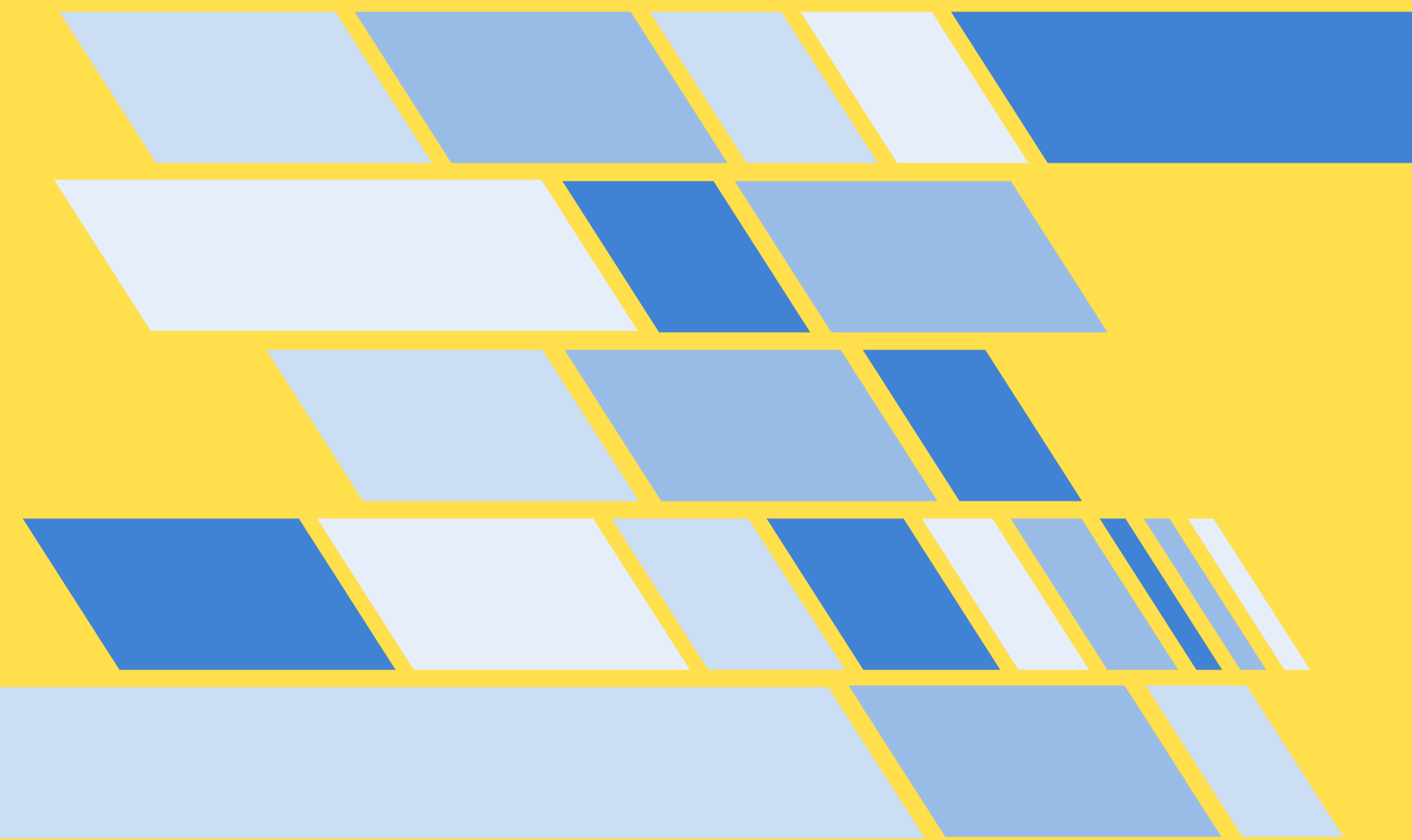


# Aspire. Act. Achieve.

## Hunter Joint Organisation Strategic Plan 2018-21

---

April 2018





# Contents

---

**Our organisation** // 4

**Our aspirations** // 5

**Our roles** // 6

**Our challenges and opportunities** // 7

**Our planning process** // 8

**Our action areas** // 9

# Our organisation

## One new organisation

The Hunter Joint Organisation (JO) was established in mid 2015 as part of the Office of Local Government's broader piloting of a joint organisation model in five regions of NSW. It is built on the strong foundations of Hunter Councils Inc, which was established over 60 years ago.

The Hunter JO consists of 10 councils located around the Manning and Hunter River Valleys:

- » Cessnock City Council
- » Dungog Shire Council
- » Mid Coast Council
- » Lake Macquarie City Council
- » Maitland City Council
- » Muswellbrook Shire Council
- » Newcastle City Council
- » Port Stephens Council
- » Singleton Council
- » Upper Hunter Shire Council.

