



Regional
Development
Australia
H U N T E R

SEPTEMBER 2012

URBAN PLANNING

FOR THE HUNTER'S FUTURE



An Australian Government Initiative



A NSW Government Initiative

Regional Development Australia

Regional Development Australia (RDA) Hunter is one of 55 RDA committees established throughout Australia in 2009 by the Federal and State Governments to engage with regional communities and provide advice to Government.

RDA Committees:

- Provide support for informed regional planning;
- Consult and engage with regional communities on economic, social and environmental issues, solutions and priorities;
- Liaise with all levels of government and local communities about government programs, services, grants and initiatives for regional development; and
- Contribute to business growth plans and investment strategies, environmental solutions and social inclusion strategies in their region.¹

RDA Hunter's vision for the region is for the continuing growth of a vibrant and sustainable regional economy in a carbon constrained future.

The priority regional investment goals identified by RDA Hunter include:

- Sustainable growth of the Hunter's economy
- Infrastructure to improve productivity and efficiency
- Comprehensive and cohesive long term planning
- Education, skills and workforce development
- Building knowledge skills and innovation capabilities
- Enriching the natural and built environment to create liveable places.²

Contents

Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations.....	1
Introduction.....	2
Australia's Major Cities.....	3
Regional Cities.....	3
Lower Hunter Urban Area	4
Developments in Australia's Urban Policy.....	5
Planning in the Hunter.....	6
A National Reform Agenda for Australia's Major Cities.....	8
Planning for the Lower Hunter Urban Area: The Way Forward	10
Bringing it all together.....	13
Conclusion.....	14
Appendix 1 – Plans in AECOM research and analysis review.....	15
Appendix 2 – Stakeholder Forum Participants.....	16
References.....	16

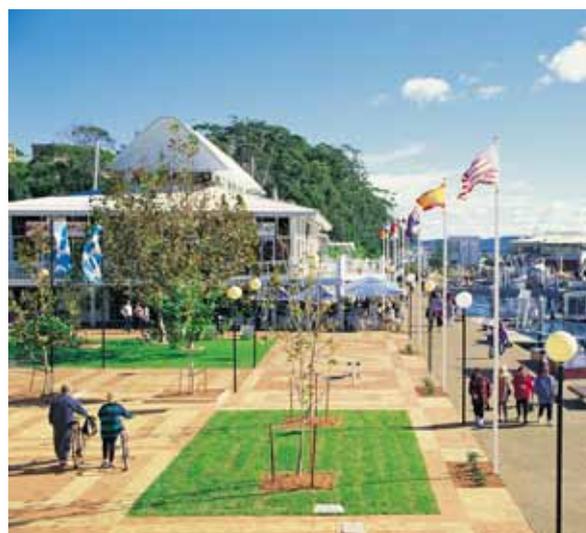


Photo: Hamilton Lund; Destination NSW

¹ Source: The Australian Government Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport. 8 May 2012

² RDA Hunter Regional Plan 2010 – 2020

Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations

RDA Hunter maintains that a comprehensive and all-encompassing view of this integrated region and its connectivity to surrounding regions, including Sydney, is the key to ensuring that sustainable and productive growth occurs across the Hunter to the benefit of the state, the nation and local communities. The Hunter is a region of unique qualities and while it makes a unique contribution to the prosperity of the nation, it does not stand alone.

Major decisions by governments on infrastructure planning and investment over the next 12 to 18 months will have a significant impact on the future lifestyles, employment options and well-being of people living in the region.

RDA Hunter recommends:

1. Regional planning agencies adopt a collaborative approach to address government urban policy and consider the regional relationships between:
 - Population, land use and housing supply;
 - Employment and economically and socially significant infrastructure; and
 - Services that best contribute to the long-term well-being of the Hunter region and its people.
2. The Upper Hunter Strategic Regional Land Use Plan and the revised Lower Hunter Regional Strategy be brought together to present a single and interconnected Hunter Regional Strategy.
3. Future regional planning efforts have regard to the planning hierarchy established in the national planning criteria for Australia's cities, and provide appropriate levels of detail for near, medium and long-term plans and projects.
4. Regional-scale planning documents contain significantly greater detail about future infrastructure and its relationship to land use to allow public and private sector coordination of investment over time.

RDA Hunter will continue to encourage and facilitate a cooperative and integrated region-wide approach to planning that seeks to secure the future of the region and position the Hunter nationally and internationally as one of Australia's most productive and significant economies.

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to raise awareness within the Federal, NSW and Local governments to the critical importance of urban planning for the Hunter. It also aims to articulate the opportunity that now exists, within the region, to draw together the many plans currently in existence with those in development.

In this paper, RDA Hunter presents the case for a strategic and integrated approach as the key to delivering the comprehensive and cohesive long-term urban infrastructure plan necessary to underpin sustainable growth in the Hunter's population and productivity into the future.

Australia is one of the most urbanised countries in the world. Our cities play a pivotal role in securing the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of our nation.

Cities are not only centres of economic activity and home to the vast majority of Australians they are also gateways for the important economic and cultural contribution of regional Australia.

Our cities have a strategic contribution to make to Australia's global competitiveness in an increasingly urbanised world.³

***The Hon Anthony Albanese MP
Minister for Infrastructure and Transport***



³ Our Cities Our Future: A National Urban Policy, 2011. P3.

