

Greater Cities Podcast Transcript

Episode 1: Connecting cities

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Dr Wendy Were: This podcast was produced on the lands of the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation and the Burramattagal people of the Dharug nation. We acknowledge Australia's First peoples as the traditional custodians of the lands and waterways. We pay respects to Elders past and present as the original storytellers and city shapers, and acknowledge that sovereignty of these lands has never been ceded.

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Geoff Roberts: Cities in the last 20 years, they've become increasingly privileged. They've become unequal.

Kourtney Garrett: One aspect of this accessibility and openness, of the way we're able to move, is really changing the way all of our cities behave.

Mateu Hernández: Cities are like human beings that rely on themselves and their connections or their ways of doing, on their traditional DNA.

Lucy Turnbull: We have to nurture the local places, the local grain, the local features.

[01:00]

Dr Wendy Were: Many metaphors for cities exist, but a continual theme is cities as living things, as organic in form. We talk about the urban jungle, the lifeblood of cities and the evolution and growth of cities. In coining the term metropolis, the ancient Greeks presented cities as nurturing places. The word is a combination of the words *mētēr*, mother and *pólis*, city. They saw the city as nurturing community, and today more than half the world's population lives in cities.

Cities are shaped and planned by humans for humans. They can grow organically, but the future doesn't just happen to us. The future is the product of the decisions we make today.

And every so often, along comes a moment in time. A moment that calls for a big rethink. A moment that is pivotal in changing the shape and direction of cities so they can better respond to the needs and desires, challenges and hopes of the millions of people who live in them.

Dr Wendy Were: My name is Dr Wendy Were. I'm the Executive Director of Thought Leadership at the Greater Cities Commission and the host of the *Greater Cities* podcast - a podcast about the future of cities.

Over this podcast series, we're going to explore the big picture thinking that is happening around the world and here in New South Wales.

This episode will look at the idea of multi-city regions - what they are and why they matter. In other episodes, we'll look at equity and how we can make our cities places where everyone can thrive. We'll look at the great challenge of our time, climate change. We'll look at how we can draw on the unique qualities of cities and the innovation opportunities to take a collaborative, systems-led approach to making them better.

We're drawing together insights from international experts from all around the world who have spent years thinking about and planning for cities and city regions.

Emilie de Rosenroll: We're thinking about how we can leverage, and also differentiate ourselves within that mega region.

Lex Brans We made, developing a strategy for the region, which is now almost done. And that means that not only the city of Amsterdam will grow, but the nine cities around Amsterdam will grow as well.

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Dr Wendy Were: The Greater Sydney Commission was established to bring community industry and government together to plan the future of cities in the Greater Sydney region, to look at how we can enhance the wonderful aspects of our cities and tackle their challenges. Central to this vision was a focus on liveability, sustainability and productivity.

Each of these areas is led by a dedicated commissioner and will meet all of them during the series. For now, here's the commission's Chief Commissioner, Geoff Roberts, talking about the work done so far on greater Sydney as a metropolis of three cities.

Geoff Roberts: We didn't want to just get bigger. We wanted to have a strategic framework of where jobs were located were located, where houses, parks and services were located so that we didn't end up with inequality.

In 2015 and 2016, we really interrogated a number of data sets. The conclusions of that analysis was that we were growing the infrastructure program and the jobs in the city largely in the east, but we were increasingly growing housing in the west.

Now this presented itself with a number of challenges around health outcomes, crime outcomes, around participation in the workforce outcomes. We really felt very strongly that this spatial inequality really needed to be addressed. And that's why the birth of, and the thinking around the metropolis of three cities, which is fundamentally about rebalancing the city in a more equitable way.

Dr Wendy Were: So a new vision for Sydney was established based around the idea of rebalancing opportunity between the east and the west of the city and people having access to jobs and amenities within 30 minutes of their home.

Geoff Roberts: I feel like in the last five years, working together across the three levels of government and with the people of Sydney, we've achieved more in five years than perhaps the 20 years preceding that. The new railway line that links to the new airport is an example. Under normal circumstances that wouldn't have been built for 20 or 30 years. The work on the Aerotropolis. The aerotropolis is the high technology precinct that surrounds the airport, that brings the headquarters of CSIRO in Sydney. That is really fundamental. That allows us to agglomerate universities, research institutions, and some of the most famous, high technology companies in the world, so that's what the contribution of if you like the first iteration of the Greater Sydney Commission.

