



Connecting the regions

A submission on Australia's national infrastructure priorities

to

Infrastructure Australia

by

the Central Coast of NSW



Central Coast NSW Area
Consultative Committee Inc



Business Central Coast



Wyong Shire Council



Gosford City Council



Central Coast Manufacturers'
Association Inc



Central Coast Tourism Inc



Urban Development Institute of
Australia – Central Coast



NSW Business Chamber –
Central Coast

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INTRODUCTION

This submission on the national infrastructure priorities of the Central Coast of NSW region represents the collective views of the following organisations and agencies:

- Central Coast of NSW Area Consultative Committee Inc
- Business Central Coast (Central Coast Economic Development Board)
- Gosford City Council
- Wyong Shire Council
- Central Coast Manufacturers' Association Inc
- Central Coast Tourism Inc
- Urban Development Institute of Australia – Central Coast Branch
- NSW Business Chamber – Central Coast

Throughout this submission these organisations will be referred to as “the parties”.

This submission seeks to make as case for four nationally significant projects which meet the criteria to be included in the national infrastructure priority list. It also makes the case for basic infrastructure investment and two projects to enable the region to develop so that it can meet its obligations in accommodating a large part of the population growth of Sydney over the next 25 years.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Central Coast is the connection, linking NSW's two largest population centres, Sydney and Newcastle. Its key role in nation building is adding value to this bridge between Sydney and Newcastle and Northern Australia.

The Central Coast has a resident population of 306,000, 1.5% of the nation's population. It is the third largest population centre in NSW and the ninth largest nationally.

Of great significance is the fact that some 38,000 people leave the region daily to work, largely in the Sydney metropolitan area. This places a significant strain on existing road and rail infrastructure.

Investment in infrastructure underpins economic activity and at the same time delivers social and environmental objectives. The unique positioning of the Central Coast region provides a great opportunity to leverage the economic activities of the Sydney and Newcastle regions through the creation of employment and service industries connected to these larger population centres. The region also has a stock of affordable housing land to provide homes for those servicing the larger centres.

Transport and communications are the key issues addressed in this submission.

This submission proposes that the Australian Government lists three urgent transport priorities affecting the region:

- A very high speed rail link between Sydney and Newcastle with stops in Wyong and Gosford;
- Increased capacity of the F3 motorway and establishment of the connection with the M7 at one end and improving the links to the Pacific and New England Highways at the other;
- Extending the commitment to a dedicated rail freight line all the way from Sydney to Newcastle to more efficiently move freight North and to greatly improve the efficiency of the commuter rail network.

This submission also advocates that:

- the Central Coast region be made a priority for the Australian Government's national broadband network to attract new private knowledge based business and government agencies; increase workers' skill levels; create a vibrant learning community through educational programs offered by interlinked University, TAFE and community colleges; and make knowledge and innovation ubiquitous.

The State Plan: A New Direction for NSW released in November 2006 sets out priorities and targets for the State. Included in those targets is a population increase for the Central Coast over the next 25 years of 100,000 people. This projected growth is dependent on a number of factors, one of the most significant being the growth in the number of migrants coming to Australia. Sydney and Melbourne are the principal final destinations of most overseas migrants.

This growth will have a significant impact on the Central Coast either as a result of migrants choosing to live here or, more likely, existing Sydney residents seeking to escape the greater urban congestion. The Central Coast's growth and its ability to accommodate new residents and provide them with amenities comparable to Sydney is therefore a significant national issue.

- Investment is therefore required to ensure that adequate urban infrastructure services are established and available to coincide with population and employment growth.

Investment in key civic and public infrastructure should also be a national priority with two major projects in the region:

- The region needs to increase the education options available locally through a full service university based in the region with major campuses in the town centres of Gosford and Wyong. The university should encompass teaching and research with a focus on the future.
- The region needs a major cultural performance centre, exhibition and educational facilities. The performance centre would be a major iconic building in the region and is considered an essential piece of infrastructure for the future.

ABOUT THE CENTRAL COAST

The Central Coast is the connection, linking NSW's two largest population centres, Sydney and Newcastle. Its key role in nation building is adding value to this bridge between Sydney and Newcastle and Northern Australia.

The map below illustrates how the region sits in relation to these two major economic centres, which represent 24%¹ of the nation's population.



The Central Coast itself has a resident population of 306,000², 1.5% of the nation's population. It is the third largest population centre in NSW and the ninth nationally and has discrete natural borders, such as the Hawkesbury River, the Wattagan Mountains and Lake Macquarie.

