

## Australia Through the Prism of Qantas: Distance Makes a Comeback

Peter J. Rimmer\*

### Abstract

Distance and remoteness have been making a comeback among economists interpreting Australia's place in the world. Although there are claims by telecommunications theorists that distance is dead, this is not the case in international air transport. As a means of elaborating this proposition, attention is focused on tracing changes in the overseas operations and route network of Qantas (Queensland and Northern Territory Aerial Services Ltd) since its inception in 1920. After discussing Qantas's origins three issues are explored: how did Qantas reflect Australia's Imperial connection; how did the nationalization of Qantas reshape the airline's priorities; how has the privatization of Qantas changed the airline's main concerns? There is an abundance of material on the history and development of Qantas's international passenger network to address these issues. The material ranges from annual reports; company histories; autobiographies and a biography of co-founder Sir W. H. Fysh (1895–1974); anecdotes from former pilots providing insights into the places used for their 'slips' or crew stopovers between flights; paraphernalia such as timetables and posters; the travel diaries of frequent (and infrequent) flyers; a living memory bank in George A. Roberts (born 1909), who worked for the company between 1936 and 1970 and who now manages the Qantas Historical Collection; and Qantas Virtual Airway providing detailed information for game-players to simulate historic, current and future flights. With this abundant material attention is focused initially on the development of air traffic as part of the rise of Britain's satellite land in the new world — Qantas being part of the network operated by British Imperial Airways from 1930. In 1947 Qantas was nationalized and the government carrier added the North American connection to its British link to offer a round-the-world service before later intensifying its connections with Asia. Then in 1995 Qantas was privatized and its management has been grappling with a new set of priorities. After this long historical journey we are in a position to comment on the comeback of distance and remoteness as key factors used by economists in accounting for Australia's place in the world.

Keywords: Australia, Distance, Imperialism, Isolation, Nationalization, Qantas, Privatization, Remoteness.

Distance and remoteness have been making a comeback among economists interpreting Australia's place in the world. Before looking at this renewed interest in distance and remoteness we need to return to Geoffrey Blainey's (1966, Japanese translation, 1980) classic re-interpretation of

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the origins of white settlement in Australia entitled the *Tyranny of Distance*. His book highlighted that overcoming the costs of distance in moving people and goods was a pivotal factor in moulding Australian history. The book's first section entitled 'Destiny and Distance' examines Australia's isolation during the long era in which sailing ships and bullock carts were the main means of transport to, from and within the British satellite. The second section entitled, 'The Taming of Distance', examines the effects of the coming of mechanical transport — steamships, railways, motor vehicles and aircraft — which points to Blainey's twin preoccupation with technology as the strongest motivating force in history and the power of distance itself as a prime determining factor like climate (Davison, 2003).

Geoffrey Blainey's propositions prompted a response from John Hirst (1975) that relative distance *in* Australia was neither absolute nor tyrannical. The population was not only primarily coastal rather than continental but also mobile and subject to changes in cost/time considerations, transport technology (e.g. telegraph and railways), and patterns of human interaction. Although an avowed anti-Marxist, Blainey (1975) exhibited a strong materialist and, at least, a partially determinist streak, providing a rejoinder that offered no retreat on distance in Australia being anything other than a powerful and revealing theme. Significantly, Blainey (1982: x) notes in the first revised edition of the *Tyranny of Distance* that ideas have not been constrained like goods and people and have moved through communications channels across oceans and even to the inland of Australia with relative ease.

Blainey (1966; ix) sees parallels between his invocation of distance, and its antithesis, efficient transport, as mirrors with which to see the rise of a British satellite land in the new world and Frederick Jackson Turner's (1920) frontier theory in America. However, as emphasized by Geoffrey Bolton (2003: 33), Australia's frontier was not that of the homesteader but the big man; the individualism that characterized the American frontier was substituted by the collectivist ethos of mateship; Americans generated their own indigenous religions (e.g. Southern Baptists and Jehovah's Witnesses) whereas churchgoers in Australia brought their faiths from England (Anglican), Ireland (Catholic) and Scotland/Ulster (Presbyterian).

As time and space form a continuum, Graeme Davison (1993) draws on Blainey's (1966) work on space in his study of the *Unforgiving Minute: How Australia Learned to Tell the Time*. Indeed in a forward to Davison's book, Ken Inglis suggests that he cannot think of a better way into Australian history than reading the *Tyranny of Distance* and the *Unforgiving Minute*, though the insights of Oskar Spate's (1968) *Australia* and Joseph Powell's (1988) *An Historical Geography of Modern Australia: The Restive Fringe* should not be missed. After tracing timeless Australia, Davison highlights surges in the imposition of time in the first century of European settlement, paying particular attention to the closing decades of the nineteenth century with the development of the railways and telegraph combining in the telegraphically controlled railway clock to heighten

time consciousness. The next cluster of inventions around the Great War — the radio, the telephone the automobile and the aeroplane — broke conventional barriers of time and space. Besides highlighting the movement of time zones Davison (2004) has moved on to study *Car Wars: How the Car Won Our Hearts and Conquered our Cities*.

Surprisingly, the books by Blainey and Davison on space and time have not provided, as noted by Bolton (2003), the springboard for Australian scholarly explorations into communications theory and cultural studies of the far-reaching effects of the information and communications technology. There is no parallel to the way Harold Adams Innes's (1894–1952) work at the University of Toronto was extended by Marshall McLuhan in his phrase 'the medium is the message'. In his second revision of the *Tyranny of Distance*, Blainey (2001) referred to the work of Frances Cairncross (1997), a general theorist on cyberspace and the information economy, which points in the title of her book, to the *Death of Distance: How the Communications Revolution will Change Our Lives*. There are strong grounds, however, for suggesting that Cairncross has mistaken a reduction in telecommunications charges for the fundamental death of distance.

As outlined by Howard Dick and the author (2003) in *Cities, Transport and Communications: The Integration of Southeast Asia since 1850*, telecommunication has brought cities into almost instantaneous contact. Essentially, the spatial outcome is that city cores are stacked pancake-like on top of each other. In effect, the cores of London, Melbourne, Osaka, New York, Sydney and Tokyo are virtually one (Fig. 1).

The existence of this global non-territorial arena of computer networks has led to the argument by Manuel Castells (1989, 1996) that a 'space of flows' is replacing a 'space of places'. However, the argument can only be related to telecommunications; it is not applicable to either international air transport or international shipping. There is distance to be covered and a time lapse when travelling by air or sea. This proposition is addressed by reference to air transport because Blainey (1966) and Davison (1993) have preferred to highlight shipping, the railway, the telegraph and the automobile. As several issues involving Queensland and Northern Territory Aerial Services Ltd (Qantas) are little explored, attention is focused here on tracing changes in Qantas's overseas operations and route network: how did Qantas reflect Australia's Imperial connection; how did the nationalization of Qantas reshape the airline's priorities; and how has the privatization of Qantas changed the airline's main concerns?

