

Chapter 3

Strategic context and need



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3. Strategic context and need

This chapter describes the strategic context to the project's development, including the key issues, demands and strategic planning directions driving the need for the project. A summary of the need for the project is provided.

3.1 Strategic context

3.1.1 Strategic planning directions

The strategic context for the project has been influenced by strategic planning for land use, transport and infrastructure at the State, metropolitan, district and local levels. The key strategies, policies and plans that were current, and informed and influenced the vision, objectives and development of the project from 2015 to early 2022, are shown in Figure 3.1. A description these strategies and plans, and their relationship to the project, is provided in Appendix B (Strategic planning review).



Figure 3.1 Strategic planning context – key strategies and policies

An overview of how the project developed in the context of these strategies, policies and plans, and how the strategic context has influenced the need for the project, is provided below. Further information on individual plans and strategies is provided in Appendix B.

Vision for growing Greater Sydney

The NSW Government set a new vision for growing Greater Sydney based on a metropolis of three cities, where most residents live within 30 minutes access by public transport to jobs, education, health facilities and other services. The three cities are the Central River City (centred around Parramatta), Western Parkland City and Eastern Harbour City (see Figure 3.2).

The Greater Sydney Region Plan, *A Metropolis of Three Cities* (Greater Sydney Commission, 2018a), is built on this vision – it uses the concept of the three cities as the foundation for Greater Sydney’s future land use and infrastructure development to deliver growth and its benefits more equally across Sydney. The vision for Greater Sydney aims to ensure that residents have quick and easy access to jobs and essential services, and that housing and infrastructure is appropriately planned and located.

A Metropolis of Three Cities aims to restructure economic activity and access to the developing and growing Central River City by aligning infrastructure to growth and improving amenity in the city. The population of the Central River City is projected to increase from 1.3 million people to 1.7 million people over the next 20 years. This will transform many parts of the city from a suburban to an urban environment with a resultant increase in the need for services and infrastructure (Greater Sydney Commission, 2018a).



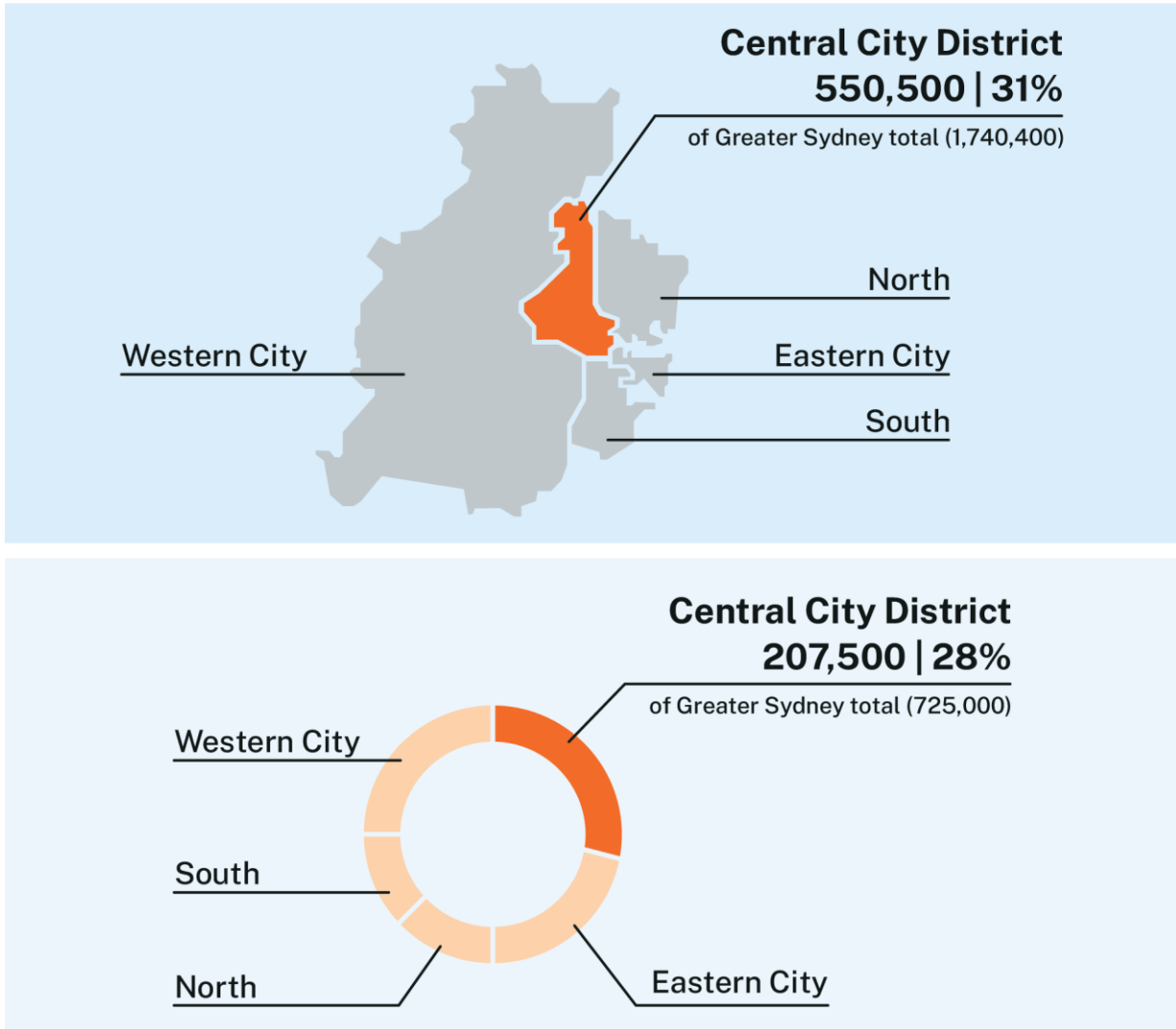
Source: Greater Sydney Region Plan *A Metropolis of Three Cities* (Greater Sydney Commission, 2018a)

