

Discussion Paper

The Six Cities Region

Delivering global competitiveness and local liveability



Acknowledgement of Country



The Greater Cities Commission proudly acknowledges Australia's First Peoples as the traditional custodians of the lands and waters of what we call the six cities.

We pay respect to Elders past and present.

We recognise and value the extraordinary and ongoing contribution of First Nations peoples and communities to Australian life, and how this enriches all Australians.

We embrace the spirit of recognition, working towards ensuring both an equal voice and equity in all aspects of our society.

Original Artwork by Zachary Bennett-Brook c. 2022.

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Message from the Minister for Cities



It is my pleasure to introduce the Greater Cities Commission's Discussion Paper on the six cities of the sandstone region.

Since the Dreaming, this region has been a place that has sustained human life and attracted community and settlement. The six cities are built on ancient sandstone, shaped by wind and water, and with an amazingly diverse and resilient ecosystem.

But cities are ultimately about human connections. These places became places of commerce and culture with incredible diverse communities that lay deep foundations for the planning visions we make today.

The strategic plans of the past still echo in the urban growth we see now. The County of Cumberland Plan of 1951 secured much of today's Western Sydney Parklands. The Sydney Region Outline Plan first introduced the importance of coastal connectivity between Newcastle and Wollongong. Sydney into its Third Century and the City of Cities Plan laid the foundations for the growth of suburban centres to make a truly polycentric conurbation.

The six cities are uniquely placed to be globally competitive. It is Australia's only functional cityregion, and is iconic around the world. This is a place that attracts not just foreign investment, but is a place people from all countries want to visit or inhabit. The six cities will have three international airports, three deepwater sea ports, and a concentration of world class universities. The incredible diversity of our people, our skills and our industries is something we can capitalise on.

The pandemic reawakened our sense of the importance of our local communities and the places we are part of. On one hand, we became more aware of importance of spatial connectivity in our cities– about the importance of our homes, our streets, and our public spaces. But also, the importance of our spiritual connectivity – about how human connections are fundamental and essential to the urban experience and the success of cities.

The new Six Cities Region Plan will build on the success of A Metropolis of Three Cities in 2018, which has shaped and delivered rapid growth and progress in a short period of time. In the Western Parkland City, a new urban centre is emerging around Western Sydney International Nancy-Bird Walton Airport, connected by rail and road. Parramatta has fully emerged as a city centre. We maintain an unmatched infrastructure investment pipeline that is making people's lives easier, more productive and happier.

“More affordable housing, more active transport, and less carbon emissions are just some of the important initiatives in this Discussion Paper that could frame our positive growth over the coming decades.”

We cannot however rest on our laurels. We need new bold ideas so that the growth of our cities makes our communities stronger, healthier and happier. A long term plan for fast rail, bringing in the Lower Hunter and Greater Newcastle, Central Coast, and Illawarra-Shoalhaven, can underpin our growth and connectivity over the long term. Deeper reconciliation with First Nations peoples will make for fairer city planning. More affordable housing, more active transport, and less carbon emissions are just some of the important initiatives in this Discussion Paper that could frame our positive growth over the coming decades.

If, as Patrick Geddes said, cities are organisms made up of complex relations, our plans must place people at the centre of our ideas. Despite the environment and the economy, the success of cities is dependent on its people, and that’s why the participation of the community is so important for the development of the new Six Cities Region Plan

This Discussion Paper does not profess to have all the solutions for the challenges we face as a community, but let’s start a conversation about what we can do together.

Rob Stokes
Minister for Infrastructure, Minister for Cities
and Minister for Active Transport



Long Jetty,
Central Coast City

Message from the Chief Commissioner



“Through adopting a city region approach, we too can enjoy the benefits of global scale. Greater economic scale will provide more jobs for our people closer to where they live and create the ability to capture the industries that underpin future economies and attract and nurture talent and investment.”

Our Six Cities Region is home to the world’s oldest living continuous culture. Aboriginal peoples from many nations have nurtured and protected these lands as their custodians for more than 65,000 years. Their caring for Country, from the escarpment to the coastline, the mighty rivers and lush forests and wetlands, continues in perpetuity. There is much we can learn from the First Peoples of these lands in shaping the future of the region. It is our hope that our next Region Plan embeds the voices, wisdom and knowledges of First Peoples, starting with the vision outlined in this paper.

We are now in the era of the global city region.

The Six Cities Region is comprised of Lower Hunter and Greater Newcastle City, Central Coast City, Illawarra-Shoalhaven City, Western Parkland City, Central River City, Eastern Harbour City. The Six Cities Region is already home to six million people. Within the next two decades, we are planning a region with over eight million people. City regions around the world, such as Singapore, San Francisco Bay and the Randstad in the Netherlands, have similar populations but operate with significantly greater economic reach.

Through adopting a city region approach, we too can enjoy the benefits of global scale. Greater economic scale will provide more jobs for our people closer to where they live and create the ability to capture the industries that underpin future economies and attract and nurture talent and investment.

But economic scale is only part of our vision. Our communities expect, and deserve, local liveability to be delivered at the same time. This means increased housing supply; housing that is diverse and affordable; growth that is managed by the provision of accompanying physical and social infrastructure which ensures complete and connected local centres and neighbourhoods; cities that actively address the challenges of climate and sustainability; and fairness and equity across our six cities.

By creating a city region, planning is integrated across a wider geographic area so that opportunities and challenges can be addressed at scale. Since the Commission’s Greater Sydney Region Plan, *A Metropolis of Three Cities*, was published in 2018, it has become even more important to ensure that transport and digital connections support social connection and economic growth, that we are planning for resilient and climate-proofed cities, and that growing communities have the infrastructure they need. It is essential that our region offers people better jobs within 30 minutes of where they live and more choice in housing and education.

“As we move from a metropolis of three cities to a region of six cities, our vision is to deliver global competitiveness and local liveability for the Six Cities Region.”

Since 2018, we have also seen greater links between Sydney and the world-class places to its north and south. Developments in transport and infrastructure have underpinned these increasing connections. At the same time, COVID-19 has accelerated some trends and started others, such as the altered living and travel patterns associated with hybrid working.

In December 2021, the Premier’s Bradfield Oration outlined a vision for New South Wales that builds on the success of the metropolis of three cities: a new global city region that enables education opportunities and industry growth, that reflects and supports new ways of living and working, and that accelerates the change and revitalisation already occurring across the six cities.

This was followed by the Greater Cities Commission Bill that passed with bipartisan support in April 2022 and ushered in a new era of strategic city planning. The legislation changed the Greater Sydney Commission to the Greater Cities Commission, set out the Commission’s function across the new boundaries of the Six Cities Region and enabled us to appoint new City Commissioners, continuing our commitment to planning informed by local engagement.

As we develop the Six Cities Region, we need to be bold and ambitious in tackling some of the defining issues of our time: housing, inequality, physical and digital connectivity, job opportunities and climate change.

These are not simple issues. This discussion paper outlines the Commission’s emerging thinking on how we can realise the vision of the Six Cities Region, including six Region Shapers that we believe can get us there.

Planning for our shared future is about improving the lives of the six million people who already live in the Six Cities Region and the millions more who will live in the region in the future.

As we move from a metropolis of three cities to a region of six cities, our vision is to deliver global competitiveness and local liveability for the Six Cities Region

We look forward to your feedback as to how we can collectively shape a globally relevant city region that offers inspiring places to live and work.

Geoff Roberts AM
Chief Commissioner



Marrickville Metro,
Eastern Harbour City

Purpose of this paper

This discussion paper aims to stimulate conversation about the best way to plan a Six Cities Region that benefits our people and captures our global economic opportunities, as we develop the Greater Cities Commission's Region Plan for the six cities.

Our Six Cities Region includes the Lower Hunter and Greater Newcastle City, the Central Coast City, the Illawarra-Shoalhaven City, the Western Parkland City, the Central River City and the Eastern Harbour City. It encompasses 43 local government areas.

The Commission has been charged with leading and coordinating Australia's first global city region. We are seeking input as to how we bring together six cities to collectively build the scale, scope and potential for a world-class region of better jobs, housing, education and leisure that is productive, sustainable and liveable for everyone - while celebrating and leveraging each city's unique character and strengths.

This discussion paper is not government policy. It is the starting point for conversations with our many stakeholders: First Nations peoples, community members, local councils, industry, state government departments and agencies, and cities experts.

The Commission will use this discussion paper to canvass these ideas broadly throughout the Six Cities Region to ensure that government, industry and community priorities inform our strategic planning.

This will include direct engagement - online and in person - with citizens, government and industry on the Region Shapers proposed in this discussion paper, informing the Region Plan and City Plans.

Help us shape the Six Cities Region

For options on submitting feedback to help the Commission plan for the Six Cities Region, please visit greatercities.au.

Introduction

From A Metropolis of Three Cities to a Six Cities Region

The Greater Sydney Region Plan, *A Metropolis of Three Cities*, was driven by a desire to shape a more competitive and more equitable Greater Sydney. The fundamental challenge with which it grappled was the inequity across the cities, because where people worked and where they lived was unbalanced. Placing housing, jobs, infrastructure, and services within a 30-minute reach of more people was a central aim of this Plan that was published in 2018.

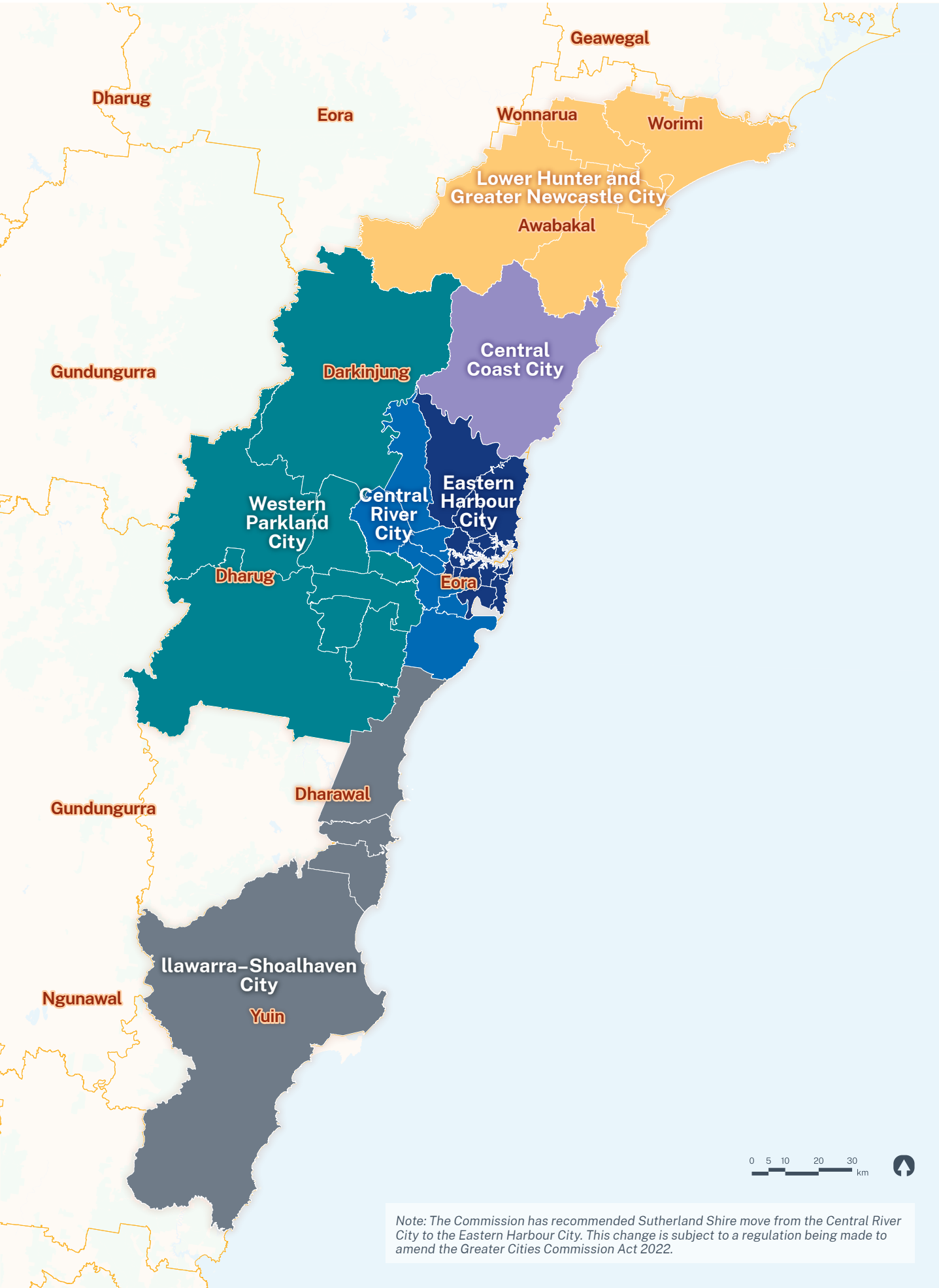
In the years that have followed, there have been major shifts in rebalancing infrastructure investment, particularly in Western Sydney within the framework of the Western Sydney City Deal. There has also been a focus on three important innovation districts: Tech Central in the east, Westmead in the centre and the Aerotropolis in the west. These innovation districts have emerged as a critical part of the innovation ecosystem that includes our health and education hubs and that will underpin the future economy.

