

**COMMITTEE
FOR
THE HUNTER**

DRAFT HUNTER REGIONAL TRANSPORT PLAN

SUBMISSION

November 2022



**Hunter Regional Transport Plan team
Transport for NSW**

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Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft Hunter Regional Transport Plan.

About the Committee for the Hunter

The Committee for the Hunter (the Committee) is an independent and inclusive champion for the people of the Greater Hunter and their enterprises. Representing over 65 organisations including some of the largest employers and institutions in the region, we provide a unified voice for the Hunter. Our members are drawn from the private and community sectors and all three levels of government. We come together with a shared interest in building a sustainable, prosperous and equitable future for our region. The Committee delivers on that promise through advocacy on regionally-significant priorities, thought leadership and partnerships.

The diversification of the Hunter economy is the most significant priority of the Committee and our members.

More information about the Committee can be found at www.hunter.org.au

Contact Alice Thompson at ceo@hunter.org.au to discuss any aspect of this submission.

Summary

Connectivity, including transport, is a key ingredient in economic development.

The Hunter has considerable endowments in the transport network that give the region competitive advantage and enviable liveability. These are an international airport and deepwater port, links to the [National Land Transport Network](#) including Inland Rail, quality road and rail connections within the region and to the Sydney metro.

Governments have made commitments to further enhance and build capacity in the Hunter's transport networks, now in planning and construction.

The upgrade of Newcastle Airport and NSW Parliament's recent decision to provide a pathway to containerised imports and exports at the Port of Newcastle present new opportunities and demands on transport.

Faster rail will enhance the benefits of our proximity to Sydney. If integrated with land use planning, fast rail and planning for high speed rail have the potential to deliver more benefits than faster travel times, including housing supply, jobs and new centres for innovation.

Regional projects and partnerships are progressing exciting opportunities for green transport that will support NSW commitments to Net Zero. This includes the Hunter Hydrogen Hub with opportunities for coastal shipping, aviation, road fleets and public transport.

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The Hunter’s population is growing, driven by migration and more residents choosing to remain in the region. New people coming to the region also bring higher expectations of transport performance, particularly public transport, as do our younger generation.

As the Hunter population and economy continues to grow and diversify, transport will need to keep up with demands or risk the competitiveness and liveability that give this region an edge.

There is capacity in existing transport networks. However, there is also evidence that transport planning and investment is not keeping up with growth, with routine congestion on key junctions, insufficient local road infrastructure inhibiting housing supply, and public transport services falling short of the performance of other cities and regions the Hunter competes with for business and talent.

Transport needs to respond to growth. But with smart planning and investment, it is also a powerful lever to shape the region and influence the location, density and sustainability of development.

As a 20 year vision, it is important the draft Hunter Regional Transport seizes the opportunities and addresses emerging challenges, and documents these directions in the final draft.

We have presented some bold ideas we would like to see incorporated in plans going forward. These include:

- Develop a **freight and supply chain strategy and infrastructure plan** for the Hunter region that:
 - incorporates development of a container terminal at the Port of Newcastle and facilitates access to the international Newcastle Airport by the 2024 opening.
 - Enhances linkages between these international gateways and key industrial precincts, producers and domestic markets.
 - examines governance options for coordination of a diverse and integrated freight, logistics and supply chain in planning and operations, similar to the Hunter Valley Coal Chain Coordinator.
 - scopes a Special Activation Precinct for an intermodal hub in the Lower Hunter, that connects and integrates all modes of freight transport and provides space for industry development, complemented by master planning, streamlined approvals and enabling infrastructure.
- Commitment to a **review of public transport services across modes in the Greater Hunter** towards an integrated and sequenced plan for immediate improvements and future investment. As a decentralised economy, fixes will require innovative approaches and partnerships across governments, the private and community sectors. For example, we have suggested an innovation challenge to identify public transport ‘deserts’ and incentivise proposals to address, while the Hunter could be the first Net Zero public transport network in NSW and a sandpit for hydrogen fuels.
- The Hunter continues to be hit by rolling emergency events including storms, fires and floods. We proposed a **Hunter Valley emergency management strategy be developed to ensure access to regional evacuation routes**, along with a Strategic Business Case for transport upgrades tied to program funding. We further suggest the Hunter has a role as a State centre for aviation for emergency management.