¹ ABS Census 2006. *Basic Community Profiles*. ABS 2007

² NATIONAL ECONOMICS/ALGA. *State of the Regions 2007-08, Appendix 1, Regional Indicators*. 2008. Page A.22. ALGA

The region has become a focus for small business or branch offices of larger ones. Data indicate there are approximately 22,000 small businesses in the region³, each employing less than 20 people and a large majority employing fewer than five.

Of great significance also is the fact that some 38,000 people leave the region daily to work, largely in the Sydney metropolitan area⁴. This places a significant strain on existing road and rail infrastructure.

The Central Coast region offers a very attractive lifestyle for families with younger children with uncluttered, clean beaches, calm coastal lakes suitable for boating and, apart from the coastal belt, reasonably priced detached housing. The region is also attractive to retirees with its moderate climate and accessibility to medical services both in the region and Sydney.

With the region's population coupled with the implications of climate change, fuel prices and the cost of travel, the Central Coast region has the opportunity to become more economically independent with greater employment self containment. By moving in this direction, especially in the area of localising employment, the economic, social and environmental future will be secured.

More importantly, the region can play a significant role in nation building by adding value to the essential bridge between Sydney and Newcastle and Northern Australia.

³ ABS Census 2006. *Basic Community Profiles*. ABS 2007

⁴ BUCHAN. *Smarter Central Coast Project draft report*. 2008. Unpublished.

THE CENTRAL COAST'S ROLE IN NATION BUILDING

Investment in infrastructure underpins economic activity and at the same time delivers social and environmental objectives. Investment in the Central Coast region is particularly important to increase the region's capacity for employment self containment.

The consensus amongst the parties on infrastructure priorities affecting the Central Coast region focus on transport and communications. The national infrastructure projects proposed in this document are already articulated in various strategies, reports and studies developed by state and federal governments and other credible parties over many years, including AusLink, NSW State Infrastructure Strategy, the 2007 Sydney-Brisbane Corridor Strategy, the North-South Rail Corridor Study and the Sydney-Hunter Transport Connection prepared by the Warren Centre for Advanced Engineering.

Governments at all levels and other interest groups have expended enormous resources in recent years analysing the transport needs of the nation and of NSW. This submission does not advocate further conceptual research on transport, rather it proposes that the Australian Government lists three urgent priorities affecting the region:

1. A very high speed rail link between Sydney and Newcastle with stops in Wyong and Gosford;
2. Increased capacity of the F3 motorway and establishment of the connection with the M7 at one end and improving the links to the Pacific and New England Highways at the other;
3. A dedicated rail freight line all the way between Sydney and Newcastle to more efficiently move freight North and to greatly improve the efficiency of the commuter rail network.

This submission also advocates that:

4. The Central Coast region be made a priority for the Australian Government's national broadband network.

TRANSPORT - PEOPLE

As mentioned previously, significant resources have been devoted to developing proposals to address the transport needs of the Sydney-Newcastle corridor.

The argument, options and recommendations are well summarised in a paper published in January 2006 by the Warren Centre for Advanced Engineering at the University of Sydney⁵. This paper specifically addresses the issues of the very high speed train and the F3 motorway. Its recommendations state:

- *the Federal and State Governments re-appraise the transport linkage of the Sydney regions with those of the Central Coast and Hunter on a broader strategic basis taking into account the full ambit of future economic viability and financial costs; and*
- *the Federal and State Governments examine the transport options for:*
 - *a western road link between the M7 and the F3, bypassing Gosford*
 - *an Orbital/F3 connection between Pearce's Corner and North Ryde to better accommodate people and Sydney freight movement and provide traffic relief to both the Pacific Highway and Pennant Hills Road, and*
 - *a VHST rail connection between Parramatta and Newcastle as the northern portion of the VHST network for Greater Sydney.*

The Warren Centre paper and recommendations are supported by the parties and are a fair representation of their views.

Increasing the capacity of the F3 and optimising its use is a strategy which will only be effective in the short to medium term. With the planned population growth of the Central Coast region, a completely new road connection between Sydney and Newcastle, probably to the West of the existing F3 will also be necessary.

⁵ THE WARREN CENTRE FOR ADVANCED ENGINEERING. Sydney-Hunter Transport Connection. 2006. Available at <http://www.10000friends.org.au/reports/default.aspx>

The issue of high speed trains is also the subject of a discussion paper published by Child and Judd in July 2007⁶ and presented at a *10,000 Friends of Greater Sydney* transport forum on the Central Coast. It canvasses the provision of the service between Sydney and Newcastle. The paper presents a summary of the potential benefits of High Speed Train and Very High Speed Train technology. The report recommends a high speed train regional corridor between Wollongong and Newcastle initially, which may be followed by eventual extensions along the east coast to Brisbane and Melbourne and beyond to form a national rail network.