Together, these councils are home to over 730,000 people – growing to over 860,000 by 2036.

The Hunter JO is a separate entity to Strategic Services Australia, which provides shared services to councils in the region and across the State.

## Many new opportunities

On 15 December 2017, the *Local Government Amendment (Regional Joint Organisations) Act 2017* commenced, enshrining joint organisations in the Act. At the time of preparing this plan, consultation was being undertaken on draft regulations to support the establishment of joint organisations beyond the five pilot regions.

Joint organisations are expected to be proclaimed across NSW in mid 2018.

The legal enablement of joint organisations gives them a new voice and authority. It also embeds a new model of NSW Government agencies working closely with joint organisations in regional areas.

This model has already been established in the Hunter. The CEO of the Hunter JO now sits on the Regional Leadership Executive, which is the principal governance body within the NSW Government's Regional Governance Framework. Similarly, the Department of Premier and Cabinet's Regional Director now attends JO meetings.

These features of the premier state and local governance structures in the region helps create stronger and more direct relationships between NSW Government agencies and the JO member councils.

# Our aspirations

Contemporary councils deliver an incredibly wide range of services, infrastructure and facilities to their ever changing communities. They are strong, independent organisations which are governed responsibly, managed appropriately and operated efficiently.

There are, however, important things which even the strongest and most strategic council can't deliver alone.

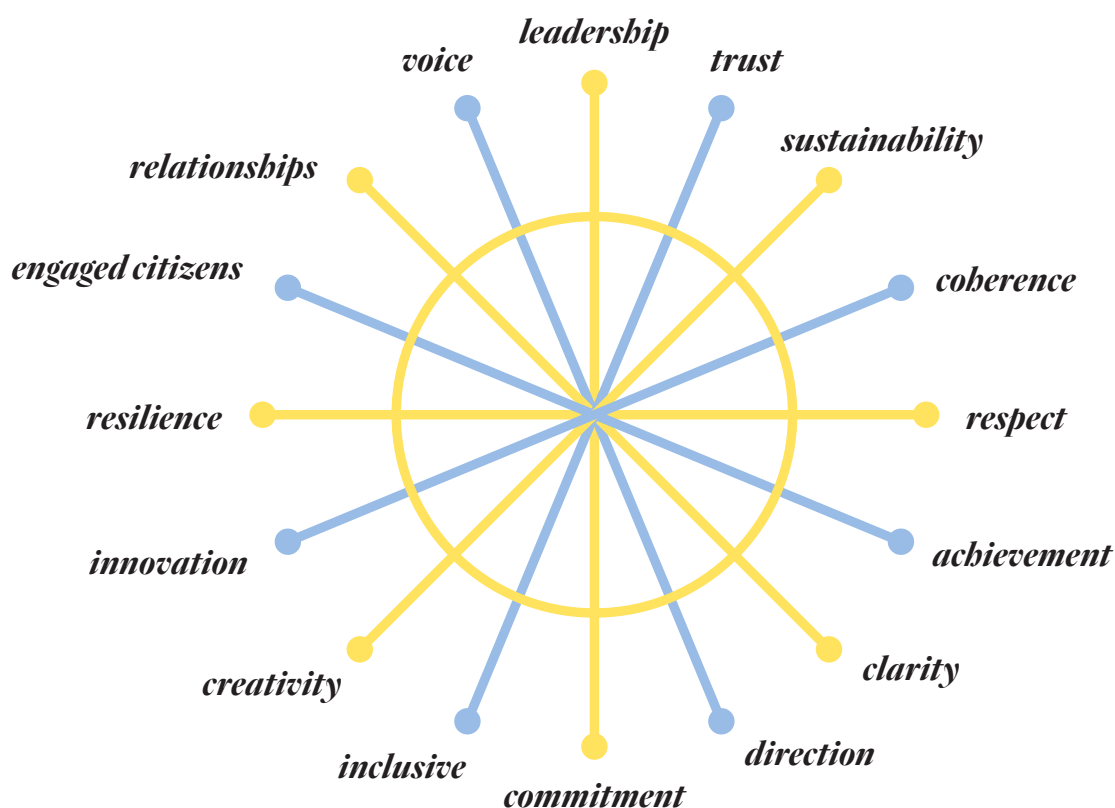
This is where the Hunter JO comes in.

JO members will work closely together – and with government, neighbouring councils and many other partners – to deliver outcomes we can't achieve separately. We will bring together networks of information, relationships and ideas to create the deepest understanding of our region and the greatest foundation for combined action.

The Joint Organisation will operate under the following guiding principles:

- » Recognise diverse local community needs;
- » Consider social justice principles of equity, access, participation and rights;
- » Consider long term and cumulative effects of actions on future generations;
- » Consider principles of ecologically sustainable development.

