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SPECIAL REPORT

Southeast Queensland's fast track to Tokyo-style commuter crush

Picture: Marc Robertson

CATTLE CLASS CHAOS

DARYL PASSMORE

SOUTHEAST Queensland is sitting on a public transport time-bomb – with rail congestion to almost double within five years.

The Courier-Mail can reveal official passenger-number projections show the train and bus networks will be unable to cope with soaring demand, forcing more people on to choked roads.

Infrastructure Partnerships Australia has warned the region's commuters face Japanese-style crushes.

"People will be unable to board trains because they are too full. Those on board will be crammed shoulder to shoulder," chief executive Brendan Lyon said.

An investigation by *The Courier-Mail* has uncovered looming problems in the southeast's transport system and what key infrastructure is needed to prevent chaos.

#getmovingseq

FULL REPORT | P12-13

OUR SLOW TRAIN

Gridlock looms as network spend stalls

DARYL PASSMORE

TIME is quickly running out for southeast Queensland's public transport system.

The region is on a fast-track to commuter chaos within five years as crucial rail routes reach capacity, unable to cope with rising passenger demand.

Official forecasts say the number of people catching trains in Brisbane each day will soar 84 per cent to 395,000 by 2021, and 160 per cent to 558,000 a decade after that.

Documents prepared for the previous LNP government's proposed BaT Tunnel project warn the expected growth "would result in the inner city rail network reaching capacity by 2021".

Overcrowding is expected to increase on all lines, according to the report.

One in five passengers on the Beenleigh and Gold Coast services will be standing within five years and a third of passengers on northern lines, such as Ferny Grove and the North Coast, would be forced to stand.

By 2031, the problem will have spread to the Cleveland and Ipswich lines and most routes northwards.

Spilling demand over to the bus network is not an option, with the same report warning that some key routes are already at, or beyond, capacity, making it "very challenging" to meet future demand anticipated to add 53 per cent more daily bus passengers by 2021.

BRISBANE RAIL PASSENGERS

	2012	2021	Growth
7-9am peak	59,500	104,900	76%
4-6pm peak	54,200	98,900	82%
Daily total	214,500	396,500	84%

CROWDED TRAINS

Crowded hours per average weekday across the network

2012: 5400

2021: 19,000

ECONOMIC DAMAGE

Cost of congestion

2031: $9.2 billion

That means more people in cars, with the number of daily private vehicle trips in Brisbane to rise 23 per cent to 5.75 million by 2021.

An audit released by Infrastructure Australia yesterday warns that road travel times will rise by a quarter in the next 16 years.

Without vital investment in transport, the annual cost of congestion to Queensland's economy will rise from $1.9 billion to $9.2 billion by 2031.

At the heart of the looming crisis is the need for a second rail crossing of the Brisbane River to supplement the Merivale Bridge.

The Newman government rejected the Bligh government's plan for Cross River Rail in favour of its own scheme, later dubbed the BaT Tunnel, but this was contingent on asset sales and voters rejected that proposal at January's election.

Transport Minister Jackie Trad said she was reviewing both the Cross River Rail and the BaT project but was unable to say when the essential cross river rail infrastructure would be built. However, she admitted it would be a minimum of five to six years.

She said the key question was funding and insisted

TO NOWHERE

the congestion-busting project couldn't proceed without Federal Government money.

Ms Trad said she had raised the issue with Deputy Prime Minister Warren Truss the first week after she was sworn in but he remained unmoved.

Mr Truss said the Abbott Government had been prepared to direct more than $1 billion towards the BaT Tunnel through its asset recycling fund but Queensland's rejection of asset leases meant the money would go elsewhere.

He said the Queensland Government could build Cross River Rail itself or in partnership with the private sector.

The Opposition transport spokesman Scott Emerson said the infrastructure was vital and admitted the LNP had no plan yet on how it could be delivered without asset leases.

He said it was now the problem of the Palaszczuk Government.

"Labor told the public they could deliver. Now they have to deliver on that problem," he said.

RACQ executive manager Michael Roth said it was time to end the politics.

"They need to get on with it," he said.

Push on to bring in rail safety system

DARYL PASSMORE

A HI-TECH safety system could buy rail chiefs valuable years in the race against public transport chaos.

Passenger advocates RAIL Back On Track want the State Government to introduce an automatic train protection program on Queensland Rail's city network.

The equipment monitors the speed and positions of trains and automatically intervenes when necessary, depending on signal settings.

"ATP improves rail safety, but the other major benefit is that it improves efficiency and capacity by allowing trains to travel closer together," spokesman Robert Dow said.

The group believes the system could boost capacity on the suburban rail network by up to 25 per cent by enabling more frequent services.

Western Australia already has an ATP system and it is being rolled out across the Sydney metropolitan network and intercity services.

In Queensland, services west of Rosewood and north of Caboolture, including the Tilt Train, use the system.

Mr Dow acknowledges that expanding ATP across the suburban network would be expensive – probably $1 billion-plus – but says it is a worthwhile investment in the long-term efficiency of public transport as well as a short-term solution to overcrowding.

