



Agenda for Sydney

The Committee for Sydney's
vision for the city.



Committee
for
Sydney



Membership

The Committee for Sydney is an independent think tank and champion for the whole of Sydney. With over 140 member organisations, we work on behalf of Sydney, not the interest of any industry or sector.

If you would like to find out more about joining us, please contact Hannah Jamieson, Director of Engagement and Development at hannah@sydney.org.au

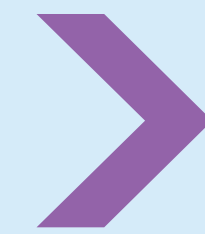


The Committee for Sydney is an urban policy think tank. We are advocates for the whole of Sydney, developing solutions to the most important problems we face. Our goal is to help Sydney be the best city in the world.



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Economy

Grow the economy, work to include everyone in it, and ensure that Sydney comes back from COVID-19 stronger than ever.



➤ Even before COVID-19 hit, Sydney's economy faced serious challenges from low productivity growth, stagnating wages, and rising inequality. And Australia's high reliance on climate-exposed industries loomed as an emerging threat. With COVID-19 driving the entire world into recession, economic rebuilding will be an enormous task. The only way out is to make Sydney one of the best places in the world to start new firms and new industries, while preparing workers for the jobs of the future. The Committee's economic agenda aims to grow the economy AND to ensure that as many people as possible are included in it. We can and must do both things.



Our vision of the future economy

- Sydney is one of the leading global centres for business.
- The top talent in the world wants to live in Sydney.
- A thriving economy generates the taxes that fund a robust public sector and a high quality of life.
- Prosperity is widely shared and there are pathways for upward economic mobility.
- Sydney is an engine for innovation.
- Sydney is deeply connected to the world.



Our agenda

Unleash the innovation economy

The innovation economy – encompassing the start-up ecosystem, transformation within larger firms, and new ideas coming out of the university sector – will create the good jobs of the 21st Century. It will also be how we replace the loss of jobs in industries that face automation and offshoring. Simply put – if we don't create the right settings for innovation post-COVID, Australia risks decades of slow growth while other countries leapfrog us. However, with the right policy settings Sydney has a shot at being a world-leading innovation centre.

Educate for the future

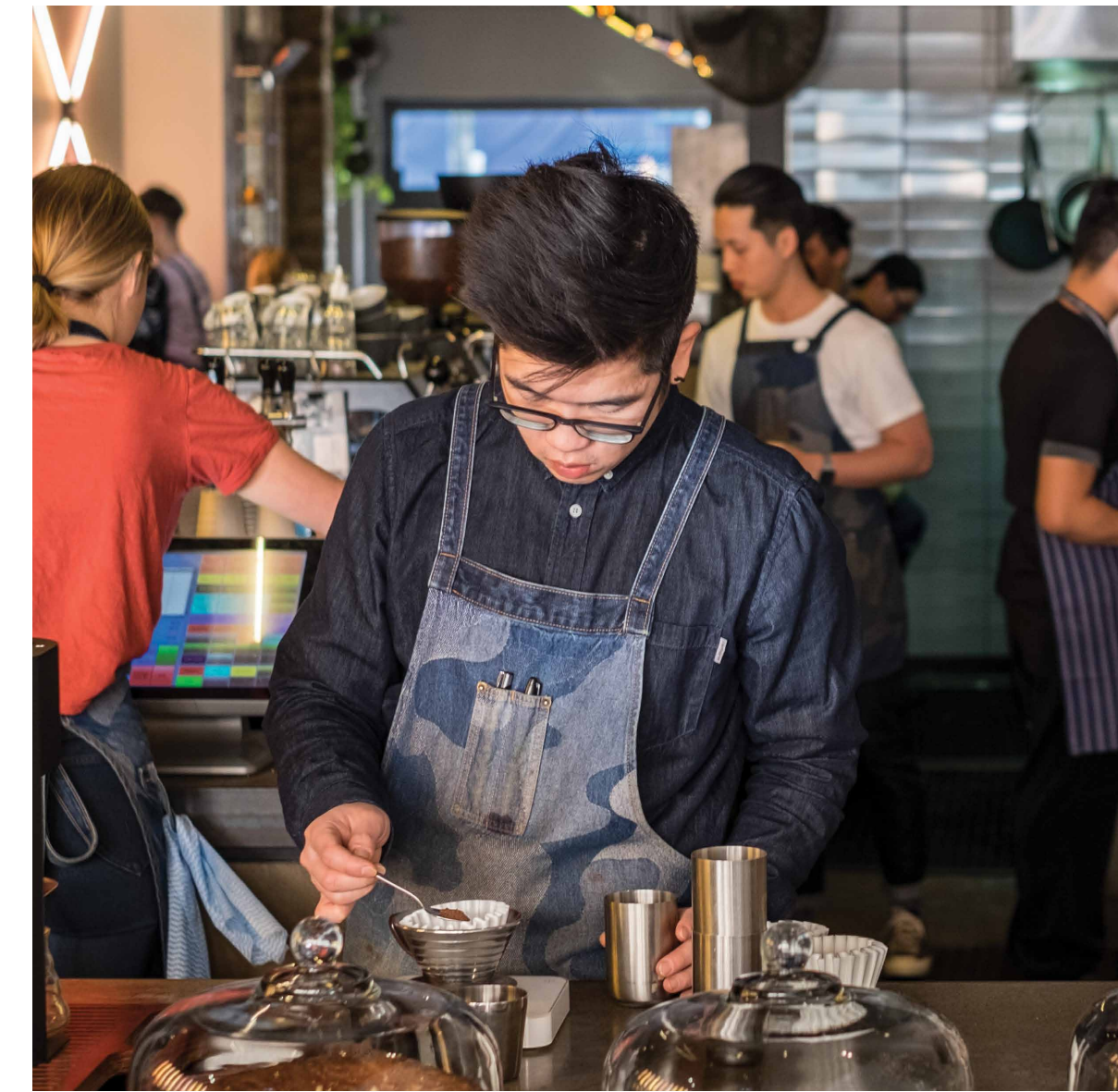
Work is changing – and we must adapt our education system to prepare young people for the new world. We know that few people will stay in a single organisation, let alone a single industry, for their whole career, so transferable skills and life-long learning are essential. While industry must step up with on-the-job training, there's no getting around the fact that governments will need to invest in a new model of education.