Universities and organisations, such as the national science agency CSIRO, are now locating throughout Greater Sydney. This is fundamental to delivering 30-minute cities, enabling a broader distribution of education and industry opportunities. The establishment of the Greater Sydney Parklands is also contributing to increased equity across the three cities, addressing community needs for open space and parklands.

This is significant progress, and the work of balancing the three Greater Sydney Cities continues.

However, since the 2018 Region Plan was published, housing affordability has continued to decline, housing supply continues to fall short of demand, climate vulnerability has increased, the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed fault lines of social inequity, and the challenge of ensuring infrastructure aligns with growth remains critical to metropolitan planning. These issues are framing our thinking as we move from planning three Greater Sydney cities to a Six Cities Region.

Figure 1: Six Cities Region





Rouse Hill Town Centre,
Central River City

Figure 2: Planning and reports timeline 2018–2024



While the 2018 Region Plan and District Plans provide important certainty and a long-term planning vision, we’ve heard clearly that the Commission needs to give direction that allows for faster delivery on the ground, particularly relating to housing and local infrastructure, with measurable and timebound targets that reflect what matters to people in the Six Cities Region. How we can achieve this is explored in greater detail in the final section, *Bringing six cities together*.

The Region Plan for the new Six Cities Region will be developed by the end of 2023, building on the work of the NSW Government and stakeholders since 2018.

The City Plans for the Eastern Harbour, Central River and Western Parkland Cities will also be developed by the end of 2023. They will replace the existing District Plans for these cities.

The Department of Planning’s regional plans for the Hunter, Central Coast and Illawarra-Shoalhaven will apply as District Plans until the Commission delivers new City Plans for the Lower Hunter and Greater Newcastle, Central Coast and Illawarra-Shoalhaven Cities in 2024. This includes the new regional plans for the Hunter and Central Coast expected to be released in 2022.

This staged approach reflects the recent and significant work undertaken by NSW Department of Planning and Environment and stakeholders in the development of these strategies and will allow time for transitioning the Lower Hunter and Greater Newcastle City, Central Coast City and Illawarra-Shoalhaven City into metropolitan planning for the Six Cities Region.

Figure 3: The Six Cities Region area





Glenrock State Conservation Area,
Lower Hunter and Greater Newcastle City

Credit: Newcastle City Council

“A stunning natural environment of national parks and world heritage areas, bounded by the coastline and the escarpment, all connected by waterways and mighty rivers.”

Our assets and strengths

Between them, the six cities already have a great many individual strengths and infrastructure assets.

Our region spans more than two million hectares³, with urban areas framed by a stunning natural environment of national parks and world heritage areas, bounded by the coastline and the escarpment, all connected by waterways and mighty rivers.

Our cultural and linguistic diversity presents distinct social and economic advantages. Australia is more diverse than ever, despite a pandemic-induced slowdown in migration. The 2021 Census found that almost half of Australians have a parent born overseas and the population continues to be drawn from around the globe.⁴

Our three international airports and three deep water ports are also becoming increasingly important. These gateways not only connect us to the sky and the sea, they plug us directly into the global economy. For the first time they will be coordinated to form a network that supports efficient trade and tourism.

We have seven world class universities and leading financial and industrial centres alongside emerging global innovation precincts, linking our places of learning with the industries of tomorrow.

We are the single biggest economic system in Australia. Our gross value added of \$485 billion is bigger than the combined contribution of Tasmania, South Australia, the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory, and is larger than the resources and agricultural industries combined.

Our geographic location, stable financial system, democratic form of government and multicultural society are all strategic advantages that allow us to be a global player in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond.

In coming together as a city region and coordinating these strengths, we can properly use our assets, ensuring our existing advantages benefit residents and cement our leadership role in the Indo-Pacific region.

Figure 4: Key data from across the Six Cities Region⁷

Six Cities Region



\$485bn

Gross value added (2020)



2,253,903

Total area
(hectares)



3,365,111

Number of jobs
(2021 projected figures)



6,265,344

Current population
(2021)



2,425,151

Total number of dwellings
(2021)

Lower Hunter and Greater Newcastle City

FIRST NATIONS LANDS

Awabakal
Darkinjung
Wonnarua
Worimi



21%

Open space as a proportion
of total city area



430,251

Total area
(hectares)



288,043

Number of jobs
(2021 projected figures)



611,852

Current population
(2021)



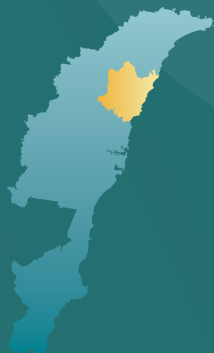
250,878

Number of dwellings per city
(2021)

Central Coast City

FIRST NATIONS LANDS

Darkinjung



28%

Open space as a proportion
of total city area



184,511

Total area
(hectares)



134,156

Number of jobs
(2021 projected figures)



346,596

Current population
(2021)



146,248

Number of dwellings per city
(2021)

Illawarra–Shoalhaven City

FIRST NATIONS LANDS

Dharawal
Jerrinja
Wandi Wandian
Wodi Wodi



43%

Open space as a proportion of total city area



581,750

Total area (hectares)



174,884

Number of jobs (2021 projected figures)



422,440

Current population (2021)



180,790

Number of dwellings per city (2021)

Western Parkland City

FIRST NATIONS LANDS

Darkinjung
Dharawal
Dharug
Gahbrogal
Gundungurra



58%

Open space as a proportion of total city area



808,995

Total area (hectares)



421,514

Number of jobs (2021 projected figures)



1,154,718

Current population (2021)



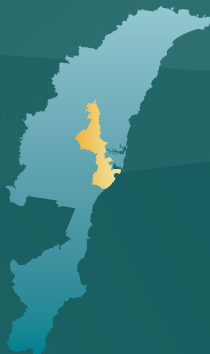
391,251

Number of dwellings per city (2021)

Central River City

FIRST NATIONS LANDS

Bediagal
Burramattagal
Dharawal
Dharug
Wangal
Wategoro
Weymaly



19%

Open space as a proportion of total city area



130,556

Total area (hectares)



774,038

Number of jobs (2021 projected figures)



1,834,311

Current population (2021)



642,424

Number of dwellings per city (2021)

Eastern Harbour City

FIRST NATIONS LANDS

Bediagal
Birrabirrigal
Borogegal
Darramurragal
Dharug
Gadigal
Gamaragal
Garigal
Gayemagal
Guringai
Gweagal
Wallumedegal
Wangal



38%

Open space as a proportion of total city area



117,841

Total area (hectares)



1,572,476

Number of jobs (2021 projected figures)



1,895,427

Current population (2021)



813,560

Number of dwellings per city (2021)

Note: The Commission has recommended Sutherland Shire move from the Central River City to the Eastern Harbour City. This change is subject to a regulation being made to amend the Greater Cities Commission Act 2022.



City regions offer global access and lifestyle benefits

The imperative to plan beyond Greater Sydney and embrace the Six Cities Region has been accelerated by recent social and economic shifts. Post-pandemic, city regions around the world are demonstrating their potential to better withstand economic uncertainty, offer a higher quality of life and win the contest for talent and investment.

As highlighted in the Commission's 2021 report, [Our Metropolitan Futures](#), cities that have relied heavily on tourism, retail, students and events have had to quickly re-evaluate the potential of their city centre. Cities that have revitalised their CBDs and rethought land use conditions and other incentives, have been able to build a larger innovation and knowledge-led economy. Cities dominated by the car have discovered the potential of unlocking streets so that communities can use and enjoy the space. Hybrid and remote working has become possible for many, with more people seizing the opportunity to live where they want to, and embrace a lifestyle that suits them. These major economic and social shifts have boosted the potential for a region of six cities which can achieve global significance and real benefits for residents close to home.

“Across the world, city regions are emerging as key to strategic, sustainable and productive city-shaping.”

The [Arcadis 2022 Sustainable Cities Index](#) ranks 100 global cities based on 28 indicators across three pillars of planet, people and profit, including air pollution, renewable energy share, cost of Wi-Fi, income inequality, employment rates and job quality. The report highlights how cities must take a holistic view for long term success, looking beyond economic development to environment, health and people's quality of life.

