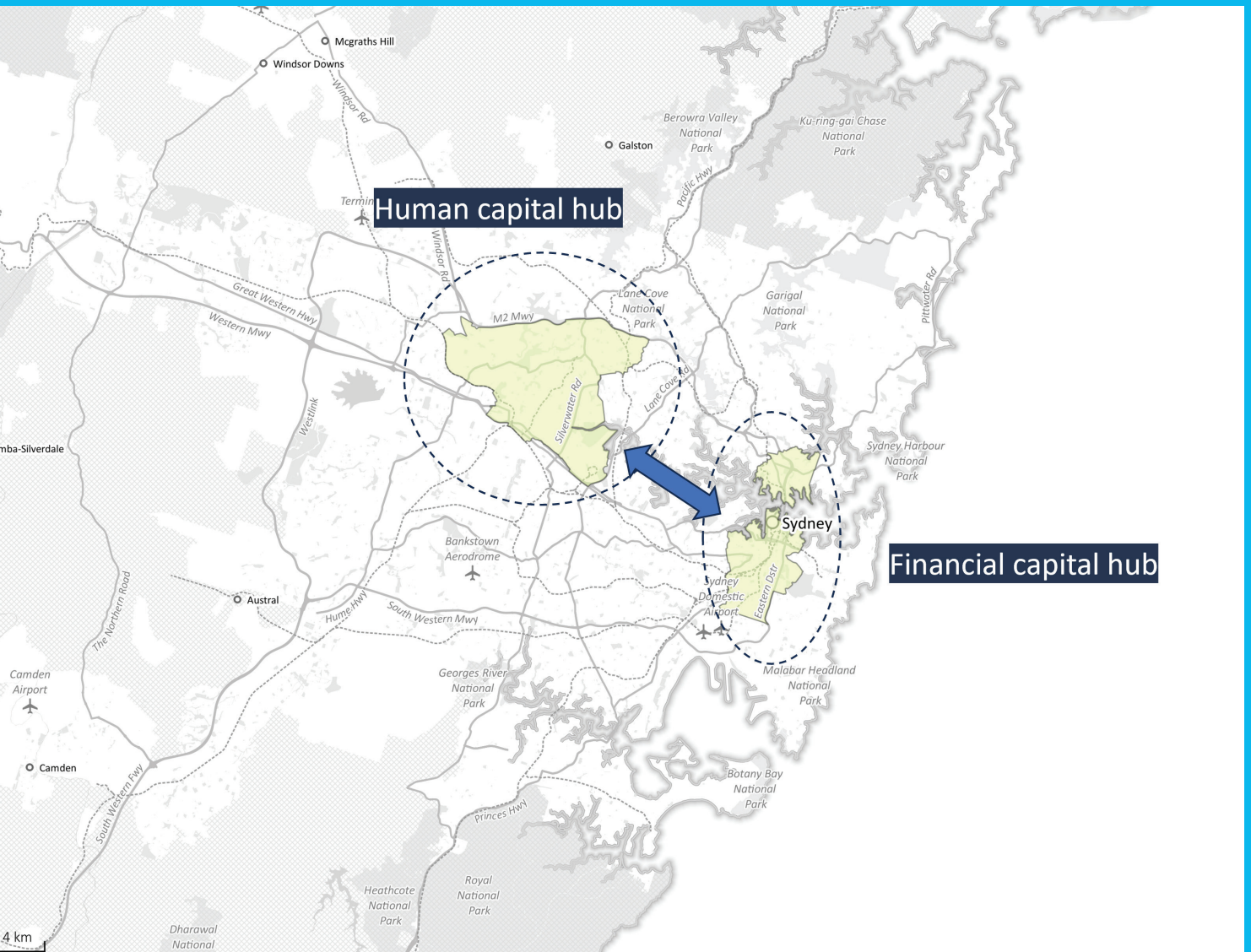


Parramatta 2050 and beyond: what makes a global city a global city?

Cities Institute Agenda Setting
February 2024



Background

Parramatta has many identities and can be considered in many ways – often at the very same time. It is simultaneously a city (Parramatta CBD), Local Government Area (Parramatta LGA), Commonwealth and State electorate (Parramatta Electoral Division and District) and Indigenous Area (Parramatta IARE). All of these identities are important, with a variety of stakeholders, representatives and constituents, and meaningful at different scales and in different contexts.

Parramatta is the natural heart of a future, polycentric, global Greater Sydney. This goes beyond its geographical location in the centre of the region. Rather, it is due to its concentration of a number of attributes that characterise truly great cities. Amongst these a few are particularly relevant; especially human capital, economic production, productivity and diversity, transport, landscapes and culture.

Purpose

The UNSW Cities Institute is developing a series of papers identifying current research and thinking across several themes, with the intention of outlining a future research agenda, provoking debate and laying a platform from which to engage potential collaborators.

This paper, prepared in collaboration with SGS Economics and Planning, focuses on Parramatta and its role in a growing, changing global Sydney. It takes as its theme the idea of Parramatta 2050 and beyond: what makes a global city a global city? It is deliberately speculative and potentially provocative, aiming first and foremost to stimulate future research, collaboration and knowledge production, leading eventually to policy with tangible outcomes.

Acknowledgement of Stakeholders

The Institute would like to thank those who contributed their time and insights to this project. This paper draws heavily on discussions with a working group comprising:

- > Dr Rhonda Itaoui – Director, Centre for Western Sydney, Western Sydney University
- > Liza Noonan – Head of Innovation & Entrepreneurship, Investment NSW
- > Craig Allchin – Director, Ethos Urban
- > Peter Poulet – Director, Cities Institute, University of New South Wales
- > Hannah Bolitho – Manager, Cities Institute, University of New South Wales

UNSW/SGS thanks them for their energy, expertise and insight, which were critical in framing this paper and its purpose. This work does not purport to be their personal view nor that of their respective organisations.

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Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Bidjigal, the Traditional Custodians of the land on which the Cities Institute is located, and pay our respects to Elders, past and present.



Parramatta 2050 and Beyond

Introduction

Parramatta in 2050 will be larger, more populous and better-connected than it is now. To a significant extent this is due to its prominence in the planning agenda for Greater Sydney, commencing from the earliest stages of Sydney as a British colony on stolen Burramattagal land, through to the County of Cumberland Plan in 1948, the Sydney Region Outline Plan in 1970s and a number of additional plans, planning documents and strategies in the first two decades of the 21st century. In many ways Parramatta is already a success story, as an anchor of Sydney’s status as one of the few genuinely ‘multi-centred’ cities around the world. This is the case despite some persistent inequalities in western, compared to eastern Sydney and the dominant harbour CBD. However, a variety of economic, demographic, social and political forces are placing even greater emphasis on Parramatta, suggesting that its role in a future global Sydney will only increase.

In particular, this paper puts forward a vision of Parramatta as Greater Sydney’s human capital heart, leveraging its established geographical and demographic centrality. To the extent that human capital is increasingly fundamental to success in the 21st century economy, this foregrounds Parramatta playing a core part in securing Greater Sydney’s economic future, particularly when combined with eastern Sydney’s financial and reputational heft. In this conception Parramatta develops alongside or ‘with’ eastern Sydney (see Table 1).

Parramatta or eastern Sydney	Parramatta and eastern Sydney	Parramatta with eastern Sydney
Parramatta and eastern Sydney in competition for people, capital and political backing. One can only win by the other losing.	Parramatta and eastern Sydney as separate cities in their own right, with little interface between them.	Parramatta and eastern Sydney in a synergistic relationship, as constituent parts of a global, polycentric Greater Sydney.

Table 1. Conceptualising the relationship between Parramatta and eastern Sydney.
Source: SGS Economics and Planning 2023

This vision, it is proposed, could be supported by five big moves. These are grounded in Parramatta’s current characteristics and seek to consolidate its success while avoiding some of the negative consequences of being considered a global city, which have manifested elsewhere. These moves are:

- > The availability of affordable spaces, open to the community for creative and entrepreneurial expression
- > Complete multi-modal transport networks to, from and within Parramatta, connecting it with Greater Sydney, NSW, eastern Australia and the world.
- > An international education and training hub
- > World leader in climate resilience
- > Parramatta as a laboratory of wellness and cohesion

Planning Parramatta: a brief history

In the brief history that follows, it is important to remember that Parramatta is the home of the Burramattagal people – at the heart of western Sydney. Aboriginal cultures in the Greater Parramatta area have successfully managed and curated Country there for tens of thousands of years, since the Burramattagal, a clan of the Dharug, first settled along the upper reaches of the Parramatta River over 60,000 years ago. Having been a gathering place to meet, celebrate and trade for millennia, this area and its subsequent growth is founded on the dispossession of the Dharug peoples from their lands.