Attract top talent from around the world

For Sydney to prosper, we must attract the smartest people from around the world to live here. Sydney has always welcomed new arrivals, so this should be one of our great strengths, if we are able to fine tune the visa and immigration system to make it easy for people to come, study, work and contribute.

Support our universities

After London and New York, no other city hosts as many international students as Sydney. The mass education of the world's young people, while also maintaining our universities' rankings as some of the best research institutions globally, is something to be celebrated. NSW must continue to ensure our research institutions create world-changing ideas while growing our ability to commercialise these ideas.



Develop a new narrative for Sydney

Sydney has for too long relied on natural assets to sell the city – the beaches, the bush, and the harbour. But these don't reflect the story of life in Sydney, and they crowd out a story about our incredible diversity, vibrancy and appetite for growth and change. Investing in a new story that has the people of Sydney at its heart will attract visitors, talent, and investment to support the economic and social growth of our city.





Attract jobs to Western Sydney

Sydney cannot live up to its potential when people have to spend an hour or more every morning and every night to access their jobs. The costs of an unbalanced city, with most of the jobs in the east, show up in lost productivity, but also in family breakdown, where people are forced to choose between a job that advances their career and a job that allows them to get home in time to pick up kids and cook dinner. The solution is to develop employment hubs spread across the city that support good jobs in the middle and west of Sydney, adding to the strength of the CBD and other long-established job centres by building on the competitive advantages of Western Sydney.

Plan for a transition away from fossil fuels

We know that sooner or later Australia’s thermal coal industry is going to disappear. We should approach this certainty with a sense of empowerment, by undertaking our own proactive strategy for transitioning the economy and supporting coal-dependent communities as the world changes. This should be the great economic project of our generation. And while we shouldn’t be naïve about how difficult this transition will be, it also represents an enormous opportunity for Australia to create new jobs and new industries that will position the country for the future.



Support the regions’ economic success

Globally there is a move to recognise the impact of mega-regions as economic entities – where multiple centres are linked by fast rail to form an integrated economy. The scale offered by a mega-region that brings the Illawarra, the Central Coast and Hunter into a stronger relationship with Sydney would deliver benefits for all. This “Sandstone megaregion” will be catalysed by fast rail connections linking the three cities of Sydney with the regions.