Australia's Major Cities

As governments focus on the structural drivers of economic growth – population, productivity and participation⁴ – they have shown a renewed interest in cities and the role of urban policy. A majority of Australians live in the **18 Major Cities** in Australia.⁵ These cities, listed below, generate **80% of the nation's economic activity**.⁶ Faced with predictions for an increasing and ageing population, a decline in the rate of productivity growth and pressure on infrastructure, Federal and State governments are seeking improved return on infrastructure investment, better alignment between population, skills and employment, and to capture the intangible economic benefits flowing from enhanced liveability.

The productivity of cities is central to Australia's continuing economic progress.

Australia's 18 Major Cities that are the subject of the National Urban Policy and the Liveable Cities Program⁷

- Sydney
- Brisbane
- Adelaide
- Newcastle
- Wollongong
- Hobart
- Townsville
- Toowoomba
- Launceston
- Melbourne
- Perth
- Gold Coast-Tweed
- Canberra-Queanbeyan
- Sunshine Coast
- Geelong
- Cairns
- Darwin
- Albury-Wodonga

Regional Cities

Urbanisation pressure being experienced in Australia's capital cities, and increasingly around regional cities, has implications for productivity, long-term community well-being and land use planning as well as natural resource and infrastructure management. These issues have led to further recognition that regional cities are critical to the debate about Australia's future population and where people and investment in infrastructure will take place.

Around one-third of Australians live in regional cities.⁸ The eleven regional Major Cities provide liveable and sustainable alternatives to capital cities; they offer diversity in employment and housing opportunities, they perform important roles in terms of the delivery of services such as education, training and health, they support the productive use of Australia's natural resource base and they boast a distinct identity and sense of community.

Australian city issues require local solutions. Multi-centred urban regions are emerging as the best answer for a comparatively low density urban area... Australian cities are at last moving away from the notion that they are mono-nuclear, radiating from the central business area in concentric waves of suburbia. ...functional cities are poly-nuclear and consist of many regional nodes linked by efficient transportation.

P Cox, P Graus and B Meyer, 2011. Home

⁴ The Intergenerational Report 2010. Ch 2, Growing the economy – productivity, participation and population

⁵ State of Australian Cities 2011, p10

⁶ State of Australian Cities 2011, p4

⁷ Our Cities Our Future 2011 *ibid* and <http://www.nationbuildingprogram.gov.au/funding/liveablecities/cities.aspx>

⁸ Baxter et al, 2011 Families in regional, rural and remote Australia AIFS

Lower Hunter Urban Area

Within the region, much of the debate and discussion about urban planning in the Hunter has focussed on the Newcastle CBD and it is widely recognised that *renewal and revitalisation of Newcastle CBD is essential for a broader regional growth strategy*.⁹

However, for national policy, planning and funding purposes the Major City of **Newcastle** is defined as the second most populated area in New South Wales. The Newcastle Statistical District includes the Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Newcastle, Cessnock, Lake Macquarie, Maitland and Port Stephens. This combined area is referred to in this paper as the Lower Hunter Urban Area, and is identified as the seventh largest Major City in Australia, with a population growing at 1.1% annually.

In this Urban Area, growth is concentrated in centres, with travel times between 20 minutes and one hour for residents commuting between centres for jobs, services, higher order medical and legal services, transport interchanges, major cultural and entertainment venues, or regional open space and recreational opportunities. As the focus of economic policy makers turns increasingly to the critical relationship between urban planning and economic growth, it is timely that planning agencies within NSW together with Lower Hunter LGAs respond to this new policy focus and the funding opportunities it brings. The NSW Government, regional planning agencies, the five Lower Hunter LGAs, the private sector and individuals share the responsibility to design an integrated urban plan for the Lower Hunter Urban Area.

Efficiency in urban planning broadly includes not only business interests but the well-being of all city residents.
Productivity Commission, 2011, Ch.2, p.12

Local Government Area	2008	2009	2010
Cessnock	50,107	50,782	51,706
Lake Macquarie	196,418	199,074	200,849
Maitland	67,918	69,084	70,296
Newcastle	153,331	154,619	156,112
Port Stephens	65,752	66,686	67,825
Lower Hunter Urban Area, Total	533,526	540,245	546,788

Table 1: Estimated Population in Newcastle Statistical District.¹⁰



Photo: Andrew Monger; Destination NSW

⁹ RDA Hunter, 2010 Connecting the Hunter: A regional approach to infrastructure

¹⁰ HVRF, 2012. Hunter Region At A Glance. Source ABS: Catalogue No. 3218.0

Developments in Australia's Urban Policy

Regional planning must be informed by State and Federal government policies and priorities for the Hunter to successfully access the government funding and investment opportunities needed to ensure the future of the Lower Hunter Urban Area as a productivity growth generator and a liveable, sustainable place.

Our Cities, Our Future – A National Urban Policy for a productive, sustainable and liveable future was released by the Australian Government in May 2011.¹¹ This Policy represents an important contribution by the Australian Government to the cities reform agenda that was agreed to by the Council of Australian Governments. (The COAG national objective for cities and criteria for urban planning are discussed below). The National Urban Policy sets out how the Australian Government can facilitate better outcomes for cities through direct investment and by influencing the actions of others. It sets in place the Government's objectives and directions for Australia's cities to meet the challenges of the decades ahead.