Figure 3.2 Central River City in Greater Sydney

Planning for the Central City District

The Greater Sydney Commission’s five district plans are a guide to implementing *A Metropolis of Three Cities* at a district level. The *Central City District Plan* (Greater Sydney Commission, 2018b) encompasses the Central River City, including GPOP (described below). The plan notes that the Central City District will be the fastest growing district in Greater Sydney over the next 20 years, with an overall population growth of around 550,500 people and demand for an additional 207,500 dwellings by 2036 (see Figure 3.3).

The demand for additional dwellings will need to be provided through urban renewal, land release and infill development, targeted particularly in GPOP.



Source: *Central City District Plan* (Greater Sydney Commission, 2018b)

Figure 3.3 Central City District – population and housing growth

Infrastructure that is responsive to growth, integrated and connected

Building Momentum: State Infrastructure Strategy 2018-2038 (Infrastructure NSW, 2018) (the *State Infrastructure Strategy 2018-2038*) endorsed the concept of the three cities as the foundation for Greater Sydney’s future land use and infrastructure development. The *State Infrastructure Strategy 2018–2038* (and the new *State Infrastructure Strategy – Staying Ahead: State Infrastructure Strategy 2022-2042* (Infrastructure NSW, 2022a), released in May 2022) recognise the importance of the timely provision of infrastructure that is responsive to growth and development and is integrated with land use planning.

Future Transport 2056 was a suite of strategies and plans for transport, including the *Future Transport Strategy 2056* (Transport for NSW, 2018), developed in conjunction with *A Metropolis of Three Cities* and the *State Infrastructure Strategy*. Future Transport 2056 was current during development of the project. The vision for the future of transport in Greater Sydney, as defined by Future Transport 2056, is for road and transport links to form part of an integrated and connected network across Greater Sydney with each of the three cities described in *A Metropolis of Three Cities*. It encompasses providing convenient access, supporting attractive places, and providing 30-minute access for customers to their nearest metropolitan or strategic centre by public transport. Future Transport 2056 reinforces the importance of public transport that connects people, jobs and services, as well as supporting places and amenity.

The *Future Transport Strategy 2056* includes a vision for a three-tiered integrated network of transport corridors across the three cities to support the efficient movement of people and goods. These include city-serving services (such as light rail) within 10 kilometres of metropolitan centres providing high frequency access to metropolitan cities/centres with more frequent stopping patterns.

In September 2022 the NSW Government released the updated *Future Transport Strategy* (Transport for NSW, 2022a). The *Future Transport Strategy* reinforces the 30 minute city and a vision for an integrated connected transport network.

Greater Parramatta to the Olympic Peninsula (GPOP) – the heart of the Central River City and focus for growth

The vision for GPOP

GPOP was first identified as a priority growth area in the 2014 metropolitan strategy *A Plan for Growing Sydney* (NSW Government, 2014a) to provide the opportunity to build on existing infrastructure and target growth that can take advantage of and support the growth of Greater Parramatta.

