Premier Nathan Rees has taken immediate action to ensure there is no delay in delivering the Rudd Government’s $42 billion Nation Building and Jobs plan to stimulate the economy and boost construction across the country.

Speaking at the CEDA Economic and Political Overview 2009 today, the Premier detailed action the NSW Government would take to deliver projects funded by the stimulus package.

“The Commonwealth has laid down significant construction commitments and tight deadlines, and the NSW Government will meet them,” Mr Rees said.

“As already agreed between the states and the Commonwealth, these projects must begin immediately in order to stimulate jobs and economic activity.

“That’s why I will introduce urgent legislation and changes to planning policies, which will ensure the fastest possible delivery of the stimulus package priority projects.

“The legislation will set out an implementation program for the works and create the statutory position of Infrastructure Coordinator-General to oversee, monitor and assist agencies in the implementation of the works.

“The Infrastructure Coordinator-General will have power to establish special tendering and procurement guidelines and take over the delivery of a program if it is at risk of being delayed.

“He will have the power to fast track projects that fall under the Federal Government’s Nation Building and Jobs plan. These powers will not apply to any other projects.

“The Prime Minister has made it clear that the building program he has funded must start as soon as possible. The global financial crisis has placed jobs and the economy at risk in NSW and there is no time to lose.”

Mr Rees said the Government will also set up a special Task Force, representing relevant agencies, to provide advice to the Coordinator-General on the exercise of his functions.

Mr Bob Leece, former CEO of Tenix and Deputy Director General of the Olympic Coordination Authority will take up the position of the NSW Infrastructure Co-ordinator General immediately.

“Leece has a strong track record in delivering significant infrastructure projects to strict deadlines and budgets. His work during the lead up to the Sydney 2000 Olympics is testament to his skills and experience. He also co-ordinated the recovery effort in Western Sydney, following the devastating hailstorms of December 2007.”

“My government is ready to launch programs for construction in schools, social housing, private home renovations and roads.

“Kevin Rudd has given us a strict timeline for the commencement of these projects and like the Olympics, Bob Leece will deliver.”
Mr Leece said there are plenty of people in NSW with the skills to make this happen.

“I am going to bring them together to ensure that NSW holds up its end of the bargain and makes a significant contribution to the national effort,” Mr Leece said.

Mr Rees said the Government had also made changes to the Infrastructure State Environmental Planning Policy (Infrastructure SEPP) which will drive most of the Federal Government’s stimulus package projects in NSW. Changes include:

- Making it easier for providers of public and social housing to build new homes
- Extending existing provisions for public schools to speed up approvals of gyms, school halls and libraries to all schools in NSW - provided they conform to set criteria

“Currently public schools can get 10 day approvals for infrastructure such as gyms, school halls and libraries provided they follow standards set out in strict performance criteria – including being no more than two stories tall, and managing noise and shadowing impacts,” Mr Rees said.

“This will now be extended to all NSW schools, including private schools, so they can take advantage of the increased funding which has been made available from the Rudd Government, and get their infrastructure built within the Commonwealth’s deadlines.

“In terms of public housing, the Government currently allows multi-dwelling public or social housing to be considered within 800 metres of 18 key metropolitan railway stations throughout Sydney, regardless of the zoning of the land.

“This system will now operate within increased boundaries - areas within 800 metres of all Sydney rail stations and within 400 metres of the commercial centre of 32 major regional centres.

“And the changes to the Infrastructure SEPP will allow the Department of Housing to self-approve social housing developments of up to 20 dwellings and 8.5 metres in height in residential zones, instead of going through a lengthy development application process.

“This will allow the state government to meet the significant construction commitments and tight deadlines set by the Commonwealth.

“Housing NSW will have to follow height, size, and design guidelines already in place for seniors housing, and will have to give notice to the local council and neighbours.

“We face unprecedented times and all tiers of government must work together to get these projects up and running as quickly as we can.”