



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 150 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 reach out at committee@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.



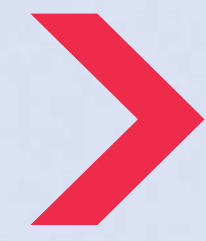
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Sydney is a fair and inclusive city that provides equitable opportunity and access for all, today and tomorrow.

This agenda is our long-term vision for Sydney.





Economy

Sydney's economy delivers ongoing prosperity for all.





➤ Sydney is a city bursting with potential, but that potential is not fully unleashed. We are the largest urban economy in Australia and one of the top twenty financial centres globally. Sydney is home to many highly regarded universities. Six of NSW's 11 public universities rank in the global top 200, two of whom are in the global top 20.

We are highly educated, innovative, complex and globally recognised. Sydney must capitalise on this potential; attracting, nurturing and retaining talent and investment so that we are the natural home for the jobs and industries that will power future economic development.

Sydney must grow both the size and complexity of the economy and ensure that this growth benefits all.





Outcomes

Economic growth: Sydney grows its prosperity.

Sydney must be prosperous, not just productive. For Sydney to prosper, we must provide opportunities for those born here as well as attract the smartest people from around the world. A prosperous city is a city that provides opportunities for all; where industries can locate and operate in the areas that best meet their needs and with the skills and infrastructure that enable them to flourish. Sydney must set itself up for success by looking to the future and attracting the industries and skills that will define the next century. This success must be distributed across the city, from West to East.

How this can be measured: Changes in multifactor productivity [Productivity Commission]

Global attractiveness: Sydney is a magnet for the world's capital, people and ideas.

Sydney has always welcomed new arrivals – it is one of our great strengths and has made Sydney a true global city. But, Sydney has for too long relied on natural and built assets to sell the city – beaches and harbour, bridge and opera house. These don't fully reflect the story of life in Sydney, and they crowd out a story about our incredible diversity, innovation capacity, vibrancy and appetite for growth and change. A new story, starting with the people of Sydney, will attract visitors, talent, and investment to support the economic and social growth of our city.

How this can be measured: Global perceptions of Sydney [Committee for Sydney's Benchmarking reports]



Economic complexity: Sydney's economy is diversified and resilient.

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. The race to decarbonise and diversify the economy should be the great economic imperative of our generation. At the same time, we must create new industries so our city's economy is not overly reliant on too few sectors for our success. This represents an enormous opportunity for Australia to create new jobs and new industries that will position the country for the future.

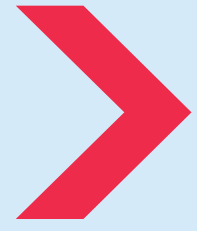
How this can be measured: Changes in economic complexity [Atlas of Economic Complexity Index]

Innovation: Sydney has a thriving innovation ecosystem.

The innovation economy – encompassing the start-up ecosystem, transformation within larger firms, and new ideas coming out of the university sector – will create many of the 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 and industry development, we risk decades of slow growth while other countries forge ahead. With the right policy settings Sydney can be globally recognised as a true innovation city.

How this can be measured: Innovation and Productivity Scorecard [NSW Innovation and Productivity Council]





Education and skills: Sydneysiders' skills create globally competitive industries and innovations.

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. After London and New York, no other city hosts as many international students as Sydney and six of NSW's eleven public universities are in the global top 200. NSW must continue to ensure our research institutions create world-changing ideas while growing our ability to commercialise these ideas.

How this can be measured: Number of tertiary education completions [NSW and Commonwealth Departments of Education]





> Mobility

It is quick, easy and enjoyable to get around Sydney on sustainable transport, and streets are full of public life.





Sydney is undergoing a great transformation: from a city whose default mode is to drive to a city that makes it easy to walk, cycle, and take public transport. In the future, there will still be plenty of driving, but more and better options for non-car trips. This shift is 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.



Outcomes



Access: People find it easy and enjoyable to get around via sustainable modes.