The State of Australian Cities 2011 supports the National Urban Policy and identifies the necessary steps to make our cities better places to live and work.¹² This report, for the first time, acknowledges that decisions which impact capital cities also impact regional cities. These decisions will especially impact on the growing Lower Hunter Urban Area.

New South Wales 2021 Goal to 'build liveable centres'

In 2011 the NSW Government released NSW 2021, a 10 year plan to guide NSW government policy and budget decisions and to deliver community priorities.¹³ As part of the strategy to 'renovate infrastructure', NSW 2021 identifies Goal 20 to 'build liveable centres' (p.40). This goal supports 'planning for towns and cities that are not only accessible and viable, but are great places to live and work' and commits to outlining 'clear subregional local housing and employment targets to be delivered by councils through local land use plans'.

State Infrastructure Strategy

Infrastructure NSW (INSW) is working with the NSW Government to identify and prioritise critical public infrastructure for NSW and how to activate public and private sector resources to deliver it. One of INSW's core activities is to develop a ***20-year State Infrastructure Strategy (SIS)***, which is due to be released in September 2012. INSW will prioritise those sectors that drive productivity and have the greatest impact on economic growth and, ultimately, quality of life.

These plans need also to look at the interdependency and interrelationships of regions beyond Sydney boundaries with particular regard to regional areas where improved infrastructure is the key to unlocking productivity and accommodating sustainable population growth.

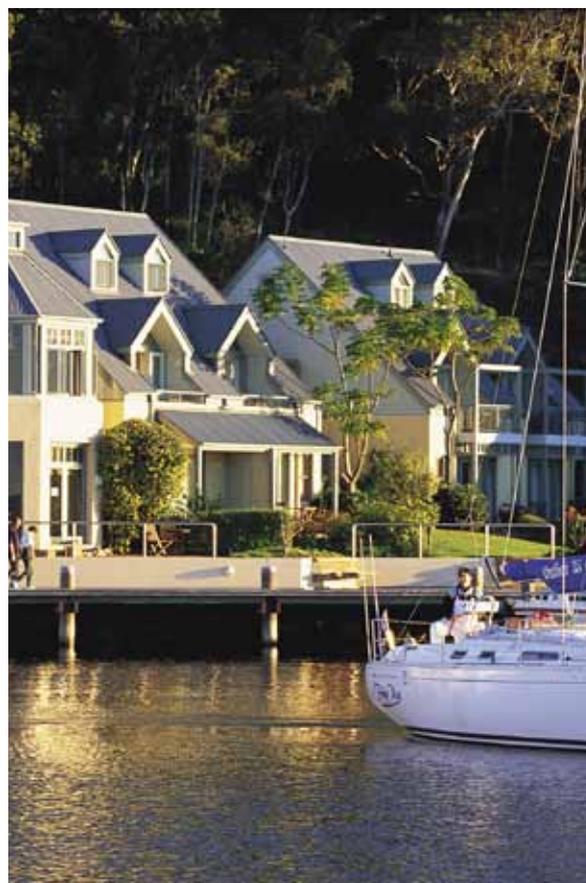


Photo: Destination NSW

¹¹ Australian Government, 2011, Our Cities Our Future Department of Infrastructure and Transport

¹² Australian Government, 2011, State of Australian Cities. Major Cities Unit, Dept of Infrastructure and Transport

¹³ NSW Government, 2011. NSW 2021 – A Plan to Make NSW Number One, Dept of Premier and Cabinet

Planning in the Hunter

Great infrastructure comes from vision, a view that the life of a great city is measured in decades, not years; and that a successful city reaches beyond its own region to make its mark, to make connections, to bring in diverse commodities and peoples, and to send forth its own products and people. In the absence of connections, a city will decline. In the absence of diversity it will become insignificant.

**Prof Phillip O'Neill,
Director, Urban Research Centre. UWS,
Newcastle Herald, 5 March 2012. p11**

The Hunter has a large capacity to grow economically and socially, and to increase productivity. Some would say that capacity is hampered by a lack of planning. Others would claim that there are already too many plans for the Hunter. Even more planning is under way including plans for infrastructure, land use, transport, water, sustainability, conservation, and a regional action plan to support *NSW 2021*.

In 2010 RDA Hunter proposed a regional approach to infrastructure priorities aimed at *Connecting the Hunter* and concluded that 'sustainable economic development and growth, improved levels of productivity, high levels of employment and community wellbeing need world-class infrastructure'. *Connecting the Hunter* also called for a long term, strategic, comprehensive and consistent regional planning framework.¹⁴

RDA Hunter maintains that a comprehensive and all-encompassing view of the region, and its connectivity to surrounding regions, including Sydney, is critically important to ensuring that sustainable and productive growth occurs across the region to the benefit of the state, the nation and the local population.

RDA Hunter will continue to encourage and facilitate a cooperative and integrated region wide approach to planning that seeks to secure the future of the region and position the Hunter nationally and internationally as one of Australia's most productive and significant economies.

RDA Hunter recommends that the various state and regional planning agencies work together towards defining a single set of prioritised outcomes, which recognise that the future lifestyles, employment options and well-being of people living in the Hunter will be shaped by the decisions made in the next 12 to 18 months and impacted as government policies and funding are rolled out.

Upper and Lower Hunter

Planning for the Hunter has traditionally addressed the Upper Hunter and Lower Hunter separately. While the two 'sub-regions' have distinctive and unique features and challenges which need to be recognised and addressed, they are interrelated and interdependent. Increasingly they operate as a single unit, sharing transport networks, labour markets and services. The future of the Hunter as a whole is also closely related to developments in surrounding regions, and particularly, by the growth and expansion of Sydney.

