

MID-TERM REPORT CARD

The NSW Government's
performance in Western Sydney

March 2021



**CENTRE FOR
WESTERN SYDNEY**

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23 March 2021



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

With respect for Aboriginal cultural protocol and out of recognition that its campuses occupy their traditional lands, Western Sydney University acknowledges the Darug, Eora, Dharawal (also referred to as Tharawal) and Wiradjuri peoples and thanks them for their support of its work in their lands (Greater Western Sydney and beyond).

THANK YOU

Thank you to all the Western Sydney advocates whose highly considered responses made this report possible. Particular gratitude to Helen Barcham and Lisa Lewis for their support, and to the formidable 2168 Children's Parliament for their wisdom and bravery.

ABOUT THE CENTRE

The Centre for Western Sydney is a Western Sydney University research and advocacy forum for the development and promotion of informed, innovative and collaborative regional solutions, created with, and for, Western Sydney.

westernsydney.edu.au/cws.html

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This Centre for Western Sydney report was developed in consultation with, and for, our community, industry, government and research partners, in the interests of supporting good government for our region and increased opportunity for its residents.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4	THE GOVERNMENT'S PERFORMANCE	12	THE OPPOSITION'S PERFORMANCE	18	1. EDUCATION AND PARTICIPATION	22
FOREWORD	8	Innovative, tactical and agile	15	A viable alternative?	19	2. HEALTH AND WELLBEING	26
Rebalancing	8	Confidence rattled	15	Addressing need	19	3. HOUSING AND COMMUNITY	30
Convergence	8	A fork in the road	15	Loss of faith	19	4. PLACE AND CONNECTEDNESS	34
Accountability	8	Champions of 'small' go large	16	The Opposition's overall rating	20	5. SOCIETY AND CULTURE	38
INTRODUCTION	10	A missed opportunity	16	WESTERN SYDNEY'S PRIORITIES	21	6. SUSTAINABILITY AND ECONOMY	42
How good is Western Sydney?	11	The Government's overall rating	16	Interdependencies	21	CONCLUSION	46
				The performance matrix	21		



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



This Centre for Western Sydney paper, the ‘Mid-Term Report Card’, assesses the NSW Government’s performance in Western Sydney over the first half of the current parliamentary term. The Centre asked its partners to highlight areas where they believed the Government had performed well over this period, along with examples of poor performance, with the option of offering a ranking.

In addition to the Centre’s own analysis, this report draws on survey responses by de-identified ‘respondents’ including:

Respondent(s)	#
Community, policy, cultural and business peaks	6
Local Government Areas	4
NSW Government	1
NSW Opposition	1
Centre for Western Sydney ‘priority’ area researchers	6

As a whole, the respondents represent Western Sydney communities, businesses, and other entities of substantial economic scale, and pronounced social and cultural depth and diversity. De-identification was a condition of participation sought by all respondents, with the majority noting they have funding, program, and advocacy dependencies with the NSW Government.

Respondents rated, and commented on, the Government’s performance across the Centre’s six priorities for the West. An aggregate ranking has then drawn from the ratings, overall, and against each priority. Assessments are supported by respondent comments where relevant.

Respondents rated the Government’s public health performance exceptionally highly, noting the importance of sustained investments in health infrastructure. Qualified support was clear for a range of transport investments; however, respondents still emphasised the need for more focus on ‘connecting the West with the West’ ahead of current major project orientations.

“On social housing, nearly all respondents highlighted the gulf between Victoria’s and NSW’s stimulus investments.”

“Respondents rated the Government’s public health performance exceptionally highly, noting the importance of sustained investments in health infrastructure.”

Much more commitment was needed, respondents observed, in planning for, and keeping pace with schools infrastructure demand, as well as ensuring equity in student resourcing and digital access. On social housing, nearly all respondents highlighted the gulf between Victoria’s and NSW’s stimulus investments, describing it as a ‘missed opportunity’ to address a generational challenge for the region. Alternatively, the Powerhouse Parramatta investment was widely supported but augmented by a call for greater backing of regional and community arts and culture programs.

Lastly, the NSW Government’s clean energy incentives were seen as a potentially transformative industry attraction and technology opportunity for the West, whilst noting much more needs to be done to address the region’s climate and urban heat issues.

The report is intended to raise awareness of, and contributions to, policy, planning and political processes among Western Sydney residents. It is also a contribution to performance improvement for the Government and the Opposition seeking to optimise their engagement with, and service of, the West.

After a decade of incumbency, and at the critical halfway mark of its current term, the NSW Government rates a B- overall for its performance across Western Sydney. With exceptionally strong community level engagement, but missing a sufficiently cohesive focus, the NSW Opposition rates a C+ in the West.



NSW GOVERNMENT MID-TERM REPORT CARD FOR WESTERN SYDNEY

WESTERN SYDNEY'S PRIORITIES						
	EDUCATION AND PARTICIPATION	HEALTH AND WELLBEING	HOUSING AND COMMUNITY	PLACE AND CONNECTEDNESS	SOCIETY AND CULTURE	SUSTAINABILITY AND ECONOMY
RATING	C	A	C-	B+	B	B-
COMMENT	Investment is steady but not keeping pace with growth or addressing inequity.	An exceptional pandemic response backed by sustained infrastructure investment and precinct development.	A missed 'stimulus' opportunity for a step-change in social housing, homelessness and affordability.	Relatively strong transport investments but missing critical links and project certainty.	The Powerhouse Parramatta commitment must be followed by more community arts and culture support.	A transformative investment in clean energy industry attraction, but lacking urgency and investment in addressing urban heat.
OVERALL	B-					

FOREWORD

REBALANCING

As cities internationally seek to recover from COVID-19, the best of them will be seeking to not just restore their central business districts but to ensure that what growth does occur will be more spatially and socially inclusive.

CBDs are unlikely to completely return to pre-pandemic levels of office occupancy and thus productivity. Accordingly, many see emerging opportunities for suburban, exurban and regional economies, already being reflected in changed residential demand. There are new opportunities for Western Sydney in such trends.

The Centre for Western Sydney's 'Mid-Term Report Card' comes at a time when the international discussion about post-pandemic recovery strategies is focussed on ensuring that any new economic momentum actually reshapes and indeed rebalances our cities.

In the UK this objective has become known as 'levelling-up'. Its aim, of reducing the gap in growth and opportunities between privileged and disadvantaged regions of the country, derives from an earlier

“CBDs are unlikely to completely return to pre-pandemic levels of office occupancy and thus productivity.”

initiative, supported by the current Prime Minister when he was Mayor of London, called the 'convergence' agenda.

CONVERGENCE

Convergence was initiated in 2008-9 by five East London boroughs seeking to ensure long term, strategic benefits for their communities from the 2012 Olympics. They were determined that all the new investment pouring into the East for the Games, and existing public investment, be spent as part of a coordinated strategy to realise 'game changing' benefits for local communities.

Performance improvement objectives included reducing gaps, between East London and the Greater London average in education, skills, health and longevity; an echo of Sydney's 'gaps' between Potts Point and Blacktown.

The boroughs did three things under the convergence agenda:

- 1) identified the key interventions to maximise preferred outcomes;
- 2) secured partners across London and national government departments, aligning policies and investments; and
- 3) set in train a regular process of monitoring and evaluation.

An independent initiative like the Centre for Western Sydney's 'Mid-Term Report Card' can ensure that convergence is prioritised in infrastructure appraisal and procurement processes. Conventional appraisal processes can often lead to other priorities being preferred, even when the relevant government agencies have previously said they support convergence.



Traditional appraisal risks drove the re-write of the UK Treasury's process guide, called the 'Green Book', to prioritise 'levelling-up' projects. Under prior Green Book guidelines, projects which might be vital for local, suburban or regional economic recovery – or indeed improvements in wellbeing and public health – typically failed at appraisal while Central London won on any Business Case Ratio (BCR) competition for resources because of its conventional return on public investment.

