

# Benchmarking South East Queensland

in a global context

Full Report



### **Benchmark acknowledgements**

This 2025 benchmark has been developed as part of wider input to inform the Smart Region Digital Plan. The Smart Region Digital Plan is one of the 29 commitments being delivered as part of the South East Queensland City Deal, a long-term partnership between the Australian Government, Queensland Government and Council of Mayors (SEQ).

The significant time and input of stakeholders interviewed during the development of this report is acknowledged.

Report has been produced by lead authors: Dr Tim Moonen, Patrick McVeigh, Borane Gille and Ezra Rawitsch, from The Business of Cities, an urban intelligence firm providing data and advice to global cities, companies and institutions. Based principally in London, since 2008 the firm has worked with more than 150 leadership teams working for cities and regions on their future economy, governance, and built form.

### **Acknowledgement of Country**

This report respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands across South East Queensland and their enduring connection to Country, which has been cared for by many generations of First Nations Australians. We pay our respects to Elders past and present.

### **Disclaimer**

Information contained in this document is based on available information at the time of writing. While the publisher has exercised reasonable care in preparing this document, it does not warrant or represent that it is accurate or complete. The publisher accepts no responsibility for any loss occasioned to any person acting or refraining from acting in reliance upon any material contained in this document.

Front page image credits: Brizzy Pix, Visit Sunshine Coast, Gary Cranitch @ Queensland Museum and BEDA

## About this Report

South East Queensland was an early adopter of global region benchmarking and is a reference point for the value of peer-to-peer comparisons. In 2017, the Queensland Government and Council of Mayors (SEQ) jointly commissioned the Business of Cities (London) to develop the first global benchmark for South East Queensland (SEQ)<sup>1</sup>, comparing SEQ to nine global peer city-regions against 40 core indicators. The benchmark was used to co-develop a long-term vision<sup>2</sup> and shared commitment to transform SEQ and deliver region-shaping infrastructure.

This independent analysis assessed the region's performance against other competitive and liveable medium-sized peer city-regions around the world with similar attributes, advantages and functions. By drawing on a unique combination of urban indices, regional datasets, intelligence and insight into regional initiatives and innovations around the world, this research placed SEQ in its proper international context and provided a relevant perspective to assess its opportunities and imperatives.

The Benchmarking SEQ in a Global Context Report (2017) highlighted the need to forge a new, permanent partnership between the Australian Government, Queensland Government and local governments for the benefit of SEQ, as well as developing a strong understanding of our region's future needs for prosperity.

Since 2017, much has changed. Globally there is a new geography of competition, revised geopolitics of trade and energy with new technologies and industries brought to the fore and altered preferences of talent and business. Within SEQ itself, the region has grown, adapted strongly through the disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic, signed the South East Queensland City Deal committing the three levels of government to a shared

programme of strategic investments to enhance regional prosperity, and successfully won the right to host the 2032 Olympic & Paralympic Games.

The prospect of the Games is pointing attention to SEQ's sense of place in the world. This 2024 analysis builds on the original benchmarking report, which was used to inform 'TransformingSEQ' a city deal proposition for the region. This latest report now considers fresh areas of advantage, opportunity and risk. It is informed by hundreds of benchmarks and comparative studies, as well as interviews and extensive engagement with more than 150 leaders and experts from across the region. It is also enriched through direct experience working with other international city-regions on their governance, economy, infrastructure and brand development – including Amsterdam, Glasgow, New York, Oslo and Vancouver.

### Aim and remit of benchmarking:

- ✓ Provide a bespoke outside-in analysis of SEQ's performance relative to global 'peers'
- ✓ Benchmark SEQ against other international locations with similar size, assets and relationships
- ✓ Identify comparative strengths, gaps and opportunities for SEQ to compete and succeed

### This report is not intended as an:

- ✗ Inside-out analysis of all of SEQ's economic and sectoral data
- ✗ Assessment of SEQ strategies, governance, fiscal or policy models
- ✗ Definitive recommendation of new policies the SEQ region should adopt



# Foreword

Queensland is open for business and to ensure South East Queensland (SEQ) can pursue an ambitious vision and remain a globally competitive region, partnerships with local government and industry are more important than ever.

Queenslanders should have certainty in the delivery of generational infrastructure and increased connectivity across South East Queensland through stronger partnerships between all levels of government to accelerate investment and coordination.

South East Queensland is one of Australia's fastest-growing regions and we want to make sure it continues to be a great place to live. As the region continues to grow, it's important we look at other global cities to understand how they are addressing both the challenges and opportunities of growth.

This independent benchmarking offers a fresh perspective of how SEQ is performing against global peer regions such as Barcelona, Metro Vancouver, Busan, San Diego and Hamburg. It assesses a range of factors including connectivity and productivity as well as innovation and sustainability by drawing on local and global data, detailed case studies, and insights from over 150 regional leaders.

The report offers a clear narrative on the region's comparative strengths, gaps, and pathways to global competitiveness. It builds upon the groundbreaking independent analysis in 2017 that positioned South East Queensland as a global reference point for benchmarking city-regions.

The 2017 report emphasised the importance of maintaining and protecting the lifestyle and natural environment that continue to make SEQ such a unique and enviable destination.

Since then, SEQ has achieved significant outcomes, including securing Australia's largest City Deal as well as the right to host the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games. With SEQ's population set to reach six million by 2046, and the need to create one million new jobs, the imperative to remain a liveable, competitive, and globally relevant region has never been greater.

This report supports our joint priorities to reset the planning partnership between state and local government, and to develop timely plans for the future of SEQ to identify what infrastructure and services are needed to accommodate our growth.

