Bradfield Oration
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BRADFIELD ORATION

Thank you for the opportunity to deliver this Oration tonight. This is a magnificent endeavour directed to ensuring smart, visionary and positive growth for our great city.

Now Sydney is growing more quickly than ever, we need strong and effective growth management. This is a challenge of course – but a much more optimistic one than cities in other parts of the world, which are facing the reality of population and economic decline.

Sydney is globally unique. We combine a skilled workforce, a stable democracy, the rule of law and proximity to emerging markets. A diverse, open-minded maritime city, we are receptive, welcoming and dynamic. And our beaches aren’t bad either!

We have an established reputation for quality and innovation and right now we are experiencing massive infrastructure investment through projects such as the Sydney Metro. I have no doubt that in the future these projects currently underway will be seen as game changers of the same scale as the Harbour Bridge, the Opera house or hosting the Sydney Olympics.

We owe a vote of thanks to the vision of bold politicians past and present for these game changers.

As global commerce, trade and growth pivots to the east we have a competitive advantage matched by, arguably, no other city. This is Sydney’s moment in time.

As we grow we need to maximise these opportunities, while also protecting and enhancing what makes Sydney so great. And the
potential upside, if we get it right, is incredible. Already our financial services sector alone contributes more to the nation’s GDP than the entire mining economy of Western Australia.

With sustained growth and progress we need ambitions to match. Sydney is already one of the great cities of the world but we can be even greater. If we get the planning right.

It is entirely appropriate that this oration is named after the visionary engineer Dr. JJ Bradfield CMG. As Winston Churchill said, “The longer you can look back, the farther you can look forward”.

In the first nine months since establishment the Greater Sydney Commission has been preparing a vision for the Greater Sydney Region, that I hope Bradfield would be proud. For a start, as he did, we are taking a metropolitan view of what Sydney needs. His works ranged from the Bridge which made him famous, to public transport and a water and sewerage system that we still use today.

And we have started the conversation, we have been out there talking to industry, Councils and the community. From town hall meetings, to working lunches, to FaceBook forums, we have begun the robust sharing of ideas that will be necessary.

In particular we have been working closely with our Government partners (Transport, Treasury, Industry, Education, Health, Planning and Environment) to ensure cross Government thinking, true partnership and consistent service delivery for the community.

This also means that we can co-create our planning strategies
alongside other key Government policies such as the State Infrastructure Strategy and Long Term Transport Masterplan so that we can have joined up metropolitan planning for the first time.

I acknowledge the vision of Premier Mike Baird and Planning Minister Rob Stokes MP, and the bipartisan support of the NSW Opposition – represented tonight by Leader Luke Foley MP and Shadow Minister for Planning and Infrastructure Michael Daley MP. Bipartisanship has enabled the creation of a unique structure for the Commission.

I also acknowledge the particular role of the Transport Minister - Andrew Constance MP - in our establishment. The ongoing support of Andrew, and his Department, is critical to ensuring we get joined up thinking in Sydney on transport and planning. Without a spirit of collaboration it is not possible to co-create a Greater Sydney.

The establishment of three great cities in the Greater Sydney Region is emerging as the central and core organising principle of the Commission’s work. This gives a clear picture of how people can realistically achieve the goal of being able to live within 30 minutes of where they work, study and play. This makes life more liveable and way more productive and sustainable for everyone.

These three cities within Greater Sydney are – the Eastern City, the Central City and the Western City. We are now on the eastern fringe or edge and need to think in those terms, just as people living in Western Sydney live on the western fringe. Is it a change of perspective, for sure, but it does reflect how we need to think if we are going to create a liveable and loveable city as our population
grows from 4.6 million now to 6.2 million in 20 years to 8 million in 2056.

