruction of essential public assets under the DRFA

Only restoration works of essential public assets damaged as a direct result of an eligible disaster are eligible for funding assistance under the guidelines and in accordance with the DRFA.

An asset damaged by an eligible disaster must meet the DRFA's definition of an essential public asset to be eligible for assistance:

- the asset is transport or public infrastructure asset that is a necessary part of a state's infrastructure and is integral to the normal functioning of a community
- the asset is owned and operated, or operated and maintained, by an eligible undertaking (local government or state government agency)
- the asset is provided free of charge or at a rate that is 50% or lower in cost to provide the service(s)
- the asset has been directly damaged by an eligible disaster and this can be demonstrated
- the asset's pre and post-disaster condition evidence clearly links the asset damage to the eligible disaster
- the asset's pre and post-disaster condition evidence clearly demonstrates the exact location, nature and extent of damage caused by the event
- where a damaged asset is covered by insurance that these costs have been excluded

When restoring an essential public asset under the DRFA, asset owner's must:

- define the pre-disaster function of the asset
- identify the damage to the essential public asset from the eligible event
- determine current construction and engineering standards
- identify potential alternative solutions to construction
- consider pre-disaster conditions and where reconstruction to pre-disaster function is not feasible
- identify opportunities to improve resilience or asset function through complementary funding sources.

Defining pre-disaster function of an essential public asset

Under Category B of the DRFA, the eligible costs that can be claimed by asset owners for the repair or reconstruction works of a damaged essential public asset must be directly related to restoring the asset to its pre-disaster function.

The pre-disaster function of an essential public asset forms the basis of funding under the DRFA and the guidelines.

Where the asset owner carries out minor repairs as part of Emergency Works that result in no change to the pre-disaster function of the essential public asset- for example, gravel re-sheeting, patching, grading, drainage repair, reinstating approaches to structures, debris clean-up, roadside furniture replacement, the asset owner is not required to document the primary asset function and the asset classification under the Essential Public Asset Function Framework.

The pre-disaster function of the essential public asset must be determined by using the Essential Public Asset Function Framework, which is outlined in Section 6.3 of the DRFA.

When completing an application for Immediate Reconstruction Works and Essential Public Asset Reconstruction works funding under the guidelines, asset owners must define the pre-disaster function of each essential public asset.

Information about the pre-disaster function of the asset will need to be entered on the claim form (Form 306) for both Immediate Reconstruction Works as well as Essential Public Asset Reconstruction works.

Asset owners should use the Essential Public Asset Function Framework to determine the pre-disaster function of an essential public asset which is undertaken by:

- Step 1: defining the primary asset function by establishing the category, sub-category and purpose of the asset.
- Step 2: defining the asset classification by establishing the type, capacity and layout and materials of the asset.

Note: Asset owners are to use established and recognised methods for categorising assets and defining the capacity, layout and materials used. Further clarification about appropriate methods may be obtained from the NSW Reconstruction Authority (RA) if required.

Step 1

All eligible essential public assets fall into two separate categories — **transport** or **public infrastructure**. Each category can then be further split into sub-categories such as a road, bridge, public hospital, public school. Table 1 shows the categories and sub-categories to be used by asset owners when defining function of essential public assets.

Table 1: Essential Public Asset category and sub-category

Category	Transport	Public Infrastructure
Sub-category	Roads Road infrastructure (including footpaths, bike lanes and pedestrian bridges) Bridges Tunnels Culverts	Public hospitals Public schools Public housing Prisons/correctional facilities Police, fire and emergency services' stations Flood levees State or local government offices Stormwater infrastructure

Step 2

The next step in defining pre-disaster function is to classify the level of service the essential public asset provides to the community. This builds further details of the essential public asset by defining the asset type, capacity, layout and materials.

Asset classification type

It is critical that the essential public asset classification type is defined. If there are multiple types within a particular category, these should be separated to ensure the estimated reconstruction cost is accurate.

The primary function of an essential public asset should remain the key consideration when assessing the specific essential public asset classification type. For example:

- If assessing a road, what is the specific use of that road, for example, is it an arterial road, sub-arterial road or local access road?
- What was the original design intent of the road, for example, is it an unsealed road for light commuter traffic between rural towns?