With the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games on the horizon, it is imperative that we continue to work together to ensure that SEQ maximises legacy and prepares to showcase the region, Queensland and Australia on the world stage.

There is a need for ambitious policy decisions that should protect the lifestyle of our Queensland communities, while facilitating responsible growth through infrastructure provision for SEQ. The increase in population must also be supported by improved project management for our transport, health, education, and other infrastructure projects that are delivered on-time and on-budget.

The insights from this study reinforce the need for continued coordination across all levels of government, South East Queensland Council of Mayors and the private sector to progress and align strategic actions. We invite readers to use this report as a practical guide for making strategic decisions and aligning actions that will shape the future of South East Queensland in the decades ahead.

Thank you to The Business of Cities for undertaking this analysis and the considerable number of stakeholders that were interviewed to inform this report.



**Brisbane Lord Mayor  
Adrian Schrinner**

Chair, Council of  
Mayors (SEQ)



**The Hon Jarrod Bleijie MP  
Deputy Premier**

Minister for State Development,  
Infrastructure and Planning and  
Minister for Industrial Relations



# Contents

6

**Introduction:** SEQ  
in a global context

13

**Executive Summary**

28

**Growth, Opportunity  
& Prosperity**

36

**Place & Connectivity**

46

**Talent & Innovation**

56

**Sustainability &  
Resilience**

60

**Experience & Culture**

66

**In-Depth:**  
The competitive  
outlook for SEQ

74

**In-Depth:**  
City regions and the  
digital imperative

80

**Clear strategic  
imperatives for SEQ  
to consider**

81

**Appendix & Data Glossary**

90

**References**



# Introduction: SEQ in a global context



## Overview

SEQ is one of more than 500 regions globally that are now the observed engines of their nations' economic growth, and centres of gravity for international business, innovation, talent and investment.

The number of regions that are internationally connected and competitive is growing by at least 20 every year,<sup>3</sup> as the opportunities of a globalising economy spread well beyond traditional 'superstar' cities and regions that were prominent in the first 20 years of the 21st century. This diversification is driven by the appetite of capital to invest in urban and regional assets, technology, businesses, and sustainable systems,<sup>4</sup> as well as by the increased location discretion among workers, and the reliance of fast-

growing industries and technologies on highly distributed sources of expertise. Corporates and capital follow startups and talent, as much as the other way round.

This means that not only is SEQ a central part of an Australian 'system' of capital city-regions. It is also part of a continually widening global cohort of urban regions that have more international reach and a desire to innovate in order to translate their growth into long term success.

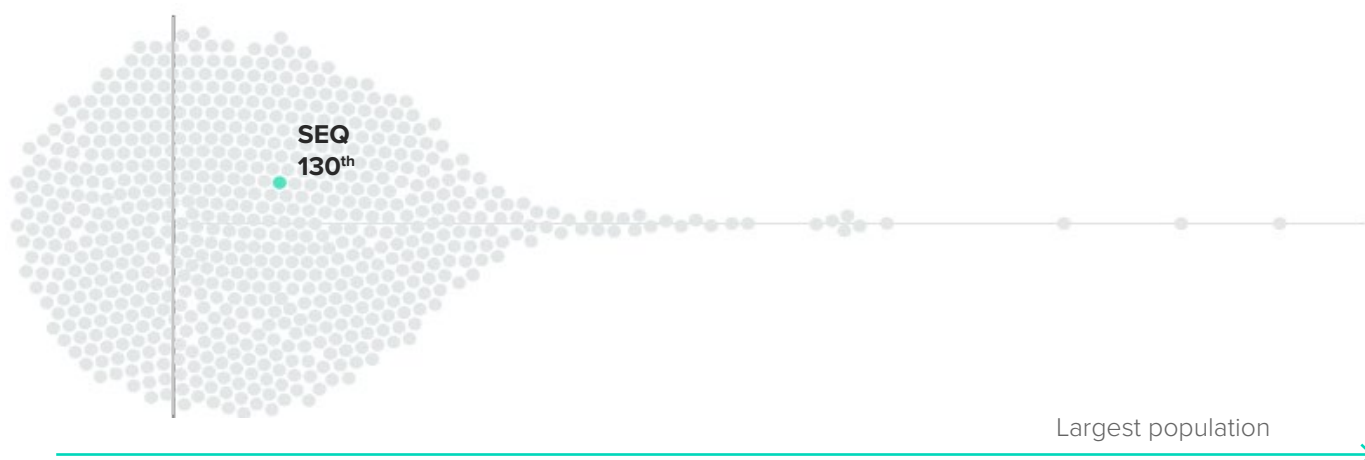
## Long-run trends for SEQ

- More city-regions means more centres of economic demand – as both competitors and partners.
- Larger urbanising markets create a stronger pull for investment, industries and talent.
- Diversification and hybridity among globally traded sectors encourage more city-regions to hone their unique know-how to serve the world.
- Corporations are more discerning about the ecosystems they enter when they choose between specialised and distinctive locations.
- Green growth and focus on environmental sustainability.
- More regions with a multi-city character driving new approaches to growth management and infrastructure planning.

## Strategic opportunities for SEQ

- Larger markets and ecosystems into which to build ‘corridor’ connections, partnerships and networks.
- Promote the additional scale and diversity that an integrating SEQ provides.
- Position SEQ as home to unique expertise and key niches in global supply chains.
- Utilise international calibre universities, non-university R&D centres, and other technology assets as capable knowledge partners.
- Demonstrate leadership and appetite in transitioning key urban systems at scale.
- To learn and share on governance innovations; to test solutions across multiple scales and geographies.

