

Towards our Greater Sydney 2056: **Comments from Climate Change Balmain-Rozelle**

Climate Change Balmain-Rozelle (CCBR) is a community group from Sydney's Inner West working towards a world which relies less and less on fossil fuels, and more and more on clean renewable energy, reducing carbon emissions and heading off the damaging effects of global warming. It has over 700 supporters, and is one of the area's most active environmental groups.

As a group, we applaud the forward thinking of planning 40 years ahead for the Greater Sydney area. We also appreciate that *Towards our Greater Sydney 2056* recognises the inequities between the Sydney Central area, where we live, and the Western Suburbs, in particular. We share the concerns set out on page 2 of the document: higher levels of congestion, lower rates of housing affordability and uneven access to employment choices.

For example, we are keen to see the advantages of frequent high quality public transport that we largely experience in our area extended to all residents of Sydney, especially where this can be powered by clean energy. For this reason, we support the development of public transport infrastructure over the expansion of motorways, as we believe that reliance on the private car must and will change because of its impact on greenhouse gas emissions. We further believe that planning for all districts of Sydney must encourage active, pollution-free options such as cycling and walking.

In commenting on this document, we have considered what is left out, and what is emphasised. In particular, we note:

***Towards our Greater Sydney 2056* does not give sufficient weight to the changing climate.**

The document explores a Productive Greater Sydney in far more detail than the Liveable or Sustainable components. In a planning document, putting sustainability first could lead to more imaginative approaches to what is in the interests of the economy. A 'productive' economy that is not underpinned by sustainability is only a short-term vision.

Further, within the discussion of A Sustainable Greater Sydney, the priority of an efficient city is undoubtedly the least developed of the whole document, consisting of a single dot point. Not only should the 'efficient city' be covered in more detail, but 'the efficient use of energy and resources, recycling of water and materials [and] the development of renewable energy sources' should be considered across all parts of the planning process.

Our discussion below follows the sequence of the document, focusing on issues relevant to climate change.

A once-in-a-generation opportunity

The introductory section of *Towards our Greater Sydney 2056* challenges us to form a notion of 'A changing, growing Greater Sydney'.

Comment: While it is good to see milestones like a Western Sydney airport as a 'once-in a generation opportunity', the introductory discussion ignores the more negative but almost certainly more significant impact on Sydney of climate change over the next 40 years. A more overt recognition would help the plan to focus on the opportunities as well as the limitations that this unwelcome phenomenon throws up.

Further, the once-in-a-generation opportunity focuses heavily around these plans for a new airport. But some futurists¹ expect air traffic to be considerably reduced by 2050, suggesting that the low-carbon economy will force air travel to revert to a premium-priced luxury.

Western Sydney will continue to grow, but the document has no contingency plan for alternative, lower-carbon transport, such as high-speed rail.

Overall, the document introduces the concept of Sydney's 3 cities of the future: Eastern, Central and Western. (Other GSC documents define 6 existing Districts). The document also notes that the Sydney of the future will be polycentric, with a hierarchy of centres: strategic, district and local. The document does not give examples of even the highest ('strategic') level, although Figure 2 may intend to show these.

Comment: It is good to recognise that Sydney's needs are not best met by focusing exclusively on the Sydney Central District. We support the broad conceptualisation of staged changes towards a fairer development across Sydney, while enhancing the natural and other advantages of each 'City'.

Page 5 describes the 3 cities.

Comment: The assumption that Sydney will be 'an eight million strong metropolis by 2056' is not justified in this document. Sydney may not be the best place to absorb population growth.

Page 6 includes a vision for Greater Sydney to 2056: of integration between these 3 cities into a metropolis. The vision 'acknowledges that Greater Sydney is more likely to develop in a sustainable manner when it has a strong, productive economy underpinning a fair and liveable lifestyle and allowing a focus on Greater Sydney's natural environment, resilience and efficiency". This is then set out in the tripartite summary of A Productive Sydney/A Liveable Sydney/A Sustainable Sydney.

¹ <http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/flash-forward-to-sydney-2050-20121231-2c2fx.html>

Comment: The document goes on to explore a Productive Sydney in far more detail than the Liveable or Sustainable components. In a planning document, putting sustainability first might lead to far more imaginative approaches to what is in the interests of the economy.

