

# NATIONAL BROADBAND NETWORK PRIORITY ROLLOUT

## *An RDA Hunter Infrastructure Project*

Since January 2010, RDA Hunter has been engaged in a project to put the Hunter forward as a priority region for the rollout of the National Broadband Network (NBN). Rather than taking a merit-based approach to attract the rollout of the NBN to the region, RDA focused on presenting the Hunter as co-operative and capable.

### **Co-operative**

---

In active consultation with 13 Local Government areas, 11 from the Hunter and two from the Central Coast, RDA developed a submission commending the Hunter Central Coast as co-operative and capable and ready to work with NBN Co on a smooth rollout across the regions. The submission was presented to NBN Co in February 2011.

### **Capable**

---

Business, education and government agencies have been brought together by RDA Hunter to ensure that the Hunter is the most prepared in terms of the rollout but also adopting and using High Speed Broadband. Numerous sessions and consultations have been run to assist business, households and local governments understand how high speed broadband can be used to improve business and connect households. Initiatives such as Broadband for Business, a group formed to harness the potential for manufacturing with high speed broadband such as 24 hour manufacturing, and a Digital Strategy Group to develop a plan for business in the Hunter are underway.

### **The Rollout Announcement**

---

In March 2012, NBN Co announced Stage One of the large-scale rollout of the National Broadband Network across Australia. Suburbs across the Hunter and Central Coast featured widely in the list of 1,500 communities that will be reached in Stage One. Many of these suburbs will have work begin within one year of the announcement. RDA Hunter has worked with NBN Co since the announcement to further inform the Hunter community on the rollout plan as well as provide guidance on how the NBN can be used in business.

As a world-class regional centre of Australia, the Hunter services national and international markets. It is important to look beyond regional boundaries when envisioning the Region's future. RDA Hunter has taken a range of information into account in developing its plans and has identified the following six priorities.

#### **Infrastructure to Improve Productivity and Efficiency**

The Hunter is too far from Sydney city to benefit strongly from growth in that region, for example, through business-to-business trading, but Sydney is close enough to capture retail and other expenditure by Hunter residents. Strategic investment in major new infrastructure is required to provide levels of regional connectivity and reduced journey times to position the Hunter as integral to the Sydney city-region. This will help to increase business interaction across the region and to attract residents and visitors to the Hunter. Other infrastructure, including water and telecommunications are essential to support population and business growth.

#### **Interaction with other strategic areas**

Transport infrastructure supports all other elements of the plan. The movement of goods into and out of the Hunter is critical, as is business and visitor travel and commuting. Faster and cheaper goods movements will make the Hunter's manufacturing industries more competitive, while business travel can bring benefits such as knowledge 'spillovers' that come from closer interactions with other businesses. The ability to commute to Sydney would transform the potential to attract people and skills, as well as making the Hunter more accessible as a visitor destination. Investments in water and telecommunications infrastructure are also critical in expanding the population and the business base.



## Grow the Hunter's Economy

The Hunter economy is overly dependent upon a few major sectors, all of which are owned and controlled externally and some of which are potentially vulnerable to global competition or policies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. There is some diversity but it is limited and the level of success in attracting new investment outside the resource industries is poor. The rate at which new businesses are started is low and too many businesses are in sectors, such as local services, which have limited potential for exporting their outputs to other parts of Australia. A more diverse economic base, including more employment in higher 'added value' industries and more future-facing sectors, including renewable energy, are essential elements for economic growth.

### Interaction with other strategic areas

There are strong links with other strategic areas: in addition to marketing the region, attracting and growing high 'added value' activities is heavily dependent on skills and talent; strategic land use planning is required to provide attractive locations; and better infrastructure and enhanced connectivity are both essential to attracting and retaining businesses and investment. Improved urban areas will help to attract new residents and visitors and to retain expenditure within the region.

## Comprehensive and Cohesive Long-term Planning

In the five years to 2009, the Region's average population growth rate was higher than that of Sydney or NSW. The Hunter's population seems likely to expand at a faster than average rate in the near to medium term, driven in part by expectations of continuing strong demand for coal, the expansion of capacity at the Newcastle Port, and the planned investments in new mining projects in the Hunter Valley. Congestion and accommodation stress in Sydney may also contribute to growth in relocation to the Lower Hunter and Newcastle. While the Hunter welcomes growth and is planning on the basis of a population of one million people, adequately catering for the scale and diversity of population increase will be critical to its future.

Strategic land-use planning is also needed to provide greater certainty to existing and emerging industries about future arrangements for managing and developing the Hunter's natural assets. Robust planning, informed by data and community engagement, offers the opportunity to minimise tensions between competing interests, and foster the growth of those industries central to diversification and growth.

### Interaction with other strategic areas

Land use is fundamental to every area of socio-economic activity, and therefore strategic land use planning links closely with housing, land for industry and commerce, and investment in infrastructure. In particular, the community and transport infrastructure to support population growth will intersect positively (or negatively) with planned enhancements to the productive infrastructure of the region.

Similarly, protecting the Hunter's built and natural heritage is dependent on an orderly approach to growing the Hunter's population, which recognises and manages the risks to this heritage that arise through inappropriate growth, and leverages these assets to create liveable places for new communities and resources for the visitor economy.

## Investment in Education, Skills and Workforce Development

One of the scarcest resources in the developed world is talent. In some sectors, business investment locates where it can access critical skills, but in every sector maintenance of high incomes in the face of global competition requires technological leadership, continuing innovation and the ability to add value in increasingly complex and competitive markets. The Hunter lags in terms of its skills base.

### Interaction with other strategic areas

Working with businesses and the community to adequately meet skills shortages will parallel actions to assist business development generally and to encourage and assist people starting new business ventures. The ability to attract new residents is closely linked to actions to deliver attractive residential locations and services, to enhance the built and natural environments, to enhance connectivity, especially to the Sydney city region, and to position the Hunter as a quality place to live and work.

## Build Knowledge Skills and Innovation Capabilities

Creativity encourages innovation and innovation plays a vital role in the development of new business concepts, process and products. Creativity and innovation play important roles in all types of business and industry at all levels, with theory strongly linked to practicality.

For the Hunter Region to continue to grow and prosper into the future, innovation and the rapid diffusion of knowledge, skills and best practice must occur and develop.

## Enriching the Natural and Built Environment to Create Liveable Places

Liveable places are an essential part of a community's success, and characteristically involve thoughtful enhancement of the natural and built features of existing communities. Liveable places also need strong core business and retail centres to support sustainable economic activity, to attract residents and visitors and to retain their expenditure within the Hunter.

The Hunter already benefits from its reputation for pleasant, beachside living, as well as the agri-tourism, eco-tourism and tree-change opportunities in the Upper Hunter. Recognising, protecting and enriching the built and natural environment will underpin the attractiveness of the Hunter as a destination for tourists, existing and potential residents and investors, in turn supporting plans to attract skills, investment and visitors.

### Interaction with other strategic areas

Liveable places intersect with all strategic areas. It is most closely connected to supporting growth through new investment and emerging industries, through ensuring that commercial environments within the Hunter's population centres are supportive of emerging service sectors, including tourism and hospitality.

Similarly, these actions critically support our efforts to build the Hunter brand and reputation in Australia and overseas. Pleasant natural and built environments are critical in attracting new residents and skills, investors and tourists.