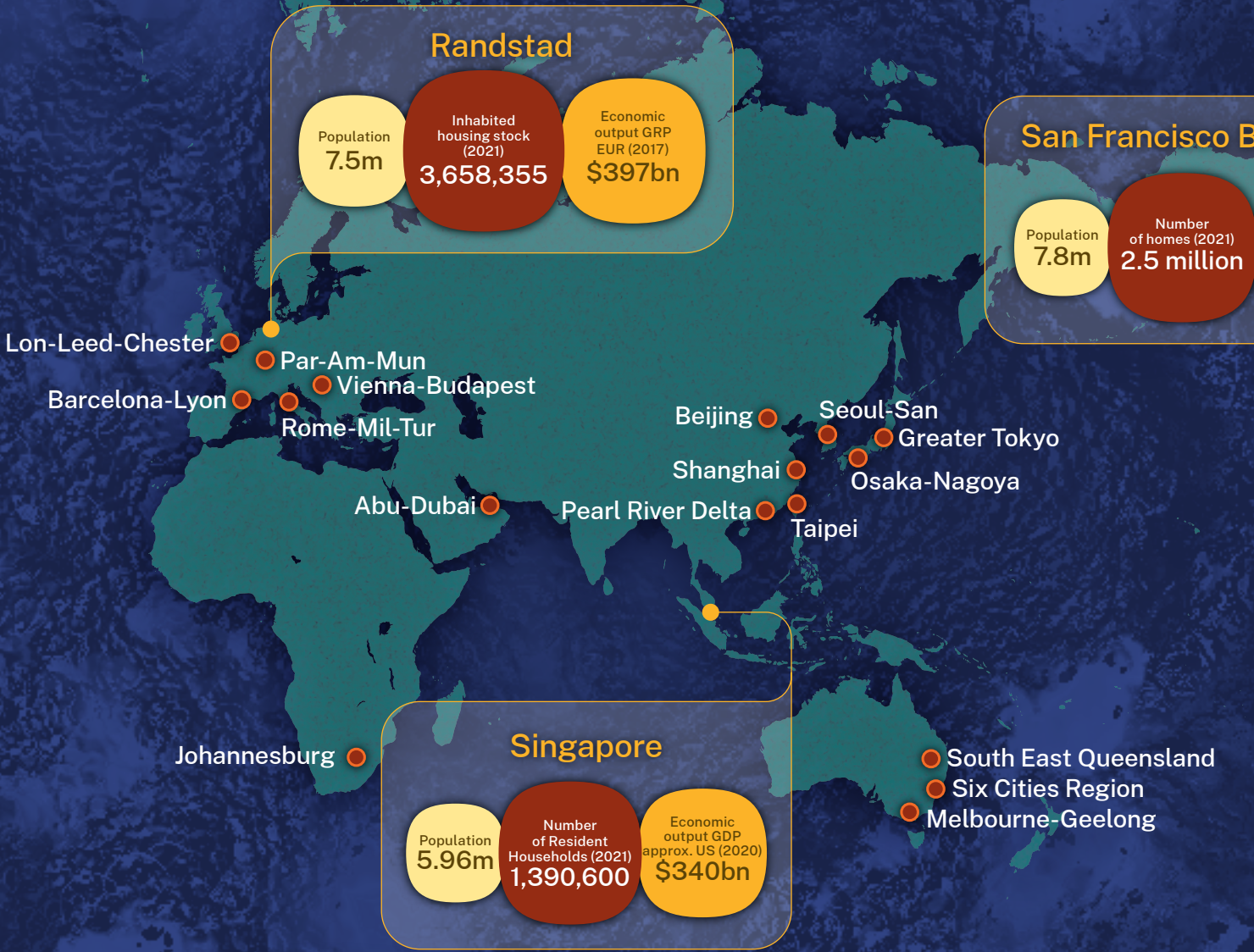
Sydney's high rating in the profit category helped it to position 33⁸, the highest Australian city on the index, but its lack of bicycle infrastructure and environmental exposure rated poorly. The most highly positioned cities reinvested their profits into social amenities, policies and environmental actions that improved the quality of life of their citizens, thus positioning themselves for long-term success.

Across the world, city regions are emerging as key to strategic, sustainable and productive city-shaping. City regions have become successful global players because they have clearly defined industry specialisations, transport networks that increase housing options and job opportunities, knowledge economies supported by education institutions and innovation districts, and airports and seaports that serve as global gateways.

We are ready to develop our own city region and stand alongside other global regions like Singapore, San Francisco Bay, the Randstad, Pearl River Delta, Greater London, Toronto and Shanghai.

Figure 5: City regions around the world⁹

City regions around the world





International city regions highlight the many benefits across economic growth, social inclusion and lifestyle for their citizens:

- The San Francisco Bay area (position 9 in the 2022 *Sustainable Cities Index*) is home to Silicon Valley, the world's flagship hub for technology, innovation and entrepreneurship. It also has a high concentration of Fortune 500 companies. It is connected by the Bay Area Rapid Transit system which, through providing a cheap and convenient means to access jobs in Downtown San Francisco, helps employers recruit and retain workers and reduces overall traffic congestion.
- The Randstad megaregion spanning dozens of cities was established decades ago, setting the stage for the Holland Metropole where high-speed rail connects Amsterdam (position 10), Rotterdam (position 12), Utrecht and The Hague, allowing each to draw on the resources of three other cities under an hour away. Each city has its own industry specialisations, resulting in the city region having strengths in finance, tourism, business, heavy industry and higher education.
- Singapore (position 35) was ranked as the most competitive economy in the world in 2019. This reflects the combined strengths of its diversified city region economy that includes manufacturing and the services sector, access to the rest of the world via Singapore Changi Airport and a busy container port, and the internationally renowned National University of Singapore.
- The nine cities in the Pearl River Delta in South-East China have become one of the most economically dynamic city regions in the world. Connected via fast rail, this city region has rapidly transformed from an agricultural to an innovation-driven economy and centre of advanced manufacturing. It is now home to some of China's top tech firms.

The six cities have many of the strengths found in these international city regions, and others besides, but it will take strategic planning and aligned policy to coordinate and integrate them to realise these benefits for our citizens.

The Vision

Delivering global competitiveness and local liveability for the Six Cities Region



Wollongong,
Illawarra-Shoalhaven City
Credit: Wollongong City Council

We envision a connected region of six cities where we can move people and goods across the region in 90 minutes, and everyone in the region is digitally and globally connected in a nanosecond. In each city, great jobs are 30 minutes by public transport from great homes. We enjoy a greater range of lifestyle choices connected to economic opportunity and most people live in vibrant local centres and neighbourhoods where all our daily needs are met within a 15 minute walk.

More than 65,000 years of continuous culture is central to our shared identity and sets us apart from anywhere else in the world. The wisdom and aspirations of First Nations peoples are recognised and embedded in planning for our future, and we care for Country. Our diverse communities are recognised as a great strength, enriching our culture and meaningfully connecting us to every corner of the globe.

Housing is more affordable and accessible, leveraging our transport and social infrastructure investments, with the government playing a material role in enabling supply. People live in homes that are sustainable, efficient and adaptable, and that meet their changing needs over time.

Local infrastructure and growth are strategically coordinated to leverage diverse centres that support their communities. Our economic assets are coordinated and leveraged in an integrated way, capturing our potential as an Indo-Pacific economic powerhouse.

An interconnected ecosystem of innovation districts linked to places of learning supercharges knowledge jobs across the region while supporting the broader jobs economy. All six cities have greater resilience because of the economic diversification of their wider and connected city economies. Our economic opportunities are matched by spectacular lifestyles offered across the region. We enjoy unparalleled accessibility to beaches, national parks, rivers and waterways, ancient geological formations and natural beauty.

Our region is recognised for its global climate leadership. Net zero is embedded in our housing, transport and infrastructure and is a major part of our global economic future. Secure and sustainable water infrastructure across the region is important for economic growth, keeps our communities cool and green and strengthens our resilience to climate-related risks.

“More than 65,000 years of continuous culture is central to our shared identity and sets us apart from anywhere else in the world. The wisdom and aspirations of First Nations peoples are recognised and embedded in planning for our future, and we care for Country.”



Credit: Sutherland Shire Council

“As part of a larger world class city region, each city can build on its own signature strengths and character.”

Planning the Six Cities Region

Over the past few years, substantial work has been undertaken by the Commission, the Department of Planning and Environment, Infrastructure NSW, Transport for NSW, local government and industry in planning the six cities.

Now, recent Federal and State Government commitments are providing essential foundations to enable the Six Cities vision. These include the recognition of First Nations peoples in decision making; the Fast Rail Strategy including early works funding for the initial staging; additional financial support for infrastructure supporting housing; significant resources to transition our economy to net zero; and increased measures around mitigating climate vulnerability.

By building upon this foundation in a coordinated and integrated way, we can work together to realise the vision of the Six Cities Region.

To meet the needs of a growing population, we need to be bold and ambitious in building the right economic, social and environmental framework to maximise opportunities that will improve peoples' quality of life. Sustainable and managed growth in population, housing and infrastructure will deliver better outcomes in terms of jobs, skills, knowledge, belonging and choice.

A mosaic of vibrant metropolitan, strategic and local centres and neighbourhoods contribute to the unique attributes of each of the six cities. As part of a larger world class city region, each city can build on its own signature strengths and character while leveraging the enhanced ability to attract new business and investment, and enhanced physical and social infrastructure and amenities.

Figure 6: The Six Cities Region will be connected through Country, transport and economic links, a hierarchy of centres and environmental assets.

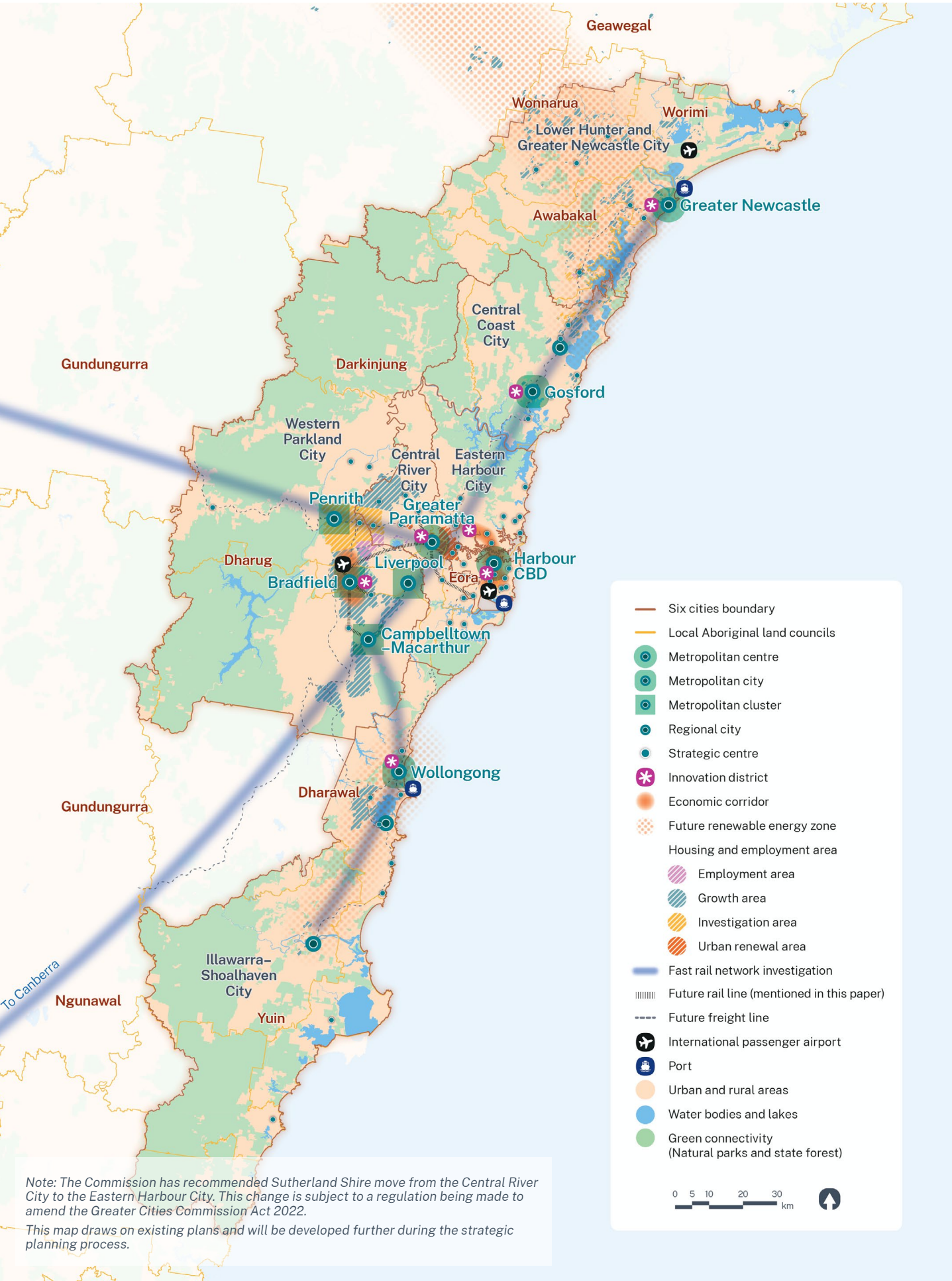


Figure 7: United Nations Sustainable Development Goals



Goals of our Six Cities Region

Recognition of First Nations peoples

Our region is home to the oldest living continuous cultures on earth, and with this comes the wisdom and knowledge gleaned from more than 65,000 years of continued custodianship of the lands, waters and seas. Caring for Country and First Nations perspectives in planning and decision-making processes are a foundation principle.