There is an abundance of material on the history and development of the Qantas international passenger network to address these questions. The material ranges from annual reports (Qantas Empire Airways, 1948–1966; Qantas, 1967–2003); company histories (Gunn, 1985, 1987, 1988; Stackhouse, 1995, 1997); autobiographies and a biography of co-founder Sir (Wilmot) Hudson Fysh (1895–1974) (Fysh, 1966, 1970; Hall, 1979); anecdotes from former pilots providing insights into the places used for their 'slips' or crew stopovers between flights (Howells, 1996); paraphernalia

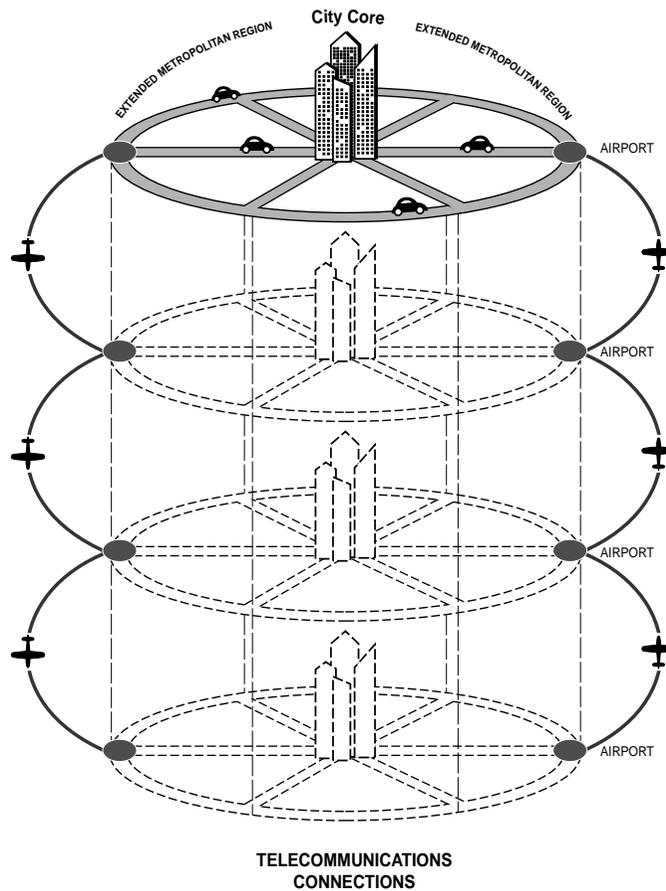


Figure 1 Instantaneous communications between city-cores has produced a 'pancake-like' urban structure (Source: Dick and Rimmer, 2003: 343).

such as timetables and posters; the travel diaries of frequent (and infrequent) flyers (Rimmer with Davenport, 1998; Rimmer, 2004); a living memory bank in George A. Roberts (born 1909), who worked for the company between 1936 and 1970 and who now manages the Qantas Historical Collection (Byrnes, 2000); and Qantas Virtual Airway providing detailed information for game-players to simulate historic, current and future flights.<sup>1)</sup>

With this abundant material, attention is focused initially on the development of air traffic as part of British investment in the new world — Qantas being part of the network operated by British Imperial Airways from 1930 to 1947. After the War Qantas was nationalized and the government carrier added the North American connection to its British link to offer a round-the-world service before later intensifying its connections with Asia. Then in 1995 Qantas was privatized and its management has been grappling with a new set of priorities. After this historical journey we are

1) Qantas Virtual Airways (<http://www.curbe.com/QVA/qva/>).

in a position to comment on the comeback of distance and remoteness as key factors used by economists in accounting for Australia's place in the world.

## ORIGINS

Australia's involvement in aviation predated the foundation of Qantas. This is evident in the work of geographer (Thomas) Griffith Taylor (1948) who explored the themes of distance, climate, technology, geopolitics and warfare long before Blainey (1966) popularised them in the *Tyranny of Distance* and other writings. Taylor's interest in providing the scientific preparation for Australian aviation can be traced to the turn of the century. As a student at the University of Sydney between 1899 and 1904, Taylor had attended occasional meetings of the Royal Society of New South Wales and listened to Lawrence Hargraves' (1866–1915) papers on box kites, providing the basis for the wing-design of early aeroplanes. Only five years after the first Australian aeroplane was flown in Melbourne by the celebrated United States' magician and escapologist, Harry Houdini, Taylor flew at Point Cook Flying School to test meteorological conditions, possibly the first flight by a meteorologist in the world. Thus Taylor (1919, 1920) was able to add a section on international aviation in his book on *Australian Meteorology*, ahead of any trans-oceanic flight from Australia. He identified the most promising air routes to the isolated continent and their dependence on variations of weather and climate.

Given that Australia was located in the largest expanse of water in the world, Griffith Taylor thought the 'Pacifico-Indian Ocean' would long prove an obstacle to flyers from other countries. To prove his point, Taylor drew a circle of 4,000 miles (6,436 km) radius from Canberra, the then centre of Australia's population, which passed through no major landmasses other than Antarctica, which was of no use as a flying depot (Fig. 2). Thus, international routes to the Americas and Africa were excluded by distance (11,265 km) and the absence of major islands. Only Asia, and more particularly India, the then Straits Settlements and the Netherlands East Indies, offered the prospect of island stepping-stones to Darwin in northern Australia for the country's earlier international aeroplane services. As flights from London to India had already been made by 1918, Taylor assumed that, with favorable winds, the distance between Calcutta and Canberra could be bridged in another four days by flying 2,414 kilometres per day, with eleven stops en route to Brisbane, offering stores of petrol and repair facilities.

A footnote written by Taylor on 10 December 1919 coincided with the arrival of Ross Smith and 'his gallant mates' in Darwin who had left London on 12 November in the Great Air Race sponsored by the then Australian Prime Minister, W. M. (Billy) Hughes. The flyers had followed Taylor's route exactly from Calcutta to claim the \$20,000 winner's prize for completing the distance within thirty days (Taylor, 1920: 275). This epic feat awakened Australians to the possibility

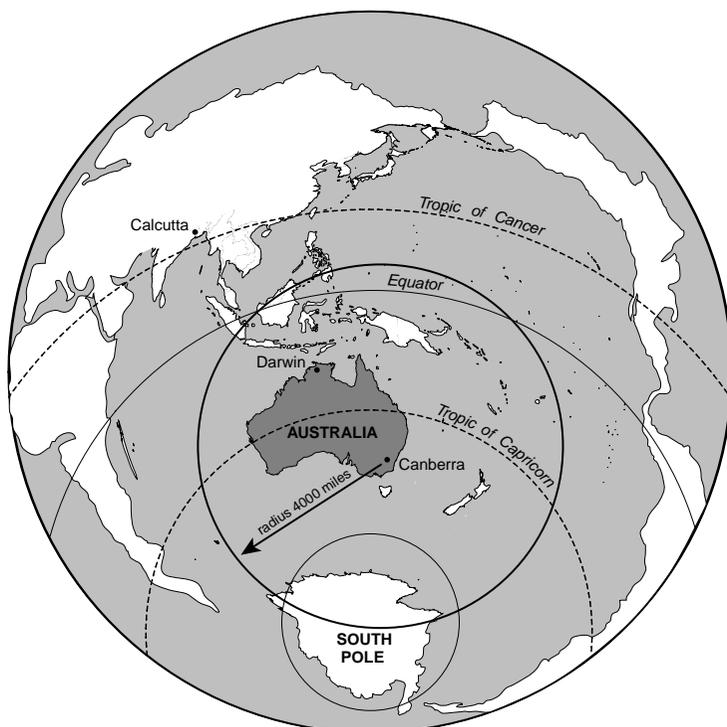


Figure 2 The isolation of Australia by the great oceans (Source: Based on Taylor, 1920: 274).

of international air travel overcoming their geographical remoteness, which was eventually realized through the establishment and development of Qantas.

At the time of the Great Air Race, wool was the main staple product in Australia. Except for the 20 years after the discovery of gold in 1851, this had always been so. When two ex-wartime pilots, W. Hudson Fysh and Paul J. McGinnis (1896–1952), wanted sponsorship to enter the Race they sought support from the wealthy pastoralist, Sir Samuel McCaughey of Yanko, western New South Wales (Hall, 1979). However, Sir Samuel died suddenly and his estate refused to continue the arrangement. Although Fysh and McGinnis were relegated to selecting the air race route across great areas of Queensland and the Northern Territory, they used this experience to create an out-back airline.