ACCOUNTABILITY

In convergence, the task is one of continual improvement and refinement. That means it is vital that the performance insights in initiatives like the 'Mid-Term Report Card' are fed back into systems design and review. Such information is meant to guide performance and improvement, and also promote accountability.

This brings me to the final benefit of a Report Card in the context of a 'levelling up' analysis: accountability, not just within government but to communities and specifically the communities most directly affected.

'Convergence' is a moral imperative but also, through its focus on data and performance, it enables communities to hold governments to account for achieving the change they say they seek.

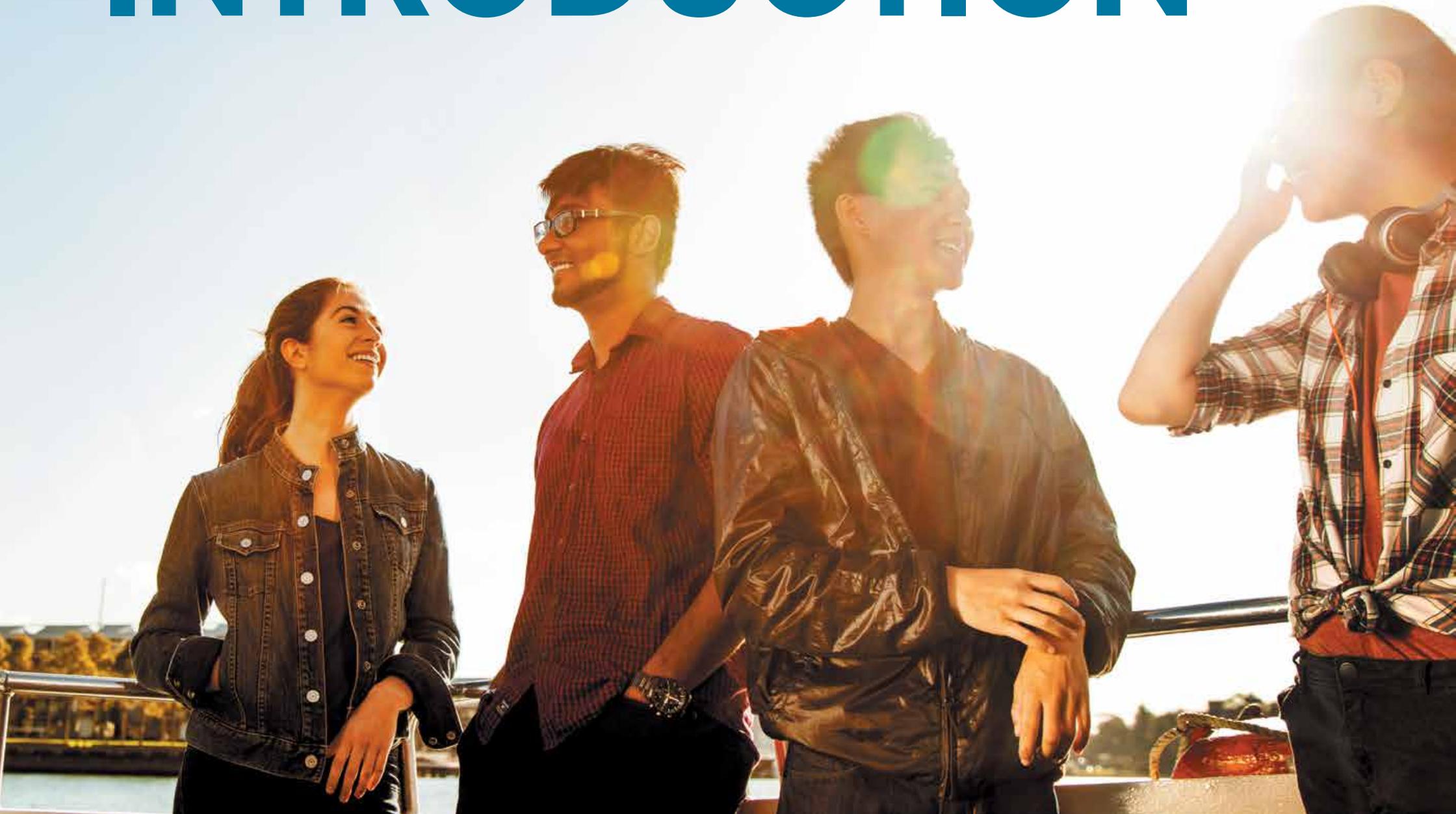
Dr Tim Williams

Strategic Advisor to Arup, Chair of Open Cities, and Adjunct Professor, Western Sydney University.



“An independent initiative like the Centre for Western Sydney’s ‘Mid-Term Report Card’ can ensure that ‘convergence’ is prioritised in infrastructure appraisal and procurement processes.”

INTRODUCTION

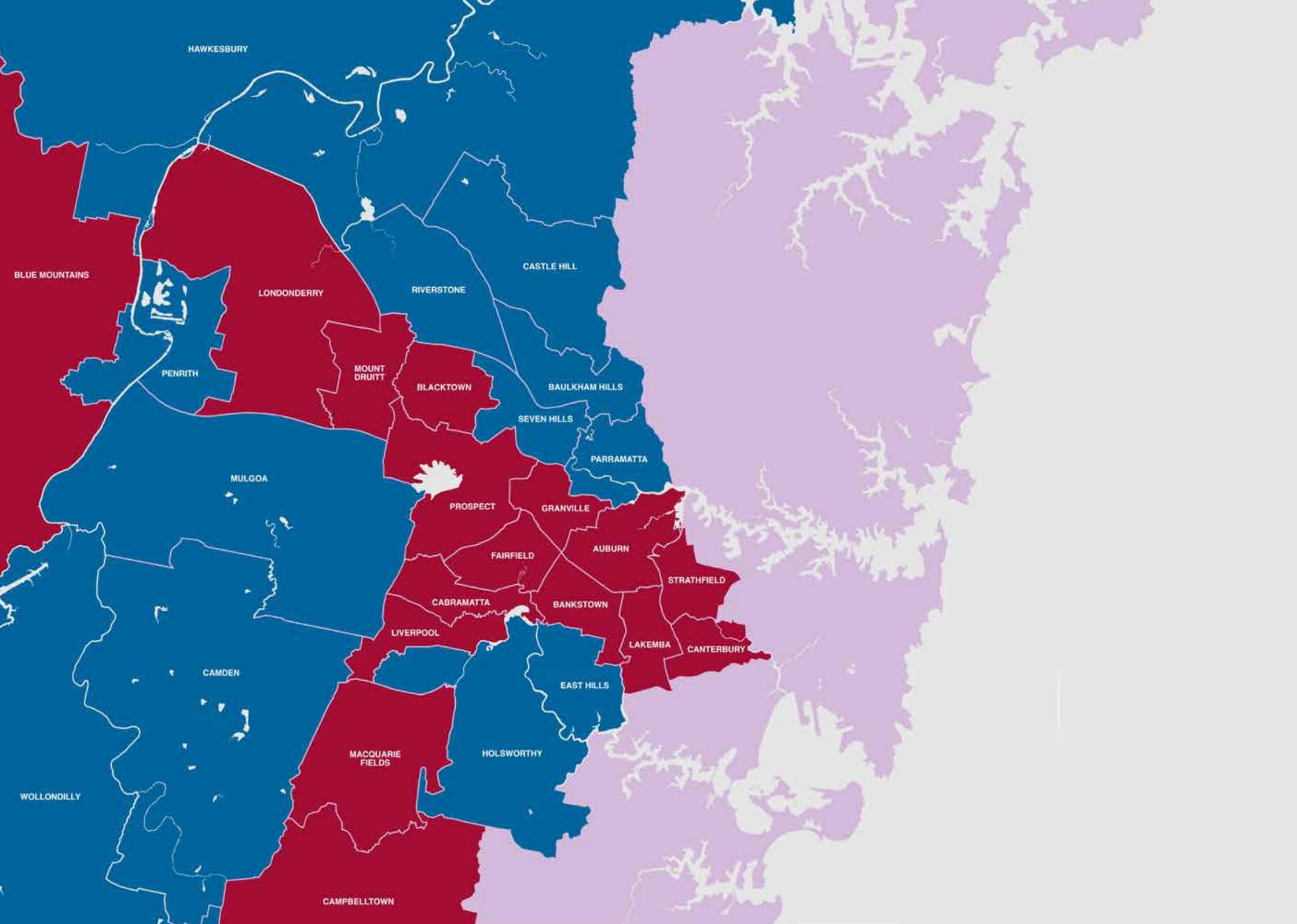


HOW GOOD IS WESTERN SYDNEY?