The Joint Organisation will seek to promote the following values in our community:



# Our roles

---

The *Local Government Act* sets out three principal functions for joint organisations:

**1 Strategic planning and priority setting:** to establish strategic regional priorities for the joint organisation area and to establish strategies and plans for delivering those strategic regional priorities.

**2 Regional leadership and advocacy:** to provide regional leadership for the joint organisation area and to be an advocate for strategic regional priorities.

**3 Intergovernmental collaboration:** to identify and take up opportunities for inter-governmental co-operation on matters relating to the joint organisation area.

The Act also enables joint organisations to deliver services, undertake capacity building and have any other legal function.

The Hunter JO has delved deeper into the potential of these legislated functions and will focus on the following six roles.

---

## Research and analysis

Developing and communicating a strong evidence base for planning and advocacy

---

## Knowledge and learning

Sharing best practice and capacity building approaches to operations and service delivery for the benefit of all member councils

---

## Foresight and direction

Planning together for agreed regional priorities and outcomes in close collaboration with partners

---

## Joint action

Taking action on areas where we can make a real difference for the region's communities

---

## Voice and impact

Providing a strong and united voice which advocates for the needs and interests of the region

---

These roles align with and complement the three principal functions described in the Act.

# Our challenges and opportunities

The following chart maps three clusters of opportunities and challenges which have emerged as regional priorities through the strategic planning process to date.

## Enduring assets

long terms strengths which should be recognised, celebrated and leveraged from.

## Big shifts

events which may threaten the region if not well managed, but also provide opportunities.

## Chronic challenges

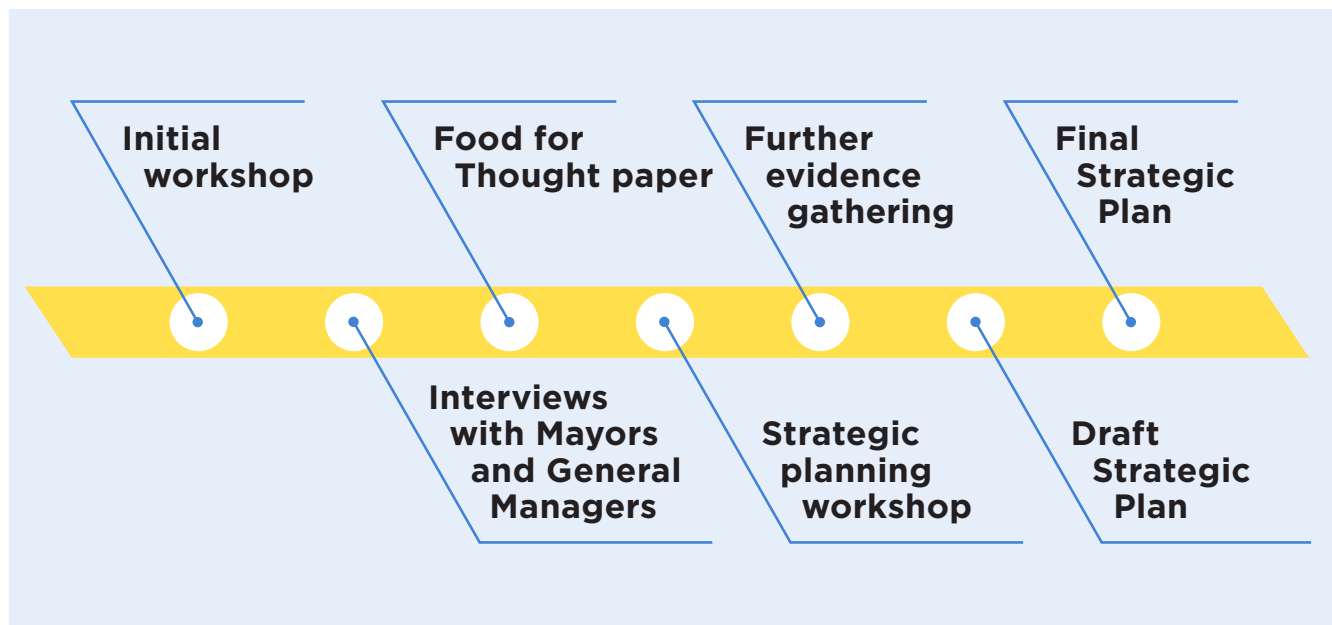
long term issues which are complex and will take concerted focus to resolve.



# Our planning process

This is the first strategic plan prepared by the Hunter Joint Organisation. It is the start of a new chapter for the organisation and sets the direction and priorities for the JO over the next three years.

The process for preparing the plan is set out below.