In 1920 Qantas was established at Winton in western Queensland with a two-passenger imported aircraft, the Avro 504 K, used for ten-minute joy rides and demonstration flights. Headquarters were then moved 160 km to Longreach (1921). With the financial assistance of another wealthy pastoralist, Sir Fergus McMaster (1879–1950), and the technical know-how of W. Arthur Baird (1889–1954), the former flight sergeant of Fysh and McGinnis, Qantas became the only airline in the world to build, fly and maintain its own aircraft (Leonard, 1994). While McGinnis left to farm, Fysh became managing director of the Brisbane-registered Qantas, which from 1922 oper-

ated, against stiff national competition, a regular, subsidized airmail and passenger service in Queensland and eastern Australia to areas not served by the railways, and from 1928 the Australian Aerial Medical Service (later the Royal Flying Doctor Service) on behalf of John Flynn and his Australian Inland Mission.

In 1928 Charles Ulm and Charles Kingsford Smith had flown 12,231 kilometres in the three-engine Fokker monoplane, *Southern Cross*, across the Pacific from Oakland Field in California to Brisbane/Sydney in a flight time of 90 hours. This feat did not prompt Qantas to look towards the shorter route to the west coast of North America. Instead the company sought a connection with the Imperial network.

In 1931 Qantas cooperated in the extension of an experimental England-Australia Air Mail from Darwin, the capital of the Northern Territory, to Qantas's new headquarters in Brisbane as part of a British bid to thwart competition from the cheaper and faster Dutch airline, KLM (Findlay, 1985). In 1934 Kingsford Smith and P. G. (Gordon) Taylor made the return trip across the Pacific in 14 days using the faster Lockheed Altair, *Lady Southern Cross*. However, by then Qantas had consolidated its Imperial connection.

### THE IMPERIAL NETWORK, 1934–1947

By 1934 Qantas had gone international with the formation of Qantas Empire Airways (QEA) in a joint airmail and passenger venture with Britain's Imperial Airways. Fysh became managing director. In 1935 the joint venture's task was to fly a DeHavilland DH 86 biplane, seating ten passengers, on the twice-weekly, four-day trip between Brisbane and Singapore; the rest of the sixteen to seventeen-day journey being completed by crews from Imperial Airways.

In 1938 Qantas moved its headquarters from Brisbane to Sydney when the larger and more spacious Empire Flying Boats commenced a thrice-weekly service to and from London (Fig. 3). The flying boats carried fifteen passengers and five crewmembers at 266 kph, with Imperial Airways crews still taking over from QEA crews in Singapore. To break the tedium of the nine-day flight, clock golf and quoits were offered on the promenade deck to the 4,900 passengers carried during its first year of operation (Gunn, 1985: 332; Byrnes, 2000). Reflecting the services offered on the great ocean passenger liners, these flights were for an elite, which did not include university professors. A distillation of the travels of Professor Griffith Taylor (1948), who left Sydney University for Toronto University in 1928, indicates that all of his pre-war inter-continental trips were by ship and not by aeroplane.

By 1940 Qantas was also involved with the nationalized British Overseas Airways Corporation (BOAC), formerly Imperial Airways, in the establishment of Tasman Empire Airways Limited (TEAL) to provide the first air services to New Zealand. In 1941 Qantas made only the third cross-

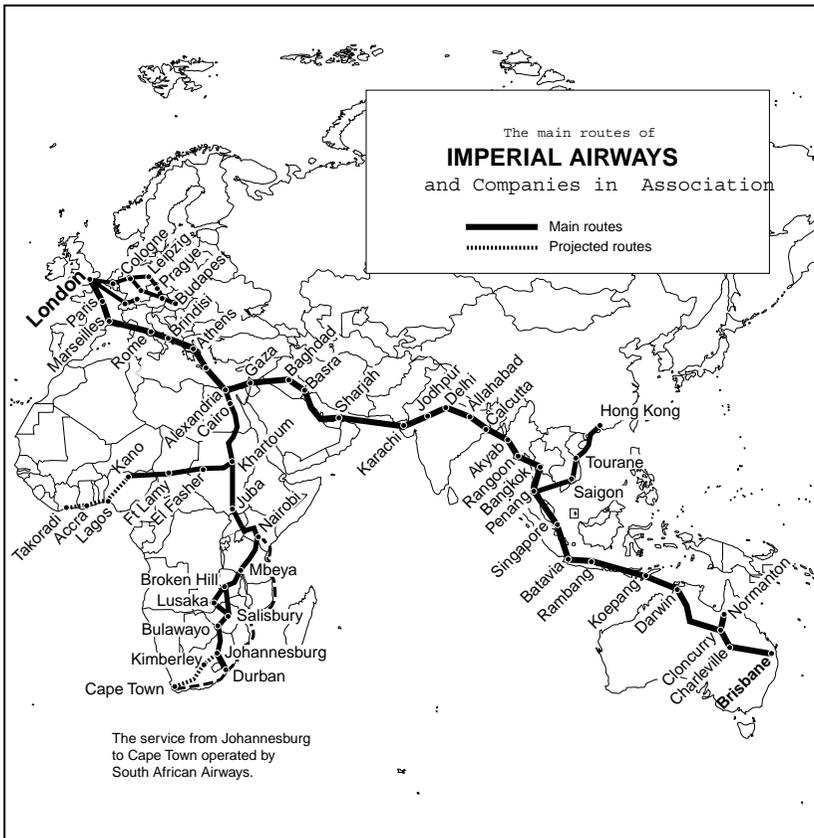


Figure 3 Imperial Airways/Qantas Empire Airways route network, 1938 (Source: Stackhouse, 1995: 48).

ing of the Pacific to Sydney when ferrying nineteen Catalina Flying Boats from San Diego into service. During World War II three flying boats and all land planes were destroyed (Gunn, 1987; Hocking and Cade-Haddon, 1951; Rimmer with Davenport, 1996). However, Qantas stood firm by the British Empire and, once the Japanese army severed ‘the horseshoe route’ in 1940 and 1941 and Singapore fell in 1942, the airline kept open the Imperial transport link with the Catalina flying 5,652 kms from Perth via Colombo to link with Karachi and London (Fig. 4). The aftermath of Pearl Harbor and the prospect of a Japanese blockade resulted in Australia progressively shifting its foreign policy allegiance from Britain towards the United States. This shift was evident in aviation.