The NSW Government has released a number of draft plans and policies that deliver on its Strategic Regional Land Use Policy to protect high-quality agricultural land and water sources from inappropriate mining and coal seam gas projects. The draft **Upper Hunter Strategic Regional Land Use Plan** represents one component of this Strategic Regional Land Use Policy.¹⁵ This plan recognises that the Upper Hunter is a unique part of NSW which is home to a range of agricultural activities and the centre of a rapidly expanding coal mining industry, with the potential of significant coal seam gas extraction. The Upper Hunter Strategic Regional Land Use Plan aims to map and protect a large part of the region as high-value agricultural land, outlines a range of key challenges facing the Upper Hunter and lists proposed actions to address these challenges.

¹⁴ RDA Hunter 2010 *ibid*

¹⁵ See <http://haveyoursay.nsw.gov.au/regionallanduse> for a copy of the Draft UHSRLUP, and public comments / submissions

The **Lower Hunter Regional Strategy 2006 – 2031** identified employment lands to contribute 16,500 jobs to a region-wide total of 66,000 new jobs by 2031. Urban and regional development advisory firm, *SGS Economics and Planning* has been engaged by the Department of Planning and Infrastructure to support a review of this Strategy. A consultation draft from this review, with details regarding growth scenarios and analysis of options is expected to become available in the second half of 2012.

Targeted effort is needed to strengthen the Hunter's planning systems and to engage government and private sector stakeholders in coordinated regional growth projects that improve the diversity of housing, increase employment opportunities and build productivity growth in the Hunter.

RDA Hunter recommends that, in the longer term, the Upper Hunter Strategic Regional Land Use Plan and the revised Lower Hunter Regional Strategy be brought together to present a single and interconnected Hunter Regional Strategy.

Regional Planning Agencies

In addition to the planning function of local government there are several significant and complementary agencies within the region tasked with contributing to regional planning and providing advice to the state and federal governments.

Local Councils develop long term Community Strategic Plans, which identify the local community's priorities and aspirations for the future. Issues in social, environmental, economic and civic leadership areas are identified. The vast amount of information about asset management, land use priorities, corridor preservation and transport networks in these plans can be usefully co-ordinated and integrated to support the development of a viable strategic planning system for the Hunter.

The Hunter Development Corporation (HDC) was established in 2007 to facilitate growth, investment and renewal in the Hunter and to encourage private sector investment in projects that contribute to economic

growth, employment, residential, commercial and industrial opportunities in the region. A current focus for HDC is to make the most of the opportunity provided by the inclusion of Newcastle in the NSW urban renewal State Environmental Planning Policy (SEPP), including the Newcastle University City Campus and Civic Justice Precinct. The HDC's Employment Lands Study identifies key drivers for unlocking investment opportunities in over 14,000 hectares zoned for industrial and employment related uses across the Hunter.

The Hunter Infrastructure Investment Fund (HIIF) was established by the NSW Government in 2011 to provide advice to the NSW Planning Minister regarding the region's infrastructure, including transport, education, water security and health priorities, to support economic growth and to enhance the liveability of the region. With administrative support from the HDC, the HIIF will develop a 20-year infrastructure plan for the region. The NSW Government allocated \$350 million to the Fund over four years, commencing in 2011.

The NSW Hunter Regional Action Plan is expected to be released in the second half of 2012. This Action Plan will identify the most important actions the NSW Government can take to improve outcomes and the priorities for the region gathered through a series of local consultations to support the achievement of the *NSW 2021* goals. Feedback will also be used to inform the NSW Long Term Transport Master Plan and other regional planning strategies.

RDA Hunter seeks to influence federal and state government policies and programs to support economic development which create new jobs, skills development, business investment and environmental solutions which generate ongoing regional sustainability. RDA Hunter has paid close attention to other related regional planning initiatives and received extensive feedback from federal, state and local government as well as the business and community sectors to help articulate regional priorities, identify and align resources, engage stakeholders and promote solutions. The **Hunter Regional Plan 2012 – 2022** was presented to the Federal and NSW governments in August this year.

A National Reform Agenda for Australia's Major Cities

Agreed planning criteria for cities

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed on 7 December 2009 to a national objective and planning criteria to ensure Australian cities are globally competitive, productive, sustainable, liveable, socially inclusive and able to meet future challenges and growth. This objective is supported by a platform of **nine national criteria** for strategic planning systems to re-shape Australia's Major Cities.

