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Infrastructure Handbrake Drags Down Growth in Sydney's West

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What came first, the chicken or the egg?

It's a causality dilemma that developers as much as councils must endure when it comes to housing development expansion.

Such development needs infrastructure. Yet without that development, why fund infrastructure.



One local government authority (LGA) acutely aware of the problem is Camden Council in the heart of Sydney's South-West Growth Area.

It is increasingly feeling the pressure to deliver huge swathes of NSW's ambitious housing targets.

Camden's population is expected to reach more than 257,000 by 2046—an increase of 81 per cent—and like many suburbs in Western Sydney, utilities, transport and social infrastructure all need improvement.

Camden mayor Ashleigh Cagney told *The Urban Developer* that the council had called for essential rail and bus services, and critical road structure, as well as investment in schools and hospitals to support its increasing population.



▲ Castle Group wants to grow its pipeline in Sydney's south-west.

“Camden is the fastest-growing local government area in Australia, and [our latest report *The Time Is Now*] is about ensuring we get the investment needed to support this rapid growth,” Cagney says.

“We need urgent action to deliver the infrastructure, services and jobs that will sustain our community now and into the future.”

Developers are of the same opinion, including Castle Group and its managing director Ritchie Perera. The group is delivering 400 homes at Leppington and Austral.

“We’re 100 per cent behind Camden Council’s infrastructure wish list. More infrastructure, services and amenities will give the community greater opportunities and quality of life,” Perera says.

Developing areas, growing councils

Camden Council and its neighbouring LGAs the Blue Mountains, Campbelltown, Fairfield, Hawkesbury, Liverpool, Penrith and Wollondilly have come together as Western Parklands City to lobby for more infrastructure.

Taking a collaborative approach led to the [development of the Leppington Town Centre transport and housing precinct](#) alongside Liverpool Council—and there are in Camden’s jurisdiction alone major growth precincts.

They include Oran Park, currently being developed by richlisters the Perich brothers with [its movie studio and employment area plans](#) complementing its residential estates.

Elsewhere, Leppington is being [developed by the likes of Maryland Estate Developments](#) among others, while Mirvac and United are [planning entertainment precincts](#) and [thousands of homes](#) at Gledswood Hills.



▲ Camden mayor Ashleigh Cagney.

In fact, according to the NSW Government's Council League Tracker, Camden Council is considering 487 applications in the 2024-2025 year (with 97 per cent of applications meeting time expectations, unlike more developed LGAs [closer to the CBD such as North Sydney](#)), with a total development cost of \$1.2 billion.

But all these projects need supporting infrastructure.

“[This] development must be supported by the right infrastructure at the right time,” Mayor Cagney says.

“That means investment in roads, transport, utilities, schools and healthcare is needed to ensure our growing suburbs remain liveable and connected.”

Castle Group's Perera says that on top of the identified areas for infrastructure development, there needs to be more.



▲ Work under way on one of Castle Group's Camden sites.

“We'd also like to see sewer infrastructure added to the wish list,” Perera says.

“Without increasing sewer capacity in the area, further growth in housing and infrastructure is impossible.

“Governments should also look at rising contributions [which are] stalling the delivery of more housing supply in the area.”

Infrastructure contributions are increasingly painful for developers forced to [bear the weight of infrastructure projects](#).

Wishes fulfilled

Despite this looming issue impacting developers, some of Camden's wishlist has already been announced.

Despite the announcement of delays to the \$11-billion Sydney Metro line to Western Sydney International Airport in February, the Federal Government revealed a \$1-billion investment to acquire land corridors for future rail extensions connecting the Bradfield Aerotropolis to Campbelltown-Macarthur and Leppington.

This was a “key priority” that the Mayor of Camden called a “step in the right direction”.

“But it is only the first step. It will cost tens of billions of dollars to actually construct this rail link we so desperately need, which is why further commitment is urgently required.”

The Federal Government also included in its Budget last month \$20 million for preliminary business cases for:

- A new Cumberland Line linking Greater Parramatta, Fairfield, Bradfield, and Liverpool.
- Upgrades to T8 Airport, South and T2 Leppington and Inner West lines.
- Outer South West Housing Enablement Development Program: Supporting infrastructure initiatives to enable new housing and improve transport links.

However, it did not go far enough, according to Cagney.

“All of the key priorities we are advocating for are essential, but if I had to pick one of utmost importance, it would be transport,” Cagney says.

“Without reliable rail, roads and public transport, we cannot properly support housing growth or connect our residents to employment and essential services. Investment in transport is the key to unlocking Camden’s full potential.”

In the wider The Parks area, the Aerotropolis sector plan, developed in conjunction with Infrastructure NSW, is also a huge step forward.

It intends to sequence the development of infrastructure in the wider region, and heralded as

“the first time the Aerotropolis has had a concrete road map that brings together planning and infrastructure co-ordination”.

“But the key issue [with the Aerotropolis sector plans] is delivery timeframes, especially for utility services,” Perera says.

“Will we have the critical infrastructure pieces in place, by the time we need them?”



▲ Camden has taken a collaborative approach, teaming with the Liverpool Council for the Leppington Town Centre.

Despite these challenges, Castle Group has its sights set on expanding its footprint across south-west Sydney, Perera says.

“We already have several projects under way across Austral and Leppington that will add about 900 homes to the area.”

With developer intentions clear, it's with governments to now figure out how to deliver co-ordinated infrastructure in partnership with the private sector.

“We cannot afford to wait,” Cagney says.

“The opportunity is here now with the Western Sydney International Airport coming very soon and

continued significant growth in our region.

“We need immediate action to ensure Camden thrives, rather than struggles, through this transformation.”

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