### THE NATIONALIZED NETWORK, 1947–1995

After the War, Australia’s nationalism usurped imperialism in Australian aviation. In 1945 BOAC re-established the air link between Britain and Australia with QEA by pooling their aircraft. The British Government harried BOAC’s Australian partner to buy the British Tudor II plane off

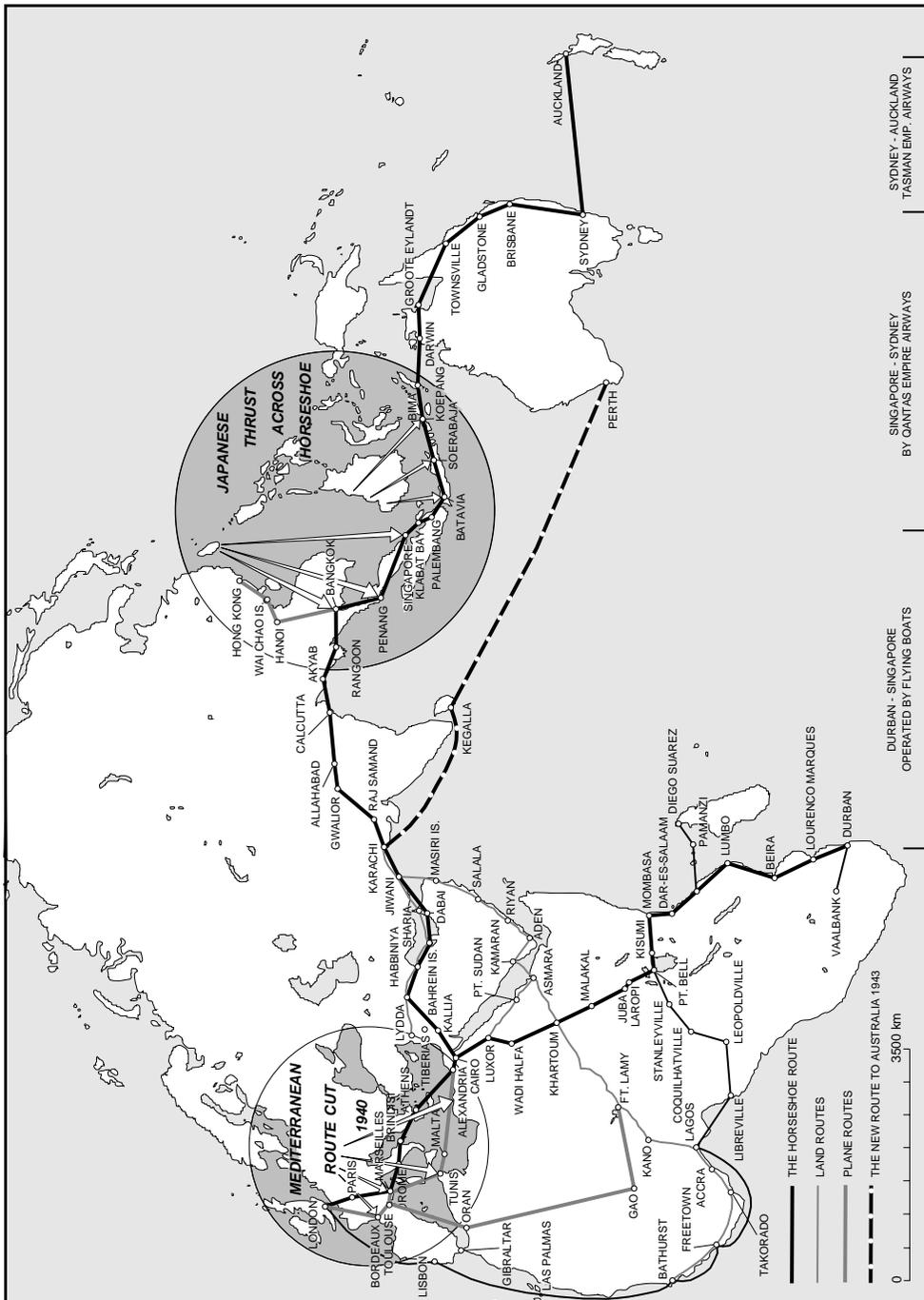


Figure 4 The cutting of the 'horseshoe route' in 1940 and 1941 and the alternative route to Australia 1943 (Source: based on frontispiece in Pudney, 1959; Rimmer with Davenport, 1996).

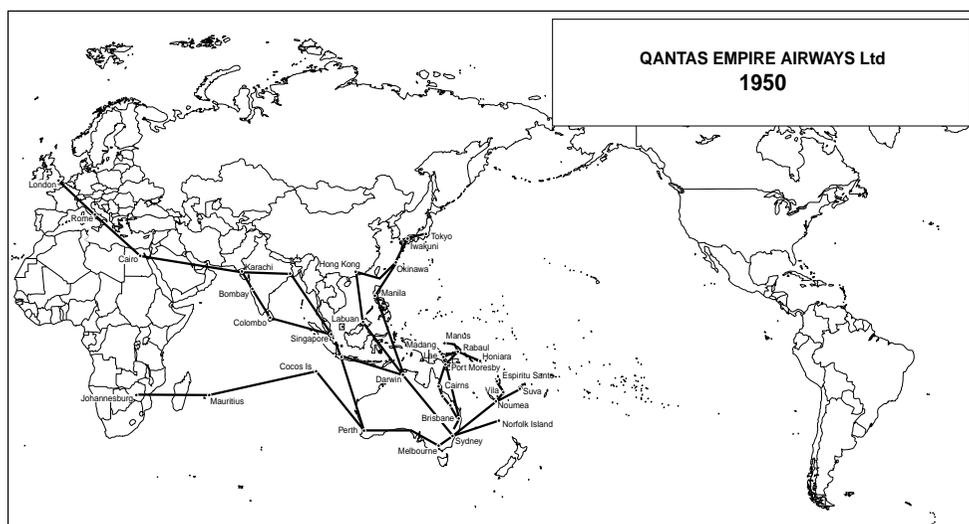


Figure 5 Qantas Empire Airways network, 1950 (Qantas Empire Airways, 1950)

the plan, rather than the American-built Lockheed 749 Constellation, which had a range of 8,000 km and could carry 39 passengers in a pressurized cabin. By 1947 the Australian Labor Government wanted to break the Imperial nexus and create a government airline by purchasing first BOAC's shares in QEA, and then Qantas shares in QEA to create Qantas as a nationalized entity. Fysh retained his position as managing director, succeeding McMaster as chairman of the government's chosen instrument in international aviation.

In 1947 Qantas inaugurated its own four-day Sydney-London service every ten days along the Kangaroo Route for £585 (\$1170) first-class return with the arrival of the first Constellation, which offered bunks for 20 passengers. Well-dressed passengers revelled in an overnight stays in Singapore and Cairo. Smorgasbords of other aircraft were used to serve Qantas' operations in Manila, Hong Kong and Japan, Malaya, New Guinea and the Pacific Islands (Fig. 5). South Africa, via the Cocos Islands, provided a possible alternative if war affected travel across Asia. When Professor Griffith Taylor (1958) did get to revisit Australia in 1948, to advise the Australian National University, he did travel by air from Canada to Honolulu at what to him was the astonishing speed of 322 kph but it is unlikely that he flew into Sydney by Qantas; more likely, he travelled by Pan Am and British Commonwealth Pacific Airways (BCPA). In 1949 Fysh flew to London to inspect the Comet jet aircraft. Despite its blistering speed of 800 kph and continued pressure from the British Government to purchase it, he still thought that its thirty-six passengers and range of 2,400 km was too small and short for Qantas' needs (Hall, 1979: 244). By 1950 the Kangaroo route accounted for 64 per cent of all QEA's revenue (Qantas Empire Airways, 1950).

### *Qantas in the Fifties*

During the 1950s Qantas's network centred on the Kangaroo route as the main commercial artery. A new trunk route was added across the Pacific to counter Qantas's American rivals, notably Pan American Airlines. This route extension had little immediate effect on the travel patterns of an immigrant professor, such as Professor Peter Scott who arrived from Britain after a four-week sea journey to take up his position at the University of Tasmania (Rimmer with Davenport, 1998). In 1953 Qantas received permission to operate its first flight to North America by taking over the loss-making express mail and passenger route from BCPA, which the company absorbed. With the delivery of the 57-passenger Lockheed 1049 Super Constellation, which had a cruising speed of 511 kph and a range of 7720 kms, an enlarged Qantas commenced its twice-weekly first-class-only service to North America, flying to San Francisco and Vancouver on alternate services via Fiji, Canton Island and Honolulu, after first conceding rights to Pan American Airways to fly to Australia and beyond.