A high speed train link between Sydney and Newcastle would add impetus to the decentralisation from Sydney, easing transport congestion and associated costs while boosting economic activity at major centres along the route.

Specifically on the local aspects, the paper indicates that travel time on the existing rail system between the Central Coast and Sydney is about 1 hour 20 minutes. The report favours a Maglev VHST which could reduce travel times to 30-45 minutes.

The summary and conclusions state:

This paper has considered the feasibility and potential benefits of a new and high tech ground transport overlay for the Sydney/Hunter/Illawarra region, based on VHST technology. The key conclusions to emerge from this consideration are as follows:

- **Technology:** *the technology exists to create a high speed Sydney Regional high speed train overlay system that would, through substantially reduced trip times, substantially enhance the commercial viability of the Sydney/Hunter/Illawarra region, and the lifestyles of those living within that region. Both high speed “wheel on track” and maglev technology should be considered, with the ultimate choice of technology to be determined by an appropriate assessment and selection process.*
- **International Experience:** *VHST is an internationally proven technology and its use to facilitate urban transport outcomes is the focus of increasing international consideration and increasing international application.*
- **Sydney Regional High Speed Train:** *a conceptual model has been presented for a high speed Sydney Regional train system, with progressive development through the following stages:*
 - *Sydney Metro East-West (Sydney-Parramatta-Penrith)*
 - *Newcastle - Central Coast – Sydney Metro*
 - *Sydney Metro – Campbelltown – Wollongong*
 - *Southern Sydney Metro – Canberra*
- **Cost:** *a preliminary cost estimate suggests that the cost of such a system would be in the range A\$13 to A\$15 billion, in current cost terms.*
- **Airport Considerations:** *the proposed high speed Sydney train system would have the potential to enhance the performance of existing airports and overcome the need for a future second airport in the “Sydney basin”.*
- **Reduced Private Vehicle Use:** *the proposed network would significantly contribute to a shift from private vehicle to public transport use within the Sydney/Hunter/Illawarra region.*
- **Implications for an East Coast VHST Network:** *a high speed Sydney Regional train system would represent an important first stage in the development of any ultimate east coast VHST network and may be a necessary stimulus for any such national network.*
- **The Way Forward:** *further consideration of this proposal will require a degree of political will and political vision by both State and the Commonwealth Governments. The indications provided by this preliminary review are that such further consideration is warranted and may well lead to the delivery of a transport infrastructure project of major local, regional and national significance.*

⁶ CHILD N & JUDD B. *High Speed Trains – Fast Track to a Sustainable Transport Future for Sydney*. 2007. Available at <http://www.10000friends.org.au/reports/default.aspx>

RECOMMENDATION

The parties therefore urge the inclusion of a very high speed rail link between Sydney and Newcastle in Australia's national infrastructure priority list.

They further urge commitment to increasing the capacity of the F3 Freeway, relieving the congestion at either end (Wahroonga and lower Hunter) and establishing the link between the F3 and M7, by-passing the Sydney Hills district.

TRANSPORT – RAIL FREIGHT

The overall situation concerning freight transport is best described in the *2007 Sydney-Brisbane Corridor Strategy*⁷ developed by the then Australian Government Department of Transport and Regional Services and state agencies from NSW and Queensland. The report states:

Significant sections of the Sydney–Brisbane transport corridor generally have difficulty in meeting current needs and a number of challenges are expected to further strain the ability of the corridor to continue to perform. The major challenge is passenger and freight growth. Population centres along the corridor (especially NSW Central Coast, Hunter Valley, NSW North Coast and South East Queensland) are some of the fastest growing areas of Australia. This will generate high levels of growth in local and regional passenger and freight movements, in addition to growth in freight traffic between Sydney and Brisbane. Interstate freight between Sydney and Brisbane is expected to almost triple over the next 20 years. This compares to an expected doubling of freight on most other AusLink corridors. Both road and rail will play important roles in meeting this future freight demand and although rail is expected to increase its market share, the majority of freight is expected to continue to be carried by road. As a result, road congestion and capacity constraints, which are already evident on the southern and northern ends of the corridor (including the F3 Freeway and Lower Hunter links, the Gold Coast, and Pacific Motorway), are expected to increase.

The report goes on to state:

The rail link will continue to be heavily capacity constrained, particularly between Sydney and Newcastle where the track is shared with commuter and long-distance passenger services, with priority given to passenger trains and access to the network by freight trains restricted during peak periods.