# Our action areas

---

This strategy is structured around six interconnected priority areas:

- 1 | Our communities stay inclusive, proud and safe and celebrate diversity**
- 2 | Our enviable environment is protected for future generations and our resources are used efficiently**
- 3 | Our economy is multifaceted, resilient and is Australia's leading regional economy**
- 4 | Our people and products move across the region easily on integrated and accessible transport networks**
- 5 | Our educational facilities support and encourage our young people and foster lifelong learning and encourage our young people**
- 6 | Our people have access to the full range of health care fostering active and healthy communities**

These areas are discussed on the following pages, along with the ways the Hunter JO will work with partners to make a difference across the region.

# 1

## Our communities stay inclusive, proud and safe and celebrate diversity

### Why this is important for our region

Reaching from the Coolah Tops National Park in the north west to Morisset in the south east, and from the Wollemi National Park in the south west to Harrington in the north east, the Hunter is a large and disparate region.

For over 60,000 years, our region has been home to many generations of the Awabakal, Biripi, Darkinjung, Geawegal, Wonarua and Worimi peoples, who still have strong connections with the land and waters across the region.

#### Hunter communities now encompass:

— coastal hamlets

— historic villages

— growing suburbs

— country towns

— regional centres

— and one emerging global city.



These places all have unique histories, cultures and identities, which are reflected in the region's events, galleries, museums, buildings and landscapes. Understanding and celebrating our Indigenous and European heritage is key to developing our strong identity.

One thing our communities all share is a strong sense of connection. Hunter people always pull together when the times are tough. Whether after the earthquake of 1989, during the closure of the BHP plant in 1999, in the floods of 2015 and through recurring periods of drought, we always weather the shocks together.

Our communities also share a love of the lifestyle the region provides. This lifestyle can mean different things for different people, but generally includes:

- » having close **relationships** with family, friends and neighbours
- » spending time in the **natural environment**, whether it be the beach or the bush
- » feeling **safe** in local cities, towns and villages and from natural disasters
- » being able to **afford** housing and other essentials of day to day life.
- » An appreciation of and desire to protect the area's **built form**.

It is this liveability that our communities value and want to protect. Housing affordability has begun to emerge as a challenge in the region, particularly for younger people and people on aged and disability pensions. The 2017 [Rental Affordability Snapshot](#) produced by Anglicare showed few affordable rental properties in the Hunter, while the Hunter Research Foundation's first home buyer [affordability index](#) shows a dramatic worsening of affordability from the early 2000s.

The Joint Organisation will promote the concept of affordable living to ensure housing location, style and cost plus access to jobs, services, leisure opportunities and ongoing energy consumption are planned and delivered across our region.

This issue is discussed in [Hunter Regional Plan 2036](#), but may need a greater regional focus if housing affordability continues to decline.

## How we will work with our partners to make a difference

- 1** Develop an **engaging online presence** which tells the stories of the diverse places and people which make up the Hunter region.
- 2** Work with the Department of Planning and Environment, Hunter Valley Research Foundation and other partners to closely **monitor housing affordability** in the region and **identify key areas of concern**.
- 3** Develop and implement a targeted program to **advocate for measures to improve housing affordability** in the region.
- 4** Continue to work together to deliver the programs to **increase community resilience and preparedness for natural disasters** through the Hunter and Central Coast Regional Environmental Management Strategy.

### Examples of engaging regional websites

The following links provide some examples of engaging and informative websites promoting regional areas.

Websites like these can help to promote the area to visitors as well as celebrate the uniqueness of the region.

[www.australiasnorthernterritory.com.au](http://www.australiasnorthernterritory.com.au)

[www.bathurstregion.com.au](http://www.bathurstregion.com.au)

[www.canberraregion.com.au](http://www.canberraregion.com.au)

[www.yassvalley.com.au](http://www.yassvalley.com.au)

[www.visitnewcastle.com.au](http://www.visitnewcastle.com.au)

## Our enviable environment is protected for future generations and our resources are used efficiently

### Why this is important for our region

The Hunter's diverse natural environment is a key contributor to the region's identity. It includes the culturally and ecologically significant Port Stephens–Great Lakes Marine Park and the World Heritage listed Greater Blue Mountains.

The region also includes 1.1 million hectares of [open space](#), 63% of which is National Parks and Nature Reserves, including Wallaroo National Park, Barrington Tops National Park, Myall Lakes National Park, Wallingat National Park, Wollemi National and Yengo National Park and RAMSAR wetlands.

Residents across the Hunter also have enviable access to spectacular beaches and coastline along the Mid Coast, Port Stephens, Newcastle City and Lake Macquarie City Councils.

The Hunter's natural environment is home to many significant environmental assets. Good planning, conservation and infrastructure will be important for protecting the environment, helping to avoid or manage risks and building resilience to natural hazards and climate change.

The Hunter region faces a number of environmental issues including [coastal erosion](#), flooding and bushfires. Climate change is likely to increase the frequency and intensity of these hazards. Climate change could also cause sea level rise, impacting the Hunter's coastal communities.