A productive Greater Sydney

Comment: We applaud the aspiration for a '30-minute workforce', and the conditions for this: better planning of employment locations, better transport connections and the ability for people to walk or cycle to local jobs, shops and services. We also applaud the goal of economic diversification.

The document assumes 75% population growth (1.74 million more people) by 2036, requiring '817,000 additional jobs' and 'more than 725,000 new homes'. (This projection is expanded upon, but not referenced, on page 8.)

Comment: As noted, Sydney may not be the best place to absorb population growth.

Note that the Western Sydney City Deal aims to deliver 100,000 jobs – *Towards our Greater Sydney 2056* does not specify the time frame. The Western City needs more than its share of the 817,000 new jobs, not less. This document does not detail how those jobs might be delivered.

The document argues that 'leveraging existing strengths in knowledge-intensive sectors will help grow Greater Sydney's economy in a sustainable way'.

Comment: To ensure this is true, the buildings in which those jobs are carried out, and the transport that carries workers to them, must be sustainable. They must not rely on fuels that emit greenhouse gases.

Other areas of jobs growth mentioned are health and education, and inbound tourism. Jobs will be focused in strategic centres, those with major health, education and commercial precincts.

Comment: The Western City is also supposed to be a trade, logistics, advanced manufacturing ... and science hub. There is no discussion of how these sectors will be nurtured.

Accelerating housing opportunities

Comment: Almost 2 full pages are given to discussion of housing, more than is devoted to the discussion of A Sustainable Sydney.

Yet the document makes no mention of sustainable design in housing, apart from noting the Department of Planning and Environment's *Draft Medium Density Design Guide*. Environmentally sustainable housing incorporating energy efficiency, orientation for solar efficiency, and new approaches to

waste and water management should be mandatory in all new housing as they are much cheaper to incorporate when built than to retrofit.

We note that discussion includes the options of housing types including apartments and terraces. To some extent this addresses the long-term trend to larger houses, which tend to be less energy efficient, and which use more energy and more, often non-sustainable, resources to build. The effects of climate change are making large houses a private indulgence that our planning should not favour over moderately-sized houses for a greater number in the community.

We also note that the role of councils is mentioned only in reference to medium density infill development. For 'urban renewal' areas, such as the Inner West, their role is ignored, although in many ways these model an efficient, productive city working towards sustainability. In the Inner West, for example, housing is already more concentrated than the Sydney average, although there is less public open space per head of population. Many residents experience the 30-minute city for cultural experiences as well as jobs, making them highly liveable areas. The Greater Sydney Commission may be able to learn from these areas, but they appear to be sidelined. The Inner West, according to the GSC's definition, seems to lack a 'strategic' or even a 'district centre'. Currently most urban councils do not have elected representatives – but this document almost treats local government as if it does not exist.

In land release areas, the document notes a major shift to small lots, resulting in a significantly higher dwelling yield. Considering this, the document should also stress that generous, attractive public green space is then required.

We note that the feasibility of urban renewal includes considering proximity to schools and health facilities, as well as heritage and cultural elements and special land uses. We stress the need for adequate social infrastructure, including green space and biodiverse areas, in all types of development, including urban renewal projects.

We note that medium density housing is recommended 'within the one to five kilometre catchment of regional transport, where links for walking and cycling promote a healthy lifestyle'. While we support this aspiration, we note that options like high-frequency shuttle buses are probably needed to serve transport hubs so that residents as far as 5 kilometres from these are less likely to rely on private vehicles.

Fast, high-frequency, low-cost public transport services to regional transport hubs should be in place from the outset of any new developments, in all areas, if we are to achieve the 30-minute city in any sustainable way. Without

them households learn to rely on private vehicles, meaning that public transport will be less well patronised and cost-effective.

A liveable Greater Sydney

This section deals with access to jobs, education, health, open space and 'community and cultural infrastructure'.

It introduces 3 priorities, of which the first, the polycentric city, overlaps with the 30-minute city in the previous (Productive) section.

Comment: As in our comments under A Productive Greater Sydney, we applaud the notion of a 30-minute city if that ease of access is achieved through good public and active transport connections.