The NSW, State, Regional and Local Road administrative system of road classification generally aligns to the model functional classification hierarchy and is to be used for the purposes of defining the essential public asset classification type for transport assets under the DRFA as follows:

- **State Roads:** motorways and primary arterials.
- **Regional Roads:** secondary or sub-arterials.
- **Local Roads:** distributor, collector and local access roads (including Crown roads maintained by councils)

For all public infrastructure assets, asset owners may use their own asset classification systems.

Asset capacity

This is the capacity of the essential public asset to perform its primary function and, additionally, other services it may have been providing to the community prior to the eligible disaster.

For example, the capacity of the road to perform the primary function of transport vehicles travelling from point A to point B might include:

- two lanes of local traffic in each direction or one lane in each direction
- a pedestrian walkway on one side of the road
- a breakdown lane on both sides of the road.

Asset layout and materials

This should focus on engineering details of the essential public asset. It is essential that the appropriate expertise is applied in developing the estimated reconstruction cost. Consideration should be given to dimensions and layout, materials used, and road infrastructure, including barriers, signage, signalling, lighting, noise attenuation, drainage, and associated footpaths or bikeways.

For example:

- What are the general dimensions and features (including safety) of the essential public asset?
- In the instance of a road, how wide are the lanes, shoulders and pedestrian walkways?
- What is the depth of the pavement?
- Does the road have line markings, safety barriers, lighting or traffic signals?
- What materials have been used to construct the road – gravel, granular with seal, concrete or asphalt?
- How does the road interface with its surroundings – are there signalised intersections?

Table 2 provides examples of the typical descriptions used for layout and materials.

Asset owners will be asked to identify where a number of common construction and roadside materials are used as part of their submissions for funding for essential public asset restoration works including:

- sealed
- concrete

- concrete
- gravel
- signalling
- footpath or bikeways
- noise attenuation
- cycleways
- unsealed and unformed
- unsealed – formed only
- barriers
- signage
- lighting
- drainage
- other: to allow description of materials used where none of the above suit or for non-transport items.

Table 2: Example applications of the Essential Public Asset Function Framework

Asset description	Function category	Function sub-category	Classification type	Classification capacity	Classification layout	Classification materials
Typical highway	Transport	Roads	State road	2-lane each direction with shared path on one side	3.5 m lane width with 1 m sealed shoulders, 2 m wide path	Asphalt seal, 600 mm flexible gravel pavement, sealed shoulders, concrete path
Sample Regional road	Transport	Roads	Regional roads	1-lane in each direction	3.3 m lane width with 0.5 m unsealed shoulders	Bitumen seal, 450 mm flexible gravel pavement, gravel shoulders
Busy rural road	Transport	Roads	Local roads	1-lane in each direction	3 m lane width with 0.5 m unsealed shoulders	Bitumen seal, 300 mm flexible gravel pavement, gravel shoulders
Quiet rural road	Transport	Roads	Local roads	1-lane in each direction	5.5 m wide trafficable width	Unsealed gravel pavement 100 mm deep
Rural road drainage culvert	Transport	Road culvert	Local roads	1 in 5 year flows	Twin diameter 375 mm pipes 7.2 m long with headwalls	Concrete pipe and headwalls
Rural bridge over creek	Transport	Bridge	Local roads	1-lane bridge without crash barrier	5.4 m wide deck	Concrete deck, timber substructure
Urban stormwater system	Public infrastructure	Stormwater infrastructure	Trunk drainage line	1 in 20 year flows	Diameter 900 mm pipe 50 m long	Concrete pipe and pits
Any Town Levee Bank	Public Infrastructure	Levee	Primary urban protection levee	1 in 50 year flood event	3 m crest width, 1:5 batters, 1.3 km long	Earthen embankment

Current building and engineering standards

Any specific building, design and construction standards, legislated by the Commonwealth or state, including for safety and occupational health and safety purposes, should be adhered to when establishing the eligible estimated reconstruction cost. The standard of reconstruction works must be consistent with current standards had the eligible disaster not occurred.