Deputy Premier and Transport Minister Jackie Trad said she was "happy to have a look" but warned that finding the money would be difficult.

Queensland Rail said it "remains committed to working towards an automatic train protection system" but the current focus was on additional rolling stock.

Seventy-five "new generation" six-car trains are being manufactured in India, with the first expected to be in service by the middle of next year.

Bridge of sighs on track to meltdown

GET ON BOARD

TWEET YOUR PUBLIC TRANSPORT EXPERIENCES AT #GETMOVINGSEQ

WHAT YOU SAID

@klimblud
I have boycotted public transport. Unreliable busses, extortionate prices and long travel times. Far more economical to drive #getmovingseq

@itone62
#GetMovingSEQ change the timetable, not enough trains express to outer suburbs and after 5pm (normal working hours)

@Derwant
Transport in Brisbane at capacity by 2021. Olympics in 2028? Forget it! #GetMovingSEQ

@nhojdier
Get rid of ridiculous bus duplication like the 200/222 and the 330/333/340 #GetMovingSEQ

@PeteFTD
Lack of Federal funding shouldn't prevent QLD from investing in the strong public transport network it needs. #GetMovingSEQ #qldpol

DARYL PASSMORE

IT'S Brisbane's bridge of sighs — a bottleneck at the heart of the city's looming public transport crisis.

As the only inner-city rail crossing over the Brisbane River, Merivale Bridge is a vital link in southeast Queensland's train network.

But with only one track in each direction, it is already struggling to keep up with demand in peak periods.

The bridge will hit capacity within five years, preventing further services for the soaring passenger numbers predicted for the Gold Coast, Beenleigh and Cleveland lines.

Nineteen trains cross the bridge every weekday morning peak hour, carrying commuters from the south and east to Roma Street and Central. Official projections say 28 trains an hour will be needed to cope with demand by 2021, rising to 33 by 2031.

The bridge, however, cannot carry more than 24 and there is no funded plan in place to change that.

The Bligh government's Cross River Rail proposal for two 10km single-track train tunnels was tossed out by the Newman government in favour of its combined double-decker rail and bus tunnel project, known as the Bat Tunnel.

Following the LNP's defeat at January's state election, both proposals will be reviewed before one is submitted to the new Building Queensland major infrastructure agency for cost/benefit assessment.

"We need a second river crossing for heavy rail," Deputy Premier and Transport Minister Jackie Trad said.

"The Labor Government acknowledges that. We are working hard to progress how we get there."

But with the Federal Government refusing to help pay for public transport infrastructure, Ms Trad admits options for finding more than $5 billion that is needed for an alternative crossing are limited.

The Merivale Bridge is just one of several serious bottlenecks in the rail system.

Another is the crucial section between Bowen Hills and Roma Street, where the entire suburban system is funnelled into just four tracks.

Between them, they can handle a maximum of 88 trains an hour.

Currently, 70 are operating and that is forecast to reach 83 within six years.

An environmental-impact statement prepared for the Bat Tunnel project said: "As well as the inner-city tunnels and stations, the approach routes ... are also constrained, limiting capacity into the inner city.

"For example, services from Milton (on the four-track western line) and Park Road (Beenleigh, Gold Coast and Cleveland trains on the three-track southern line) must merge to access the Brisbane CBD via only four tracks to the southwest of Roma Street Station."

Both Labor's Cross River Rail and the LNP's Bat Tunnel would have overcome the inner-city rail gridlock with tunnels and underground stations. The Bat project would have enabled an extra 16 trains in and out of the city during the morning peak by 2021.

Plea for federal funding support

SARAH VOGLER

THE Palaszczuk Government is banking on a change of heart from the Federal Government, or an influx of private cash, to get key public transport projects off the ground.

Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk has vowed to continue to fight "tooth and nail" for federal infrastructure funding and has renewed her call for Prime Minister Tony Abbott to either allow Queensland access to a $5 billion infrastructure fund without selling assets or grant a one-off payment.

If that doesn't work, partnering with the private sector may be the only hope to build projects such as a second cross-river rail link in Brisbane or a duplication of the Sunshine Coast rail line.

"We are seeing Queensland locked out of any infrastructure funding ... and it is not good enough," Ms Palaszczuk said. "My message to Tony Abbott is very clear. If you can give Western Australia a one-off deal for GST, you can give Queensland a one-off deal for capital infrastructure."

Deputy Premier Jackie Trad yesterday delivered the message straight to Mr Abbott as the pair sat on stage together at Brisbane's Paniyiri Greek Festival.

"I took the opportunity after the formalities to raise with him the need for southeast Queensland to have a second river crossing for heavy rail," Ms Trad said.

"He said to me that there were no payments available for urban rail or urban public transport infrastructure unless we wanted to go through the asset recycling/asset sales program."

Ms Trad said she believed Queensland should not miss out on funding because of its stance on asset sales.

"Queenslanders have had two elections on asset sales and they have made their views very clear," she said.

Ms Trad said talks were also under way with the private sector and blamed the LNP for the delay in building the cross-river rail because it rejected a deal with the former federal government.

