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# THE SIX CITIES REGION DISCUSSION PAPER SUBMISSION

NOVEMBER 2022



Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Six Cities Region: Discussion Paper.

## 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](http://www.hunter.org.au)

Contact Alice Thompson at [ceo@hunter.org.au](mailto:ceo@hunter.org.au) to discuss any aspect of this submission.

## Introduction

The Committee has supported the entrance of the Greater Cities Commission to the Hunter and the region's inclusion in the Six Cities plan.

We recognise that an ad hoc approach to the Hunter's development will never be sufficient for the task of steering a \$63 billion economy through structural change and coming out stronger on the other side.

There is support for the Hunter being part of a bigger plan for the six cities. We recognise that success lies in partnerships.

Coordination of planning, infrastructure and budgets across agencies, governments and sectors will deliver better outcomes from public investment in the Hunter and across the six city region.

Collaboration – with all three levels of government working in partnership with Hunter business and communities in a shared plan for investment and growth – will multiply resourcing and benefits.

Being part of a global city region is the Hunter's opportunity for gravitas on the world stage, and to transform our region's economy through the challenges ahead. And we are primed to more heavy lifting for team NSW.

The Committee welcomes the invitation to help shape this future through commenting on the Six Cities: Discussion Paper. And we stand ready to partner with Government to make these reforms work and deliver the ambitious vision for the Six Cities Region.

# Feedback

The Committee strongly supports the vision outlined in the Discussion paper and the Six Region Shapers that provide structure to the Paper and priorities.

Our feedback is structured under these sections.

## Introduction

1. The title 'Lower Hunter and Greater Newcastle City' is too long for natural communication. The Lower Hunter region and Greater Newcastle basically refer to the same geography, and these terms are used interchangeably locally. If the Hunter is to project to a global audience, as emphasised in the Discussion Paper, this title should be changed and shortened.
2. While the geography of the Lower Hunter and Greater Newcastle City (the Lower Hunter City) is defined, strong linkages to the Upper Hunter will be important in terms of functional geography, trade and labour force movements. The impacts and opportunities presented by a decline of coal industries are pronounced in the Upper Hunter, but will be experienced across the entire Greater Hunter region. This challenge calls for the best team at the table, deployment of the strongest capabilities across the region, and coordination across the Greater Hunter including government programs and investment. The linkages between the Upper and Lower Hunter should be confirmed in the Lower Hunter City plan as it is drafted, including interaction and hierarchy with the draft Hunter Regional Plan.
3. Thank you for providing clarity on the timing and sequence of plans for the Six Cities. Please provide clarity that the City Plans for the Lower Hunter and Greater Newcastle City replace the Greater Newcastle Metropolitan Plan or otherwise, due for review September 2023.
4. Highly supportive of the global focus of the city alliance. That is the point of difference of inclusion in the Six Cities, and what can be achieved working together to project the scale and might necessary for impact in a competitive global economy.

## Vision

### Delivering global competitiveness and local liveability for the Six Cities Region

5. The proposed vision is strong and supported. In particular, the 'bookend' of global competitiveness with local liveability, recognising the interdependency of both in the emerging economy.
6. Recognition of First Nations peoples, their enduring connection to country and a stronger role in planning and priorities for the Six Cities Region is essential in the development of city plans.
7. Recognition that the government plays a material role in housing supply is welcome.
8. The vision would benefit from a paragraph on partnerships and a culture of collaboration, across governments, sectors and with communities.
9. Add the productive or technical capacity of cities in the reference to innovation, in addition to knowledge jobs. In the Hunter, our innovation advantage looks different to the Sydney economy in that it is applied and vested in a strong manufacturing and industrial sector.

10. Net Zero reference could incorporate the city region's role in exporting services and technology solutions to the world, in addition to climate leadership and domestic performance.

## Goals of our Six Cities Region

11. Strongly support the goals on recognition of First Nations peoples and alignment with UN Sustainable Development Goals.
12. Set an objective to bring on SDG indicators and First Nations peoples' outcomes on parity across the six cities region. This would help assessment of the problem, options, help target interventions and understand the effectiveness of measures. There are currently significant discrepancies in the quality of life and standards of living across the six cities, and between the Hunter and Greater Sydney Metro. Regional development is about making people's life better. A clear statement on intent to do just that would be fitting and well received.

## Planning the Six Cities Region

13. Noting that the reference to additional financial support for infrastructure supporting housing, that has not been the experience in the Hunter.