We've never had so much government in Western Sydney. A City Deal, an Aerotropolis, a Central River City, a Western Parkland City, commissions, authorities and statutory bodies, along with major infrastructure projects and record development, plus a dedicated ministerial and opposition portfolio! Some might ask, 'How good is it?' This is the question the Centre for Western Sydney put to its many community, industry and government partners in February 2021.

The resulting, inaugural, 'Mid-Term Report Card' rates the State Government's performance in the West. It does so at the halfway mark (23 March 2021) of the state electoral cycle, marking a decade of Liberal-National incumbency in NSW. The results are mixed. The tone? Candid and constructive. The intent? Better planning, policy and outcomes for Western Sydney.

“We’ve never had so much government in Western Sydney.”



HAWKESBURY

BLUE MOUNTAINS

LONDONDERRY

RIVERSTONE

CASTLE HILL

PENRITH

MOUNT DRUITT

BLACKTOWN

BAULKHAM HILLS

MULGOA

SEVEN HILLS

PARRAMATTA

PROSPECT

GRANVILLE

FAIRFIELD

AUBURN

STRATHFIELD

CABRAMATTA

BANKSTOWN

LIVERPOOL

EAST HILLS

LAKEMBA

CANTERBURY

CAMDEN

HOLSWORTHY

MACQUARIE FIELDS

WOLLONDILLY

CAMPBELLTOWN

Auburn	9.1%	VOLTZ, Linda	Holsworthy	3.3%	GIBBONS, Melanie
Bankstown	13.8%	MIHAILUK, Tania	Lakemba	22.4%	DIB, Jihad
Baulkham Hills	18.7%	ELLIOTT, David	Liverpool	16.7%	LYNCH, Paul
Blacktown	17.7%	BALI, Stephen	Londonderry	6.4%	CAR, Prue
Blue Mountains	14.9%	DOYLE, Trish	Macquarie Fields	14.8%	CHANTHIVONG, Anoulack
Cabramatta	12.9%	LALICH, Nick	Mt Druitt	16.4%	ATALLA, Edmond
Camden	7.6%	SIDGREAVES, Peter	Mulgoa	7.2%	DAVIES, Tanya
Campbelltown	17.0%	WARREN, Greg	Parramatta	10.7%	LEE, Geoff
Canterbury	13.0%	COTSIS, Sophie	Penrith	1.3%	AYRES, Stuart
Castle Hill	24.7%	WILLIAMS, Ray	Prospect	10.7%	McDERMOTT, Hugh
East Hills	0.5%	LINDSAY, Wendy	Riverstone	6.3%	CONOLLY, Kevin
Fairfield	17.9%	ZANGARI, Guy	Seven Hills	6.4%	TAYLOR, Mark
Granville	7.6%	FINN, Julia	Strathfield	5.0%	McKAY, Jodi
Hawkesbury	17.5%	PRESTON, Robyn	Wollondilly	5.5%	SMITH, Nathaniel

Two-Party preferred margin post 2019 NSW Election

WESTERN SYDNEY

NSW ELECTORAL DISTRICTS
2019 ELECTION PARTY DISTRIBUTION

Centre for Western Sydney (c) 2021



**CENTRE FOR
WESTERN SYDNEY**



THE GOVERNMENT'S PERFORMANCE



INNOVATIVE, TACTICAL AND AGILE

Against the backdrop of the pandemic, the Government's investments in public health, understandably, rated very highly. The value of these targeted and sustained improvements to health system capacity were proven, and undoubtedly noticed, across Western Sydney as the highly coordinated pandemic interventions were deployed.

Innovative, tactical and agile initiatives from the Government in planning and public space were also rated favourably, especially when forged through open and genuinely inclusive co-design with the West's residents.

“Against the backdrop of the pandemic, the Government's investments in public health, understandably, rated very highly.”

Narrow, but exceptionally important relief for many parents and children was also exceedingly welcome but tempered with considerable frustration that these measures were not taken further as at-scale stimulus initiatives.

CONFIDENCE RATTLED

Alternatively, confidence in policy and process has been rattled. Transparency and accountability concerns pepper report card responses. This easy-to-get but hard-to-shake perception of self-serving politics has been compounded by 'pork barrelling' commentary espoused at the highest levels of Liberal and National party leadership. Voters residing in the nation's most intensely electorally contested region have, in their report card verdicts, taken deep offence at that commentary. It is viewed as a corrosive politicisation of important community programs, and has been rated accordingly.

“Voters residing in the nation's most intensely electorally contested region have... taken deep offence at [pork barrelling] commentary.”

Additionally, despite the Government's comparatively solid infrastructure development record, many Western Sydney residents struggle to see how this program of works is making their lives better; perhaps pointing to flaws in the Government's supporting narrative. Similarly, uncertainty on once firm commitments to particular Western Sydney projects continues as a source of disappointment, articulated in nearly all report card responses.

“The self-professed ‘small’ government specialists were compelled to go large.”

A FORK IN THE ROAD

The mid-point of a third-term of incumbency is a pivotal juncture. Maintaining momentum, dispelling fatigue and fostering innovation is hard to do, but critical. The performance of a deeply experienced administration, like Premier Gladys Berejiklian's team, should set the Government up for a strong finish to this term. With a decade of depth to draw on, there are no excuses for faltering in meeting the Premier's own commitments to the people of Western Sydney.

“This region has distinct expectations of government, and it marks harshly when it perceives neglect.”

In a rapidly growing, culturally diverse and socioeconomically dynamic region like Western Sydney, the Government's trajectory over the next two years will rightfully attract very close scrutiny. This region has distinct expectations of government, and it marks harshly when it perceives neglect. The typically pronounced rates of voter swing in the West – nearly double (-4 per cent) the statewide (-2.3 per cent) swing against the Coalition in 2019 – are evidence of that. Equally, the region's voters historically reward stability, vision and above all, integrity; over the past few decades backing in long terms of incumbency for both Labor and Liberal-National governments.

CHAMPIONS OF 'SMALL' GO LARGE

Events over the past year have placed extraordinary pressure on governments, globally. The NSW Government is no exception. Comparatively, it has performed well. Ironically it has done so via an agile departure from its ideological footing. The profound economic, social and related fall-out of the pandemic has demanded a 'big' political response. Stimulus and intervention were urgently needed. This is an uncharacteristic approach for a fiscally conservative, centre-right political grouping like the NSW Liberal-National coalition, that traditionally advocate a light touch from government.

The self-professed 'small' government specialists were compelled to 'go large'. To an extent, and against type, they did. However, the full effectiveness of economic stimulus in Western Sydney remains to be seen. The Government's relatively quick economic response rated well in the region. But the targeting and rationale behind key elements of that response are naturally points of considerable contention in the West. Everybody has their own idea of how it should have been directed. But the gritty reality of the impact in the West must be the ultimate guide.

