

POWERING BUSINESS IN THE HUNTER

A Business Hunter White Paper for the Cabinet in the
next Australian Government

INTRODUCTION

The 2022 Federal Election will be one of Australia's most important in history and presents enormous challenges and opportunities for the Hunter in our role as one of the nation's leading regional economies.

The next Cabinet of the Commonwealth of Australia is presented with a unique opportunity to reframe and stabilise national economic growth and business confidence to deliver continued prosperity on the back of nearly three years of upheaval. Running parallel is unsurpassed short-term stimulus expenditure in response to the COVID pandemic, and current global and geopolitical uncertainty that will sharpen the focus and impacts of supply chain, labour market and economic predictability for the next term of government at least. Addressing the opportunities this climate presents and tempering the challenges will best be achieved through strategic commitments across the nation that strengthen our existing economic assets while making pathways for new industrial growth and global market readiness.

As the nation's leading regional economy of more than \$56.8B Gross Regional Product¹ **it is critical that the next Australian government prioritise significant and cohesive investment in the Hunter. The Hunter region is the ultimate testbed and a safe investment to deliver government and commercial certainty in Australia's economic future.**

This is the Hunter region's era. We have the strategic economic framework in place and are well positioned to respond and perform as a primary driver of the next wave of economic prosperity across the country. To deliver this ambition, Business Hunter recommends strategic, diverse, and comprehensive economic policies for the Hunter at the upcoming federal election. Policy that meets national economic objectives to realise the global investment potential in the Hunter, and policy that complements strong business and employment growth the region. The Hunter region is ready to further our contributions to the national economy in our areas of strength and comparative advantage and to diversify our own markets in industries that will meet the kind of returns on investment that Australia will need to achieve sustainable economic growth required for the next term of government and the decades that surpass it.

Business Hunter is the region's leading policy and advocacy organisation for business. For more than 135 years we have grown to serve the interests of around 3,700 business members and affiliates, offering a wide range of business focused policy and advocacy services, business support products, and tools and services such as Human Resources, Legal Advisory, recruitment, and skills attraction.

We work across the gamut of Hunter's largest businesses right through to our newest start-ups and a large variety of business SMEs in between over a wide range of industry sectors. Through our ongoing consultations and engagements, the message we hear is crystal clear: **this federal election must look beyond one term of parliament.** The next Federal Cabinet must, to all efforts, commit to strategic investment in the Hunter.

We recognise that business confidence and business growth lead to employment and market growth, and as such, the voice of business must resonate with incoming governments. Our 2022 Federal Election Brief has been formulated through ongoing member engagement to present the next Cabinet with the types of large scale, value-led, regionally, state and nationally significant economic investment that will contribute to Australia's economic growth long-term. They reflect the Hunter's position as one of the country's leading business and economic engine rooms; the overall theme of our priorities is to drive business growth, industrial growth, and the jobs growth that will follow.

¹ Dept of Regional NSW/Remplan, 2019.

Our priorities show that the geographical and infrastructure potential of the Hunter region and the strategic investment we are calling for will reap benefits for the nation - not just for the Hunter. Our priorities will open the entire Northwest, New England and Mid to North Coast to the Queensland border through greater economic and service connectivity. The result will be business growth realised through investment in the Hunter's infrastructure that will underpin and expand freight, industry, and commerce - expansion beyond Greater Newcastle and the Hunter. We are championing state-wide growth and connectivity, driven through shared benefits realised through opening our existing infrastructure assets that can service global commercial interactions for our regional NSW partners who similarly are ready to seize opportunities for growth and economic diversification that will aid national growth.

Our focus is on strengthening our existing and enabling new industries while fostering a skills, workforce and business readiness pipeline in vocations that are critical to assist growth. These pipelines should focus on attraction to energy production and emissions reduction, new and diversified knowledge development, and connecting this to net zero strategies; participating in frontier industries like cyber and space; building an industrial scale circular economy; fostering advanced manufacturing in sectors including medical technologies and defence; sustaining and growing mining for existing and importantly, emerging resource requirements; nurturing our research institution outcomes and maximising the opportunity to develop and produce here in the Hunter; and build scale in our skilled workforce to drive and enable entrepreneurial and embedded commercial outputs that have national and global significance.

