



### In times of need we've been there

Whenever there's been a crisis to face, from natural disasters to world wars and disease outbreaks, the people of Transport have been there playing an essential role. From the Spanish flu outbreak to COVID-19, we've been proud to do our bit for the greater good. In this From the archive, we take a look back at some of the most significant crises from the last century.

#### The black death

In January 1900 an outbreak of the bubonic plague spread from the Sydney waterfront, with rats carrying the disease across the city. Over eight months that year, 303 cases were reported and 103 people died.

The response plan included transporting infected people to quarantine stations, intensive cleaning and demolition of some sections of the inner city and dock area, as well as a rat extermination program. Thanks to the efforts of many the city was declared free of the plague by September. the plague by September.



*Cleaning harbour-side wharfs to reduce the rat population, 1900. Source: NSW State Archives and Records*

#### The Spanish flu

In 1919 more than 290,000 people across Sydney were infected with the Spanish flu and more than 6,000 people died.

To prevent the disease from spreading people were required to wear face masks when travelling on NSW trains, trams and ferries.

**Watch a video** about the 1919 Spanish flu pandemic in Australia from the ABC's Australian Story [here](#).



*Tram passengers wearing face masks, Sydney, 1919. Source: Parramatta Heritage Centre*

#### Roads for the military

As World War II raged across continents, the Department of Main Roads swung into action to help protect NSW by building roads to provide access for the military.

Heathcote Road and the bridge over the Woronora River were built between 1940 and 1943 to provide a vital link to the Holsworthy military base. Nearly 30 years later, the road still connects the north and south and right now we're planning work to widen the bridge to make it safer for motorists.



*Building Heathcote Road, 1940s. Source: The Highway Man (DMR publication)*

#### Rail tunnel shelters

During World War II around 6,000 square metres of underground space, including several unused railway tunnels, were converted to air raid shelters to provide the public with a refuge from expected enemy air raids.

In 2015 during repainting works at Town Hall Station, a sign was discovered that would have directed people to shelters in the lower platforms and tunnels 4 and 5, which had been constructed when the station opened in 1932 but weren't at that time being used by trains.



*Shelter entrance at Hyde Park South. Source: Australian Rail Historical Society*



*Historic sign discovered at Town Hall Station in 2015.*

### Hunter floods

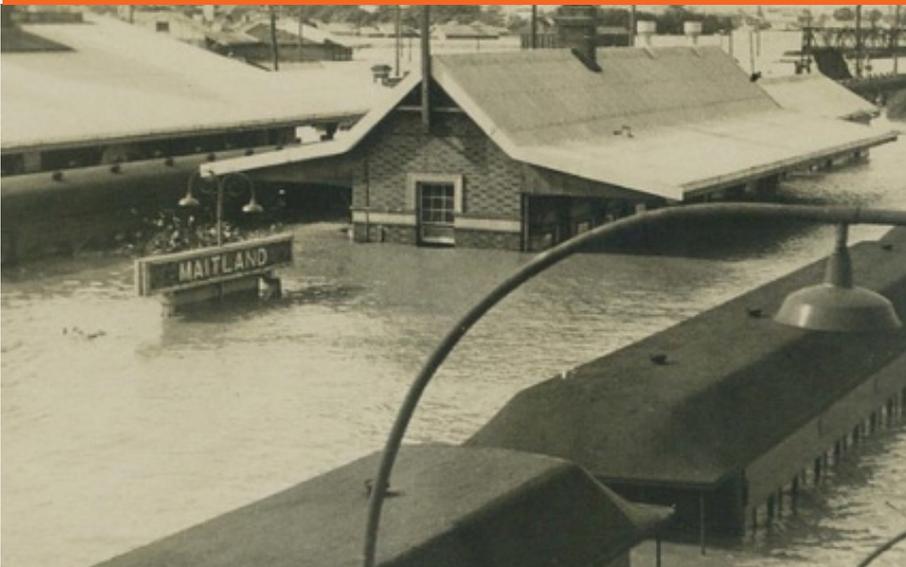
In 1949 and again in 1955, the Hunter River burst its banks flooding large areas of the Hunter Valley including the town of Maitland.

The 1955 flood was one of the most devastating natural disasters in Australia’s history. It overwhelmed rivers on both sides of the Great Dividing Range, creating an inland sea the size of England and Wales.

It was all hands on deck during these disasters with food, clothing and medical supplies being transported from Sydney, and welfare officers distributing food from railway goods trains.



Unloading supplies from a goods train, Maitland 1955. Source: Maitland City Library



Maitland railway station under water, 1949. Source: Maitland City Library

### Hawkesbury River crisis

In 1978, following a week of torrential rain, the Hawkesbury River flooded and four vehicle ferries broke away from their moorings at Wiseman’s Ferry. The runaway ferries rushed downriver towards Brooklyn where it was feared they would crash into underwater piers sinking the Hawkesbury River Bridge. Thanks to a joint effort by Transport and other workers, the ferries were secured on temporary moorings at various locations along the riverbank and disaster was avoided.

**Listen** to the oral history to hear from those who witnessed the event [here](#).



Vehicle ferries lashed together and anchored in the Hawkesbury River, 1978 Source: Hornsby Shire Council