GOAL 4 – Prosperous urban centres with job opportunities

Over the last century, the region’s population has become increasingly concentrated in the larger urban centres, primarily as a result of agricultural restructuring, mechanisation and changes in labour markets. This trend is likely to continue.

The two regional cities, Tamworth and Armidale, are projected to support over half the region’s population by 2036 and their development will help to drive growth for the region. A further 28 per cent of the population is projected to reside in the four strategic centres of Inverell, Narrabri, Gunnedah and Moree, which provide a range of employment opportunities and services to their communities and to other adjoining centres.

Efficient transport networks will support economic activity and more local job opportunities in centres. The growth of mining services and agriculture-related industries will also drive demand for additional industrial land and commercial opportunities in centres. An ongoing supply of industrial and commercial land for development, which is not constrained by adjoining land uses or access to infrastructure, is essential to grow jobs.

The draft Plan:

- identifies planning controls and infrastructure to support the delivery of new housing and job opportunities that will facilitate the growth of Tamworth and Armidale;
- improves linkages across the region and inter-regionally by investigating options for improved road and transport connections;
- secures adequate supplies of land to support jobs by prioritising infrastructure planning and delivery for industrial and commercial land;
- reinforces the vitality and viability of commercial centres;
- grows tourism employment opportunities; and
- acknowledges the importance of education and agricultural research facilities.

DIRECTION 4.1 Grow the regional cities of Tamworth and Armidale

The regional cities of Tamworth and Armidale provide access to State and regional services, higher-order retailing, major health and education facilities, and industry and related employment for the region. These services and facilities will continue to generate population and employment growth.

Tamworth is particularly influential and provides high-level services and facilities that are used by residents across the New England North West. Around one in three of the region’s houses and jobs are located in this local government area.

Armidale provides a range of services for the New England district, with 17.4 per cent of the region’s jobs in 2011 and a 16 per cent share of the gross regional product in 2013-14.
Tamworth and Armidale have growth precincts (see Figure 12) that contribute to the wider regional economy and influence the region through the services and opportunities they provide. These precincts are based around a number of major institutions which are anchors for economic growth and new jobs, due to the services and opportunities they offer. These major institutions create employment and research nodes and include the recently redeveloped Tamworth Base Hospital, the Armidale Rural Referral Hospital which is currently being upgraded, the University of New England, and TAFE New England.

Encouraging the clustering of complementary activities in these precincts will drive employment and economic growth in the region.

Figures 13 and 14 illustrate the location of growth precincts and the areas where future growth is projected for Tamworth and Armidale.

### TABLE 2: TAMWORTH AND ARMIDALE – SHARE OF POPULATION, HOUSING AND JOBS IN THE REGION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>TAMWORTH</th>
<th>ARMIDALE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Share of regional population 2011[^3]</td>
<td>31.9%</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share of regional population 2036[^4]</td>
<td>35.1%</td>
<td>19.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share of regional housing 2011[^5]</td>
<td>30.5%</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share of regional housing 2036[^6]</td>
<td>33.8%</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share of jobs 2011[^7]</td>
<td>33.2%</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share of Gross Regional Product 2013–14[^8]</td>
<td>32.2%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[^3]: Data source [1]
[^4]: Data source [2]
[^5]: Data source [3]
[^6]: Data source [4]
[^7]: Data source [5]
[^8]: Data source [6]
Identify opportunities to accelerate housing supply in land release areas to support projected population growth.

Identify opportunities to improve transport connectivity to other settlements and markets.

Update planning strategies and policies relevant to regional needs.

**Case Study: Armidale Airport Master Plan**

Armidale Regional Council is developing an Airport Master Plan for their airport precinct. To date, the precinct has focused on aviation-related activities. Land outside the airspace protection zone offers major development potential for tourism and residential development associated with private aviation and commercial development, including an airport hotel and highway service centre.

Approximately 14 hectares of industrial zoned land is available in Stage 1 for aviation-related activities and commercial development and a further 5.5 hectares of business zoned land for an airport hotel, museums, highway service centre and visitor information centre. A further 8.5 hectares is proposed for development of a residential air-park, offering combined residential housing and aircraft storage.

**DIRECTION 4.2**

Enhance access to jobs, goods and services by improving connections between centres

Having reliable transport connections within and between settlements improves access to health services, education and job opportunities.