GET ON BOARD

TWEET YOUR PUBLIC TRANSPORT EXPERIENCES AT #GETMOVINGSEQ

WHAT YOU SAID

@Jeffrey_Addison
Regular announcement: Next service to #Nambour is a rail bus." "Departs 7:20am from #Caboolture" 26 buses daily... #2tracks

@jacekmockl
#GetMovingSEQ ...we need flexibility in rail infr(astructre). Sydney, they set a TIDC (transport infrastructre development commission) to remove constrains in 2005. 10 years now and everyone benefits

@Virtualhyacinth
Packed buses at QUT KG. 3 not in Service #getmovingseq

@LYBA5kw
#getmovingSEQ: Just convert the SE busway to rail. Make BT reshape network around it.

@nbojdier
Stop the bus waste for a start. -50% loading across Victoria Bridge during peak hour is pathetic! #GetMovingSEQ

1pm at University of Queensland bus-stop

"Most of the buses are good, but I find some routes will be off sometimes."
Caled Roberts, 19, Taringa, student

"The 417 and 414 buses are usually late. I've waited 20 minutes for the bus before. They usually are about 5 minutes late and I have to factor that in. I'd like more buses at night time."
Sophie Perissinotto, 19, Taringa, student

"I find the public transport network OK because I only travel short distances. But it can be pretty frustrating when they are late – which happens sometimes. My biggest issue is buses leaving earlier than they say they should."
Lizzie Delaney, 21, Indooroopilly, student

"I catch the 414 and it runs once an hour, which is not often enough. Sometimes the bus doesn't turn up at all. I once had a 9am meeting and the bus didn't turn up, so I've been inconvenienced from time to time. I think for students it's worse. We need the buses more often. I also think the fares are expensive."
Mark Gould, 62, St Lucia, lecturer

"Overall I'm pretty happy with public transport in Brisbane. I don't hear too many issues, but I'm sure they do exist."
Harry Meixner, 18, Fig Tree Pocket, student

Billions in bucks to get nowhere fast

Busways at their limits and no solution in sight

DARYL PASSMORE

BRISBANE'S busway system has cost $100 million per kilometre to build, but crucial sections are already at bursting point.

The 25km web of dedicated bus corridors into the city centre has so far racked up a total bill of $2.54 billion. The latest stretch – the 1km extension from Buranda to Coorparoo – came with a $465 million price tag.

The busway network is not yet complete but Department of State Development reports prepared for the former Newman government warns: "Brisbane's South East Busway infrastructure has reached capacity, causing bottlenecks at key points."

More than 500 bus services an hour head into the CBD at the morning peak.

Traffic volumes on the busiest section – between Woolloongabba junction and the Allen St exit to the Pacific Motorway – "are recognised as among the highest found anywhere in the developed world," the report says.

The 379 buses an hour through that stretch is 79 above capacity, while the 225 buses crossing Victoria Bridge each hour is 45 more than it is meant to carry. During the morning rush hour, a bus goes through the Cultural Centre bus station every 15 seconds.

An SEQ bus network study published by Transport and Main Roads two years ago warned it was approaching a level where half of all evening peak buses through that section of the network experienced delays.

But bus numbers since then have continued to rise.

The crush of buses is not new. The department documents point out that the South East Busway hit capacity seven years ago.

That means growth in CBD-bound services from the south since then has been pushed on to the Captain Cook Bridge, creating a looming congestion problem there too.

The Palaszczuk Government is looking at options for a cross-river rail initiative, but has already ruled out any bus component.

Projections point to buses contributing to further gridlock.

Fare share for bus money

DARYL PASSMORE

WRONG TRACK: Some groups believe money for busways should be spent on rail infrastructure.

COMMUTER and motoring groups are urging the Palaszczuk Government to scrap plans for more expensive busways in Brisbane.

The Courier-Mail yesterday reported that the 25km network had so far cost $2.54 billion.

Transport and Infrastructure Minister Jackie Trad and Lord Mayor Graham Quirk both say it has been money well spent in trying to ease the city's traffic congestion and the outstanding sections should be built when funds can be found.

But RACQ general manager (advocacy) Paul Turner says the motoring organisation is "not a big fan of busways. We just don't think, bang-for-buck, busways offer enough. They do make a difference (to road congestion levels) of course ... but the same sort of funds spent on expanding the road network, with dedicated bus lanes as part of that, would have a greater impact."

Robert Dow from commuter lobby group RAIL Back on Track says it is "dream time" if the Government is considering spending billions more to extend the Eastern Busway to Capalaba and the Northern Busway to at least Chermside.

"Augmentation of existing surface roads with bus priority is all that is needed," he said.

Tony Corbett, from another commuter campaign group The Translink Ripoff, said the money spent on busways should have gone into rail infrastructure

But Ms Trad said: "They will be an enduring part of our infrastructure legacy here in Brisbane."

WHAT DO YOU THINK? ARE BUSWAYS A VALUE-FOR-MONEY SOLUTION OR WOULD FUNDS BE BETTER SPENT IN OTHER WAYS?

GET ON BOARD

TWEET YOUR PUBLIC TRANSPORT EXPERIENCES AT #GETMOVINGSEQ

Central has five years before it can't cope

DARYL PASSMORE

THE number of commuters using Brisbane's busiest railway station will have to be capped within five years.