Make Sydney an easy place to do business

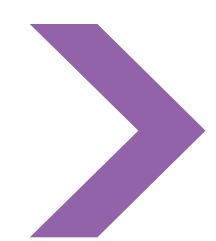
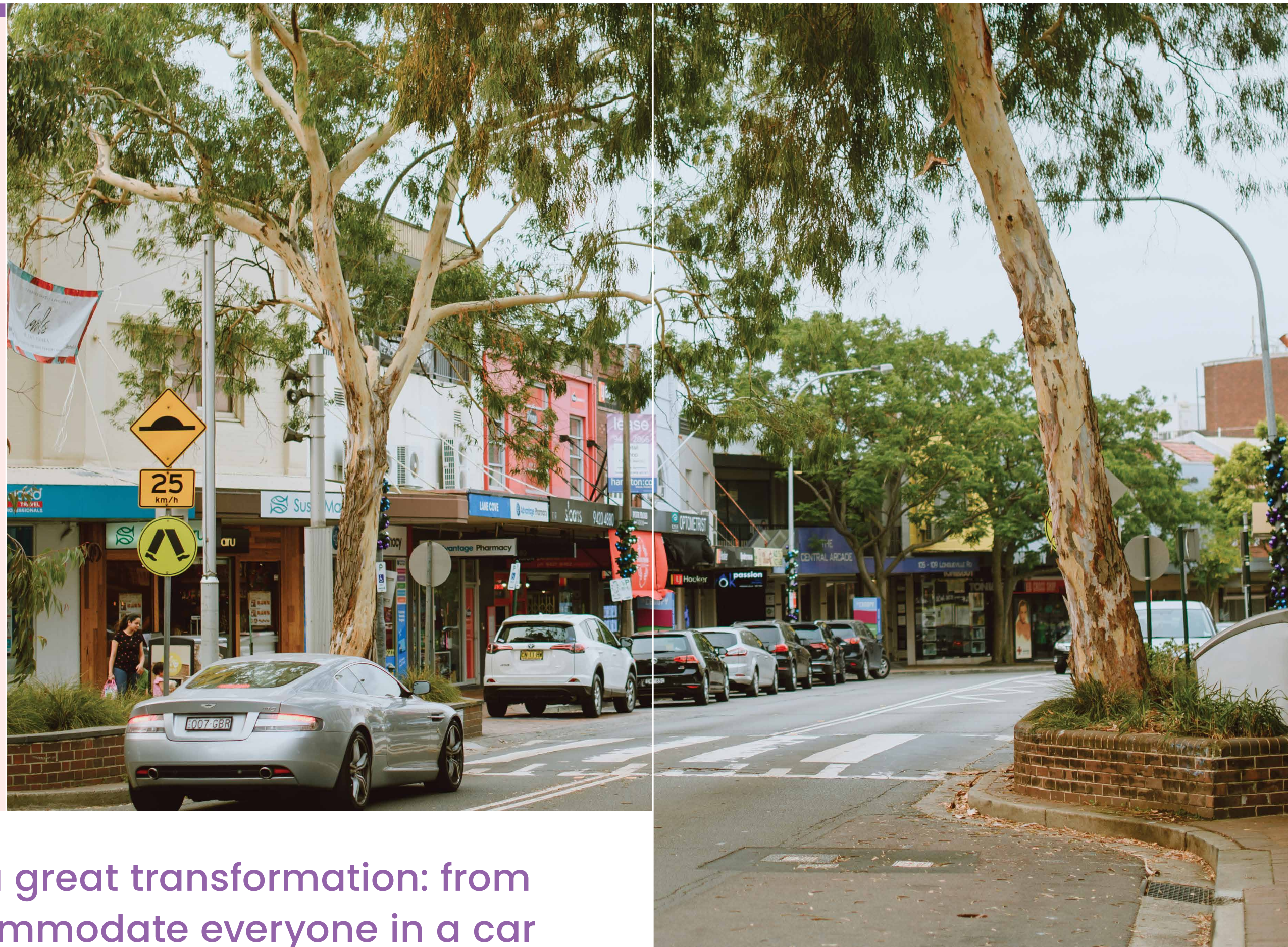
Sydney is an expensive city in an expensive country, so from a business investment perspective the costs need to be worth it. That means doing everything possible to remove bureaucracy and red tape, and to provide a transparent, enabling regulatory environment.



