PRIORITISING PRECAST

NATIONAL PRECAST INDUSTRY SUPPORTS INFRASTRUCTURE AUSTRALIA'S 15-YEAR PLAN BUT CALLS FOR USE OF PREFAB TO MAXIMISE PROJECT EFFICIENCIES.

Independent statutory body Infrastructure Australia (IA) released its 15-year Australian Infrastructure Plan in February, which sets out an 'Infrastructure Priority List' of more than 90 potential projects around the country.

The plan also outlines IA's recommended fundamental changes to the way Australia plans, funds and delivers its infrastructure.

As the peak body for the precast concrete industry in Australia, National Precast Concrete Association has come out in strong support of IA's 15-year plan for the country's infrastructure. The organisation has however, also called for maximised use of offsite manufactured products when the projects that have been identified in the plan, are rolled out.

According to National Precast's CEO Sarah Bachmann, greater use of offsite manufactured products in construction is gaining momentum by all construction industry stakeholders as the holy grail of delivering maximum efficiency improvements. In this case, Ms. Bachmann strongly believes that the use of these products is the best way to make the most of the Plan and result in truly cost effective, safe, high quality projects.

Focusing on reducing urban congestion and increasing national connectivity, IA's Plan is hoping to prepare the country for 2031 - when the population is expected to hit 30 million.

According to National Precast, all of the Plan's proposed 'high priority' projects and initiatives have the ability to incorporate offsite manufactured products - such as the precast concrete which is produced by its members.

"What we sometimes see with larger infrastructure projects like the ones named in the Plan - and particularly those that are more remote – is the major builders establishing manufacturing facilities at the project sites to produce the components that are needed. It's usually a decision made in order to reduce costs," Ms. Bachmann says.


Sarah Bachmann, CEO National Precast

"Whilst there may initially be perceived cost savings, the real costs of the decision to establish on site very often ends up being higher than if the components had been sought from established factories. Site congestion, limited ability to recycle

waste, inclement weather, finding suitably skilled staff, storage issues, safety issues and production of lower classes of finish can all eventuate as problems when components are cast in temporary facilities," she says. "In the long run the actual site costs can be higher than initially predicted. Because these higher costs often aren't considered at the start when tenders are being considered, the better decision in hindsight can turn out to be the one to buy the components in."

According to Ms. Bachmann, the alternative of buying in components offers superior outcomes.

"The beauty of offsite manufactured products like precast, is that components are manufactured in purpose-built factories, with highly specialised workers. This ensures the highest of quality products that are Australian Standard and code compliant," she says.

Safety is another benefit of using offsite manufactured elements like precast, explains Ms. Bachmann.

"When products are made on site, there is an enormous amount of activity. All of the site congestion with labour, deliveries and storage, waste, and of course more activity, can lead to unsafe sites," she says.

"The beauty of using off site manufactured products is that with all of that activity removed and instead being done in a factory, not only is there much less disturbance to the site's surrounding areas, but the site instantly becomes a much safer place. In a controlled factory environment, good safety practices are much easier to employ," she adds.

Improved speed of construction is another benefit that offsite manufactured products like precast offer. Products can be manufactured while site works are completed and then delivered just in time for incorporation into the structure. This means no need for storage and fast construction – a benefit that, Ms. Bachmann asserts, needs to be factored in to initial costings at tender stage.

"So whilst we support IA's Plan, at the same time, the entire industry needs to get smarter and engage more off site manufactured products into these structures," she says. "That's the only way we will deliver truly sustainable, efficient outcomes."

Infrastructure Australia's 15-Year Australian Infrastructure Plan

Proposed High Priority Projects:

- CityLink-Tullamarine Widening, VIC
- Perth Freight Link, WA

Proposed High Priority Initiatives include:

- Sydney Metro, NSW
- WestConnex (Stage 3), NSW
- Western Sydney Airport, NSW
- Cross River Rail, QLD
- Port of Brisbane dedicated freight rail connection, QLD
- Melbourne Metro Rail, VIC
- Hoddle Street capacity upgrade, VIC
- Perth CBD-north corridor capacity, WA
- Gawler Line rail upgrade, SA