Business Hunter's key message to the next Cabinet of the Australian Government is simple: understand and act on the priorities for business and economic growth in the Hunter region by committing to doing what is necessary to secure the region's existing strengths while positioning us to grow and further diversify the economy by taking advantage of future opportunities.

Priority – Housing our region to match our social needs and economic growth potential

Urgently clear existing housing development backlog and prioritise enablement of new and diverse housing projects across the Hunter that will keep up with our workforce attraction and jobs growth prospects.

Housing affordability and supply is a national problem and States should not be left alone to manage this if comprehensive, strategic solutions are to be achieved. The Hunter region is experiencing critical under-housing which has not traditionally significantly impacted business sectors in the region as directly as it is currently.

We are at a critical point in the supply of liveable, affordable housing at all levels. The lack of housing is a barrier to business attraction, jobs growth and industry investment in our region. Addressing housing affordability and supply in the Hunter will significantly grow our attraction and investment proposition for existing businesses seeking to attract staff, and new businesses seeking to establish themselves in our renowned region. We are not asking for incentives that drive up the cost of housing and risk interest rate pressures, like lowering deposits or drawing on future funds like superannuation to contribute to home ownership. We know that these measures stimulate demand and serve to drive house prices up further and we must look beyond measures that increase demand and focus government policy on supply.

Currently there are a range of identifiable and shovel ready projects that would support a significant supply of land and housing capable of relieving the pressure as well as accommodating growth in the demand for housing in the Hunter. These projects have stalled owing to the requirement to fund upfront certain infrastructure. There is a clear understanding that the projects generate a liability to fund in part or fully the respective infrastructure elements, however they lack the capacity to do this prior to be able to transact on the land and housing products. The Enabling Infrastructure Fund will underwrite the cost of developers to provide the infrastructure to meet diverse housing needs within each development (social, affordable, and market-driven) and be re-paid as development generates and is released to market over time. The Fund returns should be cost neutral when the private sector responsibility and liability is considered, as an incentive to boost the diverse and efficient supply on new housing stock.

From a purely business perspective, the result of unlocking and increasing supply will be strong business attraction and economic growth of our region. Business Hunter backs our regional advocates and policy partners in this space when calling on the new Commonwealth government to work with the NSW Government to urgently unlock housing development, including social and affordable housing in the region.

Social and Affordable housing:

Business Hunter supports the Compass Housing contributions to *Everybody's Home* Budget Position Paper. The Paper urges urgent Commonwealth investment in social housing to close the gap brought on by metropolitan migration to regional areas. This migration has dramatically altered the profile of housing affordability in these areas where wages are not matched to city equivalents. As of February 2022, the housing vacancy rate for rentals in the Lower Hunter is below one percent.

The resulting increases in rents and house purchase prices have meant people on low to moderate incomes, many of whom fill jobs providing essential services, are facing a lack of choice of suitable dwelling for themselves and their families, and in some instances, having no choice at all – facing long commutes to work and in extreme cases, homeless or uncertainty over their residential future.

Market housing:

The COVID-19 pandemic has encouraged metropolitan dwellers to rethink the way they work, and from where. The opportunities presented by a mobile workforce across inner and outer metropolitan regions are enormous and in the case of Greater Newcastle and the Hunter region, we have seen housing vacancies snapped up and a resulting increase in prices upwards of 20 percent throughout 2021 by workforce migration and other

factors. Business Hunter has direct and several anecdotal examples of the region's limiting capacity to attract skills to the region for the lack of liveable housing options for workers being recruited to our growing jobs and industrial markets.

The Hunter Planning Alliance², of which Business Hunter is part, is calling for the establishment of an Infrastructure Enabling Fund, which could be co-funded with the NSW Government, to be set up to unlock property development backlogs.

