COMMITTEE FOR ADELAIDE

Benchmarking Adelaide 2025

Hames Sharley
JLL
Mitsubishi Motors
RAA
Adelaide Economic Development Agency
City of Adelaide
The Business of Cities

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The Committee for Adelaide acknowledges that it operates on the traditional Country of the Kaurna people of the Adelaide Plains and pays respect to Elders past, present and emerging. The Committee recognises and respects their cultural heritage, beliefs and relationship with the land, sea, waterways and sky.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report was commissioned by the Committee for Adelaide as an update to Benchmarking Adelaide 2023 to review Adelaide's relative opportunities and challenges anew and inform the approach Adelaide takes as it continues to grow, develop, and change.

This new edition draws on a combination of data sources, including publicly available studies that rank and compare cities, national and international statistical databases such as those maintained by censuses, the OECD, and the UN, and real time data aggregated through trusted APIs of platforms such as Google, Dealroom and others. The report assesses Adelaide among a group of 20 international cities. Scores in each category reflect its overall position among this group of 20.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank lead-contributors Dr Tim Moonen, Ezra Rawitsch, and Borane Gille from The Business of Cities for their dedication and contribution to this report.

The Business of Cities is an urban intelligence firm providing data and advice to 100 global cities and companies. Based principally in London, the firm has worked with more than 10 local, state and federal governments in Australia since 2014, as well as peak leadership groups and planning commissions, on agendas surrounding the future of Australian cities' governance, built form and economy.

This report was also supported and benefited from the guiding inputs of Committee for Adelaide platinum members, Hames Sharley, JLL, Mitsubishi Motors Australia Limited and the RAA as well as the Adelaide Economic Development Agency and the City of Adelaide.

THANK YOU TO OUR BENCHMARKING ADELAIDE 2025 PARTNERS:

Hames Sharley | JLL | Mitsubishi Motors | RAA

Adelaide Economic Development Agency | City of Adelaide | Committee for Adelaide | The Business of Cities

Foreword

2025 brings us to a critical juncture for Adelaide, South Australia. We are now 25 years into the new century.

We have 25 years left to hit net zero. The political landscape at a state and national level will see elections with the potential for new Governments to be formed, whilst the continuing transformation of the traditional world order and geopolitical challenges means Adelaide faces interesting times ahead. The policy, infrastructure and investment decisions we make, based on what we know today, will define the trajectory of Adelaide for the next 20 to 30 years.

As a State, we have several big legacy projects in front of us including Adelaide University, AUKUS, the new Women's & Children's Hospital project, the final stage of the North-South Corridor and the State Prosperity Projects, including the proposed Northern Water Project. Adelaide is enjoying some broad economic momentum, with growth in several high-value industries including defence, health, education, resources, agriculture, advanced manufacturing and the green economy. The city is on the cusp of a very exciting period but there is work to do to ensure all South Australians benefit.

Like many other cities, Adelaide is facing unprecedented challenges particularly around housing, healthcare, transport infrastructure, climate change and social equity. And we must be vigilant that Adelaide's long-held advantages of lifestyle, affordability, cultural vibrancy and environment don't diminish.

As Adelaide heads towards 2 million people, it's more important than ever that we capitalise on our strengths, seize the economic opportunities before us, ensure sustainability and resilience and be at the forefront of innovation and the latest technological advancements to help the city reach its full potential.

Building on the inaugural 2023 edition, the Committee for Adelaide has once again commissioned The Business of Cities to produce the second Benchmarking Adelaide report, in partnership with JLL, Hames Sharley, RAA, Mitsubishi Motors Australia Limited, the City of Adelaide, and the Adelaide Economic Development Agency (AEDA).

Using publicly available records, long-standing statistical databases and real-time data, the report measures Adelaide within a peer group of 20 global cities, tracking progress since 2023 and across five strategic pillars of opportunity, future economy, place and space, people and planet, and reputation.

Interestingly, there has been movement in all ten areas since the first report, with positive progress being made across innovation, R&D and specialisation; skills, knowledge and population; amenity, vibrancy and experience; as well as perception, visibility and appeal.

Adelaide continues to excel as a hub for international education, high-impact research, lower construction costs and momentum to decarbonise. We are known for our enduring liveability, easy-going culture, amazing events and festivals, natural beauty and exemplary food-and-wine scene. The city impressively rates among the top 85 cities worldwide for overall economic prospects, global business linkages are improving, and we are growing our appeal to business and capital.

In other measures, however, Adelaide is being outpaced. Productivity growth continues to lag, with the city's productivity gap to the national average sitting at 20%, larger than most other comparable cities. Other cities are catching up to Adelaide in areas such as affordability, sustainability and resilience. While South Australia is setting the pace for decarbonisation and the energy transition, Adelaide still emits more total greenhouse gases per person than most peer cities and EV infrastructure and adoption remains behind.

The report also explores how peer cities have been addressing two key opportunities facing Adelaide: doing density well and capitalising on the defence economy. Adelaide can look to cities like San Diego and Toulouse to see that with the right structures and curation, the current defence investment cycle can unlock wider innovation and technology benefits. Austin and Auckland are two of many cities to show it is possible to increase density with quality in mind to serve the needs of a growing city.

This report is not about finding fault with Adelaide but is designed to spark discussion around how to build upon our strengths and keep learning from the international experiences of peer cities. **We look forward to continuing the conversation and using the latest benchmarking findings to collaborate with our members and stakeholders to shape the future of Adelaide, South Australia.**

Sam Dighton

Chief Executive
Committee for Adelaide

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

AI	**Artificial intelligence**
APAC	**Asia-Pacific**
API	**Application programming interface**
CBD	**Central business district**
FDI	**Foreign Direct Investment**
EV	**Electric vehicle**
GDP	**Gross Domestic Product**
R&D	**Research and Development**
SME	**Small and medium-sized enterprise**
STEM	**Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics**
VC	**Venture Capital**

Executive Summary

ADELAIDE IN THE WORLD IN 2025

Adelaide is at a pivotal moment of growth and change that will shape its prospects and potential for decades to come.

The city is coming into its own as a leader in industries that will shape the 21st century: from defence and energy, to health and education. Yet it has to demonstrate it can translate this advantage into success, appeal, and broadly shared benefits.

This second edition of the Benchmarking Adelaide report highlights where Adelaide stands in an international context full of turbulence and risk.

Across the 10 pillars reviewed, Adelaide is up most strikingly in the areas of 'innovation' and 'perception', two areas where it has been behind for some time:

- **Adelaide is moving up for innovation and knowledge,** driven by excellence across research disciplines, popularity of higher education, and positive signs of catch up in the startup ecosystem and industry mix.
- **Adelaide's external recognition and profile has also proved resilient.** This reflects confidence in the city's relative stability and visitor credentials, steadily deepening corporate links to the global marketplace and improved aviation connections to fast growing centres. Adelaide is also gaining more pockets of recognition as a city with future leadership potential in sustainability, nature, energy and electrification.

However, Adelaide's toolkit to take advantage of this potential growth is looking fragile, with productivity and liveability two pillars where Adelaide has fallen back comparatively on two years ago:

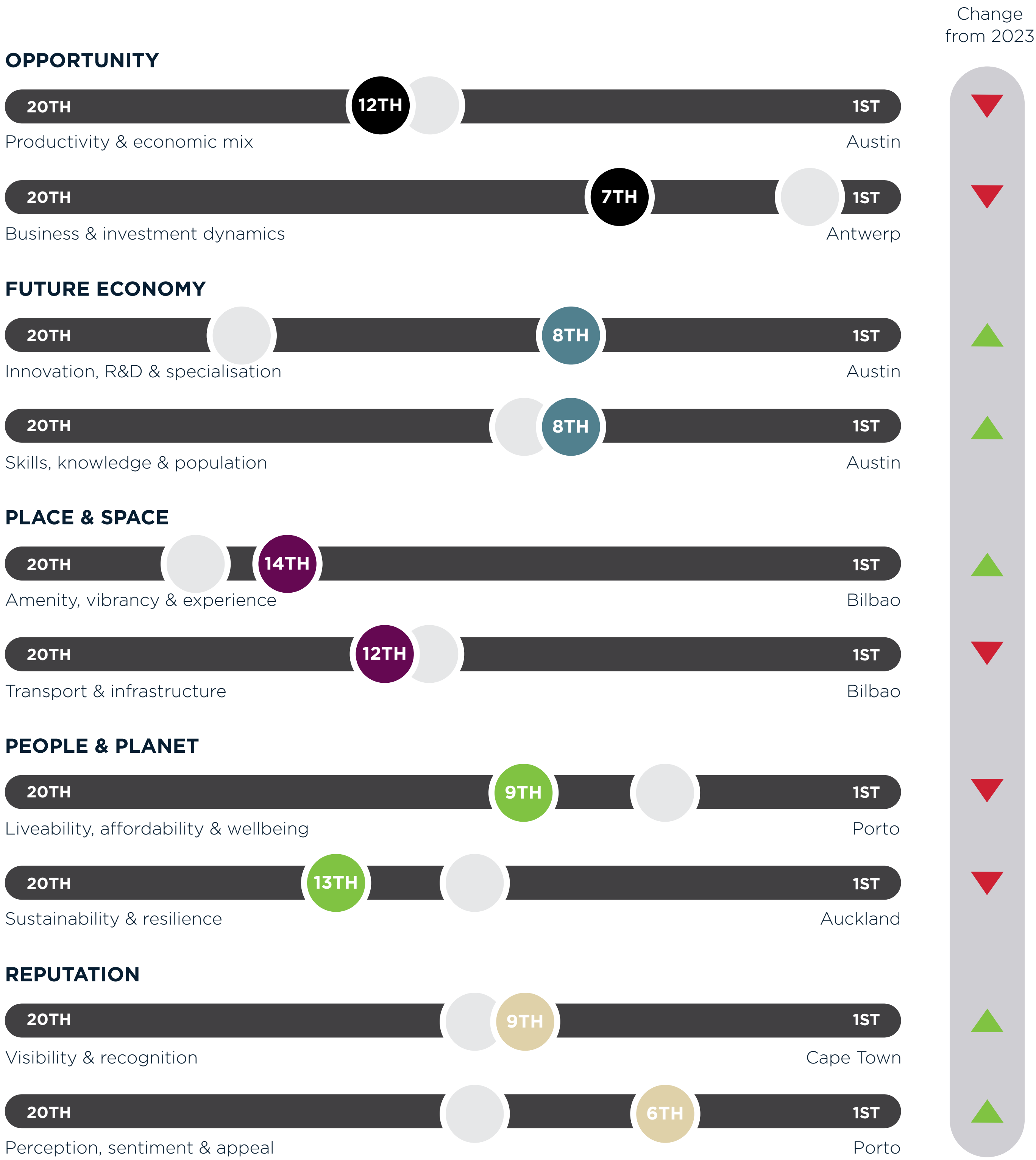
- **Adelaide deficits of productivity and capital attraction are not easing.** This suggests that even more focus is required to maximise the return from promising specialisms.
- **Others internationally continue to move ahead for infrastructure and efficiency.** Commutes are lengthening more quickly, electric and digital gaps are more notable, and enhancing public transport access is happening more slowly than elsewhere.

Adelaide is approaching a critical juncture where it must move with conviction in how it shapes growth for long-term advantage.

It has the chance to build up its competitive advantages, move fast to unexpected opportunities, be vigilant on risks, and sharpen Adelaide's combined proposition as a highly distinct city and environment in Australia and globally.

ADELAIDE'S RATINGS IN 2025

Based on Adelaide's position among a group of the 20 peer cities assessed in this report, compared to its performance in 2023 (in grey).



The cities rated are Adelaide, Antwerp, Auckland, Austin, Bilbao, Bordeaux, Busan, Cape Town, Cardiff, Edmonton, Fukuoka, Muscat, Penang, Portland, Porto, Pune, Sacramento, San Diego, Valencia, Valparaiso. Adelaide's position is calculated using an Elo algorithm that considers multiple metrics.

SNAPSHOT OF ADELAIDE'S PERFORMANCE IN 2025

Adelaide is gaining momentum

AMONG PEERS

3rd	strongest range of university specialisations
3rd	highest share of high-impact research
4th	fastest 5-year growth in VC vs peers
5x	more B Corps than the peer average
Most attractive	construction costs vs. peers

WORLDWIDE

8th	highest all-round across all liveability
Up 13	places for global business linkages
Top 50	resilience to the effects of climate change
Top 60	fastest-growing innovation ecosystems
Top 100	growth market for overseas corporate investment

But there is still work to do

Down 1	for productivity among peers
3rd highest	share of income spent on rent, after San Diego and Auckland
Bottom 3	for internet connection speeds
2nd last	for new green buildings
Below average	for walkability to key services and amenities

Bottom 8%	for homeownership affordability in the English-speaking world
Fallen outside the top 100	most visible city in global benchmarks
Below average	for cumulative risk capital attracted since 2000
Fallen out of the top 200	largest metropolitan economies
No longer among the top 100	most affordable places to study

Sources (L-R): Shanghai Ranking, Leiden, Dealroom, Metroverse, B Labs, Arcadis; EIU, GaWC, Oxford Economics, Dealroom, fDi; JLL, Speedtest, TBoC Research, GBIG, ITDP & TBoC Research; Demographia, Dealroom, Dealroom, TBoC Research, QS.

LEARNING FROM THE WORLD

The mix of results for Adelaide in 2025 points to the need to understand the pace of change in other locations. It also underlines the importance of learning from the actions and experiences of other global cities.

These cities spotlight some common features that are relevant for Adelaide:

- **Vision:** The importance of a compelling vision and plan for the future direction of the city, spanning more than one development cycle.
- **Clarity:** The value of simplicity, pace and predictability in transmitting confidence to the market and citizens.
- **Continuous collaboration:** The need to purposefully enrol businesses, clusters, and universities in the delivery of economic and spatial development.
- **Convergence:** Proactively seeking convergence opportunities across sectors and disciplines helps ideas to commercialise and advice to be impactful.
- **Major players:** Anchor companies and institutions are essential sources of innovation and of voice for the city.
- **Joined up storytelling:** Effective smaller and mid-sized cities have seen the value of a unified brand identity, harnessing the strongest and most recognisable assets.

This report also offers a glimpse into how several of Adelaide's peer cities have been progressing in two key areas: **doing density well and turning the defence economy into an innovation asset.**

- San Diego and Toulouse have shown that with the right structures, defence anchors and investments can unlock a whole host of wider tech capabilities and applications across the economy over a 20-year period.
- Austin and Auckland have shown it is possible to achieve a more effective level of density that addresses immediate housing needs as well as making many more suburbs and precincts more lively, safe, jobs-rich and appealing.

ADELAIDE'S REVEALED IMPERATIVES

While Adelaide appears to be gaining more of the building blocks to succeed across future economic and sustainability pillars, this potential will be diluted without a stronger handle on the productivity, infrastructure and governance foundations that underpin demand.

Adelaide's performance, coupled with its rate of progress over the last 2 years, and the insights of other peer cities in the last decade, points to several areas that must be looked at carefully if the city wants to progress:

1. 'Whole city' governance, leadership, vision, and storytelling to better organise growth, avoid fragmentation, integrate transport, improve land uses, and capture public imagination and confidence about the direction Adelaide is on.
2. More expansive co-investment deals and systems, that demonstrate willingness of multiple levels of government to broker agreements and give the private sector confidence that Adelaide is the place to invest and to innovate.
3. A more positive dialogue and psychology around processes of city change and, in particular, what kinds of density and development will complement Adelaide's identity and lifestyle. Sidestepping a zero-sum competitive mindset.

There is no single pathway, institution or silver bullet that can secure Adelaide's progress in these areas. The step changes will require a spirit of innovation, proactiveness and common endeavour across public, business and institutional leadership.

CHOOSING ADELAIDE'S PATH

Adelaide is now well placed to purposefully shape its own future. Its industry mix, lifestyle and resilience assets now place it closer to the centre of attention for many kinds of investors, workers, creators and growth businesses.

The stage is set for Adelaide to embrace new opportunities made possible by the strategic moves the city has been making. However, there is no room for complacency, otherwise Adelaide risks missing its moment to elevate its standing.