Second colonial settlement from 1788

From the earliest days of the colony Parramatta was the ‘second city’. After the British invasion at Sydney Cove in 1788 Captain Arthur Phillip realised there was only enough food to support the penal colony for a short time. Farming at what was initially called ‘Rose Hill’ proved successful and enabled the early colony to survive. In 1791 Phillip named the growing town Par-ra-mat-ta (approximating the term used by the local people to describe the place). A town plan was conceived by Governor Phillip for Parramatta configured on an east-west axis along the line of George Street, from the Governor’s house eastwards towards the river. The foundation stone for St Johns Church of England was laid in 1797.

County of Cumberland plan, 1948

The Cumberland Plan was a land use and transport strategy developed by the Cumberland County Council in Sydney in 1948 and adopted by the Government of New South Wales in 1951. In this plan Parramatta was one of the satellite ‘district centres’ intended to provide structure to outward or suburban growth – ultimately contained by a UK-style ‘green belt’. However, this did not eventuate at its intended scale.

Sydney Region Outline Plan, 1970-2000, 1968

In the Sydney Region Outline Plan (SROP) from 1968 the employment and activity dominance of the central Sydney CBD was recognized as the ‘biggest single urban problem in the region’. Parramatta was identified to develop as a ‘very major commercial employment centre’ to assist ‘a more balanced distribution of employment and activity in relation to where people live’. In this plan it is designated as one of two ‘sub-regional centres’ (Campbelltown serving future growth in the south-west is the other). This flagged a notional target of 50,000 jobs in Parramatta. The idea of Parramatta as a major CBD in western Sydney was conceived in Sydney’s metropolitan planning.

City of Cities 2005, 2010 metropolitan strategy

Various metropolitan plans subsequent to SROP supported the idea of Parramatta as the major commercial and administrative centre in Western Sydney. The 2005 and 2010 strategies further articulated the idea with Parramatta identified as pre-eminent amongst three ‘regional cities’ outside the Sydney CBD (the others being Penrith and Liverpool). All these centres are characterized by river access, accessible parklands and heritage street patterns – as well as significant commercial floorspace (beyond their shopping role). An employment capacity target of 60,000 for 2031 was established for Parramatta, with 2001 employment estimated at 41,662.

The 2010 strategy maintained this emphasis on Parramatta as western Sydney's 'regional city' and identified it as an anchor in the 'Global Economic Corridor' linking it to Epping, Macquarie Park, Chatswood, North Sydney and the Sydney CBD. The idea of Parramatta at the western edge of a network of transport and connected places in eastern Sydney, also with radial connections to western Sydney centres, was also shown in the 2010 strategy.

The Plan for Growing Sydney, 2014

This also identified the ambition to grow Parramatta as Sydney's 'second CBD' and facilitate this by establishing Greater Parramatta as a 'priority growth area'.

A Metropolis of Three Cities: The Greater Sydney Region Plan, 2018 – and beyond

In this plan the multi-city metropolis idea evolved, with Parramatta at the heart of the Central River City, alongside two other 'cities' (the 'Western Parkland City' focused on the new airport, and the Eastern Harbour City focused on the Sydney CBD). The plan supports Greater Parramatta's role as a major city focus for administrative, business services, judicial, health and educational jobs.

Subsequent to this plan a discussion paper has been prepared that adds three new 'cities' to an expanded Greater Sydney (or 'Six-Cities' Region) planning area: the Central Coast City, the Illawarra-Shoalhaven City, and the Lower Hunter and Greater Newcastle City.

Through all these iterations Parramatta has entrenched and expanded its role as western Sydney's major city, now with an estimated 56,000 jobs in the CBD alone. Given often unrealised aims for 'multi-centred' cities in metropolitan planning the world over, Parramatta's development can be considered an international 'planning success story'. But there is much more to be done, having regard to critical considerations, including affordability, inclusivity, accessibility and proper recognition of indigenous culture and connection to Country.

Parramatta's role now and to 2050

What is Parramatta?

Parramatta has many identities and can be considered in many ways – often at the very same time. It is simultaneously a city (Parramatta CBD), Local Government Area (Parramatta LGA), Commonwealth and State electorate (Parramatta Electoral Division and District) and Indigenous Area (Parramatta IARE). All of these identities are important, with a variety of stakeholders, representatives and constituents, and meaningful at different scales and in different contexts. In the context of this paper, Parramatta is taken in a broad sense; as an idea, and the focal point for western Sydney as a whole, where all that characterises the region comes together. This being the case, references in this section to 'Parramatta' should not be considered as restricted to the local government area, CBD or electorate alone. Rather, they take in the diverse places, communities and attributes existing within and around Parramatta, unified by the extent to which they are demonstrably – generally geographically, but also culturally, economically, historically and ideologically – apart from eastern Sydney.¹ References to eastern Sydney, subsequently, should be understood as references to Sydney and North Sydney CBDs, and the eastern suburbs; the historic basis of Sydney's identity and the focal point for its past social, economic, cultural and political energy.

Considered in these terms, Parramatta is the natural heart of a future, polycentric, global Greater Sydney. This goes beyond its geographical location in the centre of the region. Rather, it is due to its concentration of a number of attributes that characterise truly great cities. Amongst these a few are particularly relevant; especially human capital, economic production, productivity and diversity, transport, landscapes and culture.

For several of these attributes, Parramatta and western Sydney display them to a greater extent than anywhere else. In terms of industry, for example, the region is to a significant extent home to the last major concentrations of manufacturing employment in Greater Sydney. Similarly, in terms of ethnic diversity, the region displays the greatest concentrations of people speaking a language other than English. This highlights western Sydney as the traditional destination for new migrants, particularly more recent arrivals from south-east Asia, Africa, and the Middle East.

For all of these attributes, Parramatta is the 'locus' or meeting place. It is this identity – as a site of collision, negotiation, dynamism, and invention between those elements that make a great city – that foregrounds Parramatta's central role in the future global Sydney.

What does the community want?

Any discussion of a 'future' for Parramatta must be grounded in the wants, needs and concerns of the community. Cities are fundamentally about the people who live, work and play there. This normative idea should be central to all planning and policy work, yet it is particularly relevant in the context of Parramatta because the vibrancy, diversity and talents of its community is one of Parramatta's major strengths. The

¹ This framing aligns with recent work considering Parramatta's role, character, and future as a global city. For instance the Parramatta 2035 report by the Centre for Western Sydney at Western Sydney University characterises Parramatta as a 'city-region' that is simultaneously Parramatta CBD, Greater Parramatta, which extends from Olympic Park to Westmead, and the Central River City, which stretches from Canterbury-Bankstown in the south-east to the Rouse Hill in the north-west and Blacktown in the west (Glover, B., Dufty-Jones, R., Itou, R., Marks, B., Bergan, T. and Perrone, L. (2022) *Parramatta 2035: Vibrant, Sustainable, Global*, Centre for Western Sydney, https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/content/dam/digital/pdf/CFWS001_GPOP_Report_FA_print.pdf, p. 12)

potential for the development of a global city to undercut these attributes – those very characteristics that originally make it a candidate to become a global city – has become known as ‘splintering urbanism’; when the impacts of globalisation are unevenly distributed and experienced across city regions and urban population, generating altogether negative and unequal social, economic, political and cultural outcomes.²

While a programme of extensive stakeholder engagement was beyond the scope of this paper, the *Parramatta 2035* report by the Centre for Western Sydney framed its conclusions in the results of engagement with a variety of community stakeholders, including elected representatives, researchers, government officials and interest group members. Table 2 below outlines some key takeaways of relevance to this paper.