Reports prepared for the State Government warn that Central Station will not be able to cope with commuter numbers in peak periods by 2021.

Commuters would have to be diverted to Roma Street, change their travel times or find other ways to get to work, the reports say.

Without limits, there could be safety risks to passengers.

"It really underlines how bad things are," Tony Corbett, from commuter campaign group The Translink Ripoff said.

Mr Corbett said the projected problems highlighted the need for an underground CBD rail loop including new stations to relieve the pressure.

Some 40,000 rail commuters travel into the CBD each day during the two-hour morning peak – 27,400 of them getting off or on at Central.

Congestion on platforms and access stairs is already creating "a noticeable issue" at busy times, the Department of State Development report says.

But by 2021, commuter numbers into the city centre are forecast to soar by 68 per cent to 69,200 with 46,100 of them packing Central Station. It can cope with 43,000.

"Forecast demand would exceed this capacity by 2021 unless measures are put in place to 'cap' the usage of the station," the documents say.

Transit network derailed by price

DARYL PASSMORE

SOUTHEAST Queensland commuters are forking out some of the highest public transport fares in the world.

A survey of 20 services around Australia and across the globe shows only travel in London and some Scandinavian cities is more costly than Brisbane.

"And the difference is that those above us actually have brilliant public transport systems, whereas we have the worst service and for among the highest prices," Tony Corbett, spokesman for lobby group TransLink Rip-Off said.

The data, compiled by transport blogsite BrizCommuter, shows local travellers pay more than those using some of the world's leading networks including Hong Kong's Mass Transit Railway, the Paris Metro and New York's subway.

And Queensland is unique among Australian states in not giving public transport fare concessions to healthcare card holders, disadvantaging hundreds of thousands of unemployed and low earners.

A review of fares throughout Translink's network of buses, trains and ferries was an election platform promise of the new Palaszczuk Government.

Deputy Premier and Transport Minister Jackie Trad said it would be "expert-led" but no details of it have yet been released.

"Obviously one of the things people have raised consistently is the affordability of our fares structure," she said.

"And it's fair to say that if you take on board the plummeting number of people actually using the system, concerns about affordability and the fact that we need to do something to fundamentally address the congestion issue, it makes sense that we review the fare structure."

TransLink said taxpayers subsidised every public transport fare by 75 per cent.

But Queensland Consumer Association spokesman Ian Jarratt said the cost was still "very expensive" and a comprehensive overhaul was needed to bring fares down to encourage greater patronage and avoid road congestion.

Queensland Council of Social Service chief executive Mark Henley said he hoped the review would finally bring transport concessions to people with healthcare cards.

"The lack of access to affordable public transport is a clear barrier to people being able to get out and search for job opportunities and interviews," he said.

ON YOUR MARKS

Which journey is fastest on a morning peak hour journey from Oxford St Bulimba to Post Office Square in the CBD?

CAR
45 minutes
Adelaide Gee

"The journey was painful. The traffic congestion made the whole experience frustrating"

BUS
1 hour 3 minutes
Emily Russell

Route 230
Oxford Street to Adelaide St, CBD
Walk to Post Office Square

"It was stop-start, bumper to bumper for the whole journey. I can't believe the trip took so long"

TRAIN
51 minutes
Lucy Jones

Car from Oxford Street to Morningside train station 7:49am train from Morningside to Central Station
Walk to Post Office Square

"The train journey was 22 minutes but there was a lot of traffic getting to the station"

CAR FASTEST, BOAT NICEST ON DAILY SLOG

DARYL PASSMORE

IT'S quicker by car – if you can handle the stress.

The Courier-Mail put Brisbane's transport system to the test yesterday morning, using four different modes to see how they measured up during the morning commuter peak.

Our four volunteers left Oxford St, Bulimba, at 7.30am bound for the same destination – Post Office Square in the CBD.

Despite public transport's purported aim of beating the grind of road gridlock, when it comes down to travel time, the car is still king.

Our car driver was first to arrive, even after finding a parking space.

But the speed came at a cost to her nerves.

For those who took the bus and rail, it was more crush hour than rush hour, packed into crowded vehicles. But the train topped its road rival by a good 14 minutes.

River plan still leaves buses in a jam

MATTHEW KILLORAN
DARYL PASSMORE

A REVIVAL of the Cross River Rail plan will not fix the city's public transport woes, Brisbane Lord Mayor Graham Quirk has warned.

He said bus lines were close to capacity at the major Cultural Centre thoroughfare, yet the State Government was ignoring buses in its public transport pitch.

"I've made it clear to the state that doing a Cross River Rail is fine for rail but it won't solve capacity issues for the bus network," he said.

"I've said to them that Cross River Rail will not solve the Government's problems.

"There's nothing on the table in terms of bus infrastructure – it's not even in consideration at this stage, to my knowledge."

CHOCKERS AWAY: Graham Quirk. Picture: Darren England

The Palaszczuk Government is reviewing both the BaT tunnel proposed by the LNP, which would have seen a dual bus and train tunnel, and Labor's earlier Cross River Rail proposal.