We further call on Commonwealth support across the three federal portfolios that touch on housing to leverage Infrastructure Australia's Priority Projects for 2022-25 (roads and infrastructure projects of national significance) to identify priority precincts for affordable housing developments to be unlocked through major transport infrastructure or road upgrades.

Business Hunter leads a partnered approach³ to inform our advocacy for infrastructure. We understand that if Commonwealth infrastructure expenditure facilitates growth of place-based hubs in regions of national significance for growth, such as Greater Newcastle and the Hunter, investment in localised infrastructure upgrades will follow and can immediately relieve the housing shortages experienced in our region. The private sector needs confidence to invest.

ELECTION COMMITMENT: \$500M to establish an Enabling Infrastructure Fund to invest in urban infrastructure that will free up land capable of supporting the construction of over 25,000 homes and generate an annual economic output of \$12.9 billion including the creation of 15,700 jobs.

² The Hunter Planning Alliance consists of Business Hunter, Urban Development Institute of Australia, Committee for the Hunter, the Hunter Chapter of the Property Council of Australia, DANTIA, Lake Macquarie City Council, and the Hunter Joint Organisation

³ Business Hunter established and Chairs the Hunter Regional Infrastructure Committee, a group made up of more than 25 sector leaders and infrastructure associated organisations to lead policy discussion, knowledge sharing, and infrastructure needs analysis for the region. It meets monthly.

Priority – Connective infrastructure to support economic growth

1. Support and fund critical connective infrastructure projects focused on comprehensive intraregional freight connectivity and expansion of the supply chain.

Boosting infrastructure connectivity across the Hunter region will not only boost confidence to invest, but it will also significantly grow supply chain efficiencies for and beyond our region. Fully integrated, interconnected air, port, rail, and road infrastructure will service the Hunter and Central Coast, as well as the Mid and North Coast to the Queensland border and New England and the North-West.

Benefits accruing to business, jobs, and skills growth to meet growing demand and address currently below state-average workforce participation rates in youth and transitioning workforces will materialise in the following realms:

- Supply chain enterprises
- Sovereign manufacturing
- International agribusiness efficiencies
- Defence SMEs
- Medical technology deployment in rural and remote areas

Key projects for Commonwealth prioritisation

There are two projects that represent a light on the hill for the Hunter: The Port of Newcastle and Newcastle Airport.

Consistent with the NSW Greater Newcastle Metropolitan Plan and Hunter Regional Plans⁴, fully enabling the globally significant Port of Newcastle and connecting to support it with a scaled-up Newcastle Airport boasting international capability and a contemporary freight and passenger terminal will charge this region up to its full and realisable potential and will change the north-west and northern parts of NSW for the better.

The Port of Newcastle is the biggest port on the East Coast of Australia. It has been a global trade gateway for Australia for more than 220 years.

- Each year the Port of Newcastle handles around 170 million tons of cargo and when operating, many maritime cruises each year.
- This port fosters businesses across the Hunter and around the New South Wales region in the international market.
- This port relates to the major shipping ports throughout the Asia-Pacific region.

Whilst the Port of Newcastle is recognised as a nationally significant activity hub, it has enormous capacity for growth both in terms of shipping capacity based on current vessel movements and land side capacity by virtue of large areas of waterfront and near waterfront land available for development⁵. To realise genuine growth ambitions of the Port, the Commonwealth needs to engage in consultation with the NSW Government to remove obstacles to investment in the growth and diversification of and enable port related activity and the freight capacity to be increased.

⁴ NSW Department of Planning and Environment

⁵ Business Hunter acknowledges the 2022-23 Federal Budget commitment of \$100m to enable the port to be “hydrogen export ready”.

In 2021, **Newcastle Airport** was granted \$66M by the Federal Government to fund upgraded runway works allowing the airport to fly and land Code E wide-bodied, long-haul aircraft. Work on that upgrade is about to commence and will be completed within two years. It is located within the RAAF Base Williamstown and the State designated Special Activation Precinct (SAP).

The region needs an international airport terminal expansion to be completed and ready for use when long-haul international aircraft can begin to use our airport in late 2023 / early 2024. Newcastle Airport has to date invested in the order of \$5M for design of the terminal. We are now seeking to partner with the Commonwealth Government to complete the final piece of this game-changing infrastructure upgrade and unlock \$12B in economic activity for the state.