Examples:

- Buildings are to be restored to meet the requirements of the Building Code of Australia and any relevant Development Control Plans applicable to the location of the building.
- Complying with NSW Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (Part 7 *Fisheries Management Act 1994*) regulatory requirements for the replacement of a causeway or drainage structure.
- Provision of *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* compliant access to buildings.

Transport for NSW (TfNSW) technical standards for construction, testing and material properties must be used in carrying out restoration works on all State Roads and TfNSW managed bridges.

In carrying out restoration works on regional and local roads, including Crown roads maintained by councils, the technical standards appropriate to the road's pre-disaster function are to be applied based on either Austroads Guidelines and Technical Specifications, or Aus-Spec Guidelines and Technical Specifications.

Where an asset owner has adopted a set of standards that is not based on the Austroads Guidelines or Aus-Spec Guidelines, these will be considered an appropriate standard where they have been substantiated by a suitably qualified professional from the RA as being consistent with the technical requirements of the guidelines, as part of the establishment of the estimated reconstruction cost.

The application of current technical standards to restoration works may include a material change to the impacted asset in some cases; however, this will be limited to the damaged area of the impacted asset only and is not to be applied to other areas of the asset that were not damaged by the eligible disaster.

Adjustments to the asset layout and materials of this kind should be noted in the funding application and endorsed by the RA before funding is approved.

Examples:

- The pavement design for reconstructed sections of roads must be the minimum required to deliver the required asset function in accordance with the current engineering standards for the relevant category and sub-category in the case of sealed roads
- For gravel roads, the pre-existing depth of gravel measured adjacent to the damaged area, or a minimum of 75 mm of gravel pavement is to be provided to ensure constructability.
- For damaged drainage assets requiring reconstruction or replacement the reconstruction treatment is to provide for the current required standard in terms of:
 - flow capacity
 - scour prevention treatments, and
 - meet NSW Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (Part 7 *Fisheries Management 1994 Act*) regulatory requirements.
 - Materials used in the reconstruction are to reflect the current standards with regards to the grade of the drain to ensure the reconstructed asset is not at risk of further failure or damage due to not meeting the current standards.

For an asset component or ancillary item that did not exist pre-disaster but would be otherwise required under the current standards, the inclusion of this item in the reconstruction works is only eligible where there has been a material change in the roadside environment because of the nature of the restoration works.

Example:

- A new section of guardrail where the roadside batter slope and/or height has increased or the clearances to non-frangible structures has decreased and requires guardrail under the current standards.

In general, funding under the guidelines will be provided to restore the essential public asset to the current building and engineering standards.

However, in situations where asset owners were expected to update or alter the essential public asset to meet new building and engineering standards prior to the eligible disaster, and these works were not completed, the asset owner will be required to contribute an additional amount of funding for the restoration works, equivalent to the amount that the asset owner should have incurred prior to the disaster, to update or alter the asset.

Asset owners would have been expected to update or alter the essential public asset to meet new building and engineering standards prior to the eligible disaster only where:

- there was a legislated requirement to do so by a set date which was prior to the eligible disaster, or
- where a state or Commonwealth agency had taken regulatory action to direct the asset owner to do so by a set date which was prior to the eligible disaster.

In this instance the additional cost to meet these requirements would not be eligible.

Adopting alternative solutions

Once the estimated reconstruction cost is established and the asset owner is issued with a Total Upper Limit Grant this becomes the budget for the restoration works. Asset owners, in consultation with the RA, are then able to determine the most appropriate restoration approach/solution within the established budget.

The most appropriate solution may require an alternative solution which involves adopting an alternative value-for-money approach that factors in resilience improvements.

Asset owners may seek approval from RA to reconstruct essential public assets with alternative solutions if they can demonstrate:

- the same capacity (or better), and
- the same level of service to the community (or better) will be provided.

Any intention to reconstruct an essential public asset with alternative layouts or materials should be discussed with the RA prior to the application being submitted.

An alternate solution provides an opportunity to build back better and may include provisions for betterment.

An alternate solution is required to be delivered at or below the Total Upper Limit Grant value established and is subject to approval from RA.