The NSW Government has invested over $65 million in the last five years to improve the connectivity of the region’s local and State roads. This has increased the efficiency of road movements and helped to reduce local congestion.

The passenger rail network provides services to regional cities and strategic centres, connecting Moree, Narrabri, Gunnedah, Armidale and Tamworth to Newcastle and Sydney on a daily basis. The bus and coach networks also provide regional connections between urban centres, Sydney, Newcastle and Brisbane.

The regional airports are experiencing increasing domestic and business air travel. In 2014, Tamworth, Armidale and Moree airports handled over 310,000 passenger movements with Sydney Airport. Daily flights to Brisbane are also available. The airports provide services for fly-in fly-out workers and access to specialist health, education and commercial facilities. The expansion of mining activities will place increasing demands on the region’s airports. Growth opportunities also exist in association with airports located outside the region, such as the Brisbane West Wellcamp Airport (Toowoomba), to improve agricultural freight movement and access the rapidly growing Asian market.

**ACTION 4.1.1 Work with Tamworth and Armidale Regional Councils to provide opportunities for increased jobs, services and housing**

The growth of Tamworth and Armidale will strengthen the region’s economy. Residential release areas in these regional cities will deliver the majority of new housing that will be required in the region to support projected population growth. Additional housing in and around business and service centres, new land releases for urban housing and rural residential uses, and land for industry, commercial and retail development will be needed to support population and economic growth and change in these regional cities.

- Deliver strategies that strengthen the role, vitality and vibrancy of commercial centres and potential employment nodes.
- Identify infrastructure that supports growth, including the activation of health, education and aviation precincts.
FIGURE 13: TAMWORTH GROWTH PRECINCTS

- City Centre
- Health Precinct
- Education Precinct
- Airport Precinct
- Regional Sports and Entertainment Precinct
- Key Transport Connections
- Industrial/Employment Area
- Future Industrial Investigation Area
- Commercial Core
- Commercial/Business Area
- Future Business Investigation Area
- Developing Commercial/Business Area or Business Park
- Developing Residential Area
- Future Residential Investigation Area
- Existing Large Lot Residential Area
- Future Large Lot Residential Investigation Area
- National Park and Reserve
- Waterway
- Railway

Key:
- Orange Circle: Developing Residential Area
- Pink Circle: Future Residential Investigation Area
- Blue Circle: Commercial Core
- Green Circle: Commercial/Business Area
- Purple Circle: Future Business Investigation Area
- Lilac Circle: Developing Commercial/Business Area or Business Park
- Dark Green Circle: National Park and Reserve
- Blue Line: Waterway
- Railway: Railway
- Industrial/Employment Area: Industrial/Employment Area
- City Centre: City Centre
- Health Precinct: Health Precinct
- Education Precinct: Education Precinct
- Airport Precinct: Airport Precinct
- Regional Sports and Entertainment Precinct: Regional Sports and Entertainment Precinct
- Key Transport Connections: Key Transport Connections
FIGURE 14: ARMIDALE GROWTH PRECINCTS

- City Centre
- Health Precinct
- Education Precinct
- Airport Precinct
- Key Transport Connections
- Railway
- Industrial/Employment Area
- Future Industrial Investigation Area
- Commercial Core
- Commercial/Business Area
- Existing Residential Area
- Future Residential Investigation Area
- Existing Large Lot Residential Area
- Future Large Lot Residential Investigation Area
- National Park and Reserve
- Waterway
The NSW Government does not support changes to the protections for existing regional flights to Sydney Airport. It is aiming to preserve current regular passenger transport services to Sydney Airport. Ongoing access for the regional airlines to Sydney Airport and the nearby CBD is important for regional communities, as well as providing transfers to interstate and overseas destinations. Transport for NSW licences routes that operate with less than 50,000 passengers per annum, for example, Narrabri and Moree. These licences grant exclusive rights of operation on the route for the term of the licence until 2018. Ensuring ongoing access to the rapidly expanding South East Queensland region via Brisbane Airport, will also provide important economic and social links for the region.

**ACTION 4.2.2 Deliver improved transport connectivity for urban centres**

Integrating community transport services into the public transport system will improve connections between centres and communities across the region. The NSW Government currently funds several community transport programs for people living in regional areas including the:

- Community Transport Program;
- Regional Transport Coordination Program;
- Country Passenger Transport Infrastructure Grants Scheme; and

The New England North West Regional Transport Plan (2013) identified that the region will receive a share of the $389 million to support and improve rural and regional bus services. Transport for NSW will work with bus operators in the region to develop routes and timetables to improve services.