**Figure: SEQ in a wider world of metropolitan regions**



Source: United Nations World Urbanisation Prospects

Many of these regions – like SEQ – have become inter-dependent markets for housing, talent, and industry. They observe the trend that ‘regions of multiple connected cities’ are set to become an essential strategic unit of investment and policy for at least the next 25 years and very probably the next 50-100.<sup>5</sup>

SEQ has steadily emerged into one of the Southern Hemisphere’s most distinctive city-regions, shaped by its role as a trade, visitor and quality of life gateway. Understanding the competitive context and outlook for SEQ is important to the future of the region, and to the future of Queensland and Australia.

In a rapidly urbanising world, SEQ remains one of the 150 largest urban regions by population, and one of its 100 largest economies.<sup>6</sup>



SEQ's context is highly distinctive. Its footprint is large, its domestic market is relatively small, and there are long distances to larger international markets and other major cities. International comparison must be understood in this context. Yet in a globalising economy, many city-regions with their own geographic and local nuances now share certain similar attributes, advantages and functions to SEQ. They are medium-sized, highly liveable, and strategically located for trade, investment and innovation. They are SEQ's 'peers'. Many compete indirectly with SEQ for international events and conventions, tourism, students, talent, entrepreneurs, traded goods and services.

At the same time, SEQ exists in a Asia-Pacific context that is increasingly competitive, with more cities successfully achieving greater productivity, economic diversification, metropolitan infrastructure and quality of life. SEQ inevitably faces greater future competition for trade and logistics, real estate and infrastructure investment, retail, commerce, capital-intensive manufacturing, visitor economy, creative industries, business services, life sciences, education and research.

In this context, this benchmarking report provides a comparative and competitor analysis of SEQ that:

- 1 Assesses SEQ's assets and trajectory among a core 'peer group' of ten international regions with similar assets and competitiveness.
- 2 Observes the factors that shape SEQ's medium-term international competitiveness, and which are imperative to improve and invest in.
- 3 Identifies lessons and insights that can be learned from other city-regions.

## What is benchmarking and how have we measured SEQ?

Benchmarking is about meaningful and strategic comparisons. To understand how SEQ is doing requires an international view of performance and perception across a broad range of metrics among a relevant group of comparable city-regions. This report offers this 'outside in' view of where SEQ is improving or falling back in an international context.

This method was adopted in the 2017 edition of this report, and it has since been developed and applied in more than 50 cities and regions globally over the past decade. This report draws on a review of all the benchmarks which feature the SEQ city-region and its constituent cities and councils.

These international benchmarks are not perfect and do not cover every issue that matters to a region, its residents, and its stakeholders. To broaden the view, this report also features case studies drawn from a circle of 'reference peers' that provide instructive examples from the wider world of cities.

These comparisons help to contextualise the opportunities, challenges, and experiences of diverse city-regions against those of SEQ.

This report has been collaboratively developed with the Council of Mayors (SEQ) and informed by interviews with industry leaders and insights from policy officials from across the region. This report has also reviewed and showcased major plans, projects, investments and decisions underway in other city-regions, with the support and advice of experts in specific regions for additional detail.



Image Credit: Brisbane City Council



## Quick guide to benchmarking

**What is benchmarking?** “Benchmarking” means comparing SEQ to other city-regions using data. This includes publicly available studies that rank and compare city-regions, longitudinal databases, but also real-time user data.

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

**What matters can change.** The rapid rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI), for example, presents fresh opportunities and risks for different kinds of cities. City-regions are also affected by changing values or perceptions among surveyed audiences.

**Time lags.** Real on-the-ground infrastructure and improvement can take one to two years to register in benchmarks.

**City (and state) governments cannot control everything.** SEQ's performance in many areas is strongly shaped by factors outside its control or the control of its constituent councils, including market demand. Benchmarks do not assign blame or responsibility, nor do they imply an assessment of SEQ's strategies and governance.

## The framework

We review SEQ's performance across five core pillars that reflect on city-regions' short- and long-term trends. For each, we observe strengths, challenges and risks, as well as a sample of relevant comparative data.

- 1 Growth, Opportunity & Prosperity** - ability to provide all residents pathways to quality jobs, education, home ownership, entrepreneurship, quality housing and overall wellbeing.
- 2 Place & Connectivity** - neighbourhood vibrancy and appeal, and the ability to reliably connect people to jobs, families and services.
- 3 Talent & Innovation** - emerging industries, jobs in established industries, its skills pool, and partnership between research and business.
- 4 Sustainability & Resilience** - capacity to rebound from shocks, progress on decarbonising its city systems, and responsibly harness its natural resources.
- 5 Experience & Culture** - depth and variety of creative, social, and interactive activities that shape the unique identity and character of the city.