Any additional costs for the alternate solution above the Total Upper Limit Grant value must be covered by the asset owner using complementary funding.

Where an alternate solution is proposed that is more than 50% lower cost than the established estimated reconstruction cost and between \$5 million and \$25 million, an Independent Technical Review under Application Two of the DRFA is required.

Options if reconstruction to pre-disaster function is no longer feasible

In circumstances where it is not feasible to undertake the reconstruction of the damaged essential public asset to its pre-disaster capacity, layout or materials.

Examples include:

- a major landslip makes it not technically feasible to restore a road along its original path
- original building materials are no longer available at reasonable cost

In these cases, the pre-disaster function and the estimated reconstruction costs may need to be established based on the most economically comparable alternative reconstruction option.

Examples of alternative options:

- restoring the road on a different route

- using different materials.

This should be discussed with RA prior finalising any submission for reconstruction works.

Consideration of pre-disaster damage

A reduction in funding is required where the pre-disaster function of the asset was already compromised and therefore not solely attributable to damage from the eligible event. For example, a bridge that was load limited prior to the eligible disaster due to structural damage.

Where there is evidence of pre-disaster impairment of an asset, RA will:

- assess the extent to which the pre-disaster function of the asset was impaired prior to the eligible disaster
- determine the amount of remedial funding required to restore the asset to its pre-disaster function in consideration of the pre-disaster impairment of the asset.

This assessment may result in a reduction in the level of funding equivalent to the amount the asset owner should have invested prior to the disaster.

When considering an adjustment of funding to account for the existence of pre-disaster impairment, RA will consider:

- the age and design life of the asset
- the extent and appropriateness of maintenance undertaken
- the original design and construction of the asset
- any other factors that may be relevant to the decision.

There will be no reduction or increase in the Total Upper Limit Grant amount made for reconstruction works based on the pre-existing condition where that condition did not impair the ability of the asset to deliver its intended pre-disaster function.

The approved Total Upper Limit Grant amount must reflect the estimated cost to complete the full eligible scope of works including project management, cost escalation and contingencies.

There should be no cases where an approval is issued for eligible works where the Total Upper Limit Grant amount is insufficient for the eligible works to be completed without additional funding from the asset owner.

This does not extend to sections of the asset adjoining any eligible works, regardless of their pre-disaster condition, with any works the asset owner may wish to undertake on areas of an asset adjoining the eligible scope of works to be solely at the asset owner's cost.

Improving asset function through complementary funding sources

Funding will not be provided under the guidelines for improvements to essential public assets such as:

- widening of the road (formation or seal)
- increased level of service (for example additional lanes)
- increased flood immunity (for example additional culverts or increased diameter of undamaged culverts)
- realignment of roads
- provision of additional signage etc. as part of the estimated reconstruction costs.

However, asset owners may combine their own funds or resources to the Total Upper Limit Grant funding provided under the guidelines to:

- increase the capacity of an essential public asset
- amend the layout

- use enhanced materials to reconstruct the asset.

These changes will require prior approval from the RA, and they may only proceed if the asset is reconstructed to provide a level of service to the community that is equal to, or better than, the pre-disaster level of service.

The additional funding or resources provided by asset owners to enhance the essential public asset is known as complementary funding and the additional works that occur through this funding is known as complementary works.

In circumstances where approval is given to invest complementary funding in the essential public asset reconstruction works, the asset owner must provide information and assistance to enable the RA to clearly distinguish:

- the amount of funding provided under the guidelines
- the complementary funding provided.

This information should be clearly documented and included in the claim to enable separate acquittal against DRFA and complementary funding for the project.

Additional Information

- NSW Reconstruction Authority Administration of Essential Public Assets Restoration website <https://www.nsw.gov.au/departments-and-agencies/nsw-reconstruction-authority/disaster-recovery-funding-arrangements>
- [NSW Essential Public Assets Restoration Disaster Grant Program Guidelines \(2025\)](#)
- [Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements \(2018\)](#)

Contacts

For additional information or support relating to the repair of disaster-damaged essential public assets, please email Reconstructioncoordination@reconstruction.nsw.gov.au.