- Investigate further opportunities to improve bus operations in urban centres and their connections with regional communities.

**ACTION 4.2.3 Minimise the impact of development on the efficiency of the transport network**

Limiting inappropriate development along existing and proposed bypasses, and ribbon development along highways, will minimise the potential effects of development on the efficiency of the transport network. It will also protect the productivity and safety improvements from the investment in bypasses and highway upgrades.

- Identify buffer measures in local environmental plans for heavy vehicle bypasses around urban centres.
- Limit ribbon development along the region’s key transport routes.

**ACTION 4.2.1 Identify connectivity improvements for key State roads in the region**

Transport for NSW and Roads and Maritime Services are progressively preparing network and corridor strategies to cover every State road in NSW to better manage transport infrastructure and maximise benefits for all road users. The corridor strategies will set a 20-year framework, which brings road safety, traffic efficiency and asset management activities together with freight access policy.

Network and corridor strategies provide the following benefits for the State road network:

- a plan for improvement that considers all modes of transport;
- transparency for the community and councils about planning and investment decisions;
- consistency in planning, management and the operation of roads; and
- the integration of road safety, traffic and asset maintenance projects.

The Newell Highway Corridor Strategy (2015) outlines the investment priorities to develop, manage and maintain the Newell Highway. The New England Highway Corridor Strategy is also being prepared.

- Progressively prepare corridor strategies for State roads in the region.

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Tamworth Railway Station
Better monitoring of relevant industrial and employment land supply in the region is needed as well as forecasting when new industrial and employment land will be required and where it should be located.

Councils should identify and maintain an adequate supply of zoned industrial and employment land in planning strategies and local environmental plans which is:

- capable of being developed due to minimal environmental constraints;
- supported by strong transport links to markets and workers;
- unlikely to be affected by land use conflict with adjoining uses;
- capable of being cost-effectively provided with any necessary services and infrastructure; and
- able to meet changing employment needs.

Existing and future industrial and employment lands need to be protected from the encroachment of incompatible land uses.

**FIGURE 15: AVAILABILITY OF INDUSTRIAL LAND BY LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA IN 2012–13**

Source: Department of Planning and Environment 2016, *New England North West Housing and Land Monitor*
Some developments may need to be located away from traditional mixed use industrial areas and into specialised precincts due to their type, scale and nature, for example, concrete batching plants, bitumen works, food processing facilities, research facilities and other activities that may have special needs as the economy changes and evolves and as employment nodes develop.

**ACTION 4.3.1 Secure a supply of relevant industrial and employment lands to support employment growth**

The NSW Government’s *New England North West Housing and Land Monitor* provides information on industrial land supply in each local government area and indicates the rate at which industrial land is being developed on an annual basis. It is produced with council input.

The supply of land can be restricted at times by the economic cost of road, drainage, water, sewer, gas, and electricity infrastructure. There may be increases in demand in some urban areas in the region because of the expansion of manufacturing, mining and agricultural and food processing industries. The Government may need to work with stakeholders to accelerate supply in regionally significant industrial areas.

Planning for freight access should be undertaken when identifying new industrial areas. Industrial release areas should be located in close proximity to the Restricted Access Vehicle Network and have efficient access to a serving railhead where available.

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**Case Study: Glen Artney Industrial Estate at Tamworth**

The Glen Artney Industrial Estate is approximately 600 hectares in size and is located about seven kilometres west of the Tamworth Central Business District, adjacent to the Tamworth Regional Airport. The estate accommodates a wide range of uses including abattoirs, manufacturing, transport/logistics and service industries.

Tamworth Regional Council prepared the *Glen Artney Development Strategy* in 2008 to consider site constraints, infrastructure issues and opportunities for the ongoing provision of employment land. The strategy has helped to provide employment land to support new and existing employment opportunities in Tamworth.

- Monitor industrial development activity for each local government area through the *New England North West Housing and Land Monitor*.
- Prepare Statewide land release criteria to assess locations for industrial uses across regional NSW to be used in settlement planning.
- Work with councils and servicing agencies to prioritise infrastructure planning and delivery for employment and commercial lands.
DIRECTION 4.4
Enhance the viability and vitality of commercial centres

Considerable investment in social, economic and transport infrastructure has been made in the commercial centres of existing settlements. Centres can contribute to the quality of life of residents and create a sense of place and community identity. They are also an important source of economic diversity and employment.

