

Western Sydney University submission Powerhouse Parramatta Exhibition 21 July 2020

Western Sydney University strongly welcomes and supports the development of Powerhouse Parramatta. The Greater Sydney Commission's, *Metropolis of Three Cities* establishes a 40-year vision for Greater Sydney, with a 20-year plan to manage growth and change. As Sydney's second city, the Central River City will be the fastest growing district in Sydney over the next 20 years – with 70 per cent more population growth forecasted than the Eastern Harbour City. Major infrastructure investments in education, health and culture are already underway in preparation for the boom, including, for example, an investment of more than \$700 million from Western Sydney University in recent years, made particularly through the Westmead Health and Education Precinct, the Peter Shergold building in Parramatta Square, and the forthcoming Engineering Innovation Hub in Hassall St, Parramatta with UNSW Sydney. However, matched infrastructure support from government is critical. Powerhouse Parramatta will provide just that – delivering much-needed jobs, education, liveability and cultural equity in Western Sydney.

Endorsement of EIS and SEIA findings

The Social and Economic Impact Assessment for Powerhouse Parramatta identifies a number of social and economic benefits to the community at a local, metropolitan and state level. This submission makes comment on these claims.

Employment

- *Supporting approximately 1,100 full-time equivalent (FTE) construction jobs and 2,430 FTE indirect jobs over the development period, and between 300 to 400 FTE direct jobs (full-time, part-time and casual) as a result of the ongoing operation of Powerhouse Parramatta.*
- *Investing in construction employment opportunities as well as increased job opportunities for those employed in the science, education, innovation, creative and retail industries.*

The pronounced jobs deficit in Western Sydney is well documented¹ and arguably worsening due to the COVID-19 pandemic². Powerhouse Parramatta will be a major and much-needed employment stimulus for Parramatta, the Central River City, and Western Sydney more broadly. From construction through to operations, Powerhouse Parramatta will contribute to the target of an additional 52,300 jobs in Parramatta CBD by 2036. It will catalyse creative industry development around Parramatta, and stimulate regional tourism, hospitality, and retail. Further, an investment in creative skills is crucial to driving employment and economic growth, according to new research by the Australian Government's Bureau of Communications and Arts Research (BCAR). BCAR's research paper, *Creative Skills for the Future Economy*³, noted that the growth of those employed in creative occupations was accelerating, at almost double the rate of other occupations between 2011 and 2016. Australian Bureau of Statistics data indicates that cultural and creative activity contributed approximately \$106 billion (equivalent to over 6 per cent) to Australia's gross domestic product in 2014-15.

¹ Even at the height of Western Sydney's 2016-18 jobs boom, employment access was dire. The Australian Bureau of Statistics' community-level statistical area, SA2, indicates unemployment rates in 2018 were double and triple the metropolitan average: <https://www.employment.gov.au/small-area-labour-markets-publication-o>.

² O'Neill, P 2020, 'Recession will hit job-poor parts of Western Sydney very hard', *The Conversation*, <https://theconversation.com/recession-will-hit-job-poor-parts-of-western-sydney-very-hard-139385>.

³ See: <https://www.communications.gov.au/departmental-news/creative-skills-future-economy>.

In addition to driving employment opportunities, Powerhouse Parramatta will also reinforce the strategic importance of Parramatta as an economic and social capital for Sydney, which has been subsequently emphasised through its designation as the metropolitan centre of the Central City under the *Greater Sydney Region Plan* and having equal strategic importance as the existing Sydney CBD. The significant investment in education, culture and entertainment under Powerhouse Parramatta will form part of the positive transformational change occurring in the area, and arguably drive more investment into the region. Lastly, since Powerhouse Parramatta will deliver recreation and community facilities it will crucially meet the demands of population growth, forecasted to reach 470,000 people in Greater Parramatta by 2036.

World-class STEM/STEAM facilities

- *Providing significant reputational and positive public benefits through the delivery of a new world class cultural institution for science, research and creative industries for the local community as well as the Western Sydney region and Greater Sydney area.*

Powerhouse Parramatta will be the nation's premier cultural institution in terms of science and creative industry educational opportunities and programs, redressing the long-standing eastern city bias in terms of these opportunities. The future-thinking program will advance both STEM and STEAM interactions and educational possibilities in a completely new way. The proposed location will affirm Powerhouse Parramatta's centrality in an activated network of facilities, communities, knowledges, nodes and precincts across Greater Parramatta, including Sydney Olympic Park, Rydalmere, Parramatta CBD and Westmead. Here, there are unprecedented opportunities for collaboration and knowledge-exchange, supported by existing and planned future transport development such as the Metro and Light Rail.