We recognise there has been significant commitments made by governments into Hunter transport and precincts. Now is the time for implementation and coordination to get more benefits out of this focus and investment. Many of our recommendations are framed around this theme:

- Accelerate planning and delivery of committed transport projects.
- Demonstrate better alignment and integration between the Hunter Regional Transport Plan, the Six Cities Plan and the Hunter Regional Plan.
- Provide \$500 million for enabling infrastructure to unlock housing and commercial development stuck in the planning pipeline due to delays in transport infrastructure, while progressing planning and governance reforms to prevent issues like this into the future.
- Enhance access across the region to the new International Newcastle Airport which opens in 2024 as a near term priority, including public transport.
- With the private sector and local governments, examine options for adaptive reuse of coal transport corridors and associated lands for future freight, passenger, industry or tourism purposes over the short, medium and long-term.

Ad hoc approaches to planning and investment are not an efficient use of public funding and won't be sufficient to address the challenge of a \$63 billion economy in economic transition. In this Plan, we call for:

- Coordination of transport needs across NSW Government portfolios in a joined up and sequenced plan. This includes state-led precincts like the Williamstown SAP, Hunter Park and the John Hunter Health and Innovation Precinct along with programs like the Renewable Energy Zone and Upper Hunter.
- Coordination of long-term transport planning and investment across all three levels of government, with particular focus on interface with the Commonwealth on projects like Inland Rail, the M1 and fast rail/high speed rail. The benefits are optimised and more efficient delivery arrangements. The risks are that competing priorities will slow things down, introduce potential conflict between projects and reduce future options and benefits.

The Committee continues to argue that we will get better outcomes from coordination of initiatives in a joined up plan for the Hunter's diversification: across portfolios, levels of government, business, industry and communities. Transport, with its region-shaping potential, needs to be the foundation of this new deal for the Hunter.

Introduction

Transport is a priority for the Hunter and key area of focus of the Committee.

The Youth Committee for the Hunter recently [surveyed young people](#) across the ten LGAs of the Greater Hunter. Transport was identified as a priority for youths, essential to access housing, education, employment and social opportunities.

Around 50 per cent of young people surveyed stated that current transport services were not sufficient to meet the 15-minute region objective in the draft Hunter Regional Plan

Four out of the top six priorities for improvement related to public transport: more services and routes, higher frequencies and better experience.

Youths were keen to tell us about options that would improve transport access and experience, including to regional centres that are not particularly rural or remote. This includes centres and corridors across Cessnock, Maitland, Singleton, the Upper Hunter, Muswellbrook and Port Stephens. Young people and regional leaders are reporting this is significantly impeding access to higher education so critical to their, and our region's, future.

If significant areas and populations remain inaccessible, particularly high growth and more affordable places to live, it will further embed disadvantage into the region impeding social mobility and cohesiveness.

As the Hunter grows and our economy develops, transport especially public transport will become even more critical in maintaining our competitiveness and quality of life as we compete with other cities and regions for talent and business.

The State’s housing crisis, more pronounced in popular regions like the Hunter, is being exacerbated by a lack of investment in transport infrastructure

The Hunter Planning Alliance, a partnership between the Hunter Joint Organisation, Property Council NSW and UDIA NSW Hunter Chapters, Dantia, Business Hunter and the Committee, identified \$22 billion in development being held up because of delays in Transport for NSW approvals and funding.

The Alliance recommended reforms to approval processes and funding for enabling road infrastructure to unlock these houses. The group also argued for better long-term planning and infrastructure prioritisation to prevent shortfalls into the future and ensure public and private resources work together to address housing affordability and supply. The tenet of these recommendations has been picked up in the draft Plan and there is further work required to integrate transport planning with land use to confirm a pipeline of prioritised works for public and private funding.