In 1958 Qantas used the 'Super Connies' to inaugurate the first round-the-world service with the establishment of the Southern Cross route to London via San Francisco and New York to complement the Kangaroo route, which was 1,500 kms shorter. Ahead of its competitors outside the United States and with the aid of the World Bank, Qantas took delivery in 1959 of seven 110-seater Boeing 707-138 jetliners capable of operating at 885 kph with a range of 5,632 kilometres. (When turbo-fans were added they were referred to as V-Jets.) Immediately, these jets were introduced to both the Kangaroo and Southern Cross routes, resulting in Darwin being by-passed and Fiji over-flown (Fig. 6). This reduced journey time for long-haul travel on the Kangaroo route dramatically from four days to 34 hours with seven stops. Flying time between Sydney and San Fran-

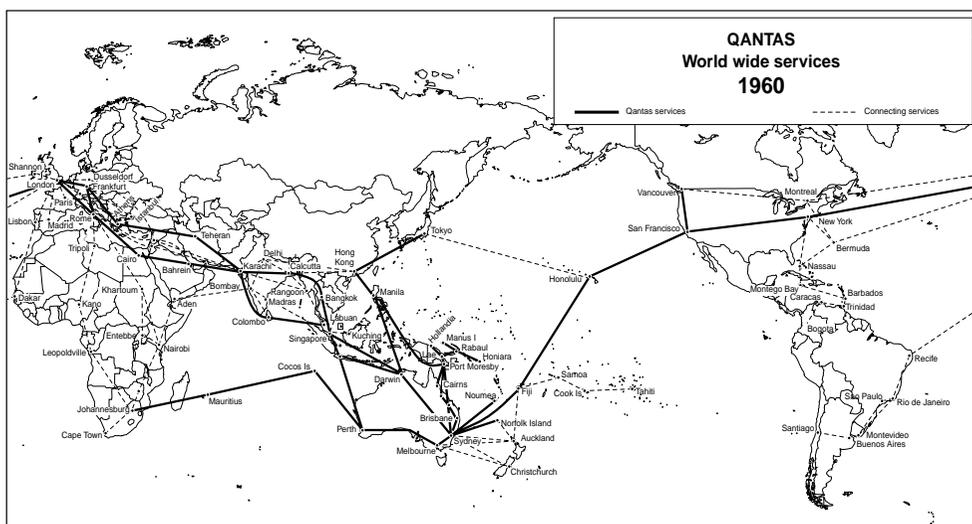


Figure 6 Qantas Empire Airways route network, 1960 (Source: Qantas Empire Airways, 1960).

cisco was also reduced from 27 hours 30 minutes to 16 hours.

These significantly shortened journey times brought Australia much closer to the major population centres in the Northern Hemisphere and put the number of international air passengers ahead of international sea passengers for the first time (Stackhouse, 1995: 131). Previously deterred by the long journey, singers, concert performers and other artists began to include Australian cities in their itineraries. In 1960 Professor Peter Scott was the first academic from the University of Tasmania to go by air on sabbatical (Rimmer with Davenport, 1998). Also tourist fares were introduced between Sydney and London with a 20 per cent reduction off the regular fare. Standards in passenger dress still prevailed with suits for men and hats, gloves and make-up cases to the fore for women. Lockheed Electra International prop-jet airliners, with a capacity of 73 passengers, were introduced to other Qantas routes.

Thus, after existing in relative isolation for more than 100 years, the historian Blainey (1966) saw Australia drifting into a new orbit with fresh threats and opportunities. Asia was seen to be closing in on Australia as over 100 years of protection by distance, afforded Australian industries and culture was rapidly eroding. The characterization of Australia as a 'distant outpost of a Eurocentric world and still British and colonial' was no longer applicable (Pesman, 1996: 1). The United Kingdom was overtaken as Australia's main trading partner by both Japan and the United States, which rebounded to the benefit of Sydney over Melbourne as air services from these countries called there first (Broetze, 1985: 68) The increased development of air travel also reflected changes in the Australian economy triggered by the massive upsurge in exports of coal from Queensland and iron ore from Western Australia.

### *Qantas in the Sixties and Seventies*

During the 1960s and 1970s Qantas's fleet, network and management were transformed to meet the new challenges in North America and Asia. An expanding Boeing fleet replaced the ageing propeller-driven aircraft (Table 1). In 1966 Sir W. Hudson Fysh, the original co-founder of Qantas, was deposed as chairman. New management disposed of the Boeing 707-138 B aircraft and standardized the Boeing 707-338 C series to cater for the increase in journeys to Australia by migrants from Europe, with Qantas accounting for 50 per cent of all travel movements to and from Australia (Findlay, 1985: 16). By 1967 the term Empire was dropped from the title of Qantas Airways Limited and the purchase of the larger Boeing 747-238 was delayed until the more advanced prototype B series was available to cater for mass travel and the ubiquitous package tour replete with the distinctive Qantas passenger bag. In 1971 the introduction of the innovative 400-seater Boeing 747-238 B "Jumbo" further reduced journey time between London and Sydney to 24-25 hours with one stopover, and Los Angeles and Sydney to 15 hours (non-stop) in return for allowing more American airline services between the United States and Australia.

Table 1 CHANGES IN THE QANTAS FLEET AT FIVE YEARLY INTERVALS, 1960–2003

	1960	1965	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2003
<b>CORE</b>										
Airbus A 330–220	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	4
Boeing 747–400	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	18	24	24
Boeing 747–400 ER	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Boeing 747–300	0	2	21	12	0	2	6	6	5	6
Boeing 747–200 B	0	0	0	11	19	19	16	5	3	0
Boeing 747–100	7	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Boeing 747 SP	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	2	2	0
Boeing 767–300 ER	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	16	22	29
Boeing 767–200 ER	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	7	7	6
Boeing 737–800	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	18
Boeing 737–400	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	21	22	22
Boeing 737–300	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	16	16	21
Boeing 717–200	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	14
Super Constellation	11	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Lockheed Electra	4	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Douglas Skymaster DC. 4	3	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Douglas DC. 3	8	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Otter DHC. 3	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hawker Siddeley HS 125	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sub-total	37	12	28	23	19	23	42	95	101	148
<b>REGIONAL</b>										
Brit Aerospace 146	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	17	15
De Havilland Dash 8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	25	33
Shorts SD 360	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0
Sub-total									46	48
Total	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	147	196

Note: ER Extended Range; SP Special Performance. 3 Boeing 747–200 B were Combi aircraft in 1985, 2 in 1990 and 2 in 1995.

Source: Qantas Empire Airways Annual Reports, 1960–67; Qantas Airways, Annual Reports 1968–2003.

Qantas shunned the costly Anglo-French Concorde (and Boeing's Supersonic Transport prototype), which would have enabled Professor Scott from the University of Tasmania to have high tea in Melbourne and dinner in Heathrow (Rimmer with Davenport, 1998). Instead, Qantas shifted from the luxurious servicing of the elite, prepared to pay high prices, to competing in the mass market with big aeroplanes offering the lowest seat-km costs. Economy fares were equivalent to 21 weeks of the average wage, and, as prosperity increased and fares rose, the prospect of air travel came within the reach of all Australians. The ritual sea voyage to Europe for working holidays by young, middle-class Australians travelling on returning migrant ships was replaced by travelling by Qantas on the Kangaroo route (Table 2).