Theme	Description
A city with soul	This theme captures the discussion around the idea that great cities have a ‘soul’. They are not sterile, bleak, and empty places, but vibrant, distinctive, well designed and attractive. A global city consists of precincts or boroughs: local destinations with unique character and identity. Great boroughs are social spaces that give locals and visitors a place to gather to shop, dine, work, study, have fun, enjoy music, art, a coffee or a drink. They exude an atmosphere and quality that contributes to the area’s liveability
A river city	This theme recognises the importance of the natural environment, including water enriched spaces, for supporting and enhancing liveability and quality of life. The river is vital to Parramatta as an inland city, yet its value has been overlooked. Understanding how the community interacts (or does not) with the river is essential. Key issues include the river’s health, swimmability, improved infrastructure and amenities. As Greater Parramatta’s future population grows, it is forecast that most of this growth will be concentrated along the river, making the river even more of a priority.
A city for all people	This theme celebrates Greater Parramatta’s diverse and multicultural community and seeks to give a voice to all, including those who are often excluded, such as refugees, migrants and the homeless. It also considers how different population segments (such as youth) and users of the City (such as workers) engage with and experience the City.
An affordable city	This theme reflects the importance of access to affordable, decent and diverse housing options for the community. Greater Parramatta’s transformation should not exacerbate the affordability crisis but provide solutions to address it.
A city for Western Sydney	This theme reflects the consensus that it is important that all Western Sydney benefits from what is happening in Parramatta. It considers how Greater Parramatta fits in and complements the broader region and surrounding cities (such as Penrith and Liverpool). It recognises the importance of ensuring that these communities are heard and brought along on the journey.
A connected city	<u>This theme recognises Greater Parramatta’s connections to Western Sydney, the Eastern City, regional NSW, Australia and the world. It reflects the discussion on how Greater Parramatta should define its relationship with the Eastern City and how this relationship could be strengthened for mutual advantage. It acknowledges the NSW Premier’s remark that the Greater Sydney’s success depends on Greater Parramatta. It seeks to understand how we can sell Greater Parramatta to Sydney, NSW, Australia and the rest of the world.</u>

Table 2. Selected aspirations from engagement with the Parramatta community. Source: Glover et al. 2022, p. 64

2 Graham, S. and Marvin, S. (2011) *Splintered Urbanism: Networked Infrastructures, Technological Mobilities and the Urban Condition*, Routledge

From even the summary above, a clear set of community priorities emerges that should define Parramatta as a global city. First, and perhaps foremost, is inclusivity. For some, the transformation of Greater Sydney – particularly its eastern component – into a global city from the late 20th century has accompanied undesirable outcomes, particularly around affordability, liveability, access to services and employment and the development of an at-times antagonistic relationship between the eastern and western parts of Sydney.³ This appears to have inculcated a strong desire for Parramatta to avoid this same fate by safeguarding – and indeed, intensifying – its authenticity, accessibility, affordability, diversity and activation. The transformation of Parramatta into a global city that excludes, alienates or displaces the community that is already there will, frankly, constitute a failure.

Moreover, there is a strong sense of Parramatta as an anchor for the rest of western Sydney, and an acknowledgement that a focus on Parramatta should not negate or sterilise the contributions of the diverse communities that exist within the region. If global Parramatta were to subsume or isolate places like Merrylands, Harris Park, Auburn or any of the many other localities that enjoy a distinct identity yet have much to gain from the development of the region, it too would be a failure.

Finally, the community is engaged with environmental quality and protection, and more broadly, the existence of a profound connection between local Indigenous groups and the area that is now known as ‘Parramatta’. This cultural heritage is something to be celebrated, with indigenous voices given priority regarding the natural environment, as well as economic, political and social governance. A global Parramatta that neglects to celebrate and implement Indigenous perspectives will be in denial of its own history, culture, and Country.

What should Parramatta be? Parramatta as Sydney's human capital hub

Figure 1 overleaf presents one vision of Parramatta's role in a future global Sydney. It is not definitive, nor is it final; rather, it is just one of many depictions of what Parramatta could be in the future that reflects both its current attributes and the trajectory of the region. It presents Parramatta as Sydney's human capital hub, which, appended to the financial strength and international recognisability of eastern Sydney, can project the entirety of greater Sydney into a more exciting, interesting, inclusive, and prosperous future.

In mainstream economic theory, human capital is one of the key inputs to production. When combined with financial capital, embodied in technology, it allows the efficient, competitive production of goods and services for the market. Particularly as economies shift toward the production of high value-added, tertiary goods and services, which compete largely on the basis of the creativity, ingenuity and skills of their human progenitors, rather than the sheer concentration of raw inputs, which can drive price reductions through economies of scale, human capital takes on even greater importance.⁴ It is, in short, the driver of a competitive 21st century economy.

Parramatta is the human capital heart of Greater Sydney. This is clear to see in Figure 1, which shows that the **population centre of Greater Sydney** – what can be thought of as the average latitude and longitude of a person in Sydney – is in Parramatta LGA, in the middle of the Parramatta River. While only illustrative, it does highlight that Parramatta is the demographic, as well as geographic, centre of the Sydney region.

3 Glover et al. 2022, p. 18

4 OECD (2022) *Value for Money in School Education: Smart Investments, Quality Outcomes, Equal Opportunities*, OECD Publishing, Paris

Moreover, the ABS notes, this centre of population is gradually moving west, away from the coast, over time, reflecting stronger population growth in the west compared to the east of the city. This trend is set to continue, bolstering the sheer amount of human capital present in the Parramatta region.⁵

While the proportional under-education of western Sydney compared to eastern and northern Sydney is well known, with the proportion of skilled workers in the former persistently lower than the latter,⁶ in absolute terms western Sydney's larger population means that it has **a larger reservoir of skilled workers to draw on than these other regions**. This is demonstrated in Figure 3, which shows Blacktown as the LGA with the largest total number of workers with at least a Certificate III level of education. Highly populated Parramatta and Canterbury-Bankstown are also amongst the Sydney LGAs with the highest total numbers of skilled workers. A Certificate III indicates skills and knowledge in a vocational field, and is a qualification considered equivalent to the completion of high school or Year 12 and is recognised across Australia.⁷



Figure 1. Parramatta 2050 on a page. Source: SGS Economics and Planning 2023

5 ABS (2023) *Regional population*, <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/regional-population/latest-release#data-downloads>

6 Itaoui, R., Balogh, S. and Gerace, G. (2023) *Bridging the divide: Exploring the intersections of education, income and identity in Western Sydney*, https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/content/dam/digital/images/centre-for-western-sydney/Bridging_The_Divide_Issues_Paper.pdf