PASSIVE

All roads lead to population-driven growth

Strategically ambiguous about the role of the city centre

Single sectors and single projects

Govt-led approaches to long-term planning, ecosystem development

Placemaking improves in pockets

City of neighbourhoods

Positive but disparate narratives

Domestic competition focus

Lack of motives or confidence to change

THE RISK

- **Stuck in the productivity slow lane**
- **Unable to supercharge the common endeavour required for change**
- **Misses out permanently on opportunities**

ACTIVE

Relentless focus on productivity

Strategic intent around the city centre

Convergence and joined-up projects

Multi-stakeholder approaches to vision, planning, and ecosystem become the norm

A high level of ambition around place mix, quality and variety

Signature precincts and gravitational pull.

Clear and bold storytelling

Global impact and influence focus

Continuous improvement mindset

THE OPPORTUNITY

- **Australia's most human-scale metropolitan city**
- **One of the world's best cities for families, entrepreneurs, and specialist firms**
- **The home to infrastructure that raises the standard of precincts and places and connectability**

Introduction

Benchmarking Adelaide is about making strategic and salient comparisons. To understand how Adelaide is really doing means adopting a global view on how it performs and how it is perceived. This work offers an 'outside in' perspective on whether Adelaide is moving ahead or falling behind in the world of cities.

This approach was applied in the 2023 edition of Benchmarking Adelaide, having previously been used in more than 50 cities globally during the past decade.

THE FRAMEWORK PILLARS

As in 2023, Adelaide's performance is assessed across five strategic pillars:

- **Opportunity:** Adelaide's ability to foster economic opportunities and cultivate prosperity for all its residents, and its capacity to embrace changing economic and geopolitical circumstances.
- **Future Economy:** Adelaide's potential to build a competitive advantage in growth industries, and to train and educate the talent needed to do so.
- **Place & Space:** Adelaide's capacity to improve the public realm, neighbourhoods and environments that increase the vibrancy, productivity and appeal of the city.
- **People & Planet:** Adelaide's record for promoting inclusion, wellbeing and good stewardship of the urban and natural environment on behalf of its residents, institutions and investors.
- **Reputation:** Adelaide's visibility on the radar of prospective workforce, businesses, students, visitors, and others, and its potential to achieve global reach and resonance for a broad base of users and markets.

For each pillar, Adelaide's performance is organised into two distinct themes. Each section provides an at-a-glance summary of Adelaide's position compared to its peer cohort and a sample of key metrics.

BENCHMARKING: A REMINDER

What is benchmarking? In this report "benchmarking" means comparing Adelaide to other cities around the world through data. This data is made up of publicly available studies that rank and compare cities, long-term databases and real-time data from digital platforms.

It's all relative. Cities can improve yet fall behind others who are improving faster. The opposite is also true.

What matters can change. New challenges and new technologies can affect how a city does in benchmarks and what benchmarks choose to feature a city. The recent rise of AI, for example, presents fresh opportunities and risks for different kinds of cities. Cities are also affected by changing values or perceptions among surveyed audiences.

Time lags. Real on-the-ground infrastructure and improvement can take 1-2 years or longer to register in city performance & perception data.

City (and state) governments don't control everything. Adelaide's performance in important areas is shaped by forces beyond its immediate public control – market demand, private investment and corporate research and development spend as some examples. Benchmarks do not assign blame or responsibility or imply an assessment of a city's strategies and governance.

With a population close to 1.5 million today, Adelaide is just outside the world's 400 largest cities.

Cities of its size typically feature less often in well-known benchmarks that compare cities.

Adelaide has relatively good visibility – it is featured in 27% of global city performance and perception benchmarks published since the beginning of 2024. However, because it is the 5th city in Australia it is less often covered than the likes of Cape Town (which appears in 43% of indices) and Auckland (40%).

As such, this analysis also incorporates data from longitudinal databases, census data, and real-time platforms aggregated from trusted APIs that analyse business and transport data.

Every source of data has its own strengths and limitations. This paper looks to consider known issues of time lags, data volatility, or limitations in the spatial or audience coverage of any benchmarks.

THIS REPORT AIMS TO:

- Develop a bespoke outside-in analysis of Adelaide's performance and perception relative to comparable international peer cities.
- Identify comparative strengths, gaps and opportunities that can make Adelaide more internationally competitive.
- Benchmark Adelaide with other international locations with similar size, assets and relationships.

THIS REPORT DOES NOT PROVIDE:

- An inside-out analysis of all of Adelaide's economic, sectoral, and fiscal data.
- An assessment of Adelaide's strategies, governance, fiscal or policy models.
- A definitive recommendation of new policies Adelaide should adopt.

ADELAIDE'S PEERS

Since 2023, Adelaide's cohort of liveable, medium-sized cities has not been standing still.

As Adelaide heads towards 2 million people, it faces the challenge of how to compete effectively and also manage its growth at an enlarged scale.

These agendas are shared by other liveable mid-sized cities internationally.

To calibrate Adelaide's path in this international context, this benchmarking approach considers its progress among 'peer' cities.

These are cities that share many common features, which make them useful comparators and potential competitors for Adelaide to keep track of and look towards in the next cycle.

There are six common features of Adelaide's peer group of cities:

- Similar size (1-2 million people) and position in their national or regional systems. Many have larger cities near them.
- Natural assets (including food and wine industries) and a strong liveability proposition.
- Well established niches hosting high value-added production and education
- Diversification imperative, after historically being more dependent on commodities and visitors.
- Desire to preserve advantages of commutability, affordability, and relevance.

These cities present lessons that may be useful to Adelaide around brand identity, governance, district development, and skills pathways.

WHY COMPARE ADELAIDE TO THESE CITIES?

- Spot competitive advantages and weaknesses in a wider context
- Understand whether the pace of change is sufficient
- Learn from their successes and failures

WHO ARE ADELAIDE'S PEERS?

Adelaide is compared in this report to a group of 20 mid-sized cities reputed for their liveability:

Antwerp	**Cardiff**	**Porto**
Auckland	**Edmonton**	**Pune**
Austin	**Fukuoka**	**Sacramento**
Bilbao	**Muscat**	**San Diego**
Bordeaux	**Penang**	**Valencia**
Busan	**Portland**	**Valparaiso**
Cape Town		

WHAT SCALE DO WE LOOK AT?

Benchmarks mostly focus on the whole city of Greater Adelaide.

References in this report to "Adelaide" or "the city" are referring to metropolitan Adelaide, unless it is otherwise specified that they are referring to the City of Adelaide, the CBD, South Australia, or some other scale.

NB: Not all 20 cities in Adelaide's peer group appear in all benchmarks analysed. Where appropriate we also compare Adelaide to:

- *Other fast-growing small to medium sized cities of 1-2 million people.*
- *Other cities in the OECD and across the Asia-Pacific region.*

Whilst nationally collected data is also occasionally used, the purpose of this study is not to compare Adelaide primarily to other major Australian cities. Australian city comparisons are only used in cases where international data is limited or not directly comparable.

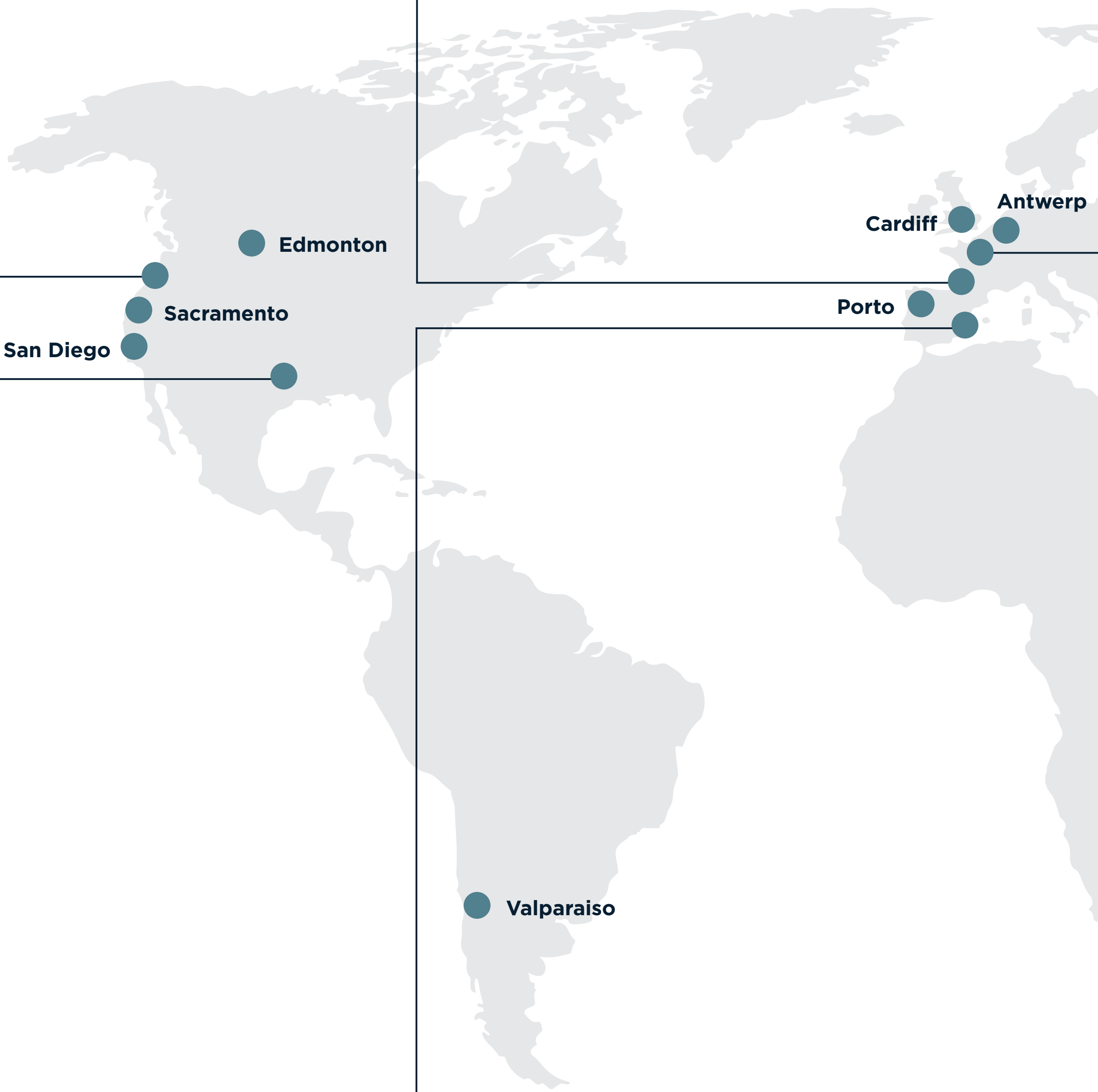
HEADLINES FROM ADELAIDE'S PEER CITIES

PORTLAND

Portland reformed its government, appointing a professional administrator as executive, overseen by an expanded city council.

BILBAO

Bilbao created the Bay Awards to build its relationship with innovation. It is also moving forward with a waterfront technology district.



AUSTIN

Austin simplified its zoning code to allow denser housing on smaller plots of land.

VALENCIA

Valencia's post-flood shift is into high quality tourism, integrating micro-destinations in the Pobles del Sud–Pinedo, El Saler, and El Palmar–into health- and gastronomy-focused visitor routes.

BORDEAUX

Bordeaux launched 'Join the Bordeaux Crew,' a new place identity strategy highlighting the region's efforts to diversify its food and wine offer to changing tastes and make viticulture more sustainable.

BUSAN

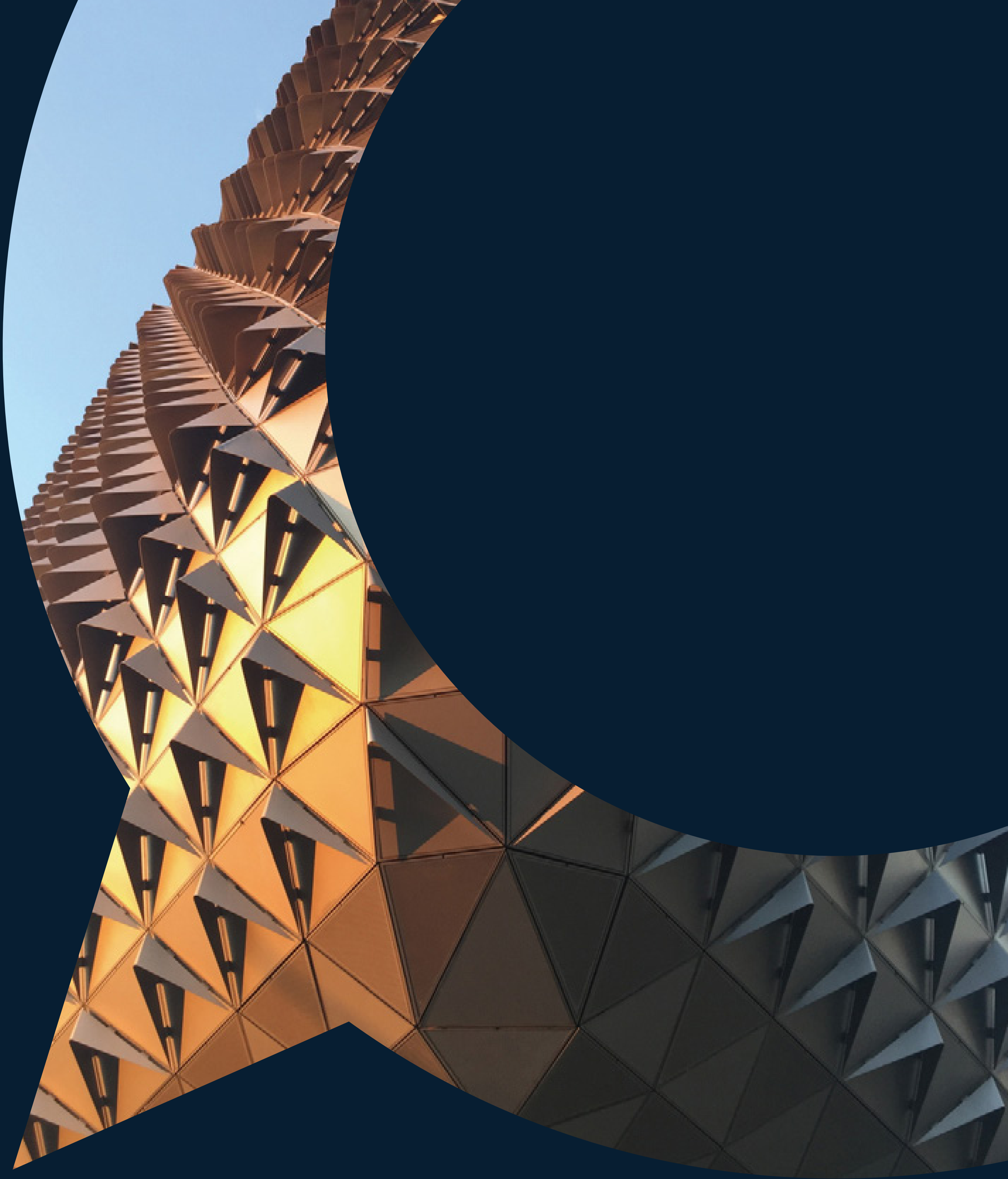
Busan is building its first old-age friendly district, accommodating an ageing population that is among the highest in the world.

CAPE TOWN

Cape Town became the first city in Africa to launch a comprehensive data strategy, as a whole-city metropolitan tool to manage the city better.

PUNE

Pune is leading India's EV transition as EV sales trebled in 2024 to nearly 100,000 units.



Chapter 1
Opportunity

OPPORTUNITY:
GROWTH NEEDS TRANSLATING INTO SUCCESS

Adelaide has many of the ingredients of an opportunity economy: a growing population, investment in strategic industries, cost and inclusiveness advantages, and positive signs on enterprise.

But others locally and internationally continue to move ahead on productivity, a key barometer of future living standards. The size of high productivity sectors is small, and workforce and training barriers are significant.