Now there's still a long way to go. We need to do more. We need to think bigger than that.

Dr Wendy Were: We'll find out more from Jeff about the future vision later in the episode.

We live in an era of globalization. We have a global economy. We face global challenges like climate change and a pandemic. And we have access to global communication, travel and knowledge sharing tools that have brought the world closer together.

Local place-based context will always be important, but we can also learn a lot from city regions around the world and from the experts who study them.

Dr Tim Moonen: So if you take a look at the top 30 cities in the world, say, by most measures, well over half of them are now in a permanent kind of relationship with their region and their neighbouring cities. The world is telling us essentially that the multi-city region is here to stay, and it's one of the organising ideas I'd say about the urban planet in the next 30, 40, 50 years. And the places that get it right are really going to stand to flourish.

Dr Wendy Were: That was Dr. Tim Moonen. Tim's been tracking cities around the world for over a decade. He's the Managing Director of The Business of Cities, a London based consultancy that reports on global trends and innovation in cities. Tim and his team think a lot about the changing form of cities, the future economy of cities and the relationship between people and cities.

We'll hear from Tim throughout the series as he shares his perspectives on the issues facing global cities.

Tim has also interviewed experts from a wide variety of cities, from Tokyo to Texas, Paris to Porto. Tim will unpack the experiences and perspectives of a diverse range of city thinkers, so we can better understand the possibilities of city regions.

Dr Tim Moonen: Well, the multi-city region is a phenomenon of our time because of the major factor that firstly, the world is going from 60% urbanised to 80% urbanised in the next 30 or 40 years, more and more people are coming into cities to the edge of them and to connected places nearby. And that tends to mean nearly every way you look that cities are figuring out how to organize at that bigger scale.

Yet alongside this mega trend of urbanisation, you've got these twin drivers, the digitisation of the economy and the de-carbonisation of our planet. Those two factors are really creating a new set of ideas and a new set of choices about where people choose to live and how they choose to live in and around and between our cities.

The ability of city and regional systems to really serve a new kind of flexibility and agility is really going to be very important in this next period of time. That's why we're seeing a shift to bigger picture regional thinking, and even more attention to how it is that places and neighbourhoods really deliver for people.

Uma Adusumilli: I think one of the things that will happen is more attention to neighbourhood planning. People will start slowly demanding better streets around their houses, and better commercial and entertainment facilities around them, better work centres. I think that's going to be extremely interesting outcome, which will itself enable a more polycentric nature.

Dr Wendy Were: That was Uma Adusumilli, former Chief Planner, Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority, and here is Greg Clark, chair of Connected Places Catapult in London.

Greg Clark: We're going to have to think about amenities, quality of place, how those cities and towns complement one another, and a lot of this is going to be the introduction of new kinds of urban amenities into places that weren't previously considered very urban. So, the cafe culture

the nightlife, the lifestyle, but in a more remote setting. This, I think is the exciting next chapter. It's the century of the connected interdependent cities.

Dr Wendy Were: The idea of becoming a mutually interdependent group of cities relies on better connections between them. Improving these links is a common. Dr. Tim Moonen provides more context through three global examples in Tokyo, New York and Dallas.

Dr Tim Moonen: If a mega region, or a region of multiple connected cities, is going to become a really integrated, interdependent place, it is going to need to move people and goods and ideas around it pretty quickly. All kind of infrastructure is needed for that, including digital connectivity. A lot is going to come down to how well cities and regions really service this new kind of hybrid economy that's emerging. And there's a very live debate all around the world right now about what sorts of infrastructure they're really going to need if they're really going to become successful, joined up places at that larger scale.

So let's just think about two examples. Two of the great cities in the world, in fact, Tokyo and New York City.

Firstly in Tokyo, the connections that have existed now for more than 50 years between Tokyo, Osaka, Nagoya and other cities in the central Japanese belt, that spurred all kinds of mutually beneficial housing and economic change in the region.

Dr Wendy Were: Here's Hiroo Ichikawa, head of the Mori Memorial Foundation.

