Faster rail plan
The Australian Government has a national leadership role in investing in transport and social infrastructure – supporting and shaping the growth of our cities and regions to benefit all Australians.

To better align future population growth with long term infrastructure investment, the Government has developed a 20-Year plan for a Faster Rail Network to boost our major regional centres and take pressure off our largest cities.

The Faster Rail plan is centred on delivering faster, more efficient and reliable journey times along strategic corridors that link our major capital cities and growing regional centres.

As a first step towards this plan, the Government invested $20 million in faster rail business cases for Sydney to Newcastle, Melbourne to Greater Shepparton and Brisbane to the regions of Moreton Bay and the Sunshine Coast. These business cases are due to be completed in mid-2019.

The Government has also committed funding to undertake a business case to upgrade passenger rail services between Toowoomba and Brisbane.

Building on this first step, the Government is now committing $2 billion to help deliver faster rail between Melbourne and Geelong – a nationally significant commuter corridor.

The Government will also invest in additional business cases for priority faster rail corridors between Sydney to Wollongong, Sydney to Parkes (via Bathurst and Orange), Melbourne to Traralgon, Melbourne to Albury-Wodonga, and Brisbane to the Gold Coast.
To ensure we can deliver better connectivity to our regions and cities, we will establish a dedicated National Faster Rail Agency, supported by an Expert Panel to progress the Government’s Faster Rail plan. The Agency will work in close partnership with state and territory governments and private industry. It will also provide advice to the Government on future faster rail opportunities around Australia, including for high speed rail.

Faster rail will help shape the future growth of our cities and regions; bring people, jobs and services closer together; provide a catalyst for greater investment in the regions; and, over time, help take pressure off Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane.

The Hon Michael McCormack MP
Deputy Prime Minister
Minister for Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Development

The Hon Alan Tudge MP
Minister for Cities, Urban Infrastructure and Population
The Opportunity

Faster rail offers the opportunity to promote the integrated development of Australia’s cities and regions.

Australia’s population story is one of strong growth. Australia’s population is now over 25 million, having increased by almost five times over the last century.

If Australia is to continue to make the most of population growth, we must plan and invest in the infrastructure and services needed in the future. Better population planning will help overcome capacity constraints and congestion pressures in Australia’s biggest cities.

Over the past 10 years, 75 per cent of Australia’s population growth has occurred in our three largest capital cities and this trend is projected to continue. Today around 67 per cent of Australians live in capital cities, making Australia one of the most urbanised nations in the world. Most Australians live in our three largest cities of Sydney (21 per cent), Melbourne (20 per cent), Brisbane (10 per cent) and their surrounding regions (12 per cent).

Transport, particularly rail connectivity, will be an important factor in further integrating regional and metropolitan economies for their mutual benefit.

The Faster Rail plan supports the Government’s population plan by identifying strategic rail corridors and determining transport priorities in the context of projected population growth.

Faster rail offers the opportunity to promote the integrated development of Australia’s cities and regions by improving access to employment, education and services as well as more affordable housing and lifestyle amenity. Better transport connectivity improves economic and social ties and brings people and jobs closer together.

At the same time, faster rail connections can create broader economic benefits for regional centres. Larger populations increase the demand for local services and attract businesses and industry to the local areas.
20-Year plan for a Faster Rail Network

Connecting cities and people

While Australia's overall population has been growing at a historically strong rate of 1.6 per cent per annum, our three largest population centres have been some of the fastest growing in the world. By 2066, the Australian Bureau of Statistics projects Melbourne will grow to 10.2 million people, Sydney to 9.7 million and Brisbane to 4.8 million.

The regional centres have cheaper housing, more open spaces and other lifestyle amenities such are less congestion. This makes them attractive destinations. Fast rail to the regional centres can accelerate their economic and population growth. The international experience demonstrates this.

In particular, faster passenger rail links can strengthen economic and social ties and connect people to housing, jobs and services.

Transport, particularly rail connectivity, will be an important factor in further integrating regional and metropolitan economies for their mutual benefit.