GPOP is described as a 4,000 hectare area spanning 13 kilometres east–west from Sydney Olympic Park to Westmead, and seven kilometres north–south from Carlingford to Lidcombe and Granville, taking in (Greater Sydney Commission, 2016):

- the Parramatta CBD and Westmead health and education precinct
- next generation living from Camellia to Carlingford
- advanced technology and urban service sectors in Camellia, Rydalmere, Silverwater and Auburn
- the Sydney Olympic Park lifestyle precinct.

In 2016, the Greater Sydney Commission collaborated with key government agencies and other stakeholders to develop a vision for GPOP to become the geographic and demographic centre of Greater Sydney: ‘Greater Sydney’s true centre – the connected unifying heart’ (Greater Sydney Commission, 2016).

The role of GPOP is reinforced in *A Metropolis of Three Cities*.

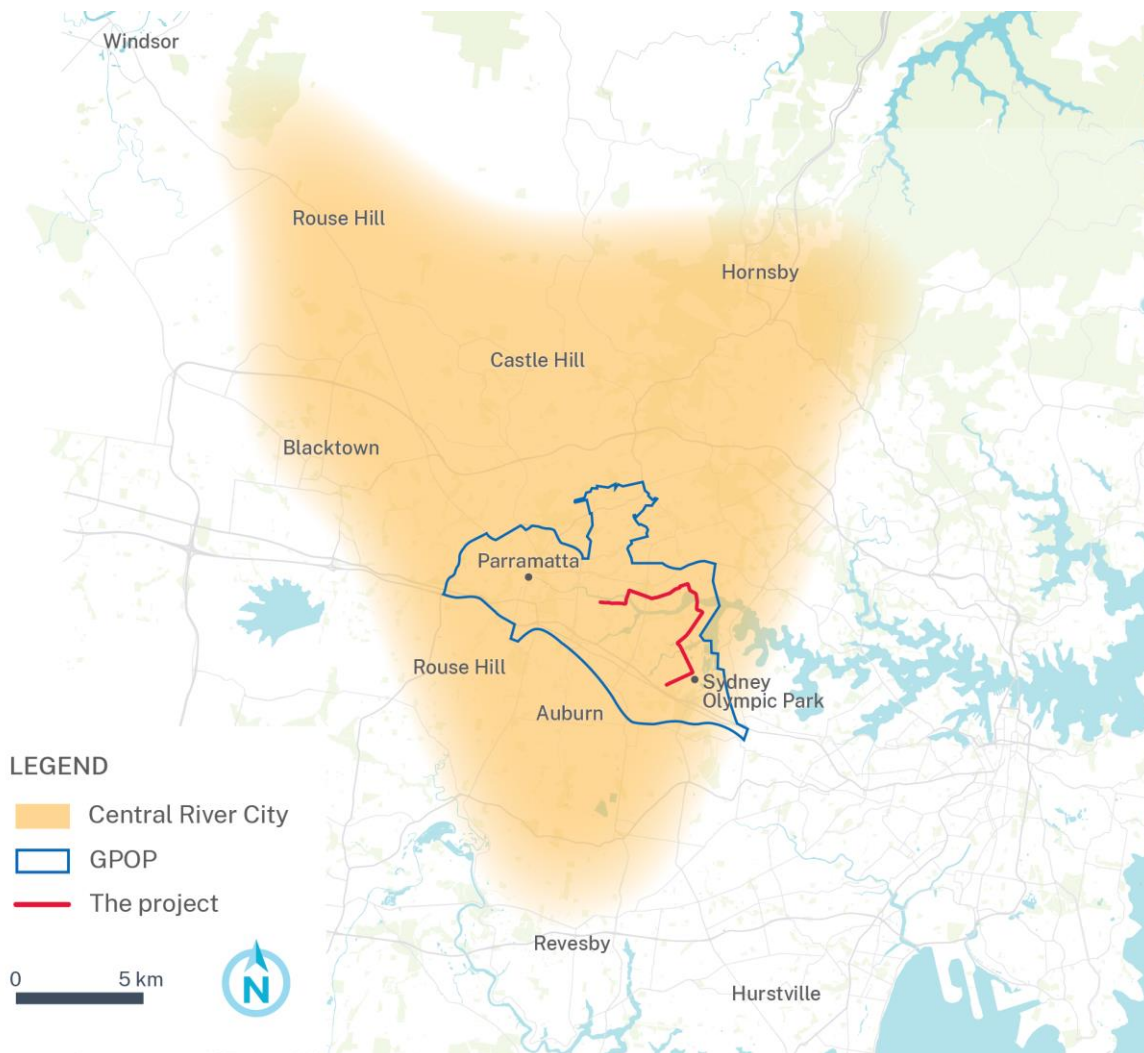
Future growth as the core of the Central River City