The region is also dealing with the environmental impacts of mining, including [mine subsidence](#), the clearing of native vegetation and the associated loss of biological diversity, soil and water pollution and coal mining emissions.

Other issues facing the Hunter region include land contamination, in particular the presence of per and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) on and in the vicinity of RAAF Base Williamtown, as well as sustaining water quality and security.

In particular the Manning and Hunter rivers face water quality and storage issues resulting from runoff from land and waterside activities, loss of native and riparian vegetation and altered stream flow.

The Hunter Joint Organisation is already committed to delivering the Hunter and Central Coast Regional Environmental Management Strategy (HCCREMS) which delivers programs to address some of environmental issues facing the region, including protecting biodiversity, climate change adaptation and mitigation, waste avoidance and resource recovery as well as environmental compliance and environmental education.

The environment focus will also include efficiency in use of resources, including water and energy and encouraging research, and renewable energy sources.

The Hunter Region has significant resources requiring rehabilitation of land and environments including mine sites and former industry sites. Learnings need to be shared.

The HCCREMS is delivering [a number of initiatives](#) including:

- » The Regional Contaminated Land Program which aims to improve access for Council staff to contaminated land technical expertise, provide regional policy and procedure templates for land use planning and information management, and increase the awareness and technical capacity of Council staff to identify and manage contaminated sites.
- » The Regional Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery (WARR) Strategy which seeks to address all aspects of waste management – from avoiding the creation of waste in the first place right through to final disposal of materials. Since the commencement of the WARR Strategy, the region has increased diversion of domestic waste from landfill from [38% to 44%](#), despite seeing a significant population increase over the same period.
- » The Regional Biodiversity Program which focuses on identifying and mapping regional biodiversity values and threatening processes, identifying conservation priorities and on ground restoration and rehabilitation works across the region. The program also provides technical input to local and regional planning and management strategies

The HCCREMS is also committed to building the resilience of local communities to natural disasters through land use planning, community development and support, infrastructure management, community education, communications, environmental management and local emergency management.

## How we will work with our partners to make a difference

**1** Continue to work together to deliver the **Hunter and Central Coast Regional Environmental Management Strategy**.

**2** Establish a **Costal Resilience Sub Committee**, made up of representatives from relevant Hunter JO councils, to increase collaboration in planning for climate change.

**3** Work together to find an **effective recycling solution** for the region.

Key role for the Joint Organisation is work with business, community and government to facilitate the development of key infrastructure to facilitate business performance and attract new enterprise to the region.



### 3

## Our economy is multifaceted, resilient and is Australia's leading smart regional economy

### Why this is important for our region

The Hunter is NSW's premier regional economy, accounting for 28% of gross regional product (GRP) in NSW, while having only 21% of the population.

The region's economy is also growing faster than the NSW average, with [26% growth in GRP](#) from 2013 to 2016 compared with [21% growth in NSW](#).

Nonetheless, challenges remain. The upper Hunter economy is currently highly dependent on mining and power generation industries which are vulnerable to global and regional shocks.

One of the greatest economic challenges facing the Hunter region is transitioning the economies of Dungog, Muswellbrook, Singleton and Upper Hunter Councils to new opportunities.

In response to this challenge, the Regional Leadership Executive led by the Department of Premier and Cabinet established the Upper Hunter Economic Diversification Project, which in 2017 released an [action plan](#) to support long term economic development and industry transition.

A further economic challenge is retaining our young people, which is discussed in Section 54.

There are also many strengths from which we can leverage, including the numerous industries already in the Hunter.

Newcastle as the regional capital, is a hub for industry, education, health, business, personal, tourism, port and logistics services. Newcastle is recognised as a nation leading smart city. Newcastle's Smart City Strategy is positioning Newcastle as a smart city internationally. It will revitalise and transform both Newcastle and the region as a recognised centre for innovation.

A key role for the Joint Organisation will be to work with business, community and government to facilitate the development of key infrastructure to facilitate business performance and attract new enterprise to the region.



## Our multifaceted economy

**16%**

of the workforce employed in **health care and social assistance** – the largest industry in the region

**3,500**

people employed at the **RAAF Base Williamtown** with another 1,000 at the Lone Pine Barracks in Singleton

**\$461million**

in **agricultural production** in the Upper Hunter alone

**Over 120**

**wineries** throughout the region

**1.25million**

passengers through **Newcastle Airport** in 2016-17

**Around 80%**

of the state's **electricity** is generated in the Hunter

**\$15.8billion**

in exports through the **Port of Newcastle**

**Over 30,000**

people employed in the second largest regional industry – **retail trade**

**Over 1,000**

academic and 1,500 non-academic staff employed by the **University of Newcastle**

**Provides 80%**

of the total value of stud horses exported by Australia

**Nearly 3.5million**

domestic overnight **visitors** between in the year to September 2017

**31%**

of Hunter based businesses introduced **new or significantly improved goods or services** in 2015

The primary mechanisms to coordinate the growth of the region's economy are the [Hunter Regional Plan 2036](#) and [Greater Newcastle Metropolitan Plan 2036](#) (in draft form at the time of writing). These plans both have a strong economic focus.