> Mobility

Make it easy to get around, while reclaiming streets for public life.





Sydney is undergoing a great transformation: from a city that tries to accommodate everyone in a car to a city that tries to make it easy to walk, bike, and take public transport. In the future, there will still be plenty of driving, but over time, as people get better options for more trips, there will be a shift. We view this change as an inherent part of Sydney maturing into a true global city. We can learn from the world's leading cities about how to do this in a smart way, while adapting lessons from other places to the unique geography and constraints of Sydney.

Our vision of urban mobility

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Every person in Sydney has access to high-quality, high-speed public transport – primarily trains, supplemented by trams, rapid buses, and ferries.

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Sydney is a joyful, safe, and comfortable place to walk.

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Everyone can walk to a local shopping street.

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Everyone can cycle safely wherever they want.

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Most trips do not require a car – because the other options are so much better.

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Trips that still require a car are easier because there are far fewer people competing for existing space – including deliveries, tradies, people who are mobility-impaired, and people trying to get out of town.



Our agenda



Adopt a mode target

Government needs a target to guide transport investments and policies, and the most important target to use is the share of trips made by each mode. Simply put, Sydney needs an overarching goal for reducing the share of trips made by car that drives transportation decision-making. This target should be translated into strategies and investments to bring it about, with regular calibration and revision so that over time we actually make progress.

Build a network of trunk transport lines

The network of heavy rail, metro, light rail, ferry, and rapid bus lines forms the backbone public transport network. This is what people use to cover distance. As Sydney builds out more of the network the goal is to move toward an interconnected grid of lines that allows a person to go from anywhere to anywhere – like what you see in mature transit cities around the world.

Make public transport financially sustainable

If we are going to be in a world where public transport carries a much larger volume of trips, then we are going to need to find a way to pay for the higher operating costs. That means shifting service to higher efficiency lines (which carry more people at lower costs) and looking for better ways to deliver service – supported by regular incremental fare increases and, in the long run, land use changes that put the people in places where public transport works best.

Enable universal micro-mobility to connect people to trunk transport lines

People should be able to access backbone public transport stations in all kinds of different ways: primarily walking and cycling, but over time supplemented by new technologies – electric scooters, on-demand shuttles and things that haven't been invented yet. Given how spread out Sydney is, in some cases solving the “last mile” problem may actually require solving the “last five kilometres”.

Build a complete network of physically protected cycle lanes

Cycling is one of the most efficient, easy, and low-cost ways of getting around in cities all over the world. To have high rates of cycling requires one thing: physically separated cycle lanes. These lanes can also accommodate stand-up electric scooters and electric bikes – which make their use a viable option for going up hills, wearing nice clothes, or just not being athletic. In the outer suburbs, where extreme heat and greater distances are significant challenges, cycling may be best encouraged as a last-mile option to rail, metro and rapid bus hubs. Shade, road separation, drinking water provision and secure storage will be a priority on these cycle links.





Shift to car-sharing

In the future people are going to use a car when they need one without having to own one. Car-sharing (as represented today by companies like GoGet) and ride-sharing (as represented today by companies like Uber) are the early examples. As the vehicle fleet evolves toward autonomous electric cars, it’s simply not going to make sense for people to own their own cars when they can summon one to get where they want to be at any time. The net result will be a massive gain of urban space as all of the street space and garages can be converted to new uses. Sydney should do everything in its power to support this transition.

Reduce parking in busy urban cores, gradually, over time

Sydney needs a plan for removing parking, over time, from central locations while still making it easy for deliveries and services, and prioritising space for people with mobility impairments. In some cases, it will make sense as a transition strategy to provide parking at outer train stations, in order to let people transfer from car-dependent suburbia to the urban mobility network as far away from the centre as possible. Residential parking requirements will be reduced, with parking de-coupled from housing, especially close to hubs.

Manage congestion through dynamic road pricing

From an economic perspective, congestion is a sign of a mispriced resource. One of the most powerful tools we could use to manage congestion is to price driving appropriately, following the lead of cities like London. A modern road pricing scheme would improve on London’s cordon, by creating a system that is flexible, dynamic, and distance based.

Reclaim streets for public life

The final step, which builds on all the previous steps, is to begin converting street space to provide a better public realm for pedestrians. Put simply, this means widening footpaths, or in a few cases embracing full pedestrianisation. By switching to a more sustainable, high-performance mobility system, we will be able to reap the benefits of a more liveable public realm for strolling, sitting, and simply enjoying city life. Everywhere in the world, great cities are walking cities, and Sydney can be one of the best.