Liveable cities need not just open spaces, but natural (biodiverse) areas. The 30-minute city should ensure all Sydney residents can access natural passive recreation areas within 30 minutes.

The second priority, for a city of housing choice and diversity, recognises not just different types of housing, but different types of housing consumers, including renters and households on very low and low incomes.

Comment: As in our comments under Accelerated Housing Opportunities, we applaud affordable housing of diverse types.

In particular, we note the reference to older people, which the document has not previously recognised, although this proportion of the population is increasing, and also to those with disabilities and from 'different backgrounds'.

Renters also get recognition in this section, as do those on low incomes. This group is likely to grow in the next 40 years, unless wages for those in service industries like aged and child care are better rewarded.

We urge the Commission to adopt a meaningful affordable housing target of at least 15% on private land, and at least 30% on government land.

The third priority is for 'A collaborative city'.

Comment: It is not clear why this is a Liveability priority. Collaboration between government agencies, service providers and the wider community is necessary to achieve good outcomes in all areas.

For example, in our own area, collaboration on the Bays Precinct appears insufficient, with development going ahead in some areas (e.g. on Sydney Ports Authority land) without a full master plan being agreed upon. And sixty-

one hectares of regional open space at Callan Park has been languishing for years without establishment of a Trust to manage it.

While we support collaboration, we stress that community input must be based on listening to the community by planning bodies with a genuine willingness to amend plans, not just to go through a tick-the-box 'consultation'.

A sustainable Greater Sydney

This section recognises for the first time in the document, that 'the changing climate requires responses and adaptations ...', and that we need 'to recognise and foster opportunities to improve environmental performance, economic development and social relations'.

Comment: We applaud the commitment to improve environmental performance, but for the document to leave it to page 12 to mention it suggests the commitment is not strong enough.

The priority for 'a city in its landscape' recognises the natural environment has a value for communities, the economy and regional tourism.

Comment: We applaud the need for planning to recognise waterways, biodiversity, and green spaces. We note that increased tree canopy has a role in providing amenity, carbon absorption and mitigation of the heat island effect of climate change.

The reference to enabling 'local food' is at odds with the expansion of Greater Sydney over market garden areas.

The second priority is 'An efficient city'. Here, the document states that a sustainable city monitors its impact on global systems and climate change.

Comment: While the notion of 'monitoring' is weak (an unsustainable city may also 'monitor its impact'), we applaud the commitment, although well hidden, that a more efficient Greater Sydney will 'reduce reliance on carbon', and also that it will 'influence the design and location of water, energy and waste systems'.

However, this priority is undoubtedly the most underdeveloped part of the whole document. A single dot point not only conflates 'minimisation' and 'mitigation' of environmental impacts, but covers 'the efficient use of energy and resources, recycling of water and material together with the development of renewable energy sources'.

How will planning for 2056 create an efficient city? .

Will all new buildings have to meet energy efficiency standards? Will sustainable building materials be mandated? Will all land release areas include water recycling? Will Greater Sydney commit to Zero Waste, as has, for example, San Francisco? Will resource recovery centres be part of every regional, district and local centre? Will local hospitals, car parks, businesses and residences be encouraged or mandated to collect solar energy from rooftops? Will cogeneration be supported for high-energy users like heated swimming pools? How will large and small industrial businesses be sited to help reduce air, water, noise and carbon pollution?

While we accept that this document cannot spell out every aspect, we hope for more emphasis and more detail than is currently given.

The third priority is for resilience, and here the document notes the aim to ‘identify and adapt to the impacts of climate change ...’ as well as to reduce exposure to hazards and to build capacity to react to natural disasters.

Comment: We recognise the need to adapt to the impacts of climate change, but urge that resources are not diverted from minimisation of Greater Sydney’s carbon impact.

‘A Sustainable Greater Sydney’ concludes with a vision that conflates ‘Sustainability’ with protection of the natural landscape: the vision for each of the Cities refers to harbour, river and parkland.

Comment: Sustainability must also mean how we live in terms of our impact on the greater environment: our energy use, our consumption and how we deal with our waste, and the polluting outputs of these.

The vision should incorporate these more complex ideas.