Access to international markets will drive significant investment in the region and have a catalytic effect on our economy in a post-COVID world. Should the new government wish to reap full return on its significant investment in a runway upgrade and unlock the potential of the proximity to freight, defence, port and the Williamstown SAP for the entire north-eastern seaboard and our north-western inland neighbouring regions, raising the intake and capacity of the terminal is essential expenditure for this next term of government. Importantly, it will also service the labour force of emerging industry sectors such as renewable energy which have already been the focus of significant government support in the form of policy programs and funding.

ELECTION COMMITMENT: Removing obstacles to investment in the growth and diversification of the Port of Newcastle.

ELECTION COMMITMENT: \$55M one-off investment in an *international airport passenger and freight terminal* at Williamstown

2. Improve connectivity on road and rail networks

Over the last five years, several key road and rail projects relevant to or within the Hunter region have advanced by virtue of progressive State and Federal funding commitments for planning and construction now embedded in the current budget (2022/23) and the forward estimates.

To continue to boost economic and community efficiency and connectivity of the region, it is vital that these projects continue to progress and not be deferred or delayed. In the Hunter's context, this means getting on with the road projects along and connecting with the M1 and New England Highways. The upgrades of these arterial roads will unlock freight connectivity between the Hunter and the regions north and west that rely on road connection to our port, our airport, and our inland rail networks to move their goods and services across the state and offshore. The northern and western NSW federal roads funding must be reflective of the existing and growing needs to transit rural, regional, and outer metro agricultural and commodity-driven freight into and out of the connectors of global markets that exist through the Port of Newcastle and the Newcastle Airport.

Business Hunter does not want to overlook the long-term vision to deliver high-speed rail along the Eastern Seaboard, connecting Melbourne with Brisbane, beyond and in between, over a decade of multi-term government investment; high-speed rail investigations and acquisitions must continue.

Proposals to deliver faster rail connectivity between Central Station (Sydney), Gosford (Central Coast), and Newcastle Interchange have also been subject to planning and feasibility review and notably, a commitment in the 2022/23 Federal budget to upgrade the existing line with a focus of works on the Wyong to Tuggerah straight.

There are additional pertinent investment priorities for the Hunter region in making it more competitive as a global and domestically interconnected city region that require additional, ongoing government investment prioritisation to deliver a first-world commuter experience between the business cities of NSW. Business Hunter recommends that the Federal Cabinet maintain a partnered, ongoing investment trajectory with the

NSW Government to continually upgrade the travel experience between Newcastle Interchange (through light rail connectivity), Gosford and Central Coast hub interchanges, with Sydney Central to achieve a minimum 1-hour reduction in the express, business commuter travel times between these regions.

Business Hunter believes that providing faster existing rail improvements that significantly reduce the commuter travel time to Sydney via rail by 60-minutes minimum with better business and commercial connectivity on commuter trains must be part of the next Cabinet's immediate and ongoing project priority to connect our three cities. This work needs to progress whilst longer term plans and investigations for a Fast/High Speed Rail are underway.

It is crucial to ensure any current faster rail commitments include installation of Wi-Fi connectivity on commuter trains. This long overdue digital infrastructure will enable business to continue, not freeze, on travel between Newcastle, Central Coast, and Sydney. Reducing travel times, of course, is essential, but so is a first world commuter experience.

ELECTION COMMITMENTS:

Faster rail: Ongoing government commitments to attribute infrastructure to reduce travel times by 60-minutes minimum.

Immediate investment: to install digital technologies such as national Wi-Fi connectivity to function on commuter trains.

Priority – Rapidly and adequately enable the Hunter’s new energy future with clear transition from roadmaps and feasibilities to projects and solutions that deliver reliable and affordable power

Business Hunter calls on the next Federal Cabinet to prioritise investment in our nation’s energy diversification to look beyond feasibility to rapid project delivery that will secure our regions and the nation’s energy supply security and sovereignty immediately and for the long-term to 2050.