7 Ibid. p. 5

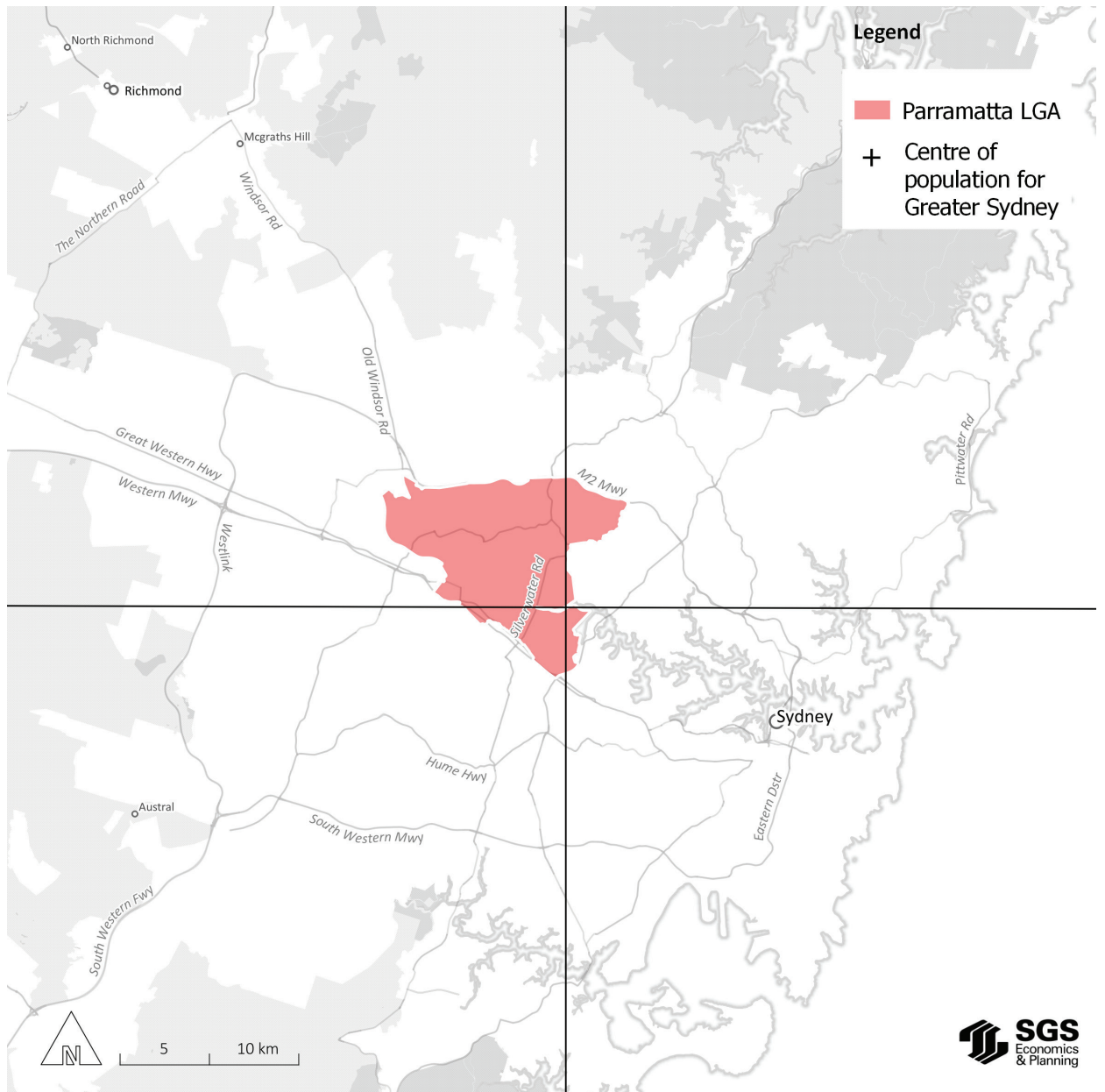


Figure 2. Centre of population for Greater Sydney.
 Source: Census of Population and Housing 2021; SGS Economics and Planning 2023

Note: centre of population is calculated by taking the latitude and longitude centroid of each SA1 in Greater Sydney, multiplying by the population of each SA1 to obtain weighted latitudes and longitudes for each area, summing to obtain a population-weighted latitude and longitude and then dividing by the total population to obtain a single coordinate. This can be thought of as the weighted average latitude and longitude for Greater Sydney; the point where the average person is most likely to be.

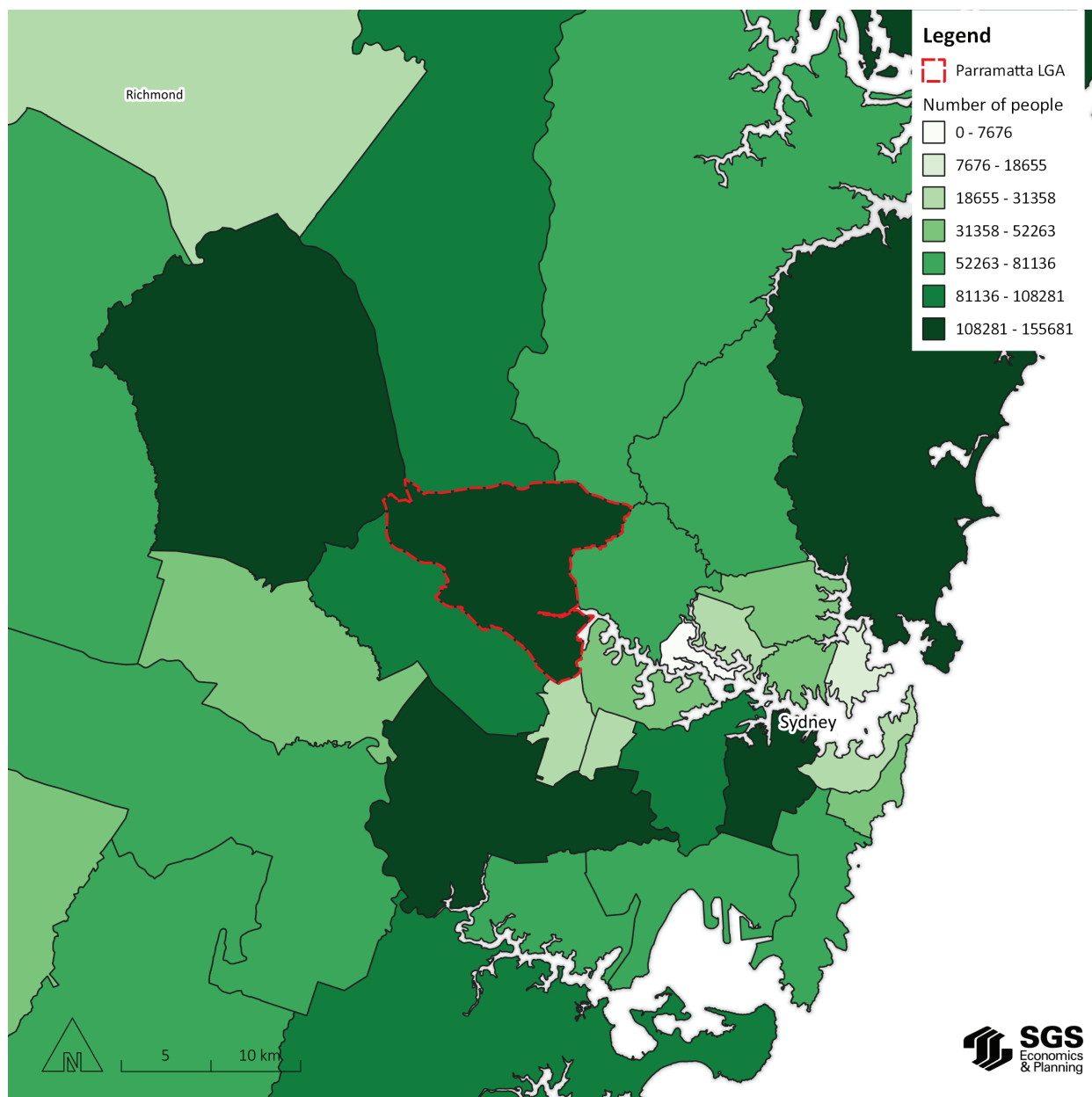


Figure 3. Number of people holding a cert iii qualification or higher – by LGA. Source: Census of Population and Housing 2021; SGS Economics and Planning 2023

In terms of economic output, the number of people with skills is more important than the distribution. Areas with higher numbers of skilled workers will be, all things equal, more productive, and more attractive to inbound investment, than those with fewer skilled workers. This suggests that analyses focusing only on proportional levels are, to an extent, under-selling the level of human capital present in places like Parramatta and western Sydney as a whole. However, it is critical not to ignore the clear inter- and intra-regional educational inequalities highlighted in proportional analyses. While overall deep pools of skilled labour in Parramatta and western Sydney are attractive from an economic point of view, there must be an emphasis on ensuring the greatest possible proportion of the population has access to skills and

up-skilling opportunities, and that any inequalities in educational attainment do not compound other inequalities.