Adelaide continues to compete well, yet it is unclear if the toolkit to develop the whole city's economy is best equipped to make the most of changing global, macroeconomic and industry conditions.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Population growth dynamics combined with investment headwinds in other markets are converted into a cycle of major anchor companies and clusters grounding in Adelaide.
- Adelaide's business climate comes to be viewed as more competitive in international markets.
- Adelaide builds critical mass to channel more young talent into higher value activities, resulting in wage growth and greater levels of shared prosperity.

RISKS

- Stuck in the productivity slow lane may undermine confidence and compromise the means to invest in future economy.
- The wage gap with bigger Eastern Seaboard cities in Australia becomes a larger deterrent for professional talent as housing costs converge.
- A limited global profile which means Adelaide is only rated and regarded by 'usual suspects' and is overlooked by other markets of investors, partners and talent.

PRODUCTIVITY

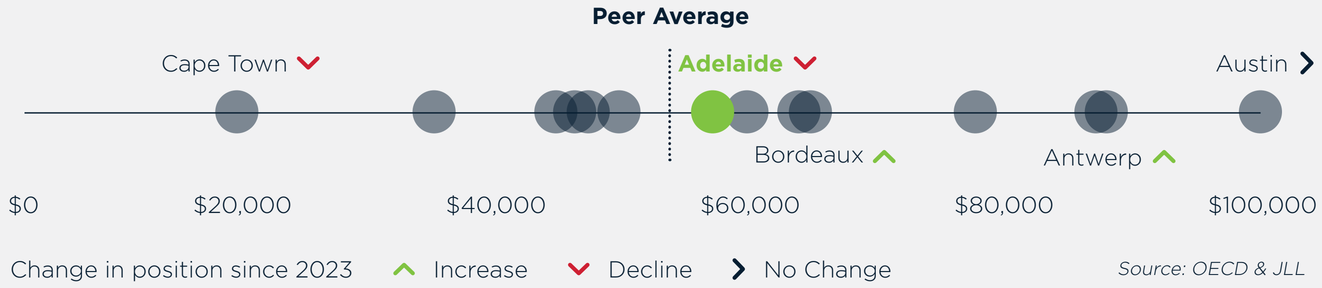
PENANG | **ADELAIDE** | **AUSTIN**

BOTTOM RATED CITY — **12TH** — **TOP RATED CITY**

20TH | **1ST**

PRODUCTIVITY HAS FALLEN BACK

GDP per capita for Adelaide, USD $ PPP



Source: OECD & JLL

PRODUCTIVITY GROWTH IS BEING OUTPACED

- Adelaide is down 1 place to 10th for economic output per person among its cohort, overtaken by Bordeaux, and just 4% above the median.
- Others continue to grow at a faster rate. Austin and San Diego for example are nearly twice as productive per worker.
- Adelaide's productivity gap to the national average (20%) is larger than most other comparable cities.[1,2]
- Adelaide's work-from-home share – an important barometer of productivity in the medium term - is more in balance with global averages than other Australian cities. Its share (17%) is on par with San Diego and Auckland, and lower than Austin (25%) or Melbourne. [3]

ADELAIDE LAGS ITS NATION'S PRODUCTIVITY

- Adelaide's economic output per head is 30% behind Australia's average. Most of its peers' match or outpace their national averages – leader Bilbao is 30% ahead of Spain as a whole.
- 3.5% more people in Adelaide are not in education, employment or training compared to Australia as a whole. This national gap is larger than peer cities. While cities like Auckland have recently improved here, Adelaide has seen the second-highest recent increase in disengagement among peers.[4]

ADELAIDE SECTOR MIX IS SLOWLY BECOMING MORE FAVOURABLE TO A MORE PRODUCTIVE ECONOMY

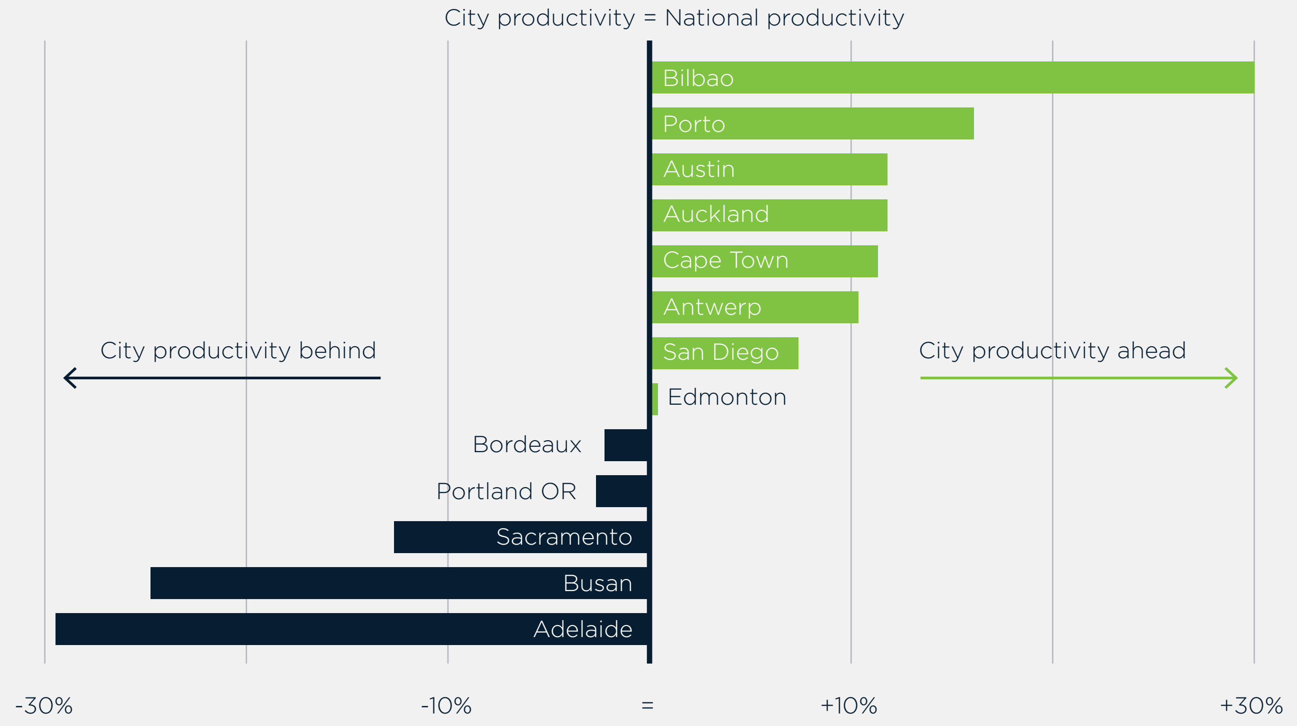
- Adelaide's share of jobs in typically higher-paying sectors, such as finance, legal services, IT and energy, is catching others up, rising to 7th among peers. Adelaide has halved the gap to Antwerp, from 15% to 7%. Leader Austin has double Adelaide's share of jobs in higher-paid sectors.
- Adelaide is rated as having 20%+ fewer jobs in management roles and in professional, scientific, and technical services than its peer median.
- Adelaide's biggest relative concentration appears to be in arts and creative sectors (1st among peers). Healthcare and social assistance are also much larger sectors than in other cities.[5]
- Adelaide's smaller 'knowledge economy' than other peers is a drag on productivity. If Adelaide/SA had the industry mix and productivity of Sydney/NSW, its economic output would be about 20% higher.[6]

MORE SUCCESSFUL THAN MOST AT INCLUDING WOMEN IN THE WORKFORCE

- Over a 10-year period, Adelaide has been reducing the gender gap in long-term employment faster than other cities, by about 25% in all.
- Despite increased divisions associated with COVID, Adelaide currently has the lowest recorded gender gap in all employment among peer cities.[7]

ADELAIDE LAGS NATIONAL PRODUCTIVITY MORE THAN MOST

Metropolitan GDP per capita as a share of national GDP per capita



Source: TBoC Research based on local censuses

BUSINESS AND INVESTMENT DYNAMICS

VALPARAISO	ADELAIDE	ANTWERP
BOTTOM RATED CITY	7TH	TOP RATED CITY
20TH		1ST

ADELAIDE IS GROWING ITS APPEAL TO BUSINESS AND CAPITAL

- Adelaide is witnessing a stronger uptick in overseas investment. With foreign capital investment into new corporate assets and facilities in Adelaide doubling in most recent year on year figures, rate of change is currently an impressive 3rd among peers.[8]
- Adelaide now rates among the top 100 fastest-growing markets for foreign direct investment globally. And among its cohort Adelaide is 6th for absolute levels of FDI. This partly reflects Adelaide and SA consistently rating among the better places to do business in Australia, now up to 3rd among peers.[9,10]
- For the share of real estate investment attracted from overseas, Adelaide is 11th among peers, outpacing Auckland.[12]
- Adelaide is tending to attract a smaller number of high value low job investment projects from foreign investors. For jobs created Adelaide rates in the bottom 15% among 100 high growth cities globally.[13] This reflects demand to invest in capital-intensive domains where Adelaide is strong.

SOLID FOUNDATIONS FOR GROWTH

- Adelaide impressively rates among the top 85 cities worldwide for overall economic prospects - 4th among peers.[14]
- This is in large part due to being one of the 5 fastest growing peer cities based on forecast population change to 2050. The growth rate is faster than all but Pune, Austin, and Edmonton. Adelaide's leadership in frontier economic sectors such as AI, for example through the Australian Institute of Machine Learning, also speak to its competitive prospects.[15]
- Adelaide benefits from confidence in the wider political environment – it gains top 20 scores for public institutions, business environment, and political stability.[16]

ADELAIDE IS GAINING BUSINESS REACH

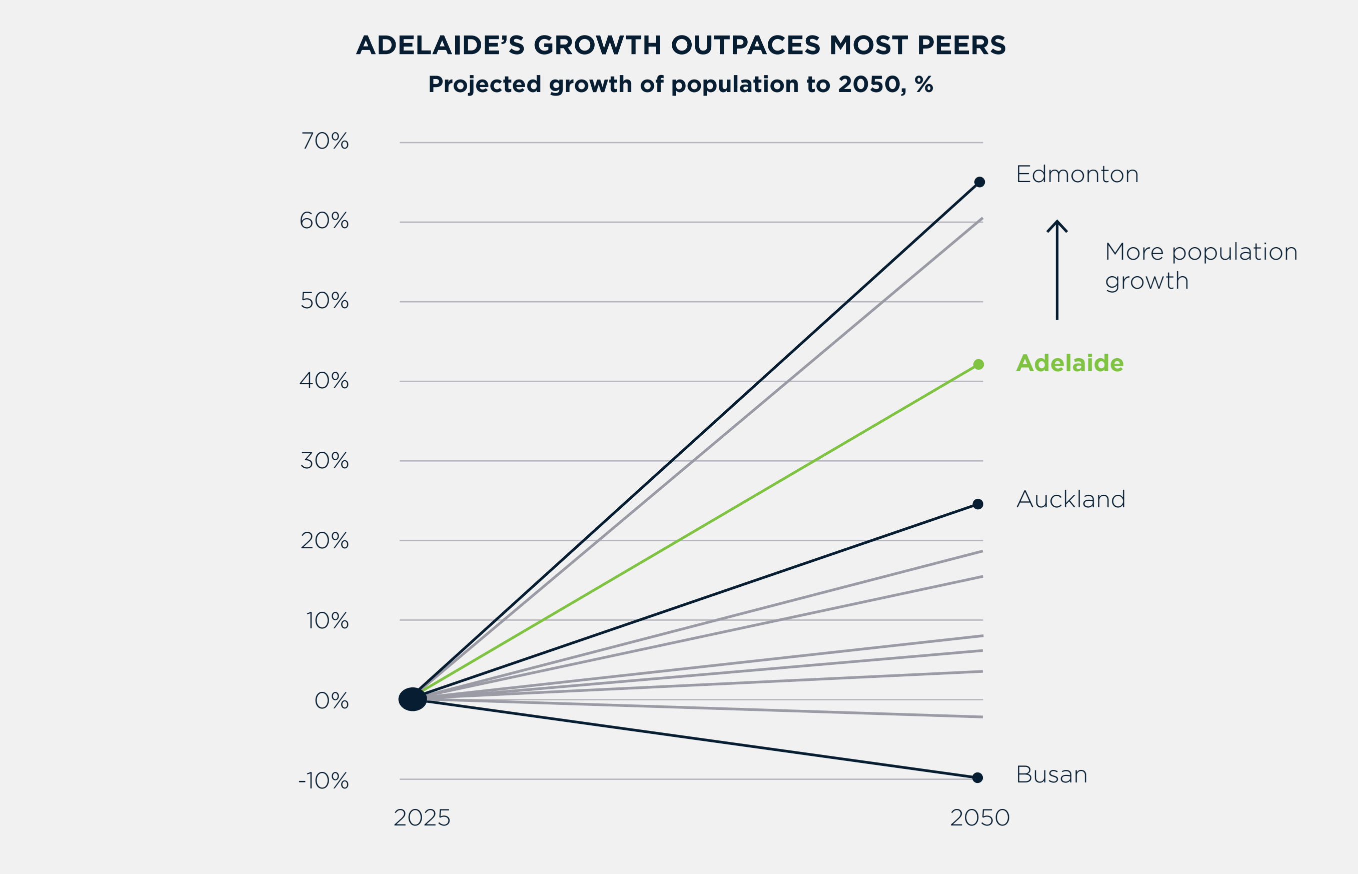
- Adelaide has climbed 13 places globally for the overall presence of globally connected firms in professional and related services.
- As the 136th most globally networked business city, it is now ahead of Edinburgh, Osaka and Pune.[17]
- This is despite Adelaide's metropolitan economy now being outside the top 200 cities globally.[18,19]

COST ADVANTAGES, DEMAND GAPS

- Adelaide retains advantages in the real cost of doing business over peers, remaining in the top third among global cities.[20] Adelaide is surprisingly rated the least expensive peer market in which to develop new real estate. Global inflation has seen costs in Adelaide overtaken by others over the last 3 years.[21] Adelaide also has lower fit-out costs among APAC peers.[22]
- Possibly because of other costs or uncertainties, this potential has not yet fully translated into commercial real estate demand. Here Adelaide is 'best of the rest' – above average but outside the top tier for volume of transactions.[23]
- Occupancy of Adelaide's CBD office space is still tracking at approximately 5% down on international peer average.[24,25]

ADELAIDE IS NOT TOP OF MIND FOR INVESTORS OR EVENT ORGANISERS LOOKING TO AUSTRALIA.

- International investment in real estate is a much lower share of investment in Adelaide than in other cities (4.4% vs 11.8% average). Some comparable cities have shares above 10%, such as Fukuoka (17%) and Bilbao (35%).[26]
- Adelaide's hosting of high-level meetings and conferences remains at 11th of 20 peers. Cities like Auckland attract even more major rotating events – about 80% more per year at the last count.[27]



Source: TBoC Research based on local censuses

WHAT SHOULD ADELAIDE NOW DO?

Adelaide has a strong fundamental outlook and the chance to translate its momentum into long-term leadership.

Based on the benchmarking analysis, below are proposed actions for Adelaide to pursue to boost productivity levels and enhance business and investment dynamics:

ACTIONS

- Ensure recommendations from the South Australian Productivity Commission are pursued and executed holistically
- Assess whether Adelaide's business message is registering internationally and ensure investment attraction approaches are competitive against other jurisdictions
- Position Adelaide to be a world leader in AI-related research and public services, with the talent and industrial capability to match.

WHAT SHOULD GOVERNMENT DO?

- Continue to ensure that Adelaide is perceived and experienced as one of the most agile and effective markets in Australia to do business and operate in
- Assess economic and spatial development choices through a medium-and-longer term productivity lens
- Continue to pursue cycles of reform to ensure business costs, construction costs and regulations remain competitive
- Ensure industrial land capacity is unlocked in ways that maximise productivity and efficiency of the logistics system
- Speed up decision-making and modernise the public sector to ensure a greater focus on innovation, efficiency and productivity
- Ensure investment and business attraction strategies are targeted and executed according to good international practice, ideally including a single front door.