Acquisition:

Business and industries must be supported as the nation moves to renewable energy and decarbonisation. This support is also important if we are to maintain function as both an energy sovereignty and exporter of energy for the future. Importantly, the Government’s focus must centre on skilling our workforce to meet the existing and projected skills shortfalls in the energy jobs markets.

Supply:

The Australian Government is not blind to the issues presented in the Hunter context of traditional energy suppliers reassessing and closing their energy supply assets over the next one to ten years. An energy gap is presented in the current and short-term future despatchable base energy supply market and this gap must be addressed. This gap impacts regions beyond the Hunter and also risks energy remaining affordable and having reliability in supply at scale to support existing industry let alone new growth.

There is enough thought leadership in our region that has communicated the impacts of short energy supply while new markets are created. Business Hunter has played a role here, however; what the Hunter needs is an immediate strategy to move Government and advocacy roadmaps from ideation to real-life projects. With energy suppliers currently planning to shut down coal fired power supply sources, we must move our energy economy from a region in declining energy generation to one ready to diversify and augment existing as well as prepare for and deliver new energy supply.

The region has strong claims to lead the nation in new energy futures and both State and Federal governments have recognised this and directed policy and project initiatives and funding towards the Hunter. We know where government leads the private sector is more inclined to follow and there are already signs this is occurring in the region. This must continue with increased vigour to convert plans to projects in production or otherwise risk energy supply gaps, increasing prices and a detrimental impact on industry and business across the region and more broadly, the nation.

There is also genuine opportunity for the government to participate in the development of hydrogen pilot projects stemming from existing investments already established under the auspice of the University of Newcastle and the Newcastle Institute of Energy and Resources. This includes opportunities to scale up hydrogen production, so the impacts and stresses of commercialisation are understood and accommodated.

Transmission:

The next Commonwealth Government must also prioritise national funding to upgrade the transmission network. By doing so, the federal government will enable a more energy ready network to meet 2025, 2030, 2040 and 2050 supply requirements. Whilst the region has been targeted as a genuine candidate for energy production, the instability in the grid caused by the incorporation of renewables into the networks has caused well documented problems and is stymying investment.

The issue requires Investment to restructure power transmission and grids otherwise the productive capacity from new projects will be constrained in delivery. This in and of itself will be a block to the flow of private sector investment into new projects that will ultimately replace the capacity lost with the retirement of the coal fired assets.

ELECTION COMMITMENTS:

Skilling for the new energy jobs market

Actions and agility to move project plans through approval, funding and construction phases to urgently deliver clean energy projects as the market demands

Prioritise funding and action to address the shortcomings of the existing energy grid so new investments can proceed to ensure supply of reliable and affordable power to businesses and homes

Priority – Urgently support and fund collaborative pipeline of preparedness in skills, training, research and education for existing and future businesses and industries.

Like many other parts of Australia, the Hunter region is experiencing serious constraints in the labour market which will need to be addressed if new and existing industry ambitions for the region and the nation are to be realised. However, in difference many other regional areas across the nation, the Hunter has the prospects of being a broad crucible for the new economy if it can capture and deliver on the groundswell of potential laying before it. This will not be restricted to one sector, but many - there are several key industries experiencing the pulses of growth and development. A Workforce Growth and Development Pathway program to feed interest, enrolment, skills and jobs uptake in existing, undersubscribed and emerging sectors will address potential shortcomings.

Business Hunter is calling for a pilot of a Workforce Development and Growth Pathway program in the Hunter region. The program will seek to address the growing skills intermigration issues with a vision to growing industry opportunities in renewables, defence, manufacturing, circular economy, health and education sectors, as well as the business spin-offs to support new jobs in these priority new industries. It will also offset the adapting of jobs over time associated with transition from coal fired power stations and slowing of growth in the coal mining sector.

Engagement with apprenticeship and training agencies, education bodies, and industry to immediately and directly establish a pathway program for enlisting workers within traditional sectors at risk, to provide options, training, incentives for existing employers to retain, continually skill and retrain, and steadily develop workforces over the coming decades. The Hunter region is an ideal pilot site and economic testbed to establish a template for the future workforce for the nation.