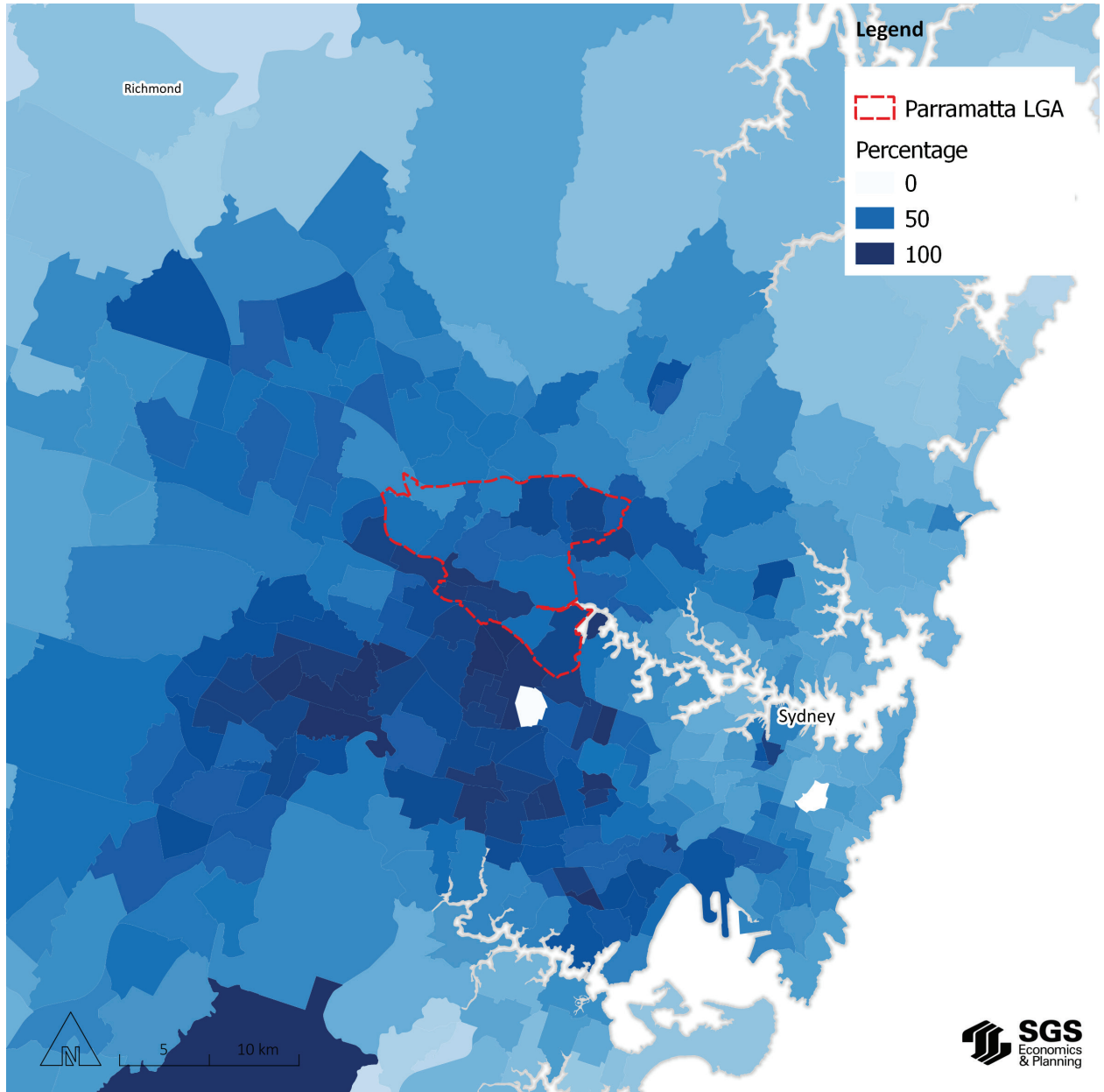


Figure 4. Percentage of population speaking a language other than English at home Source: Census of Population and Housing 2021; SGS Economics and Planning 2023

Building on the clear volumetric advantages displayed by Parramatta and western Sydney, which establish its identity as the human capital heart of Sydney, is the fact that **Sydney becomes more diverse the further west one travels**. This is highlighted in Figure 4, which maps ethnic diversity across Greater Sydney, as indicated by the percentage of the population speaking a language other than English at home. Particularly in areas on Parramatta's southern and north-eastern fringes, as well as further west and south into western

Sydney, this percentage exceeds 75 per cent; three in four people speaking a language that is not English. This is well more than central, eastern and north-eastern Sydney, where the percentage typically falls below 50 per cent.

Ever-stronger connections are being made between cultural diversity and economic success. Particularly important in recent literature are the ways in which the different skills, mindsets and experiences present in a diversified workforce can underpin better decision-making, new ideas and increased creativity and innovation. As a result, its **cultural diversity could be expected to contribute to a systematically more productive economy in the Parramatta region**. More broadly, it creates interest, activation, resilience and liveability, which in turn are key attractors of high-value, high-skill workers equipped to succeed in the knowledge economy.⁸ This speaks to the more fundamental point that high levels of diversity make a place an attractive, enjoyable and interesting place to be. Parramatta's diversity, which is such a feature of its economic and normative appeal, must be maintained and, if possible, expanded as the region becomes a global city.

Human capital is only economically meaningful to the extent that it is combined with investment. The co-location of human capital with jobs, employment, and productive opportunities, therefore, is a powerful combination. Figure 5, which depicts areas of significant employment in the manufacturing, health, professional services and information and technical industries across Sydney, shows that **Parramatta's deep reservoir of human capital exists at the coincidence of three of these four. Employment in manufacturing, health and professional services all intersects at Parramatta**, with only information and technical, which is currently restricted to a band traversing central Sydney from Macquarie Park and Frenchs Forest in the north-west and north-east to Eveleigh in the inner south, not represented. Such diversity has been consistently recognised as underpinning economic strength in global cities across the world, with areas with a diversity of industry, employment and commercial land-uses demonstrating higher levels of innovation, productivity, and output.⁹

Not everybody can be a knowledge or retail worker. Nor should they. A diversity of industry and employment opportunities is key to levels of inclusion, innovation, and vitality in local and regional economies. Particularly meaningful in this sense is the manufacturing sector, with western Sydney home, to a significant extent, to the last remaining concentration of manufacturing employment in Greater Sydney. While conventionally understood as a value-addition 'low point', compared to higher value-added activities that occur immediately before (R&D, design) and after (distribution, marketing, servicing) production,¹⁰ increased attention is being paid to the role of manufacturing industries, businesses, spaces and employment in underpinning complex, innovative and productive economic ecosystems. This is particularly the case where they are co-located with high-knowledge workers, industries, and institutions, such as universities, allowing them to play a key value translation role, which transforms high-value pre-production activities – particularly R&D – into increasingly advanced and high-value manufactured outputs. This, for example, has underpinned the prominence of Camperdown's industrial land in the 'Tech Central' vision for central Sydney. It is also why eastern Sydney's remnant industrial lands alone are more economically productive than Adelaide CBD.¹¹

8 Fensham, P. (2017) 'Planning in Australia: economic benefits of cultural diversity', *SGS Economics & Planning*, February 23, <https://sgsep.com.au/publications/insights/economic-benefits-of-cultural-diversity>

9 Gill, J. (2019) *Jeremy Gill: The truth about jobs of the future is that they are complex and need integrated land use*, The Fifth Estate, 4 April

10 CSIRO (2016) *Advanced Manufacturing: A Roadmap for unlocking future growth opportunities for Australia*, p. 3

11 Gill, J. (2021) 'Safeguarding employment precincts is a vital part of planning for economic growth', *New Planner*, March, pp. 18-19