## 1 An embedded First Nations voice

14. Strongly support the statement of intent for First Nations' voices to be embedded into the strategic planning of the Six Cities Region and establishment of the First Nations Advisory Panel, including coordination with NSW and Federal Close the Gap programs and governance.

## 2 A connected Six Cities Region

15. Digital and physical connectivity are essential to development. Strongly support the short-term recommendation to achieve equity in digital access across all parts of the city region and communities.
16. Longer term infrastructure planning is essential to provide certainty to councils and the private sector to coordinate their priorities and investment. As the Lower Hunter City Plan is developed, we are looking for future key corridor and public infrastructure priorities to be identified to trigger further studies and gateway review given long lead times for project planning and the need for corridor reservation. Identifying these future needs in city plans should be understood as a commitment to good process, rather than a project.
17. The NSW Freight and Ports Strategy needs to be urgently revised to incorporate a container terminal at the Port of Newcastle and the new international Newcastle Airport, as we have recommended in feedback to the draft Hunter Regional Transport Plan. These are new strengths that reset the strategy, hierarchy and operation of State transport networks and connectivity with international markets.
18. Furthermore, we have recommended the near-term development of 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.
19. Looking for firmer commitment to develop a spatial plan for freight, ports and airport with Transport for NSW, rather than consideration (action 2.5). This is critical to the competitiveness of the global six cities region and national economy.
20. Fast rail that links the six cities and provides coherency to their development is the right place for GCC focus. It will also be important for coordination with the Federal Government on High Speed Rail given their commitments, and ensure that options are enhanced and not extinguished through development.
21. The Hunter is a relatively self-contained economy that benefits from proximity to Sydney but is not dependent on it. This makes intra-regional connectivity a priority. In particular public transport accessibility and services are not sufficient for an economy or population of this size and have encouraged car dependency. Unless addressed, this will reduce liveability, competitiveness and productivity, and actively work against GCC goals for the six city region and NSW commitments to Net Zero.
22. In the text referring to the city making benefits of fast rail: more emphasis on the role of fast rail and heavy rail in setting the structure and density of economic activity. If planned right and integrated with land use, heavy rail can increase the development capacity and density, creating places for dense economic activity, innovation and jobs while connecting workforce to opportunities.
23. 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.

24. Public transport services on existing infrastructure must be improved in the short term while planning and investing in future capacity. The Hunter can no longer afford to wait or rely on the promise of future improvements. This requires an integrated plan across modes to improve public transport, including connection of Upper Hunter communities with jobs, services and education. We are together a functional economic region.
25. Welcome the recommendation to progress Bus Rapid Transit (2.8). This needs to incorporate the Hunter not just Sydney metro, an obvious and lower cost solution to getting better performance from public transport on existing, or augmented infrastructure.

### **3 Housing supply, diversity and affordability**

26. Housing access and affordability is at crisis in the Hunter. It is impacting communities across the economic spectrum from those requiring social and crisis housing, to key workers and executives. It is currently impacting the Hunter's ability to house workforce essential for addressing shorter term labour shortages. In the long-term, it will diminish the Hunter's competitiveness and exacerbate inequality.
27. We recommend that this requires government to play a stronger role in housing supply, including direct investment in social, crisis and affordable housing stock.
28. We join voices with the [Hunter Planning Alliance](#), calling for \$500 million funding for a program of enabling infrastructure to unlock over 40,000 homes and 590 hectares of employment land stuck in the planning pipeline because of delays in transport infrastructure.
29. We have advocated for quantitative targets for housing to be embedded in plans, and are pleased to see this reflected in the Discussion Paper. We note that further consultation is required with councils and industry to ensure targets can be delivered.
30. Government-owned land is an important lever to achieve objectives for housing. But land availability is not necessarily an issue in the Hunter. There are many places, with the right infrastructure, that can accommodate new dwellings and density. It will be more important to preserve the ability for the economy to grow through strategic use of government-owned land for commercial and industrial purposes. These functions should be prioritised before residential development is considered on government land.

### **4 Inclusive places linked to infrastructure**

31. The Hunter is already a 15-minute city. Travel times are not the issue. The priority for this city is to provide more transit options, in particular public transport and active transport, to reduce car dependency.
32. With the right planning and infrastructure, the Hunter has much more capacity for growth and heavy lifting on population across the six cities. We encourage a macro view to population growth in the Region Plan and how this could be distributed across city regions to achieve Six Cities goals. This is an opportunity to shape outcomes rather than respond to population growth projections.
33. Support place-based strategies for priority areas, provided these are linked into Cabinet decision making and agency budgets as this is what implementation requires.

