

# A vibrant and safe CBD is vital for our economy

It takes people to make a community and we are going to need much more of that essential ingredient if the Sydney CBD is to become its own vibrant community by day and night.

Unfortunately, the signs are not promising that the population of the CBD is going to grow significantly if the experience of recent years is any guide to the demographics of our city.

And that's a pity because so many things are dependent upon having a downtown area that is alive with people who live in the area and, it is to be hoped, can also work in it.

Having a people-rich CBD can influence how safe women feel when they are out and about in the city at night. It can also influence the night time economy in having employees who live nearby.

It can even influence the availability of public transport services with more people wanting to travel to or from the city at all hours.

At Business Sydney, we've set a



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goal for the population of the wider city area — the boundary of the City of Sydney Council — to more than double to 600,000 within 10 years.

The CBD is going to have to get a kick along if this ambitious goal is to be achieved. Australian Bureau of Statistics data offers a somewhat gloomy picture of population and housing growth. Sadder still, the data shows that Melbourne is doing much better than Sydney in building home units in its central area and increasing its population quite dramatically in the process.

In fact, in Sydney, population growth in the central 2000 post code area all but stalled between the 2016 and 2021 censuses.

The CBD population in 2021 was 27,936 — an increase of only 525 or

1.9 per cent more than five years earlier. No doubt, the pandemic is partly responsible for Sydney's sluggish growth. In contrast, the population of Melbourne's central post code 3000 area increased by more than 5000 to reach 43,084.

In the decade from 2011, Melbourne more than doubled its CBD population and increased the number of private dwellings to 34,347, up more than 21,000.

It is apparent authorities in Melbourne made a calculated decision to have vastly more people living in its central area and they made it happen. No such decision was made in Sydney and the CBD population has languished.

So, why the focus on the CBD and why is it so important to have more people living there? It has long been commonplace for people to live in the centre of cities such as New York, Paris and Rome.

Having cities filled with single-purpose office buildings with city

workers heading home to their dormitory suburbs leaving downtown areas deserted at night is a relatively recent phenomenon in world terms. It's time to reverse that trend.

A good start would be to encourage home unit development in the city, especially housing that essential workers can afford so they can live closer to where they work.

It should be no surprise that many of the first responders working from police, ambulance and fire stations in the city commute long distances to work from the Central Coast, Blue Mountains and Wollongong.

Having people in the city going about their lives at all hours would be a crucial factor in women being more confident about engaging in the night time economy.

Business Sydney and Urbis Sydney recently jointly hosted a forum on improving women's engagement in the night time economy and released a 10-point plan to help achieve it.

According to City of Sydney Council research, Sydney's night-time economy is worth more than \$3.6 billion annually but it has the potential to be far more with increased participation of women who currently face a number of obstacles in doing so. Our forum heard that women feel more confident in the city when other people are about at all hours, a situation that would be helped by having more people in the CBD.

Turning Sydney into a 24-hour city in line with its global city status, with more people living in the central area, would prompt a rethink of public transport services, which currently shut down by midnight or soon after. A much bigger population in Sydney's CBD would give it the reputation as a city that never stops still. That's all part of the magic when the CBD becomes a workplace as well as a home for more people.

**Paul Nicolaou is the Executive Director of Business Sydney.**