Be smart about freight

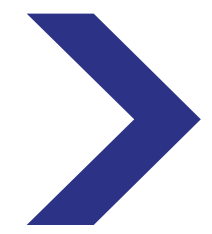
Getting goods in and around a dense city is no easy task. As we take steps to make Sydney more walkable and sustainable, we need to remember to include freight and deliveries in our thinking. Things are changing fast – from home delivery to robotic warehouses to drones, and Sydney has the opportunity to use new technologies to make city life easier.





Planning

Plan for a growing city in a way that improves quality of life and prosperity for all.



Cities are constantly changing. If we are smart about how we plan for the city to evolve over time, we will be able to make Sydney more liveable, more vibrant, more inclusive and more sustainable with each passing year.

Our planning agenda focuses on the connected network of vibrant neighbourhoods across Sydney, while also celebrating the CBD and other major centres as expressions of Sydney's dynamism and global ambitions.



Our vision of complete neighbourhoods

- Everyone in Sydney can walk to a neighbourhood town centre with all the necessities of daily life.
- Every neighbourhood has a mix of housing types – different sizes, different formats, different levels of affordability – so people can find what they need at every stage of life and communities are economically and socially integrated.
- People in Sydney are healthy and active because their neighbourhoods support walking and cycling.
- Sydney is filled with beautiful public spaces – parks, plazas, wide footpaths, and more – providing access to nature and to the simple joys of city life.



Our agenda



Plan for job growth

While Sydney has taken a beating from COVID-19, we believe that population and job growth will return as the world recovers. Sydney's planning system needs to do the heavy lifting to make sure that we welcome the growth gracefully. This means continuing to support the CBD and other job centres as we work through changes in working patterns triggered by the pandemic while making room for a wide variety of new industries.

Focus new development around train stations and other major transport hubs

People who live or work near major transport hubs will have great access to the rest of Sydney. In residential areas, they can anchor town centres with shops and amenities for the broader community.

Reinforce high streets as the centres of neighbourhood life

Local shopping streets provide enormous convenience to people. They give neighbourhoods their identity and enable a casual enjoyment of city life. Sydney was originally built out with high streets as the centres of neighbourhood life, but now, many have been degraded by poor traffic management. They should be nurtured, reinvigorated and protected, and in some cases created from scratch to bring them within walking distance of all Sydneysiders.

Embrace medium-density housing formats

The traditional Sydney terrace house is beloved by most people, although it is a higher density building type than what got built after World War II. As part of diverse housing options, we should welcome modern versions of the terrace house, as well as other low-rise formats, in places where taller buildings don't make sense.

Build complete communities

Given Sydney's growth numbers, greenfield development is a reality; not all of it is going to happen within the existing urbanised footprint. But greenfield development shouldn't be on the old model, which locks people into permanent car dependency and forces everyone onto long commutes. We need to build new complete neighbourhoods supported by infrastructure, above the minimum density threshold and designed to support local shops and public transport.





Retrofit post-war suburbs to make them more walkable

Sydney experienced explosive growth in the decades after World War II, and as a result many parts of the city reflect the values of the day: car-oriented, single-use development, with nothing to walk to. Some of these areas contain high concentrations of social and affordable housing nearing the end of its useful life. We need to figure out how to renew and adapt the post-war suburbs to include a greater mix of uses — to offer smaller blocks, more amenities, better public space, and more diversity of land use.

