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Sydney’s Metropolitan Strategy—towards a sustainable city

Metropolitan Strategy
The Metropolitan Strategy is a vision for the kind of city we want to live in. We have been talking extensively to the community about this, and the directions and strategies for managing growth and change over the next 30 years. We have also talked about implementation issues including governance, finance and other tools we need to bring about a shift in urban form and transportation in the metropolitan region.

The end result will be a framework that supports sustainable growth, provides practical guidance for land use decisions, makes liveable places, balances the needs of the people and the environment, and conserves regional assets.

The strategy has grown out of planning reforms designed to simplify the planning system and make it more effective. These included:

- appointing Minister Knowles as the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure, with whole of government responsibility for coordinating planning with infrastructure
- creating the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources (DIPNR), a single agency responsible for natural resource management, land use planning, infrastructure coordination and transport planning
- creating a Cabinet Standing Committee on Infrastructure and Planning to bring all the relevant ministers together to make important decisions and trade-offs while adhering to the priorities that are established in the Metropolitan Strategy.

Planning challenges
Key planning challenges that we face include:

- population growth—Sydney will have a sustained period of population growth for at least the next 30 years
- people and housing—the average number of people per dwelling has dropped due to taxation policies and other things while their houses are getting bigger
- ageing population
- travel behaviour—people are spending on average one hour and 20 minutes travelling each day. They are also making lots of small trips—51% of trips are less than five kilometres in length and most trips are for activities like education, recreation and shopping; travelling to and from work accounts for only 25% of trips
- car use—car growth is increasing faster than population growth and vehicle kilometres travelled (VKT) is increasing faster than car growth.

Working towards a sustainable city
Sustainability is about living within our means. To do this we must look after natural resources and the environment, support a competitive economy and create better places to live and work. We must also find ways to do these things simultaneously rather than trade between them.

There are a number of directions we can go to balance growth and strengthen regions.

- Plan for balanced growth in the Greater Metropolitan Region (GMR) within natural resource constraints—this is a very important starting step for the Metropolitan Strategy. We need to better balance urban renewal in existing centres and corridors with some new, staged greenfields land release.
- Strengthen the regions—we must manage ongoing pressures on the Central Coast and ensure the Illawarra and Lower Hunter grow and maintain at least their current share of total GMR population. Regional strategies therefore need to be developed for these regions in 2004 and 2005.
which also explain how these regions link and work with Sydney.

- Manage growth and value non-urban areas—we need to limit urban sprawl and direct new greenfields growth into specific growth centres so as to protect rural land, parks and conservation areas.

- Build liveable new communities—new greenfields communities will be planned in a significantly different way than in the past. They will have local jobs, access to safe and reliable public transport, local schools, shops and parks and a variety of housing. We are currently finalising investigations for the north west and south west sectors of Sydney and will be imposing strict criteria for the delivery of these things.

- Renew existing areas—about 70% of Sydney’s population will have to be accommodated in existing areas. By concentrating on centres and corridors that we have already announced for renewal (e.g. Paramatta Road) or which have this potential (e.g. Airport–CBD, Canterbury Road, Hume Highway), we will have a good framework for ensuring these people can live where there already is transport infrastructure, services and jobs.

- Strengthen employment and existing precincts—we need to bring together activities in the major industrial areas and along corridors to create both the wealth and jobs that will underpin Sydney’s economy. This includes activities at the airport, ports and existing business precincts, and major new industrial areas such as Huntingwood West and the former Wonderland site.

- Connect centres with the transport network—the Government is tackling transport problems by investing in the rail network through borrowings (e.g. Rail Clearways project), in bus transitways and through reforms identified in the Unsworth Bus Review that ensure we have buses in logical places around centres and going directly to major centres in Western Sydney. There is also the Epping to Chatswood rail line, the Western Sydney Orbital and the Cross Sydney Tunnel. However, we must get the balance right between provision of transport infrastructure, demand management and location of land uses to relieve congestion and get the city to work more optimally.

- Target infrastructure—the Metropolitan Strategy will be a key budget tool to target where infrastructure needs to be. We must also look at new technologies for delivering the infrastructure.

- Use appropriate funding and governance arrangements—we need new funding sources to deliver the infrastructure. In new land release areas for example, we are looking at significant development contributions to assist with infrastructure given the nexus between the benefits the developers are creating for communities and the prices they obtain in these areas. We are also considering new governance options such as a development corporation to make sure the infrastructure is established. Local government will lead implementation of aspects of the Metropolitan Strategy where appropriate.