Currently, many regional trains run at slower speeds due to track limitations. For example, the average speed between Sydney and Wollongong is less than 60 km/hour. This means that trains often need to wait for trains coming from the other direction before they can pass. Single tracks create a bottleneck that restricts the number of trains that can run, which often leads to overcrowding during peak periods.

Upgrading rail networks across key regional corridors could allow for significantly faster average journey times, in some cases by as much as half, increasing the frequency of services and improving network reliability.

Faster average speeds and journey times could also accelerate regional population growth and allow more people to access affordable housing, jobs and services.
Faster rail connections in particular can make rail a more attractive choice for commuters travelling into capital cities from surrounding regions. The speed and comfort of rail lends itself to transport over long distances, allowing for more productive time than would otherwise be the case in a private vehicle and helping to support the increasingly flexible nature of work.

At the same time, faster rail connections can create broader economic benefits for regional centres. Larger populations increase the demand for local services and attract businesses and industry to the local areas.

Our plan would see several fast rail connections to regional centres assessed, planned and built over the next twenty years.

As is outlined in this document, the Government will immediately proceed with the funding for the construction of the Geelong to Melbourne fast rail.

Other rail corridors would be funded subsequent to this. This could include:

- Sydney to Newcastle
- Sydney to Wollongong
- Sydney to Canberra
- Sydney to Parkes (via Bathurst and Orange)
- Melbourne to Greater Shepparton
- Melbourne to Albury-Wodonga
- Melbourne to Traralgon
- Melbourne to Ballarat
- Brisbane to Sunshine Coast
- Brisbane to Gold Coast
- Brisbane to Toowoomba

There is work underway to assess the viability and requirements of many of these, and the Government is providing $40 million for five additional business cases. This will inform the priorities.
A new National Faster Rail Agency will be established to implement the 20-year plan, working closely with the relevant state and territory governments and private sector proponents.

The National Faster Rail Agency will be established from 1 July 2019 and have the following functions:

- lead the development and implementation of the Australian Government’s 20-year plan for a Faster Rail Network;
- oversee the development of business cases with state and territory governments, ensuring that population and transport policy objectives are met;
- identify additional rail corridors that would benefit from faster rail services over the long term, in consultation with state and territory governments, industry and stakeholders;
- work with relevant state and territory governments in the delivery of faster rail construction projects;
- develop an investment strategy recommending how faster rail projects can be staged to link future expenditure to investment need, and increase community and industry confidence to reduce market pressures;
- explore alternative funding and financing options for faster rail, such as private sector contributions and value capture opportunities; and
- provide advice on options to future proof corridors for high-speed rail, including the need for technical guidelines, corridor planning and protection.

The National Faster Rail Agency will be supported by an Expert Panel. The Expert Panel will provide advice to the Minister for Cities, Urban Infrastructure and Population and to the Agency on faster rail, transport demographics and economics to inform project identification and delivery, service requirements and operating standards. It will also test private sector interest given the considerable private sector interest in partnering with governments to build faster rail.

The Agency and Expert Panel will also be directed to provide advice on the opportunities for future faster rail business cases, including Sydney to Canberra and Melbourne to Bendigo and Ballarat.
First Priority: Faster rail to Geelong

The Australian Government is committing $2 billion to help deliver faster rail between Geelong and Melbourne.

A faster rail service between Geelong and Melbourne has the potential to halve travel times, giving more time back to commuters and unlocking new economic and social opportunities for the region. The Australian Government is committing $2 billion to help deliver this transformational upgrade. We will be seeking matched funding from the Victorian Government and contributions from the private sector will also be considered.

This investment builds on our landmark $5 billion commitment to deliver the Melbourne Airport Rail Link, which will include investigating options to increase capacity from Sunshine to the Melbourne CBD, enabling faster rail services from Geelong.

The delivery of faster rail to Geelong will also complement the recently agreed Geelong City Deal, which will deliver more than $355 million in investment to the region, supporting Geelong’s continued economic diversification, growth of the visitor economy and a thriving city centre.