A Metropolis of Three Cities recognises the metropolitan centre of Greater Parramatta (including Parramatta CBD, North Parramatta and Westmead) as the core of the Central River City and notes the economic role of the broader GPOP area. GPOP, at the centre of the Central River City (see Figure 3.4), is one of the fastest growing areas in the city, with 24,000 dwellings delivered in the corridor in the 10 years to 2017-18.

The centrality of GPOP within Greater Sydney provides the opportunity for it to attract people from all parts of Sydney – to visit, work, live and play. This will support the NSW Government’s vision for the Central River City to become a 30-minute city,

A *Metropolis of Three Cities* and the *Central City District Plan* note that:

- GOP is integral to the three-cities vision of *A Metropolis of Three Cities* and future planning for the Central River City.
- GOP will be the focus for economic activity and infrastructure investment in the Central River City.



Source: *Greater Parramatta and Olympic Peninsula* (Greater Sydney Commission, 2016c)

Figure 3.4 Location of GOP relative to the Central River City

The City of Parramatta's *City Plan 2036* (City of Parramatta, 2020a), *Local Housing Strategy* (City of Parramatta, 2020b) and *Employment Lands Strategy – Review and Update* (City of Parramatta, 2020c) contain priorities and actions to help achieve the vision for Greater Parramatta as the core of the Central River City. A significant proportion of the growth and development planned for by these strategies would occur within GOP.

3.1.2 The challenges to achieving the future vision for the Central River City and GOP

The potential for growth within GOP is constrained by a range of issues, which in turn affect the opportunities for planned development. Planned growth and urban renewal in GOP will not be achieved by just maintaining the current transport network and planning controls.

The key issues and challenges to achieving the vision for GOP, and the broader strategic directions for the Central River City, are summarised below.

Connectivity and accessibility

GPOP is currently undergoing a major transformation, with significant investment in urban renewal, employment, education and cultural infrastructure. However, the vision for this important growth corridor is currently being delivered without an effective city-serving transport network in the eastern areas of the corridor, affecting connectivity between the planned growth precincts, and contributing to worsening congestion.

Growth precincts within GPOP are geographically and functionally separated by natural and human-made barriers such as the Parramatta River, the M4 Motorway, rail lines and other major arterial roads, including Parramatta Road, James Ruse Drive and Silverwater Road.

The issues with connectivity and accessibility constrain the ability of new communities located in eastern areas of the Central River City and GPOP (including Melrose Park, Wentworth Point and Sydney Olympic Park) to readily access the Parramatta CBD and services and employment areas to the north and west. As shown in Figure 3.5, local north-south and east-west connections are mainly limited to arterial roads and are constrained by limited river crossings. This means that local journeys between precincts are reliant on arterial roads that also serve other purposes.

The lack of alternative routes in and out of Wentworth Point means that traffic between this and other GPOP precincts converges with cross-city traffic on arterial roads. This also contributes to long journey times in the area.

In addition, there are no easily accessible active transport connections across the Parramatta River and between key centres and destinations within GPOP, with several gaps in the links that do exist.

