# How high is the dome?

***How high is the dome Mr Thodey etc?[[1]](#endnote-1)***

## Introduction

Why Mr Thodey?

He is chairing a review of the Commonwealth public service. [[2]](#endnote-2)

The review has published a draft report. The draft does not mention something for which there is overwhelming evidence at least in the infrastructure and transport portfolio: public servants not taking pride in their work. Rather dishing-up crap.

## An affront

The latest heap to offend the beagle’s sensibilities arrived the other day. Proving the otherwise sensible the Hon. Anthony Albanese MP is not the only one to have recurrent visions – or worse - of bullshit – or worse.[[3]](#endnote-3)

It is a Fast Rail Plan for 20 years. Signalling political and bureaucratic diarrhoea. For two decades? Institutionalised via a new commission or something. Robbing you of public money. Why not call the enema bandit and get it over with.[[4]](#endnote-4)

Who said the infrastructure bureaucracy was irredeemably incompetent? They were right.

## Your money at work

What are you getting for your public money? What are new fruits of the labours of the political and administrative classes? Here are a few bon mots from the worse than worthless 17-page pamphlet.[[5]](#endnote-5)

Let’s start with the purpose:

*‘To better align future population growth with long term infrastructure investment’*

That is: populate to try justify infrastructure spending.

Next. Action on the plan:

*‘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…’*.

After spending $20million on studies, the next step is to spend $2billion on one of the few things that wasn’t studied. Next please!

*‘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* ‘

Readers would realise officials have a chip on their shoulder about Wollongong e.g.:

* stopping the national transport network at the foot of Mount Ousley 5km or so to the west of the city – supposedly because they ran out of money;
* proposing high speed rail is kept well away from the area – while, of course, assuming people from the Illawarra would drive up to the Southern Highlands just to catch the train;
* the curious white-anting of the Maldon-Dombarton proposal.[[6]](#endnote-6)

But don’t the officials realise the current railway line isn’t under their influence – yet.

True the trains are slow, but this is not due to single-track. The line from Sydney to Wollongong is almost entirely double-tracked, meaning trains don’t have to wait to pass each other. Which they don’t do – unduly wait - on single-track lines either.

Does this presage a Departmental ‘nation building’ proposal? To single-track a double-track line?

Next:

*‘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.’*

Why ‘average’? And faster (or slower) is not an adjective used for journey times. Faster journeys, yes. Journey times shorter, halved, yes. Halving faster journey times, NO. And relating average journey times to higher frequencies or network reliability; NO. In fact, the opposite might be true.

Next is the credibility destroying:

*‘Other rail corridors would be funded subsequent to this. This could include: ….. • Sydney to Canberra • Sydney to Parkes (via Bathurst and Orange)….• Melbourne to Albury-Wodonga ……. • Brisbane to Toowoomba ‘*

None of which have any chance of achieving the relevant one-hour transit time and most of which would be undercut by the more efficient and effective airlines.

To ensure everyone gets the message that the report is a sham, an even more obvious straw-man:

*‘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’*

One could be uncouth and refer to the ‘expertise’ of the latest high-speed rail panel inflicted on Newcastle, Wollongong etc.[[7]](#endnote-7)

Yet couthly the beagle asks: if the Expert Panel is to do what is said, what will the new Agency do? Is its sole purpose to be an organisation that is subsumed by the Department?

Next:

*‘The Australian Government is committing $2 billion to help deliver this transformational upgrade. We will be seeking matched funding from the Victorian Government……. 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’*

$4.0bn to complement $0.4bn. I guess it does. Getting ‘comped’ Canberra style certainly beats a free room in Vegas. [[8]](#endnote-8)

Next:

*‘the current rail service is often over capacity…….. 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.’*

Averaging up to? And what do faster trains do for crowding? Will passengers fall-off because the train is going so fast? Or is the idea the passengers only stand for a half hour? At twice the speed?

And why is the Commonwealth doing this?

*‘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.’*

Which is simply false in all relevant - legal and practical - senses. And shows no appreciation of the Commonwealth’s role in railways.

Next? You get the picture. There is more, but too much for here.

## To conclude

While Geelong-Melbourne may be among the best candidates for higher speed rail in Australia, it is not the only candidate.

The economic or social merit of public funding for any higher speed rai project has not yet been demonstrated. A public inquiry should precede any Government commitment, including of funds, to any significant rail project in Australia, including higher speed rail Geelong-Melbourne.

The Government’s present publication to support its announcement of Faster Rail is - not unexpectedly - tosh.

It misrepresents the role of the Commonwealth and its Government, misunderstands transport and railways and proposes appalling practices in infrastructure, planning and the use of public money.

Its credibility could not be further damaged if it said: ‘the dome is 12,000 miles high’. Its sole saving grace is that the Commonwealth’s spell-check works a lot better than the beagle’s.

In my view the above shows more than just typical politically vacuous proselytising. It indicates the authors, editors and approvers do not take pride in their work. This is a problem not identified by Mr Thodey’s review. Nor did his review identify an associated and perhaps causal problem – an absence of bases for Commonwealth ‘roles’.

By the way, the next time the Government and Department want to steal an idea like higher speed rail Geelong-Melbourne, they should contact the author of the idea - if not to understand the key points then just as a courtesy.

And ring the relevant Premier a bit earlier than the night before ‘the launch’.[[9]](#endnote-9)

6 April 2019

1. <https://www.pinterest.com.au/pin/302656037444277360/> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.apsreview.gov.au/priorities> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. <https://johnmenadue.com/john-austen-high-speed-rail-bite-the-bullet-please/> [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. <https://justcriminals.info/2016/11/12/illinois-enema-bandit-1975/> [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. <https://infrastructure.gov.au/rail/trains/faster_rail/index.aspx> [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. <https://www.thejadebeagle.com/the-dog-that-didnt-bark.html> [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. <https://www.thejadebeagle.com/high-speed-rail---a-note.html> [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=comped> [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. <https://www.theage.com.au/politics/victoria/fast-rail-to-geelong-do-they-really-think-we-re-that-stupid-20190322-p516kh.html> [↑](#endnote-ref-9)