WHAT CAN THE PRIVATE AND CIVIC SECTORS DO?

- Seek to be co-creators and co-investors in Adelaide's economic future, not beneficiaries or bystanders - be at the table with solutions and resources
- Encourage a deeper dialogue and focus on the medium and long-term drivers of Adelaide's productivity, not just on short-term priorities
- Invest in technologies and platforms that enable innovation, deliver efficiencies and provide a globally competitive edge
- Tell Adelaide's business success stories.


LUMO
SA
STAMFORD

Chapter 2
Future Economy

FUTURE ECONOMY: INNOVATION MOMENTUM YET CHALLENGES PERSIST

Adelaide's innovation scene is gathering pace, and the city has established a promising platform in multiple industries. University strengths and the creative sector emerge strongly this year, and student appeal remains a key advantage.

Despite these advances, Adelaide has very clear challenges attracting the kind of innovation-rich companies risk investment that will trigger a step change. Underlying issues of R&D spend, collaborative innovation infrastructure, and resident qualifications, all appear to be stubborn. The talent drain has only eased somewhat.

These point to a need to accelerate with the coordinated ecosystem approach, and work even harder and more joined up on skills, interface, market relationships, and communication.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Adelaide's higher education, scientific and creative specialisations attract significant global investment.
- An evolving sector mix, with much more potential for convergence across industrial, technology and creative sectors.
- Adelaide starts to attract higher volumes of professional talent, and consistent credibility with international investment, so that Adelaide retains and grows more productivity-raising enterprises.

RISKS

- Adelaide does all the right things 'on paper' but talent and innovation trends fall short.
- Lack of clarity and conviction about how Adelaide should address stubborn barriers around skills and sectors.
- Opportunities for clustering and concentration are missed, or disincentivised by transport and spatial deficits.

INNOVATION, R&D AND SPECIALISATION

MUSCAT	ADELAIDE	AUSTIN
BOTTOM RATED CITY	8TH	TOP RATED CITY
20TH		1ST

INNOVATION CATCH-UP

- Adelaide has achieved the 4th-fastest growth in venture capital (VC) among peers since pre-COVID, and the 7th fastest growth in ecosystem value. This puts it just inside the top 50 fastest growing ecosystems globally.[28,29,30]
- The concentration of VC Adelaide is attracting is now in the top third among similar cities, and in the top 100 globally.[31]
- This reflects an uptick in enterprise. Adelaide is just inside the top quarter of cities globally for the rate of new firms founded since 2020.[32]
- Adelaide is now regularly starting to register as one of the up-and-coming startup ecosystems to watch.[33]
- This is welcome as other cities have accrued big advantages: Adelaide is in the bottom half globally for risk capital attracted since 2000. While the value of Adelaide's growth enterprises is catching up, there is a long way to go to overtake the peers above them.[34]
- Adelaide remains behind when it comes to cities' major innovation success stories, support funds, and angel investors, often in the bottom 30% of global cities.[35]

GROWTH FIRMS WITH CAPITAL NEEDS STRUGGLE

- In the seed round, Adelaide startups raise capital is in line with global average, aided in part through government grants such as Seed Start.
- But Series A rounds and VC funding are still well below global averages.[36]
- Adelaide is also not yet a major centre for angel investment. Leader Austin has 16x as many angel investors, San Diego has 7x.[37, 38]
- Longer times to exit and lower exit amounts are a factor, contributing to a decline in registered start-up exits since 2019.[39]

CREATIVE AND HEALTH SECTORS ARE ESTABLISHING A STRONGER FOOTHOLD

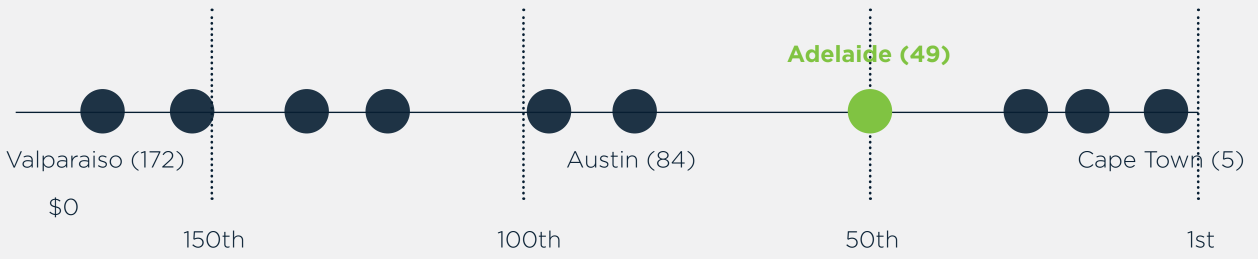
- Adelaide is more recognised for the strength of its arts, music, film, and gaming industries, in the top third of its cohort. Universities and firms perform well in measures of demonstrated innovation in arts, media, and culture.[40]
- Rated Australia's most cost-effective studio location, the SA share of national video game jobs compares with creative hubs internationally like Austin/Texas (12% to 10%).[41,42]
- Adelaide has stronger research specialisations than most peer cities in human biological sciences, clinical medicine, pharmaceutical sciences, and public health.[43] It is also a global top 50 standout for orthopaedic hospital care.[44]

DIVERSIFYING THE MIX OF FIRM SIZES IS A PRIORITY

- Adelaide has a higher share of micro-companies with a single-digit headcount. It is also among the 4 peers with the largest share of small firms (11-50 staff).[45]
- The share of companies raising more than US$1m is still relatively low, albeit better than 60% of peers.[46]
- But Adelaide's investability is still mostly driven by larger firms, at 7th among peers, indicating that the many small enterprises it is host to are still struggling to seek or attract risk capital.[47]

ADELAIDE HAS CRACKED THE TOP 50 FOR ECOSYSTEM VALUE GROWTH

5-year growth in startup ecosystem value, 1st = best



Source: Dealroom

ADELAIDE'S UNIVERSITIES CONTINUE TO DRIVE IMPACT AND PARTNERSHIP

- Adelaide has improved to an impressive 4th for the frequency of global research impact (12%) across its universities.[48]
- As a system its universities are also collaborating more than most. 85% of research publications draw on research partnerships (above the 82% average), although less published research is freely available as 'open access'.[49, 50]
- Adelaide's commercialisation potential benefits from more interdisciplinary collaboration across research and innovation. The city's depth of institutes, centres and start-up hubs host capability in both the technology and the policies that shape AI, fintech, cybersecurity and industry decarbonisation.

RATE OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE R&D SPEND CONSTRAINS POTENTIAL

- Adelaide continues to host less R&D spend across both public and private sectors, at barely a quarter the rate of American peers, and half of faster-growing European cities.[51]
- This constrains its patent rate and perceived adequacy of innovation infrastructure, in the bottom 15% and 30% of global cities, respectively.[52]
- This suggests imperatives both to diversify R&D investment, and more strategically deploy federal investment into the ecosystem.[53]

SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE AND POPULATION

MUSCAT | ADELAIDE | AUSTIN

BOTTOM RATED CITY | 8TH | TOP RATED CITY

20TH | 1ST

HUMAN CAPITAL DRIVERS ARE POSITIVE

- Adelaide is among the top 10% of cities globally for its population diversity and youth. Among its peers, it has the 3rd strongest demographic ingredients for a high skill economy.[54]
- Adelaide's foreign-born population has increased by over a percentage point to 29% - now 2nd among peers, just ahead of San Diego.[55]
- Despite its size and distance, Adelaide attracts more international newcomers than 80% of its peers.[56]
- The educational attainment gap is closing but still exists - Adelaide has 10% fewer residents with a degree than its international peers.[57] This partly reflects lower workforce qualifications and mobility especially in sectors where firm productivity potential is high, such as cybersecurity, software and civil engineering.[58]
- A bigger share of First Nations students attend Adelaide's universities than comparable cities internationally with Indigenous populations.[59]

A GENUINE INTERNATIONAL HUB FOR HIGHER EDUCATION ON THE CUSP OF TRANSFORMATION

- As Adelaide University prepares to formally launch in January 2026, Adelaide begins a new chapter in higher education already as the top-rated city for the share of international faculty in its universities, and 2nd place for the share of international students.[60]
- Adelaide has the 9th highest-rated overall university system among its peers, tending to perform better in measures of teaching and reputation than on research.[61]
- When Adelaide University debuts in global academic rankings it will reflect the integrated prowess of two established leaders in higher education. The merged university will have over 65,000 students and more than 6,000 staff, attaining a scale larger than many comparably performing institutions.
- The desirability of Adelaide as a place to study remains high, 2nd among peers and just outside the top 25 globally.[62]

IMPRESSIVE SPECIALIST ACADEMIC CAPABILITY

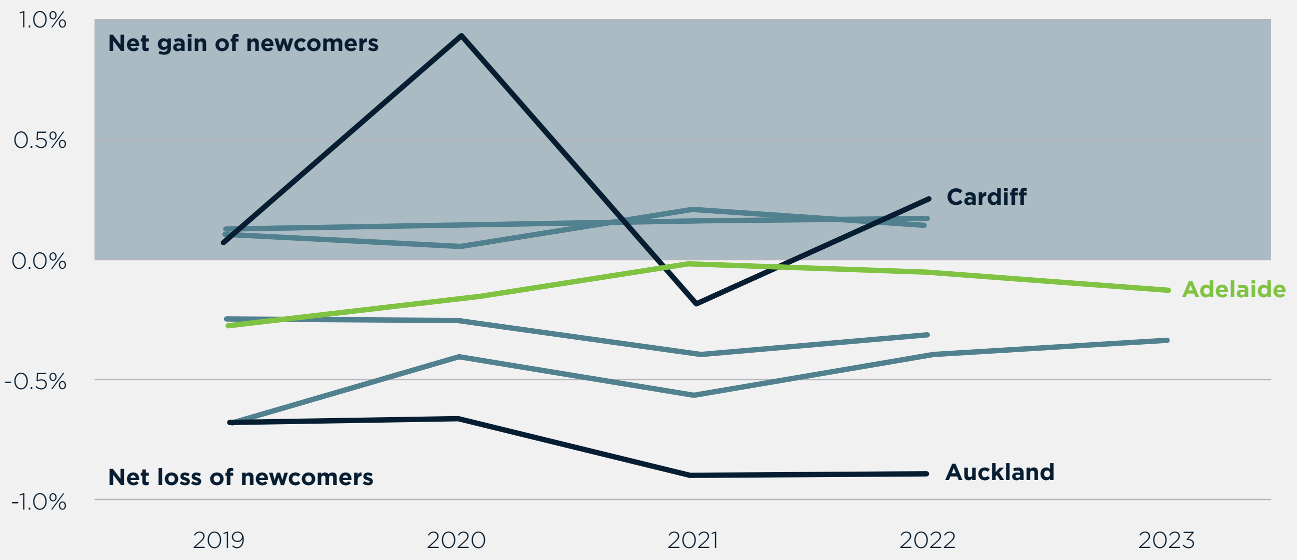
- Adelaide is a very impressive 3rd overall for both breadth and depth of academic specialisation. It has 11 academic programs currently rated in the world top 100, ahead of all peers except Austin (12), Valencia (13) and San Diego (35).
- These programs include environmental science, environmental engineering, and electrical engineering, where no peer city has a higher rated program than Adelaide. More broadly here Adelaide stands out for the strength of its provision in computer science, engineering (electrical, civil, and chemical), water resources, automation, chemistry, and mining and mineral sciences.[63]
- Adelaide also hosts world-leading expertise in consumer marketing.
- Adelaide benefits from a 10% higher share of experienced coders than the median peer city. These point to potential to harness Adelaide's tech capabilities across wider industries.[64]

EMPLOYERS INCREASINGLY RATE ADELAIDE'S GRADUATES

- Since 2021, Adelaide has been steadily improving companies' all-round confidence in its universities' graduates. It remains the 2nd most attractive university system in its cohort after Auckland from which to source new hires.[65]
- More graduates from Adelaide's universities enter full-time employment in the 15 months after earning their degrees than in most peers, behind only Cape Town and Austin.[66]

ADELAIDE'S 'BRAIN DRIP' RISKS RESUMING

Net domestic migration as a share of population



Source: OECD

ADDRESSING 'BRAIN DRIP', SKILLS GAPS AND TALENT NEEDS REMAINS A KEY PRIORITY

- Within Australia, Adelaide continues to see its newcomers outnumbered by those who leave for elsewhere. By contrast some peer cities – such as Valencia – have escaped this dynamic over the last five years and become net importers of talent. [67]
- The share of occupations facing a skills shortage in South Australia is currently 5% above the national average. This reflects gaps in managerial and executive roles, computing and electronic professionals, as well as other sectors.[68]
- Adelaide also faces the prospect of near-term skills shortages in trade occupations as a generation of skilled workers retires.[69]
- Arriving overseas talent comprises a lower share than in most Australian cities – 1.8% per year.[70]
- Cost has typically been an incentive in favour of Adelaide, although the city has dropped outside the global top 100 for the affordability of higher education, given both living and tuition costs.[71]

WHAT SHOULD ADELAIDE NOW DO?

Adelaide has created a strong platform in future economy sectors. It now has a promising framework to connect pockets of excellence across different places into a fully orchestrated ecosystem.

The benchmarking analysis points to several proposed actions that can help build on Adelaide's progress in innovation and skills pillars.

ACTIONS

- Patiently build up specialisation by attracting start-ups and major companies in established areas of competitive advantage
- Raise the investment rate in technology, innovation, training and R&D, building scalable opportunities between the state's Innovation Places
- Focus on retaining young people – including international students – and channelling more talent into the industries that drive the innovation system
- Engage and resource the intermediaries who can break down silos between universities, research, enterprise and corporates and ensure the engine for growth is coordinated with a shared game plan.

WHAT SHOULD GOVERNMENT DO?

- Keep syncing up Adelaide's combined innovation story and the profile of signature districts and establish an effective set of metrics to track progress
- Ensure mechanisms are in place to continuously gain industry input to training curricula, promote career pathway opportunities to young people and incentivise mid-career re-skilling in key sectors
- Ensure Government agencies pull together to make the most of the Innovation Places Leadership Framework
- Be vigilant as to whether innovative businesses have confidence in Adelaide's long-term trajectory and capacity.

WHAT CAN THE PRIVATE AND CIVIC SECTORS DO?

- Champion Adelaide's innovation potential with a strong and unified voice
- Use the opportunity of the upcoming merged Adelaide University to deliver an uptick in joint ventures, programmes, shared facilities and co-investments, taking the lead from examples such as San Diego and Barcelona
- Develop and implement new models for providing work-ready training and curricula
- Utilise Adelaide's strong standing as a hub for international education and academic specialisation to tap into and retain local skills, expertise and talent
- Proactively engage with investors, major funds and angel investors to attract risk capital and establish R&D-intensive and innovation-rich enterprises in Adelaide.

In Focus

HARNESSING DEFENCE INDUSTRIES FOR A HIGHLY PRODUCTIVE ECONOMY

THE OPPORTUNITY FOR ADELAIDE

Adelaide is at the forefront of Australia's expanding defence industry. With advanced shipbuilding and manufacturing capability, world-class research and development, and a growing local defence industry, the city faces a unique economic opportunity in delivering the multi-billion-dollar AUKUS submarine program.

As Australia's largest and most complex defence capability project, the build of AUKUS submarines in Adelaide will create between 4,000 and 5,500 roles, with up to 4,000 additional workers required to design and build the submarine construction yard at Osborne.

Many of these workers will be based at either the Osborne Shipbuilding Yard, the Edinburgh Defence Precinct, in the CBD or within existing innovation precincts, including Technology Park and Lot 14. This convergence of world-class defence skills and expertise in Adelaide provides significant opportunity to expose local skills and neighbouring industries to cutting-edge technology, research and innovation.

Global experience shows this potential can also be optimised to spark a wide range of commercial, productivity and local supply-chain benefits for the local economy. This requires continued collaboration with SMEs to grow and enter AUKUS supply chains and the evolution of defence procurement policy to deliver a more capable, innovative, resilient and competitive sovereign defence industrial base.