Transport must be responsive to growth. It also has a role in shaping the region through providing clear signals to citizens and markets on where development and density will be, and where it won’t. There is an opportunity in the Plan to better harness this role of transport to optimise the structure and function of future settlement and balance productivity, liveability and sustainability.

The removal of penalties on containers at the Port of Newcastle represents a game changer for the Hunter economy and State transport network

The development of a container terminal can now be incorporated in the NSW Freight and Ports Strategy, along with the new international Newcastle Airport. Planning for the NSW and Hunter freight network and its interaction with passenger services, along with priorities for investment and reform, will also need to be reviewed.

There is an opportunity in the Hunter Regional Transport Plan to set these processes in motion and catalyse the strategic rethink of the Hunter transport network. Now is the time for long-term planning and partnerships across governments and sectors to achieve our shared vision for a diversified regional economy and stronger, more resilient State.

As the Hunter economy and population grows and changes, our development trajectory must be low carbon to be competitive, sustainable and safe

The draft Plan points out that the transport sector was the second highest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions. It is also one of the fastest growing.

As an emerging centre for Net Zero and clean energy, the Hunter will benefit from positioning as a place to live or invest that supports people and business achieve their values and goals for sustainability. It is fantastic to see the draft Plan align with State goals for Net Zero, commitment to decarbonisation across public transport fleets and operations plus emphasis on active transport solutions.

The final Plan could go further. There are a number of positive initiatives outlined in the plan. With our large population and diversity of communities and settlements, the Hunter offers a sandpit of scale to trial network solutions to hydrogen fleets, electric vehicles and active transport for broader rollout across the State.

Regional Priorities

The Committee strongly supports the vision outlined in the draft Plan and the six Directions that provide structure to the Objectives and Initiatives outlined in the Plan.

Our feedback on the draft Plan is structured under these Vision themes, augmenting Initiatives proposed in the Plan as well as suggesting new areas of focus.

Connected

1. More evidence of long-term corridor planning and reservation to connect the centres identified in the network map in Figure 11.
2. Prioritise and accelerate delivery of transport infrastructure already committed to in State Budgets and provide more definition/certainty to communities, business and local governments on timing. This includes:
 - Mandalong Road
 - M1 to Raymond Terrace
 - Muswellbrook and Singleton bypasses and town improvements
 - Nelson Bay Road upgrades
 - Hillsborough Road
 - Fast rail Sydney to Newcastle corridor.
3. Commitment to a review of public transport services across modes in the Greater Hunter towards an integrated and sequenced plan for immediate improvements and future investment.
 - special focus on bus rapid transit on existing infrastructure and/or with road modifications
 - more daily services to the Upper Hunter
 - commit to trial and showcase hydrogen fuels and fleets
 - provides clear directions for the future Newcastle Light Rail network, including recommendations on corridor preservation
 - commit to the Hunter being the first Net Zero public transport network in NSW.
4. Focus on improving public transport options to new growth areas, while also prioritising gaps in existing communities and opportunities for urban infill.
5. The Hunter is a decentralised economy. More emphasis on cross-region linkages between centres in addition to linkages to Newcastle (the 'hub') to reflect peoples transport needs, particularly across the Lower Hunter growth areas. This was the trap Sydney metro fell into that is proving very costly to remediate.
 - Urgent funding for a program of transport infrastructure to unlock new housing supply in the Hunter, while reforms to planning and prioritisation processes are implemented, including through the Hunter Urban Development Program Committee and Place Delivery Groups. \$500 million will unlock over 40,000 homes and 590 hectares of employment land stuck in the planning pipeline due to delays in transport infrastructure.

6. Demonstrate better coordination and interface with the Australian Government on long-term transport planning and projects, including:
 - High Speed Rail
 - Faster Rail
 - M1 to Raymond Terrace
 - Inland Rail.

Safe

7. Improve pedestrian and active transport safety through street and intersection design, not just via lower speed limits.