United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

The Discussion Paper's ambitions have also been framed by the [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals](#) to ensure our six cities can achieve a better and more sustainable future for all our communities.



Fairfield,
Western Parkland City

Six Region Shapers

To realise the vision and capture the benefits of the Six Cities Region, we are proposing six Region Shapers – a set of priorities that will frame the 2023 Region Plan and guide conversations with government, business, community, the not-for-profit sector and universities and research institutions.

Drawing upon the UN Sustainable Development Goals, these Region Shapers reflect the priority outcomes that the region must deliver to create economic, environmental and lifestyle benefits for millions of people.

Each Region Shaper is explored in the following sections, including an outline of a 20-year vision to set our strategic direction, to inform our engagement and strategic planning work to develop the Region Plan.

Figure 8: Six Region Shapers





Wollongong,
Illawarra-Shoalhaven City

1

An embedded First Nations voice

A 20-year vision: More than 65,000 years of continuous culture is central to our shared identity and sets us apart from anywhere else in the world, and the wisdom and aspirations of First Nations peoples are recognised and embedded in planning for our future.

The lands of the six cities are located on the ancestral and unceded homelands of the Awabakal, Bediagal, Birrabirrigal, Borogegal, Burramattagal, Darkinjung, Darramurragal, Dharawal, Dharug, Gadigal, Gahbrogal, Gamaragal, Garigal and Gayamaygal, Guringai, Gundungarra, Gweagal, Wallumedegal, Wandj Wandian, Wangal, Wategoro, Weymaly, Wodi Wodi, Wonnarua, Worimi and Yuin peoples.¹⁰

The Commission will improve the cultural safety and relevance of the strategic planning process through mechanisms that recognise the aspirations, cultures, languages of the peoples who have been the custodians of the various lands across the Six Cities Region for more than 65,000 years. By listening to and establishing partnerships with representatives of First Nations communities, working with First Nations peoples, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, traditional custodians, and Local Aboriginal Land Councils, the Commission will enable First Nations perspectives to inform and influence all its planning and decision-making processes.

The move towards active recognition of First Nations peoples' ongoing custodianship of the land is a fundamental shift in NSW's strategic planning. Just as the [Uluru Statement from the Heart](#) calls for the establishment of a First Nations voice in the Australian Constitution, the Commission will create the space and mechanisms for First Nations' voices to be embedded into the strategic planning of the Six Cities Region.

As a first step the Commission will establish a First Nations Advisory Panel to advise on regional strategic planning. The Panel will operate as a voice to the Commission and guide implementation of the Region and City Plans.

The Commission's engagement of First Nations peoples in strategic planning will link to the [NSW Government's Implementation Plan for the National Agreement on Closing the Gap](#) by:

- Creating new partnership frameworks
- Amplifying First Nations perspectives in NSW Government decision making
- Increasing First Nations representation on decision making and advisory bodies
- Seeking feedback on the cultural safety and appropriateness of our engagement and planning work to understand where we can improve
- Assessing how our programs and policies will impact First Nations communities.

Progressing this Region Shaper

- 1.1 The Region Plan and City Plans will identify and incorporate the aspirations of First Nations' peoples including:
 - a. social aspirations, including social cohesion and social infrastructure
 - b. wellbeing aspirations, including health and healing
 - c. environmental aspirations, including land management, climate resilience, biodiversity management
 - d. land aspirations, including land management, land ownership and return of land, and plans for existing land holdings
 - e. economic aspirations, including education, training, jobs, entrepreneurship and investment
 - f. cultural aspirations, including cultural heritage, language revitalisation, significant and sacred site management and protection, and place naming
 - g. planning aspirations, including ensuring the planning system is designed to enable the achievement of First Nations aspirations.

In developing the Region Plan and City Plans, the Commission will coordinate engagement with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, traditional custodians, Local Aboriginal Land Councils, the Federal Government and other relevant NSW agencies, including Department of Premier and Cabinet (Aboriginal Affairs NSW), Regional NSW, Crown Lands and Department of Planning and Environment.



Circular Quay,
Eastern Harbour City

2

A connected Six Cities Region

A 20-year vision: A connected Six Cities Region delivers universal high speed digital access for all residents in the short-term. In the medium-term, three sea ports and three international airports operate as a system of global economic gateways. Our 20-year vision is that fast rail connects our coastal cities to the north and south, intersecting in the Central River City, based on a prioritised and staged series of network enhancements and smart technology, supporting job and housing distribution.

Digital and physical connectivity will underpin the success of the Six Cities Region. People must be connected within and between the six cities: to each other, to place, to physical and social infrastructure, to local centres and neighbourhoods, to Country, to the world. Existing relationships and connections must be strengthened, and new ones built, coming together as a highly networked region.

Providing universal digital access and fast data connectivity across the entire city region is a key component of our future cities' economies and societies. Supporting people to be better digitally connected will support automation, ease, learning, and growth and will enable more choice in where people live and work. Improved digital connectivity is also essential to increased innovation and productivity across the economy.

Connecting the region across its north-south and east-west axes will enable the mobility of freight and people like never before, and enable jobs and housing to be distributed across the wider region. This will provide better access to domestic and international markets, jobs, education and services. It will enable our region to respond to new talent location preferences and remain competitive to a younger innovation workforce, by increasing the supply of housing to bring down the cost of living and providing improved transportation for commuters. It also enables more affordable homes through opening up new opportunities for settlement, and better lifestyles for our communities.

An integrated and efficient road, rail and freight system will be critical for our region's competitiveness. Since the release of the 2018 Greater Sydney Region Plan, significant foundational work has been delivered. The Commission will work with Transport for NSW to ensure NSW's freight strategy maximises the benefits of a joined-up Six Cities Region.

Improved connectivity within the broader region, as well as to our ports and airports, are required to improve access to global markets. These gateways also need to support the increasing volume of freight movements and address the vulnerabilities in global markets and changing customer expectations revealed by the pandemic.

Our ports and airports need to work as a system so we can integrate our freight network and make better use of existing infrastructure. Industrial lands are needed to support population and economic growth. They should be retained near trade gateways to safeguard freight and logistics capacity and support efficient operations.

Planning for fast rail, new metro links and improved bus services will connect communities within and between cities so that people and goods can travel across the Six Cities Region in a safe, sustainable and convenient way. This will link people to amenities and enable important social ties between family, friends and communities.

Improved transport connections also have the potential to expand our communities' access to labour markets and supercharge the region's productive capabilities, while also reducing our total carbon emissions.

The Commission is recommending a staged approach to connectivity in the region. This can be delivered in the short term through digital connectivity and in the medium term through improving freight movements to take advantage of the economic gateways of the Six Cities Region. Over the longer term, the fast rail network can be rolled out, with work commencing in the short term to support a staged delivery.



Newcastle Airport,
Lower Hunter and Greater Newcastle City
Credit: Newcastle Airport Pty Ltd.

“If equal access to digital connectivity with smart technology is not delivered across the Six Cities Region in the short term, we will have lost a critical window of opportunity to provide residents with an essential access point for economic and social participation.”

Universal digital access

COVID-19 highlighted the inequality that exists for people and businesses, and the urgent need for investment in digital infrastructure to close the digital divide. The [Australian Digital Inclusion Index](#) measures the access to, affordability, and digital ability of technology. It found major inconsistencies of connection across the six cities. If equal access to digital connectivity with smart technology is not delivered across the Six Cities Region in the short term, we will have lost a critical window of opportunity to provide residents with an essential access point for economic and social participation.

The digital connectivity that sustained us during COVID-19 will continue to grow in importance. It will enable the development of smart city technology across the whole region that will make fixed and mobile digital and physical mobility more efficient, productive and sustainable.

By fully participating in the digital economy, we will be in a better position to attract talent and investment to the six cities region.

Improved digital connectivity is a critical component of the [NSW State Infrastructure Strategy](#), and the [Smart Places Program](#) which includes supporting investment in digital connectivity in State sponsored precincts.

Progressing this Region Shaper

- 2.1 The Region Plan will support the recommendation of the State Infrastructure Strategy to adopt a targeted and sequenced State digital connectivity enablement investment program, commencing with high-priority precincts in each of the six cities.
- 2.2 The Commission will work with NSW Government, local councils, the private sector and the Federal Government to prioritise increased digital connectivity in these locations.
- 2.3 The Region and City Plans will identify locations with low rates of digital connectivity, and where higher speed or increased connectivity would support innovation districts.



Linking freight, ports and airports for economic growth

A robust and connected freight system is key to maximising our existing strategic advantages. The safe, productive and sustainable movement of freight within our Six Cities Region and between NSW and international ports, airports and logistics hubs will provide local opportunities and grow the NSW economy. New and upgraded connecting infrastructure is required to support the future needs of Port Botany, Port Kembla and the Port of Newcastle as well as Kingsford Smith Airport, Western Sydney International (Nancy-Bird Walton) Airport and Newcastle Airport and their surrounding areas. The Commission will work with Transport for NSW to identify other missing links in the freight network.

The Six Cities Region enjoys the benefits of three deep-sea ports. Port Botany will be the main container port for the near future. Port Kembla is planned to be the future second container terminal to support long-term demand and the resilience of the Six Cities Region's freight network. Port of Newcastle will continue its global role in energy exports as it transitions from coal to hydrogen, as well as grows and diversifies its trade base over the next 20 years.

The development of a new rail connection to Western Sydney is a crucial link that would support additional rail freight capacity in and out of Port Kembla and the Illawarra-Shoalhaven City.

There are at least nine existing airports in the Six Cities Region: three international passenger airports, three defence airbases and three general aviation airports. It is crucial to strategically plan for the passengers that use the region's airports, the businesses that co-locate near them and the freight that will pass through them. As the aviation industry moves towards net zero emissions, strategies to reduce the carbon footprint of our airports are needed.

The Six Cities Region has an immediate opportunity to grow the international and domestic passenger markets and improve air freight for markets to the north, particularly to areas where we have a free trade agreement.

The opening of the Western Sydney International (Nancy-Bird Walton) Airport in 2026 will be a game changer for the Six Cities Region. It offers a significant opportunity to transform the aviation sector and better connect our people and air freight to the rest of the world.