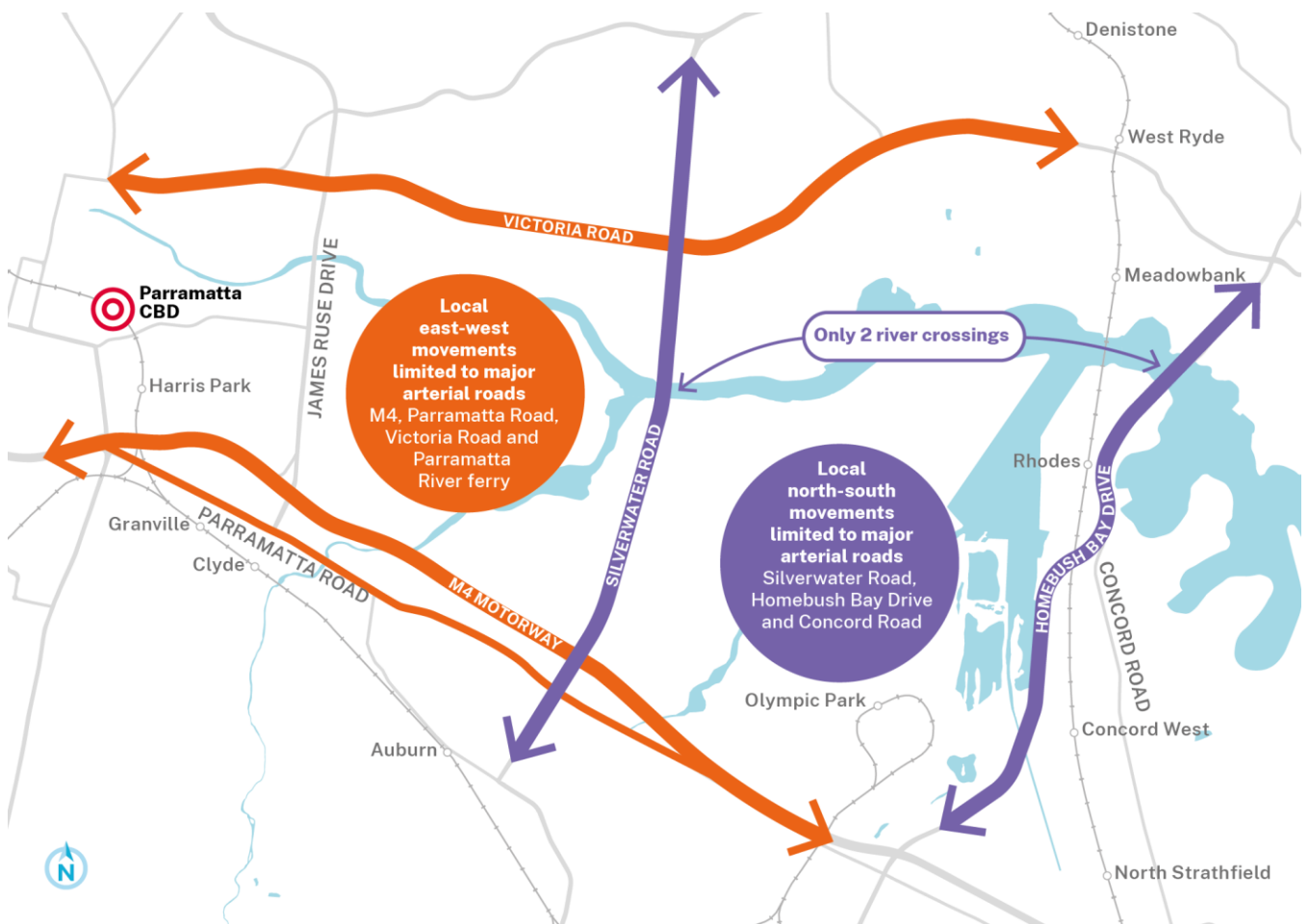


Figure 3.5 Existing north-south and east-west connections

Transport choice and congestion

The existing population places a significant demand on the transport network, including road, rail and bus infrastructure. Residents have limited transport mode choice, with public transport largely limited to buses, Sydney Trains stations at Parramatta, and Sydney Olympic Park (and further to the east in Rhodes), and Parramatta River F3 ferry wharves at Parramatta, Rydalmere and Wentworth Point. For residents of Sydney Olympic Park and Wentworth Point, current public transport is focused on services to the Sydney CBD, with no direct bus services connecting Parramatta and Wentworth Point, and no direct bus services between precincts north of the Parramatta River and Sydney Olympic Park. Ferry services between Wentworth Point and Parramatta are limited to an hourly service. In addition, ferry services between Rydalmere and Parramatta are replaced by a bus service during low tides.

Existing public transport networks are heavily constrained by the barriers noted above, and the suburbs without rail access experience poor choice of transport modes. The limited public transport accessibility, and the availability of relatively cheap parking, results in high levels of car use in GPOP.

GPOP faces growing challenges with respect to transport journey times and reliability for residents, workers and visitors. Car dependency is high, with private car transport comprising the majority of journey to work trips. In 2016, 20 per cent of roads within GPOP were already experiencing high levels of congestion in peak travel times (SGS, 2017). Forecast population growth will generate significant additional traffic volumes, further increasing congestion. By 2026, it is forecast that nearly 30 per cent of roads in GPOP will be congested, increasing to nearly 40 per cent by 2041.