Business Hunter notes there is a range of measures to extend existing and new industry opportunities that will emerge from both confirmed and proposed industrial growth enablers including the following:

- Aerospace and defence including the Williamtown SAP, Astra Aerolab and regional airport expansion
- The John Hunter Hospital Innovation Precinct and Living Lab
- The Advanced Manufacturing Centre at Muswellbrook and the Energy Hub at Liddell (AGL)
- The Hydrogen Hub at the Port of Newcastle and growth in the Hydrogen Skills Hub identified by the University of Newcastle.

These projects will have the capacity and capability to:

- Bring a broad set of new investors to the Region
- Attract new companies to the Region
- Build stronger corporate, investor and community confidence.
- Improve commercialisation pathways for research
- Facilitate upskilling opportunities that will support the energy generation transition

Strategic skills, jobs and education growth must happen alongside a transition from coal power domestically, over the next few decades. If designed through collaboration and leveraging from industry,

education and training agencies that already exist⁶ (rather than funding new ones), this Workforce Growth and Development Pathway program can support existing workforces and their current employers to manage skills intermigration across emerging industries. For mining in particular, this approach will also encourage career interest, uptake and growth in futures-based mining engineering and supporting workforces that will counter the current contraction in enrolments for mining and metallurgical courses and assist our nation to meet the demands of future energy industries, resources and raw minerals supply.

Policy must focus on incentivising businesses to develop, upskill and diversify their workforces to meet future industry needs without risking “skills flight”. No business in the Hunter is currently willing or able to “give up” their workforce for new industry or transitional purposes. Commonwealth action must focus on supporting traditional workforces (existing); new technologies (emerging) and (future) workforce to position career trends as vital for undertaking at the national level.

The planning, management and execution of a comprehensive skills journey is so critical to our regional success, that Business Hunter has committed to staging a summit series - titled *Powering Business 2050: Emerging Industries and the Future of Work*. The Inaugural Summit will take place over two days (22-23 June 2022) in the Hunter. We believe this will be an important sounding board and policy development platform for the next Cabinet in the Australian Government, along with your NSW Government colleagues, to participate and contribute to a solutions-focused discussion and policy development that will enable the Hunter to prioritise the skills growth trajectory to 2025, 2030, 2040 and 2050. Business Hunter looks forward to welcoming the Federal Cabinet to the region in June.

ELECTION COMMITMENT: Initial five-year funding commitment of up to \$10m to enable a Workforce Growth and Development Pathway program, piloted in the Hunter region.

ELECTION COMMITMENT: Increase funding to the tertiary and vocational education sectors to consolidate efforts, attract and produce high quality skills and training programs that are purpose-designed to fill shortages in existing skills markets while forward planning and funding meet the new jobs and expertise required to support new markets.

ELECTION COMMITMENT: Fund a precinct-model for investment and infrastructure at the University of Newcastle to co-locate industries with researchers, commercial agencies, as well as primary, secondary and tertiary educators, skills and jobs trainers.

ELECTION COMMITMENT: \$30M funding for growth and investment incentives to extend existing and proposed industrial growth initiatives to restore and build business confidence and encourage immediate complementary private investment.

⁶ Business Hunter supports the continuation of funding and scope undertaken by the Hunter Hydrogen Technology Cluster NewH2 and believes other energy resource agencies should be leveraged in a similar manner to the Cluster to coordinate research, development and skills readiness for business.

CONCLUSION

The Hunter Region sits at a very important and strategic threshold in terms of its capacity to deliver national economic growth as well as attraction and growth in business confidence and interests. The opportunities that lay before us have never been greater and the region is ready to meet the challenges in partnership with the next Commonwealth government that understands and prioritises our prosperity as the key regional economy of Australia.

The Region presents a strong return on investment for the incoming Federal Government in key industries that will deliver economic and business growth for the nation. We simply need the right business conditions and the right infrastructure (social and economic) to grow and realise our potential.