The Eastern City comprises the areas from Macquarie Park to North Sydney, the Sydney CBD down to Kingsford Smith Airport. It is the Harbour City with its icons of the bridge and the Opera House, it is our “Global City” and the place people come to visit from all around the world. It is the heart of economic activity -- more than 18% of Sydney’s jobs are located in the existing CBD and the City of Sydney Local Government Area accounts for 30% of the Greater Sydney Region’s contribution to GDP. The Eastern City is now the hub of financial, business and professional services, education, culture, entertainment and tourism.

Our vision for the Eastern City is to enhance its role as a powerhouse of the Australian economy. If businesses want to locate in the Eastern City we should celebrate and encourage this – a city that rejects investment is a city in serious trouble! The Eastern City also demonstrates agglomeration economics at work – in the financial, business and professional services and IT sectors in particular. The power of economic scale and agglomeration is a critical one for global competitiveness.

And to enhance this Eastern City, we need a vision for how it will grow -- we cannot just rest on our laurels. I commend Premier Baird’s focus on realising the potential of the Bays Precinct as an innovation hub; the future of the Central to Eveleigh corridor is also very important.

The Eastern City has been the home of a lot of innovation the
property and financial services sector, and we hope this continues. For example, in the early 1960s, the Strata Titles Act made owning your own apartment a lot easier in NSW. We were world leaders in this. We need to maintain our competitive position which is why amendments to keep our legislation as good as the world’s best are critical.

The world’s first Real Estate Investment Trust was created in Sydney – General Property Trust (GPT), related to Lend Lease who advocated the Strata Titles legislation. And Westfield brought to the world big mall retailing, starting in Western Sydney. Then Macquarie Bank was a pioneer in infrastructure investment funds and there have been many fast followers here too. All these companies are now global leaders in their fields. All these were major innovations and we must not forget that. These innovators – Lend Lease, Westfield, Macquarie Group have gone on to conquer the world. We must be so proud of that. I hope there are many more great innovations and many more huge successes that were first created here. To do that we must continue to have a receptive mindset to new ideas and innovations.

The completion of Barangaroo by Lend Lease as the first carbon neutral precinct of its type in the world presents a real opportunity for us to market our capacity in this area and use it as basis for a new centre of excellence of enterprises that build world’s low carbon, high efficiency buildings. Barangaroo shows this as a practical possibility.

We also need to protect the variety and distinctiveness of suburbs in
the Eastern City. From Haymarket to Hurlstone Park, Daceyville to Dulwich Hill, our suburbs have an intrinsic and individualistic quality. This means that a cookie cutter approach won’t work.

As Jane Jacobs, renowned urbanist, once said “When we deal with cities we are dealing with life at its most complex and intense. Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody”.

At the same time as we look at what is here now, we still have to think big to make sure we grow well and do not become stuck in our ways. Getting the balance right between creating and nurturing great local neighbourhoods at the same time as creating great urban systems – like transport, water and other utilities and public resources including parks, education and health— is a vital task.

We need to be subtle, at the same time as we need to think big and inclusively. A city that works well for women whose perception of safety and accessibility may differ from men’s, and for children who need a sense of safety, wonder and playfulness – we need to create a great city for everyone.

Moving to the geographic heart of the Greater Sydney Region, the Greater Parramatta area is Sydney’s second CBD. Referred to as the Central City in our three cities model, this area is at a critical moment in history – the stars are aligning with total investment from the public and private sectors of over $10b over the next five years. And there will be high rates of population and jobs growth that accompanies this investment, as there must be. We have been
charged with task of ensuring there is deep and continuing collaboration and coordination with local government and all the departments, agencies and stakeholders engaged in the area.

Our mantra is that we are “co-creating a greater Sydney” and Parramatta is a good example of this in action.

Working with Parramatta City Council and other stakeholders, we have created a vision around all the various projects and investments we call GPOP – the Greater Parramatta to Olympic Park area. With due attribution to Korean Pop and Japanese Pop! This area is 4,000 hectares in size which is comparable to the City of Melbourne at 3,640 hectares.

