

# Participants Information Sheet

## Context of Forum 2008

The Blue Mountains *Better Future Economic Forum 2008* will bring together key public sector decision makers, business leaders, Federal, State and Local government, academics, conservationists and others to discuss the current and future directions and frameworks for economic sustainability in the Blue Mountains. In particular, the Forum will assist in developing an action plan for economic development that implements the 25 year City Vision for a more sustainable Blue Mountains.

Without change, the Blue Mountains is facing a future of an aging population and static growth. The *Better Future Economic Forum* will provide an opportunity to examine how to progress towards sustainable economic development and how the Mountains should differentiate itself to achieve local job creation and a desirable lifestyle for all who work, live and play in the Mountains. The challenge is finding the right balance between development, lifestyle and environment. While it is important to stimulate investment and create jobs, in doing this we must also take care not to compromise the environmental and social values that make the Mountains so appealing.

## What is Needed to Develop a Better Future?

To secure a better economic future, the Blue Mountains must develop an action plan that will ensure its key resources are committed to initiatives that will lay the foundation for building economic prosperity. Participants will hear about successful businesses and initiatives in other local areas and be asked to provide their input.

The forum will build on two key themes from the Blue Mountains 25 Year City Vision:

- Creating a strong & diversified local economy
- Developing sustainable business & industry



## Economic Indicators

2006 Figures Source: Lawrence Consulting / ABA Stats

- Modest average annual growth of 0.6% to 2026
- Aging population 12.3% people over 65 years
- Gross Regional Product \$1,586.3m
- Largest contributors to GRP business service sector \$161.2M, education \$138.1m, health services \$113.1m, accommodation, cafes and restaurants \$104m
- 50% businesses turnover <\$100,000 PA
- 5.8% businesses turnover >\$1m
- Ave workforce size 3.2 persons
- Highest average workforce - accom/cafes/restaurants - 13 persons
- Index of economic diversity 0.701 (all of NSW 0.992) - (1.0 is highly diverse)
- 35,928 people employed, 17,964 employed locally

## What might the Better Future Forum Deliver?

Input from participants will assist in the creation of an economic development action plan for the City. Taking into consideration initiatives being employed by other Cities, some of the actions and strategies that might be considered for implementation in the Blue Mountains include:

- Improving opportunities for home based businesses.
- Providing opportunities for businesses based outside the region to have supported "hub" offices for workers living in the region.
- Actively attracting industry that is complimentary to our World Heritage environment.
- Developing business clusters and "incubators" to assist emerging businesses.
- Developing true business parks and industrial centres to provide support to businesses attempting to develop locally eg. Lawson Estate.
- Closer, more synergistic working relationships with adjoining local government areas.
- Considering whether or not there is a need for any other economic development committees or structures to support economic development in the region.
- Creating niche industries that capitalize on future high growth—industries such as Climate Change and Wellness industries and promoting these to target markets
- Considering the concept of "one stop shop" for businesses needing business information.
- Developing proposals for projects attracting funding from private and government partners.
- Understanding local business demographics by developing a comprehensive data base of businesses.

## Opportunities and Challenges

Your input into the Forum is critical to its success. Identifying and considering the key opportunities and challenges for sustainable economic development in the Blue Mountains, will be an important focus.

### Key Opportunities:

- Using World Heritage Listing as a catalyst for becoming a leader and model in sustainable tourism
- Attracting and developing clean, green industries that diversify and strengthen the economy
- Capitalising on the growth in telecommuting and e-commerce businesses
- Encouraging and supporting the emerging home based business sector so that more people can work locally rather than having to commute
- Developing productive alliances with neighbouring/complementary regions
- Maximising economic opportunities presented through proximity to Sydney—the largest City in Australia
- Services industry development

### Key Challenges:

- Diversifying the local economy and reducing reliance on tourism industry
- Impact of bushfires on tourism
- Proposed Bells-Line freeway could cause downturn in tourist numbers
- Creating local employment to remove need for workers to commute
- Delays in highway upgrade causing impacts and making Village centres more isolated.
- Highway upgrades change perception as a “destination”
- Increased competition/bigger budgets from other tourism regions
- Managing impact of visitation on natural areas and local communities

### Key Questions for Consideration

How would you respond to the following questions? Considering these questions prior to the Forum will help you add value to the discussion. It will also assist in delivering an outcome that is practical and which provides valuable input into an economic development action plan for the Blue Mountains.

- How can we increase the range of sustainable businesses and industries in the Blue Mountains?
- How can we promote existing, and support new creative & and cultural initiatives and industries?
- How can we establish formal partnerships outside the region that increase sustainable employment opportunities for local people?
- How can we drive productivity growth and competitiveness to succeed in the future?
- What are the right industries and businesses for the Blue Mountains and how do we attract them?
- What skills need to be developed, attracted and retained?
- Converting hobbies to business and home based businesses to SME – what support is needed?
- What are our long term sustainable priorities and how do they fit with economic growth ambitions?
- How do we create an environment to encourage longer tourist stays?
- How do we get existing businesses to support emerging businesses?
- How do we attract businesses to support current local businesses and industries?
- What are the components of a sustainable business accreditation scheme?
- How do we leverage the existing cultural and arts heritage to promote and encourage new economic opportunities and business ventures?
- Lifestyle businesses – how do we encourage people to move their businesses to the Blue Mountains?
- How do we leverage tourism and other business opportunities from existing education and training facilities?
- What can be done to maximise land-use productivity while minimising environmental impact?
- What does a modern infrastructure look like to allow local development?
- How can the Blue Mountains respond to the infrastructure challenges it knows about?
- How should the Blue Mountains leverage its relationship with Penrith and its planned strong growth?
- Do current local, state and federal government initiatives, regulations and plans allow the Blue Mountains to respond to future opportunities and challenges?
- Are there impediments to business development we can address?
- What options should we consider for regional energy?
- What can be done with policy initiatives to make our existing infrastructure work harder and smarter?
- How can we get more players into infrastructure?