Notwithstanding the discussion regarding the Sydney-Brisbane corridor in the *North-South Rail Corridor Study*⁸ and its implications for the Sydney-Newcastle section, the *2007 Sydney-Brisbane Corridor Strategy* highlights the urgent need to address the rail congestion issue affecting the people of the Central Coast region. Improvements in rail freight movements through the Sydney metropolitan area, Hornsby and Gosford through a dedicated freight line would reduce any immediate need for an inland freight line between Melbourne and Brisbane.

The parties welcome the Australian Government's commitment⁹ to spend \$840 million on improving rail freight services between North Strathfield and Gosford. However, they urge that this commitment not stop at Gosford but be extended all the way to Newcastle to improve journey times for commuters who are increasingly travelling to work from destinations North of Gosford.

RECOMMENDATION

On this basis the parties urge an urgent allocation of funds to enable the commencement of construction of a dedicated rail freight line between North Strathfield and Gosford and to a further commitment to the extension of the rail freight line to Newcastle and the Hunter.

⁷ AUSLINK. *2007 Sydney-Brisbane Corridor Strategy*. 2007. DOTARS

⁸ ERNST & YOUNG. *North-South Rail Corridor Study*. 2006. DOTARS.

⁹ ALBANESE A. Speech to Australasian Rail Association. Canberra. 27/08/2008.
http://www.minister.infrastructure.gov.au/aa/speeches/2008/AS20_2008.htm

COMMUNICATION

Central Coast Households (CCH) Internet usage by can be summarised as:

- 74%¹⁰ with computers have Internet access compared to Australian households at 64%¹¹.
- However, only 63%¹² have broadband Internet access compared to Australian households a 69%¹¹.
- Thus 37% of CCH access the Internet by dial-up or Integrated Services Digital Network (ISDN).

Conversely Central Coast Businesses Internet usage can be summarised:

- 88%¹⁰ with computers have Internet access compared to Australian businesses at 86.5%¹³.
- However, only 78%¹² have broadband Internet access compared to 90.5%¹³ of Australian businesses.
- Thus 22% of Central Coast Businesses access the Internet by dial-up or ISDN.

A large number of Central Coast residents experience problems regarding Information Communications and Technology (ICT). For example, currently 63%¹² of Central Coast residents have Broadband at home. This is partially a result of 69% of all Central Coast telephone exchanges having ADSL2+. These inadequacies prevent many households and small business from accessing the World Wide Web at even minimal speeds. In many areas of the Central Coast residents are denied the economic, business, educational, cultural and social benefits provided by ADSL2+; a service considered the norm elsewhere in Sydney or Newcastle. The existence of this digital divide is largely due to the inadequacy of the existing copper cable infrastructure. Originally designed for 20th century analogue services, copper cabling is completely inadequate to handle the data capacity that 21st century digital technologies demand.

Unfortunately telecommunications options are limited for many Central Coast Households. A frustrated local resident summed up the views appropriately in the media, "Broadband comes to the end of our street and runs parallel on both sides...(but) we don't seem to be able to get broadband where we are. We are in a black spot where wireless telecommunications don't work and the only option we have is satellite broadband, which is prohibitively expensive"¹⁴. As this speaker identifies there are alternatives but each has their own limitations. For example, 'low cost' dial-up Internet services are plagued by:

- Low data speeds (less than 56Kbit/s)
- Dropouts
- Connection to the Internet via the old Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) is transient unlike broadband which is permanently online
- Local call charge rates apply each time a connection to the Internet is initiated

Satellite broadband also has shortcomings, such as:

- Inherent speed and bandwidth limitations
- Variances in data transmission quality due to its susceptibility to atmospheric changes
- It is too expensive even considering Government subsidies to those who qualify

Then there is ISDN, a technology offered by Telstra to subscribers unable to utilise ADSL (because of distance limitations or the need for voice combined with the Internet). However, ISDN also has limitations:

- A maximum download speed of 128kbit/s
- Can require inline cable repeaters to boost the signal
- Induces noise into other copper cable pairs which can adversely affect any ADSL subscribers connected in the same cable

ISDN is a service offered in many so called semi rural areas on the Central Coast including Matcham, Holgate, Ourimbah and Fountaindale. Finally, 3G wireless mobile broadband technology is also available in various areas of the Central Coast from Telstra/Hutchison and Vodafone. However, it also has important limitations:

¹⁰ Central Coast Research Foundation, 2008, *Central Coast Economic Indicators*, Hamilton, NSW.

¹¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2007, *Household Use of Information Technology, Australia, 2006-7*, no. 8146.0, ABS, Canberra.

¹² Central Coast Research Foundation, 2008, *Central Coast at a Glance*, Hamilton, NSW.