A MISSED OPPORTUNITY

Australia's last recession, in the early 90s, primarily hit male blue-collar workers. This one unequivocally impacted women. That cohort of essential workers, professionals, carers and community members, critical to generational wellbeing and prosperity, especially in Western Sydney, fared the worst. They overwhelmingly bore the brunt of the labour market, housing, health and economic disruption. Many of them continue to do so, particularly across particular areas of south-western Sydney, where wage levels have – for some time – not kept pace with housing and related cost-of-living expenses.

Major exclusions, shortfalls and abrupt cessations in Commonwealth assistance to women heightened the expectations the NSW Government would step into the breach. Again, while bespoke programs to support women – for example, return-to-work schemes – were rolled out, they were not viewed as being of sufficient scale. Other initiatives came through, like the extension of the free preschool scheme. Still, the overall extent and nature of government initiatives, even in stimulus, do not appear to fully grasp, nor capitalise on, the very substantial economic gains of enabling greater female participation in the workforce. That is viewed by report card respondents as perhaps the biggest missed opportunity.

“Major exclusions, shortfalls and abrupt cessations in Commonwealth assistance to women heightened the expectation on the NSW Government to step into the breach.”

GOVERNMENT'S OVERALL RATING

The NSW Government rates comparatively well overall in Western Sydney, with its efforts to support health and wellbeing a standout. Its capacity to explain its good work, however, remains an issue for voters in the West, as do critical signs of fatigue evident in lapses in accountability, transparency and commitment. Assessing performance across the six priority areas, the NSW Government rates a B- at the mid-term point in Western Sydney.

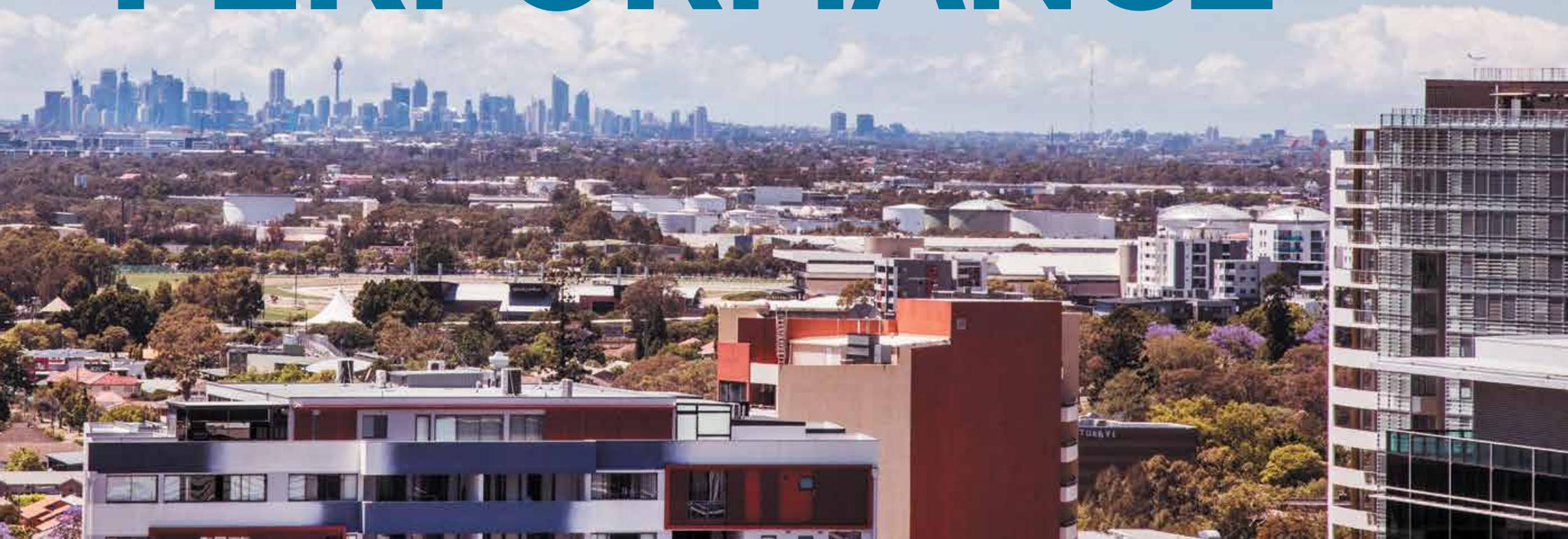


THE COALITION'S OVERALL RATING IN WESTERN SYDNEY:

B-



THE OPPOSITION'S PERFORMANCE



A VIABLE ALTERNATIVE?

Good government depends, very significantly, on a robust, razor-sharp but constructive opposition; one that holds the incumbents to account, while promoting a considered, progressive and viable alternative. Report card respondents broadly rated NSW Labor's performance in this regard, over the past two years in the West, as moderate.

“Good government depends, very significantly, on a robust, razor-sharp but constructive opposition.”

ADDRESSING NEED

If they still stand, then NSW Labor's pre-election (2019) commitments to accelerate the Sydney Metro West, boost nurse-to-patient ratios, and lock-in (15-20 per cent) affordable housing mandates will address significant areas of need for Western Sydney. Similarly, appropriately resourcing the Independent Commission Against Corruption would help address growing accountability, transparency and integrity concerns.

“Appropriately resourcing the Independent Commission Against Corruption would help address growing accountability, transparency and integrity concerns.”

Plans to strengthen Industrial Relations Commission protections for under-paid and gig workers would be welcome among worker cohorts highly represented by Western Sydney residents. Equally, a suite of policy commitments made under 'social justice' and 'women' themes would respond to significant gaps in the Government's response to a range of issues, particularly relevant for a socioeconomically diverse region like the West.

LOSS OF FAITH

Other aspects of NSW Labor's record are troubling for Western Sydney. The party's strident and sustained rejection of the relocation of the Powerhouse Museum to Parramatta was repeatedly cited, in report card responses, as a disappointment. The rationale for Labor's stance is not seen as being sufficiently explained, resulting in it being viewed by some as emblematic of a loss of faith in, and connection with the West, in favour of inner-Sydney interests.

“The party's strident and sustained rejection of the relocation of the Powerhouse Museum to Parramatta was repeatedly cited, in report card responses, as a disappointment.”

The need for a more coordinated approach from the Opposition on championing its considerable Western Sydney constituency was also noted, with issues like school-aged digital literacy, infrastructure and internet access seen as areas where Labor's voice was needed with more intensity. Similarly, Labor is viewed as not having challenged the Government with the necessary rigour on significant failings in social housing stimulus, support for under-paid 'essential workers', migrants and refugees and small business innovation.

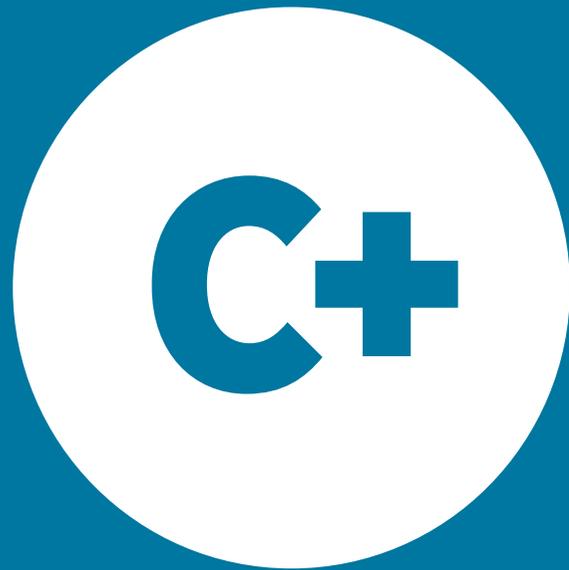
THE OPPOSITION'S OVERALL RATING

Critiques of Labor were tempered with exceedingly positive reports of the commitment, dedication and ability of particular representatives. The capacity of individual members to rally and champion the interests of constituents at the electorate level was commonly described as exceptional, with certain representatives viewed as standouts; some of them, highly experienced, but underutilised.