## How we will work with our partners to make a difference

**1** Establish an **Economic Sustainability Sub Committee**, made up of representatives from member councils, to coordinate the economic development activity of the JO and report to the Board.

**2** Work with the Hunter Research Foundation, University of Newcastle and other research partners to gather and analyse economic data and develop a regional attraction plan based on regional strengths in research, education, transport and logistics, aerospace, agribusiness and tourism.

**3** Deepen relationships with the Department of Planning and Environment and the Hunter Development Corporation and gain a commitment to a formal JO role in the implementation, monitoring and review of the *Hunter Regional Plan 2036* and *Greater Newcastle Metropolitan Plan 2036*. Be an effective and outcome oriented committee member.

**4** Work with the Hunter Regional Leadership Executive to deliver the **Upper Hunter Economic Diversification Project Action Plan**, monitor its success and review as needed.

**5** Collaborate to ensure Newcastle and the Hunter realise our potential as a smart region and innovation ecosystem, driving jobs and investment whilst ensuring technology improves livability and sustainability for our region.

**6** Develop a **sustainable model to coordinate council-run events** across the region and showcase the Hunter and attract local, national and international visitors.

**7** Work with Destination NSW, Newcastle Airport and other partners to more strongly promote the Hunter as a multifaceted visitor destination. Develop a regional destination management plan.

**8** Work with the Department of Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities to undertake more detailed **exploration of the opportunities created by a City Deal**, as well as the pre conditions and process to develop a City Deal in the Hunter.

**9** Explore and act on **smart ways to transform local and global disruptions**, such as the disruption of recycling services, into economic opportunities for the Hunter.

### What is a City Deal?

A [City Deal](#) is an agreement between Local, State and Federal Government. It works to align the planning, investment and governance necessary to accelerate growth and job creation, stimulate urban renewal and drive economic reforms.

It is a commitment from all levels of Government towards a number of identified local economic development opportunities.

There are six focus areas identified by the Australian Government for action under City Deals. The focus areas selected under each City Deal are dependent on the city's needs and priorities.

### How has the region previously turned disruption into opportunity?

[Renew Newcastle](#) is an innovative strategy designed to reverse decades of urban decay through high quality, low capital, creative and place making projects.

It connects creative entrepreneurs with vacant spaces, supporting a community of local, small business owners who bring life, interest and activity into the underutilised neighbourhoods.

Through a unique 30-day lease agreement Renew Newcastle has successfully leveraged the opportunities created by disruption within the inner CBD of Newcastle and other locations to create vibrant and active commercial hubs.



# 4

## Our people and products move across the region easily on integrated and accessible transport networks

### Why this is important for our region

The Hunter region is connected through some major transport infrastructure, including the:

- » **Newcastle Light Rail** project and future extensions
- » **Central Coast and Newcastle rail line**, which connects Sydney to Newcastle
- » **Hunter Expressway**, which has significantly reduced travel times through the region
- » **Hunter Valley Coal Rail Network**, which carries coal between the Upper Hunter and the Port
- » **Newcastle Airport**, with additional airports at Taree, as well as Cessnock and Maitland
- » **North Coast NSW rail line** from Sydney to Brisbane
- » **Pacific, Golden and New England Highways**, which link the Hunter to other parts of NSW and beyond
- » **Port of Newcastle**, which is taking on a visitor role with the development of a Cruise Ship Terminal
- » **Ferneleigh Track** walking and cycling trail.
- » **Freight rail bypass**
- » **Future Transport NSW 2056**

Many parts of the region are therefore relatively well connected. However, transport remains the single biggest challenge for Hunter communities.

The nature of this challenge varies considerably across the region. It can mean addressing the:

- » large maintenance backlogs for **basic transport infrastructure**, such as roads and bridges, in some areas
  - » significant congestion at **Hexham Bridge and Singleton**
  - » timetabling conflicts between commuter and freight transport on the **Hunter Valley Coal Rail Network**
  - » very limited **public transport** options across the Hunter, particularly the upper Hunter.
  - » extension of the **Newcastle light rail** system to better service the region
  - » **faster trains** to Sydney
  - » congestion at the **Adamstown crossing**
  - » Greater Newcastle **integrated transport plan**
- It can also mean taking up opportunities to:
- » create and connect regional walking and cycling infrastructure, such as the **Richmond Vale Rail Trail**
  - » open employment lands, such through the **Lake Macquarie Transport Interchange and Newcastle Airport.**

The NSW Government has announced funding or plans to address some of these challenges and opportunities, including the M1 extension which plans to bypass Hexham and Heatherbrae and the Newcastle Freight Rail Bypass. However, there is currently no shared view between councils, government agencies and other key stakeholders about regional transport priorities.