San Diego's transition from the 5th largest city on the U.S West Coast into one of the world's most vibrant innovation-driven economies has been substantially shaped by its defence economy. In France, **Toulouse's** aerospace cluster has been consciously deployed to diversify the technology base of a wider ecosystem.

SAN DIEGO: FROM ‘NAVY TOWN’ TO INNOVATION POWERHOUSE

40 years ago, San Diego had a core foundation of technical talent and expertise, but a small group of San Diegans recognised that there was not enough venture capital to fuel the growth of new companies.

A small group at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) and local business leaders decided to co-found a matchmaker called CONNECT, linking engineers, scientists, students, civic leaders, entrepreneurs, and angel investors into closer partnership and commercialise ideas.

The model was designed to be broad-based, multi-sector, bottom up, and with dedicated leadership.

CONNECT began only with about A$300,000 in today’s money, contributed by 30 supporters. It had a full-time director, a seasoned entrepreneur and ecosystem champion, and was initially run out of modest office space near campus. It ran “how to” sessions, business workshops, showcases, one-on-one sessions, and startup roundtables to share issues with peers and experts.

These evolved into structured programs and pitches within a high-cadence calendar of events. Consistent sponsorship from local businesses and the university kept attendance fees low or free, encouraging a broad mix of entrepreneurs and researchers to attend. Philanthropic capital was also connected to early ventures.

Over time an ecosystem was born. The cohort of startup founders and venture investors grew. Successful spinouts bred more venture capital and a collaborative innovation community. Many of San Diego’s most successful companies—including Qualcomm—owe their early momentum to this platform. The arrangement gave rise to 3,000 companies that have raised over A$3b in capital.

> *San Diego’s greatest strength [is] its collaborative spirit and willingness to give back to the community by helping those in the ecosystem who need it.*

DENNIS ABREMSKI & PAUL ROBEN
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

> *There is less of a culture of looking to government or to the big company or the old families to navigate our way out of the problems… [here] it’s the willingness to take charge of our own future and to get organised and go after it. We don’t wait.*

MARY WALSHOK
FOUNDER, CONNECT

> *CONNECT armed us with access to a network of experienced executives that launched DTx to early success with fundraising and execution of the business plan.*

ARTHUR SUCKOW
CEO, DTX PHARMA, ACQUIRED BY NOVARTIS IN 2023

THE SPILLOVERS OF DEFENCE TECH

Government and defence spending in San Diego has long been designed to stimulate commercial R&D efforts that eventually find broader markets, from wireless tech, wearables, sports-tech, biotech, consumer electronics, robotics, and cybersecurity.

Many initial growth ventures focused on dual-use technologies—products meeting specific military requirements but also serving commercial markets.

One result was wearable technology for defence that was then applied to healthcare: Startups began to develop soldier health-monitoring devices, biometric authentication tools, and now AI-driven training platforms. A University 'Catalyst' initiative connects startups to military procurement while also supporting civilian health applications. This is tied into a Blue Tech Incubator at the Port which produces spinoffs in maritime surveillance, underwater drones, and ocean energy.

A BRIDGE BETWEEN MILITARY DECISION-MAKERS AND INNOVATORS

Barriers to enterprise innovation are common in the defence industry, due to strict procurement regulations and long development cycles. The shift from R&D to rapid deployment is critical for creating dual-use commercial applications. So, San Diego has built a non-traditional network the - SoCal Tech Bridge - that unites Navy and Marine Corps units, research institutions, SMEs, and emergency services.

This network provides direct funding and testing opportunities for defence-adjacent startups. SMEs have better access to procurement channels and government contracts, strengthening local supply chains and giving rise to new commercial applications in autonomous systems, energy solutions, and healthcare. Special agreements (known as OTAs) give startups and SMEs a route to secure contracts without a long procurement process.

San Diego also benefits from a major research centre (NIWC) that is in continuous collaboration with industry on issues around information warfare, cybersecurity, AI, and unmanned systems.

ORCHESTRATION BY WHOLE-REGION ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ORGANISATIONS

San Diego has benefited from dedicated and collaborative business leadership. Its Chamber of Commerce, regional Economic Development Corporation, and CONNECT have shown sustained commitment over many decades to increase business interaction and collaboration, promote the city, and attract federal and private investment.

Key advantages to the economic development organisation's (EDC) arrangements include:

- It is empowered to work directly with SMEs to provide them with up to $25,000 and mentorship to navigate the government contracting processes, which it has done for up to 15 firms each year.
- It coordinates a cross-sector advisory council (SDMAC) that fosters stronger ties between private sector innovators and defence agencies.
- It runs a dedicated talent pipeline initiative with local community colleges to develop cybersecurity and AI defence talent.

SAN DIEGO HAS ALSO DONE TWO OTHER THINGS VERY WELL:

1. Use its assets as a real-world testbed for new technologies. Carefully convened partnerships among homegrown corporates, telecom providers, defence agencies have enabled San Diego to use its Marine Corps Air Station as a 5G system validator and sandbox, enabling rapid prototyping and then piloting of autonomous vehicles, drone logistics, and digital fortress cybersecurity applications. Also, with the support of local government and utilities, the city's marine base has pioneered a microgrid that boosts operational resilience and keeping the military "plugged in" to civilian infrastructure.
2. Invest in a broader place identity to attract talent. San Diego's climate, coastal environment, and quality-of-life advantages have been central to the attraction of talent across the tech ecosystem. San Diego REDC's 'Life. Changing.' regional identity strategy has helped San Diego get recognition beyond its beachy reputation – creating a confident image of a high-skill, high-amenity region with global connections.

San Diego's success speaks to the importance of mid-sized cities inventing, convening and coordinating. Today more than 2,000 companies have been spawned across the ecosystem. The city's defence and defence-tech sector now generates roughly A$40b in direct spending and 350,000 jobs, a scale about 20 times larger than Adelaide's current figures.

> ***The frequency and diversity of interactions…result in knowledge flowing in many directions, leading to faster and more effective application, development and commercialization of promising research initiatives.***

MARY WALSHOK
FOUNDER, CONNECT

TOULOUSE: FROM AEROSPACE TO BROADER TECH

Toulouse in southwest France is perhaps best known for its aerospace cluster anchored by Airbus and 130,000 students enrolled annually in engineering universities.

Yet more than most European cities it has also successfully shifted into a set of SME driven specialisations such as satellite technology, avionics, software, medical devices, data analytics and new mobility.

AN EFFECTIVE CLUSTER

After Toulouse gained its corporate and national anchors, the challenge was how to deepen relationships. Aerospace Valley was founded 20 years ago to coordinate joint R&D, gaining 850 members, the majority of which were small firms, as well as universities and research institutions. This organisation supports accelerated tender processes, and dual-use spin offs such as drone and satellite data startups now working on agriculture (precision farming), climate monitoring, and disaster relief.

Venture funding for aerospace and defence startups in Toulouse has tripled in the past decade, and 1,500 firms are now in the cluster.

COMMERCIALLY-DRIVEN NETWORKS & HUBS

The talent fostered by Toulouse's two large institutions has been knit into a broader ecosystem by entrepreneurial hubs focused on testing, commercialisation, and skills.

Campuses and networks such as B612, La Mêlée, La Cité and Francazal Air Base not only drive coworking and concentration. They also function as shared facilities and sandboxes for trials in areas like air mobility eVTOL (electric vertical take-off and landing) aircraft, hydrogen aircraft, autonomous shuttles, EV battery tech, and alternative fuel research.

A WHOLE-CITY FRAMEWORK

Toulouse's progress as one of Western Europe's big success stories also reflects the role of the metropolitan leadership. Toulouse Métropole streamlined its external relations under a single identity, 'Toulouse a Tout' (Toulouse Has Everything), shifting the city's tourism-focused brand to an integrated approach for business, events, investment and creative industries.

The metropolitan approach has also allowed Toulouse to effectively accommodate investment at scale from pension funds and development banks into key city systems.

AIRBUS ANCHORS THE EUROPEAN AEROSPACE AND TECH CAPITAL OF TOULOUSE


LA CITÉ, ONE OF TOULOUSE'S INFLUENTIAL INNOVATION HUBS


PONT NEUF, TOULOUSE

IMPLICATIONS FOR ADELAIDE

San Diego and Toulouse point to several opportunities to leverage strategic industries into a high-value and multi-purpose tech ecosystem in Adelaide:

Deep frameworks for cross-sector collaboration. Mid-sized cities succeed when relationships among universities, defence practitioners, SMEs, and other civic organisations are tight and coordinated, with an apparatus in place for continuous engagement and response to new circumstances.

Resources to shift to dual-use. Local enterprises need a committed model to navigate through procurement requirements and adapt products to broader commercial markets. Success here has helped build a pipeline of investment in technical solutions beyond single customers or envelopes.

Build the training, mentor and advisory networks that structure support for research to be commercialised. These are especially advantageous when they are multi-disciplinary and converge medical, engineering, data and supply chain expertise.

Encourage maximum interface between anchor institutions and hardware sectors. In cities of Adelaide's scale, the leadership, appetite and brokering capacity of universities is usually essential. Other cities speak to the incentives and the know how these organisations need to have in order to fluently engage with multi-use technology needs, and multiple types of company and interests.

Cultivate international innovation partnerships, anchored by major companies or institutions, that can encourage cross-border flows of research, talent, capital and joint venture, as well as stronger potential market reach. This relies on strong awareness and conviction among public and private stakeholders that such partnerships are worth it and rely on sharing models of funding and commitment.

The digital backbone has to be market ready across the facilities and sites that serve the full set of R&D activities.

For references & further reading, please see Appendix A

Chapter 3
Place and Space

Image source: South Australian Tourism Commission

PLACE AND SPACE:

ADELAIDE'S MOSAIC OF PLACES ARE SAFE AND SOUND BUT GETTING AROUND AND STANDING OUT IS BECOMING HARDER

Adelaide largely delivers on the essentials of safety, greenery, and community amenity. There is some recognition for Adelaide's food scene and creative underbelly – mainly among students and event-goers. But other cities continue to outperform it on the more inspirational and magnetising elements that cities compete on.

This partly reflects issues with Adelaide's growth model: a city centre with a lower share of residents and businesses, longer commutes, and fewer centres of gravity, all constrain Adelaide's ability to stage the choices and attract the customer base that underpin enduring appeal.

With population expected to rise by 40% over the next 25 years, Adelaide must act deliberately to foster the kind of connectivity and vibrancy it will need for the economy it wants to host.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Capitalise on the breadth of work in Adelaide's City Plan, the Greater Adelaide Regional Plan and transport strategies to prepare for and respond to population growth, with a mobility system fit for the future and an amenity base and street life that is more vibrant and compelling.
- Adelaide's existing creative community helps to revitalise its external place identity, express itself distinctively compared to the rest of Australia, and help the city reach the bracket of cool mid-sized cities.
- Adelaide successfully makes the most of the current digital initiatives to improve reliability and reputation. The payoff could be a differentiated position in sectors reliant on fast, reliable internet—helping the city retain talent and attract global firms.

RISKS

- Adelaide loses its unique selling point potential as the best version of the 'Australian dream' in a metropolitan city.
- Cost-pressures combined with an under-activated centre and default sprawl sees Adelaide's amenity offer diluted and thinly spread across the suburbs.
- Adelaide continues to project the energy of a smaller and less diverse city. Its festival, culture and character strengths are not reflected in the lenses of city ratings. Its ability to compete in the higher echelons is constrained.

AMENITY, VIBRANCY AND EXPERIENCE

MUSCAT	ADELAIDE	BILBAO
BOTTOM RATED CITY	14TH	TOP RATED CITY
20TH		1ST

SAFE, SOUND AND STUDENT-FRIENDLY

- In 2025, Adelaide retains its 1st position for student experience among peers and is 20th globally among 150 competitors.[72]
- Adelaide has among the lowest murder rates among its cohort and regularly is rated in the top 30% the safest among popular global cities. [73]
- Adelaide is also in the top tier among similar cities for pedestrian safety & well-being.[74]

INGREDIENTS FOR AN INTERNATIONAL CALIBRE FOOD SCENE

- Adelaide's food scene attracts more recognition in 'top city' accolades and media than most peers.[75]
- Adelaide has a high share of independently-owned restaurants among its peer group, ahead of 80% of global cities.[76]
- It also gains strong ratings for the affordability and diversity of dining choices. It is top 10% globally for range of vegan and vegetarian options – 1st among its peers.[77]

RECOGNITION FOR VIBE AND CREATIVITY

- Neighbourhood brand recognition is one important driver of city appeal: Norwood recently featured in a leading global rating of the world's coolest neighbourhoods.[78]
- Adelaide's arts ecosystem, as measured by the presence of internationally recognised artists, arts auction performance, arts education, and recognised leading authors, is now considered in the top half among global cities. Here it is 5th among peers. Relative to its peers, growth in the size of Adelaide's creative economy has not significantly outpaced others since 2023 and it remains in the bottom 25%.
- The UNESCO Music City also performs in the top 30% of cities globally, based on the number of Spotify streams generated by Adelaide-based artists and other indicators of musical production and influence.[79]
- Adelaide's foodie scene has not yet attained recognition in international indices based on expert perception, placing in the bottom fifth among global cities.[80]

RISING VISITOR COSTS MAY DAMPEN APPEAL

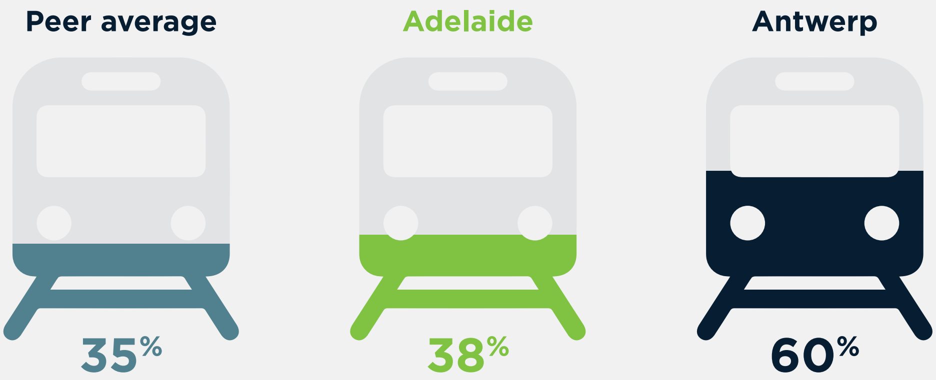
- Adelaide currently has the 4th highest total annual visitor spend among peer cities.[81]
- Yet in 2025 Adelaide is in the bottom 40% of cities for the overall cost-benefit appeal of its tourist offer.[82]
- For visitors, it has the 2nd highest overall cost per night for food, accommodation, and entertainment, indicating the rising cost of visiting.[83]

ADELAIDE'S CITY CENTRE LAGS PEERS FOR CRITICAL MASS OF HOMES AND JOBS

- Adelaide's CBD is its economic engine, cultural core, higher education hub, and key hub for transit and city systems, hosting 130,000 jobs. It's also a magnet for incoming overseas talent, with 1,700 net new arrivals year on year in 2023 and 1,400 in 2024.[84]
- Yet with only 26,000 people living in the city centre, the share of city population is barely a third of the peer average, lower than peers like Portland, Sacramento, and Edmonton (1.8% vs 5%). In a like-for-like-sized area, Adelaide is 15th among peers for city-centre population.[85]
- Ambitions to raise city centre residents to 50,000 and jobs to 150,000 over the next decade would see Adelaide's CBD population and employment roles catch up to similar levels among peers, on a par with Auckland today.[86]

PUBLIC TRANSPORT HAS ROOM TO CONNECT MORE PEOPLE TO OPPORTUNITY

Share of population with 45mins of main station by public transport



Source: TBoC Research based on analysis of TravelTime & GHSL for Adelaide, Antwerp, Auckland, and San Diego. Note that 45 minutes includes walking, waiting, transfer, and travel time

