

Investing in Infrastructure

AUSTRALIAN DEMOCRATS ACTION PLAN INVESTING IN INFRASTRUCTURE MODERN ECONOMY

The Australian Democrats recognise that high-quality infrastructure is essential for social wellbeing, environmental health, economic prosperity and protection of public safety. Infrastructure is often thought of as just hardware, like our public transport network, roads, rail, ports, airports, and utilities such as gas, water, electricity and telecommunications networks. But the Democrats have a broader view of infrastructure that includes social infrastructure, like our schools, universities, skills, public housing, justice facilities, hospitals, cultural and sporting venues. This government has failed to future-proof the economy and the community by using the boom years to boost education, productivity and infrastructure.

Our Action Plan

“As a result of poor institutional arrangements and policy we need to set a new direction for infrastructure and invest in Australia’s future.”

Senator Lyn Allison
Leader, Australian Democrats

- Establish an independent cross jurisdictional **National Sustainability Commission** to coordinate investment in infrastructure to meet future growth needs and ensure consistency between sustainability policy and implementation.
- The Commission to take a **watchdog role in sustainable development** and provide independent reporting on risks, ongoing maintenance, national efficiency, cost-benefit and environmental impact.
- The Commission to publish ten year **‘infrastructure forward plan’** to coordinate national priorities, for appropriate and timely infrastructure investment and ongoing maintenance. The plans to be informed by regular and transparent audits.
- Require independent evaluation and **assessment of Public-Private Partnerships** by the Australian National Audit Office before approval.
- **Coordinate State and Commonwealth** governments to ensure the delivery and ongoing maintenance of priority infrastructure.
- **Invest** in core infrastructure including ports, rail and road to support our growing export economy and to remove costly bottlenecks.
- **Build sustainable suburbs and cities.** Ensure that new developments conform to best practice sustainability standards and protect natural resources. A moratorium on residential expansion on the fringes of capital cities. Fund the development of sustainability assessment tools.
- **Expand investment** in energy infrastructure particularly transmission networks to relieve constraints and provide access to market for remote energy resources such as geothermal, solar and wind projects.

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- Create efficient National Markets for transport (freight, passenger and ports), water and energy by addressing regulatory barriers.
- Pool state and Commonwealth **transport funding** and allocate to road, rail and public transport, according to clear criteria, including greenhouse. (see 'Land Transport' Action Plan).
- Expanded funding for schools, universities and R&D efforts (see 'Our Education System' platform).
- Establish Community Health Centres that specialise in preventative health care (see 'Our Health System' platform).
- Major public investment in urban and rural water infrastructure. (see 'Urban Water' Action Plan).
- Major public investment in telecommunications and IT infrastructure (see 'Telecommunications' Action Plan).

The Issues

Lack of affordable accommodation and the supporting social infrastructure is impeding progress in important economic regions in Australia. Congestion in our cities, near-permanent water restrictions and the nation's high greenhouse gas emissions are symptoms of under investment, poor coordination and poor long-term planning. Social infrastructure, in particular the availability of housing, needs urgent and priority attention.

Some of Australia's skills base and expertise is moving offshore to places that have numerous infrastructure projects in the pipeline. In a global economy, Governments must commit to pipeline of projects to provide opportunities for skilled workers and firms at home. The Democrats believe that forward planning of infrastructure projects will give the workers and firms certainty and opportunity at home, and ensure that we have the capacity to meet our infrastructural needs.

The construction of infrastructure and community amenities is just the starting point for whole-of-life management, ongoing maintenance is essential to the ongoing safety and amenity. However infrastructure maintenance is not as politically attractive as the construction of new infrastructure and can be neglected by responsible authorities.

The Howard Government has underspent on infrastructure. This has resulted in State governments seeking third party finance through Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs). But unfortunately the process has often been secretive and cost-effectiveness of PPPs not publicly reported. Democrats' policy will require improved transparency and auditing.



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