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High Speed Rail

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High-speed rail in Australia has been under investigation for over 30 years. In 2013, the former Labor Government released a two-part Report on the implementation of High Speed Rail on the east coast of Australia, linking Melbourne, Canberra, Sydney and Brisbane.

Former Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, the Hon. Anthony Albanese MP, also established a High Speed Rail Advisory Group to advise the Government on key industry and community issues arising out of the report. The Advisory Group was also tasked with finalising station locations and developing a business case for the project with Infrastructure Australia.

On 8 November 2013, Prime Minister the Hon. Tony Abbott MP announced that the Government would abolish the High Speed Rail Advisory Group alongside 21 other non-statutory bodies.

On 9 December 2013, Shadow Minister for Infrastructure the Hon. Anthony Albanese MP introduced a private member's bill to establish a High Speed Rail Authority similar to the former Advisory Group.

The Hawker Britton Occasional Paper on changes to non-statutory agencies is available here.

Background

On 5 August 2010 the Hon Anthony Albanese MP, Minister for Infrastructure and Transport, committed $20 million to undertake a strategic study on the implementation of a HSR network on the east coast of Australia.

The two-part study, *Moving Forward with High Speed Rail*, informs the Australian Government, the ACT and state governments' consideration of next steps for HSR in Australia. The study was undertaken in two phases and was managed by the former Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government. The Terms of Reference for the study were released on 31 October 2010.

The report of Phase One of the study, which was released on 4 August 2011, considered possible route and station options, providing the basis for transit times and construction costs. Phase two of the study,

released on 11 April 2013, determined optimum route alignment, identified patronage levels, developed cost estimates and investigated financing options.

Phase One Report

A consortium led by leading global consultancy AECOM Australia and comprising KPMG, Sinclair Knight Merz and Grimshaw Architects was appointed to undertake Phase One of the study. Their Report was released on 4 August 2011.

The key findings of the Phase One preliminary study were that an east coast HSR network would:

- Cost between $61 billion and $108 billion to build and involve laying more than 1 600 km of new standard-gauge, double-track.
- Achieve speeds of up 350 kilometres per hour and offer journey times as low as 3 hours from Sydney to Brisbane, and just 40 minutes from Sydney to Newcastle.
- Carry around 54 million passengers a year by 2036 including, for example, about half those who would have flown between Sydney and Melbourne—currently the world's fifth busiest air corridor.
- Offer competitive ticket prices, with one way fares from Brisbane to Sydney costing $75–$177; Sydney to Melbourne $99–$197; and $16.50 for daily commuters between Newcastle and Sydney.
- Cut carbon pollution, with emissions per passenger a third of what a car emits and each full train—450 passengers—equivalent to taking 128 cars off the road.

Corridors

The Phase One study short-listed a number of corridor options for further analysis Phase Two. The shortlisted corridors were:

Table 1: Shortlisted Corridors

Segment	**Shortlisted Corridors**	**Length (Km)**	**Approx. Cost $Billion (2011 Dollars)**	**Travel Times**	
Brisbane - Newcastle	Direct Corridor	676	21.7 - 35.9	2 hrs 10 mins	3 hrs
	Direct Corridor via Gold Coast	701	24.9 - 40.6		
	Coastal Corridor via Beaudesert	701	20.0 - 27.8		
	Coastal Corridor via Gold Coast	706	22.2 - 31.7		
Newcastle - Sydney	Central Coast Corridor	120	10.7 - 17.9	40 mins	
Sydney - Canberra	Hume Highway Corridor via Southern Highlands	271	10.9 - 19.2	1 hr	3 hrs
	Princes Highway Corridor via Wollongong & Southern Highlands	290	15.0 - 24.5		
Canberra - Melbourne	Hume Highway Corridor via Wagga-Wagga and Albury-Wodonga	552	19.5 - 25.6	1 hr 50 mins	
	TOTAL	**1 619 – 1 668**	**$61 - $108 billion**		

Stations

The Phase One report also shortlisted a number of station location options for further consideration in the Phase Two study. These options were:

- Roma Street Station and South Bank in Brisbane.
- Central Station, Eveleigh, Homebush and Parramatta in Sydney.
- Southern Cross Station and North Melbourne in Melbourne.
- Civic and Canberra Airport in Canberra.

Patronage demand analysis suggests that central business district (CBD) locations would be the major trip generator and attractor in each city. Peripheral stations were considered for Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne, typically located towards the urban boundary where there is good access to the arterial road network.

