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Malcolm Turnbull's government can widen its infrastructure view beyond roads



Road and rail: Infrastructure players hope the new Turnbull government will take a wider view of transport needs than the previous Abbott government. Simon O'Dwyer



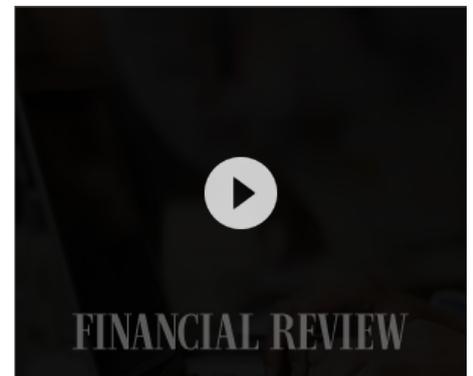
by Michael Bleby

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull could widen the federal government's view about infrastructure beyond spending money on roads, infrastructure players say.

It was crucial for the new government to treat transport in particular, as a single system of railways and roads, rather than as one or the other, rail advocate and former deputy prime minister Tim Fischer said.

"We must have a balanced focus from Canberra," Mr Fischer told *The Australian Financial Review* on Tuesday. "I always thought it was one of those curiosities that the (Warringah) electorate of the previous prime minister Tony Abbott had zero commuter railway stations, whereas the (Wentworth) electorate of the new Prime Minister has several commuter railway stations."

Mr Turnbull, who [in July highlighted his use of commuter rail](#) following the helicopter scandal that claimed former speaker Bronwyn Bishop's political scalp, could break the politically partisan deadlock over infrastructure modes.



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Other politicians were quick to talk infrastructure [after Mr Turnbull's party-room victory over Mr Abbott](#) on Monday night. Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews said he hoped the new federal government [would permit the state to use the \\$3 billion in federal funding](#) for the cancelled East West Link road-and-tunnel project for the state's planned Melbourne Metro rail project. Shadow infrastructure minister Anthony Albanese on Tuesday said Mr Turnbull should immediately repudiate Mr Abbott's "absurd refusal" to invest in public transport.

PARTISANSHIP MAY END

The new Turnbull government could end the party-political, road-v-rail argument, said Brendan Lyon, the chief executive officer of policy group Infrastructure Partnerships Australia.

"The last few years has seen the Abbott government back road projects and Labor back railways, when everyone knows we need both working together," Mr Lyon said. "Federal funding for good state rail projects would be good policy, given that congestion is a drag on the national economy, and smart politically because it neuters Labor's opportunity to attack the Coalition on rail funding and cities."

Some people were cautious about the new administration.

"We do not expect that the leadership change will lead to changes to projects either currently being planned or under way," said Ian Shepherd, the chief executive of engineering consultancy GHD.

But others were more optimistic. Greg Steele the managing director of Hyder Australasia and chairman of the Transport Reform Network, said he hoped Mr Turnbull would back the lobby group's move to replace fuel excises with road user charging.

"It has the potential to engage super funds," Mr Steele said.

"We are certainly hopeful that Prime Minister Turnbull... will be more considerate of the need to provide federal funds to support essential city-shaping road and rail projects," said Committee for Melbourne chief executive Kate Roffey.

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