Western Sydney University's Rydalmere campus, for example, is the largest in the area, accommodating over 13,000 students and staff. Further, the University also offers major academic facilities such as its new \$30 million science and health building at Rydalmere, a forthcoming \$280 million Engineering Innovation Hub in Parramatta, as well as cultural assets like the Margaret Whitlam Galleries. These extensive collaborative opportunities will enable Powerhouse Parramatta to extend beyond the key MAAS sites in Ultimo, Parramatta, Castle Hill to a more thoroughgoing engagement with regional cultural institutions to expand the reach of the MASS collections and programs state-wide.

Educational benefits

- *Improving life-long education outcomes for students and supporting long term social and economic wellbeing through delivering an active working precinct that provides world class education, research and community facilities as well as education programs with high tech digital spaces for research and education programs, enhancing opportunities to collaborate with schools, universities and industry.*
- *Enhancing local and broader community lifestyles through the creation of a series of life-long learning programs, opportunities for culturally diverse festivals and events, specialist education and innovative learning opportunities.*

An educated population is an important enabler of future growth as it sets up the region for high value jobs. Through the long and extensive presence of Western Sydney University and other universities in the Central River City, the region now boasts among the highest Bachelor degree attainment levels in the country. Thus, Powerhouse Parramatta will be immediately embedded in a thriving knowledge economy.

Further, as outlined in *Western Sydney Creative*⁴ – Western Sydney University’s decadal strategy for arts and culture – the University’s public role includes providing opportunities for the creative development of staff, students and creative individuals and organisations. One part of this role, according to the strategy, includes:

Developing and stewarding collaborative partnerships with institutions, to provide new pathways to skills, training and qualifications in the creative arts. It also involves supporting students to build social capital, by facilitating and brokering connections, networks and industry experience through mentoring, placements and internships that enable our graduates to become resilient, entrepreneurial creative leaders.

Commensurate with this strategy then, is Powerhouse Parramatta’s presence in a new model of a museum embedded in its community, and drawing communities to its innovative cultural, educational, and research facilities and programs. As a partner with Western Sydney University, Powerhouse Parramatta will undoubtedly form a meaningful partnership premised on knowledge-exchange with other public sector and industry partners. This will provide enhanced learning and employment opportunities for the region. Crucially, it will also recognise the growing expectation that workers will need more ‘21st century skills’, including skills in creativity, higher-order cognition, and systems-thinking skills as well as interpersonal, emotional intelligence, and collaborative skills in order to meet the future needs of innovative and high-growth industries. Thus, partnerships between Powerhouse Parramatta, Western Sydney University and actors will collaboratively rethink how we approach arts education at all levels in order to support students, and the community more broadly, as they become proficient at multiple literacies.

Powerhouse Parramatta will also be able to galvanise new forms of lifelong learning opportunities through a partnership with Western Sydney University. The University’s School of Humanities and Communication Arts, for example, has recently revised its Arts program to include engaged and work-based learning opportunities. This provides valuable opportunities for students to engage with the museum’s programs and collections as part of their studies. Students will greatly benefit from collaborations with Powerhouse Parramatta as they engage with a leading example of a creative industries institution, as well as participate in the development of the wider creative industry sector in the Central River City.

New cultural infrastructure

- *Providing new cultural and entertainment opportunities during both day and night and diversifying the local night-time economy.*
- *Improving way of life for users of the Parramatta CBD area, through enhancing active travel connections between the Parramatta CBD and the Parramatta River foreshore and thereby improving local access and amenity.*
- *Improving access to Powerhouse Collections as well as international exhibitions alongside engaging communities with local histories.*
- *Improving the level of visitation and tourism expenditure within the local and regional area and, in turn, increasing demand for entertainment, food and accommodation from visitors which will generate increased employment for residents in the locality. In addition, Powerhouse Parramatta, as a best-in-class facility, will help secure future exhibitions and events.*

Western Sydney has a vibrant network of independent creative practitioners who live, produce and operate across the region. In particular, Western Sydney plays host to a growing small to medium arts sector. This sector is often the laboratory, or the research and

