



Australian Citizens Party

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MEDIA RELEASE

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Why the Citizens Party supports China's Belt and Road

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China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), also known as One Belt One Road, announced by President Xi Jinping in 2013, is a vision for long-term transcontinental investment in infrastructure to expedite trade and economic cooperation among all the nations of the world. It comprises the Silk Road Economic Belt along the ancient Eurasian trading route known as the Silk Road, and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, upgrading ports all over Asia, Africa, and Europe to facilitate global shipping trade. As the Belt and Road Initiative website describes: "BRI aims to promote the connectivity of Asian, European and African continents and their adjacent seas, establish and strengthen partnerships among the countries along the Belt and Road, set up all-dimensional, multi-tiered and composite connectivity networks, and realise diversified, independent, balanced and sustainable development in these countries." One hundred and forty three nations have entered into Belt and Road agreements with China.

To explain its support for the BRI, the Citizens Party is happy to associate itself with the following endorsements by prominent Australian politicians from both major political parties*.

Liberal Party

Australian Trade Minister Steven Ciobo, 14 May 2017: "Australia supports the aims of initiatives such as Belt and Road that improve infrastructure development and increase investment opportunities in the Asia-Pacific region. ... Australian companies have significant expertise and experience in infrastructure construction, so I will be working to identify projects for Australian businesses that address the serious infrastructure shortfalls across our region. These projects could be worth hundreds of billions of dollars over the next decade. Australian private sector involvement in such projects will help create Australian jobs."

Trade Minister Steven Ciobo, 18 May 2018: "Australia and China share the common goal of improving infrastructure in the region and Australia welcomes the contribution BRI can make to regional infrastructure. There is opportunity for Australian businesses to be involved in BRI projects both here in China and in third countries. ... The Australian Government is working to identify and facilitate access to commercial opportunities resulting from BRI. Australia can bring much to the table."

Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, 7 August 2018: "[W]e look forward to working with China on Belt and Road Initiative projects where, assessing them on their merits, we conclude they're consistent with our objectives, standards and priorities. Generally, we welcome more investment in infrastructure in our region. Indeed, it would be hard to identify a country in our region more open to foreign investment, including Chinese investment, than is Australia."

Australian Trade Minister Simon Birmingham, 4 November 2018: "The Australian Government welcomes the fact that through the Belt and Road Initiative, China invests more across our region."

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison, 16 May 2019: BRI is "good for Australian companies, it's good for Australian jobs. Chinese growth and its prosperity and its economy is a good thing for Australia. I welcome it. I advocate it. I celebrate it."

Prime Minister Scott Morrison, 26 June 2019: "The infrastructure needs of the region are enormous and Australia welcomes the contribution that the Belt and Road Initiative can make to regional infrastructure investment and to regional development."

Labor Party

Australian Shadow Minister for Trade Jason Clare, 27 March 2017: "In simple terms, One Belt, One Road means more roads, more railways, more ports and more airport infrastructure. That means demand for commodities like iron ore and coal, which creates opportunities for Australia's resource sector. ... Building the middle class in Asia means more people will not only want to buy our resources, but they will want to buy our goods and services".

Australia's Shadow Foreign Minister Senator Penny Wong, 2 May 2017: "China's Belt and Road

Initiative (BRI) provides valuable opportunities for bilateral and multilateral co-operation. ... Australian companies are in the box seat to take advantage of China's willingness to invest tranches of its enormous national savings pool in regional enterprises that broaden the material wellbeing of its citizens and ours. Our reluctance to join the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank was timorous and self-defeating. We need to display much greater confidence in harnessing the opportunities of the BRI."

Australian Shadow Minister for Defence Richard Marles, 28 May 2017: The Belt and Road Initiative should be assessed on "a case-by-case basis ... Certainly it's not about rejecting China's initiative out of hand. That makes no sense at all. There are going to be important infrastructure projects and a desire from China to invest in them, which may well be in our national interest that we should ultimately support."

Shadow Foreign Minister Penny Wong, 8 August 2017: "[W]e need a policy that looks at the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) with an eye to identifying points of mutual interest and complementarity rather than reflexive negativity."

Australian Shadow Treasurer Chris Bowen, 29 September 2017: "President Xi's Belt and Road Initiative will have profound ramifications for years to come. We will come to office if we win the next election with an open mind as to how Australia and China can best collaborate on the Belt and Road Initiative, with a clear-eyed approach to our respective national interests. We will examine proposals on a case-by-case basis including considering how the Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility and the Belt and Road Initiative can best complement each other."

* Unlike the two major parties, the Citizens Party believes Australia should have an independent foreign policy, and not suddenly drop a policy that is clearly in Australia's national interest under orders from our US and UK allies. In this case, the change in Australia's policy started not in Australia, but with the USA's 2017 National Security Strategy document, which for the first time included an Economic Strategy statement that suddenly declared China's infrastructure cooperation to be a "threat" to the USA.

How is China working with other countries to build infrastructure any kind of threat to the USA? It isn't, not at all. It is, however, a threat to the way the USA and UK have controlled the global financial system through the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, which for decades have only loaned money to nations on condition that they "reform" their economies through privatisation and deregulation, allowing City of London and Wall Street banks and corporations to move in and loot them. In the most hypocritical irony, the USA started screaming the BRI was "debt trap" diplomacy—for which there is zero evidence, and in fact China forgives a lot of debt—whereas the US-enforced IMF system has been the real debt trap all along. Because the BRI was so clearly an opportunity for Australia, like the rest of the world, the politicians cited above continued to endorse it, and then-Treasurer Scott Morrison signed a BRI agreement with China in 2017. However, the USA became increasingly strident about the BRI, especially under Trump's bloviating Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, culminating in Pompeo ordering the Morrison government in 2020 to overrule Victoria's BRI deal. Morrison followed Pompeo's orders, and now both the Liberals and Labor are so obsequious to the USA on this issue, they want Australians to forget they made the above statements, and that Morrison signed a BRI deal. Building infrastructure, and cooperating with the nations in our region to build infrastructure, is a good thing to do, so the Citizens Party continues to support this project that has been endorsed by most of the rest of the world, as being in the national interest of Australia.

[Click here to sign the Citizens Party's petition for a public post office bank, which would invest its deposits in infrastructure projects to develop Australia.](#)