The Government’s investment in faster rail along the Geelong to Melbourne corridor will have major benefits. The rapid population growth in the western region of Melbourne and constraints in existing infrastructure are impacting growth opportunities and the economic potential of the region.

Transport connectivity between Geelong and Melbourne is constrained. Passenger rail services between Geelong and Southern Cross Station take approximately one hour at an average speed of between 70 and 80 kilometres per hour. A report by the Victorian Auditor-General shows that during peak hour, the current rail service is often over capacity as passengers attempt to board trains at key outer metropolitan stations such as Wyndham Vale and Tarneit.

A faster rail service averaging up to 160 kilometres per hour from Melbourne to Geelong would reduce travel times from approximately one hour to just over half an hour. In particular, upgrading the track (including alignment and electrification), signalling and train control systems will enable faster trains to run more efficiently.

Enabling more commuters to travel along the rail corridor from Geelong to Melbourne will also take pressure off the road corridor, further spreading the benefits of this investment.
Figure 1: Geelong to Melbourne Faster Rail
Assessing key corridors to determine future priorities

In order to assess projects for future funding, detailed business cases will need to be undertaken. The Australian Government has three faster rail business cases already underway and will commit a further $40 million to fund a further five business cases. These complement work underway by state governments.

In each business case, the economic viability is determined based on an assessment of the costs and benefits of the proposal, including travel time savings. The business case will also consider the preferred route, expected construction costs, operational costs and revenues, along with potential private sector contributions and partnerships.

**Faster Rail business cases underway**

In the 2017-18 Budget, the Australian Government committed funding to the development of business cases for faster rail connections between Sydney and Newcastle in New South Wales, Melbourne and Greater Shepparton in Victoria, and Brisbane and the regions of Moreton Bay and the Sunshine Coast in Queensland.

The Government has also committed funding to undertake a business case for passenger rail services between Toowoomba and Brisbane.

**Sydney to Newcastle**

The Australian Government is exploring improvements to the rail connections between Sydney and Newcastle that would facilitate faster passenger rail services as part of a business case being undertaken in partnership with the NSW Government.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, in 2017, over 480,400 people lived in the Newcastle-Maitland region with the population growing by around 1.1 per cent per annum. Newcastle-Maitland produced $34 billion in Gross Regional Product in 2016-17.
The Central Coast and Newcastle regions offer affordable housing while enabling people to commute to employment clusters for work. The region offers economic development opportunities, with improvements in rail services potentially benefiting travel, trade and tourism.

The Sydney to Newcastle business case is investigating works including reducing track curvature, deviations and realignments, removal of level crossings, junction rearrangement and better segregation of passenger and freight services. Travel times between Sydney and Newcastle could be reduced from approximately 3 hours to 2 hours.

The Sydney to Newcastle faster rail business case is expected to be completed by mid-2019.

Melbourne to Greater Shepparton

The Australian Government is exploring improvements to the rail connections between Melbourne and Greater Shepparton as part of a business case being undertaken in partnership with Consolidated Land and Rail Australia (CLARA), a private consortium.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, in 2017, over 51,200 people lived in the Shepparton-Mooroopna region with the population growing by around 1.4 per cent per annum. The region produced $7 billion in Gross Regional Product in 2016-17.

Regional cites like Greater Shepparton have the potential to support higher populations by attracting people to enjoy lifestyle and amenity benefits which are a feature of regional areas.

The CLARA proposal provides an innovative and revolutionary model for building a High Speed Rail link between Melbourne and Greater Shepparton funded by the development of two new sustainable cities.

CLARA has indicated that travel times over the full length of the line could be reduced from around 3 hours to approximately just over half an hour.

The CLARA business case is expected to be completed by mid-2019.

Brisbane to the regions of Moreton Bay and the Sunshine Coast

The Australian Government is exploring faster rail upgrades to the rail connection between Brisbane and Nambour as well as a new rail spur to Maroochydore as part of a business case being undertaken in partnership with the North Coast Connect Consortium.