Sydney and Melbourne airports have not been short-listed because initial patronage demand forecasts indicate most HSR demand would be for travel to the CBDs, rather than to airports.

The following regional areas have sufficient size and demand to warrant a regional or parkway HSR station, although other regional station opportunities may exist:

- Brisbane to Newcastle: Gold Coast, Far North Coast, Northern Rivers, Mid North Coast
- Newcastle to Sydney: Central Coast
- Sydney to Canberra: Southern Highlands, Illawarra
- Canberra to Melbourne: Riverina, Murray, Goulburn Valley

HSR demand is relatively insensitive to the precise location of regional stations if appropriate access is provided between the nearest cities or towns and the HSR station.

The full report of the Phase One study is available here.

Phase Two Report

On 11 April 2013 former Minister for Infrastructure and Transport the Hon. Anthony Albanese MP released the Phase Two Report of the High Speed Rail (HSR) study.

The Minister's press release is available here.

This report was also prepared by AECOM together with its sub-consultants Grimshaw, KPMG, SKM, ACIL Tasman, Booz & Co and Hyder. This report made a number of key findings regarding the financing, alignment and timeframe of a possible HSR development. Those key findings are:

Definition of the preferred HSR system

- The HSR network would comprise approximately 1 748 km of dedicated route with four city centre stations, four city-peripheral stations (one in Brisbane, two in Sydney and one in Melbourne) and 12 regional stations.

- To meet expected demand, the HSR system would offer a combination of services, including direct express services and limited stop services.

- The dedicated HSR network would need to be integrated into the hubs of existing urban public transport systems and road networks to maximise its connectivity with other transport networks.

Cost of constructing the HSR system

- The estimated cost of constructing the preferred HSR alignment in its entirety would be about $114 billion (in 2012 terms), comprising $64 billion between Brisbane and Sydney and $50 billion between Sydney, Canberra and Melbourne.

Forecast HSR demand

- Between 46 million and 111 million passengers are forecast to use HSR services for intercity and regional trips, if the preferred HSR network were fully operational in 2065, with a central forecast of 83.6 million passengers per year.

Staging the development of HSR

- The optimal staging for the HSR program would involve building the Sydney-Melbourne line first, starting with the Sydney-Canberra sector. Subsequent stages would be Canberra-Melbourne, Newcastle-Sydney, Brisbane-Gold Coast and Gold Coast-Newcastle.

Table 2: Commencement and operational milestones for optimal staging

Stage	Main construction commences	Operations commence
Sydney-Melbourne line		
Sydney-Canberra	2027	2035
Canberra-Melbourne	2032	2040
Brisbane-Sydney line		
Newcastle-Sydney	2037	2045
Brisbane-Gold Coast	2043	2051
Gold Coast-Newcastle	2048	2058

- It is possible the program could be accelerated, with the Sydney-Melbourne line operational by 2035. In this case the Sydney-Canberra stage could be operational by 2030.

Table 3: Commencement and operational milestones for accelerated staging

Stage	Main construction commences	Operations commence
Sydney-Melbourne line		
Sydney-Canberra	2022 (earliest possible start)	2030
Canberra-Melbourne	2027	2035
Brisbane-Sydney line		
Newcastle-Sydney	2032	2040
Brisbane-Gold Coast	2038	2046
Gold Coast-Newcastle	2043	2053

Financial assessment

- The HSR program and the majority of its individual stages are expected to produce only a small positive financial return on investment.
- Governments would be required to fund the majority of the upfront capital costs.
- If HSR passenger projections were met at the fare levels proposed, the HSR system, once operational, could generate sufficient fare revenue and other revenue to meet operating costs without ongoing public subsidy.
- HSR fares adopted for the study have been assumed to be comparable to air fares on the inter-capital routes, and it would appear HSR could sustain higher fares.

Economic assessment

- Investment in a future HSR program could deliver positive net economic benefits.

Environmental and social assessment

- The preferred HSR alignment has been selected to avoid major environmental and social impacts. The residual impacts on natural environments and heritage can be managed by appropriate mitigation and, where necessary, offsets.

Broader impacts of HSR

- Aligning public policies, programs and capabilities across Australian Government, state/territory government and local government agencies as part of a corridor regional development concept would be necessary to realise the full benefits of HSR.

Implementing a future HSR program

- Both the public and private sectors would play a significant role in the planning and implementation of a future HSR system.

- The key risks to the HSR program and its successful performance are common to all major greenfield infrastructure projects; most notably, a lack of certainty about future demand and revenues, and the potential for cost over-runs during construction.