## Lower Hunter Freight Corridor

Transport for NSW are currently undertaking preliminary investigations to assess options for the Lower Hunter Freight Corridor.

Preservation of the Lower Hunter Freight Corridor is an Action in the NSW Freight and Ports Strategy, the State Infrastructure Strategy and a 'high priority initiative' in

Infrastructure Australia's Infrastructure Priority List. When built the Lower Hunter Freight Corridor will remove most of the freight trains from within the urban area and at the Adamstown and Islington Junction level crossings, enhancing the amenity and liveability of the Newcastle region.

## How we will work with our partners to make a difference

- 1** Establish a **Transport Connectivity Sub Committee**, made up representatives from member councils, to coordinate the transport and associated infrastructure planning activity of the JO and report to the Board.
- 2** Coordinate and prepare submissions on regional planning initiatives such as the 2056 Freight and Ports Plan.
- 3** Work with the Transport for NSW and other partners to access and **analyse detailed transport data** across the region and **understand gaps** in infrastructure and services.
- 4** Engage at a senior level with key transport stakeholders including Transport for NSW, Roads and Maritime Authority, Newcastle Airport,

Port of Newcastle and Keolis Downer to better **understand their forward planning** for the region.

- 5** Use the in depth evidence base to prepare **Hunter JO agreed priority list of infrastructure**, system and service improvements which will make the greatest difference to communities and businesses across the region. This will include expansion and connectivity between cycleways.

- 6** Develop and implement a **targeted advocacy program** to gain commitments from infrastructure and service delivery agencies, including the Australian Government, to deliver agreed priorities.



## 5

---

# Our educational facilities support and encourage our young people and foster life long learning

## Why this is important for the region

Education is important to ensuring a bright future for any young person.

The Hunter has some excellent educational facilities. The [University of Newcastle](#) is ranked in the top 1% of universities in the world and has three campuses in the region. It is currently investing \$95 million in the landmark [NeW Space](#) development in the Newcastle CBD. There are also 10 [TAFE NSW](#) campuses in the region. Many of these have strong connections to major regional employers, including the Mining Skills Centre in Muswellbrook, Equine Skills Centre in Scone, Hunter Maritime College in Newcastle, and the Plant, Heavy Vehicle and Auto Electrical Training Centre in Kurri Kurri.

However, it is not easy for young people in some parts of the region to access tertiary education, particularly without a car. For example, there are few public transport options connecting young people in the Upper Hunter to tertiary education options in Newcastle and surrounds. There is only one train line connecting the Upper Hunter with the rest of the Hunter region and no public transport options linking surrounding areas with that train line.

Only 14% of young people in the Hunter region aged 15-24 are enrolled in some form of tertiary education, compared to 21% for NSW. Youth unemployment is also up slightly compared to

NSW, at 16% compared to 14% for NSW. The low proportion of young people engaged in tertiary education and higher youth unemployment indicates a possible disconnect between the transition from schooling to training or employment.

Indigenous Australians are even less likely to be enrolled in some form of tertiary education, with only 17% of Indigenous people in the Hunter region aged 15-24 enrolled in further education compared to 29% of non-Indigenous young people aged 15-24. Additionally, only 29% of Indigenous school leavers completed year 12 or equivalent, compared to 42% of non-Indigenous school leavers.

Improving earlier levels of education as well as raising student awareness and aspiration can help more students transition to tertiary education.

It will also be important to explore ways to ensure young people can have better access to local employment opportunities following education.

Like many other regional areas, the Hunter also loses younger residents to education and employment opportunities elsewhere. Projections indicate that the proportion of Hunter residents aged 15-24 years will continue to decrease, from 13% in 2016 to 11% in 2036. This is often due to breadth of education and employment opportunities available in major cities.

While traditionally studying tertiary courses online have been difficult due to a lack of access to high speed broadband in some regional and rural areas, the delivery of the NBN network may assist people in accessing and undertaking distance education more easily.

Another educational challenge is ensuring the provision of schools keeps up with the pace of development. Between 2016 and 2031, it is expected there will be almost [6,000](#) extra students in government primary schools and some [3,400](#) more students in government secondary schools throughout the Hunter.

This is the highest growth outside the Sydney metropolitan area – and doesn't include the projected demand for private school places. As most [population growth](#) is expected to occur in Lake Macquarie, Maitland and Newcastle, the number and capacity of public and private schools in these areas will need to be significantly increased to cater for this increasing demand.