¹³ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008, *Summary of IT Use and Innovation in Australian Business, 2006-7*, no. 8166.0, ABS, Canberra.

¹⁴ Wilson, S. 2007. *Locals' need for speed – Labor's broadband rollout would get people connected; [Central Coast Edition]*, The Daily Telegraph. Surry Hills, NSW. Aug 31, pg.18.

- A maximum theoretical download speed of 1.8Mbit/s (in reality it can drop to 64Kbit/s depending on the number of users in a 3G cell)
- Has topographical limitations regarding geographic coverage
- Suffers from signal reception black spots and dropouts
- It's expensive compared to ADSL (3G can be enhanced with High Speed Packet Access (HSPA) technology but this is not currently available on the Central Coast)

Ultimately the only sustainable long term answer to ameliorate the digital divide between the fast broadband service "haves and have nots", is for the Central Coast region to gain access to high speed broadband services. This is borne out in a recent study conducted by the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) that indicated 70%¹⁵ of consumer households consider Broadband a critical service for the future.

The economic and social implications of a National Broadband Network to local communities are substantial. Improved broadband technology will enable the vast majority of the region's population access to information and facilities in key sectors including health, education, social welfare, utilities, finance, ICT, government and other community based services. An integral part of the federal government's NBN strategy is the potential to increase regional employment opportunities in industries such as:¹⁶

- Warehousing and logistics
- Food processing
- Manufacturing
- Construction and associated products
- Health and community services
- Tourism
- ICT services

The business community understands the benefits of a broadband roll-out in our region. This is highlighted in a Cisco survey (referenced in the NSW parliament) regarding barriers facing Australia's ICT industry. Cisco's report indicated "barriers most commonly cited by businesses include insufficient infrastructure, particularly slow and unreliable Internet access, the high cost of broadband, and skills shortages in the industry"¹⁷. Combined with a high speed NBN, the Central Coast has a number of local attributes that regional businesses could exploit. These commercial attributes include:¹⁶

- A highly skilled and motivated workforce
- Centralised and cost-effective access to markets
- Expansive future industrial and commercial property options (main locations at Mount Penang Parklands, North Wyong Industrial Estate, Somersby Industrial Park and Tuggerah Business Park)
- Affordable prices of commercial rents
- Geographical capacity to accommodate new FTN broadband infrastructure

Residents, business and governments acknowledge that regional NSW needs an NBN capable of at least 12Mbit/s and there is acknowledgement that this network needs to be available to 98% of Australian businesses and homes. The Central Coast is the 9th largest region in Australia. The timely roll-out of an NBN would facilitate Central Coast enterprises with further opportunity for developing technological competitive advantages that take the region past the more traditional pursuits of mining, agriculture and basic manufacturing.

The proposed NBN is all about making Australia's business enterprises more competitive nationally and internationally. A speedy and timely roll-out will enable development of this region's most precious resource, its people. To ensure a sustainable economic and social future for the region, it is critical that the NBN strategy be an integral part of our region's four key goals: to attract new private knowledge based business and government agencies; increase workers' skill levels; create a vibrant learning community through educational programs offered by interlinked University, TAFE and community colleges; make knowledge and innovation ubiquitous.

¹⁵ Australian Communications and Media Authority, 2008. *Telecommunications Today, Report 4: Customer Satisfaction*, ACMA, Canberra.

¹⁶ Department of State and Regional Development, 2008. *Central Coast Mixing Business and Pleasure*, viewed 4 October 2008, <http://www.business.nsw.gov.au/region/profiles/Central+Coast.htm>

¹⁷ Parliament of New South Wales, 2002. *Regional Information Technology and Communications Strategy: Urgent Motion*, viewed 4 October 2008, <http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/parlment/hansart.nsf/V3Key/LA20020606025>

Combined with the NBN, these endeavours will lead to major benefits for the Central Coast:

1. **Commuting** – Reduce the number of workers commuting daily to work in Sydney or elsewhere.
Benefits:
 - **Environment** – less CO² vehicle emissions due to fewer vehicles on the roads.
 - **Fuel** – Less consumption by private and commercial vehicles.
 - **Efficiency** – Reduced travel to work increases employee productivity (up to 30%) and reduces stress, absenteeism and associated costs.
 - **Telecommuting** – Provides business efficiencies gained from employees working from home. Companies such as IBM have successfully utilised telecommuting globally and on the Central Coast for many years.

