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Sydneysiders to lead post COVID rush to regions, but faster rail investment needed

New research has found Sydney residents are ready to move to the regions after COVID-19, but faster rail is key to supporting a new boom in centres like Newcastle and Wollongong.

[A survey of 600 residents across NSW, Victoria and Queensland](#) commissioned by the Australasian Railway Association (ARA) found Sydney residents were most likely to make the move after COVID-19 had permanently changed work patterns for many.

Faster rail connections increased city residents' likelihood to move, grew the potential for regional tourism and raised the chances of regional residents using rail for their commute.

The findings were released to accompany the launch of the [ARA's Faster Rail Report](#), which found immediate investment in upgrades to the existing rail network would speed travel times and increase the frequency and reliability of rail networks.

ARA Chief Executive Officer Caroline Wilkie said investment in rail would allow regions to capitalise on the clear desire of Sydney residents to make a post pandemic lifestyle change.

"More Sydney residents want to make the move out of the city as their daily commute becomes more flexible," Ms Wilkie said.

"Faster rail services would mean catching the train from Newcastle or Wollongong to the city would take the same time as driving.

"Highways in and out of Sydney are already reaching capacity, so making rail a genuine mode of choice on these routes would help bust congestion and support thriving regions.

"With Sydney's population set to rise by a further 3.7 million by 2060, investment in faster rail is needed now to make the most of this rare chance to change how we live, work and support the growth of the state after COVID-19."

A third of Sydney residents surveyed (35 per cent) were likely to consider relocating to the regions after COVID-19, with 45 per cent expecting some of the changes to their work patterns as a result of the pandemic to be permanent.

Almost half (49 per cent) of Sydney respondents said faster rail connections would make them more likely to consider a move out of the city.

Regional residents also threw their support behind faster rail, with 60 per cent of Newcastle residents surveyed saying they would be more likely to use rail if it took the same or less time than their chosen mode of transport.

Faster rail was also expected to drive growth in the regions, with 84 per cent of Newcastle respondents believing faster rail would make the region more attractive.

The Faster Rail Report, prepared by Arup, found faster rail connections would drop the travel time to the city to just 120 minutes from Newcastle and 60 minutes to Wollongong, consistent with road travel times.

The report identified a three step plan to achieve faster rail:

1. Act now to upgrade existing rail lines to deliver faster, more reliable and more frequent services
2. Establish new fast rail lines in the next five to 10 years
3. Prepare for high speed rail in the long term by preserving rail corridors now

“For too long rail investment has lagged behind road funding and the regional rail network is now below global standards,” Ms Wilkie said.

“It is time to bring Australia up to standard and tap into the new demand for regional development resulting from COVID-19.”

The NSW Government is developing a fast rail strategy to examine potential routes along the Northern (Central Coast, Newcastle, Taree, Port Macquarie), Southern Coastal (Wollongong, Nowra), Southern Inland (Goulbourn, Canberra) and Central West (Lithgow, Bathurst, Orange/Parkes) corridors.

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Further information

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