Further reductions in fares occurred in the late 1970s to offset charter fares. By this time Qantas had sold the last of its Boeing-707s and became the first airline in the world to have a fleet composed entirely of Boeing 747s. By 1979 seating was increased to ten abreast and tracksuits and

Table 2 TRAVEL TIME AND COSTS BETWEEN SYDNEY AND LONDON SINCE 1947

Date	Aircraft	Flying time (hours)	Journey time	Seats	Return fare \$A	Weeks
1947	Lockheed Constellation	55.07	4 days	38	1,170(F)	85
1954	Super Constellation	51.30	4 days	57	1,346(F)	43
1959	Boeing 707	26.00	34 hours	220	1,670(F) 1,188(Y)	38 27
1971	Boeing 747	22.00	25 hours	356	2,050(F) 1,304(Y)	33 21
1995	Boeing 747-400	22.00	23.25 hours	396	8,739(F) 2,469(Y)	12 4

Note: F First Class; Y Economy. Weeks needed on average male wage to pay fare.

Source: Tabakoff, 1997.

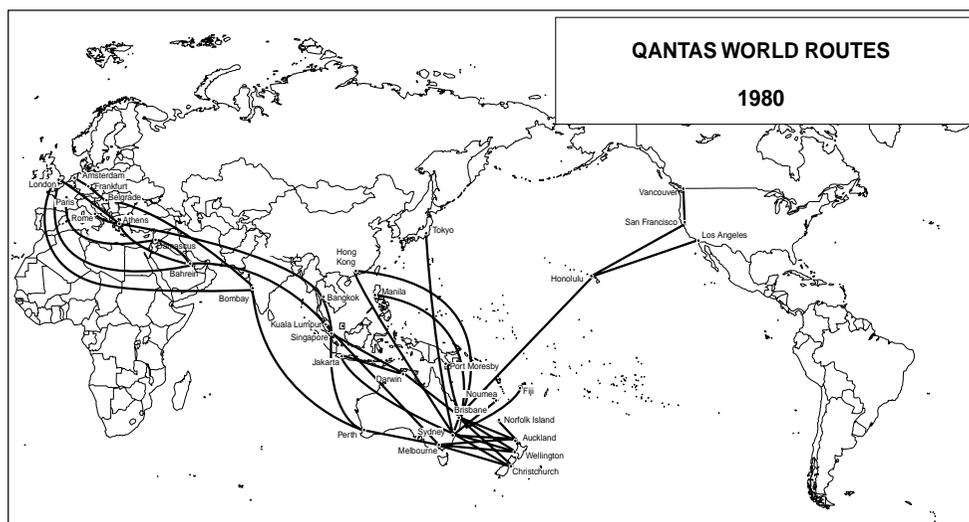


Figure 7 Qantas route network, 1980 (Source: Qantas Airways, 1980)

jeans replaced the previously de rigueur furs and high heels worn by female passengers.

Following the introduction of a low fare policy to combat competition from airlines based in developing countries, a major rationalization of the route network occurred. The expansion of the network during the 1960s to cover wide areas of the world for reasons of prestige alone could no longer be profitably sustained. Operations on the Southern Cross Route to London via North America (1958–73) and the route to London via Mexico (1964–74) were discontinued, together with the service on the Kangaroo route via Hong Kong (1964–1974). By 1980 Belgrade, Rome, Frankfurt, Paris and Amsterdam had been transferred from the Australian-United Kingdom service to become terminator services in a less extensive network (Fig. 7). Relatively, few routes had been developed

to cater for the demand for holidays in Asia.

### *Qantas in the Eighties and Early Nineties*

The threat of competition from charterers and lower-cost Southeast Asian airlines on the Kangaroo route, and the demand by United States carriers for increased capacity on the Trans-Pacific route, led to the Qantas fleet, network and management being revamped because its share of total air passenger movements to and from Australia had declined to 44 per cent in 1983 (Findlay, 1985: 160). Stretched upper-deck Boeing 747-400s and the Extended Range Boeing 767-300s twin-engined jets were introduced, together with the world's first business class, and the company returned to profitability. The flagship 747s could operate with a single stopover between Sydney and London in 23 hours. Consequently, destinations in Europe, notably Athens, Istanbul, Belgrade, Vienna, Rome, Paris, Amsterdam and Manchester, were cut back leaving the Kangaroo route deeper, broader and slightly faster in flight time (Table 3).

Offshore hubs were developed first in Singapore and then in Bangkok on the Kangaroo route and in Honolulu on the Pacific route (Fig. 7). On the former route, the 747s linked Sydney/Melbourne to Singapore, and Singapore to London, and 767s flights connected the small state capitals of Perth, Adelaide and Brisbane via Cairns/Townsville. Collectively, these routes met the demands of migrants wanting to return to their home countries.

The 747s and the 767s were also used to provide direct flights between Sydney, Brisbane and Cairns and Asian cities, notably Tokyo, Osaka, Seoul and Taipei as well as beyond the Golden Triangle pivoted on Singapore, Bangkok and Hong Kong, to Guangzhou and Beijing. This increased involvement with Asia prompted the historian Geoffrey Blainey's controversial comments on the level of 'Asian immigration' at a 1984 Rotary Club meeting in Warrnambool in southwest Victoria. Blainey's (1984) comments were further elaborated in a book entitled *All for Australia* that displayed his affinity for 'old Australia'. This book prompted a rebuttal by a group of fellow historians entitled *Surrender Australia? Essays in the Study and Use of History* (Marks and Ricklefs, 1985). Since then debate has continued, as discussed in *The Fuss that Never Ended: The Life and Work of Geoffrey Blainey* (Gare, D., et al., 2003).

Meanwhile, Qantas extended its services to New Zealand. In 1988 attempts to merge the government airlines of Australia and New Zealand failed. However, Qantas took a share of 19.9 per cent in Air New Zealand as part of a consortium to prevent the company going to British Airways. Losses experienced by Qantas during the Pilots Dispute of 1990 and the Gulf War crisis led to cut-backs in staff. Further reorganization ensued making comprehension of the composite Qantas' fleet and its accounts difficult because the company was transformed from an international airline into an international and domestic carrier (cf. Table 4). In 1992 Qantas acquired the government-owned domestic fleet of Australian Airlines (formerly TAA) for A\$400 million, enabling the company to

Table 3 CHANGES ON THE KANGAROO ROUTE, 1960–2000

	1960	1965	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000
<b>AUSTRALIA</b>									
Melbourne	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1
SYDNEY	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Brisbane	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Darwin	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Adelaide	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
Perth	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Port Hedland	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Cairns	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
<b>Sub-total</b>	5	5	4	5	5	5	7	7	7
<b>ASIA</b>									
Bali(Den Pasar)	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1
Jakarta	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Singapore	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Kuala Lumpur	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	0
Manila	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bangkok	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Hong Kong	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Calcutta	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
New Delhi	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bombay	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0
Colombo	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Karachi	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Teheran	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
Bahrain	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	0
Damascus	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0
Cairo	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Sub-total</b>	10	10	11	8	7	8	5	5	4
<b>EUROPE</b>									
Istanbul	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Athens	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0
Belgrade	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0
Vienna	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
Rome	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Frankfurt	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Amsterdam	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	0
Paris	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
LONDON	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Manchester	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
<b>Sub-total</b>	4	6	6	7	6	7	4	3	4
<b>Total</b>	17	20	21	20	18	20	16	15	15

Source: Qantas Annual Reports(1960–2000).