Create amazing public spaces across greater Sydney

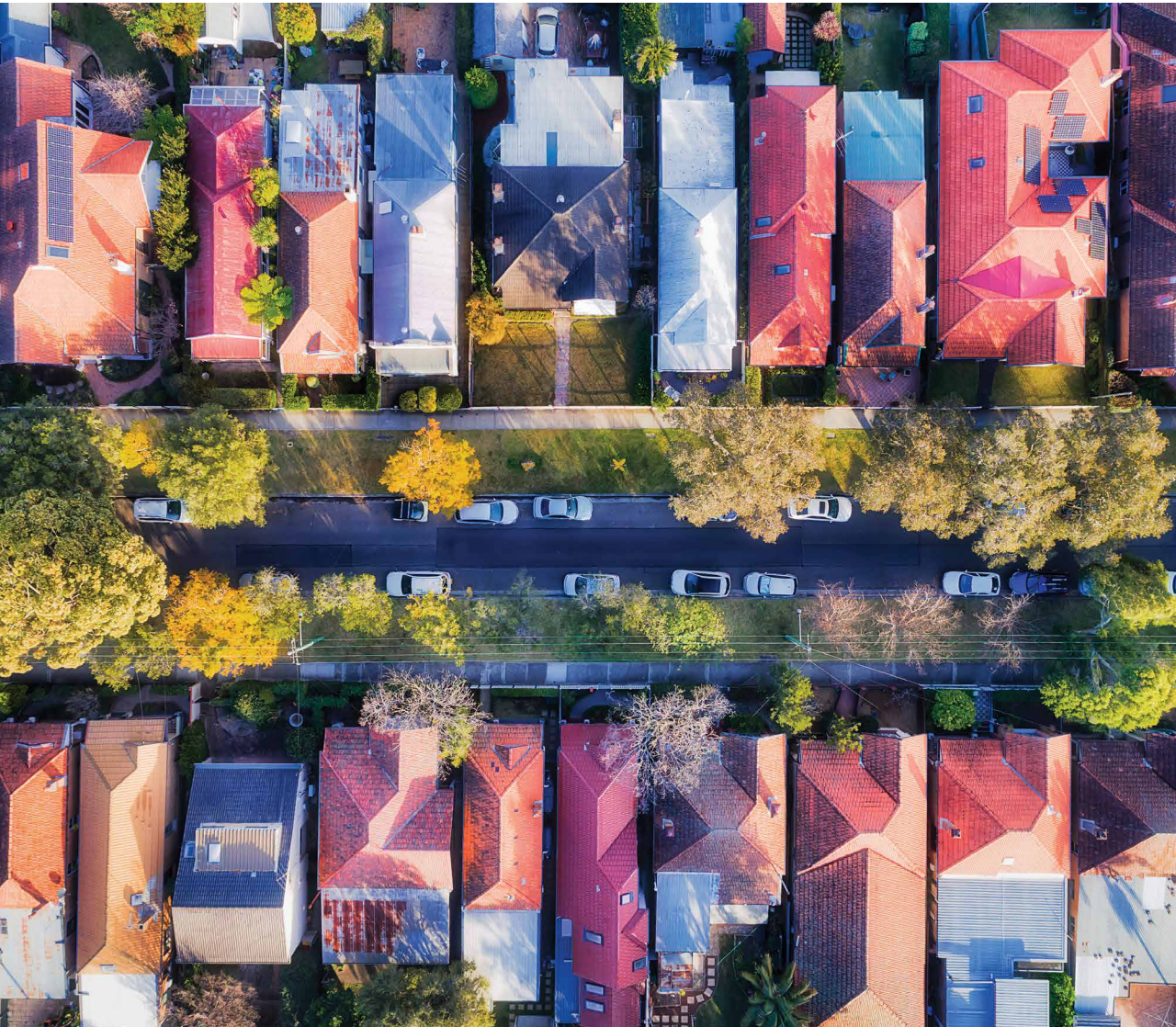
Places where people can meet and socialise are the underpinnings of city life. From streets to bush walks, from urban plazas to playing fields, we want to see a public space renaissance to improve quality of life for people regardless of age, income, or station in life.

Make housing more affordable

Sydney is one of the most unaffordable housing markets in the world; fixing this will require a fundamental change of direction. Aspiring homeowners will benefit most from tax reforms like abolishing negative gearing, along with overall increases in housing supply. Lower-income residents need investment in social and affordable housing, in line with what we see in other OECD countries. At all income levels, we also want to see a wave of experiments — with new construction methods, new dwelling types, and new forms of ownership.

Create a transparent and predictable planning system

NSW should move from an ad-hoc, project-driven planning system to one that relies on integrated planning — to give greater certainty to both residents and investors. This includes predictability about developer contributions and other charges.





Resilience

Adapt to climate change
and other threats.



Sydney is highly vulnerable to climate change – from extreme heat and sea level rise, as well as fires, floods, and global refugee flows. Like all cities in the world, Sydney faces the urgent challenge of retrofitting the urban systems to adapt to climate change, while at the same time ramping down emissions toward zero. We embrace these challenges with a spirit of optimism because we know that Sydney has everything it needs to successfully meet them.