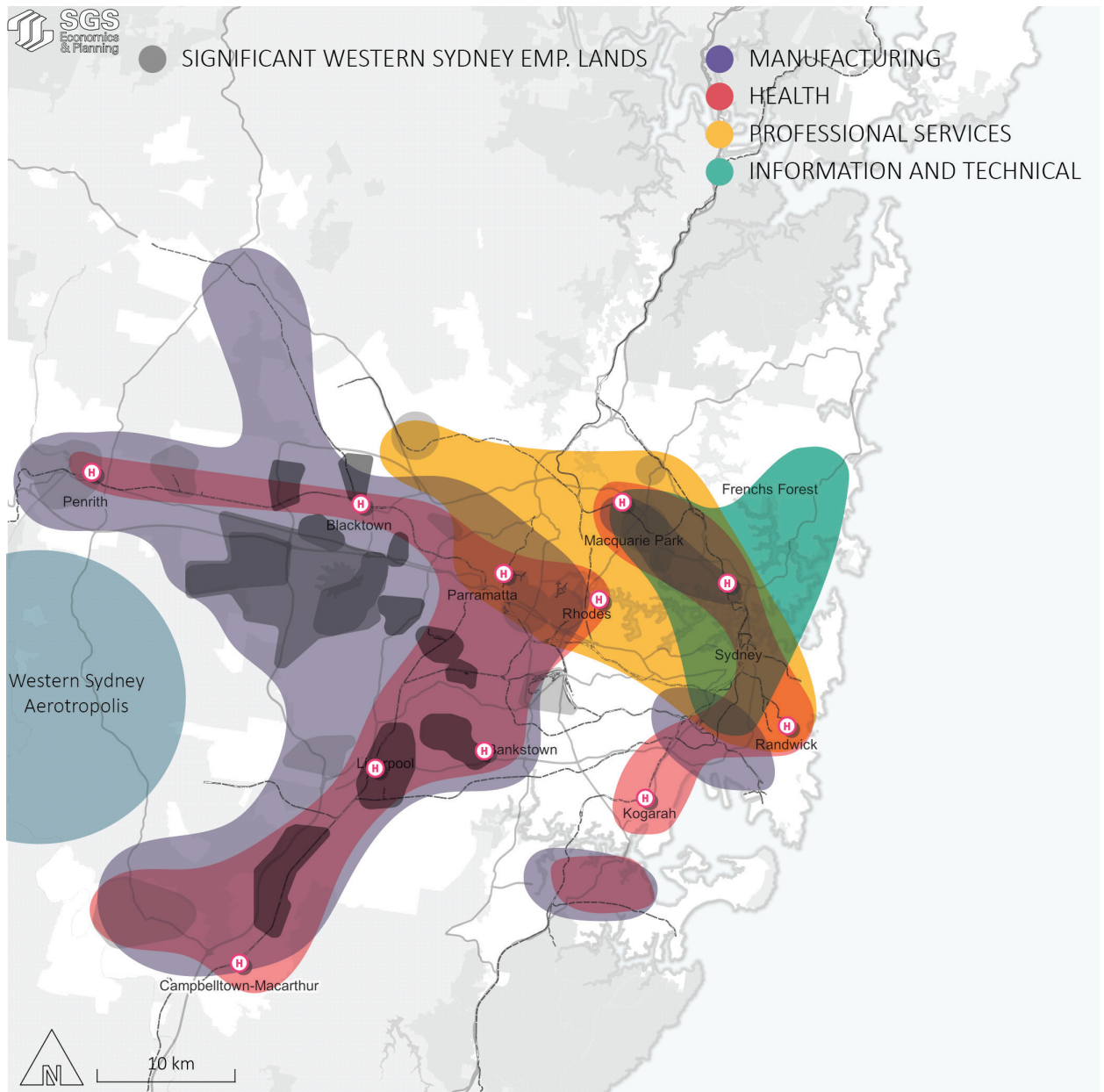


Figure 5. Major employment lands across Greater Sydney. Source: Census of Population and Housing 2021; SGS Economics and Planning 2023

With Parramatta and western Sydney having significantly more industrial land and employment than central Sydney, appended to knowledge-intensive activities underway at Westmead and within local universities and the deep and wide labour pool existing throughout the region, the stage is set for this to anchor a more high-value, tangible, and productive economy across Greater Sydney. Even if regeneration of this industrial space were to take place, it is critical that this be focused on the primary function of facilitating industrial activities – for instance, by allowing it to host industrial businesses that have been priced out of eastern Sydney – rather than giving over to recreational, residential or commercial land-uses. For example, previous place strategies have highlighted the planning and policy support necessary for

Camellia, with its endowments of well-located, well-connected industrial land, to become an innovation and emerging technologies precinct for Greater Parramatta. In doing so it could both replicate and house businesses that are being progressively priced out of Alexandria, which has latterly played this role for eastern Sydney.¹²

Jobs, people, space and, to a lesser extent, capital, must all be physically linked. This is true even as remote working and digital connectivity become more integrated into economies. These technologies augment, but do not replace, physical connectivity, which still underpins competitiveness, productivity, and knowledge transfer, as well as access to labour and product markets, in local economies. These are referred to collectively as ‘agglomeration’ benefits.¹³

Figure 5 shows effective job density, which is a measure of accessibility to jobs in each area, based on the immediate location of jobs nearby as well as how long it takes to get to other jobs further afield. As a result, it is an effective measure of the strength of agglomeration across Sydney. In showing a solid band of accessible employment from eastern Sydney CBD out to Parramatta CBD, it demonstrates the relative success that has already been achieved establishing a multi-centred economic structure across Greater Sydney.

Into the future, however, **effective job density in Parramatta could be expected to increase even further as major public transport projects such as the Sydney Metro and Parramatta light rail come online.** The former uses Parramatta as its major hub, establishing rapid connections through Parramatta between Western Sydney Airport in the south-west and eastern and northern Sydney closer to the coast. In its most ambitious iterations, this vision also includes Parramatta as the epicentre of fast rail lines connecting Sydney to Newcastle, Wollongong, Canberra and the far west of NSW.¹⁴ The latter, meanwhile, establishes a local transport grid, augmenting existing rapid bus services with light-rail connections through Parramatta to Carlingford in the north, Westmead on the western edge of the CBD and Sydney Olympic park in the south-east. This connects businesses and residents across the region to the economic, cultural, and infrastructural epicentre in Parramatta.

Combined, these transport developments signify ever-increasing effective job density in and around Parramatta, with more of Sydney’s jobs increasingly accessible to residents, and more of Sydney’s labour accessible to local employers. They also establish Parramatta CBD as a legitimate transport hub for Greater Sydney, potentially rivalling even Central Station in Sydney CBD. In bringing western Sydney’s infrastructural footprint in line with its enormous human capital potential, transport is the last piece of the puzzle in establishing the region as the engine room of the Greater Sydney economy.

12 SGS Economics and Planning for NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (2021) *Camellia-Rosehill Place Strategy – Economic Analysis and Consolidated draft Place Strategy & Workshop Scenario Review*, https://shared-drupal-s3fs.s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/master-test/fapub_pdf/Economic+Analysis+and+Implementation+Report.pdf

13 SGS Economics and Planning (n.d.) *Effective Job Density: comparing our regions and cities*, <https://sgsep.com.au/maps/thirdspace/australia-effective-job-density/>

14 O’Sullivan, M. and Rabe, T. (2022) ‘Radically faster’: Parramatta at centre of NSW’s high-speed rail future’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 May, <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/radically-faster-parramatta-at-centre-of-nsw-s-high-speed-rail-future-20220511-p5akev.html>

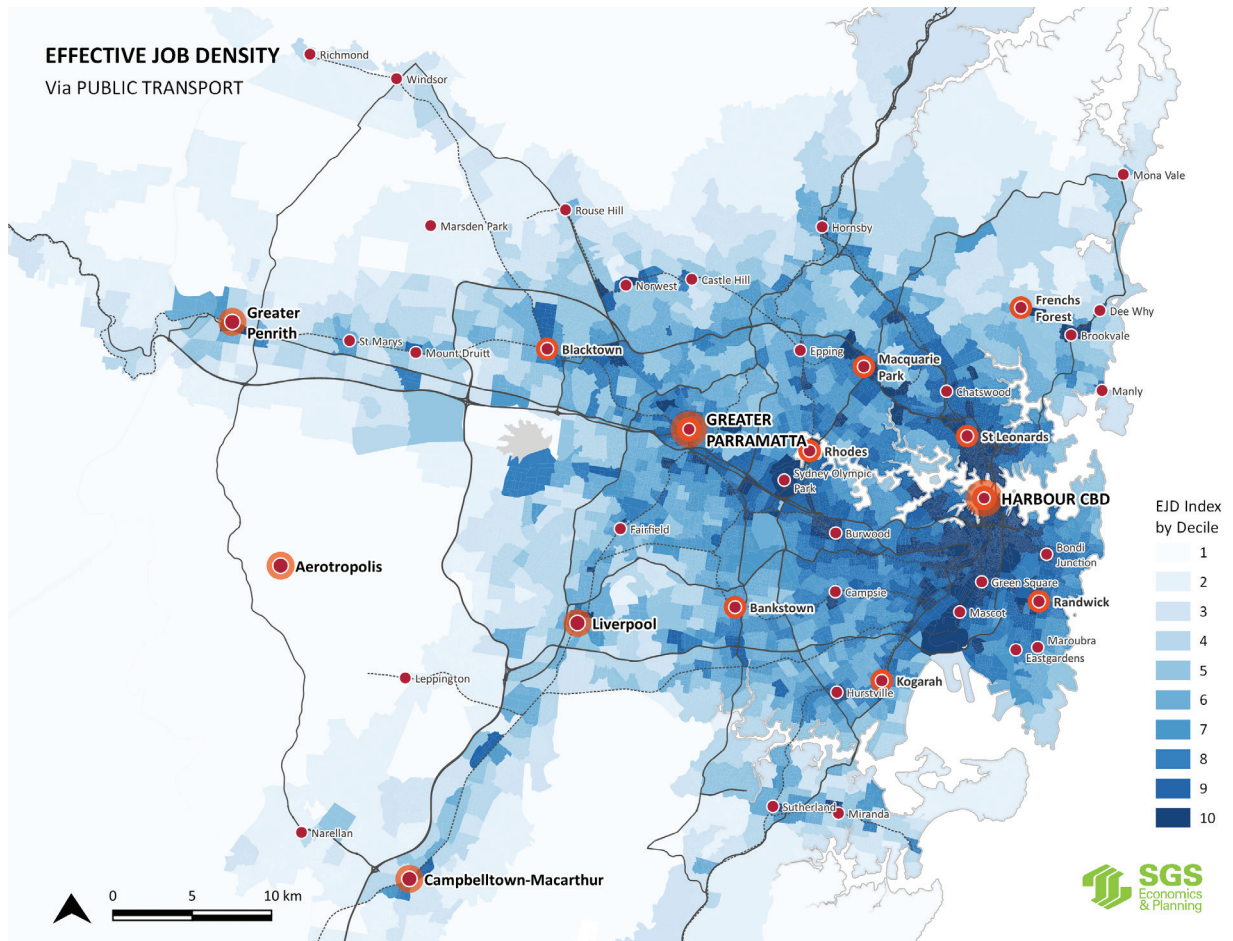


Figure 6. Effective job density via public transport across Greater Sydney. Source: SGS Economics and Planning 2023

In accounting for Parramatta’s economic potential, it is important not to shy away from its limitations, or the risks to this vision. Chief amongst these is climate change, with **western Sydney displaying the most intense concentrations of climate vulnerability of any region in Greater Sydney**. This is highlighted in Figure 7, which maps scores on the Heat Vulnerability Index developed by the NSW Government. Understanding of the economic risks of climate change is still developing, but it is clear that they will be substantial, with recent Reserve Bank of Australia analysis highlighting the severe risks to financial stability, household wealth (via house prices) and insurance markets of an inadequate climate change response.¹⁵ By virtue of its relatively greater exposure to climate impacts, Parramatta and western Sydney as a whole can be expected to bear the brunt of these impacts.