Not just a snappy name, GPOP is a shared vision for the growth of this area as an additional 41,000 people call Parramatta home over the next five years.

It’s time for a change of perspective and a change in the way we all imagine Greater Sydney. Greater Sydney needs a true city at its centre, close to its people.

Accommodating two million people within 30 minutes of Parramatta, GPOP is our vision for how we can do this.

The Central City which also includes Blacktown, another huge and high growth city within Sydney, needs to build on its unique character and extraordinary range of what it has to offer. I like to imagine the Central City as our Great River City, where the Parramatta River and green spaces of the Parramatta Parklands become the true spine and backbone of the place.
But we should not restrict our thinking to just the next five years. We should also look long term and make sure that we continue to bring city shaping projects to the Central City.

For example, Greg Dyer, Interim General Manager of City of Parramatta Council told the Parramatta 2021 launch last week that a West Metro would seal the deal for Parramatta – bringing the Central City to within 15 minutes connectivity of the East City. While this type of project is still a number of years away, it would help set the scene for a future vision of Parramatta and the critical relationship between the Eastern City and Central City – and would also ease the capacity constraints on the Western Line that will become real soon enough. This is such an important time to plan for the infrastructure we need, especially in the parts of Sydney that will experience the highest rates of population growth.

Who knows – in five to seven years the idea of moving all of state government – including parliament from the Eastern City to the Central City might seem irrefutably logical.

The Greater Sydney Commission office is in Parramatta and the area’s metropolitan centrality is clear to anyone who lives or works there. What could be more logical than having our government right in the heart of the city where most of the population is based? A new Parliament in the Central City of Parramatta in the mid-2020s could be a game changer for Sydney.

There are other, smaller but important initiatives that can be easily undertaken in a growing and changing city. For example, we can leverage the natural features of Parramatta to deliver Sydney’s first
extensive bike sharing scheme. The City of Parramatta Council recently undertook a trial with Parramatta Park Trust and this was a great first step in delivering an active transport scheme of the highest standards. Bike sharing is a fantastic way to free up road space, improve public health and boost the local tourism offering. It doesn’t even need to cost that much, with experience from cities such as Shanghai, Paris and London demonstrating that – at scale - schemes can be revenue positive.

As these opportunities arise, the Central City will continue to require not just coordination and collaboration but also ambition and excitement. At the Greater Sydney Commission, we think our job is to plan, and also to dream big dreams – and figure out ways of making them happen.

And then to our Third City, Western Sydney. In the past, there have been calls for the airport to be called Bradfield, but perhaps in fact it should be the Western Sydney city that we call Bradfield, centred around the airport or aerotropolis as the Daily Telegraph dubbed it in an article earlier this week.

Much more than just an airport, the third Western City is a critical focus for Greater Sydney and, arguably, a primary reason for the Greater Sydney Commission’s creation. If current trends continue, by 2036 over 50 per cent of Sydney’s population will live west of Parramatta. This is a fantastic opportunity for Western Sydney. And the onus is on us, as planners, to maximise the economic growth opportunities while delivering the liveability and sustainability. If we don’t plan well there will be an increasing geographic separation
between where people live and where they work. And we have to bring the lifestyle opportunities to where the population will be living.

If the Eastern City is the Harbour City and the Central City is the Great River City....perhaps the Western City can be the South Creek City. It will use as a key lifestyle asset South Creek which runs 80kms northwards right through the heart of Western Sydney.

Focussed on the new Western Sydney Airport, we think a greater ambition for the west of Sydney is greatly needed. This will not be a city as we know it in Sydney, and it will not rise from a desert like Dubai in the UAE. Instead it will build on the cities and towns we call the “string of pearls” (Camden, Campbelltown, Liverpool and Penrith) to provide homes as well as jobs, and the related airport services, to the west of Sydney. The airport will be the anchor for new jobs across many sectors and underpin and drive the growth and success of the string of pearls.