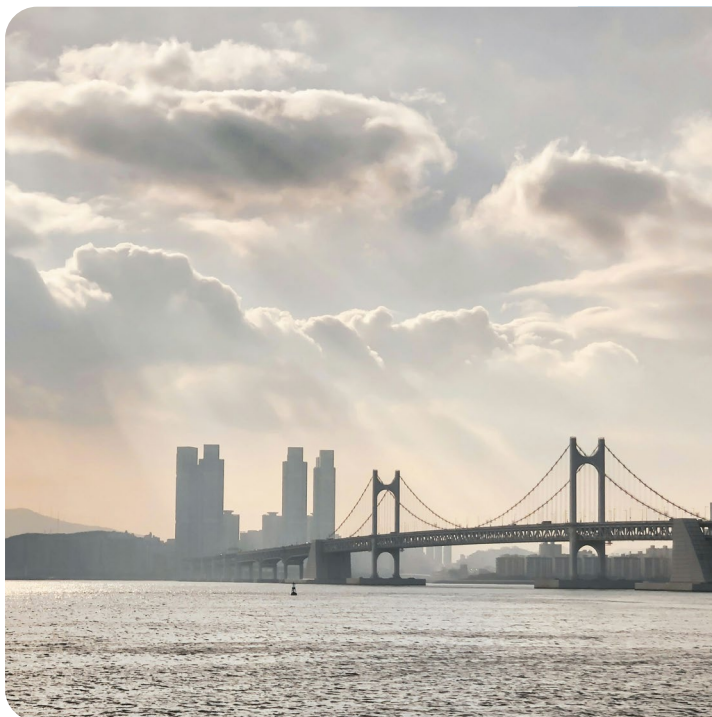


Image Credit: Unsplash

External benchmarking is not a substitute for internal analysis. However, international comparative data offers an extra lens to better contextualise SEQ's strengths, identify the landscape of competition, and more sharply reveal SEQ's patterns and challenges. This methodology has been applied and refined at a regional scale in more than 30 regions globally over the past decade, including in Canada, the Netherlands, Oman, South Korea, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. Looking at regional performance over time also makes it possible to pinpoint which regions are flourishing and why, and identify more of the drivers that will influence success over the next 10-20 years.

## How this report measures SEQ

Regional data has evolved and improved since 2017, better reflecting the full range of areas that shape city-region success and demand, and the changing priorities of residents, businesses, visitors, and investors. Data on mobility, land use and spatial development is especially improved, supporting more analysis beyond individual administrative borders and as part of regional patterns of agglomeration. There is also more urban data being produced at the metropolitan or 'functional' scale that much better approximates regions such as SEQ.

For the purposes of this report, the scale of the South East Queensland city-region is defined as incorporating the local government areas (LGA) of Brisbane, Moreton Bay, Gold Coast, Ipswich, Lockyer Valley, Logan, Noosa, Redland, Scenic Rim, Somerset, Sunshine Coast, and Toowoomba.

### **This report draws on five primary types of data sources:**

- 1** Metropolitan indicators and databases – e.g. from databases maintained by the United Nations and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).
- 2** National and regional statistics and census data including data on demographics, development, transport, services, and investment.
- 3** Spatial datasets with global coverage – e.g. the EU-Copernicus Global Human Settlement Layer
- 4** International indices and rankings that measure metropolitan and regional performance.
- 5** Regional aggregations of data available from online data platforms and providers – e.g. Crunchbase, Dealroom, Google, TripAdvisor.

### **No dataset is perfect:**

Every region is different and gets measured differently. Throughout, every effort has been made to assess the peer regions using comparable scales of analysis and data frameworks.

While data is becoming more comprehensive, not all issues relevant to regional development are captured by international data. More comparative data is urban than 'regional'. In cases where the vast majority of measurable assets reside in large urban centres, city- or metropolitan-level data often suffices for an accurate assessment of the state of play.

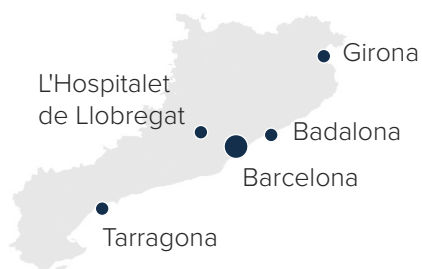
### **Best-fit data:**

Wherever possible, this analysis has looked to match to the SEQ geography, or as close as possible, from aggregations of data at the local government and functional metropolitan level.

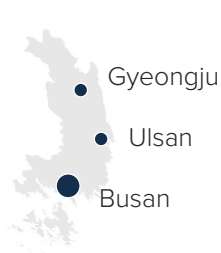
Cases where an alternative scale has been adopted are distinguished in-text. This alternative has only been used where doing so ensured discussion of the best data available and where no substantive difference in score, position, or implication was foreseeable.

## Introducing the peer regions of SEQ city-region

**Barcelona Region**



**Busan City Region**



**Hamburg Region**



**Metro Vancouver**



**South East Florida**



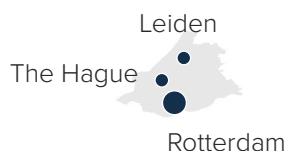
**San Diego Region**



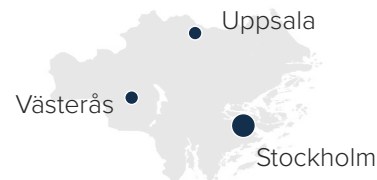
**Seattle-Puget Sound**



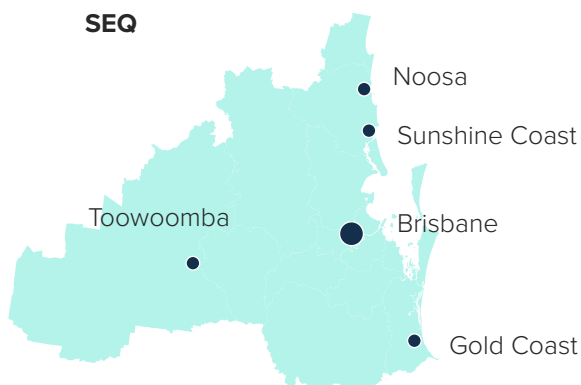
**South Holland**



**Stockholm Region**



**SEQ**



Regional maps are to relative scale  
Source: GeoBoundaries

These ten city-regions all comprise of multiple local governments, with the largest central city surrounded by a larger regional population. They lie across a spectrum of spatial and governance contexts, outlined in Table 2.

