

Cities could crumble under population boom as interstate migrants flood Sunshine State

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One regional town is tipped to double its population, growing at a rate of more than 126 per cent, as Queensland’s migrant boom puts pressure on infrastructure.

Queensland’s booming population is predicted to surpass seven million by 2046 – but experts warn Brisbane and the Gold Coast would soon become dysfunctional if housing supply and public transport issues were not urgently addressed.

New population projection data shows Queensland’s population will blow out by two million over the next 20 years, mainly in the southeast, with the Gold Coast nearing one million residents and Ipswich’s population more than doubling.

Regional areas are predicted to grow at phenomenal speeds as interstate migrants from NSW and Victoria seek out affordable living, particularly in Moreton Bay and the Sunshine Coast.

Social researcher and demographer Mark McCrindle said the SEQ population boom would become a significant national interest over the next decade and the federal government would eventually have to step in to help Queensland catch up on critical infrastructure demand.

“Queensland population growth has exceeded 100,000 over the last 12 months alone,” he said. “Regional cities can absorb people, but they need infrastructure – that’s more than roads and transport; like offices, business growth, telecommunications, energy. “And we can’t have money just coming from state coffers; it has to be national growth because the state is taking so much growth from other states.”

To successfully redistribute the population, experts say housing supply and public transport will need to be addressed “rapidly” to allow freight movement and job access.

RACQ head of public policy Dr Michael Kane said Brisbane’s current transport options were so poor that the city was “on the path to dysfunction” and would sooner come to a grinding halt with residents unable to travel efficiently.

Projected Queensland population growth

LGA	2021 (b)	2026	2036	2046	Growth from 2021 to 2046 (people)	Percentage
Queensland	5217653	5663247	6492441	7299934	2082281	39.91%
Gold Coast	633,764	710,911	847,540	983,004	349,240	55.11%
Brisbane	1,264,024	1,347,337	1,467,709	1,603,148	339,124	26.83%
Moreton Bay	484,428	551,701	676,171	796,515	312,087	64.42%
Ipswich	233,302	272,052	384,032	529,064	295,762	126.77%
Sunshine Coast	346,648	392,711	471,366	545,523	198,875	57.37%
Logan	350,740	395,967	485,613	539,874	189,134	53.92%
Townsville	195,515	207,512	236,434	264,899	69,384	35.49%
Cairns	169,312	181,303	206,646	231,164	61,852	36.53%
Mackay	123,183	130,167	144,404	159,361	36,178	29.37%
Toowoomba	175,316	182,290	197,694	211,402	36,086	20.58%
Fraser Coast	112,078	119,950	130,237	136,870	24,792	22.12%
Livingstone	39,881	44,143	54,697	62,990	23,109	57.94%
Redland	161,730	170,015	179,685	183,649	21,919	13.55%

He said governments needed to fundamental rethink long-term transport strategies such as building an underground rail system, rather than continue pushing short-term projects.

“The Gateway, Pacific motorway and Bruce Highway – that’s the major spine of the Queensland economy and there’s a chokepoint on it,” he said.