34. Strongly welcome targets to increase the proportion of walking and cycling trips by up to 30 percent, noting this will require significant investment and collaboration across council boundaries to deliver in the Hunter. These targets need to be embedded in the draft Hunter Regional Transport Plan.

## **5 Powering local jobs and economies**

35. Higher levels of tertiary education attainment will be necessary in the Hunter to achieve this goal and our full potential. This requires better access to education in terms of transport and location, as well as designing new pathways for learners that cut through high school, TAFE, tertiary, industry and research.
36. Support a quantitative target for jobs in the Region Plan and respective cities. The suggested categorisation into knowledge-intensive, health and education, population serving and industrial is less helpful applied to the Hunter given the interplay across these. For example, our health sector provides both services and technology. The smart manufacturing sector is knowledge-intensive. Innovation occurs because of cross sector pollinisation and precincts that support this, and is conversely impeded by a siloed approach.
37. Welcome the focus on knowledge intensive jobs. The Hunter has a strong knowledge sector that is an under-appreciated driver of jobs and competitiveness. It takes a different type of planning and infrastructure to support the growth of these jobs than a resource-led economy. Firms in these sectors thrive on proximity and agglomeration, requiring a uniquely urban solution to grow, including a strong arts and culture scene, world class digital and public transport services, and amenity for a smart and skilled workforce.

## **6 Climate-resilient green cities**

38. The Hunter's development must be low carbon to be sustainable and safe. We have argued it is essential in our positioning to a global economy. As the world moves to Net Zero and clean energy, there is significant business and capital to be harnessed. The region has growing production and services in clean energy and technology to supply this demand.
39. Positioning as a global centre for clean energy and technology will benefit from all aspects of the Hunter economy and built environment demonstrating low carbon and sustainable performance. There is an opportunity to attract business and investment by supporting firms to achieve their ESG goals and emissions targets while being part of a vibrant ecosystem addressing a global challenge.
40. The Hunter has a broader role in supporting all six cities achieve emissions reduction targets.
41. Circular economy is also an emerging sector of competitive advantage in this region. There is significant collaboration and work underway ready to be leverage by the GCC. The Hunter is poised for leadership across the six cities on circular economy and would welcome opportunities to showcase or sandpit solutions. The University of Newcastle, partnering with the University of NSW, was recently awarded \$50 million under the Australian Trailblazer Recycling and Clean Energy initiative. The \$277 million program will lead research commercialisation initiatives that will help Australia and the world transition to sustainable recycling and clean energy solutions and systems.
42. The Hunter is exposed to significant risks including drought, floods and fires. As part of the City Plan, we recommend development of an emergency management strategy and Strategic Business Case for transport upgrades to maintain access to regional evacuation routes as

well as protection of critical infrastructure, tied to program funding. Similar to [that](#) conducted by Infrastructure NSW for floods in the Hawkesbury-Nepean Valley.

## Bringing together six cities – the next steps

43. The region is aligned across stakeholders on what a collaborative partnership model with the GCC and being part of the six city region could offer:

- A coordinated partnership between levels of governments, agencies and sectors, towards unified, place-based plan for growth and diversification.
- Stronger representation of regional priorities into Government decision-making and investment authority.
- A stronger role for councils in the delivery of regional and State objectives.
- More local input into the prioritisation and sequencing of infrastructure and services, enabling councils and the private sector to align plans and capital with the Government – increasing resources, efficiencies and benefits.
- More accountability and resourcing for implementation and delivery.

44. Stakeholders in the region are also seeking assurance that reform and additional governance makes things better:

- Focus on accelerating existing commitments in the region rather than starting planning and prioritisation from scratch or slowing down. We are looking to the GCC to cut through agencies and processes.
- There is already strong footprint of the State Government in in the region. Coordinate these commitments to get better outcomes from focus and investment.
- Focus on the gaps and opportunities that fall through boundaries and agencies and are only identified through a higher order lens. This includes identification of regionally-significant and city shaping projects and projects.
- Provide a longer-term horizon on planning and Government investment so regional partners can back in resources and make complementary decisions.
- Ensure decisions are underpinned by evidence, expert advice and consultation, and less politics.
- Lock the Hunter into a normative cycle of planning and investment linked to Cabinet, annual Budgets and agency Total Asset Management (TAM) planning.
- Improve collaboration and coordination across the Six Cities.