The network of heavy rail, metro, light rail, ferry, and rapid bus lines forms the backbone public transport network. As this network continues to grow and create more points of connection, we will be able to go from anywhere to anywhere, without needing our cars. Public transport stations will be accessed by walking and cycling and increasingly supplemented by new technologies – electric scooters, on-demand shuttles, car share and ride share. In the future people will be able to easily use a car when they need one without having to own one. The result will be a gain of urban space as street space and garages can be converted to more productive uses.

How this can be measured: Passenger Satisfaction ratings [Transport for NSW]

Freight: Goods move efficiently and sustainably while not disrupting communities.

Getting goods in and around a dense city is no easy task. As we take steps to make Sydney more walkable, sustainable and dense, we must remember to include freight, logistics and industrial lands in our thinking to ensure it is properly planned for. Things are changing fast – from home delivery to robotic warehouses to drones and automated trucks – and Sydney has the opportunity to use new technologies to make city life easier and freight more sustainable.

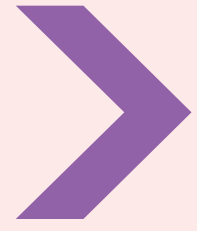
How this can be measured: Percentage of freight movements on sustainable transport [Transport for NSW]

Mode share: People use sustainable transport for most of their trips.

Sydney needs a mode share target to reduce the share of trips made by car and to increase those made by public and active transport. This helps to direct government investment in transport infrastructure and policies. In a world where public transport carries a much larger volume of trips, 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), looking for better ways to deliver and fund services, investing in high quality and connected cycling infrastructure and making land use decisions that put the people in places where public transport works best.

How this can be measured: Percentage of trips taken by sustainable transport – Active Transport, Public Transport and Mobility as a Service [Transport for NSW]





Streets as public spaces: High streets are full of people.

Local high streets provide enormous convenience to people. They give neighbourhoods their identity and enable a casual enjoyment of city life. Sydney originally grew with high streets as the centres of neighbourhood life, but now, many have been degraded by poor traffic management or removed from the planning of new communities. They should be nurtured, reinvigorated and protected, and in some cases created from scratch to bring them within walking distance of all Sydneysiders. Streets should be thought of as public spaces, meaning widening footpaths, reducing car dependence and parking dominance or even embracing full pedestrianisation of certain streets.

How this can be measured: Number of high streets measured as “great” [Committee for Sydney High Street analysis]

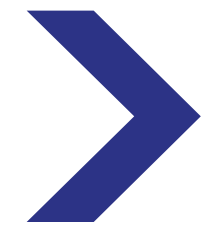




Planning

Sydney has well-connected communities, industries and infrastructure in the right places.





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.

At the same time, the unaffordability of our housing affects every aspect of our lives – from our ability to access employment and opportunity, to the ability for key workers to continue to make our city hum.

Our planning agenda focuses on “doing density well” in 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.





Outcomes



Density: Density is done well in Sydney because people live or work within walking or cycling distance to amenity.

Density done well is a must have. This means locating more housing around major transport hubs – like train stations, metro, light rail or rapid bus – shops and amenities, public and play spaces, as well as other critical forms of social infrastructure like libraries, healthcare, childcare and schools.

In places where taller buildings don't make sense, we should welcome modern versions of the iconic Sydney terrace or the 1960s walk up flat. We need to figure out how to encourage a greater mix of housing forms and diversity in all our neighbourhoods.

How this can be measured: Percentage of homes within 1,200 metres of a town centre [Australian Bureau of Statistics]

Affordability: Sydneysiders can afford homes that meet their needs.

Sydney is one of the most unaffordable housing markets in the world; fixing this will require challenging business-as-usual approaches. Aspiring homeowners will benefit most from tax reforms like abolishing negative gearing, along with overall increases in housing supply and diversity. 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. Importantly, affordability is not just the sticker price of housing, but the cost of living in it over its lifetime.

How this can be measured: Percentage of people who spend more than 30% of income on housing in Sydney [Australian Bureau of Statistics]





Climate adaptation: Our buildings and public spaces are comfortable for our climate and tread lightly on the planet.