LGA	2021 (b)	2026	2036	2046	Growth from 2021 to 2046 (people)	Percentage
Lockyer Valley	41,762	44,453	50,794	57,354	15,592	37.34%
Gladstone	64,304	67,236	73,021	78,285	13,981	21.74%
Bundaberg	100,118	103,553	109,790	114,091	13,973	13.96%
Rockhampton	82,904	85,511	90,217	96,380	13,476	16.25%
Whitsunday	37,660	40,550	45,596	50,512	12,852	34.13%
Scenic Rim	43,595	47,030	52,976	55,580	11,985	27.49%
Somerset	25,391	26,791	30,775	34,836	9,445	37.20%
Noosa	56,873	59,628	63,425	65,989	9,116	16.03%
Gympie	53,851	56,800	59,589	60,836	6,985	12.97%
Mareeba	23,174	24,391	26,627	28,684	5,510	23.78%
Tablelands	26,488	27,398	29,122	30,337	3,849	14.53%
Isaac	22,426	23,061	24,478	26,208	3,782	16.86%
South Burnett	33,325	33,875	35,458	36,691	3,366	10.10%
Douglas	12,445	12,952	14,286	15,289	2,844	22.85%
Southern Downs	36,641	37,165	38,503	39,019	2,378	6.49%
Cassowary Coast	29,525	30,275	31,116	31,599	2,074	7.02%
Western Downs	34,360	34,813	35,888	36,371	2,011	5.85%
Central Highlands (Qld)	28,311	28,657	29,251	29,884	1,573	5.56%
Weipa	4,176	4,314	4,748	5,067	891	21.34%
Yarrah	2,598	2,721	3,020	3,343	745	28.68%
Palm Island	2,180	2,201	2,457	2,764	584	26.79%
Carpentaria	2,159	2,232	2,465	2,618	459	21.26%
Northern Peninsula Area	2,886	2,986	3,156	3,239	353	12.23%
Cloncurry	3,705	3,880	3,969	3,958	253	6.83%
Torres	3,533	3,621	3,713	3,739	206	5.83%
Cherbourg	1,212	1,245	1,302	1,346	134	11.06%
Hope Vale	999	1,030	1,082	1,102	103	10.31%
Napranum	907	948	989	1,008	101	11.14%
Burke	430	444	490	520	90	20.93%
Mapoon	442	480	503	519	77	17.42%
Woorabinda	1,041	1,053	1,077	1,101	60	5.76%
Aurukun	1,131	1,184	1,184	1,180	49	4.33%
Kowanyama	1,108	1,121	1,148	1,157	49	4.42%
Doomadgee	1,435	1,443	1,457	1,472	37	2.58%
Pompuraaw	632	639	655	660	28	4.43%
Wujal Wujal	284	295	307	312	28	9.86%
Cook	4,631	4,689	4,726	4,646	15	0.32%
Lockhart River	653	648	648	648	-5	-0.77%
Croydon	269	261	245	234	-35	-13.01%
Diamantina	270	264	240	219	-51	-18.89%
Barcoo	312	305	278	253	-59	-18.91%
Bulloo	342	332	301	278	-64	-18.71%
Richmond	769	762	723	693	-76	-9.88%
Boulia	470	460	418	382	-88	-18.72%
Etheridge	724	703	660	630	-94	-12.98%
Mornington	1,061	1,061	1,005	950	-111	-10.46%
Quilpie	702	681	618	570	-132	-18.80%
McKinlay	838	806	705	626	-212	-25.30%
Winton	1,132	1,107	977	865	-267	-23.59%
Paroo	1,708	1,656	1,504	1,386	-322	-18.85%
Blackall Tambo	1,920	1,883	1,716	1,571	-349	-18.18%
Torres Strait Island	4,300	4,332	4,151	3,937	-363	-8.44%
Flinders (Qld)	1,521	1,462	1,280	1,133	-388	-25.51%
Mount Isa	19,226	19,211	19,127	18,760	-466	-2.42%
Banana	14,663	14,530	14,331	14,150	-513	-3.50%
Barcaldine	2,863	2,807	2,559	2,343	-520	-18.16%
Murweh	4,010	3,925	3,619	3,360	-650	-16.21%
Charters Towers	11,923	11,875	11,553	11,169	-754	-6.32%
North Burnett	10,144	9,753	9,587	9,360	-784	-7.73%
Longreach	3,693	3,607	3,219	2,888	-805	-21.80%
Balonne	4,379	4,170	3,761	3,364	-1,015	-23.18%
Burdekin	16,842	16,409	16,111	15,810	-1,032	-6.13%
Goondiwindi	10,404	10,093	9,712	9,183	-1,221	-11.74%
Maranoa	12,960	12,705	12,027	11,246	-1,714	-13.23%
Hinchinbrook	10,992	10,715	9,780	8,765	-2,227	-20.26%

“We’re running out of land for the cities and we have increasingly higher density, so we need to work on that higher-density transport planning which we (currently) do very poorly.

“For big cityscapes, we need to think about underground rail and more bus corridors, like what Perth is doing, and then we need to work out how to grow the regional cities to take the pressure off capital cities.”

Both the Queensland Property Council and the Real Estate Institute of Queensland said the state desperately needed to diversify its housing supply, and unlock greenfield and infill land so that houses were put on the ground sooner.

REIQ chief operating officer Dean Milton said Ipswich, which is expected to grow at a rate of more than 126 per cent, would face the largest housing challenge and southeast councils should start having conversations about expanding onto farmland.

“Areas like the Sunshine Coast, Gympie, Lockyer Valley, Toowoomba, they’ll have to start being developed now if people want space,” Mr Milton said.

“We’ll have to talk to farming areas out west and find the balance between food and housing.”