“The capacity of individual members to rally and champion the interests of constituents at the electorate level was commonly described as exceptional.”

On the basis of those assessments, it is clear that Labor retains significant capacity with respect to its Western Sydney credentials at the grassroots level. Coordination and consolidation of effort remains an issue. It is also evident – through inquiries and similar fora – that particular early-career Labor MLCs have markedly high levels of awareness of, and commitment to, Western Sydney and the issues critical to the region. They must be utilised. Labor rates a C+ in the West at this mid-term point, with clear paths for improvement, and enough time – if committed – to mount a very compelling, alternative vision for Western Sydney.

LABOR'S OVERALL RATING IN WESTERN SYDNEY:



WESTERN SYDNEY'S PRIORITIES

INTERDEPENDENCIES

Western Sydney might be viewed as a challenging proposition for any government, given the region's unapparelled growth, its spatial, socioeconomic, health and economic disparities, and its relative political unpredictability demand a nuanced approach. Understanding the interdependencies is the key to good government in the West. Being flexible and responsive, operating inside, outside and across portfolio lanes is a must. Recognising the region's strengths is fundamental.

“Understanding the interdependencies is the key to good government in the West.”

With regard to Western Sydney's strengths, the cascading effect of supporting women in the economy, highlights what is possible if interconnected government engagement with the West is encouraged, supported and benchmarked. The priority a government affords an evidently critical, and inter-related issue like the economic participation of women, is a good barometer of its performance overall.

THE PERFORMANCE MATRIX

The Centre for Western Sydney's 'Mid-Term Report Card' takes a comprehensive and integrated approach to benchmarking. It looks at the Centre's six defined priority areas, critical to Western Sydney's continued development:

1. Education and participation
2. Health and wellbeing
3. Housing and community
4. Place and connectedness
5. Society and culture
6. Sustainability and economy

The ratings against each priority account for the Centre's own analysis and the responses received by the Centre's partners in business, the community, local government, peak bodies, researchers, the NSW Government and the Opposition. Ratings include, where applicable, partner and Centre commentary on specific areas of government performance.



EDUCATION AND PARTICIPATION

ABOUT THIS PRIORITY

From early childhood through to the tertiary stage, education remains the most impactful catalyst for positive change in socioeconomically disadvantaged communities. Remarkable improvements in access to, and participation in, quality education have been achieved across Western Sydney over the past three decades; however, profound inequities persist in particular sub regions and among some communities.

“From early childhood through to the tertiary stage, education remains the most impactful catalyst for positive change in socioeconomically disadvantaged communities.”

Digital literacy and digital access are increasingly pivotal. The major economic and labour market dislocations of the pandemic-related recession heighten the urgency to address this priority.

“The NSW Government’s schools infrastructure program is not keeping pace with Western Sydney’s growth.”

GOOD PERFORMANCE

- New schools at Catherine Park, Gledswood Hills, Jordan Springs, Narellan and Oran Park
- \$120 million funding commitment for community and mobile preschools in 2021
- \$337 million over the 2021 school year for intensive tutoring programs
- Expansion of the ‘School Breakfast 4 Health’ program
- Commitments on Departmental accountability under the ‘School Success Model’
- Revived TAFE under new management with \$80 million for a new Construction Hub
- Release of the ‘Accelerating R&D’ action plan and NSW Tertiary Education Strategy
- Planning for the Multiversity and the ‘knowledge job’ Aerotropolis at the new airport

POOR PERFORMANCE

- Chronic schools overcrowding and capacity issues in the north west and outer south west
- Short-sighted schools infrastructure planning in high growth areas
- The growing ‘digital-divide’ for students from less wealthy areas
- An increasing funding gulf between the region’s richest and poorest schools
- Major uncertainty and delays in the rollout of the schools air-conditioning program
- Lack of clarity on proposed TAFE job cuts and the impact on Western Sydney
- No connection for the new TAFE Construction Hub on the St Marys – Badgerys Creek Metro
- Pulling ‘Boosting Business Innovation’ R&D support for Western Sydney entrepreneurs
- Slow to address international student needs during the pandemic

THE VERDICT

While acknowledging the major increase in school building and upgrade activity, the majority of Mid-Term Report Card respondents felt the NSW Government’s schools infrastructure program is not keeping pace with Western Sydney’s growth. Many also observed that not enough is being done to address widening inequality between the region’s schools. Nor was there sufficient recognition of, and support for, education as a pathway from disadvantage. The stark digital divide that emerged during lockdown emphasised the urgency of that task.

In contrast, the extension of the free preschool program, the expansion of the Foodbank-partnered school breakfasts

initiative, along with commitments to greater departmental accountability in performance improvement, were positive and welcome developments. Equally, the co-design – with universities, TAFE and industry – of the New Education and Training Model for the Aerotropolis was seen as an encouraging step, by the Government, towards genuine collaboration. It is not clear, however, that the spirit of collaboration extends to encompass the development of a business case for an Advanced Manufacturing Research Facility, which in budget commentary cites only ‘business, industry and government’ as having a role.

Measures to ‘revive’ TAFE were welcomed, but respondents were undecided as to the Government’s long-term commitment to that task, especially in light of reports of potential large scale TAFE job cuts. Failures to link critical skills and jobs initiatives were also highlighted in Transport for NSW’s decision to exclude the new Construction Hub and Kingswood TAFE from the nearby St Marys to Western Sydney Airport Metro link. The Government’s decision to end ‘Boosting Business Innovation’ funding for Western Sydney businesses was viewed as an ‘incredibly short-sighted’ and disappointing move during a recession.

INVESTMENT IN EDUCATION AND PARTICIPATION IS STEADY BUT NOT KEEPING PACE WITH GROWTH OR ADDRESSING INEQUITY.





A woman with long brown hair tied back, wearing a purple long-sleeved shirt, black leggings, and black sneakers with red accents, is running on a paved path. She is wearing large white headphones and has a joyful expression. The background features a lush green park with trees, a wooden walkway, and a body of water reflecting the sky. A large, white, stylized graphic element, resembling a question mark or a large '2', is positioned on the left side of the image, partially overlapping the woman and the background. The text 'HEALTH AND WELLBEING' is overlaid in the center in a bold, blue, sans-serif font.

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

ABOUT THIS PRIORITY

Health is a fundamental barometer of community wellbeing. Significant investments have been made, in recent years, in health infrastructure and services at sites like Blacktown-Mt Druitt, Liverpool, Nepean and Westmead. Equally, the recent public health response to the pandemic, across Western Sydney, indicates a relatively high level of functionality and capacity across the network.

Planning and policy development processes indicate the beginnings of a response to Western Sydney's entrenched over-representation in chronic health conditions like diabetes, heart disease and mental health issues. This is particularly true for people from Indigenous communities. Pronounced health workforce shortages in key frontline and allied health professions in the years ahead is a matter of additional concern. Meeting these challenges will be pivotal in ensuring Western Sydney's wellbeing through a period of continued growth and change.

“The recent public health response to the pandemic, across Western Sydney, indicates a relatively high level of functionality and capacity across the network.”

GOOD PERFORMANCE

- Strong, steady, decisive and informed management of the pandemic
- The scientific and technological approach to contact-tracing
- Major investments in health infrastructure and precincts
- Commitment to expanding health research in the West
- Good communication lines between NSW health networks and local government
- Locally embedded mental health and wellbeing programs
- Positive inter-departmental collaboration on health and education precincts

POOR PERFORMANCE

- Lack of cut-through in pandemic information for non-English speaking communities
- Missed opportunity to take a stronger stimulus position on medical research funding
- Lack of focus on, and investment in, specific health challenges like diabetes and obesity
- Clinical and chronic care favoured ahead of access to community (primary) health services
- Insufficient progress on Integrated Health Hub delivery in high growth areas
- Not enough recognition of, or investment in, urban heat mitigation as a public health issue
- Although significant, health infrastructure investment is not keeping pace with growth

THE VERDICT

Respondents overwhelmingly lauded the NSW Government's management of the pandemic. Putting early challenges aside, the response in the West was seen as being 'led by the science', and described as 'exceptional' in its measure, clarity and execution.