The regions of Moreton Bay and the Sunshine Coast are the second and third most populated and fastest growing regions in Australia. Improved travel times will result in further economic growth revitalising the historic railway towns on the corridor and increasing tourism to the regions.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, in 2017, over 325,100 people lived in the Sunshine Coast region with the population growing by around 2.3 per cent per annum. The combined regions of Moreton Bay and the Sunshine Coast also produced $29 billion in Gross Regional Product in 2016–17.

This new and upgraded infrastructure would facilitate higher speed passenger rail services between Brisbane and the regions of Moreton Bay and the Sunshine Coast.

Travel times could be reduced from approximately 2 hours to 45 minutes between Brisbane and Maroochydore.

The Brisbane to the regions of Moreton Bay and the Sunshine Coast faster rail business case is expected to be completed by mid-2019.
Brisbane to Toowoomba

The Australian Government has committed funding to undertake a business case for passenger rail services between Brisbane and Toowoomba.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, in 2017, over 135,300 people lived in Toowoomba with the population growing by around 1.2 per cent per annum. Toowoomba produced around $8 billion in Gross Regional Product in 2016-17.

The business case will investigate a range of route options, including but not limited to upgrades to the existing rail line to enable regular commuter passenger rail services and integrating passenger services in freight corridors; route staging and timing of construction; and types of rolling stock.

Regular passenger rail services have the potential to improve access to jobs, health services and affordable housing along the Brisbane to Toowoomba corridor, and increase development throughout the region.

A passenger rail line would also benefit the Toowoomba and wider Lockyer Valley area with increased tourism access.
New Faster Rail Business Cases

The Australian Government is committing $40 million to fund an additional five business cases for faster rail in priority corridors between Sydney and Wollongong, Sydney and Parkes (via Bathurst and Orange), Melbourne and Albury-Wodonga, Melbourne and Traralgon, and Brisbane and the Gold Coast.

Figure 2: 20-Year plan for a Faster Rail Network
These five corridors connect capital cities with major regional centres and warrant investigation due to the opportunity to shift commuter demand from road to rail, the potential to stimulate regional growth and provide access to jobs, services, housing and amenity.

Australian Government funding for these business cases will be provided on a 50:50 basis with the relevant state government and/or the private sector.

These business cases will build on the faster rail business cases that are already underway. The business cases will identify opportunities to improve passenger rail services by increasing average speeds up to 160 kilometres per hour.

The focus of the Government’s plan is to deliver the right outcomes on each corridor, to provide communities with faster and more affordable rail access to major hubs.

**Sydney to Wollongong**

The Australian Government has committed to provide funding to develop a faster rail business case for the Sydney to Wollongong rail corridor.

Wollongong has a population of 298,400, with average annual population growth of 1.1 per cent over the last decade.

Wollongong is a strong regional economic centre with a Gross Regional Product of more than $14 billion which is underpinned by an established business environment alongside advanced manufacturing, trade and logistics.

The current quality of the rail service in the Sydney to Wollongong corridor reflects a range of operational and infrastructure constraints including the Illawarra Escarpment and the single track Coalcliff Tunnel. Uncompetitive rail services add to congestion on roads linking Sydney and Wollongong.

A faster rail connection between Sydney and Wollongong would consolidate the corridor’s significant role to the nation’s economy and would unlock more affordable housing opportunities in the region by reducing journey times between Sydney and Wollongong from approximately one and a half hours to just over half an hour.

Improved rail services have the potential to improve accessibility to the Sydney employment market from Wollongong, which has above average unemployment, and where a substantial percentage of the population travels to Sydney for work. Currently, approximately 17 per cent of the local population travel to Sydney to work.

**Sydney to Parkes (via Bathurst and Orange)**

The Australian Government has committed to provide funding to develop a faster rail business case for the Sydney to Parkes rail corridor (via Bathurst and Orange).

Parkes is located within five hours of Sydney and three hours of Canberra by car, at the cross roads of major north south and east west road and rail transport corridors.