Hiroo Ichikawa: So we have a kind of connection and we have a relationship kind of win and win relationships to each other. So it's very important issue for the future of Tokyo. This is the first case in the world because of, quite rapid train, make a shorten time of the connecting and new way of thinking of cities and regions.

Dr Tim Moonen: Meanwhile, if we look at New York City and the network of cities that surround it, there's a renewed urgency now to connect up the New York to Boston corridor, given the potential that can have to transform the innovation economies of those two cities, but actually also to create much bigger dividends in terms of the civic capital, the equity, the housing opportunity for the whole region.

Dr Wendy Were: Here's Tom Wright, CEO of the New York Regional Plan Association.

Tom Wright: Obviously after COVID, some people have said, well, is this still a priority? Is transit ridership now going to be depressed, and so we don't need to do this anymore? And the answer is, even in the short to midterm with the depressed levels of ridership, if anything, that's just a bigger opportunity in my mind to do the kinds of heavy work, with less of a disruption than there would have been before.

We know this is, this is a project with a 50 to 100 year time horizon, and we know we're going to need that capacity and so this is absolutely vital to the city and the region, and indeed the entire Northeast, because it will speed travel up and down the entire Northeast corridor from Boston to Washington, which is about 20% of the GDP of the entire United States.

Dr Tim Moonen: And it's not always the usual suspects. There are other cities and regions that have been held back by long travel times in the past, large distances between the cities. They're starting to move ahead with the sort of infrastructure that's going to transform the character and the connectivity of the whole region. One great example is Dallas and Houston.

Dr Wendy Were: Former CEO of Downtown Dallas, Kourtny Garrett, explains.

Kourtny Garrett: The opportunity with high-speed rail for Texas is absolutely tremendous because what it will essentially do is create this mega economy, right? This mega region. So you're connecting the economy of Dallas with the economy of Houston and joining those two together creates a strength and a position for Texas as a whole. And then of course, those two cities and all of the cities around it, that accelerates again this national and international position, drawing business, drawing, more residents. Suddenly you're coming into an area and you can live in one city, but be in another in less than an hour by just hopping on a train.

That creates a whole different way of living.

I think one aspect of this accessibility and openness of the way we're able to move and mobility improvements, is really changing the way all of our cities behave.

Dr Wendy Were: Connecting up multi-city regions in all sorts of ways is not just due to the number of people and their demands for choice. It's also a chance to plan the collective future in a more integrated way and head off some of the collected pressures that cities are facing.

Dr. Tim Moonen highlights some of the challenges of our time.

Dr Tim Moonen: So cities and city regions are responding, I think, to the alarm bells. There are many that are ringing. The housing markets that have become so saturated and expensive. The environment that needs much more urgent and systematic consideration. The risk of sprawling in an uncoordinated way beyond the metropolis.

These sorts of risks, these sorts of realities are creating a recognition, I think, not that the city is dead – far from it –but instead that the multi-city region is in fact a unit that you have to plan, you have to coordinate, if we're going to deal with these kinds of interrelated issues and challenges.

Lauren Sorkin: Resilience planning, and certainly resilience challenges, don't stop at city boundaries. So planning in terms of a megacity scale or a regional is a trend. And it's a good trend, because water sheds, food sheds and energy grids are very rarely limited to a city; almost always regional, sometimes state, sometimes they're national.

Dr Wendy Were: That was Lauren Sorkin, Executive Director of Global Resilience Cities Network, and here's Lex Brans, Head of Housing and Special Projects in Greater Amsterdam.

Lex Brans: In the Holland Metropol context, we are in a delta and we see the rising of the sea level. So we have challenges to meet, and we meet them together, because well our delta problem is a problem of us all. It's very important to develop from the beginning with the markets, so it's public-private working on it with science, and also with the consumers of course.

Dr Wendy Were: Building a multi-city region is not simply about managing the growing pains of the big central city. It's also about putting the smaller city and city region on the map and bringing them a new sense of competitive advantage and borrowed scale. Dr. Tim Moonen explains.

Dr Tim Moonen: We are seeing these smaller and medium sized cities begin to re-establish what it is that they can be really excellent at and start to find partners and relationships and opportunities through being better connected with the larger city. And it's very common over time for those places to evolve from being affordable and attractive residential locations to places with a real economic purpose, a real specialisation that's serving a much wider market in the region and nationally, even internationally. And they in effect are becoming the new

crucibles of innovation in their own right, while all the time retaining that special character identity in the community that they inherited.