Traditional commercial centres are facing challenges due to the growth of online and bulky goods retailing, and from declining discretionary retail spending on non-food and beverage goods over the last 20 years. Centres need to adapt to remain vibrant and capable of delivering their important commercial functions and to provide community and social benefits.

Focusing major commercial activities such as shops, offices, banks and government services in town centres or existing commercial zones strengthens the role, vitality and vibrancy of centres.

Opportunities for residents to live and work in and around town centres and main streets can be made available in the form of shop top housing, villas and townhouses.

ACTION 4.4.1 Encourage retail and commercial uses in main streets and town centres to enhance the vitality and viability of these areas

It is important to support retail and business activity in existing commercial centres with sufficient zoned and appropriately located land. Councils should regularly review their retail commercial land supply in areas experiencing population growth to plan for sufficient zoned land.

Where it is not possible to expand or accommodate growth in existing centres, or where there is significant market demand, councils may need to consider new centres of an appropriate size and scale.

Proposals for new centres (including retail proposals) will need to demonstrate how they:
- respond to retail supply and demand;
- respond to innovations in the retail sector; and
- maximise the use of existing infrastructure (including public transport and community facilities) commensurate with the scale of the proposal.

The net community benefit should be a factor when assessing these proposals.

- Focus new retail areas in existing commercial centres, unless there is a demonstrated need and positive social and economic benefits for the community.

Case Study: Glen Innes Town Centre Master Plan

Glen Innes Severn Council has made significant investments in the Glen Innes Town Centre to support a vibrant retail and commercial centre and encourage urban activation and investment.

In 2011, the Council adopted a Central Business District (CBD) Master Plan which proposed a $2.2 million investment to improve pedestrian safety, upgrade street lighting and create a town square shared zone and street tree planting.

In 2012, the Council received $1.8 million as a loan from the NSW Government Local Infrastructure Renewal Scheme to enable the works proposed under the Master Plan to be completed in a shorter timeframe.

Work on the CBD revitalisation began in 2013, and is being carried out in stages.
DIRECTION 4.5
Grow tourism to support employment opportunities and urban centres

Tourism is an important contributor to the region’s economy. In 2015, there were over 1.2 million domestic and international overnight visitors to the region\(^4\) and they contributed over $740 million to the economy.\(^4\) This represented the highest tourism expenditure in inland NSW.

The New England North West has an array of tourism attractions and experiences that support economic activity and employment opportunities, including:

- bushwalking and birdwatching in World Heritage Areas, such as the Washpool, Gibraltar, Oxley Wild Rivers and the Werrikimbe National Parks;
- nationally significant Aboriginal cultural sites, such as the Myall Creek Massacre and Memorial site;
- important heritage buildings, such as the Anglican and Catholic cathedrals in Armidale;
- world-class events and conference facilities, such as the Australian Equine and Livestock Events Centre and the Tamworth Regional Entertainment and Conference Centre;
- internationally recognised events and festivals, such as the Tamworth Country Music Festival and AgQuip Field Days at Gunnedah;
- fossicking in the local waterways around Uralla, Glen Innes and Inverell;
- driving and cycling day trips to local wineries, farm gates and local produce suppliers;
- world-class hang-gliding around Manilla; and
- hot artesian waters in and around Moree.

Good transport connections and the region’s proximity to larger settlements in South East Queensland, the Hunter, North Coast and Sydney, provide opportunities to develop and build diversity in the economy by growing the tourism sector. Tourism-related transport services, such as festival bus services and park and ride services, will be considered through the development of annual servicing plans for major events, as outlined in the New England North West Regional Transport Plan (2013).

ACTION 4.5.1 Facilitate opportunities for a range of tourist experiences and accommodation

The NSW Government will work with councils to plan for a range of tourist experiences and accommodation. This includes providing scope for complementary land uses, and infrastructure and services that support and build on existing and emerging tourist attractions across the region. This can be done by:

- providing flexible planning controls to facilitate a range of tourist accommodation options, such as farm stay and bed and breakfast developments;
- enabling a diverse range of cultural heritage tourism, including opportunities to engage with Aboriginal communities and their culture; and
- supporting the development of complementary tourism experiences associated with agriculture.

- Planning strategies and local environmental plans to provide land and opportunities to support tourist experiences and accommodation.