COAG's Nine National Planning Criteria for Australia's Cities

- 1 *be integrated across functions and government agencies*
- 2 *have a hierarchy of long-term public plans*
- 3 *provide for nationally significant economic infrastructure*
- 4 *address nationally significant policy issues*
- 5 *consider and strengthen networks and connections*
- 6 *provide for evidence-based land release*
- 7 *provide for investment and innovation*
- 8 *encourage world-class urban design and architecture*
- 9 *provide implementation arrangements and supporting mechanisms including:*
 - *clear accountabilities, timelines and performance measures,*
 - *intergovernmental coordination including under the EPBC Act,¹⁶*
 - *evaluation and review, and*
 - *consultation and engagement.¹⁷*

These criteria are broad in scope and provide a basis on which to assess the likelihood that planning arrangements will satisfy the future requirements of the population and economy, and attract government and private sector investment. The criterion requiring *integration across functions and government agencies* is identified as the most important of the nine criteria. "Integration is especially important in strategic planning due to the high degree of interdependence in (major) cities of a range of complex systems, including geography, climate, land economics, construction, labour markets, road and transport systems, energy, water and sewer systems. Given that cities are about space, the interaction between land use planning and transport – how we use and get around space – will affect the economic, social and environmental outcomes in cities."¹⁸

Future infrastructure funding decisions made by the Commonwealth will be based on States meeting the national criteria.¹⁹ ...the Australian Government will link future infrastructure funding decisions to meet these criteria.²⁰



Photo: Paul Foley; Lake Macquarie Tourism

¹⁶ Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 [Cwlth]

¹⁷ COAG, Communique 7 December 2009. Frost, M. June 2012, ALGA presentation.

¹⁸ Ch 3. Common themes and findings. COAG Reform Council. Review of capital city strategic planning systems. April 2012

¹⁹ COAG Reform Council Media Release 21 June 2010

Liveable Cities Program

The Australian Government's Liveable Cities Program provides \$20 million to support State, Territory and local governments to meet the challenges of improving the quality of life in capital cities and major regional cities. The Program aims to achieve improved alignment of urban planning and design with the National Urban Policy and COAG principles outlined above. Assessment of city plans against COAG's national criteria will determine funding from the Federal Government for urban developments.

State and Territory governments have submitted plans for their capital cities. The COAG Reform Council has

assessed these plans against the national criteria²¹ and found that "None of the capital city strategic planning systems has been found consistent with criterion four."²² The panel went on to highlight *demographic change*, *housing affordability* and *social inclusion* as particular issues that have not received an adequate response from governments. The Council also found that while the Commonwealth, States and Territories are all committed to making housing more affordable..." none of the indicators ... show any progress towards this objective".²³

Australian government attention will turn next to the remaining major cities, including the Lower Hunter Urban Area.



Photo: Newcastle Herald

²⁰ Our Cities Our Future: A National Urban Policy, p9

²¹ Ch 3. Common themes and findings. COAG Reform Council. Review of capital city strategic planning systems. April 2012

²² Review of capital city strategic planning systems, Overview, p 2.

²³ Review of capital cities strategic planning systems: Report to the Council of Australian Governments, April 2012

Planning for the Lower Hunter Urban Area: The Way Forward

The planning responsibility for urban growth, land use and change is held by the States and Territories, together with local governments. The Australian Government supports the States and Territories in this role through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG).

The five Lower Hunter LGAs have a new and unique opportunity to consult with and engage local constituents, to work with each other and with regional planning agencies to develop a comprehensive long-term vision and integrated strategic plan for the Lower Hunter Urban Area which influences NSW Government decisions, and secures Australian government and private sector investment in the region.

Regional research and consultation

In 2011 RDA Hunter commissioned an independent professional technical and management support team, AECOM, to review current Hunter plans with reference to the COAG criteria for city planning. The purpose of this review was to:

- Analyse the supplied plans for the adequacy of existing planning and governance arrangements to meet the Hunter's economic development challenges.

- Identify priority areas for research, analysis and decision making in order to improve the planning arrangements in the Hunter, in support of the Hunter's economy.

A cross section of representative planning documents for the Hunter region prepared by local and state governments and other significant economic and social regional entities were included in the review. The 16 plans available at the time were identified as either geographic (5 plans), or functional (11 plans). They are listed in Appendix 1. A high level assessment was undertaken of each plan, with reference to the COAG criteria for cities.

"In performing this assessment, it was acknowledged that the Hunter region is extremely diverse. In particular, some local government areas are predominantly rural, and many of the criteria adopted by COAG are simply not relevant for those areas. A one-size-fits-all approach is plainly not sensible for smaller townships within the Hunter" The table on the next page identifies the extent to which the plans address each of the COAG Criteria for cities.²⁴



Photo: Hunter Development Corporation

²⁴ AECOM, 2011 report to RDA Hunter, *Our Cities, Our Future: Assessing the Hunter's integrated planning*.

COAG Criteria for Cities		Geographical Plans	Functional Plans
1	Integration	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓
2	Hierarchy of plans	✓✓	✓
3	Nationally-significant economic infrastructure	✓	✓✓
4	Nationally-significant policy issues	✓✓✓	✓
5	Networks and connections	✓✓	✓✓
6	Urban land release	✓✓✓✓	✓
7	Investment and innovation	✓	✓
8	Urban design and architecture	✓	✗
9	Implementation arrangements and supporting mechanisms	✓✓✓✓	✓

✓✓✓✓ Criteria addressed in all of the plans
 ✓ Criteria addressed in very few of the plans
 ✗ Criteria addressed in none of the plans

Summary in AECOM 2011 report: Assessing the Hunter's integrated planning

Table 2. Assessment of the number of Hunter plans that address COAG Criteria for Cities



Photo: Newcastle Herald

“COAG Cities Criteria have not been adequately addressed to date, most notably in relation to planning for infrastructure of national economic significance, and neither has connectivity between major population and employment centres both within and outside the region (COAG criterion 3 and criterion 5). One of the consequences of these omissions is that the investment and policy priorities for the Hunter as a region are not clear in the reviewed documentation (COAG criterion 7).