15 Kurian, S., Reid, G. and Sutton, M. (2023) *Climate Change and Financial Risk*, RBA Bulletin – June 2023, <https://www.rba.gov.au/publications/bulletin/2023/jun/climate-change-and-financial-risk.html>

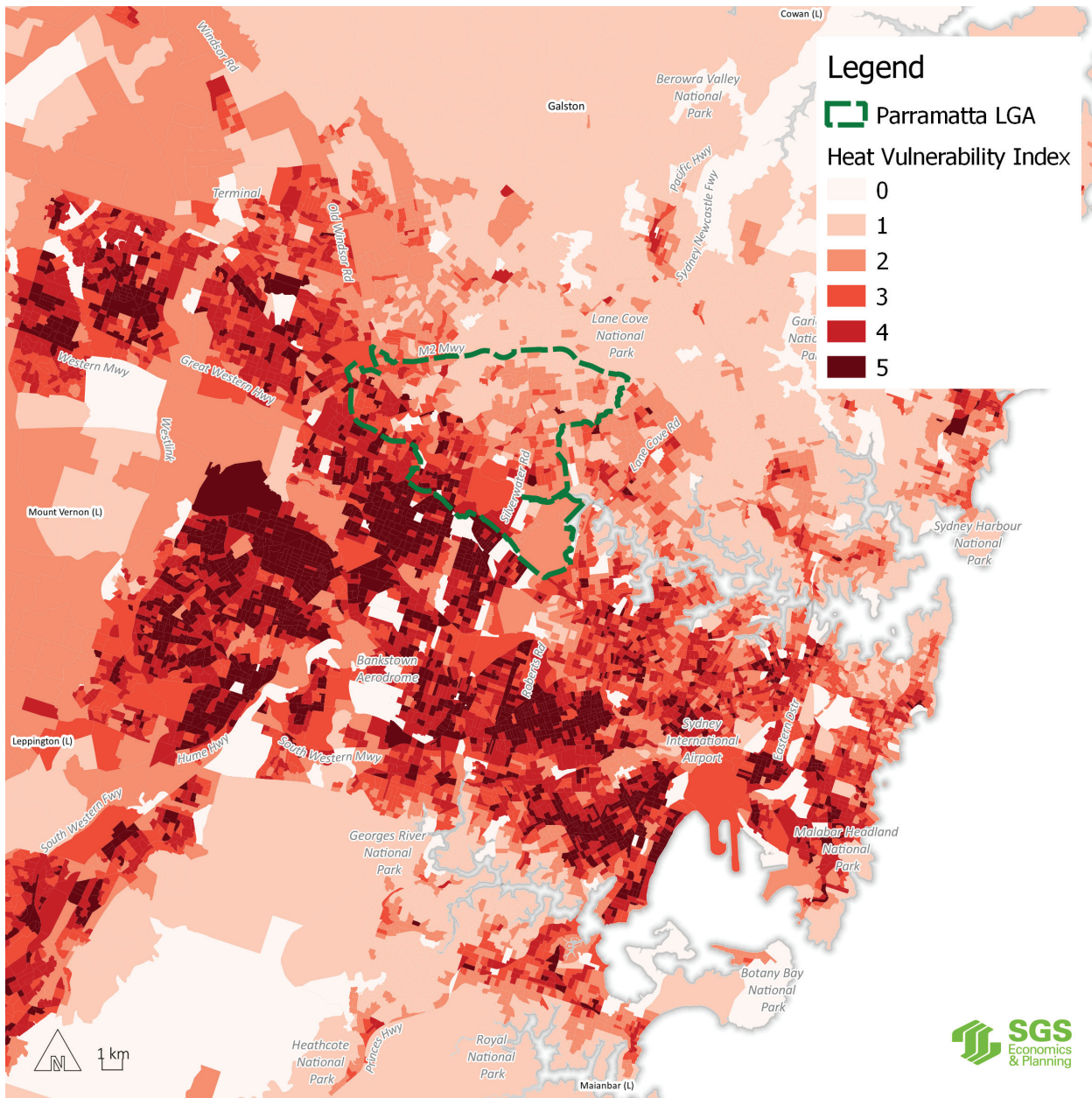


Figure 7. Heat Vulnerability Index scores across Greater Sydney. Source: NSW Department of Planning and Environment 2019; SGS Economics and Planning 2023



Policy moves: five propositions

The following are 'five big moves' that can support the vision of Parramatta as a global human capital hub. These moves are illustrative, not definitive, and deliberately ambitious, to provoke further thinking and open up future pathways for more detailed research.

1. The availability of affordable spaces, open to the community for creative and entrepreneurial expression

It is no secret that inner Sydney is a crushingly expensive place to live, work, create and spend time. As Parramatta develops into Sydney's human capital heart, and the engine room of the globalised Greater Sydney economy, it is critical that this not be accompanied by the kinds of price rises for residential, commercial, and industrial land that have contributed to central and eastern Sydney becoming increasingly bland. This was a key concern uncovered during consultations for the *Parramatta 2035* report; the community emphatically **do not want** global Parramatta to become a boring, empty, corporatised place. Rather, they expect it to showcase the diversity and rich cultural and artistic assets of which they are rightly proud. There is an additional concern that a sudden influx of investment could open opportunities for rent-seeking, as the asset-rich expand their wealth and holdings at the expense of equity and access in the local economy.

Artistic and cultural expression should be done from the bottom-up, not top-down. This means that, while large, strategic initiatives such as the relocation of the Powerhouse Museum to Parramatta can boost the region's cultural offering, most activity should be the result of the community expressing itself in an autonomous, dynamic way. The best way to secure this kind of bottom-up expression is to ensure a ready supply of diverse and affordable space, with an emphasis on creative, educational, and entrepreneurial uses. Any actions that expand this space, or insulate existing assets from aggressive, in-bound investment chasing elevated returns, must be pursued.

2. Complete multi-modal transport networks to, from and within Parramatta, connecting it with Greater Sydney, NSW, eastern Australia and the world

As expressed in the previous chapter, Parramatta is the epicentre of an expansive future transport network, envisioned to be made up of light rail, heavy rail, fast rail, rapid buses and two airports moving people into, out of and across Greater Sydney. Its transport connections have already underpinned a high level of effective job density in Parramatta, yet the maximisation of labour and product market access, business-to-business connection and broader recreational visitation depends on a large pipeline of future transport investments. Also dependent on these investments – particularly those connecting Parramatta CBD to suburbs and communities on its fringes – is the capacity of Parramatta to act as an 'anchor' for the entire western Sydney region.

Some of these investments, such as long-range fast rail, have been mired in political uncertainty for decades. Others – particularly the Westmead-Airport and Bankstown-Liverpool Metro connections – have

been more recently endangered due to perceived misadministration, cost overruns and budget constraints. It is critical, nonetheless, that these investments be followed through. With transport connections into eastern Sydney becoming increasingly congested, and the demographic and economic centre of gravity moving away from the coast, toward Parramatta and western Sydney, a failure to overcome the reliance on Central Station as the critical hub of Sydney's old radial transport system is a recipe for inefficiency, frustration and the inhibition of creative energy.

3. An international education and training hub

Education drives human capital development. And while Parramatta already has enviable human capital reserves, there are persistent inequalities in attainment compared to eastern Sydney, as well as within the region itself, along ethnic, economic and gender lines. Education in western Sydney must be as widely available and accessible as possible. While western Sydney's universities are gaining prominence, there remains a need for multiple pathways of continuous learning and development, and more educational campuses in the region. This can ensure that locals can find the educational offerings they require, with due prominence given to vocational and non-university education and training, and have access to upskilling and additional education throughout their lives.