The Greater Sydney Commission is working closely with the NSW Government, local Government and the Federal Government, to deliver a city deal and governance arrangements to achieve this. Watch this space!

The Western City is about opportunity for the west. By elevating the area to ‘city-status’ we are reinforcing that ad hoc planning and ‘hoping for the best’ will not suffice. Rather a co-ordinated approach to delivering city-scale economic, social and environmental outcomes is required with a level of aspiration and ambition to match that of Bradfield 80 years ago.
If you look at a map of metropolitan Sydney it is not just the eastern edge city that has great natural green and water resources.

There is also the potential to create great pools of liveability at the same time as building the hard infrastructure – the roads, the railways and the other big ticket items that should wherever possible, be co-designed with liveability and quality of life in mind.

The Western City, or Bradfield as it may be known, also directly targets the objective of achieving a more equitable distribution of infrastructure, hard and soft. For instance, with a changing climate, the role of tree cover and open space will become increasingly important to health and well-being, and urban resilience.

The most vulnerable in our community are also often in the areas experiencing the greatest heat island effects and the least access to open space. This is not only about quality of life, but also quantifiable impacts on health, on energy costs and on transport accessibility. Focussing on a West City will allow us to ensure that the resources we need – the type that can only be deployed when city-building – go to the most vulnerable in the West and also to where the population is growing at the greatest rates.

Perhaps we need to encourage a more holistic approach to how we manage our water assets. We must not only ensure water security but also enhance liveability through creating more water based resources, including recreational resources and greater spaces through canopy cover. This will require a new way of thinking from those involved – agencies, industry and the pricing regulator.

This is also a particular opportunity for design-led planning. This
type of planning will be critical to our future urban form. Design-led planning presents a particular opportunity to co-create hard infrastructure and soft infrastructure. This will improve liveability, quality of life and productivity.

But, to avoid confusion, the Western City and the Central City are not just about a fair go for the West – as important as this is. Getting these two Cities right is about the success of the whole Greater City Region.

The Eastern City has increasingly apparent constraints and limitations – from curfews at Kingsford Smith, to low housing affordability, to a shortage in office space – that will be increasingly difficult to respond to within the geographic confines of the East. For our city to grow, become more productive and more liveable we need a balanced city and distribution of assets at the centre and west of our city. This is necessary if it is going to work well and provide a great quality of life and opportunity for all.

My vision for Sydney 2056 is also for continued policy innovation, led or at least supported by the Greater Sydney Commission. We not only live in a time of great population growth but of demographic and technological change. In some parts of Greater Sydney the increase in the number of people over 85 will more than double.

We need to make sure that policy innovation does not just ‘keep up’ with these changes, but actually where possible leads them – supporting continued improvements to liveability, productivity and sustainability as we become a leading global city in the South East Asian region.
We are already exploring some exciting areas of policy innovation. One is the concept of shared use of spaces. Smart growth means collaboration and better sharing the resources we already have. Sharing and efficiency are absolutely essential in the environment and times we live in. It is good governance too. But we must work harder to deliver it. This is particularly important when the number of people living in a community is growing as it is in Sydney.

The Greater Sydney Commission will champion and encourage the shared use of community resources across all government departments and agencies, such as the Department of Education, Transport for NSW, Road and Maritime Services, utilities such as Sydney Water as well as the resources owned or managed by local government such as parks and community facilities.

There is potential for better collaboration is between the schools, (both government and non-government) and local government-managed parklands, and community and sporting facilities. Transport agencies, like Transport for NSW, have some open land that may be put to better use. There is an opportunity to identify in our District Plans a presumption in favour of open space and community facility sharing.

Often open space and community facilities are already shared, but the Greater Sydney Commission can help deliver a more clearly articulated governance system to support this. We expect that this will then be reflected in Council’s Local Environment Plans.