## SEQ in the global mind: the global indices and beyond

Global indices and rankings of urban areas are almost exclusively measured at the scale of cities and 'Greater' cities, not whole regions like SEQ. In addition, cities smaller than 500,000 people very rarely feature in international assessments. But given the strong interdependence between the success of regions and the success of their largest gateway city, here we briefly review what Brisbane's recent performance may mean for SEQ.

Brisbane has become more visible internationally. Despite being only the 220th largest city globally, it has cemented its position among the top 80 most appraised cities and an impressive 17th in Asia Pacific.<sup>7</sup> Its visibility has potential to continue rising not only towards Melbourne and Sydney but also popular lifestyle cities like San Diego and Barcelona, in line with its growing population and scale.

Meanwhile, the next most visible cities Gold Coast and Sunshine Coast are both currently outside the top 200 most featured cities. This reflects both size constraints and also the limited international profile and economic base of local government areas beyond Brisbane. There is limited recognition of most SEQ locations internationally as leaders in particular sectors or niches (whether for example healthcare, smartness, gastronomy, social innovation, or climate resilience).

Brisbane is clearly part of global circuits of city competition that have intensified in the past five years, due to the rapid returns to scale in the Asia-Pacific and increasing specialisation and success of mid-sized cities in North America and Europe. Cities like Abu Dhabi, Edinburgh, Hangzhou, Oslo, and Austin all emerge as high performers in the international markets Brisbane broadly compete in – whether driven by visitor economy growth, higher education shifts, business climate, or digital talent.

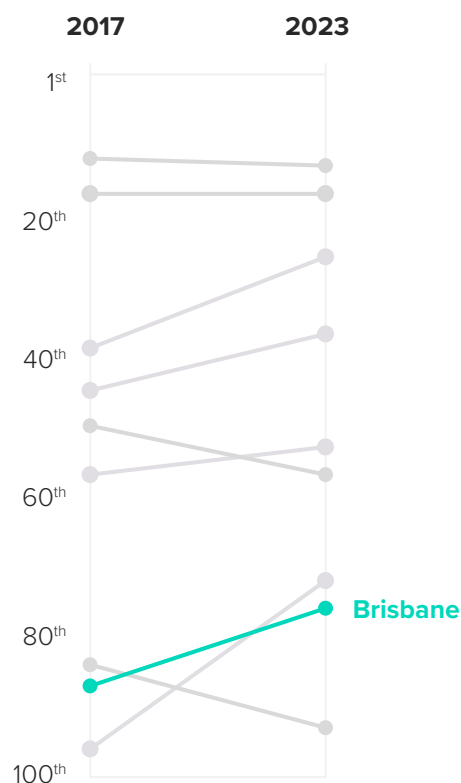
What is clear is that Brisbane is standing out more strongly than it has previously for lifestyle, universities, work-life balance, investment and business base. It is enjoying a stronger cycle of demand than many others – from investors, students and visitors. Cities are also being rated more on their economic mix, their innovation ecosystem and their affordability. These are areas where Brisbane will continue to increasingly depend more on the region to provide scale, diversity, and efficiency.

As such, the rest of this report focuses on understanding and benchmarking SEQ as a whole region to assess its readiness to compete and succeed over the medium term. In the following sections, we examine SEQ's economic growth and performance trajectory in more detail, examining the following five key pillars:

- 1 **Growth, opportunity and prosperity**
- 2 **Place and connectivity**
- 3 **Talent and innovation**
- 4 **Sustainability and resilience**
- 5 **Experience and culture**

### Brisbane has become more visible in the past cycle

Visibility rank, 2017 vs 2023, Brisbane vs peers



Busan not featured as outside the top 100.

Source: TBoC Research based on an analysis of global indices and rankings





## Executive Summary



# Introduction

## Strong growth trajectory with stable foundations

South East Queensland (SEQ) is midway through a historic 40-year transition, during which it is doubling its population from 3 to 6 million people and establishing itself as one of the world's 100 largest city-region economies. This growth trajectory allied to stable foundations place Brisbane in the top 5% of cities globally for future opportunity, and propel locations across the region into stand-out prospects.

SEQ has many of the ingredients and endowments to become the world's consummate middleweight region – a place of extraordinary lifestyle, pre-eminent education, advanced technology, healthy environment, world-class clusters, abiding openness, welcome and warmth, convenience and connection, all grounded in a confidently authentic identity and communities of character. Looking to a mid-21<sup>st</sup> century of multiplied risks, few places on earth possess these combinations in the way SEQ can showcase.

As such, SEQ is becoming more popular and prominent. The city-region is reaching a new threshold both of internal scale and interconnectedness, and external reach and relationships. Hosting the world at the 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games will profoundly shape the region's international reputation for the remainder of this century.

## Learning, leading, and succeeding on the global stage

This makes it important for leaders across SEQ and Australia to step back and observe how the city-region is evolving in a global context, who it shares common paths with, and what it can learn from and share with the world. There is a local and national stake in SEQ's success.