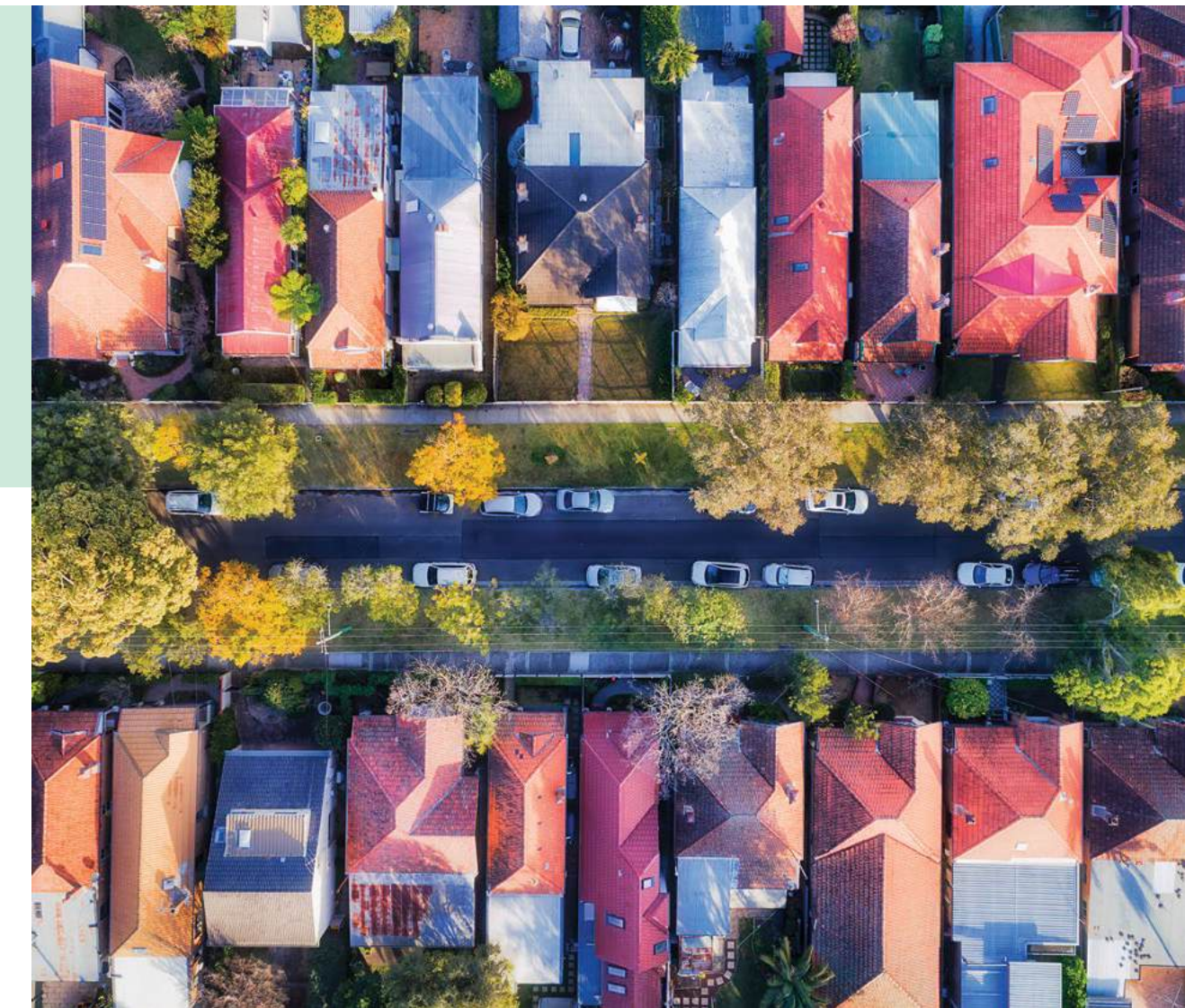
We need to design buildings and public spaces that are adaptable to our climate while minimising environmental impact. This means prioritising housing designs that maximise natural light, ventilation, and insulation, reducing reliance on air-conditioning. It involves making sure there's space for trees in yards, planning for streets with ample tree canopy or enabling plants on balconies and rooftops. These elements not only provide shade and cooling but become the lungs of the city. Access to green spaces, parks, or pools is also essential, providing natural cooling solutions and fostering spaces where the city feels open, comfortable and connected to its environment.