Liveable

8. Incorporate accessibility in the review of public transport services (Recommendation 2) to improve PTAL ratings and performance.
9. Invite the community and stakeholders to identify public transport ‘deserts’ and incentivise proposals to address through an Innovation Challenge.
10. Commit to Wi-Fi coverage across all public transport hubs and services in the Hunter at a set date in the near-term.
11. Set targets for the employment of Aboriginal people in the procurement of transport projects and services, helping to meet NSW commitments under the Indigenous Procurement Policy.

Sustainable

12. Commit to trial and showcase hydrogen fuels and fleets on road, rail and aviation, and commit to the Hunter being the first Net Zero public transport network in NSW (outlined in Recommendation 2).
13. Explore options for network solutions to circular economy, green fuels and fleets in a Hunter freight and supply chain strategy and infrastructure plan (Recommendation 18).
14. Include sustainability and Net Zero as a performance criteria in Recommendation 8) Invite the community and stakeholders to identify public transport ‘deserts’ and incentivise proposals to address through an Innovation Challenge.

Productive

15. Significantly improve multi-modal connectivity across the region to the new international Newcastle Airport and Williamstown Special Activation Precinct, including immediate improvements and longer-term priorities.
16. Immediately revise the NSW Freight and Ports Strategy to incorporate a container terminal at the Port of Newcastle and the new international Newcastle Airport.

17. Develop a freight and supply chain strategy and infrastructure plan for the Hunter region that:
 - incorporates a container terminal and industry development at the Port of Newcastle.
 - facilitates access and industry development at the international Newcastle Airport and Williamstown Special Activation Precinct.
 - examines governance options for coordination of a diverse and integrated freight, logistics and supply chain in planning and operations. The Hunter Valley Coal Chain Coordinator demonstrates the benefits of an independent body overseeing large and complex supply chains in partnership with producers and suppliers.
 - scopes a Special Activation Precinct for an intermodal hub in the Lower Hunter, that connects and integrates all modes of freight transport and provides space for industry development, complemented by master planning, streamlined approvals and enabling infrastructure.
 - improves linkages between key industrial precincts and producers, international gateways and domestic markets.
 - reduces road movements through urban areas and prioritises the viability of rail transport.
 - maximises the industry opportunity presented by the link to Inland Rail.
 - as a priority, focuses on facilitating delivery and long-term growth of NSW Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) and the Hunter Hydrogen Hub.
 - Expands export capabilities for manufacturers and producers.
 - identifies shared infrastructure requirements and sequences priorities to coordinate and integrate public and private investment, potentially through a strategic business case for the network.
 - identifies and protects critical freight corridors and functions from incompatible development.
 - work with councils and industry to prioritise a program of first-mile last-mile upgrades and High Productivity Vehicles restrictions, linked to funding programs.
 - utilises advances in technology and data to optimise planning, coordination and operations.
 - explores options for network solutions to circular economy and Net Zero.
18. Strategic assessment of coal transport corridors and adjacent lands to augment for future freight, passenger, industry or tourism purposes over the short, medium and long-term, as industry needs change.
19. In consultation with councils, develop a regional airfield strategy, coordinated with the Sydney aviation basin.

Resilient

20. Establish an aviation centre for emergency management in the Hunter.
21. Develop a Hunter Valley emergency management strategy and Strategic Business Case for transport upgrades to maintain access to regional evacuation routes, tied to program funding; similar to [that](#) conducted by Infrastructure NSW for the Hawkesbury-Nepean Valley.

Action Plan

22. Seeking dates for commissioning and deliver for the new Intercity and Regional Rail fleets (Items 3 & 4)
23. Mandalong Rd missing from the 'In Planning' list.
24. There is a level of local cynicism around fast and high speed rail given how many announcements and promises have been made that have not come to fruition. We recommend evidence of progress, clear delivery pathways and timing emerge soon to increase confidence (Item 23).
25. Rapid bus transit options and implementation is a near term priority (Item 33).
26. Similarly, on-demand transport services are already operational in Lake Macquarie and Newcastle. This is a matter of expansion rather than investigation, and a near term priority (Item 54).
27. The extension of ferry networks arguably utilises some of the least congested space in the city. Recommend this is a near term proposition (Item 69).
28. Planning for the expansion of the light rail network, informed by an integrated public transport plan for the region, is a near term priority or ad hoc development will reduce options and increase costs (Item 71).
29. The rail corridor from Maitland to Cessnock is still in place. Options can be examined in the near term. This would also respond to feedback that connections between centres of the region are a priority in addition to links to the Newcastle CBD (Item 73).
30. The international Newcastle Airport will be operational from 2024. Connections to and from the Airport to key destinations in the region are a near term priority, supported by all ten councils in the Greater Hunter (Item 78).

