

31 May 2022

Strong pipeline and certainty needed to avoid rail skills risk

The Australasian Railway Association (ARA) has warned delays to key rail projects could see NSW lose the skills needed to deliver the state's megaprojects as industry workers seek greater certainty in other states.

ARA Chief Executive Officer Caroline Wilkie said a stop-start approach to already announced projects such as Parramatta Light Rail Stage 2 and further stages of the Sydney Metro could put the skills and expertise available on continuing projects at risk.

She said while the Infrastructure *NSW State Infrastructure Strategy 2022-2042* released today confirmed the importance of sequencing major projects to support their successful delivery, the industry needed certainty to ensure it could meet the state's investment program.

"While sequencing projects to make the most of skills and resources is a sensible step, this does not mean we should be putting a stop to already announced projects," Ms Wilkie said.

"A lack of clarity on future projects could see the industry put its focus on states where there is more certainty, and drain much needed skills from NSW projects already underway."

Ms Wilkie said while the infrastructure sector was experiencing skills shortages, a strong and sustainable pipeline of work was key to attracting new people to the industry.

"We hear from rail industry workers time and again that they want certainty in their careers and they want to know they can continue to work on exciting projects over time," Ms Wilkie said.

"When plans for future projects are unclear, it puts careers at risk and ultimately leads to more employees choosing other industries.

"Industry needs to be able to plan their workforce and retain their top people to ensure the success of major rail projects."

Ms Wilkie said a range of measures could help mitigate project delivery risks in the current climate.

The ARA had long advocated for a national approach to infrastructure project planning to ensure industry had clear visibility of the project pipeline and supported improved processes to enhance the coordination of major projects.

She said more could be done to improve procurement and planning processes to ensure industry could spend less time on bidding for projects and more time delivering them.

While the pandemic had impacted international supply chains, the current pipeline of projects was positive for Australian suppliers.

“The current project pipeline is creating new opportunities for rail suppliers to build local capability and ensure we have a resilient supply chain for the future,” Ms Wilkie said.

“Ensuring certainty for all rail suppliers is absolutely essential to make the most of the current wave in investment.”

Ms Wilkie also welcomed Infrastructure NSW’s call for prioritised plans for asset and network improvements to ensure the continued strength of the existing infrastructure network.

“Upgrades and maintenance can improve the speed, reliability and efficiency of the rail network and is an important part of ensuring its resilience for the long term,” Ms Wilkie said.

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Further information

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