How this can be measured: Average life cycle carbon emissions of homes. [BASIX]

Employment and services: Our city can service itself. It has the right workforce and industries in the right places.

Sydney's planning system needs to do the heavy lifting to make sure that we support population growth with good jobs in the right places. This means continuing to invest in our CBDs and other employment centres to encourage growth in existing and emerging industries and respond to the changing ways in which we work. It also means viewing essential urban industrial lands not as 'land in waiting' for residential development, but a vital part of a highly functioning and efficient city.

How this can be measured: Amount of employment land in each District of Sydney [NSW Dept. Planning, Housing and Infrastructure]





Resilience

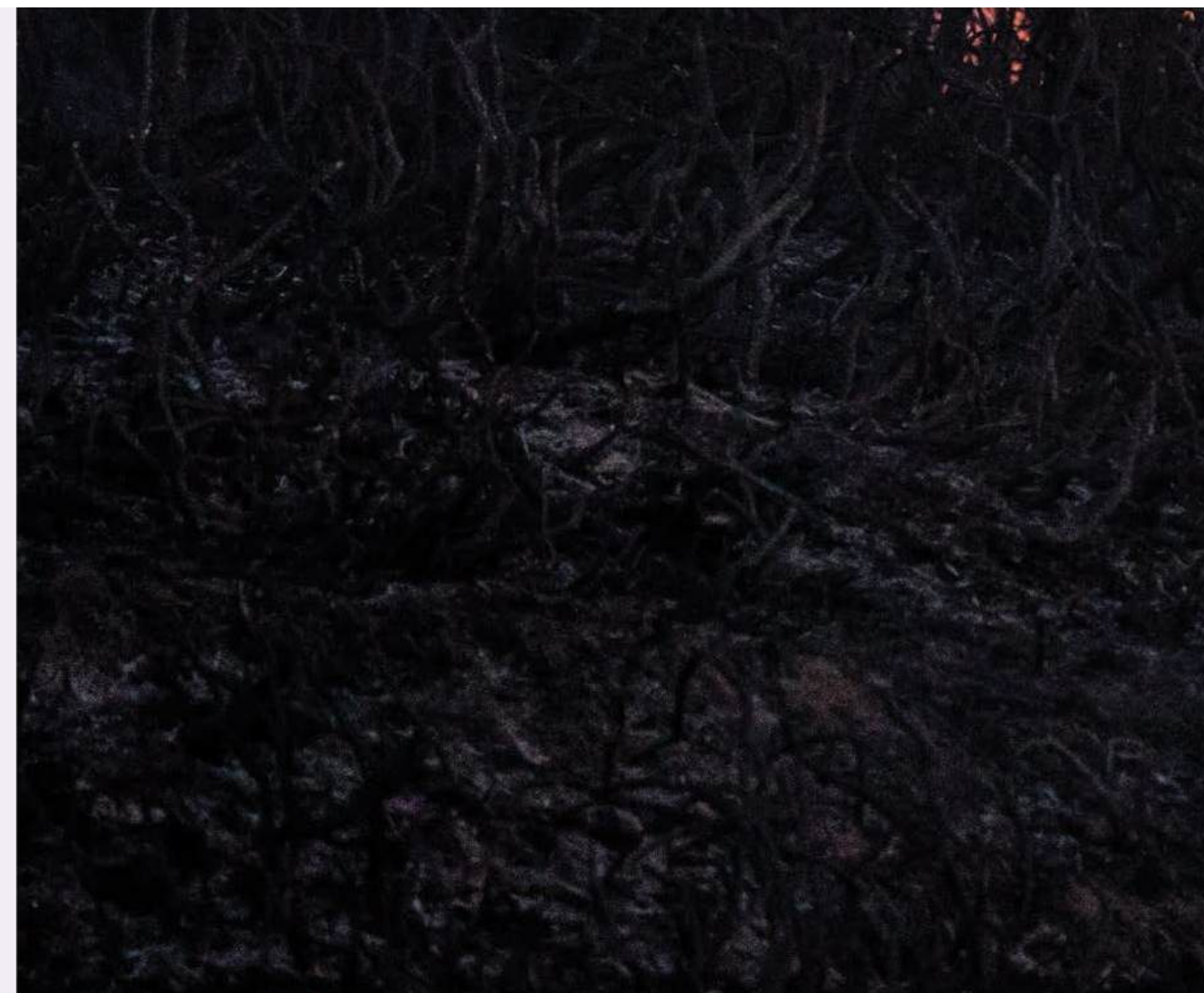
Sydney is net zero, nature positive, and our communities and infrastructure are resilient in the face of climate change.





