



Mr David Singleton FTSE is a member of the Swinburne University of Technology Board, a Director of Standards Australia Ltd, a Non-Executive Director of The Future Business Council and Chairman of the Infrastructure Sustainability Council of Australia. He worked with the global consulting group Arup for 41 years, holding a series of global and regional leadership roles. He also chairs ATSE's Infrastructure Forum.

WE NEED BETTER INFRASTRUCTURE DECISIONS AND PLANNING

BY DAVID SINGLETON, CHAIRMAN, INFRASTRUCTURE SUSTAINABILITY COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA

Leaders must think strategically about how to plan, fund and implement projects, says David Singleton.

The pace at which urban development is happening across the world in the 21st century is intense.

Highly concentrated demographic growth in cities is one of the greatest challenges that leaders face as they look to protect the future of their nations in the face of the global sustainability challenge.

There are few easy answers to the question "What does it take to make cities better?" But many of the possible pathways to better cities are intrinsically linked to infrastructure provision.

Cities which make wise infrastructure investments have proven success at meeting future economic, environmental and social needs.

Improved understanding of the interactions between infrastructure provision, the needs and aspirations of the population served, and technology and sustainability both now and into the future is essential for our nation's prosperity.

In an Australian context, the combined population of Australia's capital cities will grow by nearly 16 million by 2061, and the proportion of Australians living in a capital city will significantly increase – from 66 per cent in 2011 to 69.3 per cent in 2031, and 73.4 per cent in 2061.

These "medium" projections suggest that the population of Melbourne will grow to 8.6 million by 2061, Sydney to 8.5 million, Perth to 5.5 million and Brisbane to 4.8 million.

The implications of this population growth for urban infrastructure needs will be significant.

As a consequence, Australia faces several difficult decades and must come to grips with a backlog of infrastructure investment that has been – and will continue to be – exacerbated by

population growth, by increasing demand and by the impacts of climate change.

Australia's lack of transparency in infrastructure decision making has often led to inefficiency and community distrust, and has constrained informed debate about the implied trade-offs: which projects, service outcomes, priorities, funding, and so on.

To get the greatest value from future infrastructure investments, leaders must think more strategically about how to plan, fund and implement these projects.

This could include:

- Creating platforms to engage the public in discussions about investment decisions
- Creating greater transparency around spending
- Incorporating environmental and social issues into decision-making
- Partnering with the private sector to find new sources of funding and design ideas.

Robust infrastructure planning would allow industry to develop effective delivery plans and better workforce management, particularly in engineering.

Economic, social and environmental benefits, such as jobs growth and creation, reduced demand through efficiency, equity of public and economic assets and reduced greenhouse gas emissions, will accrue as a result of the development of sustainable long-term infrastructure.

Cooperation with communities and collaboration across sectors will result in speedier delivery of more successful high-quality infrastructure that accounts for the needs of all affected parties.

Governments should develop a citizen jury approach for consulting with

people, so that sound infrastructure decisions can be made.

When leaders take the time to learn from each other's successes and failures, infrastructure challenges can be overcome.

Achieving this will involve continuing to take advantage of the financial resources and innovation brought to the table by the private sector, as well as integrating community feedback into operations through ongoing engagement and stakeholder management.

Together, these strategies will help leaders to transition our nation for the future and will ensure that our cities can attract the investment and global talent that can enable their economies to grow.

WHAT IS A CITIZEN JURY?

Citizen juries involve the wider community in the decision-making process. Participants are engaged as citizens, with no formal alignments or allegiances, rather than experts. Citizen juries use a representative sample of citizens who are briefed in detail on the background and current thinking relating to a particular issue, and asked to discuss possible approaches.

Citizen juries are intended to complement other forms of consultation rather than replace them. Citizens are asked to become jurors and make a judgement in the form of a report, as they would in legal juries.

The issue they are asked to consider will be one that has an effect across the community and where a representative and democratic decision-making process is required. Citizen jurors are seen to bring an intrinsic worth in the good sense and wisdom born of their own knowledge and personal experience.