As a precinct on the edge of a peninsula, Wentworth Point has limited road entry and exit points, which leads to a funnelling of demand and associated congestion on the limited roads that connect it to the wider region. The rapid residential development and densification in recent years has increased congestion, particularly along Hill Road. With accelerating development in Melrose Park, it is likely that these issues will be exacerbated.

City-shaping growth and development

The issues with transport accessibility and congestion noted above will constrain growth, hamper productivity improvements and lead to sub-optimal urban renewal growth and development outcomes.

There is a growing urgency to address the challenges and opportunities in GPOP. As noted in section 3.1.1, the Central River City and GPOP are undergoing rapid urban renewal and attracting significant investment. Between January 2020 and September 2021, the NSW Government approved 19 State significant projects in the Parramatta LGA, which are estimated to generate more than 5,500 jobs. Between 2008 and 2018, 24,000 dwellings were delivered within GPOP, with over half delivered between 2015 and 2018. By 2041 many of the nominated growth areas within GPOP are anticipated to be densely populated, driving increased demand for public transport services. For example, Wentworth Point – without a direct rail station – is forecast to have a population density exceeding that of Chatswood, which is currently served by both Sydney Metro and Sydney Trains services.

A number of urban renewal developments are already occurring, increasing population growth over the next 10 years. New or improved destinations within GPOP that will benefit from better transport will be operational within five years. This city-shaping growth demonstrates the growing urgency of addressing the transport connectivity challenges in the corridor.

Further adding to the need to address these challenges is the planned delivery of Sydney Metro West (see section 3.1.3). Sydney Metro West will connect major centres in GPOP with the Sydney CBD by providing fast and frequent cross-city services. Frequent and reliable access to Sydney Metro West stations, particularly from the areas north of Sydney Olympic Park (Wentworth Point and communities on the northern side of the Parramatta River) and the Carter Street precinct, will be critical to unlock the benefits of Sydney Metro West for GPOP residents, and will support access to housing, jobs, and sporting and cultural attractions.

The growth occurring in GPOP, and the delivery of Sydney Metro West, creates a growing urgency for better city-serving transport in this area – a key priority of Future Transport 2056. Without a public transport system that connects social infrastructure and serves the community within GPOP, the 30-minute access vision of *A Metropolis of Three Cities*, the *State Infrastructure Strategy*, and Future Transport 2056 will not be fully realised.

Amenity

Poor public transport connectivity in the GPOP precincts and traffic growth also affect the liveability and amenity of communities, as a result of congestion, impacts on streetscapes, noise and air pollution. This in turn affects the opportunities for and use of active transport, and the associated connectivity and health benefits.

3.1.3 Related and complementary projects

Parramatta Light Rail Stage 1

Parramatta Light Rail Stage 1 will improve accessibility and connectivity for communities located in the western and northern areas of GPOP, with services between Westmead and Carlingford via the Parramatta CBD and Camellia.

The route will link Parramatta's CBD and Parramatta Station to the Westmead Health Precinct, Cumberland Hospital Precinct, CommBank Stadium, the proposed Camellia town centre and entertainment precinct next to Rosehill Gardens Racecourse, the new Powerhouse Parramatta, the private and social housing redevelopment at Telopea, and three Western Sydney University campuses.

Parramatta Light Rail Stage 1 was approved by the NSW Minister for Planning in May 2018. Major construction is underway, with the track installation complete and light rail stop construction in progress. Stage 1 is expected to start operating in 2024. Further information is available at: [Parramatta Light Rail](#).

Sydney Metro West

Sydney Metro West is a new 24 kilometre metro line between Westmead and the Sydney CBD, with stations at Westmead, Parramatta, Sydney Olympic Park, North Strathfield, Burwood North, Five Dock, The Bays, Pyrmont and Hunter Street in the Sydney CBD.

Sydney Metro West will link communities not previously serviced by rail as well as supporting growth in areas between the Central River City and Eastern City. Sydney Metro will complement the Sydney Trains T1 Western Line to service the growing needs of Western Sydney. This will effectively double the rail capacity of the area between the two cities.

In March 2021, the project received its first major planning approval for the project concept between Westmead and the Sydney CBD and major construction work between Westmead and The Bays. Sydney Metro is now seeking approval for further major civil construction work, including station excavation and tunnelling, between The Bays and Sydney CBD. The EIS for major civil construction between The Bays and Sydney CBD was on public exhibition between November and December 2021. The EIS for tunnel fit-out, construction of stations, ancillary facilities and station precincts, and operation of Sydney Metro West was on public exhibition between March and May 2022.