### Integrating land use and transport planning

There are two things we can do to influence air quality and build a better city:

- Manage land use demand within the natural resource limits for the Sydney region. This also means managing urban form and guiding the development of sustainable new communities.

- Better manage transport demand. Though politically difficult to achieve, community support for this is growing. Key policy elements include reducing (short) car trip proliferation, determining infrastructure priorities, demand management pricing, and influencing travel choices—destinations, modes and travel times.

The traditional neighbourhood design, where you have mixed land uses and an inter-connected network of streets, has significant effects on reducing the greenhouse gas emissions from urban sprawl to a more sustainable level. A study of energy use and greenhouse gas emissions in Perth confirmed this by finding energy use and greenhouse gas emissions were noticeably lower in traditional areas with their higher resident and worker densities, higher levels of connectivity, and proximity to other places. These factors both reduce the need to travel and make alternatives such as public transport more viable. This is what we are now attempting at Sydney’s urban fringe.

By way of comparison, in Clovelly in Sydney’s eastern suburbs 59% of homes are within 400 metres of shops. This is what we call a pedestrian shed—you can walk 400 metres and get to a shop. In newer areas like Green Valley in Sydney’s south west, only 13% of the homes are within 400 metres of a shop, so it is unlikely many people will walk to that shop.
As another example, Burwood in Sydney’s inner west has a range of land uses—residential, commercial/retail, light industry, community, parks—and there are a lot of workers living in this mix. In Green Valley, there is a shop and housing and therefore no context for walkability. Everyone is car dependent.

Additionally, in Burwood there is a range of people living there on a range of different lot sizes, meaning there is a range of housing to accommodate the needs of an ageing population. Green Valley however, is almost mono-cultural in terms of lot sizes and very unrobust for the population that will live there in the future. This ‘inbuilt redundancy’ for our future communities will be very difficult to change.

The Metropolitan Strategy therefore looks at the fundamental building blocks for a sustainable Sydney.

- **Neighbourhoods** (e.g. Flemington, Concord North)—one to ten shops, a child care centre, primary school, home offices and access to small parks. Houses are detached and up to two storeys high.

- **Small urban villages** (e.g. Summer Hill, Haberfield) —10 to 50 shops, a small supermarket, child care, primary school, etc. (i.e. some mixed land use), as well as a mix of housing (town houses and up to four-storey flats) to support the vibrancy of the centre.

- **Larger urban villages** (e.g. Strathfield, Ashfield)—two to three supermarkets, more than 50 shops, a range of housing including mid-rise apartment blocks up to six storeys high, and civic and cultural facilities (banks, medical centres, library, small civic square).

- **Major urban centres** (e.g. Liverpool, Bankstown, Blacktown)—major retail shopping centres, government offices and regional headquarters, and a range of services (medical, fire, police, library, community arts) so you don’t need to drive out of your local region, or you can at least catch one of the new buses to access these facilities. Residential density would be mid to high rise (i.e. six to 20 storeys).

- **Primary urban centres or CBDs** (e.g. Parramatta, Sydney)—major concentration of retail, civic and cultural services as well as professional, educational and medical facilities (court houses, universities, TAFE, hospitals), and high density living (20+ storeys). These centres typically are the focus of the fixed transport network. They also are and will continue to be engine drivers of the economy and we need to continue to focus transport and other infrastructure investment here as well as make them as liveable as possible.

Thus, in new communities in particular, air quality will be addressed by a strong commitment to reducing car dependency via the structure of land use and urban design. As well as local employment opportunities (and economic development) in new light industrial areas and shopping centres, there will be local walking and cycle facilities built from the start to discourage short car trips. There will also be new rail links and dedicated bus routes to move people between centres.

**Metropolitan Strategy timeframe**

We have held two Futures Forums and a number of community forums which have involved people from across the greater metropolitan region (e.g. Parramatta, Gosford, Wollongong, Ryde). We are also working with local government, non-government organisations and others to flesh out the Strategy’s concepts and ensure we have the governance arrangements and other tools needed to bring this to bear.

When asked at these forums, ‘what do you like about the area in which you live?’ and, ‘what could be done to improve Sydney by 2030?’ people have commonly answered ‘good air quality’. This is one of the things we are seeking to achieve with the Metro Strategy.