Major investments in health infrastructure – in particular at, Campbelltown (\$632 million), Liverpool (\$740 million), Nepean (\$550 million) and Westmead (\$832 million) – were viewed favourably, as were broader precinct initiatives. While not lagging to the extent of schools, respondents noted that health infrastructure investment – despite its scale – is still not keeping pace with growth, especially in the outer south west.

“Respondents overwhelmingly lauded the NSW Government's management of the pandemic.”

Differing views exist as to the balance between investments in primary and tertiary care. And while communication between local health districts and wider agencies is seen as strong, especially in the south-west, there was sustained criticism of perceived failings to achieve 'cut-through' on important public health messages with the region's non-English speaking communities. Overall, however, the Government is performing well in a critical area for Western Sydney, with a clear long-term plan and commitment to implement it.

AN EXCEPTIONAL PANDEMIC RESPONSE IN SUPPORT OF HEALTH AND WELLBEING, BACKED BY SUSTAINED INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT AND PRECINCT DEVELOPMENT.



A





HOUSING AND COMMUNITY

ABOUT THIS PRIORITY

A safe and secure home is a fundamental right many people in Western Sydney are denied. Rates of homelessness and housing insecurity have changed little in recent decades. Worse, the representation of young people and older community members, particularly women, is increasing. This is intolerable, particularly in a country as wealthy as Australia.

The recent recession and related labour market implications will further impact housing affordability across Western Sydney. Without a coordinated, and at-scale, government response to support social housing, profound housing challenges experienced throughout the region risk being exacerbated.

“A safe and secure home is a fundamental right many people in Western Sydney are denied.”

GOOD PERFORMANCE

- \$812 million commitment to building and upgrading social and affordable housing
- \$291.8 million in 2020-21 (\$1.1 billion over 4 years) for specialist homelessness services
- Changes to State Environmental Planning Policy to fast-track social housing projects
- Stamp duty and land tax reform proposals to ‘reduce upfront costs for buyers’
- Rapid re-housing of people experiencing homelessness during the pandemic lockdown
- Affordable housing targets in the Greater Sydney Commission’s district plans
- Extended exhibition time on key housing related strategies to allow proper consideration

POOR PERFORMANCE

- The failure to match Victoria’s \$5.3 billion commitment to social housing and job creation
- Missed opportunity to utilise stimulus for large scale social housing investment
- Less than half of the \$812 million committed to social housing will be spent this year
- Lack of ambition on, and commitment to, ‘inclusionary zoning’ affordable housing targets
- Problems with social housing quality and responsiveness to maintenance issues
- Failure to transition project ownership or management to community housing providers
- Large scale developments approved with no, or inadequate, transport and infrastructure
- Terrible urban design for heat in endless plains of McMansions

THE VERDICT

In light of the NSW Government’s commentary on the ‘strong and stable’ state of its Budget position, its reluctance to make at-scale stimulus commitments to an issue of demonstrably profound need, like social housing, was questioned by nearly all Mid-Term Report Card respondents. This perception was further articulated via respondent references to the State’s (pre-December 2020) AAA credit rating, and the better-than-expected fiscal recovery setting emerging in early 2021. Surely, ideal platforms for a bold stimulus response.

“The Government’s reluctance to make at-scale stimulus commitments to an issue of demonstrably profound need, like social housing, was questioned.”

Referencing the Victorian Government’s \$5.3 billion investment in social housing, one respondent calculated this equated to a \$791 per capita (ABS, 2020) investment

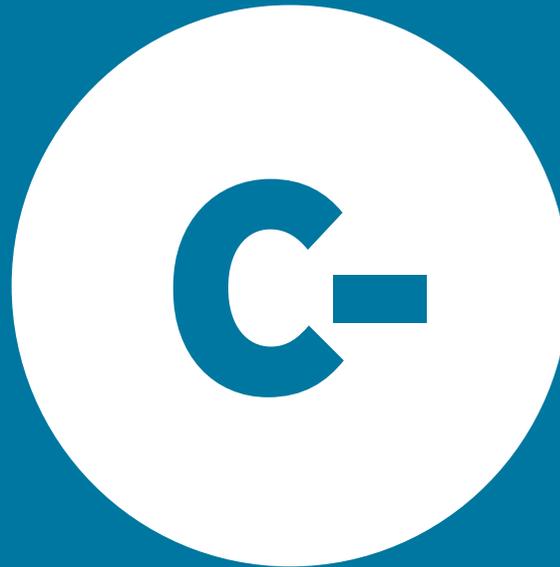
for Victorians, compared with NSW's spend of \$99 per capita per resident on social housing. The interstate gap was similar with regard to investments made to redress homelessness. Respondents also noted the 43,000 job creation target attached to the Victorian scheme, citing it as a further missed opportunity to support construction jobs.

Almost without exception, the Government was assessed as having failed to seize a generational opportunity to act on an issue of critical importance for Western Sydney and NSW more broadly. With two years remaining in this term, the opportunity for action, at-scale, still exists.

“The greater promotion of a principles-based approach to planning is a subtle yet important change.”

The greater promotion of a principles-based approach to planning is a subtle yet important change. Equally, the Government's commitment to breaking down patterns of housing 'segregation according to income bracket' and tenure type is encouraging. If properly funded and supported across portfolios - and done with (not to) communities - such an approach could prove a vitally important shift for a region like Western Sydney.

A MISSED OPPORTUNITY FOR HOUSING AND COMMUNITY STIMULUS THAT COULD HAVE DELIVERED A STEP-CHANGE IN SOCIAL HOUSING, HOMELESSNESS AND AFFORDABILITY.







PLACE AND CONNECTEDNESS

ABOUT THIS PRIORITY

As a markedly dispersed and dynamic metropolitan area, Western Sydney relies on connectivity – via transport links, digital and related infrastructure – to realise the full range of regional priorities. The Greater Sydney Commission’s ‘Three Cities’ framework promotes the principle of a ‘30-minute city’. This approach, if supported by targeted infrastructure investment and evidence-based policy development, is a viable structure against which to pursue rapid, multimodal and sustainable transport options.

Prioritising connections to, and significantly increasing, jobs-dense concentrations is pivotal. Concurrently, planning for transport and digital connectivity must respond to changing work patterns instilled throughout the pandemic. Measures to ensure digital connectivity for socioeconomically disadvantaged members of the community are critical, as is supporting digital literacy.

“Prioritising connections to, and significantly increasing, jobs-dense concentrations is pivotal.”

GOOD PERFORMANCE

- \$656 million invested in Parramatta Light Rail (Stage 1)
- Opening of the Metro North West (Tallawong to Chatswood)
- Planning, consultation and site investigation underway on the Sydney Metro West
- Commitment to open the Sydney Metro – Western Sydney Airport line by 2026
- \$350 million committed to begin construction on the M12 airport link in 2022
- Significant travel time savings in WestConnex (Haberfield to Parramatta) M4 stage
- ‘Your High Street’ and ‘Streets as Shared Spaces’ community engaged planning
- Aerotropolis and Westmead designated as ‘lighthouse’ precincts
- New Western Parkland City Authority to focus on entire Western Sydney City Deal area

POOR PERFORMANCE

- Uncertainty over the Government’s commitment to Stage 2 of the Parramatta Light Rail
- More stops in the East and Inner Sydney than Western Sydney on the Sydney Metro West
- No firm timeframe or commitment to link Campbelltown via rail or metro to the Airport
- Gaps in train service frequency and speed from 2017 timetable still not addressed
- Poor connections between Western Sydney hubs entrenches car dependency
- Lack of funding for the undergrounding of the Bankstown stop on the Metro conversion
- The fast-tracking of employment lands rezoning without addressing transport gaps
- Some agency ‘place’ programs are simply duplications, and poorly conceived

THE VERDICT

For a community as diverse, and a region as expansive, as Western Sydney, Mid-Term Report Card responses regarding place and connectedness were understandably detailed, varied and considered. The Coalition’s delivery of the North West Metro, and investment in projects like the Parramatta Light Rail – developed at the local government level – have been welcomed, as has work to accelerate the project. Similar commitments to initiatives like the Sydney Metro West and the Western Sydney Airport line, are viewed positively.