Progressing this Region Shaper

- 2.4 The Commission will work with Transport for NSW on six cities airports and ports strategies for integration in the Region and City Plans.
- 2.5 The Commission will work with Transport for NSW to consider the land use and spatial implications of the freight, ports and airport strategies.

“Fast rail has the potential to be among the most important Region Shapers, transforming settlement, jobs and enabling a truly polycentric city region.”

City making benefits of fast rail – delivering the connected Six Cities Region

- Faster and more reliable journey times would bring businesses and communities together, providing more opportunities for industry specialisation, employment matching and productivity, improving access to jobs while providing better opportunities for employers to recruit and retain talent.
- Improved transport connections would support opportunities to grow housing supply in accessible high amenity areas.
- Improved transport connections would alleviate development pressure on environmentally constrained locations, reducing risk of housing in climate vulnerable areas.
- Increased supply and diversity of housing would provide more affordable homes and better lifestyles for our communities.
- More equitable access to employment, services and opportunities would drastically improve quality of life for marginalised communities.
- Faster and easier access to cultural and recreational activities would boost quality of life, domestic and international tourism, the 24-hour economy, and the service industry.
- A prosperous and vibrant economy in the main cities would have positive impacts to hinterland and surrounding suburbs and rural areas.
- An interconnected network of cities and communities with a larger diversity of economic, cultural and civic opportunities would make NSW a bigger player in the global market, attracting global talent and investment.
- Connecting and optimising use of our economic gateways would create better access to domestic and international markets.
- Improved transport connections would enable more of our population to have better access to education and training, supporting a highly skilled workforce.

Detailed investigations and business cases produced over time will optimise the fast rail strategy and should also consider the city-building benefits set out above.



Fast rail

Already, COVID-19 has accelerated the existing trend for residents to live and work in outer metropolitan areas, and with hybrid and remote working trends for many workers here to stay, our transport connections need to reflect this new reality. It is vital that our six cities are connected via fast, reliable and efficient rail to realise our vision.

The NSW Government is working towards delivering a fast rail strategy to connect the six cities as well as other key regional centres, and the nation's capital, Canberra. The delivery model, as well as staging, financing and value for money, will be confirmed through the business case processes.

A dedicated fast rail line from Newcastle to Wollongong would serve the Hunter, Central Coast, Greater Sydney, and the Illawarra-Shoalhaven, with an extension connecting Greater Macarthur to the Southern Highlands, Southern Tablelands and Canberra regions.

The Region Plan and our six City Plans will support the delivery of a holistic strategy for fast rail that considers complementary infrastructure and non-infrastructure policies.

The Commission encourages the delivery of fast rail to have a mission and objectives which recognise fast rail's city and place-shaping potential, as well as its connectivity function.

Fast rail could connect our skilled workforces and innovation districts in each city. As an example, the potential to link the Aerotropolis via metro rail and then to the fast rail would leverage all these assets to an internationally significant status, and create city-shaping benefits.

The [State Infrastructure Strategy](#) calls for the government to progressively fund and deliver the fast rail strategy based on a prioritised and staged program of network enhancements. It encourages government as an immediate priority to define stages and sequencing for the delivery of the fast rail that considers demand and economic development objectives.

The 2022–23 NSW State Budget includes previously committed funding of \$275 million over four years for further detailed planning and to commence early works of the fast rail network. Further funding for the delivery of future stages is subject to agreement with the Federal Government.

“Improving inter-city connections will reduce travel time and connect the six cities into a city region.”

Public transport

Improving inter-city connections will reduce travel time and connect the six cities into a city region. It will be essential to integrate local public transport routes with outer metropolitan transport options, including fast rail, urban and suburban bus and rail networks and walking and cycling paths. The bus network also has an important role to play, as one of the most efficient ways to transport large numbers of people across our cities.

Express coach services will serve the coastal communities between Port Macquarie and Newcastle, complementing existing rail services that will continue to serve inland communities, and other opportunities for express coach services between fast rail hubs and key regional cities and centres in other regions are also being investigated.

Fast rail has the potential to enable the inter-regional public transport connectivity that is critical to the six cities vision.

Progressing this Region Shaper

- 2.6 The Region Plan will support the delivery of a holistic strategy for fast rail that will develop the city making elements of the fast rail strategy to realise the benefits.
- 2.7 The Region Plan and City Plans will continue to prioritise rail links to connect the Western Parkland City to the rest of the city region.
- 2.8 The Region and City Plans will support a rapid bus strategy (including new fleet, services, technologies and infrastructure) that services key centres and corridors across Sydney, prioritising Parramatta Road and Victoria Road, and between the Western Sydney International (Nancy-Bird Walton) Airport and key metropolitan centres of Liverpool, Campbelltown and Penrith.
- 2.9 The Region and City Plans will support the extended program to improve public transport within the metropolitan cities of Newcastle, Central Coast and Wollongong.





Avalon Beach,
Eastern Harbour City

3

Housing supply, diversity and affordability

A 20-year vision: Everyone in the Six Cities Region has access to a quality home that is connected, resilient, affordable, and which meets their needs. People have benefited from increased housing supply, with more places to build homes across the Six Cities Region. A large-scale program of building social and affordable housing, including key worker housing, on government land has ensured that people on low to moderate incomes can also meet other basic living costs such as food, clothing, transport, medical care and education.

Integrated planning has ensured homes are connected to existing and planned transport infrastructure. Planning for homes of the future reflects the diverse needs of the population, including life stage, cultural needs and multigenerational living. Resilient housing is provided through more green and adaptable homes, and not building in climate vulnerable areas.

More than a roof over our head, a place to call home is essential to wellbeing. A home offers freedom and connection: freedom to choose a living situation that meets our needs without creating financial worries, as well as the ability to connect and contribute to the lives of people around us.

People in the Six Cities Region enjoy one of the most desirable lifestyles in the world, but housing has become increasingly unaffordable.¹¹ Housing is repeatedly identified by the community as one of the most significant issues facing Greater Sydney.¹² It is also a priority across regional NSW, with Infrastructure Australia recently identifying the ‘availability, diversity and affordability of housing’ as the primary infrastructure gap in regional areas.¹³

In some Local Government Areas in 2016, about a quarter of very low to moderate income households were spending more than 30 per cent of their household income on rent, placing them in rental stress.¹⁴

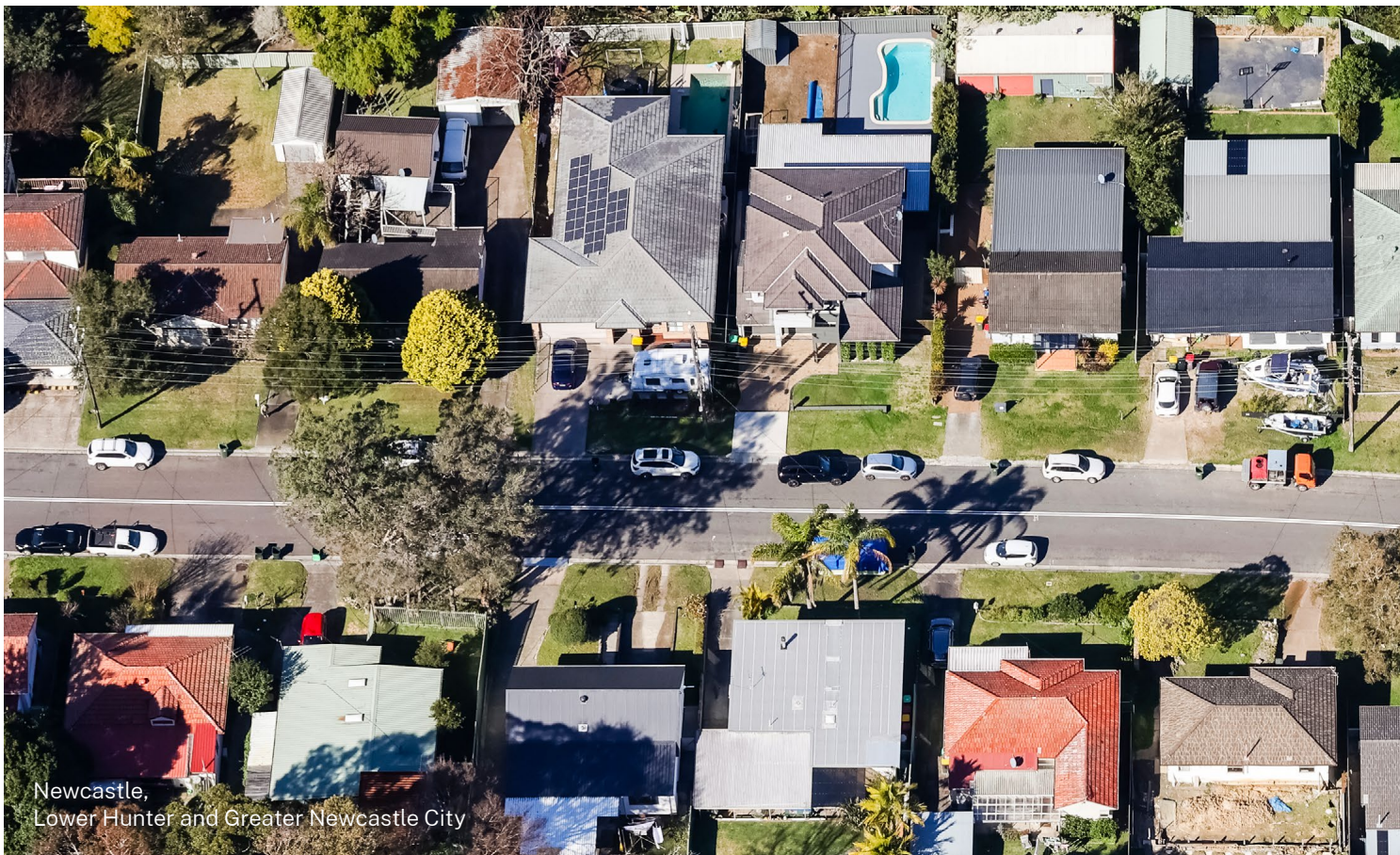
Rental rates surged 9.4 per cent between May 2021 to May 2022 across Greater Sydney, and rental vacancies have been at a critical low in the Lower Hunter and Greater Newcastle, and Illawarra-Shoalhaven.¹⁵ There are also challenges around security of tenancy, with more people needing to age in rentals, and older women one of the fastest growing groups experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity in Australia.¹⁶

The housing crisis has been further exacerbated by external factors. COVID-19 exposed the vulnerability of various parts of our social fabric, including a shortage of affordable, social housing and crisis housing. Climate-fueled disasters are increasingly driving internal displacement, and people who are homeless or lack access to resilient or secure housing are most impacted.

Providing resilient, connected and affordable homes that support good lives is an essential, shared responsibility between all three levels of government and the private sector.

