High speed rail

High speed rail is a nation-building investment that can reshape how Australians live and work — unlocking housing, connecting people to jobs, strengthening regional economies and reducing transport emissions.

This is the final stage of a careful and methodical planning process that has been underway since 2023. Subject to the successful completion of this final stage, it is important to move swiftly into construction and delivery to maximise efficiencies and minimise delays and costs.

The opportunity

About 60 per cent of Australia's population lives on just two per cent of the nation's land along the east coast. High speed rail would connect Brisbane, Sydney, Canberra and Melbourne. It would enable new housing, and reduce pressure on roads, airports and existing rail services.

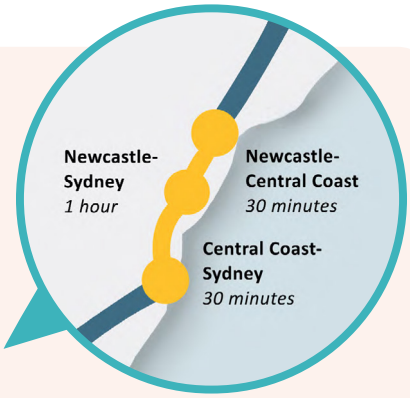
What high speed rail will deliver

- Facilitate 115 million passenger movements each year by 2061
- Increase national economic output by $342 billion in net present value terms to 2086
- Enable capacity for 500,000 additional homes and 290,000 jobs
- Create an average of 22,000 construction jobs annually, and almost 50,000 at peak construction
- Create a multi-decade pipeline of work across construction, engineering, rail systems, rollingstock, steel, concrete, digital technology and advanced manufacturing.

Newcastle–Sydney: the first stage

Newcastle–Sydney will connect Australia's largest city with its largest regional economy through the country's busiest intercity rail corridor.

The Federal Government has committed $659.6 million to a two-year development phase. Early contractor involvement is now underway to refine the design, cost, construction methodology, program and risk allocation before the Government makes a final investment decision.



Reduce travel times from three hours to just one hour

Generate $250 billion in economic benefits over 50 years

Support more than 99,000 additional jobs

Improve outcomes for conventional passenger and freight services

Why high speed rail matters

Housing and regional growth

High speed rail will bring regional communities closer to employment, housing, education and service centres, and provide more choice about where we live and work. With coordinated planning, high speed rail will unlock substantial housing capacity around stations and across the wider corridor.

Productivity and transport capacity

Trains will operate at up to 320km/h without conflicts with conventional passenger or freight services. Its dedicated infrastructure is essential to achieving the journey times and reliability needed to attract passengers from cars and aviation.

Sustainability

High speed rail provides a renewable-electricity-powered alternative to short-haul aviation and long-distance car travel. It would reduce pressure on congested motorways and could defer or reduce the need for further road and aviation infrastructure.

Australian jobs and industry

The project will create significant opportunity for Australian manufacturing, skills development and construction productivity. Standardised designs, modular construction and advanced manufacturing could reduce costs over successive stages.

KEY CHALLENGES

High speed rail will be delivered across several decades and electoral cycles. It will only succeed with sustained political commitment that avoids stop-start planning and delays.

The current development phase is designed to resolve the project's key challenges. The next priority is ensuring that, if the project meets the required investment tests, it can move into delivery without an unnecessary delay. A prolonged gap would increase costs, disperse specialist capability and weaken market confidence.

Governments must also coordinate corridor protection, station precincts, housing, connecting transport and economic development. Without this coordination, Australia will not capture the project's full benefits.

ARA recommendations

Key recommendations

1. **Maintain bipartisan support**
   Maintain broad support for the High Speed Rail Authority (HRSA), the Newcastle–Sydney project and the long-term vision for an east coast high speed rail network. Investment decisions should receive proper scrutiny, but Australia should avoid revisiting the fundamental case for high speed rail.

2. **Establish a clear pathway to delivery**
   Investment decisions should be scrutinised and government funds must be used in the public interest. But when infrastructure projects are started and stopped across election cycles, delays and cancellations only add cost and complexity. A clear pathway to delivery is essential to make the most of Australia's investment in high speed rail.

3. **Plan for the wider network**
   Treat Newcastle–Sydney as the first stage of a national network. Publish a long-term plan for future stages, corridor protection and investment priorities.

4. **Protect future corridors**
   Work with relevant state, territory and local governments to identify and protect future corridors before development constraints increase the cost and complexity of later stages.

5. **Coordinate housing, transport and precinct planning**
   Align high speed rail planning with housing, employment, local transport, utilities and community infrastructure to maximise housing, productivity and regional development benefits.

6. **Develop and maintain Australian industry and workforce capability**
   Develop an early workforce, skills, manufacturing and supply-chain strategy that supports Australian industry while drawing on proven international high speed rail technology and expertise.

7. **Maintain community and industry engagement**
   Ensure HSRA remains resourced to engage with communities, landowners, First Nations groups, industry and all levels of government throughout planning and delivery.

About the Australasian Railway Association

The ARA is the peak body for the rail industry in Australia and New Zealand.

We proudly represent more than 240 member organisations with a shared vision to foster collaboration and create opportunities to support a thriving rail industry enabling economic growth and driving sustainability. Our members include listed and private companies, government agencies, franchisees, universities, research bodies, sole traders, preservation railways, associations and unions.

They cover all aspects of rail including:

- The passenger and freight operators that keep essential rail services moving;
- The track owners, managers and contractors that deliver a safe and efficient rail infrastructure network;
- The suppliers, manufacturers and consultants that drive innovation, productivity and efficiency in the industry.

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