Emilie de Rosenroll: We cannot behave as though we're on an island so there's a requirement to work with the region and the bigger metros around us, and that also includes Seattle. We are thinking about our economic strategy and, what sort of specializations we should have. We're thinking about how we can leverage, and also differentiate ourselves within that mega region. We're a mid-size city, we're compact, we offer a tremendous value proposition for why people would want to live here and work here.

Dr Wendy Were: That was Emilie De Rosenroll, Head of the South Island Prosperity Partner.

Managing risk and responding to increased lifestyle demands are the drivers of multi-city regions, and we've heard how smaller cities are finding renewed purpose.

We also ask Dr. Tim Moonen and to share his insights on the benefits of multi-city regions.

Dr Tim Moonen: The three most obvious and visible benefits that those regions that have made positive moves to join up are observing to us are number one, productivity, namely the good jobs and the business development effects that come from being a much larger, more integrated market of skills, clients, customers, housing, and so on.

The second benefit is more sustainable stewardship, in effect, of the assets and the resources that span the region. Everything from how ports and airports are being primed for the future or to how water supplies and food ecosystems are protected to best serve what is usually still a growing urban population.

And then the third benefit that's often overlooked is the brand and the reputational and soft power advantages when the cities are using their combined scale to really build that international presence, their position, and even their influence.

Dr Wendy Were: So, what is it that a group of cities needs to enable them to function as a multi-city region?

Dr Tim Moonen: Well, perhaps even more than any other kind of city building and urban shaping activity, the multi-city region is destined to be a collaborative exercise. It can only really succeed when government comes into a close and continuous working relationship with the larger and medium sized businesses to start with, the anchor institutions, the ports and the airports.

There's such a complex marriage going on here between economic and social and environmental management. In a way, multi-city region building is a team exercise, and it relies on high levels of trust. It relies on creating new kinds of networks, often bringing places that are quite far apart into new sorts of relationship.

Emma Frost: I think the first thing I'd point to is the role that government has to foster and enable collaboration over competition between places so that we can start to create a kind of network of learning and capacity building between places and we can enable that collaboration to overcome competition or to at least be the starting point before competition.

Dr Wendy Were: We just listened to Emma Frost, Director of Innovation, Sustainability, and Community in the London Legacy Development Corporation. Here's Henri Håvard, Business Policy Advisor at the Bergen Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Anri Håvard Hebib: The key here is cluster thinking and that's something Bergen has really been eager to work on. Clusters within ocean technology, within media technology, and so on. We have new businesses that has arrived because of the cluster thinking, innovation has been really driving and we also see that the productivity has increased.

Strategic collaboration is a key to succeed in the future cities, and we also see that competitors needs to collaborate.

[21:36]

Dr Wendy Were: So, we've threaded a path from Mumbai to New York, from Dallas to Amsterdam. And it's clear that the multi-city region is where so many of the great cities around the world are headed.

Many of them are experimenting with new ways of connecting, collaborating, and leading to build clusters of multiple cities, each with unique characteristics and strengths, joining together to be greater than the sum of their parts.

But what does this all really mean? And in particular, what does this mean for us here in Australia? Here's the Commission's Chief Commissioner, Geoff Roberts.

Geoff Roberts: So since 2018 a lot has changed, hasn't it? We've had COVID, we've had floods, we've had bushfires and, you know what, we've learnt from city regions in the rest of the world.

And in thinking bigger about the next iteration of our plans, it really became obvious that we had a golden opportunity to think about the wonderful cities, the Lower Hunter and Greater Newcastle to the north of Sydney, the Central Coast that sits between the Lower Hunter and metropolitan Sydney, and then the great industrial port city of the Illawarra-Shoalhaven to the south.

And really in a post COVID world and looking at these experiences that other cities and city regions have had in the world, it becomes quite obvious that if we think about this city region - let's for a moment, call it the six cities region - if we think about this as an integrated unit, but still with fiercely independent and distinctive cities making up the city region, we can actually be a top 10 city region in the world.