ADELAIDEANS ACCESS TO AMENITIES AND WALKABILITY IS MORE UNEVEN

- Adelaide has fallen from 15th to 18th among peers for the metropolitan concentration of shops, homes, schools, and other community assets as other peers densify faster.[87]
- The number of people who can easily walk to key services in Adelaide remains 25% below the peer average of 46%. However, here Adelaide has improved about twice as fast since 2023 compared to the peer average improvement.
- Still, the average density experienced by residents is 77% lower than the peer average. [88]
- While the CBD benefits from higher levels of concentration, other parts of Adelaide are harder to access on foot. Overall, Adelaide's level of walkability and amenity is impaired by the sprawling character of its next largest centres.[89]
- Vibrancy relies on consumer volume. But locations within a 45-minute public transport journey of Adelaide's centre have 30%+ less residential density and a lower share of regional population than the peer city average.[90]

Image source: South Australian Tourism Commission

TRANSPORT AND INFRASTRUCTURE

PUNE	ADELAIDE	BILBAO
BOTTOM RATED CITY	12TH	TOP RATED CITY
20TH		1ST

ADELAIDE'S CONGESTION, CAR RELIANCE AND MAINTENANCE NEEDS IS BECOMING MORE PRONOUNCED

- With traffic rising in many liveable mid-sized cities, Adelaide has slipped behind Porto to become the 7th least congested among peers. Other cities like Valencia, Cape Town, and Auckland are currently home to even more traffic.[91]
- International measures of average commute journeys suggest Adelaide's travel times have been rising faster than most cities in Australia and beyond.[92,93]
- Adelaide residents spend more time driving than most, and with about 4 in 5 journeys made by car, Adelaideans choose the car 21% more often.
- So, while rush hours in central areas are more congested in peer cities, Adelaideans overall spend longer in traffic than most drivers globally. In Adelaide it takes longer to drive 10km than it does in other peer cities.
- Traffic congestion is now widespread across the city: Adelaide has a lower variation between CBD and whole-city congestion than 90% of cities globally.[94,95]
- South Australia's estimated A$2b road maintenance backlog needs to be addressed to improve road quality, traffic movement and safety for all users.
- Compared to global peer regions, South Australia's transport safety is on par with the average, 6th of 11 peers and just inside in the top half overall.[96]

PUBLIC TRANSPORT LAGS

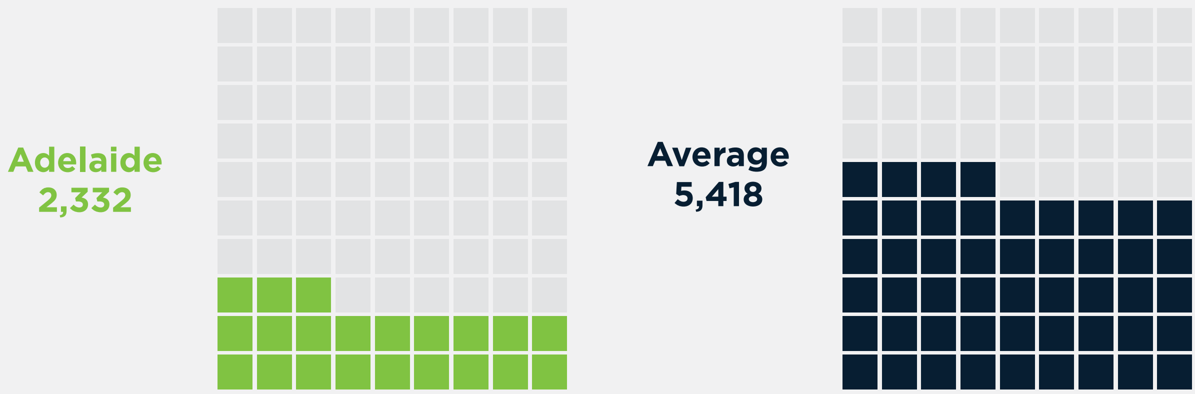
- Adelaide has fallen 2 places among its peers for how easy it is to get around without a car.[97] Not surprisingly the number of households living without a car in Adelaide continues to decline, from 11% in 2001 to 8% in latest figures.[98]
- Adelaide's public transport capacity in central areas stands at 7th among its cohort. Yet currently only 12% of city centre residents use public transport. This is up from 10% in 2011 but below the rates of most peer cities.[99]
- Only some suburbs are relatively well connected by bus and rail access by international standards. Adelaide though does still have a greater share of residents living within walking distance of frequent, all-day transport than most other cities in Australia.[100]
- Other cities are improving public transport faster: Adelaide has fallen from 75th to 50th percentile among peers for the share people living within a 10-minute walk of public transport.[101]

ACTIVE TRANSPORT POTENTIAL NOT REALISED

- Adelaide's benign climate and flat geography is much better suited than most cities to active transport. The share of trips made by walking, biking, or public transport is on a par with the better-performing North American cities.
- But Adelaide residents currently choose active transport about a third as often as APAC leader Fukuoka and most in Europe.[102]
- Recent investments in pedestrian and bike infrastructure, such as the A$2m State Bicycle Fund and SA's Road Safety Program will take time to shift behaviour: in 2025 Adelaide stays last among 8 measured peers for bikeability. Bike adoption is still on a par with much colder international cities such as Edmonton.[103,104]
- The same applies for trips made on foot. The share of trips made by walking, measured at 16%, is well behind the 30-40% average in Europe and leader Bilbao where 56% of all trips are made on foot.[104]
- Adelaide's active transport investments do not yet reach the scale of some peers, such as Austin, which has already committed a total of A$190m to bikeways & urban trails as part of a A$1.8b, 2,000 km cycling network under development by 2039.[105]

TRANSPORT-RICH AREAS ACCOMMODATE HALF AS MANY PEOPLE

People per square km in areas reachable by public transport in <45 minutes from the main station



Source: TBoC Research based on TravelTime, GHSL

GLOBAL LINKS ARE RECOVERING AND IMPROVING

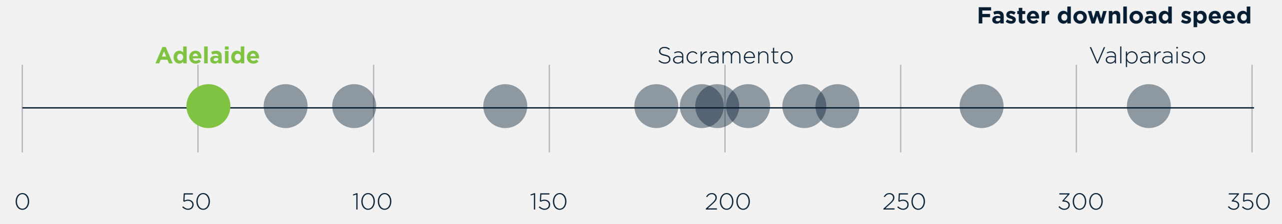
- Adelaide's air passenger demand has picked up faster (+25% YoY) than in most cities (+5%) recently.
- The range of flight connections – 31 international and domestic – has improved at a faster rate than many cities over the last decade. But with the peer median able to access 62 destinations, more global reach and influence is a priority.

DIGITAL CONNECTIONS ARE STARTING TO CATCH UP

- Adelaide has achieved the 4th fastest improvement in download speeds among peers in recent years and has closed the gap with the Australian average to 6%. (OECD) This reflects more investment in backbone fibre optics, underpinned by state-level efforts and successful initiatives like Ten Gigabit Adelaide.
- However, currently many other peers typically benefit from 4x the broadband speeds.
- For mobile connections, Adelaide is stronger and benefits from 4% faster speeds than the peer average.[107]

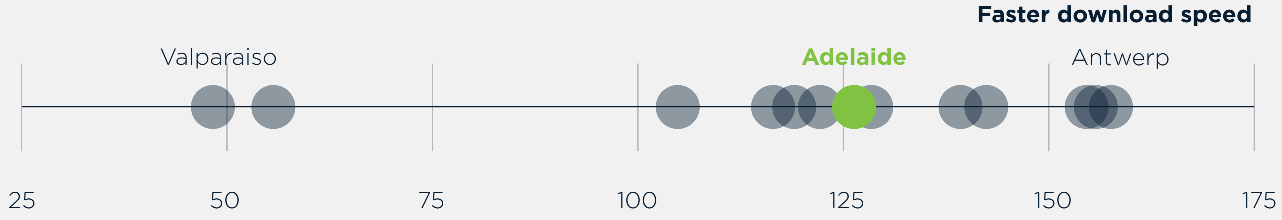
ADELAIDE LAGS PEERS IN FIXED BROADBAND SPEED...

Average fixed broadband download speed (Mbps)



... BUT MOBILE CONNECTIONS ARE MORE ON PAR

Average mobile download speed (Mbps)



Source: Speedtest

WHAT SHOULD ADELAIDE NOW DO?

Adelaide is already a great place to live, but it needs to make new and existing centres more attractive, activated and connected so that the city's anticipated growth is used to its full potential.

The benchmarking analysis points to several proposed actions that can help improve the experience of Adelaide and future-proof its infrastructure:

ACTIONS

- Prioritise the delivery of an integrated, efficient and sustainable transport network, informed by data and with long-term funding beyond election cycles, to cater for population growth and to overcome constraint issues
- Increase investment and delivery of safe active transport options across Adelaide
- Secure more direct international flights to improve global reach and connectivity.

WHAT SHOULD GOVERNMENT DO?

- Rigorously assess and deliver long-term planning, transport and infrastructure funding settings to deliver improved amenity, connectivity and experience
- Celebrate and foster Adelaide's events, festivals, galleries, museums, art and cultural institutions to ensure they are agile, resilient and contribute to the city's vibrancy and magnetic pull
- Address barriers to growth in Adelaide's evening and night-time economy in line with national and international best practice.

WHAT CAN THE PRIVATE AND CIVIC SECTORS DO?

- Improve place management tools and activation around commercial and residential hubs to improve amenity and foster vibrancy
- Ensure a stronger coalition of good practice around the quality 'missing middle' in ways that deliver and communicate wide ranging public and vibrancy benefits
- Work creatively to consider what kinds of future icons, attractions and experiences should become synonymous with Adelaide in the future
- Collaborate and problem-solve on how to promote whole places, implement tactical urbanism and encourage pop-ups and SMEs into more temporary or transition locations.

Chapter 4

People and Planet

Image Source: Megan Crabb

PEOPLE AND PLANET: ADELAIDE'S LIVEABILITY MODEL RISKS FRAYING

Adelaide remains up ahead for healthcare, safety, and environmental performance. The deep advantages of strong air quality, extensive green space, and energy mix continue to propel Adelaide towards the top of the charts in a fast-moving field.

Yet rising costs, slower decarbonisation, low amenity sprawl, and rising climate risks, together pose threats to Adelaide's hard-won position.

The trends present sharp choices for Adelaide about what development and economy model will best deliver for good growth, resilience and quality of life.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Adelaide can still get in place the metropolitan planning frameworks with the capacity to coordinate across boundaries and address rising externalities before they become chronic (sprawl, congestion, inflation).
- Build up the toolkit, know-how and confidence around redevelopment, sustainable reimagining of existing urban places.
- Signal and sharpen Adelaide's sustainability and energy leadership globally, with purpose and commitment, matched by real progress on waste, canopy cover, climate-resilience and resource management.

RISKS

- Adelaide misses the opportunity to become known as at the vanguard of sustainable and planet-conscious cities.
- Out-of-reach prices and escalating risks and costs steadily erode Adelaide's reputation for easygoing liveability. Gaps between well-serviced and under-serviced neighbourhoods could widen.
- Adelaide does not make a combined or effective case for the right strategies, investments and systems integration to higher tiers of government. Citizen engagement and democratic conversation about the whole city's future is absent.

Image Source: @paulpayasalad

LIVEABILITY, AFFORDABILITY AND WELLBEING

VALPARAISO | ADELAIDE | PORTO

BOTTOM RATED CITY | 9TH | TOP RATED CITY

20TH | 1ST

ADELAIDE RELIABLY OUTPERFORMS FOR QUALITY-OF-LIFE ESSENTIALS

- Adelaide continues its climb in measures of core healthcare, living standards, education and environment. It achieves top 10 scores in more than one index and keeps its top 30 position for expat quality of life, retaining 2nd place among all its 20 peers.[108,109,110]
- Adelaide's life expectancy is 1st among peers, and South Australians are living longer and more physically active than than the Australian average.[111]
- Where quality of life measures weight strongly for cost of living, access to culture, and equality of incomes, Adelaide is still usually top 20% globally but not as exceptional overall.[112]
- Wellbeing remains a focus of local and state governments, with initiatives such as the City of Adelaide's Wellbeing Dashboard and South Australia's Wellbeing Index helping to track progress toward better health outcomes.[113,114]
- South Australia's recognition of its higher rates of social isolation – 27.7% of people experience persistent loneliness – compares unfavourably with other states, speaking to the importance of new investments in social infrastructure, such as A$43m for community centres and additional funding for community grants and programming.[115]

PROFOUND NATURAL ADVANTAGES BUT WARNING SIGNS

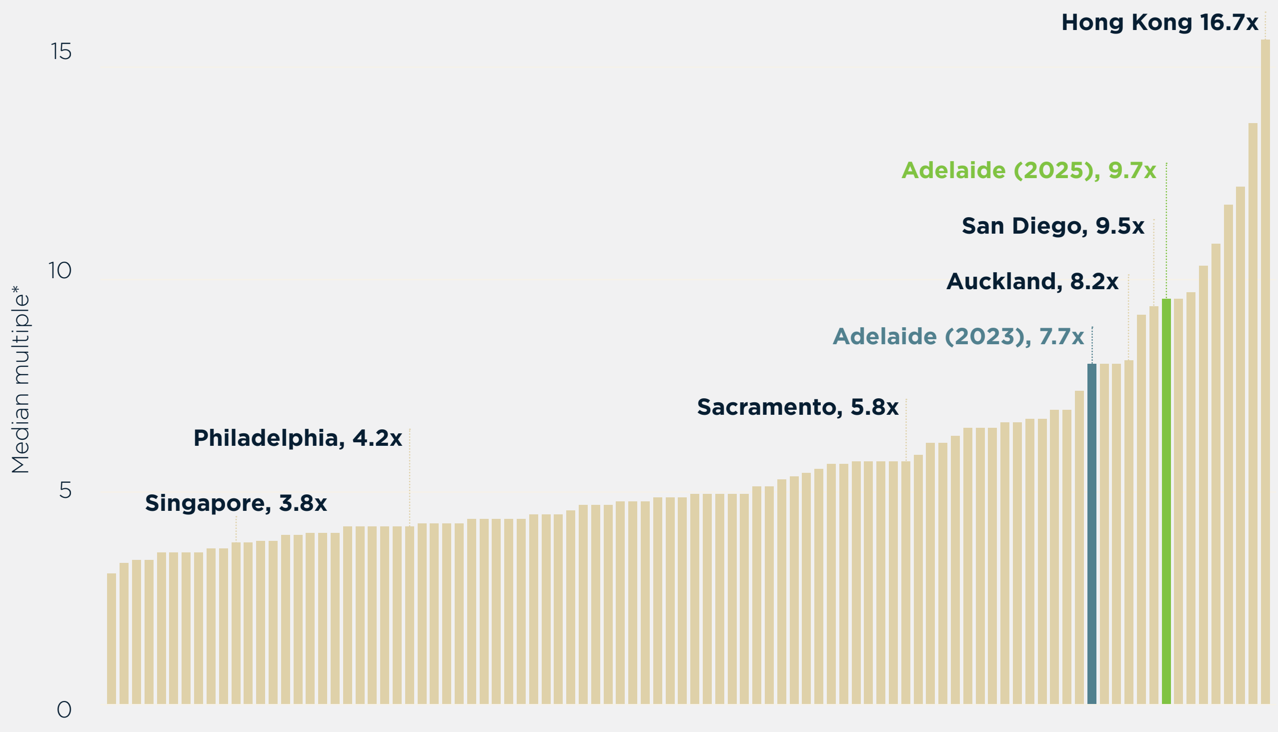
- Adelaide inherits advantages of low heat stress, fewer days where heating or cooling is needed, and a low urban heat island effect.[116]
- Adelaide still excels for air quality. Average concentration of fine particulate pollution is 38% lower than average and 8% below Auckland.
- However, Adelaide has seen the largest increase in particulate air pollution in the last five years of any city in its cohort and in Australia. The trend is especially apparent for PM2.5 and PM10 particles which tend to be linked to fuel combustion, bushfires, and dust.[117]

HOUSING OWNERSHIP AND RENTAL IS BECOMING HARDER

- Adelaide had long avoided being among the bottom 10% of English-speaking cities for homeownership costs relative to wages. However, Adelaide is now in the 8th percentile, among the most expensive of 86 housing markets worldwide.[118]
- Despite this increase, housing costs are still slightly more manageable than most Australian capital cities. However, they are catching up to more expensive international peers. The share of income consumed by rent is now 3rd highest after San Diego and Auckland.[119]
- Residential vacancy rates in Adelaide are now below 1%, as compared to the next closest peers Auckland and Edmonton at 2.3% to nearly 10% in peer Austin.[120]
- Growing asset values and risks of bushfire and flood have caused insurance costs to grow faster than other cities in Australia and many peers – 97% in Adelaide, 30% faster than consumer prices.[121]
- For students, declining overall affordability of education is driven by housing prices. Increasing rents have attracted new development, with additional housing for 1,000 students to be delivered in the CBD over the next two years.[122]
- For expats, more fast-paced cost of living inflation in other markets has seen Adelaide actually improve its affordability, from 58th to 51st percentile for housing costs.[123]
- At the same time, Adelaide's wages run 8% behind the national average, in contrast to English-speaking peers in New Zealand and North America where metropolitan wages tend to track 5-15% ahead of national averages.[124]
- As Adelaide looks ahead to 40% population growth over the next 25 years, maintaining the affordability of housing will require more supply.