Table 1: Dwelling completions by city

City	Dwelling completions (2016–2021)	New dwellings (2016–2021)	
		% detached	% multi unit
Lower Hunter and Greater Newcastle	21,031	55%	45%
Central Coast	7,201	50%	50%
Illawarra-Shoalhaven	11,652	59%	41%
Western Parkland	40,470	68%	32%
Central River	73,210	33%	67%
Eastern Harbour	67,559	4%	96%



Targets to improve supply, affordability and diversity

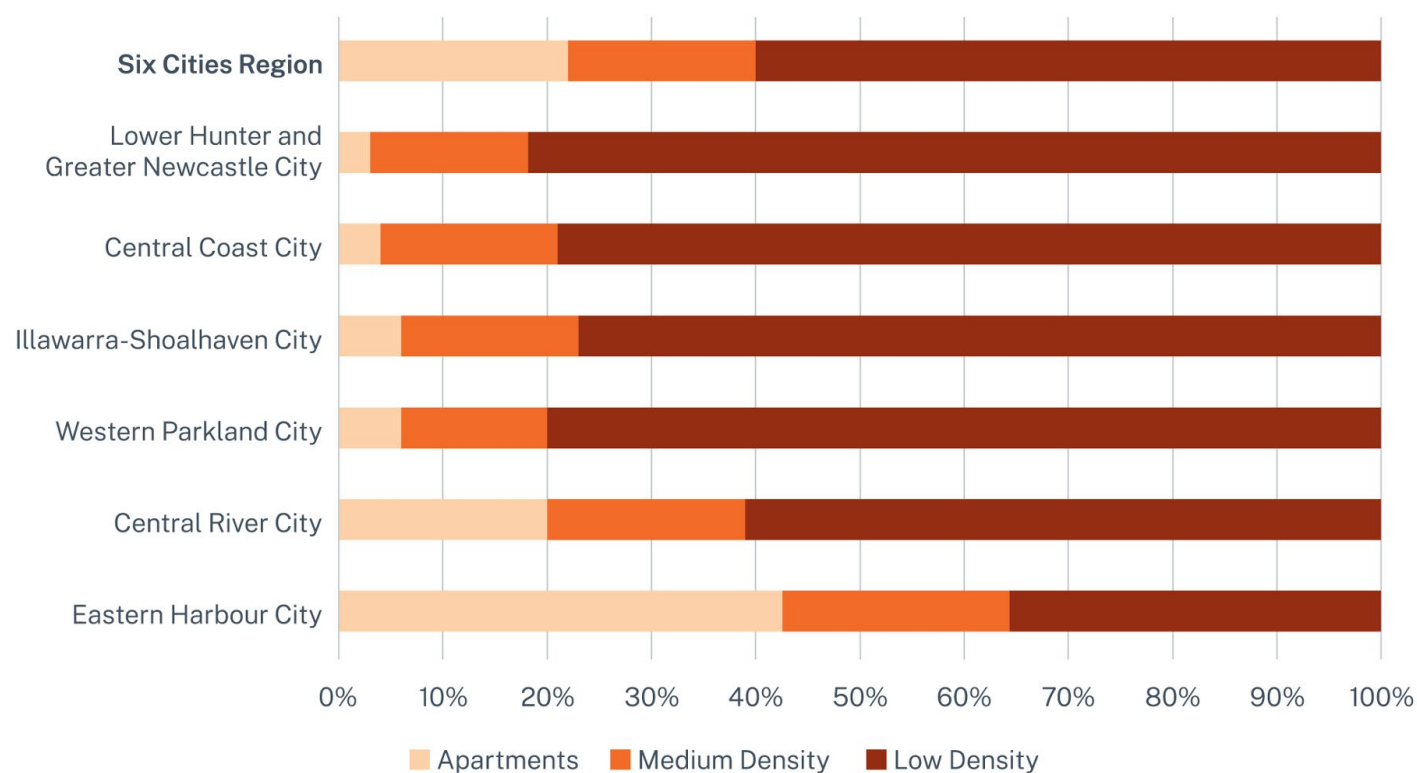
Our cities need diverse housing to meet our changing needs over our lifetimes – from when we first leave our family home, to retirement, and everything in between. This includes crisis accommodation, specialist disability accommodation, affordable housing, social housing and culturally sensitive housing that supports communal and multi-generational living.

A lack of housing diversity across the Six Cities Region means there is often a mismatch between supply and demand for types of housing. The Six Cities Region must accommodate these needs and enable choices while maximising affordability, including for our most vulnerable community members. This can happen through providing a full range of homes, from single dwellings with granny flats, dual occupancies and townhouses and low-rise apartments through to larger-scale mixed use development in thriving local and strategic centres.

Current NSW Government initiatives underway to create a more inclusive and sustainable housing sector include fast tracking infrastructure, property tax reform, offering shared equity for first home buyers and revitalising social and affordable housing.



Table 2: Existing dwelling types across the Six Cities Region¹⁷



The Commission recommends that housing diversity is improved, in part, by:

- Increasing the proportion of multi-unit and higher density housing in accessible locations that are supported by infrastructure.
- Ensuring existing and new freestanding homes and medium density housing are connected to quality amenity, essential services and transport infrastructure.
- Continuing to work with councils through their local housing strategies.

Region Shaper Four 'Inclusive places linked to infrastructure' outlines how housing will be strategically located and built in the Six Cities Region.

Progressing this Region Shaper

- 3.1 The City Plans will set five, 10 and 20 year housing targets for each Local Government Area (LGA), including for resilient, adaptable, affordable and diverse housing.
- 3.2 The Commission will work with stakeholders, including local and state governments, housing providers and industry to identify additional approaches to incentivise achievement of housing targets.
- 3.3 The Region Plan and City Plans will identify priority housing areas proximate to existing and future transport hubs over the first 10 years of the Plans to ensure supply is increased and development is supported by appropriate infrastructure. This will include diverse and affordable housing adjacent to the roll out of fast rail and metro stations, rapid transit stations and innovation districts.
- 3.4 The Region and City Plans will prioritise areas for housing developments that are connected to transport hubs and supported by local infrastructure.

3.5 The City Plans will set the following targets for housing to be delivered in locations within 800m of a strategic centre or transport hub:

- a. a minimum target of 25 per cent for the proportion of the total LGA housing target to be delivered through a mix of higher density housing types (e.g. apartments, town houses, and boarding houses) in these locations
- b. a target for the proportion of affordable housing in these locations.

3.6 The Commission will work with local councils, state and federal agencies and industry to improve delivery of affordable housing, including new financing mechanisms, with a 10 per cent affordable housing target for new rezonings where there will be a housing uplift.

3.7 The City Plans will set a target of up to 30 per cent for the proportion of social and affordable housing in residential developments on government land.







North Ryde,
Eastern Harbour City

4

Inclusive places linked to infrastructure

A 20-year vision: Everyone in the Six Cities Region lives in an inclusive and vibrant community that connects them to quality housing, services, jobs and amenities within a 15 minute walk or cycle in their local centre and neighbourhood, and within 30 minutes by public transport to strategic centres, jobs and other key destinations including health and education. This may include 24/7 access in some areas.

“Developing amenities and social infrastructure alongside a greater supply of housing is critical to creating quality, equitable places in which people thrive.”

Our cities need to support people's access to economic opportunity and amenity, but also a sense of social connection and belonging, and healthy lifestyles.

Effective planning for the Six Cities Region will create destinations for work, leisure, business and residential life that generate inclusive economic growth, both locally and for the broader region. The Commission will continue to plan for the place-based investment and linked infrastructure needed to generate widespread social and economic benefits for people, including investment to support access and resilience, social connection, local identity, and civic participation in our public spaces.

Local centres and neighbourhoods where people love to live are made up of many elements: how well connected and walkable they are; how close jobs, local parks and green spaces, shops and services are; how long it takes to get from 'A' to 'B'; how well-located social infrastructure such as schools and health services are; and the quality of these services and amenities.

For many communities, living local was an unexpected outcome of the COVID-19 pandemic. People found new appreciation for local centres and neighbourhoods and the importance of accessible local amenities and blue and green spaces. However, the pandemic also highlighted unequal access to local jobs, housing, health, aged care, education, open space, waterways and recreational opportunities.

Each local centre and neighbourhood needs to be planned to capitalise on the qualities of each place, including heritage. The Commission's planning will create and improve 15 minute local centres and neighbourhoods, considering land economics, housing types, active transport, local mobility, digital connection, planning infrastructure upgrades, freight servicing and the factors that create much loved places, such as tree canopy and open spaces.

A stable home also gives people access to social infrastructure and shared spaces, allowing people to be part of a community. Developing amenities and social infrastructure alongside a greater supply of housing is critical to creating quality, equitable places in which people thrive. Housing is discussed in detail in Region Shaper Three, 'Housing supply, diversity and affordability.'

Region Shaper Six, 'Climate-resilient green cities' explores how our infrastructure will also need to be safe and sustainable so that people can continue to 'live local' in homes, communities and cities that drive us towards net zero emissions and mitigate climate-related risks.



Vibrant local centres and neighbourhoods that provide equal access to services and amenity

A Metropolis of Three Cities focused on the planning decisions needed to support new infrastructure in each city, including cultural, education, health, community and water infrastructure, to fairly balance population growth with infrastructure investment.

The upcoming 2023 Region Plan will do the same but with a greater emphasis on infrastructure delivery and social and environmental infrastructure. It will identify how to create well-designed places that enhance quality of life, that are accessible and attractive, with local access to infrastructure, such as the arts and culture, essential services, childcare, cycling pathways, waterways and open spaces. Effective planning for local centres and neighbourhoods should be informed by prioritisation that includes criteria such as infrastructure implementation needs and capacity.



Cabramatta,
Western Parkland City

Infrastructure to enable dynamic centres

With the shift in activity from central business districts to local strategic centres expected to continue, town centres and main streets will play an even more important role in community life.

Town centres have moved the focus away from large, physical retail stores and embraced more experience-based mixed uses. Main streets need to offer a mix of tenancies, buildings, transport, arts, hospitality and entertainment choices for the local community. This creates the vibrant culture, equitable and inclusive community, sense of safety and mix of uses that characterise great centres and quality places. The physical characteristics of local centres and neighbourhoods can also shape a cohesive social environment, with inviting public spaces and walkable streets, along with community events, encouraging diverse groups to mix.

Higher density development around public transport nodes connected to infrastructure and homes, with better walking and cycling access, is an efficient and sustainable way of ensuring more people can access services and amenities.

There has been significant investment in public transport infrastructure and upgrades to rail and metro stations, including NorthWest Metro, Parramatta Light Rail, Newcastle Light Rail, CBD and South East Light Rail, and the upcoming Metro West. Our new and expanding network also includes development of fast rail that links our regional centres and public transport to the Western Sydney International (Nancy-Bird Walton) and Kingsford Smith airports.

To ensure housing is concentrated in locations that provide a high quality of life, the Commission recommends that precinct density – in appropriate locations, where the benefits of density are greatest – is set in planning instruments at or as soon as possible after the time of transport project approval, to ensure amenities and active transport links are in place.

“Facilities and services should also be delivered in a way that supports wellbeing, and ensures the choice of readily available active and public transport modes to easily access services, jobs and learning that are in close proximity to where we live.”

Progressing this Region Shaper

- 4.1 The City Plans will identify precincts and centres with the most potential to support delivery of housing targets, in line with existing and planned infrastructure. Key locations will be close to stations and transport hubs.
- 4.2 The City Plans will identify which of the precincts and centres identified under 4.1 would benefit from place strategies to align land use and infrastructure.
- 4.3 The Commission will consider how business cases and funding decisions can be better aligned to achieve strategic planning priorities, including aligning housing with infrastructure.

Making active or public transport the preferred choice

Vibrant and inclusive local centres and neighbourhoods are also ones where people are not reliant on cars to access essential services. Planning cities requires a flexible and accessible built environment that supports community health and convenience, which includes active transport options. Active transport supports ageing in place, accessibility, mobility and health, and planning should support wheelchairs, mobility aids, walking and cycling as the preferred modes of transport for local trips.

