

# Chinese boom has a message

Shane Wright  
Economics Editor



Tony Abbott wants to see cranes standing above the cities of Australia. First he'll have to come to western China and the ancient city of Chongqing because that's where it appears almost all the world's cranes are being used.

A city that dates its history back more than 2000 years, its population is growing nearly 200,000 residents a year.

Within three blocks of the absolute centre of the city — a centre dominated by huge Cartier, Rolex and Louis Vuitton advertisements — there are a few 50 storey-plus skyscrapers being built.

And across the Yangtze River in the "new Chongqing" more than a dozen high cranes are being put to use building high-rise apartments.

And even at the end of the city's main airport there are almost 30 high cranes working on new residential and business developments.

A decade ago Shanghai was where almost 50 per cent of the world's high cranes were being used. While that city continues to grow at a mind-boggling pace, the cranes have moved westwards to centres such as Chongqing, which has averaged economic growth of 14 per cent a year for the past five years.

For most Australians, Chongqing is unknown.

History-minded people might recognise it as the capital of China during World War II. Now, however, it is just a city that most have never heard of.

But later this month direct flights will commence between Sydney and Chongqing. The city's airport already handles more than 22 million passengers a year — almost double the number through Perth Airport.

In a city with so many skyscrapers it is perhaps not a surprise that Australian company Eastern Elevator has established its Chinese headquarters in Chongqing.

The city is also home to car manufacturers including Ford, Suzuki, Fiat and China's Chery. Australia's DSI, which supplies



Onwards, upwards: Construction work on the Wayaobao Bridge, part of the Yuiang Highway in Chongqing municipality, China. Picture: Getty Images

drivetrains and clutches, has set up in Chongqing to supply the industry.

And 100km away, through a series of tunnels and bridges, is Chongqing Iron and Steel where you can watch WA iron ore unloaded from ships that have made their way up the Yangtze.

The steel that is made will find its way to the nearby car manufacturers.

Looking at all the cranes and all the construction it's easy to get carried away about China's economic future.

It can be too easy to miss the forest for all the 50-storey concrete and steel trees.

Many big apartment blocks are being built but there is continuing doubt about who will live in them — China is getting richer quickly but that wealth is not being spread evenly.

The country also is spending hundreds of billions of dollars creating the world's biggest high-speed rail network. About \$24 billion is being sunk into a high-speed rail link to the far western city of Urumqi.

It seems to have been built to satisfy political concerns about western provinces where large minorities, or in some cases

ethnic majorities, are not so enamoured of Beijing's form of government.

At \$24 billion, that's a lot of cash to make a political point. Yet it marches on, with pundits surprised by the public usage of the 10,000km of high-speed rail already in existence. And it has taken some pressure off the airport system.

Closer to home, Mr Abbott has made plenty of political mileage in his focus on building major road projects in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane.

At the same time, he has made clear his Government's distaste towards funding urban rail projects, much to the chagrin of Colin Barnett and Troy Buswell. But driving around Shanghai, Chongqing and Beijing as I have for the past fortnight, it's clear that roads are not the single answer for the mass transit of millions of people.

Shanghai is clearly being consumed by cars. It is a combination of a population that is rapidly becoming more wealthy, enabling more and more people to buy a car to put on to a road system already congested beyond belief.

Beijing's 10-lane ring roads

are something to behold. But they are also choking, as are the residents as smog combines with dust to make face masks more than a fashion accessory.

And Chongqing is in a difficult situation because the town centre is so mountainous that moving goods, let alone people, is extremely difficult.

Especially when you're adding thousands of people a week to the city. In each case, authorities are trying to deal with the avalanche of cars with policies such as taxing lightly small engine vehicles or experimenting with public transport — Chongqing has a monorail-type Metro that effectively runs through some buildings as well as a type of subway.

Figures out last week from the Australian Bureau of Statistics suggest Perth will overtake Brisbane as the nation's third biggest city by 2028, with a population of three million.

Given the space which Perth — with a population approaching two million — has managed to absorb it seems more than downright stupid to expect an extra million residents, and their near

quarter-acre blocks, to only use a crowded road system to move about. While much is made of the way China residents are buying more cars as they get richer, a less remarked-on development is also under way in Australia.

Whereas Chinese residents are buying their first car, in Australia more and more people have two or three cars.

Congestion on roads is worse in Sydney, where public transport is an extended four letter word, and Melbourne.

Infrastructure is more than just roads. It is about integration, recognising that people need to go about their business and getting it in place with an eye to the future as well as present day costs.

Focusing on one mode of transport in a country that is growing fast is asking for trouble. And the political leaders who make the decisions today won't be around to face the consequences of their missteps.

That goes as much for the leaders of the Chinese Communist Party as those inhabiting the Commonwealth and State government benches.

the new year

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