We also need to rethink how our transport and logistics networks will operate in the next 40 years. As I outlined to the NSW Freight
Advisory Council recently, the Greater Sydney Commission is committed to working with industry and Government to identify these trends and ensure our strategic planning backs-in the best outcomes. There is no doubt that the shift of freight and logistics will be to the Western City – land values alone will drive that outcome, so will the new airport and transport investment. But we need to value the urban services we need right across our city as well.

We need to recognise and support the massive uptake in local delivery of online sourced products. One excellent idea currently being pursued is the roll-out of delivery lockers by Transport for NSW and Australia Post in key hub train stations such as Parramatta. But I think we should also investigate local provisioning – maybe even on a building by building basis – of delivery lockers. The planning system can help provide for this.

Above all perhaps, the planning system needs to understand and have an open mind about the opportunities technological change can create. Some people find it impossible to work because they are isolated and unable to drive. Why can’t drive sharing services fill the gap if public transport is spread too thin?

Similarly as our vehicle fleet rapidly shifts to autonomous or semi-autonomous operation we need to ensure that the planning system does not act as a barrier. The marginal cost of provisioning electric charging facilities in new build carparks is low compared to the prohibitive cost (and logistical challenges) of retrofitting. It is a
legitimate function of the planning system to mandate the provision of key infrastructure, such as electric vehicle charging in commercial developments, to ensure the resilience of our building stock and urban form to future technological change.

I also believe the time has come for us to rethink how the Government interacts with the private sector on major city-shaping projects. Concerns about a lack of transparency in how previous NSW State Governments were dealing with third parties, including allegations recently heard by the Courts about some former Ministers have led the current Government to – quite reasonably – impose strict controls on business dealings with Government. The unsolicited proposal process, overseen by the Department of Premier and Cabinet, ensures that there can be no question of improper behaviour or favouritism.

But I have found the formalistic structure and probity rules around normal conversation and engagement with people who are often the innovators and deliverers of creative, better solutions for our city – who often happen to be in the building development industry – can be constraining. Having to pay a probity officer $200 per hour to observe a meeting is a restraint on the amount of discussions you have with the private sector for sure. When I was in the Town Hall, I would always take advisers or council officers to meetings and this was considered sufficient.

Experience in other major cities such as London, as Dan Labbad wrote in the Daily Telegraph recently, shows that the private sector
partnerships with the Government can – when well designed – deliver innovative solutions that the Government on its own could never have achieved. Particularly on issues such as affordable housing, carbon neutrality and high quality urban design, we need to ensure that we have a culture that encourages communication and collaboration that promotes private sector innovation too.

We need to be able to ensure that the private sector can sit down with Government in a way that ideas can be shared, and value created, without reducing – in any way – community confidence in the process and the ‘best value’ principles that are understandably central. A more workable system would benefit everyone.

This approach will help ensure that innovation occurs because of, not despite, the Government.

‘Game Changers’ are central to the Greater Sydney Region’s growth and success. The bipartisan vision of the NSW Parliament, supported and encouraged by the Daily Telegraph through this event and others, to create the Greater Sydney Commission has being one ‘game changer’ for Sydney. I certainly hope we are and can be.

And we can do this if we get the balance right between the macro forces and the micro elements that makes Greater Sydney and its myriad components work, and what makes our city liveable and loveable too. We have to dream big at the same time as we respect the value of the neighbourhoods and the suburbs that are part of the rich mosaic, natural and man-made, that make our great city. We can do it if we collaborate and work together to create a Greater
Sydney. And we have to make sure our city does not just get bigger, which it certainly will, but it also gets even better.

This evening I have endeavoured to give you a flavour of what the Commission is thinking and doing to deliver on this collective aspiration.

There can be no limit to our ambition right now. History has shown the capacity for Sydney to be the crucible of global progress and innovation – in business, culture, design and sustainability. And now, more than ever than any other, the stars are aligned. With the establishment of the Greater Sydney Commission, with the unprecedented growth and investment, with the global forces moving economic growth and progress ever closer to our city, we have an incredible chance. The chance to be so much, the chance to be an even greater global city.