Table 4 QANTAS PERFORMANCE STATISTICS AT FIVE-YEARLY INTERVALS, 1960–1995

		1961	1965	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995
Passengers	Million	0.2	0.4	0.7	1.4	2.0	2.5	4.2	14.2
RPK	Billion	0.6	1.4	4.7	10.1	16.5	16.7	27.1	50.2
ASKs	Billion	n.a.	69.7						
RSF	%	58.2	57.9	55.7	62.8	68.6	64.2	69.1	72.0
Av. stage	km	n.a.	3,482						

Note: RPK Revenue passenger kilometers; ASK Available seat kilometers; RSF Revenue seat factor

Source: Qantas Empire Airways (1961–1967); Qantas (1967–2003).

provide seamless international and domestic services as *Qantas — the Australian Airline*. Then in 1993 British Airways took 25 per cent equity in Qantas and renewed collaboration on the Kangaroo route, after a 46-year separation, in a bid to create a global airline. Although it has been possible to fly Sydney/London direct in the fuel-efficient Boeing 747-400 ‘Longreach’ class since 1989, the two airlines continued the concept of the offshore hub-and-spoke system pivoted on Singapore and Bangkok.

This hub development has prompted the author to develop the global hub-and-spoke system to demonstrate Australia’s position in the world economy (Rimmer, 1999). Singapore and Bangkok can act as air hubs because they are located at intersections on ‘Main Street’ — the prime, west-east, world-spanning, transcontinental axis in the northern hemisphere linking Europe, Asia and North America — and the north-south axis linking Australasia (Fig. 8). Similar to links between Europe-Africa and North America-South and Central America, the north-south axis is a cul-de-sac. There is little scope in Australia for anything other than air terminal activities, particularly as the penguins in Antarctica generate little traffic!

Between the 1950s and the 1990s Australia’s position in relation to world gross domestic product (GDP) has improved, spurred by the industrialization of Asia. In the 1950s only 16 per cent of world GDP was located within 10,000 km of Australia; by the 1990s this had increased to 28 per cent. Out of 222 countries in 1998, the United Kingdom ranked 4th and Japan 83rd in terms of access to world GDP ahead of Australia in 209th and New Zealand in 221st positions (Ewing and Battersby, 2003). Distance still matters!

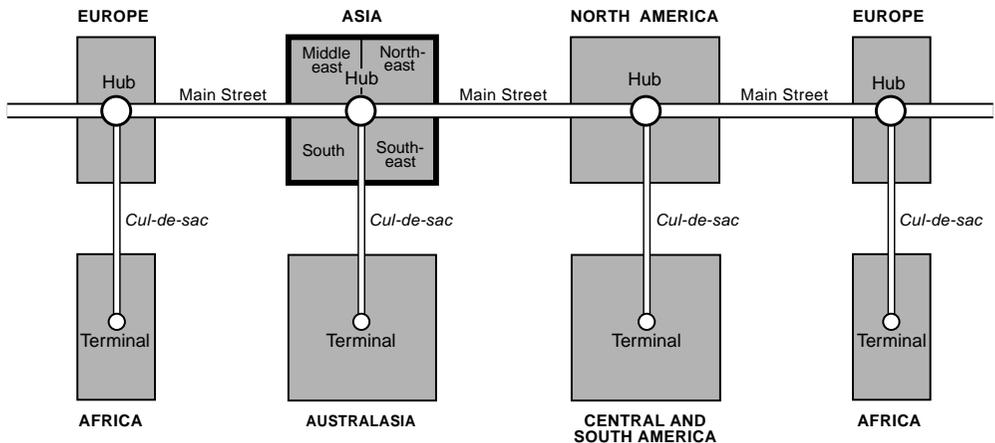


Figure 8 The global hub-and-spoke system (Rimmer, 2001: 37)

## THE PRIVATIZED NETWORK SINCE 1995

In 1995 Qantas was privatized with the government retaining a 49 per cent share. Once Qantas became a public company, the emphasis was on cash-in-hand and dividends for its shareholders. Collaboration intensified with British Airways and its *oneworld* associates in a strategic alliance that not only encompassed North America, Asia, Europe and South America but also frequent flyer exchange, code sharing and common gates (Fig. 9). In 1996, however, Qantas disposed of its share in Air New Zealand when that airline acquired 50 per cent of Ansett Holdings, which owned 100 per cent of Ansett Australia, the domestic airline, and 49 per cent of Ansett International, the international airline. By 2000 Air New Zealand had acquired the remaining 50 per cent of Ansett Holdings but one year later Ansett, Qantas's Australian domestic rival, had collapsed leaving Air New Zealand with a heavy debt burden and requiring massive aid from the New Zealand Government to survive. In 2002 Qantas renewed its bid to enter into a strategic alliance with Air New Zealand but this was thwarted. Nevertheless, Qantas was left in a strong position in Australia's international and domestic aviation, over 65 per cent of its income in 2003 coming from Australia compared with less than 53 per cent in 1995 (Table 5).

Since 2000 Qantas has tried to rethink its position within the global hub-and-spoke system aiming to remain competitive with Cathay Pacific and Singapore Airlines without endangering its strong position within its home base where advertising focuses upon the airline 'calling Australia home'. Qantas prides itself in being one of the few 'legacy airlines' that provides a profitable re-

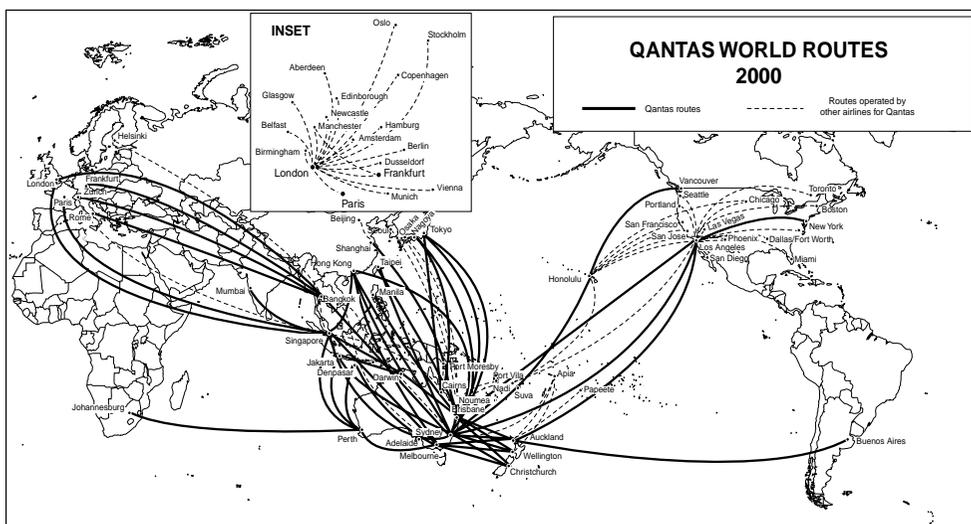


Figure 9 Qantas route network, 2000 (Source: Qantas Airways, 2000)

Table 5 QANTAS REGIONAL BREAKDOWN OF INCOME, 1995–2003

	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Australia	52.6	55.7	58.3	58.3	57.9	58.9	54.6	61.8	65.5
Japan	12.6	11.2	8.6	8.4	7.7	8.1	8.7	7.3	5.8
SE & NE Asia	10.9	10.5	10.7	9.9	8.9	8.2	9.5	7.4	4.9
Asia	23.5	21.7	19.3	18.3	16.6	16.3	18.2	14.7	10.7
UK & Europe	11.8	10.6	10.7	10.5	11.2	10.9	11.4	9.4	9.2
America & Pacific	7.6	7.3	6.8	7.8	9.5	10.0	11.3	9.0	8.3
New Zealand	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	3.7	4.1
Other regions	4.5	4.7	4.9	5.1	4.8	3.9	4.5	1.4	2.2
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
A\$ million	6278	6629	6764	7082	7289	7844	8767	9698	9848