2. **ICT Equity** – Provide all regional communities and individuals with telecommunications equity.
Benefits:
 - **ADSL2+** – Provide up to 24Mbit/s download speeds.
 - **Black Spots** – Currently only 69% of all Central Coast telephone exchanges have ADSL2+. Areas serviced by the Kulnura, Patonga, Wyee, Yarramalong, Mount White, Peats Ridge, Mangrove Mountain, Calga & Spencer telephone exchanges do not have ADSL2+. Those subscribers in identified broadband black spots including Bucketty, Copacabana, Gorokan, Tumbi Umbi and Wyoming also without ADSL2+, will have access to e-business and other high speed broadband ICT services¹⁴.
 - **Rural** – Nearly 31% of telephone exchanges (albeit with relatively small numbers of subscribers) service farm communities producing mainly poultry, vegetable and citrus fruit products in the mountains areas of the region. Farmers will reap the benefits of current and future technology related agricultural services available through government agencies such as the CSIRO and private agricultural services alike.
 - **Future** – There are multitudes of future technologies being developed that require ultra fast broadband including: IPV6, miniaturisation, nanotechnologies, data compression, identity management frameworks (IdM), Web 2.0, semantic web and cloud computing amongst others¹⁸.

3. **Entertainment** – Regional country music is an example of a local industry that is likely to become a global player with such developments.
Benefits:
 - **Music** – Australia’s ‘Nashville’ for country music could be established in our region.
 - **E-Marketing** – Opportunity for country music to more effectively reach global audiences via social networking platforms (YouTube).
 - **IPTV** – Promotion and advertising delivery using Internet Protocol Television (IPTV) technology.
 - **Distribution** – E-commerce enabled direct sales.

4. **ICT cluster** – Ongoing opportunity to promote the Mt Penang Business Park ICT cluster.
Benefits:
 - **Innovation** – Increased ICT entrepreneurial business activity through the technological fit of fast broadband and ICT/e-business goods and services.
 - **Partnership** – The ability of fast broadband to sustain the current NSW Government’s financial support for the decentralised Mt Penang ICT cluster and other co-located industries at Kariong¹⁷.
 - **Creativity** – Access to fast broadband can encourage creative ICT SME’s and small businesses to move to the Mt Penang Business Park.

¹⁸ Australian Communications and Media Authority, 2008. *Top six Trends in Communications and Media Technologies, Applications and Services – Possible Implications*, ACMA, Canberra.

5. **Call Centres** - The ability to grow the call centre industry (inbound-outbound) and create jobs.

Benefits:

- **Employment** – NBN offers an opportunity to innovate through remote agents call centres – individuals working from home over the Internet as well as traditional and more high-tech virtual call centres.
- **Capacity** – The latest fibre/broadband technologies will be required to carry vast quantities of data accessed, processed, distributed and stored between call centres, their clients and clients' customers.

6. **Education** – Provision of advanced real time online interactive educational programs.

Benefits:

- **Knowledge** – The reward for the creation of smarter regional communities.
- **Innovation** – Educational institutions will be able to deliver in real time online Internet based academic and community based training/educational courses/programs and other educational content to all manner of industries via IPTV or other emerging broadband based technologies.
- **Opportunity** – Those individuals or groups in communities that cannot attend face to face learning initiatives will no longer be disadvantaged.

7. **Government** – Seamless integration with the NSW governments 'People First' ICT strategy.

Benefits:

- **Government** – The NSW government is currently halfway through implementation of a state wide telecommunications and ICT infrastructure services 'People First' project.
- **Services** – The NSW government's 'People First' ICT strategy is designed to provide business, government departments, employees and residents, seamless delivery of and access to government information and services.
- **Efficiency** – The opportunity for regional business and local governments ICT systems and infrastructures to integrate & interwork with the 'People First' ICT systems and services.
- **Employment** – Opportunities to promote, increase and improve services delivery and employment opportunities for locals through synergies derived from a NBN providing business opportunities to leverage ITC applications and systems solutions that fit the 'People First' strategy.

It will be critical for Australian prosperity in the 21st Century for Governments at the State and National level to more fully appreciate the potential of the Central Coast. The region is well placed to harness the benefits of Sydney and Newcastle if the appropriate infrastructure is in place, but it is also time that the region was understood for its own inherent and abundant advantages.

RECOMMENDATION

The region is constrained but with the right initiatives it has the potential to be a huge source of productive social and economic capital. The timely provisioning of ICT services over a new national high speed broadband network is a critical step in fully utilising this untapped potential. The Government is urged to make the Central Coast region an initial priority for the national broadband network.

The NSW government's 'People First' ICT systems and services strategy aims to improve services and systems, both within government and the wider community. This strategy needs assessment by local and federal government to determine ICT synergies between 'People First' and a national broadband network that will encourage, support and develop Central Coast small and SME entrepreneurial business activity.