We can confidently face the Indo-Pacific region with our geopolitical context. We have three deep water ports - the Port of Newcastle, Port Botany and Port Kembla. Imagine those three ports working as an integrated system. We've got three international passenger airports in Newcastle, Kingsford Smith and Nancy Bird Walton. Imagine thinking about those as an integrated airport system much like in New York or like in Toronto, or like some of the big Chinese cities that are multi-airport cities.

One of the proudest elements of the city region is that we have seven universities in the top 200 universities in the world. Universities really play a crucial role in thinking and inventing the future, then being the catalyst for those smart jobs in city region.

So at core, what are we on about here? We're on about equity.

Cities are people places. The evidence around the world of cities in the last 20 years is that they've become increasingly privileged. They've become unequal, and we don't want that.

The fundamental driver that drives absolutely everything we do is that a resident of any of the six cities should be treated the same. It's not right that only 85% of residents within the six cities have access to digital connectivity. That's not right, we need to get that to 100%.

Affordable housing is crucial. We haven't got that right to date. We need to do more in terms of affordability to help young people, old people, multi-generational people both own and rent a dwelling where they want to. For me, and for all of us, the singular word that drives us every minute of every day is about equity.

Dr Wendy Were: People are the beating heart of cities and equity underpins everything in the six cities vision, and collaboration is going to be key to our success.

Geoff Roberts: The work we're doing at the moment isn't about Sydney getting bigger. It's more about polycentricity, now that's a sort of, at one level, a ridiculous word. What polycentric means is that idea that there are more jobs for more people closer to where people live.

We're talking about eight to 10 million people in this city region by the middle of the century. So what we believe is that we can be competitive. But we can also retain our localness, so we can have that global local, we call it globalised localism. But really it's about living within neighbourhood a 15 minute neighbourhood within six 30 minute cities. It's about innovation districts in each of the six cities.

And you know what? We can take this moment in time and make sure that a net zero future is relevant to the whole of the six cities region. That's what the six cities planning is all about.

[27:25]

Dr Wendy Were: So the big question is, how do we make this happen? How can our cities succeed together? What do we need to focus on to create this future, and to ensure we have a thriving ecosystem for all of our six cities?

We're now going to hear from local city experts who've been thinking about the future of our cities for a very long time. Here's Mike Mrdak, current chair of NEC, who has spent nearly 20 years working for the federal government on transport infrastructure projects.

Mike Mrdak: So we built infrastructure in Sydney very much for most of the last 120 years around a radial network, of how do you get people to connect between their suburban areas and their places of work, which predominantly Inner Sydney and in a Western Sydney.

What we've really seen over the last 10 to 15 years is a radical change. What we're now seeing is an economic area which is much more diverse and has a lot more people moving across that region than we could have ever imagined even 10 years ago. And that means your networks have got to change quite considerably.

But what it also means is it's a very inclusive concept. Because you no longer have a sense of the city as being a primary. The new patterns of work are actually bringing people much more back to a local setting and that people want to live and work locally.

What we've now got is multiple regions all having their own characters, all having small economies, which then can conglomerate up into larger regional economies.

Lucy Turnbull: If you move around and use any or all of these region areas, these six cities, you can see that there are very, very strong interrelationships between the cities and so we can figure out how they can be enhanced so people feel better connected to work, better connected to their families, better connected to their friends, and better connected to anything they want to do in life.

For many people, their daily life is bound by the five or six kilometres ring, so we have to nurture the local places, the local grain, the local features, as at the same time as we recognise the significance of greater connection between the six cities.

One of the great opportunities I see in this is for people to think no matter which of the six cities they live in, they have greater access to the skills and training. If you create faster transport links between the Illawarra and Newcastle and the other cities, that spreads the opportunity for people to skill and train in those other great universities. That you can study the subjects you are really passionate about no matter where you live. That's a very powerful thing to be able to do.

Dr Wendy Were: That was Lucy Turnbull, former Chief Commissioner of the Greater Sydney Commission and former Lord Mayor of Sydney City and here is Professor Barney Glover, Vice Chancellor of Western Sydney University.

Barney Glover: I have a strong view that universities are actually crucial to the development of our regions. It's not just about the research they might be doing or the partnerships with business and industry that they help to develop and to foster. It's actually about the economic impact they have in city centres by virtue of their size and their scale.

