

Cross River Rail to transform Brisbane

Mark Ludlow

The man in charge of building Brisbane's biggest infrastructure project, the \$5.4 billion Cross River Rail, has said he has learnt the lessons from the infrastructure delivery of big rail projects in Sydney and Melbourne and will deliver it on time and on budget.

Cross River Rail chief executive Graeme Newton, the former boss of the \$12 billion Queensland Reconstruction Authority, which helped rebuild the state after natural disasters, said the major delivery of contracts for the 10.2-kilometre rail duplication would be locked in by mid-2019.

After a decade of uncertainty under successive state governments over whether the project would proceed – and who would pay for it – Mr Newton wants to focus on the future for the project he says will transform Brisbane.

The Cross River Rail will provide a crucial underground river crossing – 35 metres below the surface – and is aiming to unblock the commuter bottle-neck in a city that is almost more renowned for its sporadic development than its brown snake-like river.

"Cross River Rail is about the context of the city and its development. It will help turbo-charge other developments in the city. By 2025, the whole face of Brisbane will have changed," Mr Newton told *The Australian Financial Review*. "People were still a little bit

Key points

The project will provide an underground river crossing in a bid to clear traffic.

The three major contracts are expected to be finalised early next year.

sceptical about this project last year and this time last year we had an election campaign and it was only the second last day of the campaign when the [Liberal National Party] Opposition said they would proceed with the project subject to timing, but now we are getting on the front foot and industry is behind us."

Cross River Rail is part of a \$15 billion infrastructure boom in Brisbane over the next five years that includes Star Entertainment Group's \$2 billion Queen's Wharf integrated resort and casino, the Howard Smith wharves redevelopment and Brisbane's new runway.

The Palaszczuk Labor government is hoping to use the Cross River Rail project to undertake redevelopment in Woolloongabba in Brisbane's south, near the famous Gabba sporting ground, and the eye-sore Roma Street transit centre, which they are hoping to turn into a 17,000-seat entertainment



Graeme Newton wants to focus on the project's future. PHOTO: ROBERT SHAKESPEARE

stadium. The Brisbane City Council's \$944 million Metro project will also link with the Cross River Rail.

The state Labor government waited for years for the federal government to step up to contribute funding the project, which will also be delivered in part as a public-private partnership. After argy-bargy with the federal Coalition government, the Palaszczuk government finally bit the bullet last year and announced it would fund it on its own.

Treasurer Jackie Trad has committed \$2.8 billion over the next four years to Cross River Rail, with the remaining

to come from the private sector as well as government contributions. Federal Opposition Leader Bill Shorten has also committed a future Labor government to \$2.24 billion.

The three major contracts for the Cross River Rail include the Tunnel, Stations and Development public-private partnership (which is essentially the greenfield tunnels and the stations), the Rail, Integration and Systems alliance (connecting into the existing Queensland Rail network) and the \$634 million European Train Control System project. They are

expected to be finalised early next year.

The three main consortiums short-listed for the tunnel construction include a CIMIC Group-led consortium called Pulse (which includes Pacific Partnerships, CPB Contractors, UGL, BAM, Ghella and DIF), the Qconnect group of QIC, Capella Capital, Lendlease, John Holland and Bouygues as well as the CentriQ Partnerships consortium of Plenary Group, Acciona, GS Engineering and Construction, Salini Impreglio and Spotless Group.

With big consortiums also involved in Sydney and Melbourne Metro projects Mr Newton was initially worried about whether the depth of talent in bidding teams would stretch to Brisbane's Cross River Rail.

But with bid teams of more than 150 people, Mr Newton is confident their expertise will deliver a project that will learn the lessons from their southern neighbours, including problems with Sydney's trouble-ridden light rail project. He said there would be a much more "engaged and interactive process" with bidders to avoid problems down the track. "You do have a degree of trepidation because of what's happening in Sydney and Melbourne, but there has been a lot of engagement with bidders. Normally in a field of three you do have one who is not cutting the mustard, but we are happy with all three. There is a strong appetite for this project," he said.