Progressing this Region Shaper

- 4.4 The Region Plan and City Plans will set targets to increase the proportion of walking and cycling trips by up to 30 percent by 2030 through planning and investment in active transport connections.
- 4.5 The City Plans will set five, 10 and 20 year targets for mode shift to public transport.

Tallawong Metro Station,
Central River City





5

Powering local jobs and economies

A 20-year vision: Our economy has performed strongly over the past two decades, with new jobs in high-performing industries that are resilient to future shocks. Addressing workforce gaps, underrepresentation and the barriers to workforce participation has led to better living standards for individuals and families, and improved economic security and wellbeing, bringing enormous social and economic benefits. Our population is highly skilled in future-facing areas and the Six Cities Region is seen as the threshold between Australia and the world.

The significant scale of the region allows each city's competitive advantages to be fully utilised and invested in. Innovation districts are established as engine rooms of ideas, invention and collaboration, and they are connected to local industries, higher education institutions and Vocational Education and Training (VET). People can easily access local education and development opportunities and smart, secure jobs, many in the growing knowledge economy and international trade.

Our global economic advantage and ability to compete with the rest of the world depends on the knowledge and capability of our people and the innovation of our industries.

Currently, people across our Six Cities Region do not have equal access to job and education opportunities. To diversify our economy and attract, and then make the most of, talent and investment, we will develop a network of global innovation districts. These districts are places where knowledge, learning, research and ideas collide, developing new businesses, products and services that bring jobs and benefits to all our citizens.

Innovation districts, including health and education hubs, remain priority areas for building knowledge intensive jobs growth across the six cities. A number of current projects will set the scene for improved economic dynamism and future knowledge intensive jobs growth across the Central River and Western Parkland Cities. This includes the recently announced

Advanced Manufacturing Research Facility at Bradfield, as well as investment in the Viral Vector Manufacturing Facility at the Westmead Health and Innovation District.

Defining the distinct and complementary roles of the innovation districts, global trade gateways, and economic corridors in all six cities will benefit each city and underpin the success of the region. Sustainable economic growth will be secured by building upon existing industries and growing jobs in priority knowledge and industry sectors. Focus industries will include agriculture, tourism, technology, health industries, defence and aerospace, renewable energy, advanced manufacturing and materials, smart freight and logistics, agriculture and tourism.

By making access to education more equitable and ensuring that jobs are more evenly spread across the region, people will have better access to more jobs, closer to where they live. Our supercharged economy and our skilled people will be better equipped to confidently face and engage with the rest of the world.

“In shaping the Six Cities Region, the Commission will focus on growing knowledge industries to ensure that workers are well matched to jobs in their region, and that companies are able to scale up, innovate and broaden their market reach.”

Innovation districts as talent attraction hubs

The Commission will work with our partners to develop a network of globally significant innovation districts across the Six Cities Region. The Commission will shape the development of at least three new innovation districts in the Lower Hunter and Greater Newcastle City, Central Coast City and Illawarra-Shoalhaven City, complementing the existing innovation districts in Greater Sydney: the Aerotropolis, centred on semiconductors, defence, aerospace and modern manufacturing; Tech Central, which has a focus on deep tech, software as a service, quantum cyber and information and communication technology; and Westmead, which drives health innovation, building on Westmead's strengths in advanced therapeutics, translation cancer, immunology, vaccinology clinical trials and digital health.

These vibrant precincts will bring people and organisations together in a dynamic exchange of ideas, capabilities, research and commercialisation. They will help each city attract and retain talent and create additional jobs, both within the districts and through creating an innovation ecosystem across the city region, where research from each district can be practically applied and locally developed.

Globally significant innovation districts have a number of common elements, including more than one advanced institute of education, a scale-up start-up ecosystem and a unique and easily identified economic advantage.

Many of these elements are already in place, with our seven world-class universities accessible within 30 minutes of each innovation district, and partnerships between innovation districts and universities currently being built.

The Commission proposes that the Lower Hunter and Greater Newcastle City innovation district is likely to be centred around renewable energy, net zero emissions and military sustainment as well as defence and aerospace alongside advanced manufacturing emerging industries.

The Central Coast City innovation district is likely to focus on health, technology and food manufacturing linked to freight systems, while the Illawarra-Shoalhaven City innovation district is likely to be anchored on our maritime defence and aerospace capability, freight and logistics, specialised steel manufacturing, and the cultural and creative industries.

Progressing this Region Shaper

- 5.1 The Region Plan and City Plans will include globally significant innovation districts with strategic economic advantage in each city, including in the Lower Hunter and Greater Newcastle City, Central Coast City and Illawarra-Shoalhaven City.
- 5.2 The Commission will link innovation districts in an innovation ecosystem, connected to existing opportunity initiatives, port and airport gateways, university campuses and VET training institutions and by gigabit scale internet to the entire city region and the world.

Building resilient economies based on each city's strengths

The Six Cities Region is the largest and most productive urban region in Australia, with a population of over six million residents¹⁸ and around three million jobs.¹⁹ The population is forecast to increase to over eight million by 2040.²⁰ In 2021, our region added \$485 billion in output, which equates to roughly 83 per cent of the NSW economy.²¹

There is a great opportunity to leverage the combined scale and economy of the Six Cities Region while supporting industry specialisations in each city. Honing each city's unique comparative advantages will unlock local job opportunities in a range of industries. Jobs will be more equally distributed across the region, which means that people will not have to travel as far for work.

A catalyst for *A Metropolis of Three Cities* was the need to rebalance employment opportunity across Greater Sydney, with knowledge intensive jobs historically concentrated in the Eastern Harbour City. This remains the case, however preliminary research suggests that a shift is occurring.

The Commission will draw upon the work already done for the Williamstown Special Activation Precinct and the existing Hunter and Central Coast Regional Plans that target and prioritise knowledge jobs in these cities. Initiatives such as the Central Coast Food Manufacturing and Innovation Hub, investment into the expansion of the University of Newcastle, and the Hunter-Central Coast Renewable Energy Zone, aim to set up the regions for a transformation to increased knowledge intensive jobs in the years to come. Initiatives such as Illawarra Renewable Energy Zone, Shell Cove Business and Technology Park and innovation programs associated with the University of Wollongong will position the Illawarra-Shoalhaven City for growth in knowledge jobs.

Olympic Park,
Central River City





University of Wollongong,
Illawarra-Shoalhaven City

The growth of the knowledge economy and diversification of industry sectors will support jobs for the future and more high-quality jobs for more people, closer to home. This will encourage government and industry supporting local jobs attainment, reducing the need to travel for work opportunities, and the growth of innovation districts across the six cities will be a significant lever and catalyst in achieving this.

The Commission will also investigate mechanisms to help develop skills and investment and ensure the inclusivity and vibrancy of these districts. This would include strategies to ensure innovation districts attract women and communities who are underrepresented in the current workforce of these future industries.

Collectively, these measures will result in knowledge intensive jobs being shared across the six cities, reducing the historical reliance on the Eastern Harbour City for future opportunities.

Progressing this Region Shaper

- 5.3 The Region Plan will set job targets for each of the six cities and across four categories of jobs (knowledge-intensive, health and education, population-serving and industrial).
- 5.4 In setting jobs targets, the Region Plan will recommend the incentives, planning changes and encourage investment and skills creation needed to achieve targets.



Supporting long term investment through industrial lands

Industrial lands have an important role to play as a vital piece of economic infrastructure, because they help to generate the investment needed for the effective functioning of the Six Cities Region, including supporting an efficient supply chain.

Industrial lands must be strategically planned so that we can coordinate the functions and types of land use and infrastructure. If links are missing in the supply chain, this impacts the productivity, functioning and economic resilience of cities. If the supply chain is too complex, this can reduce sustainability and competitiveness, especially for export industries and urban services.

The Commission recently completed a review of the retain and manage approach to managing industrial and urban services land in Greater Sydney. [The Review](#) highlighted the importance of a policy that ensures a productive network of industrial lands. This will be reflected in the 2023 Region Plan.

Progressing this Region Shaper

- 5.5 The Region Plan will include an industrial lands policy across the Six Cities Region to provide certainty to communities, businesses and investors to support local, regional and state economic growth. This will ensure that industrial areas are sustainably linked to current and global gateways like ports and airports.
- 5.6. Industrial lands policy will ensure industrial areas are located close to the businesses and communities they serve, including locations near major gateways, economic corridors and innovation districts, so that new industries in the Six Cities Region can sustain a global comparative advantage.



Huskisson,
Illawarra-Shoalhaven City
Credit: Shoalhaven Shire Council

6

Climate-resilient green cities

A 20-year vision: Our sustainable and climate-proofed cities, transport, homes and businesses run on clean, renewable energy. A circular economy has transformed our urban systems and how we use resources. Our emissions have more than halved, and we play a leadership role in the global region in the transition to a net zero economy. We are actively and effectively managing climate vulnerability, proactive climate proofing, urban heat and planning, and designing our built environments to withstand flooding, bushfires and coastal erosion.

“Reducing our emissions and transforming our cities and economy as part of a net zero state will be central to our future planning.”

Climate change is one of the greatest challenges we face. It impacts our natural environment and ecosystems, our economy, our infrastructure, and our way of life. As we plan for the future, we must ensure that we achieve sustainability for the long term, transforming to meet the challenge of realising net zero emissions, while ensuring our cities are resilient and adaptable in the face of the escalating climate change impacts we are already experiencing.

Reducing our emissions and transforming our cities and economy as part of a net zero state will be central to our future planning. The NSW Government’s [Net Zero Plan Stage 1: 2020–2030](#) creates a pathway to a low-carbon state by 2050. This will build on the integrated approaches set out in the 2018 Region Plan, increasing the sustainability of our region by expanding its green infrastructure and protecting our natural environment, which should be valued and managed for its intrinsic value and contribution to improved quality of life.

To accelerate our transition to renewable energy and a net zero emissions economy, we need to transform how we build our cities, our transport and urban systems and how we do business across our region. Improving the way we manage waste, recycle and reuse will also be integral to achieving net-zero emissions. Our future planning will be consistent with best practice planning principles including sustainable development, and particularly climate change mitigation and adaptation, and enhanced resilience.

As we grow, we must ensure our region strengthens its resilience in the face of the increasing climate-related risks and natural hazards of drought, bushfire, floods, extreme heat and overexposure to UV radiation that are already impacting our communities. This is embodied in the objectives and priority actions set out in the [NSW Climate Change Adaptation Strategy](#).



Accelerating the shift to renewable energy

Substantial growth in renewable energy and electrification of transport, homes and industry and businesses is key to the Six Cities Region becoming a net zero emissions region. Approximately 59 per cent of the region's emissions are from electricity use.²²

Emissions from transport have been increasing and will continue to rise without major intervention. Passenger transport accounted for 22.1 percent of Greater Sydney's emissions in 2019–20.²³ Reaching net zero emissions by 2050 will require a major shift towards private, public and heavy electric vehicles and more trips by public transport, walking and cycling.

The [Future Transport Strategy](#) highlights how low and zero emission vehicles will be key to the transition to clean and quiet mobility. Accelerating availability and affordability of electric vehicles and charging points will be critical. Transport for NSW is transitioning the state's bus fleet to zero-emission buses and renewable energy for electric trains and light rail.