Source: Qantas (1995–2003).

turn to shareholders, customer service and reasonable job security. However, as 94 per cent of Qantas' 35,000 staff is based in Australia, the airline is thinking of sourcing a greater number of staff overseas to obtain a lower cost structure. Already these developments have involved boosting the number of London-based flight attendants from 370 to 870 to staff flights between London and Australia via Bangkok and Singapore. The target figure desired by the airline's management might result in 7,000 positions being shifted overseas, with job cuts in Australia extending from cabin crew positions to jobs in other areas such as aircraft maintenance. Qantas's sixteen unions will resist such a scenario. Also Qantas is positioning a low-cost airline called Jetstar Airways Asia in Singapore to complement the operations of its low cost carrier Jetstar Airways in Australia, which competitors are claiming is engaging in 'predatory pricing' to secure their business. Ideally, Qantas would like the Government to remove the cap on foreign ownership of the carrier and obstacles preventing a merger with Air New Zealand.

Looking ahead, Qantas has ordered twelve Airbus A 380 aircraft, with a range of 14,800 kms and capable of carrying 501 passengers for delivery by October 2006. They will be deployed on the high density Australia and Los Angeles and Australia and London routes. The first A 380 will operate between Melbourne and Los Angeles, a distance of 12,749 kms, before they operate 17 services between Australia and Los Angeles and 14 services via Bangkok, Singapore and Hong Kong between Sydney and London. Capacity on both routes would be underpinned by the Boeing 747–400 series. However, Qantas may also be considering the Boeing 747 Advanced which can carry up to 500 passengers, uses the same engine and cockpit technology as the 747 and can fly more than 14,816 kms. Only if this range extends to 16,500 kms would both Darwin and Perth be within a single-stop of London.

The expected route and managerial changes will affect the future travel/dwelling patterns of Australians as the distribution of the expatriate population in 2001 mirrored, to a large degree, the

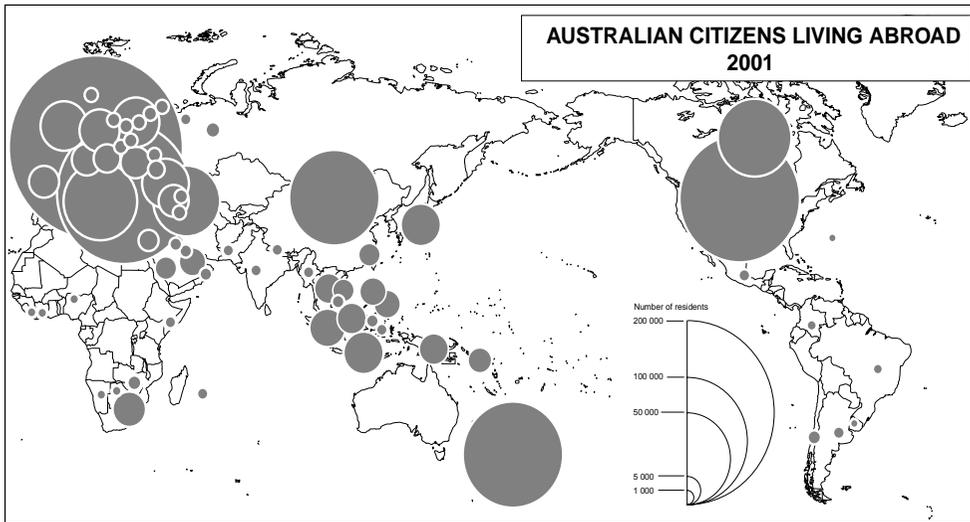


Figure 10 Australian citizens living abroad, 31 December 2001 (Source: Hugo, 2003: 5).

Qantas network (Fig. 10). On a broader scale these developments may not only lead to the deeper consideration of issues of national identity, implicit in this 'Australian diaspora' extending to immigrants and expatriates but also reshaping the narratives of Australian historians epitomized by Blainey and others (Pesman et al., 1996; Hugo, 2003). As acknowledged by Andrew Hassam (2000: 29) in the Trevor Reese Memorial Lecture in London on 'Neither English nor Foreign: Australian Travellers in Britain', 'the discipline of Geography, untroubled by political boundaries, has shown itself better placed to investigate national identity than the discipline of History, locked as it so often is, into narratives of the nation'.

## CONCLUSION

Distance and remoteness still matter. Australian cities may have instantaneous contact with any city on the world in virtual space. However, as this study of the development of Qantas since 1920 has demonstrated, the protection afforded by living in a cul-de-sac may have evaporated. Travel drawbacks still persist. Several hours flying time are required from Sydney to bridge the distance to Australia's nearest overseas neighbours. Reflecting the vast distances to be traversed within Australia, the 2100 km flight from Sydney to Auckland is shorter than the 3270 km flight to Perth in Western Australia. Longer flights are involved elsewhere: over 8 hours are required to cover the 6300 km distance to Singapore; over 10 hours to cover 7,800 km to Tokyo; and over 15 hours to cover the 12,000 km to Los Angeles. As this distance reaches the current non-stop range of Boeing 747-400s, the stopover for refuelling has to be added to the over 20 hours flight to

cover the 16,000 km distance to New York via Los Angeles and over 23 hours flight to cover the 17,150 km to London via Singapore.

The lesson from this study is that being preoccupied with a single mode such as telecommunications can lead to sweeping generalizations like 'the death of distance' that cannot be substantiated (Cairncross, 1997, rev, 2001). Indeed, there is a compelling need to recognize how succeeding modes are superimposed on top of each other and to comprehend trade-offs between them. For instance, a study by Ann Capling and Kim Nossal (2000) shows that anti-globalization protesters in Australia used the Internet successfully to mount a campaign against the Multilateral Agreement on Investment in 1997 and 1998. However, the protesters were less successful in their opposition to the World Trade Organization in Seattle during 1999, which required their physical presence on the streets some 11,000 km away. Twenty hours travel and US\$1500 was a cost many could not bear. In this instance 'place', embodying both physical distance and location, is still important.

Where do we journey to from here? There is a pressing need to look at trade-offs between technologies not only between air transport and telecommunications but also shipping. This recommendation is based on the premise that the global hub-and-spoke system underpins international shipping, air transport and telecommunications (Rimmer, 1999). There is a need to think in terms of a multilayered hub linked to sea-land, air and telecommunications networks accommodating the simultaneous movements of goods, people and information (i.e. analogous to solids, liquids and gas).

At the first level stocks capital, labour and resources are linked to sea-land transport; at the second level the transfer of complex knowledge, involving face-to-face transfer (i.e. business travel), is connected to air passenger transport; and at the third level routinized information is tied to telecommunications. Of course, telecommunications may also allow the transfer of knowledge products (e.g. downloading software, music and e-games) and transactions (e.g. the tele-transaction of investment). The mixed role of each layer is the reason they are interconnected at the hubs.

Container shipping competes with airfreight and experiences similar logistical characteristics and dynamic market forces to the aviation industry. In turn, telecommunications are critical for cargo and passenger booking systems and offer a substitute for passenger movement. Conversely, telecommunications are also stimulators, leading to more travel and higher levels of exchange activities. These synergies are critical because, increasingly, profits will not be derived from goods or passenger transport but from the use of telecommunications. The new commercial currency is not only traffic rights but also information rights.

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