Business Hunter believes the broad strategic initiatives highlighted in this document will enable the Hunter, and wider regions with whom we partner to thrive beyond one term of government. The alignment of community and business interest across the region will underwrite the ability for challenges to be overcome and the benefits realised.

Business Hunter's key message to the next Cabinet of the Australian Government is simple: understand and act on the priorities for business and economic growth in the Hunter region by committing to doing what is necessary to secure the region's existing strengths while positioning us to grow and further diversify the economy by taking advantage of future opportunities.

POWERING BUSINESS PRIORITIES: SUMMARY

1. **Housing our region to match our social needs and economic growth potential:**

- Clear existing housing development backlog and prioritise new and diverse housing projects across the Hunter that will keep up with our social responsibility to supply adequate and available housing as well as addressing barriers to workforce attraction and jobs growth prospects
- Establish an Enabling Infrastructure Fund (EIF) in partnership with NSW Government to facilitate land releases and clear property development backlogs.

2. **Connective infrastructure to support economic growth**

- Remove obstacles to investment in the growth and diversification of our port.
- Invest in an international airport terminal to boost passenger and freight capacity at our airport.
- Improve road and inland rail connective infrastructure that continues to enable a seamless freight transport journey for rural, regional, and outer metropolitan regions to move their goods across the West, North-West and North of the state into and out of the Hunter's metropolitan and global freight connection points.
- Additional ongoing prioritisation of rail projects between Newcastle, Gosford, Sydney that will deliver a genuine improvement to end-to-end travel times of 60 minutes minimum on the commuter timetable.
- Immediate investment to install digital technologies such as station and on-train Wi-Fi connectivity to improve commuter experience.

3. **Adequately enable the Hunter's new energy future of business with clear transition from roadmaps and feasibilities to projects and solutions in:**

- New energy acquisition, supply, storage, and transition – and the jobs that will be needed to power businesses of today and in the future
- Support Australia's energy sovereignty using clean technologies to assist coal industries to continue through a managed diversification and sunset period to 2050.

4. Place-based skills planning, attraction, growth and development across current and future industries and workforces, taking stock of the agencies and levers of government that exist

- Establish a Workforce Growth and Development Pathway program
- Fund a precinct-model for investment and infrastructure at the University of Newcastle to co-locate industries with researchers, commercial agencies, as well as primary, secondary and tertiary educators, skills, and jobs trainers.

The following commitments are considered essential in terms of the pursuit of this mission.

1. \$500M to establish an Enabling Infrastructure Fund to invest in urban infrastructure that will free up land capable of supporting the construction of over 25,000 homes and generate an annual economic output of \$12.9 billion including the creation of 15,700 jobs.
2. Removing obstacles to investment in the growth and diversification of the Port of Newcastle.
3. \$55M one-off investment in an international airport passenger and freight terminal at Williamtown
4. Faster rail: ongoing government commitments to attribute infrastructure development to reduce travel times between Sydney and Newcastle by 60-minutes minimum.
5. Immediate investment: to install digital technologies such as national Wi-Fi connectivity to function on intrastate commuter trains.
6. Prioritise skilling for the new energy jobs market
7. Actions and agility to move project plans through approval, funding and construction phases to urgently deliver clean energy projects as the market demands
8. Prioritise funding and action to address the shortcomings of the existing energy grid so new investments can proceed to ensure supply of reliable and affordable power to businesses and homes
9. Initial five-year funding commitment of up to \$10m to enable a Workforce Growth and Development Pathway program, piloted in the Hunter region.
10. Increase funding to the tertiary and vocational education sectors to consolidate efforts, attract and produce high quality skills and training programs that are purpose-designed to fill shortages in existing skills markets while forward planning and funding meet the new jobs and expertise required to support new markets.
11. Fund a precinct-model for investment and infrastructure at the University of Newcastle to co-locate industries with researchers, commercial agencies, as well as primary, secondary and tertiary educators, skills and jobs trainers.
12. \$30M funding for growth and investment incentives to extend existing and proposed industrial growth initiatives to restore and build business confidence and encourage immediate complementary private investment.

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