EVEN AMONG EXPENSIVE PEERS, ADELAIDE'S HOUSE PRICES ARE NOW HIGH

Average house prices as a multiple of average incomes, major global markets



** The ratio between average house prices and average incomes, expressed as a factor on income:price*

Source: Demographia

HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING SUPPLY TRENDS HAVE BEEN LESS FAVOURABLE

- Historically lower than most, homelessness has recently increased faster in Adelaide than in many of its peers. Its increase of about 20% at the last census, compares to a peer average of 12% over similar time periods.[125]
- Noting that demand varies in every city, Adelaide currently produces fewer homes than many English-speaking peers: on a per capita basis, Austin delivers 1.75 homes and Auckland delivers 1.25 for every home Adelaide delivers to the market.[126]
- Recent proposals to unlock land for development may see Adelaide's rate move closer in line with other cities, although notably other peers like Austin, Auckland and Edmonton have been prioritising a bigger share of brownfield redevelopment.[127]

PUBLIC TRANSPORT VALUE PROPOSITION IS LOWER

- Adelaide has improved to 23rd out of 40 international cities for the relative affordability of public transport fares, up from 26th. This reflects a 10% decline in real terms in 2020 public transport fares.
- But relative to wages, a typical trip on Adelaide's public transport network is rated more than twice as expensive as Singapore, and more than 40% higher than Perth and Auckland. Among big cities in Oceania, only Melbourne's public transport network is rated more expensive.
- As such Adelaide residents still pay more for a public transport network with more modest reach, frequency, and reliability than leading peers.[128]

SUSTAINABILITY AND RESILIENCE

SACRAMENTO	ADELAIDE	AUCKLAND
BOTTOM RATED CITY	13TH	TOP RATED CITY
20TH		1ST

ENVIABLE CLIMATE, BIODIVERSITY AND RESILIENCE

- Adelaide's geo-physical context and inherited advantages make it currently a global top 5% city for its low propensity for climate or natural disasters. Adelaide is rated only behind Auckland, and well ahead of Bordeaux and Austin.[129]
- Adelaide's high levels of green space, comprising 11% of the total area of Greater Adelaide, contribute to its recognition as one of the most sustainable destinations in the world.
- However, the impacts of climate change are already being felt in Adelaide including rising temperatures, increased frequency of hot days, heightened fire danger conditions, changing rainfall patterns and rising sea levels. Projections indicate that these changes will persist in the coming decades, necessitating effective planning, preparedness and adaptation.
- Adelaide's diverse wildlife puts the city in the top 30% among its peers for biodiversity. Its 1,000+ native plant species internationally compares with the most biodiverse regions of North America such as San Diego, and world leaders for biodiversity such as Cape Town and Singapore.[130]

RENEWABLE CAPACITY HELPS TO GREEN ENERGY MIX

- For over a decade, Adelaide has benefited from South Australia being at the forefront of the energy transition, rising from 30% to 70% renewable energy share since 2011.
- Adelaide remains 1st among its peer cohort for the share of energy that comes from renewables. The 70%+ SA-wide share far surpasses the 32% peer average.[131]
- Major public and private investments, including the A$21b pipeline of renewable energy generation and storage capacity – are a sign of Adelaide's commitment and potential to signal this leadership globally.[132]

LIVEABLE BEACONS ARE DECARBONISING FASTER

- Adelaide's carbon emissions have declined over the last 20 years and fallen more quickly than many cities globally. However, among its liveable peer group, the pace of emissions reduction since 2015 has only been just under half the rate.
- Adelaide still emits more total greenhouse gases per person than most peer cities. Only Antwerp is higher, primarily due to huge port and chemical facilities.[133]
- Adelaide's efficiency of emissions to economic output is better than most in Australia but behind 13 of its international peers. Auckland and San Diego are about 30% more efficient and Bordeaux is around 80%.[134]
- The energy sector's share of Adelaide's emissions is currently 34%, well above peer average (9%).
- The residential emissions share is less than half of peer cities'– owing to a milder climate requiring less heating and cooling. Transport emissions are also 6% lower than the average.[135]
- Adelaide has recorded fewer new green building certifications for buildings year on year than most – 2nd last among its cohort.[136]

EV INFRASTRUCTURE AND ADOPTION REMAINS BEHIND

- Adelaide has the potential to lead on rooftop solar, electric vehicles, smart meters and other smart energy management tools.
- Adelaide's EV sales share of 6.5% is well behind leaders like Portland (18.7%) but catching up to the peer average (7.4%).[137]
- Adelaide currently provides less access to EV chargers. US and Mediterranean cities are well ahead. Valencia for example has 10x as many.
- Charging infrastructure is also less evenly spread. At present Adelaide suburbs are typically poorly served, at 45% the rate of the city centre, compared to 95% average elsewhere.[138]

LEADERSHIP WITHIN ADELAIDE'S ESTABLISHED SECTORS BURNISH ITS SUSTAINABILITY PROSPECTS

- Adelaide is rated an impressive 3rd in its cohort for its approaches to emissions reduction, waste and biodiversity.[139]
- Adelaide's universities place it in the top 20% among peer cities for commitment to making higher education sustainable.[140]
- Adelaide has more certified social impact 'B Corporations' than most cities, 5th among peers and 36th in the world. Pound-for-pound, there are as many B Corps in Adelaide as there are in Boston.[141]
- The city benefits from initiatives to meet zero-avoidable-waste-to-landfill targets, promote tree canopy growth and mitigate the urban heat island effect in key areas. Adelaide also leads on sustainable water management, where Australia's capital cities are strong.[142]
- Coordinated local and state government leadership is critical as Adelaide has smaller local governments and more local government fragmentation than 85% of its peers. Adelaide has the smallest 'City Government' by population size in its peer group.[143]

Image Source: Josh Geelen

WHAT SHOULD ADELAIDE NOW DO?

Adelaide has a short window in which to pre-empt the risks of under-managed growth and minimise, prepare and adapt to the impacts of climate change.

The benchmarking analysis points to several proposed actions that can help improve Adelaide's liveability credentials, as well as ensure sustainability and resilience long-term:

ACTIONS

- Sensitively increase housing density in the CBD and inner metropolitan Adelaide to meet the needs of a growing population, while preparing for and minimising the impacts of climate change
- Ensure new developments on the outer edges of Adelaide are built to the highest energy-efficiency and sustainability standards and close to existing infrastructure, public transport corridors and amenities
- Explore how Adelaide's port and airport economies can be bigger catalysts for sustainable infrastructure and resource loops, learning from the approaches of Rotterdam and Vancouver
- Protect and enhance areas of parklands and open space and implement measures to encourage greater use and recreation.

WHAT SHOULD GOVERNMENT DO?

- Recruit community and business support for managed growth and transformation and build community confidence around population growth and the city's future direction
- Better incentivise and enable high-quality, medium-density and sustainable developments close to the CBD and in the best-connected and most climate-resilient locations across Greater Adelaide
- Increase investment and deployment of electric vehicle infrastructure across metropolitan Adelaide
- Place a wellbeing, sustainability and resilience lens across all public infrastructure developments and investment decisions.

WHAT CAN THE PRIVATE AND CIVIC SECTORS DO?

- Work with government to accelerate deployment of EV infrastructure and adoption, home solar and batteries and other smart energy management tools
- Invest in green skills, technologies and behavioural change incentives to increase the pace and scale of decarbonisation, waste reduction and circular economy opportunities.

In Focus

DENSITY DONE WELL: THE OPPORTUNITY FOR ADELAIDE

Image Source: Food & Wine Collective

When a city grows it has to grow well. Density is sometimes received with mixed reactions, but numerous cities can now show how density can be done well.

With Adelaide's population expected to rise from 1.5 million to 2.2 million by 2051, it's critical that the urbanisation of Adelaide occurs in a planned, managed and positive way that maintains long-held advantages in liveability and amenity.

The classic options for how a city urbanises are:

1. to allow sprawl into endless suburbs and peripheries;
2. to densify existing centres to fit more people into current city limits, and
3. to connect neighbouring areas to enable them to accommodate more growth in a networked pattern.

Deciding which combinations Adelaide should adopt is not just an engineering or financial decision. Embedded in these choices are very different models of climate sensitivity, social interaction and identity, and quality of life.

For example, allowing sprawl might sometimes be the cheapest option financially, but is also usually the most expensive fiscally and socially, as poorer people tend to be pushed out with limited access to connections and amenities.

THE GLOBAL TREND

There are many liveable cities like Adelaide that have been growing from 1 million people towards 2 million and beyond.

They find they have to deliver a higher level of density in the right locations if they are to address housing constraints and retain more of their young people. These cities are also finding that their new growth economies are urban – from AI, robotics, medicine, energy, media, digital industries, life sciences, and the experience economy. So, growing in a way that is conducive to their future economy and talent needs has become an imperative to city success over the next 50 years.

For many of these cities, a new phase of citymaking is opening up. It is about urban renewal and regeneration, and bringing forward mixed use, high amenity, locations, in established centres, inner city fringes, or waterfronts, all of which can meet the post-pandemic preferences in retail, consumption, working, and leisure habits.

These cities are asking themselves:

- How and where do we deliver density?
- How can we do it to the kind of standard that will deliver clear public benefit and support?
- How do we intelligently grow around the best-connected locations?
- How do we co-locate amenities and housing?

ADELAIDE'S CONTEXT

Adelaide still holds the promise of a relatively compact and connected city, certainly by Australian standards. More of Adelaide's population can still reach the city centre in a reasonable public transport commute than many other similar liveable cities.

Yet the trends are downward. Adelaide's future urban prospects now hinge on how and where the next 2-3 cycles of growth are accommodated.

The agenda is shaped by some important structural features of Adelaide's housing market:

Detached housing remains the default. Single family homes make up 75% of Greater Adelaide's housing mix. Apart from in the Adelaide CBD, nowhere else do detached homes account for less than 60% of dwellings.

The 'missing middle' is larger than most. Although on the rise, townhouses and small/mid-rise apartments have not yet been delivered at much scale or consistency across metropolitan Adelaide.

Well-connected parts of the city are fairly low density. Places with good access to the CBD are typically home to less than half the people in their vicinity as in other cities.

Distances between homes and jobs are growing, exacerbated by bottlenecks to unlocking new well-located jobs hubs.

Demographic and market trends. There has been a 78% increase in single households since 1991 and the number of South Australians aged over 75 is set to increase by around 50% by 2040.

Prices are on the rise. By international definitions, Adelaide's home prices are now approaching 10 times average income. The average home price in Greater Adelaide has gone up over 80% on pre-pandemic prices.

WHAT DOES 'GOOD DENSITY' LOOK LIKE?


Neighbourhoods with enough customers to feel safe and welcoming at night

Good density is not cookie cutter - it is the kind of urban living that is varied, spacious, cohesive, and ultimately liveable.

Successful cities that have density also possess authenticity of what the city is all about and the distinctiveness of existing places, respecting character, community, nature and street life. They encompass different kinds of place and precinct each with their own beauty, vernacular, amenities and customers.

Good density exists in opposition to versions of 'bad density'. That is, in cities where density breeds isolation, congestion, segregation or insecurity. Whose places are ugly, or monocultures, or encroach on nature, or are unable to move with the times when circumstances change.

Many of Adelaide's peer cities are realising that density 'done well' is the path to their city being better able to support the kinds of services and experiences that make it attractive to residents, talent, and investors – while staying fiscally sustainable and socially inclusive.

This version of density requires clear vision, a sound financial proposition, effective tools, and a strong social license.


A mix of uses with the atmosphere and street life to keep young people interested


Compact blocks and active ground floors sustain civic life and independent businesses


Urban spaces integrated with nature make city life more comfortable and convivial

Over the last 10 years, the cities of Auckland and Austin have both shifted from a norm of 'low density, low supply' towards delivering gentle and medium density more consistently.

Auckland shows how reform can be enacted to deliver new housing formats. Austin demonstrates the effect of simple, iterative adjustments to boost supply.

AUCKLAND: A REFORM-DRIVEN SUCCESS STORY

- Auckland faced a crisis of rising mortgage rates, decline in housing production, and inefficient land use. By 2015 the city had among the most expensive housing in the English-speaking world and nowhere to build but out.
- The recently amalgamated Auckland Council, whose boundary now served 'Greater Auckland', had the opportunity as well as the imperative to address land use. It set out to overhaul building rules to make new housing easier (and less expensive) to deliver in the form of a new Unitary Plan. The result was an upzoning of 75% of Auckland's residential land.

AUCKLAND'S UPZONING HAS LED TO:

- An increase in the rate of supply: the number of new homes consented annually has doubled to over 15,000 (this rate is currently nearly double South Australia's although consents are set to rise).
- A slowing of house price growth and an increase in residential vacancy rates, compared to cities in New Zealand that did not implement upzoning.
- More diverse housing types. Terraced houses have made it easier for more younger residents and lower-income households to find a place closer to jobs and amenities.

THE KEY FACTORS IN DELIVERING IT WERE:

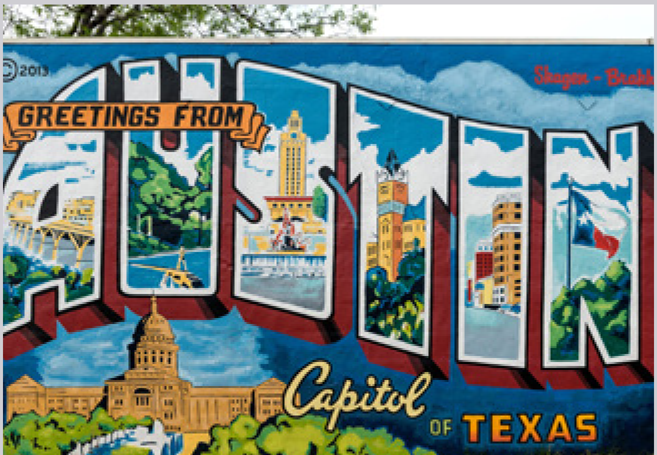
- **Cross-party consensus** through common recognition that land use was contributing factor to rising costs, flatlining productivity, longer commutes, social inequality, and climate impacts.
- **Independent experts empowered** to listen and recommend. A Panel of 11 legal, planning, and resource management professionals, considered the views of 13,000 submitters, and were empowered to recommend changes to the Plan.
- **Shared benefits and responsibilities.** Changes touched nearly every neighbourhood so that benefits are spread and burdens shared. With land values rising more evenly across the city, neighbourhoods could less easily complain of an unfair share of disruption or congestion.