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.

Resilience is a concept that informs all of our work. 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.





Outcomes

Net zero: Sydney is a zero-carbon city.

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. NSW must develop a plan for each of the key sectors that generate greenhouse gasses in NSW and be followed up by a regime of careful monitoring and recalibration over time.

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 straight-forward element that flows from the broader plan for net zero emissions, because the technologies and policy instruments are so well understood. Driving carbon out of the transport sector will be difficult, 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.

How this can be measured: Metric tonnes of CO2e emitted by Sydney per year and embedded carbon decreasing YOY] [Australian Greenhouse Gases Information System]

Natural hazard risk: Sydney's communities and infrastructure are prepared and adapted to climate risks.

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 and we will have to retrofit our cities and our life support systems to adapt to the new climate.

Home to millions, with millions more to come, Western Sydney is already struggling with urban heat and a hotter climate will only make this challenge greater. Investment in trees, water, and public space that cools neighbourhoods is required.

How this can be measured: Percentage of communities and infrastructure exposed to unreasonable natural hazard risk.





Nature positive: Sydney's natural capital and biodiversity survives and thrives in Sydney's changing climate.

The green open space across and around 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. At the same time, we need to protect and increase biodiversity while appreciating the role of nature within Sydney.

How this can be measured: Percentage biodiversity gain across Sydney [NSW Dept. Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water]



Affordability: Households and business can access clean, reliable and affordable water and energy.

As Sydney's population grows and the risk of drought increases, Sydney will need to diversify its sources of rainfall independent water supply by expanding existing desalination, introducing purified recycled drinking water, and enhancing water efficiency measures at the household, business and infrastructure scale. Sydney also has the potential to generate more of its own energy, with rooftop solar – on homes, offices and warehouses – combining with different scales of battery storage to meet the needs of our growing population.

How this can be measured: Percentage of Sydney residents who can pay electricity, gas and telephone bills on time [HILDA Survey]



Culture

Sydneysiders love their culture,
and people travel to Sydney to
experience it.



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 key to the city's competitiveness and liveability.

A city that isn't fun – or does not provide opportunities for creatives to produce and present – is a city that won't attract the best and brightest from around the world. Sydney is currently undergoing a cultural, artistic and sporting renaissance and should seize the opportunity to be a globally significant culture city.



Outcomes



Participation and access: Sydneysiders take part in culture and sport in large numbers, thanks to a tantalising array of opportunities in close proximity.

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 to tertiary education. It means ensuring that spaces for creativity and production are retained and increased. And it means building an ecosystem for creative culture 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. And for sport, it means everyone in our city has access to good quality sporting infrastructure.

How this can be measured: Number of people attending cultural and sporting experiences in Sydney [Create NSW / NSW Government data]



Attractiveness: People come to Sydney for our cultural innovation and excellence.

Think about the amazing breadth and depth of the cultural offerings of cities like New York, Paris or London: it's clear that cultural institutions can define the role of leading cities in the world. For Sydney to be a true global city, it needs its own version of this – and that means funding our museums, performing arts institutions and festivals at a level that will enable extraordinary results. It means promoting Sydney's brilliant performing arts organisations overseas. It is critical this funding is equitably distributed to enhance cultural consumption and production in centres across the city.

How this can be measured: Sydney's cultural benchmark ranking [Mori Foundation Global Power City Index]





Celebrate culture: First Nations people play a truly central role, with renewed focus on Sydney's richly multicultural identity.

