

# Trust in government key to Australia's big build

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ANU research has measured public attitudes to infrastructure investment. Credit: Tracey Nearmy/ANU

The overwhelming majority of Australians say investment in infrastructure is the key to driving Australia's COVID-19 pandemic recovery, according to research by The Australian National University (ANU).

The study is the first national report on how communities think about infrastructure, their trust in government to deliver it, and the ways they are being engaged around major projects in Australia's \$290 billion infrastructure rollout.

Last month's federal budget announcement of \$17.9 billion in new infrastructure investments saw a continued focus on infrastructure, mainly in road and rail projects. The ANU research shows the importance of delivering these projects is front and center in the minds of how Australians see a "return to normal."

While 71% of Australians agree that [infrastructure investment](#) and delivery will play a key role in the nation's recovery, 68% of the 3,500 people surveyed also said that projects should be fast-tracked if it will speed recovery.

The Australian Perspectives on Infrastructure national survey, conducted by the ANU Institute for Infrastructure in Society, also shows the public is less certain about how some projects are selected.

Only 41% of respondents agree that public sector money is being spent wisely in current projects. A further 37% are neutral or unsure.

In contrast, the majority of respondents, 59%, believe [infrastructure projects](#) are approved for political reasons, while 68% agree that politicians have too much influence in impacting how infrastructure projects are selected.

Director of the ANU Institute for Infrastructure in Society Professor Sara Bice said [community members](#) are skeptical about the opportunity to genuinely influence the selection and planning of major infrastructure projects when those projects are announced by politicians.

"In our [national survey](#), more than half of over 3,500 respondents, 56%, believed that opportunities for genuine community engagement are reduced when politicians use projects as political announcements.

"Community members recognize infrastructure as highly politicized in Australia and this is undermining their trust in government to select the projects they need most," Professor Bice said.

That skepticism was underlined by results from nine further surveys of more than 1,600 community members in some of Australia's most infrastructure intensive locations.

"Community members in some of Australia's most intensive infrastructure environments told us they felt less able to influence the process and less trusting in infrastructure proponents as the impacts on them and their communities rise."

Professor Bice said the situation is exacerbated by the perceived politicization of project selection and investment.

"As a result, we see people relying on independent regulators and their fellow community members, not representative government, to ensure [infrastructure](#) developers do the right thing."

**More information:** Next Generation Engagement Program.  
[www.nextgenengagement.org/](http://www.nextgenengagement.org/)

Provided by Australian National University

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