THE NEED FOR THE CENTRAL COAST TO DEVELOP IN ITS OWN RIGHT

*The State Plan: A New Direction for NSW*¹⁹ released in November 2006 sets out priorities and targets for the State. Included in those targets is a population increase for the Central Coast over the next 25 years of 100,000 people. This projected growth is dependent on a number of factors, one of the most significant is the growth in migrants coming to Australia. Sydney and Melbourne are the principal final destinations of most overseas migrants.

A report²⁰ prepared for the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources (DIPNR) in June 2004, stated that “Sydney’s population growth rate is most sensitive to shifts in the share of overseas immigration the city receives.” The same report states Sydney’s population projections range from 4.91 million to 5.15 million by 2026. This growth will have a significant impact on the Central Coast either as a result of immigrants choosing to live here or existing Sydney residents seeking to escape the greater urban congestion. The Central Coast’s growth and its ability to accommodate new residents and provide them with amenities comparable to Sydney is therefore a significant national issue.

To accommodate the region’s current and projected population and employment profile discussed elsewhere in this submission, the region must become more competitive through greater employment self containment, larger numbers of knowledge employers and employees and higher education standards.

The DIPNR report²¹ states “(s)uburban centres can only remain competitive if investment in recreational, cultural, physical and environmental infrastructure is provided. ... (T)here is a high correlation between the stock of these assets and the quality of the labour force and the available employment. Outer suburban nodes deserve a greater share of Sydney’s cultural and creative infrastructure investment portfolio.”

The Central Coast region will play an important role in the growth of the financial and business capital of Australia and the centre of the nation’s largest economy, Sydney. As it stands today, the Gosford-Wyong area is ill-equipped to meet the challenge.

Investment in key civic and public infrastructure on the Central Coast should therefore be a national priority.

The evolutionary pattern of the Central Coast has been the single largest contributor to the lack of infrastructure and investment in the region. The region has had only a short history of large settlement, booming from the 1960’s with the release of cheaper land, the electrification of the rail line to Sydney and the opening of the tollway, which today is the F3 that links Sydney and Newcastle through the Central Coast. This resulted in rapid residential development beyond the capacity of local authorities to keep up with demand for services. The region today still has stocks of affordable housing land to accommodate a large part of the population growth.

The Central Coast region has never had a strong economic base to provide the foundation for prosperity. Unlike the Hunter (Newcastle) and the Illawarra (Wollongong), the Central Coast has not had significant exploitable natural resources, such as coal, massive manufacturing plants, like steelworks or natural waterways or rivers, which formed the basis of trading ports and shipyards. While some of these facilities no longer exist in Newcastle or Wollongong, they have left a legacy of wealth and infrastructure on which to build their futures.

The Gosford-Wyong region evolved as a dormitory area for Sydney workers seeking cheaper land and housing and a better lifestyle than might be enjoyed in the larger centre. It also became a transport corridor to Newcastle and the North of the state. This transport corridor has become a vital link between the State’s two largest population centres.

The Central Coast has a need for the Federal Government to take a significant interest in the region. On a range of indicators, the region is lagging behind the rest of NSW and other similar parts of Australia.

The Central Coast’s positioning against the following criteria identifies it as a region in greater need for investment in infrastructure and services:

- Lower average household income;

¹⁹ NSW GOVERNMENT. *State Plan – A New Direction for NSW*. 2006 Available at <http://www.nsw.gov.au/stateplan/>

²⁰ SGS Economics and Planning Pty. Ltd. *Sydney’s Economic Geography: Trends and Drivers: Summary*. 2004. P4. Report to Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources

²¹ *Ibid.* P11.

- Lower skills levels and education;
- Insufficient economic diversity;
- Higher average age of the population; and
- Indigenous disadvantage.

The region has a number of significant natural assets, ranging from its proximity to the ports of Sydney and Newcastle with good road connections to these centres, a well-established food production industry and availability of productive agricultural land, the natural environment with both marine and land-based biodiversity, a strong sports participation culture and a growing creative group based on music performance and recording. It is these attributes which should form the basis for the future development of the region.

With significant investment in the transport and communications connections, the Central Coast has significant potential to develop in its own right, relieving the pressure on an ever-expanding Sydney and delivering products and services to the major population centres to its North and South.

To make the region attractive to those needing to find an alternative to Sydney, significant investment is required in public and community infrastructure.