New missing-middle development in Auckland with co-located amenities

Auckland-style semi-detached row homes deliver concentration without crowding

Austin: gentle density at speed

Austin promoted new housing development with simple reforms to its local rules



Austin's Eastside neighbourhood has undergone 'gentle density' infill development in recent years

Safety in numbers for many kinds of road users

In Austin, a tech and lifestyle-driven population boom saw the city grow its population by more than 20% from 2010 to 2020. Housing supply lagged, with median home values rising by over 120% in the same period.

Initially, Austin explored a full suite of top-down policy reforms to reverse this affordability crunch, but after pushback, the city opted for the lower hanging fruit to speed up supply.

Previously a standard residential lot in Austin had to measure at least 530 sq. m. This was lowered by 60%, making smaller subdivided lots viable for infill housing. This one change unlocked many kinds of accessory dwelling units ('granny flats'), duplexes, or triplexes on what were once single-lot parcels.

These reforms were combined with streamlined code approvals and helped thousands of new homes come online more quickly. In the last 12 months Austin consented units at more than double South Australia's typical rates. In 2025, the abundant supply of housing has not only curbed growth in prices and rents but also is leading to falling rents. In parallel, the city continues to refine its zoning framework to direct new, higher-density development near transit routes.

A focus on public realm—expanding pavements, bike lanes, and public open spaces—has created safer and more walkable environments for a diversifying population.

At the same time Austin took steps to address homelessness, including the development of tiny-home communities, which aim to provide transitional housing and wraparound services. By integrating these projects within the urban core—rather than relegating them to distant locations— the aim is to reduce the social isolation often associated with homelessness.

DENSITY DONE WELL: LESSONS FOR ADELAIDE

Adelaide's scores in amenity, connectivity and affordability will benefit from delivering density well in more parts of the city. For cities of Adelaide's size and context that have gone on this journey, key factors have tended to include:

1. **A compelling vision and plan for the future direction of the city,** usually drives effective new kinds of density. This often includes considering the roles of future rail in right-sizing the city – and sequencing development carefully in clear phases to achieve an optimal outcome.

2. **The best-connected locations underpin good density** and the outcome for citizens, planet, and return on investment. Larger train stations and major bus routes are essential opportunities to achieve scale, mix and quality - especially when transport systems also gain more service frequency, amenity, and capacity to host jobs. This also protects other locations from the pressure to accommodate population growth.

3. **Mechanisms to capture some of the value created** in the built environment are key so that it can be reinvested back into the place. Density done well means 'doing enough density' to support continual reinvestment. In other cities internationally this has meant new taxes, or levies, negotiated contributions from developers, or sometimes a publicly owned and accountable body to deliver much of the development directly, capturing value directly into its own re-investable balance sheet. This ensures the benefits of opting for growth today continues to serve generations to come.

4. **Simple, predictable and flexible development rules** create confidence in the housing ecosystem and tend to unlock fine-grained urbanism made up of apartments and townhouses, widening choice while maintaining broader common-sense support.

5. **Public realm first.** Density is supported when it immediately is accompanied by better footpaths, bike lanes, green spaces, local facilities, and transport services. Such amenities raise overall liveability and support local retail.

6. **Affordability and social housing.** Cities that have successfully fostered good density realise they need to be proactive about the social housing component for those most in need.

The latest **Greater Adelaide Regional Plan** released by the South Australian Government in 2025 identifies **315,000 new homes will be built over the next 30 years,** while preserving important land for future infrastructure requirements.

This provides a welcome roadmap and aligns with key outcomes of South Australia's Transport Strategy and the 20-Year State Infrastructure Strategy to ensure more integrated planning.

While greenfield development has a role to play, greater strategic infill and **increased housing density in and around the CBD and across inner metropolitan Adelaide will remain critical** to meeting the needs of Adelaide's growing population and protecting the city's liveability and amenity credentials.

For references and further reading, please see Appendix A.

Chapter 5
Reputation

South Australian Tourism Commission

REPUTATION:
ADELAIDE'S STAR RISES BUT STORY IS INCOMPLETE

In a global contest of cities for attention and credibility, Adelaide's visibility has been climbing steadily, and sentiments are warm.

This reflects faith in the city's enduring liveability and wider natural beauty, easy-going culture, enjoyable events, and food-and-wine scene. As more cities find it challenging to consistently sustain and deliver on this promise, Adelaide's core proficiencies are gaining credence and credit.

The data suggests that other cities are still more effective than Adelaide at reaching out to the world. The visitor brand crowds out its business brand, while tech, culture and innovation assets are relatively invisible. Adelaide's leadership and potential on sustainability are also yet to hit home internationally.

OPPORTUNITIES

- A decisively positive story of Adelaide's future and potential, that over 10 years builds up Adelaide's convergence of lifestyle, innovation, strategic industries and sustainability advantage.
- Translate Adelaideans' strong sense of identity into expressions in the urban fabric itself.
- Messages and voices from beyond Government campaigns and better tap into the reservoir of leaders and cultures within Adelaide.

RISKS

- Narrow narratives and disparate brands that do not add up to a coherent story and prospectus to the outside world, leading to failure to optimise external investment and jobs. Larger cities continue to overshadow Adelaide as first choice
- Limited internal pride or awareness to build confidence for the city's future. Missed opportunities to use identity as a vehicle for corporate citizenship.
- Lack of consensus or commitment around how city and state level brands reinforce each other.

VISIBILITY AND RECOGNITION
DO THEY KNOW US?

PENANG | **ADELAIDE** | **CAPE TOWN**

BOTTOM RATED CITY | **9TH** | **TOP RATED CITY**

20TH | **1ST**

IF ADELAIDE IS KNOWN TO THE WORLD, QUALITY OF LIFE IS OFTEN THE REASON

- In 2025, Adelaide is just outside the 100 most visible cities in global benchmarks, despite not even being among the 400 largest cities by population. Adelaide is 6th among its peers, above San Diego. This is a promising indicator of overall external perceptions of the city's relevance and influence.
- Most features of Adelaide tap into the city's quality of life where Australia's capital cities are now widely presumed to excel. But overall, Adelaide is captured only one third as often as Australia's most featured city Sydney.[144]

ADELAIDE RECEIVES MORE ACCOLADES AND ATTENTION FOR ITS WELCOME AND NATURAL BEAUTY

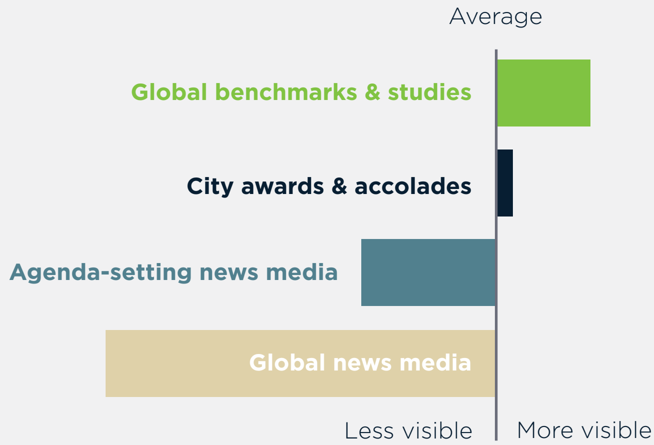
- Adelaide received more attention from 'top city' recognitions than most peers in the last 12 months, on a par with San Diego and ahead of Bilbao and Antwerp.
- These tend to focus on the city's nature, beauty, LGBTQ+ welcome, range of food choices and markets, and stand-out built heritage.
- However, there is plenty more potential for Adelaide to gain acclaim: Cape Town for example gets recognised about 4x as often.[145]

ADELAIDE IS GROWING ITS INTERNATIONAL MEDIA FOOTPRINT

- Although the overall volume of salient global media coverage of Adelaide is around 60% lower than the highly talked about mid-sized cities like Amsterdam and Vancouver, adjusted for size Adelaide performs well.
- Adelaide is typically less visible in the world's most influential media, publications that set national and global agendas – yet recently Adelaide has gained more coverage, comparable to Austin & Helsinki.
- This reflects a mixture of global focus on Adelaide's role in geopolitical (AUKUS-related) issues, and a long-standing ascription of Adelaide and South Australia as an international destination for visitors, especially food and wine enthusiasts.
- In other peer cities, economy or culture factors are more common drivers of recognition. The share of international coverage focusing on Adelaide's technologies progress is still lower than most cities.
- This raises questions about whether and how Adelaide can sharpen its identity beyond its comfortable lifestyle advantages, revealing more cutting edge in its business, industry, innovation and creativity, and turning its edges and idiosyncrasies into distinctive markers.[146]

ADELAIDE IS MORE MEASURED & TREASURED GLOBALLY, BUT LESS VISIBLE IN MEDIA

Adelaide's visibility in key areas, 2023-2024



Source: TBoC Research based on Adelaide's presence & performance in city benchmarks, awards, accolades and Adelaide global media appearances


FOS WILLIAMS STAND
MARK RICCIUTO STAND
BIRD IN HAND
STERLING HOMES

PERCEPTION, SENTIMENT AND APPEAL
WHAT DO THEY THINK OF US?

CARDIFF | ADELAIDE | PORTO
BOTTOM RATED CITY | 6TH | TOP RATED CITY
20TH | | 1ST

ADELAIDE'S VISITOR BRAND OUTSHINES THE REST

Adelaide's easy-going culture, food and wine experiences, and beach lifestyle remain the key drivers of its global media portrait. As a share of coverage, these themes appear at least twice as often as other lifestyle cities, and as much as 6 times as often as other peers.

Adelaide's natural assets and visitor appeal are covered 2x as often as in typical lifestyle cities.

Adelaide's universities and student appeal are responsible for a significantly above average share of media coverage relating to the city.

Business and investment are also covered more often than other subjects, speaking to the same trends that have seen South Australia recognised as the best state in Australia to do business.

Real estate projects and trends, and the role of the port and maritime sectors, underpin this slightly above average business and investment brand for Adelaide. However, these elements are still dwarfed by magnitude of coverage and commentary on visitor appeal and events. [147,148]

SENTIMENT IS POSITIVE IF NOT PASSIONATE

Adelaide's visitor offer is reviewed more positively than most cities. Across a range of global media positive sentiment is 19% more frequent than leading lifestyle capitals. Food and wine underpin positive impressions.

Overall sentiment on Adelaide stands up well against lifestyle capitals. Its easy-going offer and range of visitor amenities currently gain more positive balance of coverage than high-demand cities like Austin, Amsterdam, and Oslo, where the focus is often more on expense, expectations or externalities.[148]

ADELAIDE'S INNOVATION IDENTITY IS STILL FAINT

Adelaide is much more rarely described in relation to innovation and entrepreneurship, or for agendas related to decision-making, scale and leadership. International awareness of the opportunities Adelaide's presents in strategic or high growth sectors appears limited.

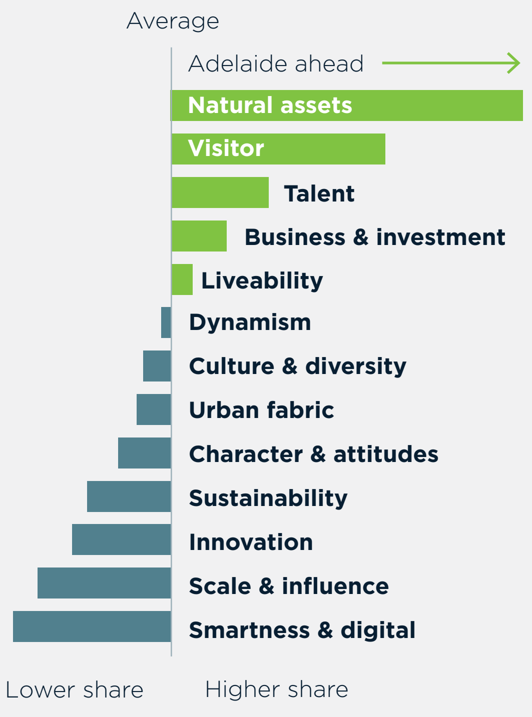
Many other high-quality-of-life cities have had much more success developing their identity as crucibles of technology and discovery, such as Stockholm, Berlin and Austin.[149]

ADELAIDE IS KNOWN AS 'GREEN' BUT SUSTAINABILITY BRAND IS MODEST

A growing cohort of cities has become renowned for leading on low carbon and new energy agendas. Amsterdam, Oslo, and Helsinki are at the fore here. Adelaide's share of coverage relating to sustainability is lower than its credentials would suggest. [150]

ADELAIDE IS MORE KNOWN FOR ITS NATURAL ASSETS & VISITOR OFFER

How media coverage of Adelaide differs from the peer average



Source: TBoC Research based on analysis of Adelaide & lifestyle city appearances in global media.

WHAT SHOULD ADELAIDE NOW DO?

Adelaide wins over some audiences for its quality of life and natural appeal, but there is an opportunity to tell a broader story to the world.

The benchmarking analysis points to several proposed actions that can help improve the visibility, recognition, perception, sentiment and appeal of Adelaide:

ACTIONS

- Maximise the alignment and complementarity of city and state brand
- Seize the opportunities of new industry catalysts, sustainability milestones, innovation success stories and global partnerships to cast Adelaide in a new and more generous light
- Add narrative perspectives that address the medium-term interests and opportunities of investors, corporates, growth companies, entrepreneurs, innovators and professional talent
- Optimise current and future brand identity assets and processes so that the market-facing community endorses, uses and amplifies city and state brand outputs and activities
- Engage and learn intentionally from successful approaches adopted by other liveable cities.

WHAT SHOULD GOVERNMENT DO?

- Seek internal and external inputs and validation of Adelaide's brand, visibility and brand management approach
- Review the balance of marketing and communications initiatives around destination, innovation, investment attraction and business functions
- Explore partnerships with cities, companies, celebrities and other catalysts that amplify Adelaide's voice, reach and relevance.

WHAT CAN THE PRIVATE AND CIVIC SECTORS DO?

- Carry out surveys of talent, businesses and external partners to assess current perceptions and potential of Adelaide
- Work with government to develop and agree on common perspective on Adelaide's brand imperatives and a preferred approach for delivery
- Utilise city and brand assets to build, augment, refine and amplify coordinated branding efforts around a common centre of gravity, and provide sources of coordinated input and constructive feedback.


Deloitte.

NEXT STEPS

This report has highlighted Adelaide's progress and its potential in a world that does not stand still.

Across many pillars Adelaide's future performance relies on establishing a platform for the whole city to grow in a way that is intentional, inspiring and interconnected.

The findings of this report are not simply 'for government' to act upon. Adelaide's success is a team effort, and the benefits of good growth will be shared by business, talent, institutions, citizens and government alike.

There are many areas where Adelaide's capable ecosystem of private, government and third sectors can logically come together to unpack the issues it touches on and move towards practical solutions. There is a need for rich and ongoing conversations at a senior level to shape the city's sense of common purpose – something peers like Bilbao and San Diego have become adept at.

Over the next 12-18 months Adelaide will benefit from a series of collaborative sprints that will logically consist of evidence gathering, round tables to weigh up different choices, identification of preferred solutions or directions, and then a development of an advocacy and/or delivery plan.

These areas may include, but are not limited to:

- Coordinate governance to deliver a version of compact growth well
- Pooled efforts on talent attraction and upskilling to transform established industries and grow emerging industries
- Supporting the innovation ecosystem ambition to reinforce the connective tissue between Adelaide and regional centres
- Opportunities for improved precinct governance and collaborative place leadership
- Identifying 1-2 priority precincts or locations for high quality reimagination
- Making the most of Adelaide's waterfront and key activity centres
- What Adelaide should prioritise when it measures its own progress.

The Committee for Adelaide looks forward to contributing as a convener and communicator around these key conversations, the big choices ahead and the common endeavour required.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The Committee for Adelaide is an independent, non-partisan and sector-agnostic think tank, bringing together businesses, industry bodies, community and government to shape the future of Adelaide, South Australia.

We provide independent thought-leadership and advocacy, as we facilitate change, spark discussion, influence policy and generate positive outcomes for the benefit of all South Australians, both now and into the future.

For further information and to get in contact visit: committeeforadelaide.org.au

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