Further information is available at: [Sydney Metro West](#).

WestConnex

When complete in 2023, WestConnex will provide motorists with a continuous, 33 kilometre-long traffic light free motorway network, supporting efficient and reliable connectivity for freight and people across the metropolitan area, including the Central River City.

The New M4 Tunnels opened to traffic in July 2019. WestConnex M4 (the New M4 Tunnels and the Widened M4) includes 5.5 kilometre-long tunnels and around 7.5 kilometres of surface roads. The WestConnex M4 links the M4 at Parramatta to the west, and Wattle Street and Parramatta Road at Haberfield to the east. The WestConnex M4 will also connect to the M4-M5 Link Tunnels and Rozelle Interchange in 2023.

Further information is available at: [WestConnex](#).

3.2 Project need summary

3.2.1 How the project addresses the identified needs

The project is needed to respond to the requirements listed in section 3.1.1 and address the challenges identified in section 3.1.2. The project has been developed in the context of the strategic plans and strategies described in section 3.1.1 and Appendix B (Strategic planning review) and complements other projects (outlined in section 3.1.3) being carried out to respond to the identified issues and demands.

A range of infrastructure is needed to unlock the development potential of GPOP and support population and jobs growth. Public transport infrastructure will need to be delivered to support growth and ensure people can move easily, and access jobs, education, recreation, and services. Additional active transport infrastructure also assists in meeting local access needs, as well as providing health and recreation benefits.

A Metropolis of Three Cities and *Future Transport 2056* recognise the importance of public transport to achieving the three cities vision for greater Sydney. The strategies note that it will be critically important to integrate the mass transit network with the economic corridors (including GPOP), centres, transit-oriented development, urban renewal, and health and education precincts.

To fully realise the GPOP vision, a catalyst is needed. The Parramatta Light Rail network, including the project, is considered central to achieving the GPOP vision. It would help meet the challenges described in section 3.1.2 by providing a connected spine through GPOP enabling more connected and liveable communities.

This vision has been reinforced by the *Future Transport Strategy* (Transport for NSW, 2022a), which recognises the project as part of the future passenger rail network (light rail) in the Central River City, connecting the Parramatta CBD to Sydney Olympic Park.

Without significant infrastructure investment, existing transport constraints and challenges will worsen. The project has been proposed to put in place the necessary infrastructure to address these challenges and keep Sydney moving and growing.

City shaping needs – responding to growth

The project is central to realising the NSW Government’s vision for GPOP as the vibrant, sustainable, and healthy connected heart of Greater Sydney. The realisation of the GPOP vision is critical to rebalancing access to jobs and housing to Western Sydney.

The project would form part of an integrated light rail network connecting the areas served by Parramatta Light Rail Stage 1 with the growing precincts to the east of Parramatta, including Camellia, Rydalmere, Ermington, Melrose Park, Wentworth Point, Sydney Olympic Park and Carter Street. It would provide frequent and reliable services to jobs, education, and services.

The project would enable the vision for GPOP as a connected and liveable city to be realised, building on the benefits of Parramatta Light Rail Stage 1 and Sydney Metro West, and the planning and investments in places and precincts across GPOP.

Light rail would provide frequent and reliable city-serving transport that is necessary for such a densely populated corridor, connecting people to jobs, services, education and cultural precincts. The capacity of the project would be about 300 customers per vehicle travelling on a dedicated corridor with reliable travel times – the equivalent of about six buses, but with improved reliability and place-making outcomes.

The Greater Sydney Commission identified that there has traditionally been a lack of integration between land use and infrastructure planning to meet community needs as an area experiences significant growth. To respond to this, a new collaborative land use and infrastructure planning model was developed to focus on overall place outcomes for GPOP. This took the form of the *Place-based Infrastructure Compact* (Greater Sydney Commission, 2019), which committed to aligning growth in the key GPOP precincts (including Sydney Olympic Park, Melrose Park and Ermington) with Parramatta Light Rail Stage 2.

By aligning with the NSW Government's vision for GPOP, the project supports *A Metropolis of Three Cities*, the *State Infrastructure Strategy*, *Future Transport 2056* (and the current *Future Transport Strategy*), *Central City District Plan*, the City of Parramatta's *City Plan 2036* and the *Place-based Infrastructure Compact* (see Appendix B), all of which emphasise the importance of the 30-minute city for GPOP and the significance of transport investment in the corridor.