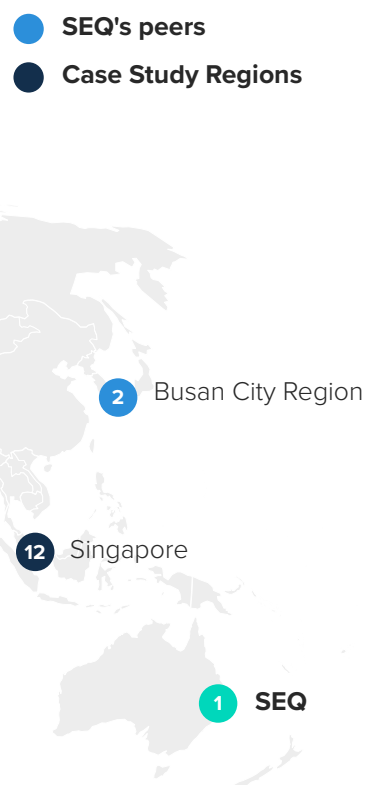
Australia's long-term aspirations as a nation of 40 million people require SEQ, as one of its 'Big 3' capital city-regions, to be competitive at a global scale for multiple cycles to come. This report follows on from the inaugural 2017 benchmarking of SEQ to assess how the region is progressing against other comparable high-quality-of-life medium-sized regions that share similar attributes and ambitions. Like SEQ these 'peers' comprise a rich economic and spatial mosaic – from high-growth cities to coastal communities, inland gateways, biodiverse rural areas, and natural icons and resources.

## Informing the region's next 5-10 years

By drawing on a combination of urban indices, regional datasets, case studies, and interviews, this research offers SEQ a fresh look at its international trajectory and new perspectives with which to review the upcoming 5-10 years of opportunities and choices.

## SEQ's peer regions

World map from <https://simplemaps.com/world>



## About the peer regions

This report compares SEQ among a group of ten carefully selected city-regions. These are 'peers', comparators and, sometimes, competitors.

### Selecting SEQ's peer regions

The selection of peer regions was based on the 2017 benchmarking report criteria of international regions of comparable population and economic size, comparative advantage in liveability, education and trade, and distinctive strategic or gateway location in their nation.

### Changes from the 2017 benchmark

Eight of the ten peers appear in both the 2017 version of this study and the current 2025 edition. Fukuoka and Cape Town have been replaced with the regions of Seattle and Stockholm in the updated study.

These new peers were selected to reflect SEQ's recent convergence toward other leading regional innovation economies with significant advanced industry capabilities, focused on precinct- and district-level development of new capacity. Seattle (known as the Puget Sound Region) and Stockholm also offer significant learnings for SEQ on how collaborative regional governance can over time yield significant agenda-setting and region-shaping power. These two new comparators also better allow for cross-cutting regional comparisons based on high-quality data.

## Common attributes of peer regions

The city-regions selected for the 2025 report form an effective 'peer group' because they share most or all of the following attributes with SEQ:

- 1. Medium-sized** - These regions have a functional population within a factor of two of where SEQ is today or is projected to be in 20-30 years.
- 2. Strong gravitational pull of the largest core city** - The main city in each region (Brisbane in SEQ's case) typically rates among the top 150 globally as a host for global companies and investment, while the wider region possesses advantages in production, affordability and lifestyle choice.
- 3. Strategic coastal location** - These regions act as gateways or hubs for global trade, talent and investment. They are in the top 100 for port, freight or distribution functions globally. They are usually the second or third regional economy in their nation or their part of the continent.
- 4. High quality of life appeal across the region** - The peer regions are, on average, rated within the top 10 in their continent for liveability and outperform on appeal for visitors and students.
- 5. Knowledge and innovation capabilities** - All the regions possess global top 200 universities and average in the top 75 across a full range of innovation benchmarks globally.

## Key figures of SEQ's peers

City-Region	Population	Size (km <sup>2</sup> )	Regional population density (inh./km <sup>2</sup> )	Population of largest city	Core city's share of regional population
Barcelona Region	7.3m	19,900	367	1.7m	30%
Busan City Region	7.8m	6,500	1200	3.5m	45%
Hamburg Region	5.4m	28,500	189	2.0m	36%
Metro Vancouver	2.9m	2,900	1012	0.7m	22%
Miami (South East Florida)	6.3m	13,600	463	0.5m	7%
San Diego Region	3.3m	11,000	296	1.4m	42%
Seattle Region	4.0m	6,300	635	0.8m	19%
South Holland	3.8m	3,300	1151	0.7m	17%
Stockholm Region	2.9m	13,600	213	1.0m	40%
<b>SEQ</b>	<b>4.0m</b>	<b>35,331</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>1.3m</b>	<b>32.5%</b>

These ten city-regions all comprise of multiple local governments, with the largest central city surrounded by a larger regional population. They lie across a spectrum of spatial and governance contexts, outlined in 'Typology of Peer Regions' on page 92.

# Key findings of 2025

## Increasingly interdependent

SEQ's growth finds itself being accommodated within the skeleton of a multi-centre region. This presents an unusually promising canvas to simultaneously meet lifestyle needs, serve urban and non-urban industries, and create the points of scale and critical mass that drive agglomeration and diversify investment. The analysis points to more areas where Brisbane's performance and prospects appear to be co-dependent with SEQ-wide factors of housing choice, connectivity, data storage, lifestyle variety, and development of the grey economy. Other local areas in turn rely on Brisbane as a magnet and gateway to the region. International experience – from Amsterdam's rise into Europe's No.3 innovation region, to Miami's shift from 'sun and fun' into an inter-continental trade and enterprise capital - suggests this complementarity is a source of medium-term advantage, if a region starts to lean in to the co-ordination task on strategy, planning, delivery and communication.