While climate is at the centre of our resilience work, everyone has come to understand that resilience is a much broader concept involving multiple threats, from infectious diseases to terrorism to many kinds of social stresses. Resilience is a concept that informs all of our work.



Our vision

- Sydney has a reliable supply of water and electricity.
- Natural systems across greater Sydney are healthy.
- Sydney is protected from rising sea levels, fires, and other climate-influenced threats, with a plan for protecting, adapting, or relocating vulnerable pieces of city structure over time.
- Neighbourhoods are designed to make life comfortable in the face of hotter temperatures.
- Sydney is carbon neutral.
- Sydney can withstand future pandemics.



Our agenda

Achieve net zero emissions in NSW by 2050—or ideally sooner

NSW has a “target” of net zero by 2050, in line with leading countries around the world, but it does not have the laws, policies, and institutions that will actually achieve that target. Building on the work in countries like the UK and states like California, the plan should develop strategies for each of the key sectors that generate greenhouse gases in NSW, and be followed up by a regime of careful monitoring and recalibration over time. The actual implementation work will involve trial and error, as we learn what works. NSW should lead on this issue and not wait for federal action.

Adopt an energy transition plan

With its abundant sunshine and natural resources, Australia has everything it needs to generate its energy without carbon emissions. The energy transition plan will be the most straightforward element that flows from the broader plan for net zero emissions, because the technologies and policy instruments are so well understood. (Other sectors will be harder.)

Convert the vehicle fleet to renewable energy

Driving carbon out of the transport sector will be difficult – and is largely addressed in our mobility program area. But one essential piece of work is converting the vehicle fleet of passenger cars, buses, taxis, and trucks to electricity powered by renewable energy, supplemented by other technologies for heavier vehicles as needed. The path to adoption starts with fleets; as charging infrastructure is built out it can gradually shift to private vehicles.

Develop a NSW climate adaptation strategy

At this point, many of the impacts of climate change are now baked in. If humans were to stop emitting carbon tomorrow, the earth will continue to warm for decades and the seas will continue to rise for centuries. Australia’s climate is permanently hotter. We will have to retrofit our cities and our life support systems to adapt to the new climate: elevating parts of our cities above the rising seas, developing new sources of drinking water, managing the landscape to become less burnable, relocating infrastructure out of harm’s way, and many other investments along these lines. The NSW climate adaptation strategy is the way we organise and prioritise this generational undertaking.





Ensure sufficient water supply

The drier climate means that Sydney is running out of its traditional sources of water. We will increasingly need to rely on a combination of desalination, water recycling, rainwater capture, and other techniques — supported by policy changes, pricing reforms, and new technology.

Clean up the air

Between pollution from cars and smoke from fires, Sydney is experiencing terrible air quality on some days. This will become a public health crisis if not addressed. We need a combination of land management changes to reduce catastrophic bushfires, changes to vehicle technology to reduce pollution, and changes to building design to filter the air.



Conserve vital habitats surrounding Sydney

The open space that surrounds Sydney is one of the defining features of the place, giving it a sense of unique identity and amenity. But these vital natural habitats are threatened by sprawl and by climate change. They need to be protected, nurtured, and expanded.

Design Western Sydney to mitigate the heat

Home to millions, with millions more to come, Western Sydney is struggling to deal with urban heat. A hotter climate will only make this challenge greater. Investment in trees, water, and public space that cools neighbourhoods is required — the alternative is a city akin to Dubai: life lived in air-conditioned spaces, shut off from the outside world.



Culture

Advance Sydney as a centre
for culture and fun.



Great cities have always been the hotbeds of cultural and creative invention. We see culture in the broadest sense as one of the true purposes of city life.

Sydney's arts, cultural, entertainment, and sporting offers are also key to the city's competitiveness and liveability. In recent years, Sydney's reputation for fun has taken a hit, but we have the assets, talent and culture to bring it back.



Our vision

- Sydney offers a tantalising and accessible set of cultural institutions, performing arts venues, and sports.
- Sydney has high levels of participation in cultural events.
- Sydney has a thriving nightlife and 24-hour economy.
- Sydney is known as a centre of cultural innovation and experimentation.