Deputy Premier Jackie Trad has said elements of both may be used in the final public transport infrastructure model, but she has ruled out any bus component being included.

"The LNP's BaT tunnel was still at fantasy stage," she said. "No funding was allocated or committed for construction, the final alignment for the project was not endorsed, the necessary properties were not acquired, the final approvals were not in place, and no contracts were let for construction works."

Cr Quirk said buses already went through the Cultural Centre nexus at a rate of one every 15 seconds, while the BaT tunnel would have taken 200 buses off CBD roads during peak hours.

Cheap approach creates an expensive future headache

BUS bosses say a "save money at all costs" approach by governments will set back public transport years.

Queensland Bus Industry Council executive director David Tape said fighting between levels of government not only threatened to delay infrastructure but discouraged operators from improving fleets and network efficiencies.

Mr Tape said major investment was urgently needed to extend busways, add bus priority lanes to roads and build park-and-ride facilities.

He said transport needs also had to be factored in to developments at the start. "It will take both sides of politics and all sides of government to make this happen," Mr Tape said. "If we get too far behind in infrastructure investment, we will never catch up."

The Courier-Mail's #Getmovingseq series has highlighted a looming crisis as the public transport system reaches capacity over the next five years.

The Queensland Government said it needed Federal Government support to pay for key projects.

Buses carried more than 188 million passengers across Queensland in 2013-14, accounting for 69 per cent of public transport trips.

DARYL PASSMORE

The cruisiest start to the day came on the CityCat, the second-slowest journey but the most pleasant.

Adelaide Gee, 23, drove to the CBD but didn't enjoy the experience. "The journey was painful," she said. "For about 20 minutes of the trip, we were only moving at 10 to 20km/h."

Emily Russell, 21, took the bus. "I can't believe the trip took so long," she said. "The bus was packed with passengers and a lot had to stand."

Lucy Jones, 22, took the train, but the drive to Morningside took nearly as long as the train journey.

"It was a comfortable trip and if I had to commute regularly, I would probably choose the train," she said.

Hannah Haidley, 17, arguably had the most relaxed trip, taking the ferry from Bulimba.

"It was quiet and smooth. I would definitely use the CityCat if I lived in that area," she said.

Empty buses clog city streets while suburban commuters left stranded

DARYL PASSMORE

HUNDREDS of half-empty buses pour into Brisbane every day, clogging city streets, while suburban travellers struggle for regular services.

State Government figures show more than 550 buses arrive in the CBD during the morning peak-hour alone. That number is forecast to almost double to 1000 in the next 16 years.

But two-thirds of them are less than half-full. Across the whole day, 78 per cent of city services have less than 50 per cent occupancy.

Rather than alleviating gridlock, the under-occupied buses are part of the problem.

"Buses must mix with general traffic on major roads and city streets and compete for time and/or space with other road users at major intersections," reports prepared for the previous Newman government say.

Buses are frequently forced to queue back on to the Riverside Expressway off-ramp and Adelaide and Elizabeth streets both handle more than their official bus capacity.

Edward and Ann streets are also affected.

Robert Dow, spokesman for commuter lobby group RAIL Back On Track, says it highlights the need for an overhaul of Brisbane's bus routes. "The bus network for Brisbane is a disgraceful mess," he said. "It is extraordinarily complex. There are too many buses where they are not required, we flood the CBD with too many buses while leaving too few in the suburbs. Entire suburbs are black holes left without frequent services."

Instead of spending billions on expanding busways and extra buses, Mr Dow says authorities should be making better use of the existing Brisbane Transport 1179-vehicle fleet by redesigning routes.

The last TransLink review of the SEQ bus network in 2012-13 was a debacle, with the City Council-owned Brisbane Transport refusing to be part of it. The State Government handed it over to the Council, which made minimal changes to services.

Busload of ideas to ease squeeze

DARYL PASSMORE

NEW buses carrying up to 150 passengers would be used on some of Brisbane's busiest routes under a plan from commuter campaigners.

Lobby group RAIL Back On Track has drawn up a detailed overhaul of the city's bus network that it claims would give Brisbane the nation's best bus network within two years.

The proposal includes articulated buses up to 18.75m long running every 10 minutes along the dedicated busways and other major roads between the CBD and suburban interchanges and key destinations.

Spokesman Robert Dow said the services would free up smaller buses to shuttle passengers between the suburbs and the interchange hubs.

Filling up with passengers from feeder services at key hubs would take hundreds of half-empty buses out of the city centre.

"It would operate almost like a light rail system," Mr Dow said. "We envisage electric buses would be used in the future, recharged from renewable sources."

A TransLink spokesman confirmed officials recently met the group to discuss the proposed network reform.

