

Infrastructure demand is growing.

How do we accelerate delivery without increasing risk?

Australia is investing heavily in transport, housing, water, energy, health and digital infrastructure. Yet many projects continue to experience delays, cost escalation and deferred benefits.

Many delays attributed to project delivery originate much earlier. They arise through unclear project pathways, duplicated business-case requirements, design processes that are not proportionate to risk, fragmented stakeholder engagement and delivery considerations being introduced too late.

Delays do more than increase project costs. They delay housing supply, constrain economic productivity and postpone the benefits that infrastructure is intended to deliver.

The challenge is no longer identifying **what needs to be built**. It's how efficiently projects move from concept to delivery.

Why are infrastructure projects becoming more difficult?

Infrastructure projects are being developed in a very different environment to a decade ago. Organisations are now managing:



escalating project development and construction costs



workforce and capability shortages



increasing governance and assurance expectations



more complex stakeholder environments



supply-chain and market-capacity pressures



planning, environmental and statutory approvals and faster delivery

At the same time, project-development processes have often accumulated additional requirements, approvals and assurance activities in response to previous project failures.

Each requirement may have a valid purpose. Collectively, however, they can create duplication, unclear accountabilities, sequential decision-making and development processes that are not proportionate to the value, complexity or risk of the project.

The result is a common challenge:

how do organisations improve the speed and quality of project development without increasing risk or compromising investment decisions?

A different approach is emerging

Risk-Based Project Pathways

Not every project requires the same development pathway, level of analysis or approval process. Leading organisations are establishing project pathways based on factors such as strategic importance, value, complexity, risk, funding certainty, delivery urgency and stakeholder impact. Identifying the appropriate pathway at project initiation provides greater clarity about the business-case, design, engagement, approval, assurance and procurement requirements that will apply. This allows suitable projects to progress more quickly while directing greater scrutiny and effort towards higher-risk and more complex investments.

Better Business-Case Processes

A faster business case is not just a shorter document. It focuses on providing the right information, at the right time, and at a level proportionate to the investment's value and risk. This can be achieved through scaled requirements, less duplication, clearer options analysis, and earlier consideration of affordability, procurement, market capacity and delivery constraints. Integrating business-case development with design, stakeholder engagement and approvals also helps ensure information is developed once and used consistently. The goal is not less analysis, but analysis proportionate to the decision being made.

Scalable Design Management

Design is essential for understanding project cost, risk, constructability and delivery requirements, but not every decision requires the same level of design maturity. Leading organisations scale design requirements to the project's stage, defining appropriate design maturity at each gate, integrating cost and schedule development, and addressing safety, value and delivery constraints early. This approach avoids unnecessary design effort while ensuring projects are sufficiently developed before procurement and delivery.

Streamlined Stakeholder Engagement

Infrastructure projects rely on input from agencies, asset owners, regulators, delivery partners and communities. When engagement is fragmented, stakeholders may be consulted multiple times and key requirements identified too late. More effective approaches align engagement to project stages, clarify responsibilities and link stakeholder input directly to decisions. The goal is not less engagement, but engagement that is targeted, coordinated and timely.

Earlier Delivery Readiness

Projects are more likely to experience delays when procurement, market capacity, land, utilities, environmental approvals and constructability are considered late or sequentially. Bringing these considerations forward can identify constraints earlier and allow suitable planning and delivery-readiness activities to occur concurrently. Earlier market engagement can test delivery assumptions, inform procurement packaging and identify capacity or supply-chain risks before a project enters the market. Clear delivery-readiness measures also help decision-makers understand whether a project is genuinely ready to progress or whether further work is required.

What high-performing organisations do differently

Across both the public and private sectors, high-performing infrastructure organisations tend to share several characteristics.

1

They establish the project pathway early

Successful organisations determine the appropriate development and delivery pathway when a project is initiated. This gives project teams and decision-makers early clarity about the work required, the decisions to be made and the evidence needed at each gate.

2

They apply requirements proportionate to risk

Strong governance, assurance and analysis are essential. However, applying the same requirements to every project can create unnecessary delay without improving decision quality. Effective organisations tailor requirements to project value, complexity, risk and readiness.

3

They connect business cases, design and delivery

Business-case, design, stakeholder, approval and procurement activities are treated as connected parts of a single project-development system rather than separate workstreams. This reduces duplication, identifies delivery constraints earlier and improves the quality and consistency of information provided to decision-makers.

4

They streamline decisions and accountabilities

Clear decision rights, approval pathways and escalation arrangements are established early. This reduces uncertainty, prevents issues moving unnecessarily between committees and enables decisions to be made at the appropriate organisational level.

5

They implement reform in practice

New frameworks and processes only improve outcomes when adopted by project teams and embedded into business-as-usual operations. High-performing organisations support reform through practical tools, training, implementation support and change management, testing new approaches on live projects, measuring results and refining them over time.

6

They focus relentlessly on outcomes

The objective is not simply to complete a business case, reach the next gate or commence construction. The objective is to make sound investment decisions and realise economic, community and service benefits sooner and more effectively.



A better question for infrastructure leaders

Much of the discussion around infrastructure focuses on speed. **The better question may be:**

*How can we improve the way projects are developed and decisions are made so that **infrastructure benefits are realised sooner while maintaining confidence in governance, investment and delivery outcomes?***

This changes the conversation:

Instead of focusing solely on acceleration, it focuses attention on the entire project-development system: project pathways, business cases, design management, stakeholder engagement, approvals, procurement, assurance, delivery readiness and organisational capability.

The OCM perspective

The organisations developing and delivering infrastructure most successfully are not necessarily taking more risk. They are better at understanding risk, applying proportionate controls and making timely, well-informed decisions.

OCM's experience supporting major infrastructure transformation programs has shown that material improvements can be achieved by reforming the processes between project initiation and delivery. This includes establishing risk-based project pathways, improving business-case processes, scaling design requirements, streamlining stakeholder engagement and approvals, bringing procurement and delivery-readiness activities forward, and applying assurance where it adds the greatest value.

The greatest benefits come when reform is supported by practical tools, clear accountabilities, implementation coordination, effective change management and capability uplift.

Better upfront project planning can reduce duplication and rework, lower development cost, improve delivery confidence and bring forward project benefit.

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