Our agenda



Fund cultural organisations at a high level

Think about the amazing breadth and depth of the cultural offerings – both mainstream and fringe – of cities like New York, Paris, or London: it's clear that culture can define the role of leading cities in the world. For Sydney to compete at a top level, it needs to have its own version of this – and that means funding our museums, performing arts institutions, and festivals at a level that will enable exceptional results.

Support culture in Western Sydney

Culture needs to be part of the broader transformation of Western Sydney. That means supporting key institutions to relocate (like the Powerhouse), supporting existing Western Sydney cultural organisations – large and small, and starting new ones.

Create a new cultural institution devoted to interpreting First Nations experience

Sydney has an incredible opportunity to develop a new cultural institution devoted to interpreting the past, present, and future of Aboriginal Australia. It could be a beacon to Australians and to the world.



Create an enabling environment for bars, restaurants, and music venues

Although COVID-19 was a major setback, Sydney is slowly rebuilding its nightlife after the devastation of the lockdown laws. For nightlife to truly thrive will require a sea change in the way nightlife is regulated and policed – moving from a system that emphasises compliance and control, to one that welcomes and embraces people going out to enjoy a meal, a show, or a drink.

Make Sydney a creative city

We want Sydney to support cultural production, not just cultural consumption. That means basic things like providing art and music in public schools all the way through tertiary education. It means supporting local film and TV production through investment and tax support. It means promoting Sydney's talented performing arts organisations overseas. And it means building an ecosystem for the arts that in some ways mirrors what is in place for sport, where government takes responsibility for providing opportunities for participation to people of all ages and skill levels.

Support widespread access to sport

Sydneysiders love playing and watching sport. Whether at major facilities in places like Moore Park and Homebush, or at local fields, we must ensure everyone in our city has access to good quality, inclusive infrastructure that enables participation.



Governance

Strengthen the effectiveness
of government at all levels.





➤ When government works well, it is the great enabler of everything – the way we plan for the future, make trade-offs, resolve conflicts, set priorities, and support the practicalities of daily life. The Australian system concentrates power in the states, so much of our work is directed at the ministries and agencies of NSW. But we also care deeply about effective governance at the federal and local levels. Providing government with better ways of making decisions, better ways of hearing and communicating with the public, and better public debates on issues are all important to making Sydney better.



Our vision of effective government

- Government delivers a high quality of services.
- Government is able to successfully grapple with complex problems and take on ambitious work.
- Government uses technology and new ideas to improve services and pilot ideas.
- Citizens trust their government.
- Taxpayers receive good value for their money.



Our agenda

Create the infrastructure for the city of the future

We owe a debt to past generations for building the infrastructure that supports the life of the city we know today. Our generation must also make its contribution by building far-sighted infrastructure that will enable the future city to work better than the one we inherited. Our task is to plan wisely, invest heavily, and build the infrastructure that Sydney will need in the future.

Transition to a land tax

Stamp duty is not an efficient tax. By creating such a strong disincentive to sell, it reduces liquidity in the housing market and keeps empty nesters from downsizing. An annual land tax is a better system. NSW should phase out stamp duty, at least substantially, and replace it with a land tax.

Reform the tax system

The tax settings need to change in order to enable new businesses to grow while ensuring ongoing funding for government. NSW should eliminate payroll taxes and consumption taxes. The Australian Government should provide an investment allowance to offset our high corporate tax rate for firms investing in Australian R&D. These changes should be funded through reform to the base or rate of the GST.

Make local government more effective

Local government provides some critical public services and is on the front lines of making sure that Sydney grows in ways that enhance liveability, so we need it to work. This means moving to direct, popular election of mayors so that they have a mandate and an ability to do big things, and uncapping local government rates to increase local government capacity.

Make Sydney a smart city

There are great opportunities to use data and technology to make government and public services more efficient. These include opening up public sources of data to enable new applications and rethinking the way government procures and contracts to encourage new approaches.





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Innovation Fund Partners

We would like to thank our Innovation Fund Partners for their support of the Committee for Sydney’s research.

Our Innovation Fund Partners are future focused, and outcome driven. They are leaders of change. Their combined investment underpins our annual research program and together with our members, enables us to grow our impact and output – striving to create a better Sydney that offers unparalleled opportunity and quality of life for everyone.

We are proud to work with our Innovation Fund Partners: Dexus; ICC Sydney; McKinsey & Company; Housing and Property Group from the NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment; Western Sydney University; and Campbelltown City Council.




Innovation Fund Partners





Keep in touch

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