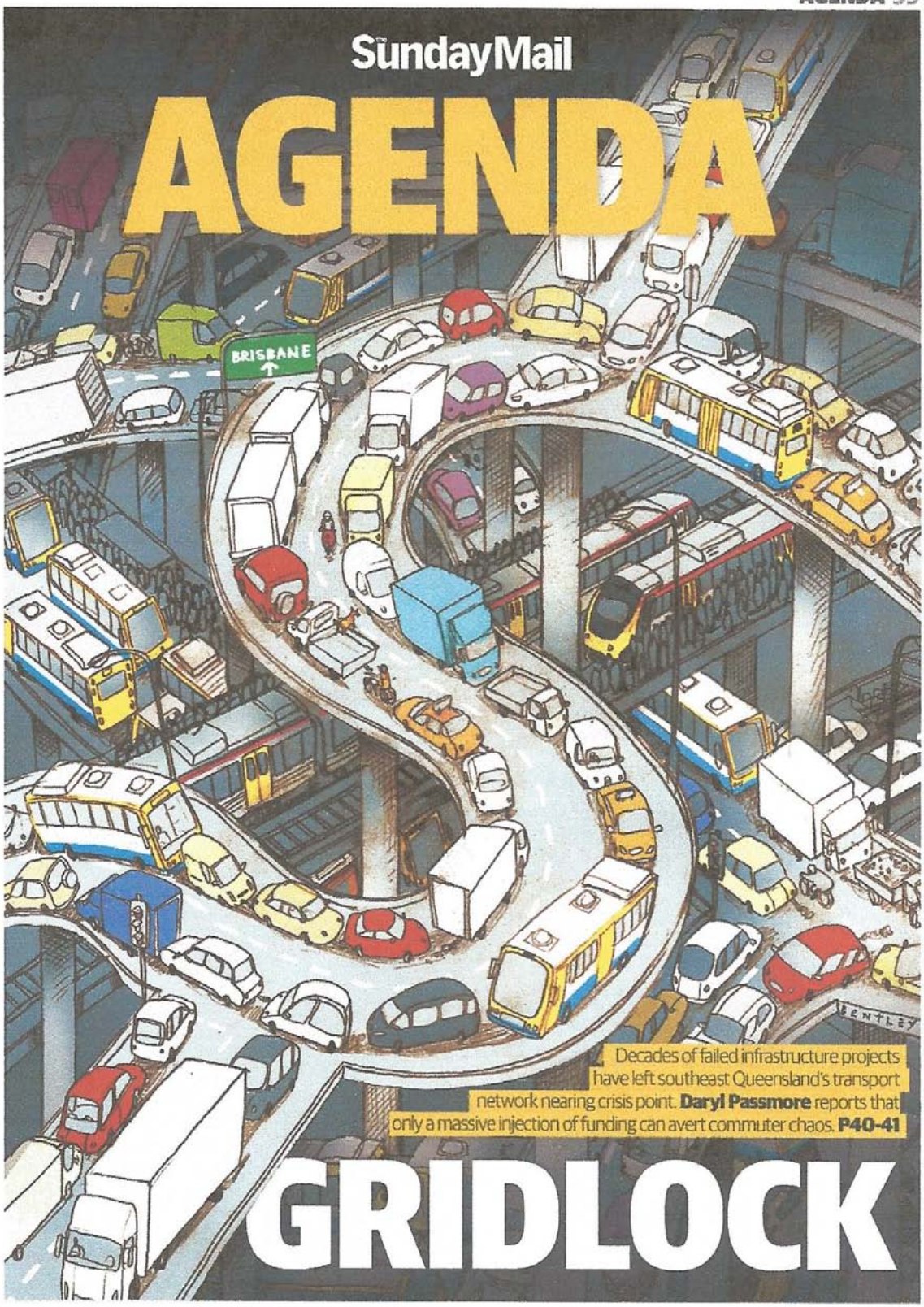
Queensland Bus Industry Council executive director David Tape said frequency was the key to more patronage.

"We need to look at network efficiencies," he said. "I'm sure there are more improvements that can be made."

But Brisbane City Council still insists no major changes to the network are needed.

A council spokesman said 30 of the 1179-bus fleet were 18m vehicles with a capacity of 97 passengers.

"Council's articulated buses could have a passenger capacity (seated and standing) of 130 people through variation to the seating configuration," he said. "However, we prefer to maximise seating options for passengers."



The SundayMail

AGENDA

Decades of failed infrastructure projects have left southeast Queensland's transport network nearing crisis point. **Daryl Passmore** reports that only a massive injection of funding can avert commuter chaos. **P40-41**

GRIDLOCK

COUNTING DOWN TO MAYHEM

A looming public transport crisis in Queensland appears far from resolution and a federal audit has some dire warnings for us if the political paralysis continues, writes **Daryl Passmore**

DESPITE their party differences, it could should be a political marriage made in heaven.

On one side, Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk, propelled to power on a promise of creating jobs for Queenslanders.

On the other, Prime Minister Tony Abbott with a self-declared wish to be remembered as "the infrastructure prime minister".

And facing them both – a looming public transport crisis in southeast Queensland. A crisis that can be averted only by massive investment in building infrastructure that would employ thousands of people.

Big-ticket projects such as a new rail crossing under the Brisbane River, duplication of the Sunshine Coast rail link and connecting the Gold Coast's light rail system to the train network will cost billions.

But the economic damage caused by not building them will run into many billions more.

