

Submission to the Draft Central West & Orana Strategic Regional Integrated Transport Plan

About Destination Central West

Destination Central West (DNCW) represents the visitor economy interests of the Central West region of NSW, covering the Local Government Areas of Bathurst Regional, Blayney, Cabonne, Cowra, Forbes, Lachlan, Lithgow, Mid-Western (Mudgee), Oberon, Orange, Parkes and Weddin. The region is a rapidly developing visitor economy anchored by world-class food and wine, heritage towns, nature-based experiences, significant events, and emerging Aboriginal cultural tourism. Transport connectivity is essential to visitor access, regional dispersal, workforce mobility and long-term economic resilience.

General Comments

DNCW welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the Draft Central West & Orana Strategic Regional Integrated Transport Plan (SRITP). We commend Transport for NSW for recognising the importance of an integrated and resilient transport network and emphasise the need for strengthened access into and across the Central West from Sydney, including the Great Western Highway and Bells Line of Road. While we acknowledge recent funding announcements into the Bells Line corridor, access to the Central West remains challenging and impacts on the first and last impressions of visitors travelling from Greater Sydney.

1. Strategic Alignment

We recommend that the Plan explicitly reference the NSW Government's Visitor Economy Strategy 2035 (VES2035) and the Central West Destination Management Plan 2030 (DMP) to ensure alignment with regional priorities. The DMP identifies key growth sectors including agritourism, events, cycle tourism, nature-based tourism and Aboriginal cultural experiences. These sectors rely on safe, reliable and intuitive transport networks. (Ref: SRITP Section 1.1 – Strategic Alignment)

2. Rail Connectivity & Public Transport

Improving the reliability, speed and frequency of rail services into the Central West is essential. This includes improved day-return options and weekend services that support events, VFR and leisure tourism. To support the growing cycle tourism market, DNCW strongly recommends that the SRITP include explicit commitment to roll-on/roll-off bicycle capacity on rail and coach services, enabling cyclists to travel more easily between towns and trails. (Ref: SRITP Section 5.5 – Public Transport)

3. Road Safety & Movement Through Main Streets

Many Central West towns have high-use main streets that serve as both movement corridors and core visitor precincts. Improved safety, placemaking, temporary event speed reductions, and vulnerable road-user protections are essential to support increased visitation. (Ref: SRITP Section 5.3 – Safety and Customer Outcomes)

4. Active Transport, Cycling & Regional Cycle Tourism

Cycle tourism is one of the region's strongest growth opportunities. The DNCW Cycle Tourism Opportunities Strategy identifies gravel cycling as a hero experience with high demand across domestic and international markets. We recommend the SRITP explicitly reference gravel cycling and rail trail development opportunities; incorporate roll-on/roll-off bicycle capacity; and commit to consistent signage, safety treatments and wayfinding for gravel routes and touring networks. The success of ridcentralwest.com.au highlights the scale of market interest and the need for integrated transport planning to support growth. (Ref: SRITP Section 5.7 – Active Transport)

DNCW notes that rail trail development in the region is not primarily a funding challenge but a policy one. Progress relies on enabling legislation and governance frameworks that allow disused rail corridors to be transferred to, or jointly managed with, local government or other appropriate agencies. Rail trails represent a significant opportunity for long-distance cycling tourism, regional dispersal, heritage activation and low-impact recreation. Strengthening policy pathways for corridor activation would unlock multiple viable opportunities across the Central West and support the broader cycling strategy for the region.

5. Workforce Mobility & Housing Access

Transport barriers for the visitor economy workforce are increasing due to regional housing shortages. Improved intra-regional public transport options, on-demand services and scheduling aligned with hospitality and events are required to support the labour market. (Ref: SRITP Section 5.5.3 – Access to Employment)

6. Freight, Supply Chains & Visitor Economy Access

While freight is critical to the region's economy, freight movements and visitor access often compete for space on the same corridors. Significant freight volumes along touring routes such as the Great Western Highway, Mitchell Highway, Mid-Western Highway and Newell Highway create safety risks for cyclists, self-drive tourists and caravan travellers. Balancing freight efficiency with visitor safety should be an explicit focus of corridor planning. (Ref: SRITP Section 5.2 – Freight Movements)

Road conditions across the Central West are deteriorating due to heavy freight demand, significant trucking activity linked to mining, agriculture and construction, and increasing movement into Renewable Energy Zone (REZ) precincts. These pressures are expected to intensify over the next decade as REZ projects scale. While DNCW supports the economic value of these sectors, it is critical that freight growth is not achieved at the expense of safe, reliable and high-quality road transport for visitors. Significant investment will be required to maintain road quality, protect key tourism corridors, and ensure that visitor mobility is not compromised by accelerated freight-related wear.