General comments

- Demonstrate better alignment and integration between the Hunter Regional Transport Plan, the Six Cities Plan and the Hunter Regional Plan.
- More evidence of coordination of transport needs across NSW Government portfolios in a joined up and sequenced plan. This includes state-led precincts like the Williamstown SAP, Hunter Park and the John Hunter Health and Innovation Precinct along with programs like the Renewable Energy Zone and Upper Hunter.
- Pp2-3 Executive Summary: There is an opportunity to discuss the changing economy of the Hunter, the new demands and opportunities this places on the transport network, and how transport can help drive and shape the new economy as it emerges.
- Pp3 para 1 Amend: Today the majority of the Hunter population choose to use private vehicles to travel, however ~~changing community needs and attitudes will see~~ alternative options will become increasingly important as the region grows and needs change.
- Pp3 para 2 Add: international Newcastle Airport and the John Hunter Health and Innovation Precinct.

- Pp4: Still not adequate evidence in the process or content of respective documents that the Hunter Transport Plan and Regional Plan are integrated, while they may have been prepared concurrently. In addition, the Greater Cities Commission Six Cities Discussion Paper outlines more concrete and ambitious targets for the improvement of public and active transport along with targets for housing supply and affordable housing. We would like to see more evidence of integration towards these objectives and across government agencies in policy, planning, funding and delivery.
- Pp10 Population forecast seems conservative and based on pre-pandemic assumptions – we understand estimates have been updated post-publication of the draft Plan. The draft Plan also discounts the potential for the Hunter to more heavily lift in accommodating housing and jobs for the State and the role that transport services and investment have in facilitating that.
- Pp8-10: More analysis required rather than statements of fact on population growth, including implications for the transport system that needs to respond to growth but also has a critical role in shaping productive, liveable, sustainable, equitable and resilient growth. Clear linkages between the initiatives in the Plan and these challenges.
- Pp11 Restricting the economic activity to the State undercuts the real size and significance of the Hunter to the national economy at \$63B per annum.
- Pp11 Add: contribution to state electricity generation capacity, now and into the clean energy future. The delivery of the REZ will place significant and distinct requirements on the transport network to be considered now in terms of demand and design specifications. In the future, the transport network will need to efficiently enable the export of Hunter clean tech and energy.
- Pp11 Edit: Tomago (Region shaping gateways)
- Pp11 Add: Eraring Power Station (industry opportunity)
- Pp12 Add: container terminal at the Port of Newcastle, which has significant implications for the planning and priorities of the Hunter and NSW transport and freight network, and an increasing role in the latter.
- Pp12 Add: context around changing demands and challenges on global supply chains and the need for resilience in freight networks and supply chain.
- Pp13 para 1: Support. Recommend pulling this paragraph into the Executive Summary.
- Pp13 para 1: Add Newcastle and Lake Macquarie as major tourism attractions.
- Pp14-15 Add: commentary that if unaddressed congestion reduces productivity, competitiveness and liveability, undermining the very benefits that make the Hunter such an attractive place to live, visit and do business.
- Pp16 Add to point 10: Young people.
- Pp18 Vision para 1 augment: Strengthening the Hunter Region's role in the NSW economy, underpinned by great places and lifestyles.....
- Pp29 Data may evidence notable flow from Maitland and Kurri Kurri to Morisset, requiring more direct public transport services than via Cessnock.
- Pp65 Reference to the new Maitland hospital should reflect this is now open and operational.