The Gross Regional Product of the broader central west region of NSW, which includes the key centres of Bathurst, Orange and Parkes, is around $14 billion per annum. This economic output is underpinned by agriculture and forestry industries, transport and logistics operations, mining, health care, tourism and public administration.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, in 2017, over 210,000 people lived in the central west NSW region with the population growing by around 0.8 per cent per annum.

Parkes has been identified as the first official Special Activation Precinct by the NSW Government.
Special Activation Precincts focus effort on the planning and delivery of infrastructure projects in certain regional locations in NSW in order to attract and grow businesses, stimulate the local economy and provide more local employment opportunities.

Faster passenger rail services in the corridor would strengthen the economic productivity of these regional centres and connect people to jobs, services and affordable housing by exploring opportunities to significantly reduce travel times.

**Melbourne to Albury-Wodonga**

The Australian Government has committed to provide funding to develop a faster rail business case for the Melbourne to Albury-Wodonga rail corridor.

The twin Murray River cities of Albury and Wodonga are a regional service and education hub for the surrounding regions in New South Wales and Victoria. Albury-Wodonga has a population of 92,200, with average annual population growth of 1.3 per cent over the last decade.

Albury-Wodonga is a significant regional hub between Melbourne and Sydney with good potential for further economic and population growth as the centre of a major diversified regional and agricultural economy in south east Australia.

Albury-Wodonga’s proximity between Australia’s two largest cities, Melbourne and Sydney, provides key strategic advantages. In 2017, Albury-Wodonga had a combined Gross Regional Product of nearly $6 billion.

Faster rail services between Melbourne and Albury-Wodonga would provide people with a viable alternative to private transportation in the corridor, facilitating an increase to passenger rail patronage by exploring opportunities to significantly reduce travel times.

**Melbourne to Traralgon**

The Australian Government has committed to provide funding to develop a faster rail business case for the Melbourne to Traralgon rail corridor in south east Victoria.

Traralgon is located in the Gippsland region. The proximity of the corridor to south east Melbourne reinforces strong connections that provide access to jobs, markets, customers and tourists.

Gippsland’s economy is predominantly based around natural resources and commodities. These natural resources together with energy generation industry, agriculture, forestry and tourism account for around $17 billion in Gross Regional Product – a major contribution to the Victorian economy.

Melbourne’s south east is one of Australia’s fastest growing and dynamic regions. Stretching from the City of Monash to Fort Nepean and to the edge of Gippsland, South East Melbourne already has a population nearly the size of Adelaide, with 1.2 million people calling the region home, and is expected to grow to 1.5 million people, up by 23.5 per cent by 2031.

A business case for the Melbourne to Traralgon rail corridor would facilitate the identification of issues, necessary upgrades and future works needed for the introduction of faster rail services to significantly reduce travel times.
Brisbane to the Gold Coast

The Australian Government has committed to provide funding to develop a faster rail business case for the Brisbane to Gold Coast rail corridor.

The major coastal tourism and lifestyle centre of the Gold Coast and its surrounding regions spans northern New South Wales to southern Queensland, south of Brisbane. This region has experienced some of the fastest population growth in the country, at around 2.3 per cent per annum over the past 10 years. The Gold Coast and Tweed Heads collectively have a population of 662,700.

The Gold Coast has a thriving economy which has diversified from construction and tourism to a knowledge-based economic environment with strengths in health, ICT, education, sport, marine and film production. The Gross Regional Product of the Gold Coast in 2017 was $32 billion.

Improvements in the capacity of the rail line between Brisbane and the Gold Coast would reduce overcrowding during peak periods and potentially help reduce congestion on the M1 Motorway. Journey times from Brisbane to the Gold Coast could also be significantly reduced.

State Business Case development

The New South Wales Government has committed to an initial $80 million for preliminary work on a new straightened route between Menangle and Yerrinbool on the Canberra to Sydney route.

The Victorian Government has committed $150 million through the Western Rail Plan to investigate faster trains to both Geelong and Ballarat due to the growth in the population.