## Rising up

By relevant international standards, SEQ's population growth trajectory is remarkable and continues to drive positive economic indicators. The city-region's demography, stability, and access to resources underpin its successful servicing of commodities industries, tourism and resource-hungry sectors. It has accrued major advantages in higher education, research and healthcare that truly stand out internationally. Brisbane especially is becoming more visible and a magnet for lifestyle and investment.

## Diseconomies of bad growth are yet to fully hit home

Like other global city-regions, SEQ is experiencing the externalities that come with growth. However, its inherited strengths mean that for the time being, compared to most global peer regions more people in SEQ are in work, income inequality is more moderate, the labour market is more gender equal, fewer people complain about the inconvenience of car travel, and the region is on the whole more affordable, greener and less polluted.

## Better placed to react to pandemic shifts

More of SEQ's unique advantages have been revealed by the altered preferences of talent and growth industries: year-round outdoor lifestyle, affordability edge over neighbouring capital city-regions, greater consistency in its high standard of living, a more generous blue and green infrastructure endowment in the immediate region and wider state, a safer bet given geo-political instabilities, and proximity to Asian markets. These attributes are also fuelling a pick-up in entrepreneurship and success in scaling up.

## The birth of a global city-region in the era of 2032

Rather like the Île-de-France is to Paris or South Florida is to Miami, SEQ is an administrative construct that has come to comprise a close fit with an expanded and urbanising city-region economy.

The 'city-region' has become a much more significant feature of global urbanisation. As is commonly the case worldwide, SEQ's own city-region system consists of a core city (Brisbane) which is the largest economic, cultural, and administrative centre, and neighbouring cities, towns, and rural areas whose own economies support and enhance the scale and functions of the whole. As with Miami/South Florida, Barcelona/Catalonia, Vancouver/Greater Vancouver and hundreds of others, SEQ's international competitiveness and reputation is shaped first and foremost by Brisbane as the primary city.

Yet these city-regions increasingly function as an interdependent economic unit where daily activities such as commuting, trade, and social interactions extend beyond the administrative boundaries of any single city. In well-established city-regions these flows are enabled by strong transport links, shared infrastructure, and communities borrowing from each other's economic advantages. The cities and communities together possess a **combined scale**, **common assets** and **complementary specialisations** that make them more attractive places to live, work and invest.

These benefits work both ways. Over time, the major hub cities (like Brisbane) in a city-region also find that their ability to continue improving their own position on the international stage depend fundamentally on the carrying capacity and efficiency of the wider region. With the right integration, planning, co-operation and communication, SEQ provides Brisbane with what economists call 'borrowed scale' - more choice, flexibility on costs, and sources of specialist capability.

As a result, more and more city-regions recognise the potential if they collaborate to compete, even if the journey to get there is often bumpy. To do so increasingly relies on new and better coordination of governance and policymaking across multiple boundaries to capitalise on opportunities of scale, ensure benefits are better distributed, and address risks of sprawl, waning sustainability, and social disparity.



## Headlines



**2nd fastest** growth in venture capital in last 10 years



**Lowest** share of income spent on mortgage payments



**2x** range of globally-rated university programs



**3x** faster pace of growth over next 20 years



**52%** more international students



**Lowest** air pollution



\* Scores and positions vs SEQ's 10 peer regions

## Emerging risks



**38%** less frequency of public transport between region's largest centres<sup>†</sup>



**23%** less productive



**3rd** fastest-ageing population



**54%** lower population density of urban centres



**9th of 10** for innovation economy



**6th** highest recognition of flagship cultural institutions



<sup>†</sup>Average frequency between each peer region's 4 largest cities based on weekday frequency of rail/bus journeys.

## The region's key growing pains

SEQ's clear areas of strength and progress are important to differentiate its proposition and profile globally. Yet analysis also points to the region's growing pains around housing, transport, and access to opportunity:

**Getting around and getting on** - SEQ has witnessed a more rapid resurgence of traffic congestion, longer commute times, and distance to jobs and amenities, which affects efficiency and access to opportunity in the region. Despite investment, public transport services remain less fast and frequent than peers in Europe and Asia, and access tails off faster beyond the metropolitan core around Brisbane. Digital connections also still lag, albeit there have been recent improvements.

**Modest productivity and hindering progress in innovation** - Despite the remarkable strength and popularity of the region's education and exports, SEQ's sector mix and rate of external investment are still playing catch up to more prosperous regions. The region still has a smaller knowledge economy and is currently more reliant on healthcare and education as drivers of jobs and growth. While some of its peers are national or international capital cities, SEQ is facing tailwinds to attract R&D, capital, infrastructure, highly employable graduates, and frontier industries to invest in the region. Productivity growth is more constrained than in comparable regions due to this lagging investment.

**Rising housing costs** - Whilst SEQ's more affordable housing than the Sydney or Melbourne regions drove much of the last wave of demand, this advantage has been eroded as the cost of land and construction has driven sprawl, placing additional pressures on the transport network. Homelessness figures are also catching up to international regions. Greater housing choice and mix is needed across the region.

**More social externalities** - Growth pressures are starting to undermine key aspects of liveability and threatening social licence for the direction the city-region wants to go in. The city-region is seeing more young and middle-income people locked out of the housing market and access to job-rich locations.