The key finding of this work is to confirm that strategic land use and infrastructure planning across the Hunter is fragmented, with local government bearing the majority of the planning burden, and planning consequently focussed on local rather than regionally integrated projects.

Viewed cumulatively, it is apparent that significant infrastructure issues which are routinely identified by stakeholders as significant for the Hunter's economic development are overlooked within this fragmented approach to planning.”²⁵

This RDA Hunter research together with on-going stakeholder consultation over a two year period has confirmed widespread support for the Infrastructure Australia position that transport networks, utilities and communication systems, in concert with infrastructure, need to support national aspirations for transforming our cities into productive, sustainable and liveable places.²⁶ The list of participant organisations in these forums is at Appendix 2. This widespread agreement, amongst state, regional and local government planning agencies working in the Hunter, together with an emerging understanding of the importance of the nine national planning criteria for cities overcomes a significant obstacle to sound comprehensive regional planning.

The framework has now been established within which state and regional planning agencies can work together to recognise the significant variations between communities and population centres within the Hunter and to develop an integrated regional plan.

RDA Hunter recommends collaborative regional planning which addresses government policy and recognises the opportunity to consider the regional relationships between: population, land use and housing supply; employment and economically and socially significant infrastructure; and services for the long-term well-being and benefit of the region and its people.

Noting the Hunter's role in hosting nationally significant infrastructure, RDA Hunter recommends that future regional-scale planning documents contain significantly greater detail about future infrastructure and its relationship to land use to allow public and private sector coordination of investment over time.

RDA Hunter also recommends that future regional planning efforts have consideration to the planning hierarchy established in the COAG criteria, and provide appropriate levels of detail for near, medium and long-term plans and projects.²⁷

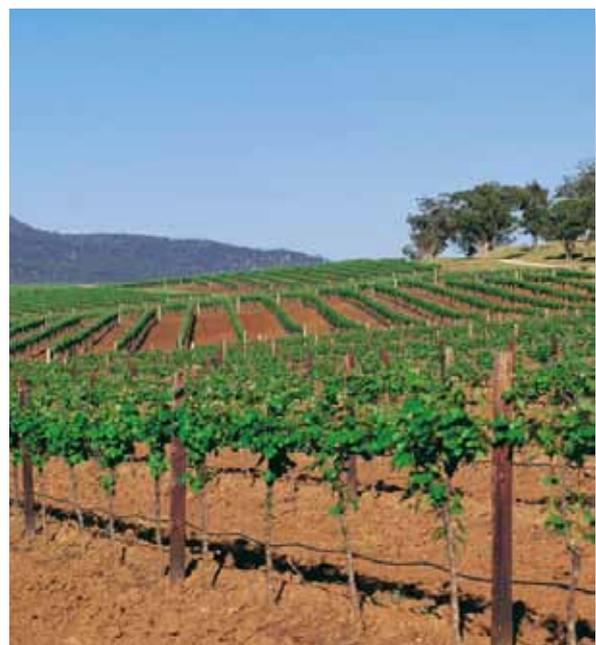


Photo: Wildlight Photo Agency; Destination NSW

²⁵ AECOM 2011, *ibid*

²⁶ Infrastructure Australia, 2012. Report to COAG. Progress and action. p40

²⁷ AECOM *ibid*

Bringing it all together

In May 2012, The Hon. Anthony Albanese, Federal Minister for Transport and Infrastructure announced a \$500,000 grant to the Hunter Region as part of the Government's Liveable Cities Program. This grant will fund the preparation of a 'Strategic Infrastructure Plan' to guide the region towards fulfilling its economic potential over coming decades and ensuring that appropriate infrastructure and other key drivers are in place. The funding will allow for assessments of how port, rail and regional aviation will work together as an efficient infrastructure network and help the region better assess and plan for future transport needs, and make best use of the National Broadband Network.²⁸

This project has the support of councils across the Hunter region, as well as the HDC, the HIIF and the NSW Department of Planning and Infrastructure. The project will build on and bring together regional infrastructure planning and address urban planning needs in the Hunter. It is an opportunity for regional infrastructure planning to be guided by new national policy, to reflect

the best in urban design, planning and renewal and to guide the growth of the Lower Hunter as a more productive and liveable urban area.

Work will take place alongside complementary work being done by RDA Hunter and Infrastructure NSW, with a grant from the Australian government's Regional Infrastructure Fund, to develop a 'Hunter Economic Infrastructure Plan'. This work will consider nation building projects that will build 'productive economic capacity in the Hunter'.

These two significant projects will bring together the best of planning to date, use robust and compatible data and provide an integrated regional 'blueprint' for future growth that ensures the future viability and sustainability of the region. A combined Project Control Group is meeting under an independent Chair and includes representatives of each agency to ensure a shared understanding of current and future challenges.



Photo: Hunter Development Corporation

²⁸ Gillard Government backs plan for Hunter growth.

http://www.sharongrierson.com/SharonGrierson/Resources/120511%20Plan_For_Hunter_Growth%20Albanese_SG_GC_JH_JF.pdf

Conclusion

Australian governments are demonstrating a renewed interest in cities and the role of urban policy including recognition that regional cities are critical to the debate about priorities for future investment in infrastructure. A set of planning criteria have been agreed nationally to ensure Australia's Major Cities are globally competitive, productive, sustainable, liveable, socially inclusive and well-placed to meet future challenges and growth. For government policy, planning and funding purposes the regional major city of Newcastle, the second most populated area in New South Wales, includes the LGAs of Newcastle, Lake Macquarie, Cessnock, Maitland and Port Stephens. In this paper it is referred to as the Lower Hunter Urban Area.

