

Submission on the Draft HumeLink East Social Impact Management Plan (SIMP)

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Introduction

Destination Southern NSW (DSNSW) appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback on the Draft Social Impact Management Plan (SIMP) for the HumeLink East project. Our feedback is focused on aligning the SIMP's social investment and mitigation strategies with long-term, sustainable tourism development priorities for the LGAs within our region, Yass Valley, Hilltops, Upper Lachlan, and Goulburn Mulwaree.

We commend the project team for its robust stakeholder engagement and commitment to legacy outcomes. However, we believe that more can be done to optimise the tourism outcomes of this major infrastructure project and ensure meaningful long-term dividends for our visitor economy.

1. High-Level Impacts on Tourism

The SIMP identifies a dual impact on tourism:

- **Negative:** Risk of displacement of short-term accommodation in tourism areas due to increased demand from the construction workforce, particularly in Goulburn, Yass, and Crookwell.
- **Positive:** Potential uplift in local tourism spend from the presence of the temporary workforce and associated visitation.

DSNSW agrees with this assessment and underscores the need to proactively manage tourism accommodation availability during peak visitor periods and community events.

Recommendations:

- Collaborate with local tourism operators to ensure key events are not adversely impacted by accommodation shortages by 'dynamic scheduling' to release the rooms required to support these events.
- Coordinate communication strategies with LGA tourism services, Visitor Information Centres, and DSNSW for transparency with potential visitors, including online comms channels.

2. Impact of Crookwell Accommodation Facility on Tourism Stock

The SIMP outlines that Stage 2 will address detailed impacts related to the Crookwell accommodation facility. However, risks are already evident:

- Community feedback has highlighted concerns regarding pressure on existing accommodation in the Upper Lachlan and Goulburn Mulwaree LGAs.
- There is insufficient clarity on mitigation measures for tourism sector displacement during workforce peak periods.

Recommendations:

- Commit to engaging with Destination Southern NSW, Upper Lachlan Shire Council, and Goulburn Mulwarree Council during Stage 2 SIMP development.
- Investigate tourism-aligned reuse of any facilities post-construction (e.g., event accommodation, seasonal workforce housing).

3. Impact on Local Tourism Operators & Workforce Access

The SIMP recognises labour draw as a social risk, particularly in sectors like tourism and hospitality.

Risks:

- Competing demand from the HumeLink project may reduce workforce availability for tourism operators.
- Cumulative pressures from multiple infrastructure projects could intensify workforce constraints.

Recommendations:

- Include partnerships with Workforce Australia, TAFE NSW, and DSNSW in workforce development plans.

4. Community Investment Plan – Tourism Alignment

DSNSW supports the Community Investment and Benefit Plan's emphasis on long-term legacy. However, to avoid tokenistic gestures and ensure meaningful alignment with tourism objectives, clearer mechanisms are needed.

Strengths:

- Opportunity to reuse worker infrastructure for tourism.
- Community priorities have surfaced tourism-aligned investments (e.g., trail development, festivals, infrastructure upgrades).

Gaps:

- Lack of defined tourism investment stream or criteria.
- No reference to Destination Management Plans or RTO priorities.

Recommendations:

- Establish a dedicated tourism stream within the investment fund.
- Include tourism experience development, event enhancement, and infrastructure resilience as eligible funding categories.
- Involve DSNSW and local councils in project selection and governance.
- Apply long-term KPIs such as increased overnight visitation, product development, and economic contribution.

5. Strengthening Monitoring and Evaluation for Tourism Impacts

While Table 10 of the SIMP references several tourism-related social impacts, it lacks strong, tourism-specific monitoring indicators.

Recommendations:

- Add measurable targets for tourism-related impacts, including:
 - Longitudinal tourism visitation (day trip and overnight), room nights, event, and spend data to set benchmarks and evaluate project impacts
 - % of local accommodation available for tourism during major events
 - # of tourism operators consulted quarterly
 - Visitor satisfaction/sentiment scores in affected LGAs before, during, and after construction
- Disaggregate reporting on tourism within broader community impact monitoring
- Include DSNSW in periodic review forums to validate tourism-related performance data and inform continuous improvement

Conclusion

The Humelink East project presents a rare opportunity to deliver enduring social and economic dividends for regional NSW. By aligning the SIMP's social investment and workforce strategies with DSNSW's tourism objectives, Transgrid and AGJV can enhance regional prosperity, resilience, and place identity well beyond the project lifecycle.

We welcome ongoing engagement in the finalisation of the SIMP and the development of Stage 2.