Progressing this Region Shaper

- 6.1 The Region Plan and City Plans will embed pathways to accelerate the achievement of net zero under the NSW Net Zero Plan including:
 - a. emissions reduction targets
 - b. targets for electric and zero-emissions vehicles
 - c. accelerated electrification of public transport
 - d. strategies for increasing active transport.
- 6.2 The Commission will embed decarbonisation and electrification measures into the globally significant innovation districts in the six cities, with a target to achieve net zero in those innovation districts by 2030.

“To accelerate our transition to renewable energy and a net zero emissions economy, we need to transform how we build our cities, our transport and urban systems and how we do business across our region.”

Transitioning to a circular economy

Waste is a significant and increasing contributor to emissions. Moving to a circular economy will reduce emissions and improve sustainability of our cities and infrastructure. This will require major changes to waste management, recycling, and reuse across the six cities.

A circular built environment could save 3.6 million tonnes of CO₂ per year across Australia and deliver \$29 billion in direct economic benefits to NSW per year by 2040.²⁴

Infrastructure and construction projects can make greater use of recycled materials, reducing waste volumes overall, as construction and demolition waste accounted for 51 per cent of all waste in NSW (by volume) in 2019–20.²⁵

Increasing the separation of household food and organic waste can generate renewable energy and reduce emissions. This may require innovative solutions in higher-density areas where fewer households have access to their own garden, including through the development of community-led ‘maker spaces’ or ‘circular economy hubs’.

The precinct planning for the Aerotropolis in the Western Parkland City already provides for the potential inclusion of a ‘circular economy hub’ as a community asset, and circular economy design will be embedded in key innovation districts.

Progressing this Region Shaper

- 6.3 The Commission will embed circular economy design into the globally significant innovation districts in the six cities, with a target of net zero waste in those innovation districts.
- 6.4 City Plans will target at least one circular economy hub in each of the six cities.

“Challenges for the region include a changing climate, growing urbanisation, and changing patterns of economic and social vulnerability.”

Nepean River,
Western Parkland City

Resilient cities

The 2019–2020 bushfires across eastern Australia caused loss of life, property, infrastructure and devastating impact on communities, vegetation, wildlife and ecosystems across our region. There were additional health and economic impacts from the thick smoke blanketing the region for months.

In early 2020, major flooding impacted parts of Greater Sydney, the Central Coast City and the Illawarra-Shoalhaven City. Floods returned to parts of the region in late 2020, 2021 and 2022, causing more devastation, disruption and landslips.

Heat is a major problem across the cities, with local communities experiencing excessive temperatures during heatwaves. 2019 was the driest and hottest year in more than a century.²⁶ Such extreme temperatures have significant impacts on comfort, peak electricity demand, productivity and human health.

While the region has always been exposed to, and responded to, natural hazards, we must build resilience and readiness to respond to more intense, frequent and severe impacts. Land use planning will play a key role in reflecting and responding to the escalating risks that current and future communities face.



The Region Plan and City Plans will identify areas in each city that are exposed and vulnerable to various climate-related risks, reflecting and responding to the objectives and priority actions set out in the [NSW Climate Change Adaptation Strategy](#). Improving access to information on climate-related risks will help communities, businesses and governments make better decisions on how to mitigate these impacts.

Research supports the multiple benefits of greater investment in green infrastructure, such as the urban tree canopy, parks and waterways. Increasing green cover and retaining water in the urban landscape reduces the urban heat island effect, strengthens local resilience to climate-related risks, helps capture and store carbon emissions, reduces air pollution, improves liveability and makes our local centres and neighbourhoods more attractive.

Even though the Six Cities Region has a variety of local green infrastructure, it still has a high level of urban heat compared to other major city regions. It is important to ensure that investment in green infrastructure is equitably distributed across the Six Cities Region so that everyone can benefit.

Recycled water, including recycled stormwater, can help mitigate urban heat in a way that is less reliant on rainfall and drinking water supplies. Currently, only seven per cent of wastewater in Greater Sydney is recycled. Making greater use of recycled water, and water conservation measures will be critical to keeping our communities cool and green.

The [NSW Water Strategy](#) outlines how water resource management can be supported by the most contemporary data and risks to water resources. We will continue to draw on current data and modelling to improve our understanding of past and future climate risks.

Progressing this Region Shaper

- 6.5 The Region and City Plans will take learnings from recent events and be informed by integrated data, including the priority actions set out in the [NSW Climate Change Adaptation Strategy](#) and the [2022 NSW Floods Inquiry](#), to reflect and respond to exposure and vulnerability to climate-related risks, particularly urban heat, bushfire, and flooding.
- 6.6 The City Plans will develop tree canopy investment strategies and set place-based targets for canopy cover.
- 6.7 The Region and City Plans will reflect the NSW Water Strategy and consider recycled water infrastructure.

Sustainable homes and buildings

As heatwaves and extreme heat days continue to increase, we also must address what this means for our homes and the wider built environment.

Lifting BASIX building standards will make our cities and homes more comfortable, sustainable and climate-resilient. It will result in greater energy and water efficiency, which in turn reduces emissions and lowers costs. We must also prioritise increasing electrification using renewable energy and restricting the use of gas in new developments from 2025.

Urban heat can also be mitigated effectively by using cooler and lighter-coloured building and paving materials, ensuring street orientation responds to local climate conditions, retaining more water in the landscape and retaining more tree canopy and green ground cover.

Our global innovation districts – Tech Central, Westmead and the Aerotropolis – will showcase leading-edge sustainable buildings as they move towards a net zero target for 2030. Their role in the global economy is outlined in greater detail in Region Shaper Five, *Powering local jobs and economies*.

Progressing this Region Shaper

- 6.8 The Region Plan will include actions needed to strengthen resilience to urban heat, including updates to urban design guidelines, planning and building.
- 6.9 The Region Plan will set targets for low embodied emissions in construction materials and support more climate-resilient, energy and water efficient infrastructure and buildings, including updated BASIX standards.



Bringing together six cities – the next steps

Getting it done: great delivery



A 20-year vision: Strategic planning across the region and each of the six cities is focused on people. There will be one plan for the region and six for the cities. Together these plans will cover the essentials needed to deliver quality of life, whatever level of government people interact with. Delivery will be structured, governed and monitored to achieve the agreed priorities in these plans.

“Coordination is easier if everyone has the same priorities. To this end, the Commission will work with delivery agencies to embed the priorities and targets set out in the Region and City Plans in their key deliverables.”

This paper sets out the key ideas the Commission believes will shape the Six Cities Region. In some cases, the actions to be taken are specific. While in many cases they are complex, these actions are within the Commission’s powers and the path for delivery is clear: for example, the setting of five, 10 and 20 year targets for new additional dwellings in each local government area. In other cases, the Commission is pointing to a challenge and provoking discussion about a potential solution, but the solution is not solely within the Commission’s powers to deliver, such as universal digital connectivity.

If we improve incrementally on our [Metropolis of Three Cities](#), we will see specific ideas translated into plans and specific actions in plans delivered. More homes will be built. More diverse and affordable housing will be provided. New strategic centres will be created and more jobs will emerge.

However, incremental improvement will not achieve benefits at the scale envisaged in this paper. This will require a significant change in the approach to both strategic planning and delivery. It will require a paradigm shift – to mobilise all levels of government and all departments of state government, and to harness the capabilities of non-government sectors including the private for-profit sector, and the for-purpose university and philanthropic sectors.

To achieve this change, there will be one overarching strategic plan for the region and a plan for each city, covering all the agreed priorities. More than just collaboration is needed. True integration is required. Plans should cover the infrastructure typically included in the state’s transport and infrastructure plans, and also the key requirements for social infrastructure and other community needs.

As a starting point, the [Future Transport Strategy](#) and [State Infrastructure Strategy](#) align with the city region approach and the 2023 Region Plan, providing the basis for whole-of-government integrated land use, transport, and infrastructure planning and investment across the city region.

The Commission has been working closely with Transport for NSW and Infrastructure NSW to ensure the Region Plan and City Plans will align with key principles included in the [Future Transport Strategy](#) and [State Infrastructure Strategy](#).

As we progress the plans, the Commission will ensure key planning principles that support sustainable development, and link to the Department of Planning, form part of the planning framework.

Figure 9: A whole-of-government approach



The next round of City Plans will be more detailed than the District Plans produced in 2018. For the Eastern Harbour City, Central River City and Western Parkland City, they will incorporate and build on the Local Strategic Planning Statements and other work done by local government. In the Western Parkland City, the Blueprint produced by the Western Parkland City Authority will also be a significant input. The Central Coast, Illawarra-Shoalhaven and Lower Hunter and Greater Newcastle City plans will follow on from and expand on the plans already in place, and will also incorporate and build on the Local Strategic Planning Statements, council’s local housing strategies and other work done by local government.

Since the release of [A Metropolis of Three Cities](#), the Commission has tracked various indicators to monitor implementation. Drawing on this experience, the Commission will establish a framework for monitoring and evaluation alongside the development of the Region and City Plans that can assist in measuring the performance of the six cities against other global cities.

Figure 10: Greater Cities Commission's strategic approach



Governance for delivery

Once the plans are in place, effective governance will be needed to oversee delivery. Specific and integrated governance might be needed for large regional and city shaping deliverables, as well as the overarching plans.

The Commission is structured to provide effective governance at the regional level. The membership of the Commission features both state and local government perspectives, as well as economic, social and environmental expertise. The Commission is supported by three Committees (Strategic Planning, Infrastructure Delivery and Finance and Governance) with the Strategic Planning Committee and the Infrastructure Delivery Committee set up to facilitate delivery and collaboration.

At the city level, the Commission will focus on city-shaping initiatives and delivery. A governance mechanism will be adopted which is effective for each city and in which the Commission will play a key role. There will be common principles – such as the need to involve state and local government, to cover all relevant areas of State Government, to include the Federal Government where relevant, and to ensure participation of community voices, including traditional owners and land councils and the private sector.

For each city, the governance might vary, and it should take into account existing structures. This will build on the work already done by other state agencies, including the Department of Planning and Environment and Regional NSW. The Urban Development Program may also provide a useful governance model.

Existing Joint Organisation of Councils or Regional Organisations of Councils may provide appropriate forums which can be incorporated into the governance structure. These bodies vary in their form and function and the Commission will work with local government to obtain their views on the right model for each city. In the Western Parkland City, the role of implementing the Region and City Plans should only be what, if anything, is needed to supplement the Western Parkland City Authority.

Recent experience has demonstrated the importance of place-based governance in achieving outcomes. The Commission will continue to lead and facilitate delivery of identified innovation districts, ensuring that they meet their potential and testing and demonstrating new collaborative and integrated delivery models.

However, state government, and the Commission in particular, cannot and should not lead every place that requires coordination. The Commission's role is to establish a network across the six cities for sharing the lessons and expertise of place-based collaboration, including innovation district governance, regardless of who leads in each place.

The Commission will use this discussion paper to engage broadly throughout the Six Cities Region on these ideas to ensure that government and community priorities inform our strategic planning.

This will include direct engagement with citizens and government and industry bodies online and in person on the Region Shapers proposed in this discussion paper, as well as informing the Region Plan and City Plans.

Help us shape the Six Cities Region

For information on how to submit feedback on the six cities vision, visit greatercities.au.

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