To successfully access the government funding and private sector investment opportunities, needed to ensure the future of the Lower Hunter Urban Area as a productivity growth generator, regional planning must be informed by emerging State and Federal government policies and priorities.

Long-term future lifestyles, employment options and the well-being of people living in the Hunter will be significantly shaped by government policies and funding decisions that are rolled out in the next 12 to 18 months.

There is a new urgency for state and regional planning agencies in the Hunter to work together to develop an agreed set of regional strategic and prioritised outcomes.

Recently announced Australian government funding for planning in the Hunter, supported by local Councils, regional planning agencies, the NSW Department of Planning and Infrastructure as well as INSW creates a new opportunity to draw together the many regional plans currently in existence with other plans in development.

The framework can now be developed to unify regional plans into an integrated strategic planning system that addresses government policies and capitalises on the opportunity to strengthen the regional relationships between population, land use and housing supply; employment and economically and socially significant infrastructure; and services for the long-term well-being and benefit of the region and its people.

This work will overcome the enormous cost and disadvantage to the region of too many overlapping but unrelated regional plans and assist in positioning the Hunter nationally and internationally as one of Australia's most sustainable, productive and significant economies.



Photo: Newcastle Herald

Appendix 1 – Plans in AECOM research and analysis review

Organisation	Document	Year
Plans with Functional Focus		
Australian Rail Track Corporation	Hunter Valley corridor capacity strategy	2009-18
Hunter–Central Rivers CMA	The Hunter–Central Rivers Catchment Action Plan	2006-15
Hunter Water Corporation	Greenprint for sustainable urban water management	2011
Newcastle Port Corporation	Port of Newcastle Strategic Development Plan	2011
TAFE NSW	Hunter Institute Strategic Plan	2011
Geographically specific plans		
Cessnock City Council	Cessnock 2020	2020
Dept. of Planning, NSW	Lower Hunter Regional Strategy	2006-31
Gloucester Shire Council	Gloucester Shire Council Social Plan	2009-14
Great Lakes Council	Community strategic plan	2010-30
Lake Macquarie City Council	Community Plan	2008-18
Maitland City Council	Social Plan	2009-19
Muswellbrook Shire	Community Strategic Plan	2011-21
Newcastle City Council	Newcastle 2030	2030
Port Stephens Council	Integrated Strategic Plans	2010-22
Singleton Council	Singleton Community Social Plan	2004-10
Upper Hunter Shire Council	Social/Community Plan	2006-09

The AECOM review of Hunter plans was also based on information from:

- contributions made by stakeholders in two workshops convened by RDA Hunter
- previous reports on the Hunter's social and economic development including:
 - Upper Hunter Infrastructure Project Summary Report
 - NRMA document
 - Upper Hunter Economic Diversification Project
 - Freight Hub Hunter (Cox / SDD/ Hyder) 2008
 - Hunter Valley Coal Chain Coordinator presentation to NSW Government – Korean Business Forum
 - DPC - Justice and Human Services Regional Managers Cluster Plan
 - DPC - Economic Development and Environment Regional Managers Cluster Plan

Appendix 2 – Stakeholder Forum Participants

Australian Rail Track Corporation	Cessnock City Council	Department of Planning
Department of Premier and Cabinet	Department of Regional Australia	Dungog Council
Gloucester Shire Council	Great Lakes Shire Council	Hunter Business Chamber
Hunter–Central Rivers CMA	Hunter Councils Inc.	Hunter Development Corporation
Hunter Water Corporation	Hunter Valley Coal Chain Coordinator	Lake Macquarie City Council
Maitland City Council	Major Cities Unit	Muswellbrook Shire Council
Newcastle Airport	Newcastle City Council	Newcastle Port Corporation
NRMA	Port Stephens Council	Property Council of Australia
Roads and Maritime Services	Singleton Council	TAFE NSW Hunter Institute
Urban Development Institute of Aust	Telstra	University of Newcastle
Upper Hunter Shire Council		

