

BRIEFING NOTE

Build a national fast passenger rail network in stages

Regional population and economic growth depends on fast connections between regional cities. A national fast passenger rail network eventually connecting all regional cities in the southeast of Australia will boost our national productivity and capacity to compete in international markets. But it is a high cost and high risk undertaking that should be undertaken in stages. The first stage should build lines linking Sydney to Canberra and Melbourne to Shepparton. Subsequent stages can extend the network to link Melbourne to Sydney, Sydney to Brisbane, and extensions to other regional cities.

Why build a fast passenger network?

The reason is simply that high speed is required to connect regional cities that are over 150 kilometres apart, with travel times that allow regular but infrequent travel for business and personal interactions. The experience in China is that businesses and people will relocate to regional cities if fast connections are available. China also shows that the connected cities complement each other, producing a higher level of economic output than without the rail connection.

Further, the Committee for Melbourne argues that a South East Australia megaregion could be created if it is connected by a fast passenger rail network. It says that Australia's capacity to compete in international markets, and our national productivity, will be boosted, by uplifting the population and investment in regional cities.

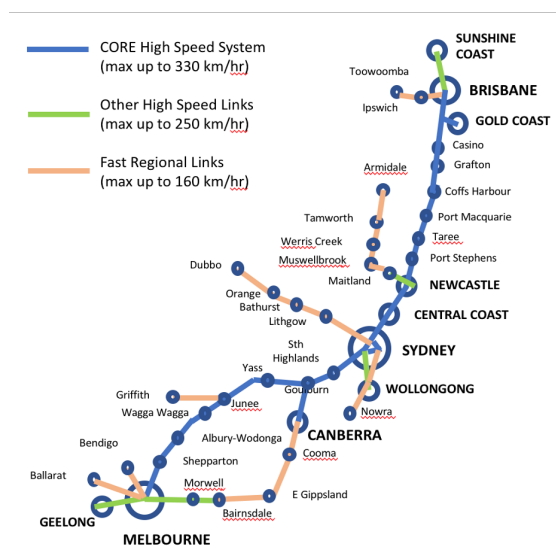
Regional benefits

A fast passenger network will open opportunities for development and growth of regional cities. It will open new markets for travel that will encourage more people to live and work in regional cities. New rail stations will become major transport hubs in each regional city, and potentially could become major business centres in their own right. They will also provide a catalyst for urban renewal, particularly in the precinct surrounding the railway station. And, of course, the rail line will connect regional cities in supply chains for national and international trade.

Staged implementation

Building a national network is a high cost and high risk undertaking, that could extend over decades. Therefore a staged approach needs to be adopted, that proves its benefits and reduces its risks. The first stage should consist of the sections of track that offer the best value in the short term. The connections between Melbourne and Shepparton and between Sydney and Canberra are proposed for the first stage. Later these lines can be extended to ultimately complete the link between the two capital cities.

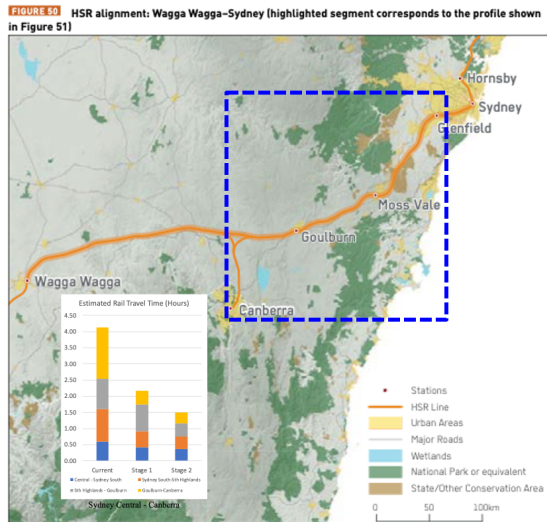
Similarly the line between Sydney and Brisbane could be started, and spur lines built to other regional cities, to extend the network into an integrated national network. Eventually it is expected that demand on the main trunk lines will justify electrification to support higher speeds, and will justify the cost to build tunnels to provide faster connectivity through Sydney and Melbourne.



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Sydney-Canberra



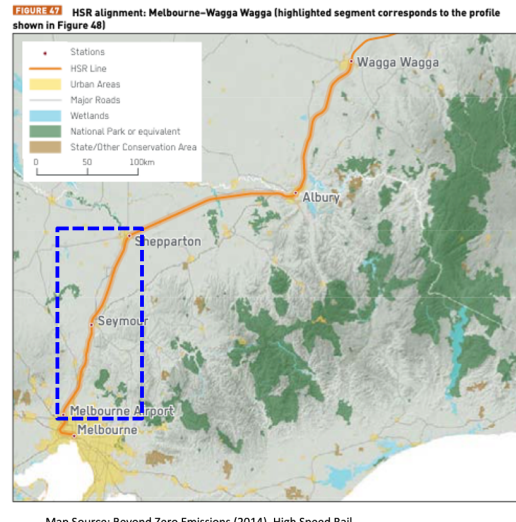
The link between Sydney and Canberra should provide strong competition with air travel. Operation on the current route between Goulburn and Canberra is particularly slow, which makes travel by train a poor option on this route. New high speed lines from Sydney to Moss Vale and from Goulburn to Canberra will dramatically improve travel times.

New diesel or alternative non-electrified trains that can operate at up to 200 kilometre per hour would be required. These would also run on the existing conventional rail tracks to provide services between central Sydney and Canberra. This link will require a new station in Canberra which could include precinct redevelopment around it. It could also include a new station at the second Sydney airport, plus new or upgraded freight terminals in Sydney, Goulburn and Canberra.

Summary

Australia should build a national passenger rail network that will eventually connect all regional cities in the southeast of Australia. This network should be built in stages to prove the benefits and reduce the risks of this megaproject.

Melbourne-Shepparton



The link between Melbourne and Shepparton will promote population and economic growth of Shepparton. Shepparton is not expected to grow over the next 30 years on current population projections – which effectively means it is going backwards. Shepparton is on the preferred route for high speed rail to Sydney, which makes building a new high speed line to Shepparton a 'no regrets' investment. Starting the line at Melbourne Airport eliminates the need for a tunnel into central Melbourne as trains can use the existing standard gauge track, or passengers can use the metro rail link into the city.

This link will require new stations at Melbourne Airport and at Shepparton, both of which could include business precincts around them, and possibly new intermodal freight terminals in Melbourne and Shepparton. Either the current standard gauge VLocity trains, or new non-electrified trains, could be used on this line.

For more information

Please go to <https://www.fastrackaustralia.net/>