"Without further investment, the cost of congestion across Brisbane, the Gold Coast and the Sunshine Coast could increase from $1.9 billion in 2011 to $9.2 billion in 2031," the Australian Infrastructure Audit released last month says.

Average trip speeds across southeast Queensland will drop by 25 per cent as roads become increasingly gridlocked, it says.

Releasing the audit, Assistant Federal Minister for Infrastructure Jamie Briggs warned bluntly: "Queensland is at risk of grinding to a halt and being left in New South Wales' wake as billions of investment dollars continue to flow south to Sydney's booming infrastructure market while major projects like the Brisbane Cross River rail and the second stage of the Gold Coast light rail remain in limbo."

As *The Courier-Mail* and *The Sunday Mail*'s #getmovingseq series has highlighted, the clock is quickly running down in the race to avoid commuter chaos.

Queensland's population is projected to rise by almost two million to 6.4 million within 16 years and seven in 10 of those additional people will be in the southeast region.

State government reports show that demand from rail passengers in Brisbane will soar 84 per cent from 214,500 a day to 395,000 by 2021 and to 558,000 a decade after that.

Within six years, trains will overtake buses as the city's main mode of public transport. However, bus travel will still rise 53 per cent from 248,800 a day to 381,300 by 2021 and 496,600 in 2031.

Parts of the bus system – including sections of the $2.5 billion busways network – are already at, or beyond, capacity. And the inner city section of the rail network will be unable to cope with any extra trains six years from now.

Meanwhile, gridlock on the roads will intensify. Eight out of 10 commuter trips are by car and the number of private vehicle trips across Brisbane will rise 23 per cent to 5.75 million a day by 2021.

"Brisbane will have the highest congestion growth rate of all Australian capital cities over the next decade," Australasian Railway Association acting chief operating officer Phil Allan says.

An ARA-commissioned study by Synergies Economic Consulting last year found a rail-oriented strategy for congestion-busting would cost less than half of one focused on new roads.

Michael Roth, executive manager of public policy at motoring body RACQ, says: "It's not about rail versus roads, it's about investing in the specific projects that deliver transport outcomes. The main point is they need to get on with it. This is an issue that will keep getting worse until it is resolved."

But infrastructure experts say the silence in Queensland on major government-funded projects such as the crucial transport initiatives is deafening.

"It's looking as flat as a tack," head of business analyst BIS Shrapnel's infrastructure and mining unit Adrian Hart

LITANY OF PROJECT FAILURES AND THE ODD SUCCESS

THE road to today's looming transport crisis has been a long and winding one.

At its peak in 1944, Brisbane's tram system (the last tram ran in 1969, pictured below) was carrying 160 million passengers a year – only just shy of the 175 million who travel on buses, trains and ferries today. An inner city subway system was first considered, and rejected, in 1970 by the Bjelke-Petersen government. Repeated studies, glossy reports, media launches, changing governments and shelved projects have led to nearly two decades of indecision and inaction, punctuated by the occasional success.

1997 BRIZTRAM

The Howard government committed $65 million from its Federation Fund towards premier Rob Borbidge's plan for a $230 million 14km light railway network linking Fortitude Valley, Newstead, West End, the CBD, South Bank, the Royal Brisbane Hospital, Roma St and UQ. But it was dumped the following year by the incoming Peter Beattie-led Labor government, partly due to strong opposition from South Brisbane MP Anna Bligh. "It wouldn't have solved all our problems, but it would certainly have helped," Borbidge says.

1997 Busways

Building on an earlier City Council proposal, the State Government began planning what has become a $2.5 billion network of dedicated busways and stations. The first section opened in 2000 and the routes now cover 25km, but some sections have already exceeded capacity. The Government and council want the Eastern and Northern Busways extended but there is no funding.

1998 Brisbane light rail

Rebadged, 3km shorter and with a greater focus on serving the city centre and connecting to new planned busway stations, BRIZTRAM resurfaced as Brisbane light rail under the Beattie government but was dropped when expressions of interests to build it were too expensive.

1998 Gold Coast Light Rail

It may have taken 16 years but Gold Coast Light Rail – first proposed in the local council's integrated transport plan – finally became a reality last year. Running 13km between Broadbeach and the University Hospital, "the G" as it is dubbed, carries 17,800 commuters daily, well above projections.

The Palaszczuk Government has given in-principle support to expanding it to Helensvale to join the main rail line to Brisbane, preferably in time for the 2018 Commonwealth Games, but says it requires federal funding.

2004 TransApex

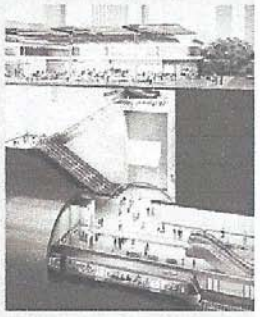
New lord mayor Campbell "Can Do" Campbell was elected with a congestion-busting plan for toll tunnels and bridges. The final project – the $1.5 billion Legacy Way tunnel is due to open this month – following the CLEM7, Go-Between Bridge and AirportLink. But vehicle numbers have fallen well below predictions on most and the public-private partnership model saw investors lose billions of dollars.