⁴ See:

https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/1590492/OVCH4186_ARTSCULTURE_Decadal_Strategy_LR12_web.pdf

development arm, of the arts industry. It is typically described as dynamic, risk-taking, inventive, self-reliant, independent, multi-skilled, diverse, innovative, and experimental. It is also very vulnerable, due to inequitable state and federal resource expenditure. The 2014 Deloitte study *Building Western Sydney Cultural Arts Economy*⁵, for example, set out a clear need for cultural inequity to be addressed in Western Sydney. Since 2014, however, very little progress has been made to redress this entrenched disparity other than the announcement of the Powerhouse development in Western Sydney. On a per capita basis, the Western Sydney Cultural Arts sector has been grossly underfunded and supported ever since the region developed its first modern cultural institutions in the late 1980s. Western Sydney represents 1 in 10 Australians yet attracts only 1 per cent of Commonwealth arts program funding, and 5.5 per cent of the States Cultural Arts, heritage and events funding. Thus, the delivery of Powerhouse Parramatta will not only deliver long-overdue infrastructure to support arts and culture in Western Sydney, but it will also give renewed focus to ways of inhabiting the developing Central River City. Crucially, it will expand cultural and entertainment opportunities in the region beyond retail and sport, creating new forms of public space, tourism, night-time economy activity, and sociality.

Strategic Planning Framework

The delivery of Powerhouse Parramatta will align with the current Strategic Planning Framework, which stipulates:

- Action 3.4.2 of *A Plan for Growing Sydney 2014* identifies the need to grow the arts and cultural opportunities in Parramatta which will boost the profile of Western Sydney. The Strategic Plan prescribes that a major new exhibition facility would act as a local and international attraction and would create significant momentum for people and businesses to relocate to Western Sydney. The Powerhouse Parramatta will reinforce Parramatta as the Central River City in delivering land use and infrastructure that will provide capacity for jobs, further opportunities for investment and business and provide accessibility to a larger and more skilled work force.
- Objective 9 of the *Greater Sydney Region Plan, A Metropolis of Three Cities – Connecting People* prescribes that whilst there is a historic concentration of arts and cultural organisations in the Eastern Harbour City, more facilities are required to support arts and culture within the Central River and Western Parkland cities to balance the three cities. Powerhouse Parramatta will be in keeping with this objective as it's intended land use will be capable of celebrating the arts as well as support creative industries and innovation within Western Sydney.
- Planning Priority C7 of the Greater Sydney Commission's *Central City District Plan – Connecting Cities* prescribes that a new museum on the banks of the Parramatta River has the potential to deliver world-class opportunities for education and research including space for social and digital interaction and exchange. Powerhouse Parramatta and its co-location adjacent to Western Sydney University and the upgrade of the Riverside Theatre will ensure that Greater Parramatta is better connected and can provide an internationally competitive health, education, research and innovation precinct.
- The *State Infrastructure Strategy Update 2014* notes that the current location of the Powerhouse Museum (within the Sydney CBD) is inaccessible due to its remote position from other key cultural institutions and outside of the Sydney CBD Cultural Precinct. Relocation to Parramatta would better serve a 'whole of sector strategy' whereby it could form the basis of the Parramatta Cultural Precinct being immediately adjacent to other CBD-based institutions including the Western Sydney University and Riverside Theatres.

⁵ <https://www2.deloitte.com/au/en/pages/economics/articles/building-western-sydney-cultural-arts-economy.html>.

- Recommendation 8.2 of the *Cultural Infrastructure Strategy 2016* prepared by Infrastructure NSW outlines the significance of the Powerhouse Parramatta, as it provides a strong anchor for a broader cultural precinct in Western Sydney and will deliver new opportunities for Sydney-based cultural institutions to deepen and widen engagement with Western Sydney. In addition, Powerhouse Parramatta is capable of further enhancing the arts and culture that contributes to the local character of its surroundings.

Powerhouse Parramatta also aligns with the following Policy Directions outlined in the Parramatta Local Strategic Planning Statement:

- Planning Priority 1: Expand Parramatta's business, culture and recreation role as the Central City of Greater Sydney. Ensure diverse and active (non-residential) uses at the street level of buildings in the B4 Mixed Use business zones of Growth Precincts and Local Centres to create lively neighbourhoods with interest and vitality.
- Planning Priority 8: Improve active walking and cycling infrastructure and access to public and shared transport. Create a walking and cycling network to support Parramatta's role as Sydney's Central City, providing ease of access to jobs, housing, public transport, schools and recreation across the LGA.
- Planning Priority 12: Enhance Local Centres and Urban Service Hubs with low-rise development and public space improvements. Enhance local centres through public space improvements and buildings that address and activate streets and spaces.