References

- AECOM, 2011. *Our Cities, Our Future: Assessing the Hunter's integrated planning*. Sydney
- Australian Government 2011, *Our Cities, Our Future. A national urban policy for a productive, sustainable and liveable future*. Dept of Infrastructure and Transport. Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra
- Australian Government 2011, *State of Australian Cities 2011*. Major Cities Unit, Department of Infrastructure and Transport. Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra
- Baxter, J, Gray M and Hayes A, 2011, *Families in regional, rural and remote Australia*. Australian Institute of Family Studies, Canberra.
- Budget 2012-13, *Portfolio Budget Statements: Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport*. Australian Government. <http://www.budget.gov.au/2012-13/content/pbs/html/index.htm>
- COAG Reform Council 2012, *Review of capital cities strategic planning systems: Report to the Council of Australian Governments, 23 December 2011* (public release 2 April 2012). Sydney.
- Council of Australian Governments (COAG), 2009. *Communique 7 Dec 2009*. Sydney
- S4 Capital City Strategic Planning Systems, Attachment B
URL: http://www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/2009-12-07/index.cfm#cap_city_strat
- Cox, P, Graus, P and Meyer, B, 2011. *Home: Evolution of the Australian dream*. Jane Curry Publishing, Edgecliff
- Dept of Planning NSW, *2006 Lower Hunter Regional Strategy* State of NSW Sydney Oct 2006 re-endorsed Feb 2010.
- Frost, M, 2012. *Summary of the review of capital city strategic planning systems*. COAG Reform Council presentation. Australian Local Government Assoc. National General Assembly. Canberra
- Hunter Valley Research Foundation, 2012, *Hunter region at a Glance*, Maryville.
- Infrastructure Australia 2011, *Communicating the Imperative for Action: A Report to COAG*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, June 2011.
- Infrastructure Australia 2012, *Australian Infrastructure: Progress and Action 06/12. A Report to the Council of Australian Governments*, June 2012. Canberra.
- Productivity Commission 2011, *Performance Benchmarking of Australian Business Regulation: Planning, Zoning and Development Assessment*, Research Report, Canberra.
- Regional Development Australia Hunter 2010. *Connecting the Hunter, a regional approach to infrastructure*. Issues Paper No.1 Hunter Region, NSW, Australia.
- Regional Development Australia Hunter 2010 *Regional Plan 2010 – 2020*. Hunter Region, NSW Australia
- Treasury 2010, *Intergenerational Report 2010*. Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra

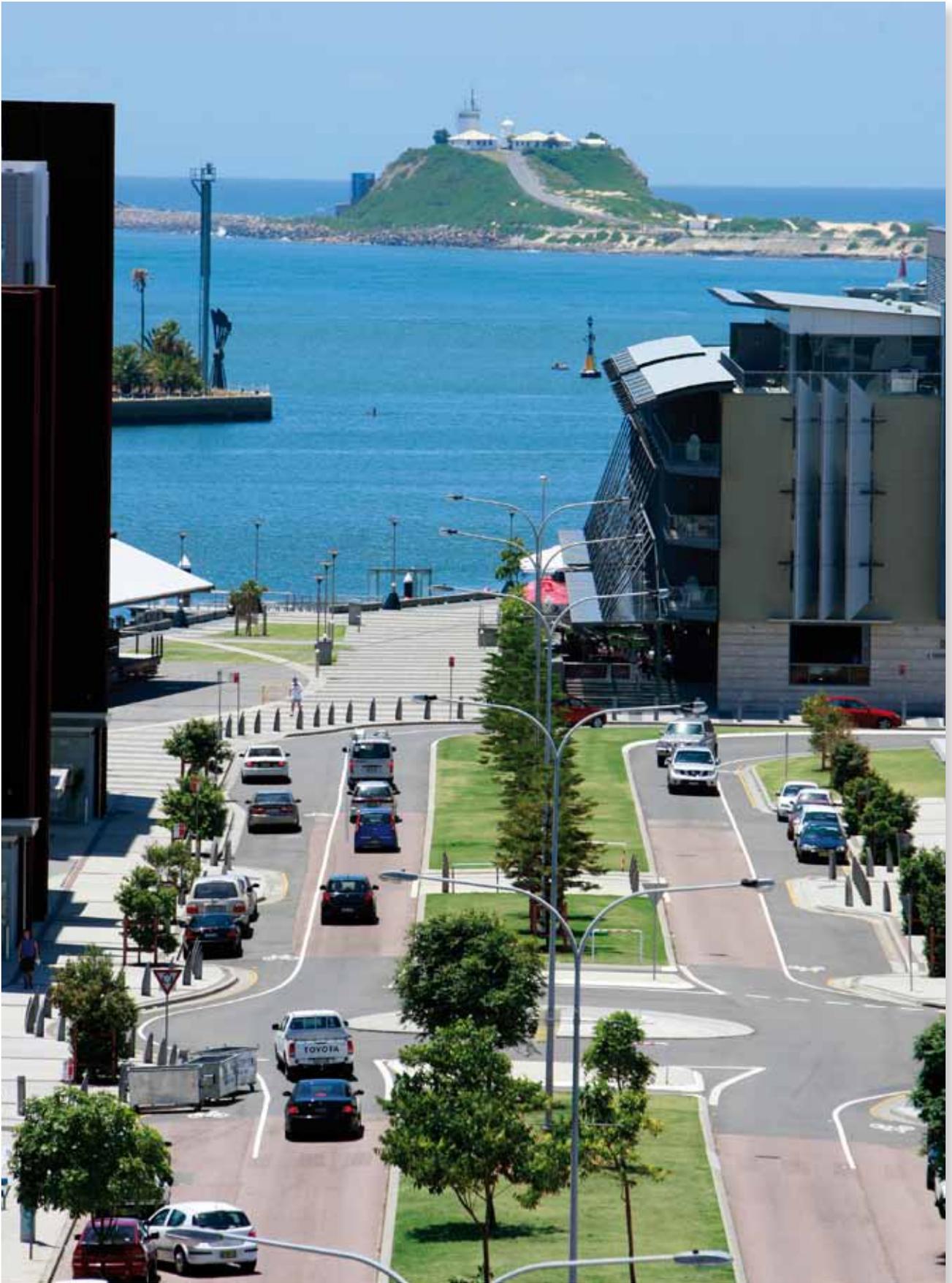


Photo: Hunter Development Corporation



RDA Hunter

Level 3, 251 Wharf Road, Newcastle, 2300

Phone: +61 2 4908 7300 Email: admin@rdahunter.org.au

www.rdahunter.org.au