Sydney has an incredible opportunity to centre its deep history of storytelling and First Nations culture, with a key action being development of a new cultural institution devoted to interpreting the past, present and future of Aboriginal Australia. Pasifika, Chinese, Sudanese, Greek, Vietnamese, Egyptian and so many other migrant communities must be increasingly front and centre in our city's cultural life, and key festivals and celebrations a growing part of our cultural identity. There is a moment for change; get it right and we could be a beacon to Australians and to the world.

How this can be measured: First Nations people report they feel their culture is represented [Committee for Sydney Life in Survey survey]

24-hour economy: Sydney's 24-hour economy is thriving, and services the needs of a 24-hour city.

For Sydney's nightlife to truly thrive has required a sea change in the way it 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, finding opportunities to say 'yes' to great ideas rather than 'no'.

To back this exciting change in, we need strong systems and policies that support care workers, hospitality staff and others who work in the night time economy – get it right for them, and it will work for everyone.

How this can be measured: Sydney's nighttime economy activity [NSW Government Data after Dark]





> Equity & Fairness

Sydney is a fair and inclusive city that provides equitable opportunity and access for all, today and tomorrow.





➤ At this moment, Sydney is becoming less fair by the day. We are at an inflection point, where our belief that we are leaving a city that provides better lives for future generations is under threat.

A backbone of Australian social and cultural identity, “a fair go for all”, should be upheld. A host of crises, from housing, to climate, to cost-of-living, threaten the possibility of an equitable and fair Sydney for those who live here now, and for those who are yet to arrive here or be born.

We need to ensure that regardless of your background or your postcode, Sydney provides everything you need for a good life. This means it is affordable, sustainable, and has an equitable distribution of physical and natural infrastructure.





Outcomes



Intergenerational equity: Future generations have better opportunities than generations before.

Sydney’s growth must not come at the expense of future generations. The decisions we make today must benefit the needs of tomorrow. This means prioritising climate resilience, protecting our natural resources, and providing housing that remains accessible and affordable over time. A starting point is to embed community wellbeing into the decision-making frameworks of government.

How this can be measured: Percentage of young people in Sydney who say they are happy with their life as a whole [Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth]

Gender equity: We have gender equality and empowered all women, girls and gender diverse people.

From the home and public spaces to workplaces, every environment in Sydney should be safe, welcoming, and inclusive. Women perform over two extra hours of unpaid care work daily - limiting their access to work, learning, and community.

By investing in accessible childcare, flexible work, and well-connected neighbourhoods, Sydney can remove barriers for caregivers and recognise care work as essential. Through policies that support gender-inclusive design, Sydney can lead by example, creating a city where all residents—regardless of gender—have the freedom and resources to thrive.

How this can be measured: Sydney’s gender pay gap [Workplace Gender Equality Agency Australia]

Geographic equity: Regardless of where you live in Sydney, you can easily access the things that make for a good life.

A truly inclusive Sydney starts with equitable access to opportunity and safety for everyone. Every community in Sydney should offer the essentials of a high quality of life—public transport, schools, healthcare, green spaces, and cultural amenities. Closing gaps between well-served and underserved areas will build a Sydney where all residents, regardless of postcode, can thrive. This requires targeted investment in areas with historically lower access to critical services and infrastructure, ensuring that all Sydneysiders can lead fulfilling lives with local, equitable access to what matters.

How this can be measured: Western Sydney’s liveability rating relative to Eastern Sydney’s [Liveability Census]

A city for everyone: We are a city that values diversity and inclusion.

Sydney’s strength lies in its diversity, a defining trait that enriches our culture, economy, and sense of community. Embracing and celebrating diversity means building a city that actively includes people from all backgrounds, abilities, and walks of life. By fostering a climate of acceptance and support, where different cultures, perspectives, and identities are valued, Sydney can grow as an inclusive, resilient, and unified city that offers a true sense of belonging to all.

How this can be measured: Percentage of diverse communities say they are happy in Sydney [Committee for Sydney Life in Sydney Survey]

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; Lendlease; Arcadis; JLL; The University of Technology Sydney; The University of Sydney, University of NSW; Western Sydney University; Sydney Local Health District; Campbelltown City Council and Business Events Sydney.

Innovation Fund Partners



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