The key, I think, to this next phase of success here in New South Wales is collaboration. Collaboration. Collaboration. Let's find new ways to work together. And I think we've seen examples of that with the advanced manufacturing research facility that will go to Bradfield near the airport. We're beginning to see really powerful collaborations. I think that's the key to getting maximum impact from the way in which our regions are developed.

[31:09]

Dr Wendy Were: We can already begin to see the changes needed in our cities to take us towards the vision of a thriving multi-city region here in Australia.

Transport, localisation and the role of universities are just some of the developments, but future visions are shaped by location and history.

Here in Australia, non-indigenous Australians have some serious work to do, to understand and acknowledge our history.

Australia is home to the oldest, continuous living culture in the world with First Nations people living on and caring for the lands and waters of the region for over 65,000 years.

But there is a dark and difficult history that must be reckoned with if we are to go forward from an honest, strong and shared foundation. The impact of colonisation on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples has been devastating. There is a profound need for truth telling and an acceptance of the wrongs done and harm caused to First Nations people.

Decolonising the city planning process is an ambitious goal and needs to start with learning from First Nations people's wisdom and deep knowledge of this country.

Here's Sean Gordon, Managing Director of Gidgee Group, an indigenous owned business and Natalie Walker, Social Commissioner of the Greater Cities Commission.

Sean Gordon: My people are the Wangkumarra Barkindji people from the corner country of New South Wales, Queensland, and South Australia. When we think about the history of Australia, our people were forced to the fringes through colonisation. It kept you out of mind, out of sight.

Historically, aboriginal people were being placed on missions and reserves. And those missions and reserves just existed of Aboriginal people. It wasn't about bringing us into society, it was about segregating us from society. And so for our people, it's always been a challenge as to how do you create new opportunities and get yourself into the centre of community, which is where a lot of these opportunities exist.

I think symbolism is important. Recognising a group of people who've lived in the country for more than 80,000 years. Flying the Aboriginal flags on buildings, the acknowledgement of country, those things are absolutely crucial and important. What's more important is making sure that there's an Aboriginal presence within those communities.

Natalie Walker: I am Kuku Yalanji from the Daintree Rainforest in Queensland, but I've lived in Sydney on Gadigal, Guringai, Garrigal lands for the last 20 years.

What Aboriginal people want to contribute to the city region, what place they want to hold, and how they want to hold those places and spaces is really up to them. What is important for us is to create the space for that voice to be sought and heard and acted on, and make sure that is embedded in our region plan.

What will follow is agreement making and what we'll follow is also truth telling. But voice is a really critical first step in that bigger journey.

It's not just the symbolism, although that is important. It's also what that translates to in terms of practical effect on the ground. So for example, how does listening to and incorporating Aboriginal people's land management practices help us become more adaptive, more resilient as a city region to a changing climate?

This benefits us all in so many ways that we can't even imagine right now, and so that's why the Uluru Statement from the Heart is so powerful. It's a gift from the Aboriginal community and the Torres Strait Islander community to the broader Australian community, where understand us and our aspirations and where we've come from so that we can build a better future together.

[35:11]

Dr Wendy Were: So here we are in an era defined by the opportunity and necessity to radically transform the way we live, work and play in the cities that most of us call home.

Great multi-city regions need a vision, but they also need values, principles, and priorities that will guide decision makers in all levels and areas of city building.

Two aspects critical to a successful multi-city region, equity and sustainability, are significantly challenged by the legacy of colonisation and modern Western ways of living.

We'll explore each of these in the next two episodes, beginning in episode two with looking at how we can build equity into the very DNA of our cities, developing services, community and belonging, while also addressing the challenges of housing, diversity and affordability.

And in episode three, tackling the crisis of our times, climate change, and how cities can achieve sustainability for the long term, transforming to meet the challenge of realising net zero emissions while ensuring our cities are resilient and adaptable.

We hope you'll join us as we continue to explore a future where the world cities are places where everyone can thrive and we care for our shared home, planet earth, for the long term.

Dr Wendy Were: Thanks for listening to *Greater Cities*, a podcast about the future of cities. You can find show notes for each episode and learn more about the work of the Greater Cities Commission and our vision for our city region at GreaterCities.au.

If you like this podcast, please like, review and share with your colleagues, friends, and family, and anyone who cares about the future of cities.

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