

Hillside



FAST LANE: *High-speed rail might be the answer to transport issues*

The need for speed

CALLS for high-speed rail links between Australia's biggest cities have resurfaced following recent disruptions to air travel due to volcanic ash.

The Member for Melbourne (Vic) Adam Bandt said the cancellation of flights to and from major cities was another good reason for developing alternative travel options.

"If we had high-speed rail between our big cities at the moment, the trains would be packed with happy travellers getting from Sydney to Melbourne and Sydney to Brisbane in three or four hours," he said.

"When you consider that the journey could be completed with comfortable seats, phone and internet access and a carbon footprint a mere fraction of the air equivalent, its benefits are compelling."

Mr Bandt said his office had been "bombarded" with correspondence calling for high-speed rail with trains travelling at speeds between 250 to 500 kilometres per hour.

"A high-speed rail link on Australia's east coast, through Canberra, would provide fast, reliable and sustainable transport for 75 per cent of our population," he said.

Infrastructure and Transport Minister Anthony Albanese has announced a

\$20 million feasibility study into high-speed rail which was part of the Greens' agreement to support the Gillard government.

"The Gillard Labor government has put high-speed rail back on the national agenda because of its potential to spur economic development and transform the way Australians get around this vast continent of ours," he said.

The terms of reference for the feasibility study identify the Newcastle-Sydney link as the "spine" of the core network and make it a "central aspect" of the study.

Mr Albanese said this focus is justified by the higher population density in that region that makes the economics of high-speed rail more likely to stack up.

But Mr Bandt labelled any push for a high-speed link between Sydney and Newcastle ahead of a Sydney-Canberra-Melbourne route as short-sighted.

"The Newcastle-Sydney connection is one of the most difficult parts of an east-coast high-speed rail network to engineer, probably requiring large amounts of tunnelling. Per kilometre, the Melbourne-Sydney leg will be cheaper and more cost effective, and the Sydney-Melbourne air route is the fourth-busiest air corridor in the world."

Gambling loophole discredited

A LOOPHOLE in Northern Territory law allowing online gambling companies to offer massive amounts of credit to problem gamblers has been criticised in federal parliament.

The Northern Territory and the ACT are the only jurisdictions where providing credit to gamble is neither prohibited nor heavily regulated. Online gambling companies are often licensed in the NT, which allows them to operate nationally under the more permissive NT law.

Alan Tudge (Aston, Vic) told the House of Representatives one of his constituents, a problem gambler who suffers from a number of mental illnesses, was offered \$80,000 by Sportsbet to allow him to continue gambling online.

"He was eventually unable to pay for the credit issued to him," Mr Tudge said. "[His] family home is now in jeopardy."

Mr Tudge noted gambling with credit is usually undertaken by problem gamblers only and called on the NT government to change its laws, saying he would otherwise be asking federal parliament to act.



CREDIT CRUNCH: *Gamblers get into debt online*