

Chief Minister Andrew Barr outlines vision for 'compact and competitive Canberra'

Canberra has unique advantages as a highly liveable city willing to embrace change, Mr Barr believes.

The Canberra Times Kirsten Lawson March 31 2016

ACT Chief Minister Andrew Barr will use Thursday's "state of the territory" speech to outline his vision for Canberra as a super-modern city built around hubs of innovative businesses and smart citizens who want to live in a bustling urban environment.

Mr Barr's vision, developed with the help of [Dr Tim Williams](#), head of Sydney business lobby the Committee for Sydney, is for a "compact and competitive Canberra" – one "that goes beyond the spatial requirements of urban infill to a community-based and economic approach for compact city development".

His vision is not a detailed plan, but is heavy on big-picture statements such as, "Canberra is a complex ecosystem and needs to best balance short-term delivery with genuinely integrated long-term progress".

It says Canberra has unique advantages as a highly liveable city willing to embrace change. As examples, it points to the coming light rail project, the recognition of Uber, free city Wi-Fi, and plans to renew Northbourne Avenue and link the city more directly with the lake at West Basin.

It says people and businesses around the world are flocking to cities – and looking to base themselves in city centres rather than business parks outside the city. Neighbourhoods with bars, cafes and restaurants and other services, close to jobs and education, have a premium "because they are where the collision of ideas and talent at the heart of modern business innovation takes place".

"Fundamentally, we need to grasp that whereas people used to follow jobs and firms, in the knowledge economy these now follow people," his document says. "Advanced firms will locate where talented workers are willing or wanting to live."

Alongside this was the shift to smaller families and households, an increasing desire for city living and to lessen the burden of commuting.

"Everywhere there is the demand from an increasingly time-hungry workforce and community to live in the 30-minute city – the city of short commutes and journeys that manages congestion with a first-class public transport system at its heart."

It stresses the importance of branding Canberra internationally to give it credibility and visibility.

Mr Barr's vision has four prongs, described as "directions of travel": Attracting and training talented people; diversifying the economy not only economically, but also as "an inclusive, welcoming society"; renewing the town centres and strengthening the suburbs; and "embracing the digital mindset".

For the first, he says Canberra will have higher-density commercial and residential areas, with walkable areas and good public transport. It would continue to support innovative businesses giving Canberra a distinctive economic identity. It would lead the nation in public housing, and ensure student housing was built at the University of Canberra and in the city to reduce pressure on the private market.

To diversify the economy, it would ensure it retained its emphasis on "equity and inclusiveness", supporting gender-diverse people, people with disabilities and others. It would continue to brand the city as "confident" and "bold", and continue the focus on renewable energy.

It would build on the first stage of light rail, extending trams to other parts of the city, promote walking and cycling, and support the development of an international airport. Higher density did not mean high-rise, the document says, with a focus on mixed commercial and residential development, infill, and medium-density including townhouses and terraces in suburban settings.

As for "embracing the digital mindset", the vision refers to continuing to push technology in schools.