

## **Observations and Outcomes - 2009 Business Survey**

### **Business Support**

The 2009 Business Survey indicated that participants would like to be engaged more by the city's Council in the form of public events designed to help local businesses. As a result, the Wagga Wagga City Council has endeavoured to provide businesses with a wide range of seminars, networking events and business development programs that have been well received by the business community. A few examples of these include:

- Information Technology Networking Event
- Pearson Street & Dobney Avenue Networking Event
- Charles Sturt University & Wagga Wagga City Council Marketing, Finance and Human Resources Seminars
- Think Manufacturing
- Wagga Wagga City Council & Australian Retail Association Workshops
- Finance Industry Networking Event

### **Development application process**

Results from the 2009 Business Survey indicated that one of the less than satisfactory factors relevant to attracting new businesses was the development application process. Council acknowledged that the development application process could be improved and steps to achieve this have been taken, including:

- Developed and implemented a Development, Construction Certificate, Complying Development Application Guideline Documents and associated checklists
- New and Revised Application Forms
- Additional Staff – 3 x Building Surveyors and 2 x Planners

In 2010 Council implemented "Online Services", providing user's improved access to a wide range of Council managed processes such as development application tracking.

Complimentary to Online Services the Planning Directorate implemented a duty planner system providing a technical enquiry service for planning related matters. Council also introduced a duty officer system for building surveyors to deal with building related matters.

More recently in 2013, Wagga Wagga City Council combined with the NSW State Government to launch the Electronic Housing Code (EHC), an initiative designed to provide more effective customer service and to streamline the process of complying development certificates.

### **Availability of appropriately zoned land**

A lack of appropriately zoned land was cited during the 2009 survey as dissatisfying for local businesses and viewed by respondents as an obstacle for attracting business to the City. In 2010, the Wagga Wagga Local Environment Plan was gazetted. Specifically the plan attempts to optimise the City's land and environment resources while ensuring that choices and opportunities related to those resources remain for future generations living in the City. The LEP created additional residential land to enable the construction of an additional 10,000 lots over the next 30 years. The LEP also created the Bomen Business Park which resulted in approximately 2040 hectares of land for industrial land use purposes.

The Local Environment Plan fosters a considered and integrated approach to infrastructure, transport and community planning while facilitating the appropriate urban development required to meet housing demand within the local government area. The plan encourages business activity, employment and reinforces the central business area as a centre of commerce, recognising the need to retain prime agricultural land while implementing the appropriate flood management measures designed to protect the community.

In 2013 The Wagga Wagga Spatial Plan was published aiming to provide clear strategic indicators for the development of Wagga Wagga over the next 30 years and beyond with the flexibility required to respond to change.



The Spatial Plan is the key strategic planning document for informing and managing urban growth and change, specific to how we use space (the land and environs) and manage competing demands for space – it will ensure that Wagga Wagga can achieve a more sustainable, prosperous and equitable future.

### **Internet services**

A recurring issue that businesses cited was a lack of reliable internet services. The National Broadband Network is designed to alleviate some of these issues, with Wagga Wagga chosen as the first point of construction in the Riverina.

The NBN is a fibre optic connection that will enable users to access world class, high speed broadband - core infrastructure of the new century. This type of connectivity is an essential tool for Wagga Wagga's businesses to remain competitive and continue to grow in sync with the rest of the world.

### **Conditions post the GFC**

One important aspect of the 2009 survey was to gauge local business conditions immediately post the Global Financial Crisis, informing Council how the local economy was affected. Equally as important is the feedback we gather now to contrast how business conditions may have changed in the wake of the international crisis.

Results from 2009 suggested that around a third of local and regional market respondents expect business conditions to remain similar in the coming year (2010), with smaller proportions expecting conditions to improve. For the national market businesses, however, a larger proportion of respondents (28%) expect business conditions to improve, compared with those (17%) who expect similar conditions.

Businesses with local and regional markets reported to have been least affected by the GFC, while businesses with more international markets seemed less optimistic about sales in the future.



One of the key outcomes of the 2013 survey will be to contrast how the Wagga Wagga City economy managed post the GFC, and if the outlook for businesses targeting both local and international markets has improved during the time that has passed.

### **Infrastructure problems**

The 2009 survey revealed that respondents believed that infrastructure problems contributed to disadvantaging businesses operating in Wagga Wagga. Significant steps have been taken since then by the WWCC to address this concern, with a number of major pieces of infrastructure being established in the City.

These include significant investment in the City's airport, with close to \$8 million in capital works completed during 2012-13. The City's airport is one of the busiest in regional NSW, servicing over 140 flights per week carrying over 210,000 passengers annually. The implementation of the 2010 Airport Master Plan and subsequent investment has been well received, recently being awarded the 2013 Regional Airport of the Year award at the annual Australian Airports Association National Airport Industry Awards.

More recently the Riverina Intermodal Freight and Logistics Hub has been proposed and moving towards the final stages of planning and development. The RIFL Hub is a major piece of infrastructure not only for the Wagga Wagga business community but for the whole region, enabling efficient movement of freight to and from the Bomen Business Park directly to the ports of Melbourne and Sydney.

Major infrastructure investment benefits the community in a number of ways such as the creation of employment. The development of the commercial precinct at the Wagga Wagga Airport will create up to 60 new jobs in the short term with the potential for many more in the years to come. During the construction phase the RIFL Hub will create 200 new jobs and potentially 65 positions once operational.



## **Labour Force statistics**

One of the key areas of interest during the 2009 survey was the City's labour force in relation to employment and unemployment patterns and expectations. From 2009, over 30% of businesses forecast that the following two years would see a rise in their employee numbers with no loss predicted by franchise businesses and very little loss expected among local and Government businesses.

The 2013 survey will enable WWCC to contrast the forecasted scenarios of 2009 with the current business positions – a valuable tool informing us of employment trends and patterns in the City.