The Central Coast region needs a number of “difference making” projects which will not only make a real difference in terms of economic development, social inclusion and environmental sustainability but will send a message to investors in the private sector that the region is actually doing something and is ready to go forward. These projects would:

- Have regional significance;
- Provide amenities and facilities for those living in the region and those wanting to visit on business or leisure;
- Provide leadership regarding work creation activities relating to the environment, sport and culture;
- Make the region more attractive to live here and for business investment; and
- Enhance the image of the region.

The decisions government makes will form the backbone of the revitalisation of the region and will enable the Central Coast to become a full-service region, playing the dual role of providing homes for those choosing to work in the nation’s largest financial and business centre, Sydney, while at the same time offering local employment opportunities for those wishing to make their livelihoods in the region.

Having regard to the significant continuing urban growth that will occur on the Central Coast during the next 25 years, investment is required to ensure that adequate urban infrastructure services are established and available to coincide with population and employment growth.

The parties also propose the following additional projects be included in the nation’s infrastructure priorities.

INCREASING TERTIARY EDUCATION OPTIONS

Education levels amongst the resident population on average have been below the state and national average, particularly the percentage of those pursuing tertiary studies. This has long been considered an impediment to the development of the region.

The Central Coast region is reasonably well served for pre-tertiary education options with a strong public sector and a range of private schools. Tertiary education, however, is delivered predominantly through “branch offices” of the Newcastle-Hunter system with the only local tertiary options the Ourimbah Campus of the University of Newcastle and TAFE, part of the Hunter Institute. Decision making regarding these two institutions is largely focused on Newcastle. The Ourimbah Campus, which combines University and TAFE programs, is predominantly vocationally oriented. The main focus of the University’s direction in the region is the health sciences, limiting the opportunities for those wanting to pursue other options locally. Students wishing to pursue studies relating to engineering, business, architecture, humanities and a range of other programs are forced to pursue or complete their studies outside of the region, mostly in Sydney and to a lesser degree, Newcastle.

RECOMMENDATION

The region needs to increase the education options available locally through a full service university based in the region with major campuses in the town centres of Gosford and Wyong. The university should encompass teaching and research with a focus on the future.

DEVELOPMENT OF CULTURAL FACILITIES

There is a significant lack of cultural and meeting facilities in the Central Coast region, hampering economic and population growth. Research consistently shows three of the key inhibitors of attracting managers and executives to re-locate to the region are, lack of cultural life and facilities, limited private educational opportunities and lack of night life and entertainment.

Encouraging creative industries and providing a major performance centre have been identified as a key development issue.

RECOMMENDATION

The region needs a major performance centre, exhibition and educational facilities, plus surrounding buildings incorporating production and commercial spaces and residential. The performance centre would be a major iconic building in the region and is considered an essential piece of infrastructure for the future.

CONCLUSION

The parties to this submission support the Australian Government's strategy to invest in important infrastructure as part of building the national economy. The strategy takes on added significance in the wake of the crisis affecting global financial markets.

The Central Coast region occupies a unique place, providing the link between the State's two largest population and economic centres. The region has enormous potential for development and to supply services to these major centres in addition to the dormitory role it provides at present. With available industrial and housing land, a large workforce (many of whom are at present travelling long distances to work, mostly in Sydney) and a lifestyle second to none combined with the threats from global warming, high fuel costs and economic uncertainty, the region is uniquely placed to assist the Australian Government achieve its goals.

Listing the following three transport priorities would make a significant contribution to the nation's prosperity:

- A very high speed rail link between Sydney and Newcastle with stops in Wyong and Gosford;
- Increased capacity of the F3 motorway and establishment of the connection with the M7 at one end and improving the links to the Pacific and New England Highways at the other;
- Extending the commitment to a dedicated rail freight line all the way from Sydney to Newcastle and the Hunter region to more efficiently move freight North and to greatly improve the efficiency of the commuter rail network.

In addition, the national would also benefit from:

- The Central Coast region being made a priority for the Australian Government's national broadband network to attract new private knowledge based business and government agencies; increase workers' skill levels; create a vibrant learning community through educational programs offered by interlinked University, TAFE and community colleges; and make knowledge and innovation ubiquitous.

The projected population increase for the Central Coast over the next 25 years, impacted by Australia's immigration policy, also justifies consideration of investment by the Federal Government in key civic and public infrastructure, specifically, adequate urban infrastructure services, a full service university to increase education options and a major cultural performance centre, exhibition and educational facilities.

With significant investment in transport and communications infrastructure combined with support for public and community infrastructure to service the needs of a rapidly growing population, the Central Coast can play its role as a significant contributor to lifting national productivity, strengthening Australia's international competitiveness, developing our cities and regions, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and improving the quality of life of Australians.

14 October 2008

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