“The scale of growth in the West, combined with the region’s profound and persistent jobs-distribution deficit demands far greater urgency and scale in infrastructure investment.”

After nearly a decade in office, there is little argument that the Coalition have made greater progress on transport connectivity for Western Sydney than their

Labor predecessors over a comparable period. But that's not enough. The scale of growth in the West, combined with the region's profound and persistent jobs-distribution deficit demands far greater urgency and scale in infrastructure investment. In this context, the way decisions on connectivity are made is also critical.

Doubt over Stage 2 of the Parramatta Light Rail, and the comparative lack of Western Sydney station sites (just three stops) on the Sydney West Metro are provoking questions as to the Government's commitment to leveraging projects to address the region's jobs imbalance. Equally, transport connections that fail to link skills and jobs centres like the Western Sydney Construction Hub to opportunities like the Airport run counter to broader government commitments to job creation.

“Connecting the West with the West must be the priority.”

The place-based framework set under the Greater Sydney Commission's 'Three Cities' model remains one of the most potentially transformative mechanisms with which to harness Western Sydney's growing skilled workforce. For that to work, connecting the West with the West must be the priority of its next iteration.

RELATIVELY STRONG TRANSPORT INVESTMENTS IN SUPPORT OF PLACE AND CONNECTEDNESS BUT MISSING CRITICAL LINKS AND PROJECT CERTAINTY.



STRATHFIELD





SOCIETY AND CULTURE

ABOUT THIS PRIORITY

As an expression of community diversity and dynamism, culture is the characteristic that kinetically defines, reshapes and challenges Western Sydney's identity. At a structural level, investment in arts infrastructure and programs for Western Sydney still significantly lags Inner Sydney and comparable populations.

The Powerhouse relocation to Parramatta brings scale, but the implications of the subsequent retention of the museum's Ultimo site, and questions over political will, need to be addressed. Resourcing and support for greater cultural expression among the region's widespread migrant, refugee and ethnically diverse communities is needed.

“Culture is the characteristic that kinetically defines, reshapes and challenges Western Sydney’s identity.”

GOOD PERFORMANCE

- Commitment to the Powerhouse Parramatta
- Confirmed Riverside Theatres upgrade
- \$190 million Western Parkland City Liveability Program
- Strong focus on public space access and activation
- Multicultural NSW COMPACT grants
- Create NSW's Western Sydney Arts, Screen and Cultural Roundtable
- New co-funded \$25 million 'Granville Centre' community hub and gallery

POOR PERFORMANCE

- Retreat on original commitment to fully relocate the Powerhouse to Parramatta
- Abandonment of both the promised ANZ rebuild then refurbishment
- Insufficient funding for smaller and community-based arts and cultural institutions
- Lack of strategic direction on the arts or a long-term plan for the region's creative future
- Under-investment in community capacity building, particularly in high growth areas
- Structural issues are a barrier to attracting large scale events and festivals to the West

THE VERDICT

The Powerhouse Parramatta is among the most significant cultural infrastructure investments in NSW history. Support for the initiative and its distinct focus on Indigenous astronomy, space exploration, transport, agriculture, food, climate and energy was strong among Mid-Term Report Card respondents. 'Why stop at the Powerhouse?' one respondent remarked. 'What about other assets... being leveraged for an accelerated equity drive into the West?'

“Why stop at the Powerhouse?”

Investments in multicultural programs via initiatives like the COMPACT scheme were viewed as positive, yet respondents emphasised the need for more comprehensive programs of support for community capacity building across Western Sydney,

particularly in high growth and socioeconomically diverse areas.

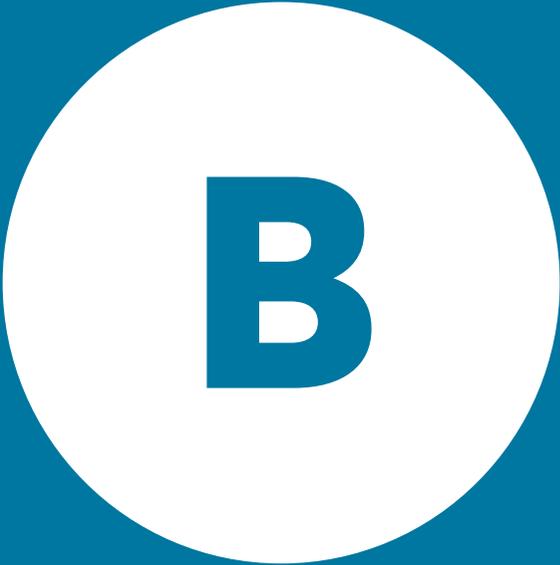
Lack of clarity and commitment on particular society and culture investments was cited as an issue of considerable concern. The rationale for the abandonment of the ANZ stadium rebuild, and then its planned refurbishment was unclear, especially in the wake of the strident case the Government made for the project pre-election. Also, it is unclear whether the much-needed 'grassroots' and 'community sports' facilities will be delivered, as promised, in the NSW Government co-funded Penrith community and sports centre.

“People need to see themselves reflected in the cultural and arts offerings made available to them.”

Respondents from the region's arts sector emphasised the need for a definitive and properly resourced cultural strategy for the region's future. The absence of such a plan became clear during the pandemic, one respondent observed, when the lack of direction made the mobilisation of urgently needed support difficult across the West.

Respondents noted the positive impact the arts has on mental health. 'People need to see themselves reflected in the cultural and arts offerings made available to them.' That was viewed as especially critical in a culturally diverse region like Western Sydney.

THE POWERHOUSE PARRAMATTA COMMITMENT MUST BE FOLLOWED BY MORE COMMUNITY ARTS SUPPORT FOR SOCIAL AND CULTURAL EXPRESSION.



B





SUSTAINABILITY AND ECONOMY

ABOUT THIS PRIORITY

While relative income, employment and economic participation levels have increased in recent decades, Western Sydney is characterised by distinct differences in prosperity. Several subregions of the West had youth unemployment levels in excess of 20 per cent, pre-pandemic. Those challenges have likely intensified as a result of the recession and associated labour market dislocation.

Persistent disparities also exist in structural barriers to economic participation among large segments of the region. For many women, poor access to child care and the lack of related policy and economic stimulus measures have compounded constraints on their capacity to engage in work. Despite numerous government strategies to address job-creation and job-density shortfalls across Western Sydney, the region still profoundly lags Inner Sydney and comparable areas on both counts. An expanded and accelerated policy response is required, and the urgency has intensified with the onset of the recession.

“The development of clean tech and circular economy solutions need to be accelerated and built into whole-of-government approaches.”

Equally, environmental sustainability, the principles of circular economy and climate policy remain challenging propositions for Australian governments – particularly at the federal level. Policy has not kept pace

“For many women, poor access to child care and the lack of related policy and economic stimulus measures have compounded constraints on their capacity to engage in work.”

with widespread global shifts towards at-scale sustainability initiatives, plus private sector and community momentum for evidence-based policy responses and investment incentives.

