

2019

**THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR
THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**Update to the Assembly - Standing Committee on Economic
Development and Tourism Report No. 5 - Annual and Financial
Reports 2017-18 - Recommendation No 1: Update on progress to
improve Sydney to Canberra Rail Link**

Presented by

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Presentation of Papers

Update to the Assembly

Standing Committee on Economic Development and Tourism Report No. 5

Annual and Financial Reports 2017-18

Recommendation No 1: Update the Assembly on progress to improve Sydney to Canberra Rail Link

The ACT Government considers improving the rail link between Canberra and Sydney a key priority, and a step on the pathway towards high speed rail. The Canberra to Sydney rail corridor presents a unique and significant opportunity to improve connectivity and strengthen the economic, service and social relationship between Canberra, its surrounding regions including the regional cities of Goulburn and Queanbeyan, and Greater Sydney. Better rail services would also unlock further opportunities for tourism, freight, urban regeneration and affordable housing along the corridor. Canberra and Sydney are centres for diverse sectors including health, education and employment and better transport connectivity between these cities is sorely needed.

The ACT is a jurisdiction wholly surrounded by NSW and as a result works closely with NSW on a range of issues of common interest that cross the border. The ACT and NSW Governments have a well established Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Regional Collaboration that provides a framework for engagement between the jurisdictions. The MoU is accompanied by an Annual Work Plan and improving the Canberra to Sydney rail line is one of the priorities identified under this MoU and Plan.

As most of the rail infrastructure upgrades required to improve the Canberra to Sydney rail link are in NSW, most of the key decisions on investment and construction to improve this corridor must be made by the NSW Government. However, the ACT has for a number of years worked with NSW to support consideration of how investment can best be made in better connecting Australia's largest and Capital cities.

The ACT and NSW have been jointly considering faster rail since the release of the Faster Rail Prospectus by the Federal Government in 2017. The ACT and NSW made a joint submission to the Federal Government at that time for investment in a business case to decrease rail travel time between Canberra and Sydney. While that application was not shortlisted by the Federal Government, ACT and NSW have continued to work together to examine what can be done to better connect Canberra and Sydney. Recent developments across multiple jurisdictions have highlighted a renewed willingness to explore better rail connections between our cities and our regions.

ACT Government Funding

In August 2018, the ACT Government committed up to \$5 million in matched funding for the development of a detailed business case to prioritise upgrades to the current service. This is in addition to the \$1 million committed to faster rail investigations in the 2018-19 ACT Budget.

ACT Work to Progress Improvements to Rail Link to Sydney

Transport Canberra and City Services (TCCS) is working in partnership with Transport for NSW (TfNSW) on improving the Canberra to Sydney rail link.

TfNSW is currently assessing the needs and opportunities of faster rail between Sydney and Canberra in order to select the best means to satisfy objectives and rank competing proposals. As part of the assessment, TfNSW is developing a business case for improvements to the Canberra Sydney rail link. To assist TfNSW develop its business case, TCCS has led scoping and pre-feasibility activities across government. These include: problem identification; needs analysis; assessment of options for better connectivity between the rail terminus and key points in Canberra; land use changes; and options for High-Speed Rail.

TCCS has provided information to assist TfNSW in its investigations in the form of land use assumptions, technical and planning analysis, vision and economic strategy, transport connections, rail station opportunities and regional connectivity.

ACT Government officials from TCCS, the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate (EPSDD) and the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate (CMTEDD) meet with NSW Government counterparts regularly to share the ACT government's vision for Canberra and the regional and national opportunities presented by improved rail connections between Canberra and Sydney. TCCS has also shared a range of strategic policy documents, reports, statements and plans to assist the NSW Government in their investigations of the corridor.

TCCS is identifying strategic opportunities for ACT Government regarding partnerships with the NSW and Federal Governments. TCCS is further exploring strategic actions the Government could pursue to take advantage of opportunities in the immediate, short, medium and long term. These relate to:

1. The preservation of future corridors for a future fast or high-speed rail line.
2. Identifying and securing possible sites for future station locations.
3. Integration with the broader local and regional transport network including cross border public transport networks to enhance the concept of Canberra as a regional hub and central access point to other major cities.
4. Land use planning changes in and around future station locations.
5. Investment in industry sectors which would enhance the benefits of an improved rail connection between Sydney and Canberra.
6. Key role and opportunities for Canberra in the context of the region and a future High-Speed Rail system.
7. Clear structure planning around station locations.

Given the long planning horizon for these studies, Transport Canberra has explored multiple possible future opportunities for the city, Territory and region during these investigations and has been working closely with EPSDD and CMTEDD in their development.

NSW Activities and Funding

In December 2018, the NSW Premier, the Hon Gladys Berejiklian, announced investigations into the delivery of a fast rail network for NSW. The plan identifies the Canberra to Sydney rail corridor as one of four corridors that will initially be

investigated. These investigations are being led by UK high speed rail expert Professor McNaughton through the NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet.

During the 2019 NSW state election, the NSW Government made an election commitment of \$295 million for faster rail including \$80 million for improved rail on the Canberra to Sydney rail corridor between Menangle and Yerrinbool, and in the recent 2019-2020 NSW Budget, \$93 million of the \$295 million commitment was identified for fast rail planning and preconstruction activities across NSW during 2019-20 including for track alignment north of Mittagong.

Federal Government Activities

On 1 July 2019, the Federal Government established a National Faster Rail Agency to provide advice to the Government on future fast rail opportunities around Australia, including high-speed rail. The agency, which will be supported by an Expert Panel, will sit within the existing Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Cities and Regional Development and work in close partnership with state and territory governments and private industry.

Next Steps

The ACT continues to engage with key stakeholders, including NSW local governments, to support improvements in Canberra to Sydney rail. In March 2019, the Canberra Region Joint Organisation with the ACT Government developed a prospectus for a Canberra Region deal outlining a three-point plan to invest in the Canberra Region. This included a call for investment in faster rail between Canberra and Sydney and corridor preservation for a potential future High-Speed Rail line.

TCCS will continue to progress the partnership with TfNSW as well as studies on Canberra to Sydney rail. TCCS will present findings and options to the Government during 2019.