Key public policy issues for a decision to proceed

- Whether to proceed with planning for a future HSR program must necessarily be a policy decision, taking account of many factors that cannot be known with certainty, and in the context of risks which cannot be perfectly controlled.

- As in all publicly-funded infrastructure projects, the balance between public benefit and public cost should be considered.

- A related policy issue is the extent to which the initial capital costs of an HSR program should be recovered from users.

The Phase Two report is available in full, here.

Consultation

Following the release of the Phase Two report, former Minister Albanese initiated a comprehensive program of public consultation and invited feedback from the general public on the Phase Two report.

The HSR Unit at the former Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government was to embark on detailed consultations with industry, local governments and community groups.

Ministerial Advisory Group

A Ministerial Advisory Group was established, charged with coordinating the next steps for HSR across jurisdictions. Members of the Ministerial Group are:

- **Scott Emerson** Queensland Minister for Transport and Main Roads
- **Terry Mulder** Victorian Minister for Public Transport and Roads
- **Gladys Berejiklian** NSW Minister for Transport
- **Simon Corbell** ACT Minister for the Environment and Sustainable Development

High Speed Rail Advisory Group

Former Minister Albanese also established a high level HSR Advisory Group to work along with the HSR Unit in directly advising the Government on key industry and community issues arising out of the report.

On 8 November 2013, Prime Minister the Hon. Tony Abbott MP announced the High Speed Rail Authority would be abolished.

The Advisory Group was to be given $52 million to finalise the route of the track and locations of train stations, in negotiation with the relevant State and Territory Governments, and directly advise the Government on key industry and community issues arising out of the second phase of the HSR report.

Members of the Advisory Group were:

- **Ms Lyn O'Connell PSM (Chair)** Deputy Secretary, Department of Infrastructure and Transport
- **The Hon. Tim Fischer AC** Former Australian Deputy Prime Minister (1996–1999) and former Ambassador to the Holy See (2008–2012)
- **Ms Jennifer Westacott** Chief Executive, Business Council of Australia and former Director-General of NSW Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources
- **Professor Sue Holliday** Former Director General of NSW Planning (1997–2003) and current member of the Urban Policy Forum
- **Professor Peter Newman** Infrastructure Australia Board member and Professor of Sustainability at Sustainability Policy Institute of Curtin University
- **Mr Bryan Nye** Chief Executive Officer, Australasian Railway Association
- **Mr Bob Nanva** National Secretary, Rail, Tram & Bus Industry Union
- **Cr Jenny Dowell** President Northern Rivers Regional Organisation of Councils

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Government rail priorities

On 28 November 2013 Deputy Prime Minister the Hon. Warren Truss MP indicated that he would write to State and Territory leaders on the eastern seaboard to seek their interest for HSR.

However, Minister Truss also outlined that the Coalition's priority rail freight project was the Melbourne to Darwin Inland Rail link, proposed during the former Howard government.

The Government has announced that a high-level implementation group will be formed, chaired by former Deputy Prime Minister the Hon. John Anderson. The Implementation Group will report to the Minister and is tasked with assisting the Minister to determine construction priorities and ensure engagement with the community and stakeholders.

The Coalition Government has also committed to investigating the rail infrastructure required for a new dedicated freight line to the Port of Brisbane.

The media release from Minister Truss on rail priorities for the Coalition is available here.

Opposition rail priorities

On 9 December 2013 Shadow Minister for Infrastructure the Hon. Anthony Albanese MP introduced a private member's bill to protect the 1 748 kilometre rail corridor for the HSR project.

The Bill would establish the High-Speed Rail Planning Authority as a vehicle for long-term Commonwealth leadership to progress this project, made up of federal, state and industry stakeholders.

The body would be similar to the High Speed Rail Advisory Group established by the former Labor Government which was abolished by the Coalition Government.

The 11 members of the board are outlined in the bill and include:

- one member from each of the states affected: Queensland, NSW, Victoria and the ACT;
- one member representing the Local Government Association;
- one member nominated by the Australasian Railway Association; and
- five members appointed by the Minister for Infrastructure on the basis of qualifications or expertise.

The authority's roles would include consideration of:

- land use planning relating to the corridor;
- safety;
- measures to minimise environmental impact; and
- public consultation.

Debate on the High Speed Rail Planning Authority Bill 2013 was adjourned on 9 December without the government indicating its attitude to the measure.

The Bill is available here.

The Shadow Minister's second reading speech is available here.