International students are particularly important. Education and training is now amongst the largest industries in Australia by output, driven in large part by growth in the number of international students coming to Australia to study.¹ With its diverse ethnic profile and relatively high affordability compared to eastern Sydney, Parramatta is the natural home for these students. Yet SGS analysis has found that Parramatta is much more prominent as a place for international students to study – drawing on its increasingly highly-rated universities in particular – than as a place to live. Especially given many international students return to their home countries after graduating from Australian universities, promoting Parramatta as a safe, welcoming, exciting place to live, as well as study, should be a key component of its future identity and reputation as a global city.

4. World leader in climate resilience

As one of the hottest, driest countries on earth, Australia is highly vulnerable to the negative effects of climate change. This vulnerability is unevenly distributed across Sydney. While Parramatta LGA itself is relatively less vulnerable than parts of western Sydney further south, the region as a whole is much more exposed to negative climate impacts than eastern and northern Sydney. This is exhibited in Figure 7 in the previous chapter, which maps the NSW Government Heat Vulnerability Index (HVI) across Greater Sydney.

The HVI includes both physical – such as tree cover, proximity to water and surface types – and social – such as population age, ethnic composition, and occupation – determinants of heat vulnerability. As a result, it highlights the multi-faceted nature of any effective response to climate change risk. While important, those responses that focus solely on the physical environment, such as expanding tree canopy, will be insufficient to address the more complex drivers of vulnerability that are rooted in social, economic,

¹ Reserve Bank of Australia (2023) *Composition of the Australian Economy – Snapshot*, <https://www.rba.gov.au/education/resources/snapshots/economy-composition-snapshot/>

and demographic characteristics. As a result, they could potentially contribute to uneven patterns of climate change risk.

This said, however, Figure 7 highlights the importance of Parramatta's natural environment and assets as a bulwark against intensified climate change impacts. It is clear to see that climate vulnerability reduces with proximity to watercourses, such as the Parramatta River, and vegetation, such as Lane Cover National Park on the northern edge of Parramatta LGA. The maximisation and protection of green and blue space, connections between them and expanded access to their benefits will be critical as climate change escalates into the future.

5. Parramatta as a laboratory of wellness and cohesion

This move is about global Parramatta as a place that uniquely 'works' for its residents, workers, and visitors. Parramatta in 2050 can only be considered a success if it takes a strong approach to securing the benefits of being a global city, and a defensive approach to warding off any negatives. It should be characterised by safe, happy, diverse, and healthy communities, employment that pays fair wages and contributes to the life of the street and wider region, and facilities and spaces that are inclusive of difference, protective of creativity and supportive of those less fortunate. Anchored by institutions such as Westmead Health and Innovation District, Parramatta Council, state and federal government agencies and other institutions involved in governance, work, welfare, education, environment, health and social protection, this move sees Parramatta as a 'laboratory' for well-being. In being a place where people can thrive, where their needs are served in a way that is distinct from other world cities, and other areas of Greater Sydney, this envisions Parramatta as a haven for its people and an exemplar for the world, in much the way that countries such as Finland, Denmark, and Bhutan serve as examples for other nations.² Parramatta, in this vision, is simply the place to be.

Conclusion

These propositions outline a distinct vision for Parramatta in 2050; as the human capital heart of a global Greater Sydney. To a significant extent, this vision works with the current demographic, educational, economic, and infrastructural fabric of the region. It also reflects the pressure of gravity, particularly affordability and spatial constraints in eastern and central Sydney.

With a crippling lack of affordable residential, commercial, and industrial space, as well as heavily congested transport links, nearer to the coast, population, labour and financial capital flows all have no choice but to intensify toward Parramatta over time. This said, however, there is room for supportive policy and strategic aims to ensure the development of Parramatta reflects and augments the features that make it desirable, rather than succumbing to 'splintering urbanism.'

² In this spirit the Australia Institute has established a 'Nordic Studies Institute' aimed at drawing lessons for Australia from the "social, environmental and economic success of the Nordic nations" (The Australia Institute (2023) *Nordic Policy Centre: About*, <https://www.nordicpolicycentre.org.au/about>)

Briefing notes

Considerations

Parramatta in 2050 will be larger, more populous and better-connected than it is now.

Parramatta is the natural heart of a future, polycentric, global Greater Sydney. This goes beyond its geographical location in the centre of the region. Rather, it is due to its concentration of a number of attributes that characterise truly great cities. Amongst these a few are particularly relevant; especially human capital, economic production, productivity and diversity, transport, landscapes and culture.

The region is home to the last major concentrations of manufacturing employment in Greater Sydney.

Parramatta and Western Sydney have significantly more industrial land and employment than Central Sydney.

The region displays the greatest concentrations of people speaking a language other than English. This highlights western Sydney as the traditional destination for new migrants, particularly more recent arrivals from south-east Asia, Africa, and the Middle East.

Parramatta is an anchor of Sydney's status as one of the few genuinely 'multi-centred' cities around the world. This is the case despite some persistent inequalities in western, compared to eastern Sydney and the dominant harbour CBD. However, a variety of economic, demographic, social and political forces are placing even greater emphasis on Parramatta, suggesting that its role in a future global Sydney will only increase.

The transformation of Greater Sydney – particularly its eastern component – into a global city from the late 20th century has accompanied some undesirable outcomes, particularly around affordability, liveability, access to services and employment and the development of an at-times antagonistic relationship between the eastern and western parts of Sydney. There is a need to avoid this same fate by safeguarding and intensifying its authenticity, accessibility, affordability, diversity and activation.

The transformation of Parramatta into a global city that excludes, alienates or displaces the community that is already there will constitute a failure.

A focus on Parramatta should not negate or sterilise the contributions of the diverse communities that exist within the region.

A global Parramatta that neglects to celebrate and implement Indigenous perspectives will be in denial of its own history, culture, and Country.

In absolute terms western Sydney's larger population means that it has a larger reservoir of skilled workers to draw on than these other regions.

In terms of economic output, the number of people with skills is more important than the distribution. Areas with higher numbers of skilled workers will be, all things equal, more productive, and more attractive to inbound investment, than those with fewer skilled workers

Cultural diversity could be expected to contribute to a systematically more productive economy in the Parramatta region.

Recommendations

Employment in manufacturing, health and professional services all intersects at Parramatta,

Transport developments signify ever-increasing effective job density in and around Parramatta, with more of Sydney's jobs increasingly accessible to residents, and more of Sydney's labour accessible to local employers.

Physical connectivity, which still underpins competitiveness, productivity, and knowledge transfer, as well as access to labour and product markets, in local economies.

Western Sydney displaying the most intense concentrations of climate vulnerability of any region in Greater Sydney.

The vibrancy, diversity and talents of its community is one of Parramatta's major strengths. The potential for the development of a global city to undercut these attributes has become known as 'splintering urbanism'; when the impacts of globalisation are unevenly distributed and experienced across city regions and urban population, generating altogether negative and unequal social, economic, political and cultural outcomes.

Education drives human capital development. And while Parramatta already has enviable human capital reserves, there are persistent inequalities in attainment compared to eastern Sydney, as well as within the region itself, along ethnic, economic and gender lines.

Maintain and expand Parramatta's diversity, which is such as feature of its economic and normative appeal, as the region becomes a global city.

Ensure any regeneration of the industrial lands in Parramatta facilitate industrial activities over recreational, residential or commercial land-uses

Artistic and cultural expression should be done from the bottom-up, not top-down.

ensure a ready supply of diverse and affordable space, with an emphasis on creative, educational, and entrepreneurial uses.

Insulate existing assets from aggressive, in-bound investment chasing elevated returns

Champion long-range fast rail and other major transport projects such as the Westmead-Airport and Bankstown-Liverpool Metro connections

Encourage multiple pathways of continuous learning and develop

About Cities Institute

We unite world class research with a real world approach, engaging with academia, industry, government and community groups to shape policy and pioneer meaningful change in our cities. We lead with deep experience in design methods, sustainable architecture and healthy urban and strategic planning.

Academic thinking grounds our practical initiatives in robust research. We connect those with insights with those that shape and deliver city outcomes, ensuring a practical application for policy, change and impact that ultimately benefits the communities around us.

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In the spirit of reconciliation, the UNSW Cities Institute acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and their connections to land, waters and community. This publication was prepared by the UNSW Cities Institute. February 2024.

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