7. Disaster Resilience & Redundancy

The Central West is highly vulnerable to flood and bushfire events that disrupt major access routes. Disruptions along corridors such as Lachlan Valley Way, Mid-Western Highway, Newell Highway and Hill End Road have previously stranded visitors, isolated communities and created significant economic loss. DNCW strongly supports corridor-level resilience planning, improved redundancy routes, real-time communication systems and prioritised upgrades for roads that provide alternate access during emergencies. (Ref: SRITP Section 5.6 – Resilience and Redundancy)

8. Aviation Access

Parkes Airport and Orange Airport are critical gateways for corporate and leisure markets. As Western Sydney International Airport (WSI) comes online, strong emphasis must be placed on improving road connectivity between WSI and the Central West. WSI presents significant opportunities for regional dispersal, international visitation and premium travel, and access planning must ensure the Central West is well positioned to benefit. (Ref: SRITP Section 5.4.4 – Airports)

Mudgee and Bathurst airports previously supported regular passenger services but no longer do. The loss of these routes has reduced connectivity to major visitor hubs in the northern and eastern parts of the Central West. With the forthcoming opening of Western Sydney International Airport (WSI), there is strategic value in re-examining the commercial viability and transport role of these airports, particularly Mudgee, which services one of the region's strongest tourism catchments. Enhancing aviation access will support regional dispersal, premium visitor experiences, and business travel opportunities.

9. Key Visitor Access Corridors: Jenolan Caves and Wolgan Valley

Jenolan Caves

The Draft SRITP acknowledges the need to “provide safe and resilient access to the World Heritage Jenolan Caves” (Section 5.6.1 – Redundancies). This is a major strength of the Plan and strongly supported by DNCW. As one of Australia’s most iconic natural attractions, Jenolan Caves is a key anchor for nature-based tourism in the Central West.

DNCW recommends that Transport for NSW work with Jenolan Caves Trust, NPWS and Oberon Council to prioritise:

- long-term restoration and resilience works on Jenolan Caves Road;
- alternative access planning to prevent full isolation during emergencies;
- improved visitor safety infrastructure due to high volumes of charter, coach and private vehicles;
- clear communication channels for real-time road status updates.

Wolgan Valley Access (Lithgow LGA)

The Draft SRITP does not reference Wolgan Valley or the damaged access corridors supporting the Valley and the Newnes Plateau. This omission is significant given Wolgan Valley’s high-value tourism profile, repeated disaster impacts, and the absence of safe, reliable access since the 2022 landslides. Wolgan Valley attracts premium visitors, event groups, domestic and international travellers, and nature-based tourists. Restoring and future-proofing access to this corridor is essential for regional economic recovery, community connectivity, emergency response capability and long-term tourism sustainability.

Recent Funding Commitment

In July 2025, the Australian and NSW Governments committed up to **\$385 million** to restore all-weather access to Wolgan Valley via a rebuilt Wolgan Road. This investment, delivered under the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA), confirms the national significance of the corridor. However, this funding alone does not address the broader access, resilience and redundancy needs of the Newnes Plateau and Wollemi networks.

DNCW therefore recommends that the SRITP include a specific action to:

- investigate the long-term restoration and future-proofing of Wolgan Road and associated access to the Valley;
- improve resilience planning for the broader Newnes Plateau and Wollemi National Park access network;
- evaluate alternative access options that reduce risk for residents, visitors and emergency services.

10. Access to the Central West from Sydney

Access from Sydney remains one of the region’s biggest transport challenges. The Great Western Highway and Bells Line of Road are critical visitor economy lifelines. Upgrades must ensure improved travel time reliability, safer overtaking opportunities, consistent road surface quality, and positive first-impression experiences for visitors entering the region. (Ref: SRITP Section 5.1 – Regional Road Connectivity)

Conclusion

Destination Central West supports the strategic direction of the SRITP but urges stronger recognition of the region's visitor economy, cycle tourism strengths, access challenges from Sydney, freight-visitor safety interactions, and the transformative potential of WSI. We welcome continued collaboration with Transport for NSW to ensure the plan fully captures these opportunities.

Yours sincerely,



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