

Drive for spatial data network

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Plans for billion-dollar expenditures by the federal government should include steps to push ahead with a spatial data infrastructure, essential for planning purposes, says the Australian Spatial Information Business Association.

Such infrastructure would provide a network of rapid data transmission of spatial information in readily usable formats with common definitions and operating frameworks, for immediate field use by emergency services, local government, construction companies, spatial professionals, business and state and federal agencies.

With Australia's large amounts of incompatible and often dated spatial data, and patchy broadband communications, setting up a smoothly working spatial data infrastructure would require substantial federal investment over several years.

In a submission to the federal government this month, the

association's chief executive, David Hocking, calls for the establishment of a national advisory committee, similar to the Federal Geographic Data Committee in the US.

The 19-member US inter-agency committee has representatives from the Executive

Other participants represent state and local government, industry and professional organisations.

The Australian association's submission says: "At present ... there is no private sector or professional representation on any national

Former federal minister of state Gary Nairn, a professional surveyor and business consultant, has argued that an investment of only \$150 million a year over five years to develop a national spatial data infrastructure would produce large savings in the design and construction of a range of hard infrastructure projects.

"With nearly 90 per cent of all government activities involving a spatial element, the benefits of an ASDI [Australian spatial data infrastructure] will be widespread, particularly with respect to the environmental, social and economic sectors," his submission argues. "This is really a no-brainer.

"If Australia is determined to grow our clever industries then we must first ensure we develop digital compatibility throughout the nation.

"A national spatial data infrastructure is fundamental to such development and it should be near the top of Infrastructure Australia's list of must-do national projects."

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Office of the President, from cabinet level and independent federal agencies. It is chaired by the secretary of the department for the interior, with the deputy director for management, Office of Management and Budget, as vice-chairman.

co-ordination committee, yet some agencies are claiming a strong reliance on private sector data acquisition to fund data collection and maintenance. Open standards that promote optimum interoperability are essential."