2007 Smart City Light Rail

Premier Beattie and lord mayor Newman agreed on a $250 million plan for a tram system to rival Melbourne's. It would link South Brisbane with New Farm and possibly Bowen Hills, with the possibility of expanding it to the busways later. But as estimated costs escalated, City Hall distanced themselves and it joined other plans on the shelf.

2008 Inner City Rail

Premier Anna Bligh unveiled a $14 billion vision for a "21st century underground rail network" featuring four lines, a series of tunnels and possible underground stations at Spring Hill, the CBD, Newstead, The Ekka, Woolloongabba and West End.



NO CASH. The State Government's stand against asset sales leaves it at a disadvantage, says Deputy PM Warren Truss. Pictures: Jack Tran

says of infrastructure activity here.

"I think it would be fair to say people are fairly gloomy in their outlook around Queensland's infrastructure sector. There is a lack of information about what it (the State Government) wants to do or how it is going to pay for it."

From a peak of $10.3 billion in 2009, publicly-funded infrastructure spending in Queensland has dipped to $6.1 billion. In the southeast, it has halved from $8.3 billion to $4.1 billion over the same period and is expected to remain there for the next four years.

The drop-off in government work was hidden by private sector infrastructure spending in recent years. But with the downturn in mining and major developments such as the LNG facilities at Gladstone reaching completion, that will plummet from 2014's high of $35 billion to $10 billion in 2017.

Hurt says Queensland's engineering construction workforce was expected to shrink by 40,000 to 190,000 by 2018.

"The private sector side is being wiped out over the next few years," he says. "This is exactly the time when you would hope governments have got their act together and invest in projects which they know are necessary and where you get good value."

With construction costs down and interest rates at record lows, there could not be a better time for public investment, he says.

"Instead, we have a situation where governments are rewriting what their priorities are and by the time they work it out, it will be too late."

BY THE TIME THEY WORK OUT THEIR PRIORITIES IT WILL BE TOO LATE

Deputy Premier and Transport and Infrastructure Minister Jackie Trad says the Palaszczuk Government wants to proceed with a new cross-river rail project in central Brisbane, extend the Gold Coast light rail to meet the main Brisbane line before 2018 Commonwealth Games and expand the Sunshine Coast rail duplication between Beerburrum and Landsborough.

All will be referred to the newly established Building Queensland body set up to assess major projects. But she says such "transformative" and "nation-building" initiatives must get federal funding.

Recent public transport projects including the new rail link to Kippa-Ring and stage one of the Gold Coast light rail were funded with contributions from all three levels of government.

The Abbott Government, though, will only put money into public transport infrastructure as part of its $5 billion Assets Recycling Initiative. Having won power opposing the previous LNP government's asset-leasing program, the Palaszczuk Government cannot participate. "The Queensland Government's decision not to sell its assets leaves Queensland at a disadvantage," Deputy Prime Minister Warren Truss says simply.

As if to reinforce his argument, the NSW Parliament this week voted in favour of a partial sale of its power network and the very next day announced it would go ahead with a rail tunnel under the Sydney Harbour as part of an $11 billion 30km "Sydney Metro" line linking the western suburbs to the north shore.

Truss defended the Federal Government's commitment to transport in Queensland, saying it was investing $134 billion on infrastructure, including the Bruce Highway improvements, Gateway Motorway North upgrade, Toowoomba Second Range Crossing and Warrego Highway upgrade.

But last month's Federal Budget contained no new projects for the Sunshine State, and $200 million previously earmarked has been delayed for three years.

2015 Cross River Rail (Mark II)

The Palaszczuk Government is reviewing its original CRR and the BaT Tunnel and says elements of each may be included in a new model – but definitely no bus component.

Labor says it is committed to some form of cross-river rail but can't fund it without federal government support.

2013 BaT Tunnel

The Newman government's bold $5 billion plan for a two-level tunnel carrying both trains and buses 5.4km underground from Dutton Park to Victoria Park, with new stations at Woolloongabba, George St and Roma St. It was to be funded from asset sales and private investment but shelved when the LNP lost this January's state election.

READY TO ROLL. Deputy Premier and Transport and Infrastructure Minister Jackie Trad says the Government is keen to act on several projects but they need federal funding.

2010 Cross River Rail

Parts of the inner city rail idea were included in a broader "rail revolution" heralded in the Bligh government's "Connecting SEQ 2031" document which included a corridor for a future alternative line north out of the city. The Cross River Rail component was scaled back from $8 billion to a $4.4 billion "core" project, including twin 10km tunnels between Yeerongpilly and Victoria Park and four underground stations. Infrastructure Australia made it their No.1 project and the Labor Federal Government agreed to match Queensland's $715 million to get started. But it was dumped by the incoming Newman government in 2012.

2013 The Cleveland Solution

A cut-price ($2.5 billion) alternative to Cross River Rail, proposed by Lord Mayor Graham Quirk. The plan featured a new railway line from Park Rd station, via a tunnel to Woolloongabba, a bridge ov the river and via another tunnel to an undergrounc station at Roma St and th to the surface up the Exhibition line to a new Bowen Hills (west) station But the proposal was not adopted by the State Government.