Our education facilities also need to accommodate skill development, skill maintenance and retraining to support those making career changes and to encourage life long learning.

It will also be important to provide opportunities for training in new technologies to ensure our populations can participate fully in community life and that no one gets left behind.

## How we will work with our partners to make a difference

**1** Establish a **Social Sustainability Sub Committee**, made up representatives from member councils, to coordinate the education, health and related policy and planning activities of the JO and report to the Board.

**2** Engage at a senior level with key education stakeholders including the University of Newcastle, TAFE NSW and School Infrastructure NSW to better **understand their forward planning** for the region.

**3** Work with the NSW Department of Education to better understand and **test their projections for growth in student numbers** throughout the Hunter.

**4** Use the in depth evidence base to prepare a **Hunter JO agreed priority list of school infrastructure improvements** which will make the greatest difference to communities across the region.

**5** Advocate to Schools Infrastructure NSW and the Minister for Education to gain commitments to **deliver agreed schools infrastructure improvements**.

**6** Work with TAFE NSW to **expand access to training and vocational services** across the region, including through innovative models such as Connected Learning Centres, Specialist Centres and Mobile Training Units.

**7** Work with the University of Newcastle and TAFE NSW to **help raise awareness, aspiration and achievement of tertiary education opportunities** for primary and secondary school students in the region.

**8** Work with Indigenous educational and community groups to support and **encourage young Indigenous people** into tertiary education.

**9** Work with local Libraries and education providers to develop and implement technology for life learning schemes to ensure all generations take advantage of new technology to improve quality of life.

## 6

# Our people have access to the full range of health care fostering active and healthy communities

## Why this is important for the region

The region has 11 district and community hospitals, as well as the regional services provided by the John Hunter Hospital. The NSW Government has also announced the development of a new hospital in Maitland, to serve growth in the area.

However, accessing the full range of health services remains a challenge for people in some parts of the Hunter, particularly where public transport options are scarce and local people must rely on community transport run by volunteers.

The arrival of the NBN will have positive impacts for people accessing health care with e-health services able to help bridge the gaps between patients and the healthcare they need. E-health services could allow many local doctors to monitor elderly and chronically ill patients without the need for a GP or hospital visit using internet-connected devices that remotely monitor patients.

Health services in the Hunter region are also facing a number of specific issues, including an [aging population, high rates of chronic mental and behavioural problems, and high risk of chronic disease](#).

With an already higher proportion of older people than the NSW average, [projections](#) suggest that by 2036 25% of Hunter all residents will be aged over 65, compared to a NSW average of 21%.

Coastal locations, which already attract large numbers of retirees, will see the population of older residents swell further. By 2036, some 39% of Mid Coast residents will be aged 65 and over. Some inland areas are also expected to see big jumps in the proportion of older people. For example, the proportion of older people in Dungog is expected to increase from 19% to 29%.

Demand for aged care places will increase and will be exacerbated in areas such as Maitland, Dungog and Muswellbrook which already have [low rates of aged care places](#). An ageing population will also place an increased demand on health services and could lead to shortages of appropriately skilled workers.

According to the Hunter, New England and Central Coast Public Health Network (HNECCPHN), [one in seven people \(14.4%\)](#) in the region experience chronic mental and behavioural problems which is higher than the national average (13.6%) ranging from 12.1% – 16.3% across the LGAs.

This is a particular challenge in regional areas, as people in these areas are often more isolated and unsupported while experiencing symptoms of mental illness. People in regional areas are more likely to struggle to find the right support because there are fewer mental health professionals and long delays can result.

All LGAs across the Hunter region are [also above the NSW average](#) for smoking and risky alcohol consumption and have rates of obesity that are [well above the NSW rate](#). Smoking, high risk alcohol consumption and excess weight are all linked to numerous health problems and are major risk factors for chronic disease. These issues left unaddressed will place a significant burden on the local health services.

For these reasons more opportunities for preventative programs and lifestyle education need to be offered. This should include fitness, nutrition lifestyle and wellbeing initiatives that include physical, spiritual and mental wellbeing.

## How we will work with our partners to make a difference

**1** Work with the Hunter New England Local Health District and other key partners to **audit health services across the region**, identify accessibility gaps and prioritise actions.

**2** Hold regional stakeholder workshops to gain input from community members and health professionals to better **understand the priority health needs** of local communities.

**3** Use the in depth evidence base to prepare a **Hunter JO agreed priority list of improvements to health services and facilities** which will make the greatest difference to communities across the region.

**4** Explore **innovative models of housing** to enable older people to age in place in Hunter towns and villages.





**Aspire.  
Act.  
Achieve.**

**Hunter Joint  
Organisation**

**Strategic Plan 2018-21**

**P** (02) 4978 4040

**E** [admin@huntercouncils.com.au](mailto:admin@huntercouncils.com.au)