Connectivity and accessibility needs

Strategic planning for the Central River City and GPOP makes reference to delivery of the Parramatta Light Rail network to tie the GPOP corridor together and provide improved connectivity to and from Greater Parramatta. The project would provide a catalyst for urban renewal along its length by providing connections to areas that will be transformed through significant NSW Government and private investment. The project would improve connectivity across GPOP by providing:

- two additional public and active transport river crossings to connect north and south of Parramatta River
- frequent and reliable city-serving light rail services to the Central River City
- new active transport links and connections to existing routes
- integration with other transport facilities and modes, including Parramatta Light Rail Stage 1, Sydney Metro West, train, ferry and bus routes.

By improving cross-river connectivity, providing frequent and reliable public transport in the eastern areas of GPOP, and providing additional active transport links, the project provides an opportunity to address growing connectivity needs.

The proposed river crossing between Melrose Park and Wentworth Point would provide a direct public and active transport (walking and cycling) connection between the precincts north of the river and Sydney Olympic Park, enabling a substantial decrease in journey time from Melrose Park to Sydney Olympic Park as well as from Melrose Park to the retail and local services hub of Rhodes (via Bennelong Bridge). This crossing would be designed to support shared running between light rail and bus services to future proof the transport corridor for potential bus routes as well as light rail operations.

The river crossing between Camellia and Rydalmere would also provide a more direct connection between the residential precincts north of the river and jobs in Camellia, Parramatta and the Westmead area. This connection would be supported by the provision of an active transport link that would facilitate access for pedestrians and cyclists north and south of the river.

Across the study area more broadly, the project would connect communities, enabling people to access jobs, services, special events and education more easily, helping to attract business and investment, and improve liveability.

Transport choice needs

The project would improve transport choice for people living and working within suburbs along its route. The project would provide an attractive public transport option to serve future residents and jobs in GPOP. Stops would be located close to where people work and live, providing quick and direct access to public transport.

The project would improve public transport accessibility, attracting people away from the use of cars and reduce congestion. The proposed active transport links would also improve active transport accessibility and connectivity. The project would complement the existing transport network, and other proposed network and active transport improvements, to support growth and respond to the growing travel demands within and beyond GPOP.

As a new GPOP spine, the project would also provide communities with multi-modal infrastructure, supporting access to not just light rail but also bus services and active transport facilities. Buses would be able to use the Melrose Park to Wentworth Point bridge to provide additional services to Sydney Olympic Park to connect to communities north of the bridge.

The project also provides an opportunity for growing and new communities to have a higher use of public transport, walking and cycling, by providing better active transport facilities and an efficient, frequent and reliable alternative to private vehicle use.

By attracting more customers to use active and public transport, the project presents an opportunity for rapidly growing communities in GPOP to adopt more sustainable mobility patterns.

Placemaking

The Parramatta Light Rail network, including the project, presents an opportunity to create more transit-orientated and better designed communities that are less car dependent and more attractive to live, work and play.

The project support urban renewal and placemaking, particularly in Camellia, and areas north of the river such as Rydalmere, Ermington and Melrose Park. Sustainable transport would be promoted with the provision of 8.5 kilometres of new active transport links that would connect stops and provide links to existing cycle routes (such as the Parramatta Valley Cycleway/River Walk) and key destinations.

The project provides the opportunity for more vibrant communities and businesses by:

- supporting additional housing growth
- supporting more affordable, attractive, healthy and sustainable communities
- supporting the development of identified urban renewal areas and improving connectivity and access to and from these areas
- providing a catalyst for business investment, jobs, and the expansion of the night-time economy
- facilitating upgrades and improvements to the public realm, existing parks, and through the creation of new active transport connections.

The project would help create more attractive communities by delivering high quality streetscapes and urban design. It would also deliver new active transport links that would facilitate pedestrian and cyclist access and connections to light rail stops, transport interchanges and main destinations, and provide missing links on existing active transport routes (including across the Parramatta River on the proposed new bridges). This would lead to improved amenity and make the area a more attractive place to live.

The delivery of light rail to existing and planned future communities provides a unique opportunity to enhance their liveability. When accompanied with comprehensive walking and cycling connections, a truly multimodal public and active transport corridor becomes a city-shaping and place-making element within the built environment.