As the site of the hottest day on the planet in January 2020 (recorded in Penrith), Western Sydney’s planning, development and growth must be led by embedded principles of sustainability, not simply isolated projects and schemes. The development of clean tech and circular economy solutions need to be accelerated and built into whole-of-government approaches, of which the Western Sydney City Deal is a ready-made framework.

GOOD PERFORMANCE

- ‘Clean Energy’ Electricity Infrastructure Investment Act
- 200,000 ‘knowledge jobs’ by 2038 target under the Western Sydney City Deal
- \$57.4 million over four years to create a Trades Skills Pathways Centre
- \$318.6 million over two years in the Skilling for Recovery training package
- Strategic business case for South West Community and Justice Precinct

- Decentralisation of government offices to Parramatta and the West more broadly
- Release of the Sydney Green Grid (Western Sydney Districts) spatial framework
- Development of the CSIRO-partnered Western Parkland City digital twin
- \$60 million to establish the Western Sydney Centre of Innovation in Plant Sciences
- Targets for tree canopy and the review of water recycling policy

POOR PERFORMANCE

- Insufficient clarity on business and investment attraction coordination for Western Sydney
- MOU's with Aerotropolis corporates need to be translated into binding agreements
- Job creation is not being pursued with sufficient urgency despite clearly evidenced deficits
- Lacking a detailed post-pandemic jobs and investment plan for Western Sydney
- Pockets of youth unemployment in excess of 20 per cent not sufficiently addressed
- Delay in finalising the 20-year waste strategy, and lack clarity on water recycling program
- No resolution of Warragamba Dam infrastructure, environmental and evacuation issues
- Slow on recreational water access at Penrith Lakes, Prospect and Central City rivers
- Improved tree canopy alone will not make walking and cycling viable in 40+ degree heat

THE VERDICT

For a jurisdiction with an exceptionally strong global credit rating and economic profile, NSW was well placed to manage the extraordinary socioeconomic upheaval of the pandemic. In many respects, as this report has highlighted, that response was solid, particularly in health and wellbeing. More targeted stimulus measures and programs supported the broader recovery effort. Equally, as Mid-Term Report Card respondents have indicated, measures like the Electricity Infrastructure Investment Act set a strong pathway and, critically, build confidence in recovery, especially for a region like Western Sydney where 'clean tech' has ready-made alignments with the area's advanced manufacturing base and emerging entrepreneurial ecosystem.

The trouble is – and respondents are almost completely in agreement on this point – the coordination and cohesion of these initiatives is unclear across wider government. 'Who is responsible?' was a common refrain. Accountability for the large scale and targeted investment attraction and job creation programs Western Sydney so evidently requires is exceedingly hard to pin down, with multiple agencies and three levels of government intersecting and, at-times, diluting agreed directions and targets. These agencies, we have been assured over the past decade, were created to end that problem. A detailed, evidence-based and genuinely consultative recovery plan for the West would be a way to short-circuit and resolve that issue.

“Accountability for the large scale and targeted investment attraction and job creation programs Western Sydney so evidently requires is exceedingly hard to pin down.”

“These agencies, we have been assured over the past decade, were created to end that problem.”

Plans emerging from the Western Parkland City Authority to promote innovations in sustainable green/blue grid are encouraging. If supported through agreed Circular Economy principles then a platform is set for this part of Western Sydney to lead globally in economically sustainable 'clean tech' solutions. The NSW Circular Economy Network, supported by the Chief Scientist and Engineers' Office is an excellent way to guide that.

Different opportunities to leverage more established economic strengths, at significant scale, exist across the Central River City. This area of the West has among the most highly skilled labour markets in the country, yet it also retains pockets of disadvantage. Prioritising transport links between the Parkland and River cities – ahead of funneling workers to the East – must be task of far greater urgency for the Government if Western Sydney's inherent strengths are

to be realised in the state's interests. This requires a renewed commitment to the principles of the Government's own 'Three Cities' model; ideally that will occur with a refresh of the plan before the end of the current electoral term.

“If 48.9C heat in Penrith does not focus minds in the Government on the urgency of this task, and the opportunities it presents, then nothing will.”

Lastly, planting more trees, while necessary, will not go near addressing the extraordinary challenges Western Sydney faces with respect to climate change and urban heat build-up. Urban design mandates, the adoption of heat resistant materials and cooling methodology – not just in building but in the roll-out and retro-fit of road and rail infrastructure – must be a matter of the greatest priority for the Government. If 48.9C heat in Penrith does not focus minds in Government on the urgency of this task, and the opportunities it presents, then nothing will.

**A TRANSFORMATIVE
INVESTMENT IN CLEAN
ENERGY INDUSTRY
ATTRACTION, INNOVATION
AND JOB CREATION,
BUT LACKING URGENCY
AND INVESTMENT IN
ADDRESSING URBAN HEAT.**

B-



CONCLUSION

A CONSTRUCTIVE APPROACH

The politics of Western Sydney and the performance of the Government and the Opposition are, of course, matters of greater sophistication than a report card rating. This report is a starting point. It is a means to provoke greater scrutiny and participation on the part of Western Sydney residents in the politics, planning and policies that shape and define our region. The articulate, considered and pragmatic critiques and solutions respondents have offered in this report should be received in the spirit in which they were intended.

It is evident that regardless of political or ideological differences, there is significant alignment between the Government, the Opposition and, importantly, community responses to Western Sydney's priorities.

The development of the report has been an opportunity to re-engage with the region's distinct characteristics and strengths. That has made one point abundantly clear. It is imperative that Western Sydney's diversity is reflected in NSW Parliament. More government representatives need to look and sound like the West. We don't have nearly enough levels of cultural diversity, nor are women, LGBTI and younger people adequately represented in both Chambers. Setting that agenda is likely a priority for future investigation on the part of the Centre and its partners.

For the Centre for Western Sydney, the performance markers and priorities identified in this report are promoted as genuinely constructive contributions to optimising policy development and government engagement with the West. This sentiment is backed by evidence. The Centre seeks to promote the work of its affiliate researchers in this regard, noting the considerable projects that have been produced, or are being undertaken

by Western Sydney University and its community, industry and sector partners. The 'Further Reading' section at the close of this report is a starting point.

In an era when, globally, trust in political structures is in flux, ensuring integrity, transparency and accountability in government is a matter of critical importance. This Mid-Term Report Card is a contribution to that task. The Centre plans to continue its Report Card model with future assessments of state and federal government performance, at the mid and end points of electoral cycles. The contribution of our partners will be essential, as will the engagement of the Government, the Opposition and the wider community. We extend our sincere thanks for that cooperation in this inaugural report.

FURTHER READING

With respect to the challenges this report identifies, there are solutions being actively developed in the West, with and for our region. Examples include:

Madden, A. L. et al., 2018, *Cool Schools*, Western Sydney University, Penrith.

Maurushat, A. et al., 2017, 'Open data : turning data into information, and information into insights that allow for evidence-based policy', *Newcastle Law Review*, vol 12 , pp 104 – 147.

Morrison, N. and Nouwelant, R., 2020, 'Western Sydney's urban transformation : examining the governance arrangements driving forward the growth vision', *Australian Planner*, vol 56, no 2 , pp 73 – 82

Newbrook, A. et al., 2020, *Western Sydney Centres: Beyond Recovery*, WSP, Western Sydney Leadership Dialogue, Centre for Western Sydney, Sydney.

O'Neill, P., 2020, *Where are the jobs? [Parts 1-3]: Western Sydney's Short-lived Jobs Boom*, Centre for Western Sydney, Western Sydney University, Parramatta.

Pfautsch, S. et al., 2018, 'Materials that make heat worse for our kids demand a rethink by designers', *The Conversation*, Sydney.

HOW WOULD YOU RATE THE GOVERNMENT'S PERFORMANCE IN THE WEST?

We'd love to hear what you think! Scan here and let us know how you would rate the Government's performance.





**CENTRE FOR
WESTERN SYDNEY**