## SEQ's performance

relative to  
peers across 10  
thematic pillars



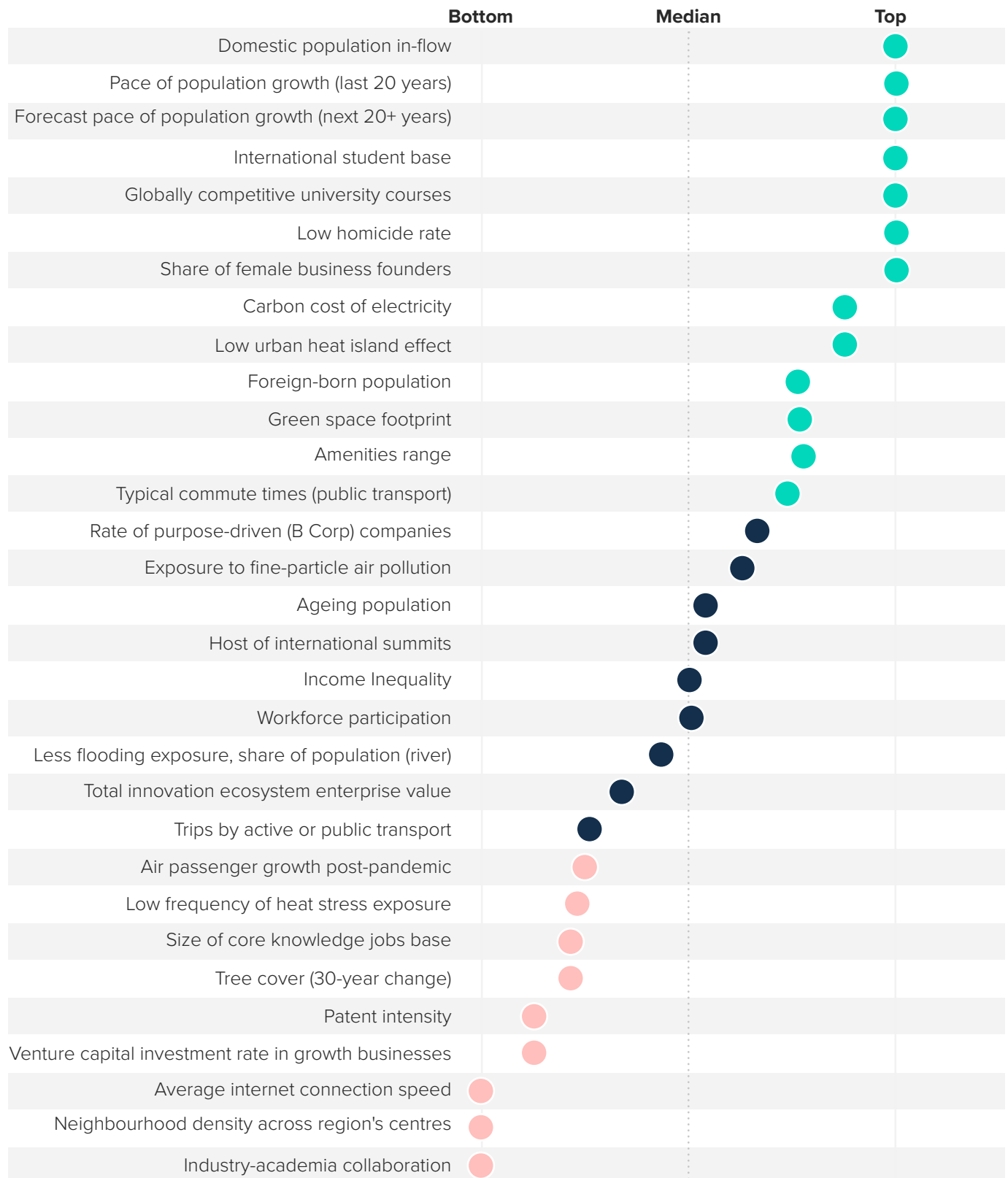
**Source:** The Business of Cities Research. For each of the 10 categories, SEQ has been evaluated in multiple comparative performance benchmarks. Its aggregate score across these benchmarks among the group of 10 peer regions informs its final position. See appendix for methodology.

The report investigates SEQ's economic growth and performance trajectory in more detail, reflecting on the city-regions' short- and long-term trends. For each, the framework observes strengths, challenges and risks, as well as a sample of relevant comparative data, examining the following five key pillars:

- 1 **Growth, Opportunity & Prosperity** - Ability to provide all residents pathways to quality jobs, education, home ownership, entrepreneurship, quality housing and overall wellbeing.
- 2 **Place & Connectivity** - Neighbourhood vibrancy and appeal, and the ability to reliably connect people to jobs, families and services.
- 3 **Talent & Innovation** - Emerging industries, jobs in established industries, its skills pool, and partnership between research and business.
- 4 **Sustainability & Resilience** - Capacity to rebound from shocks, progress on decarbonising its city systems, and responsibly harness its natural resources.
- 5 **Experience & Culture** - Depth and variety of creative, social, and interactive activities that shape the unique identity and character of the city-region.

## SEQ's international performance

Against peer regions across sample of key metrics



Percentiles are used to express SEQ's performance where in some cases data is not available for all peers; e.g., where Brisbane is 1<sup>st</sup> of 10 = 100%; where Brisbane is 3<sup>rd</sup> of 8 = 71%.

## SEQ's overall trends vs. peer regions

### Improved

- ▲ Investment appeal
- ▲ Newcomer & int'l student demand

### Maintained (2017 - 2025)

- ▶ Economic productivity
- ▶ Economic sector mix

### Overtaken

- ▼ Innovation ecosystem
- ▼ Housing affordability

## SEQ's observed structural challenges

These symptoms point to structural issues where SEQ is internationally an outlier:

**Rate of infrastructure investment and delivery is not keeping pace** - Forthcoming rail and bus rapid transit investments and improvements will make a significant difference. But at a wider picture they are insufficient to make SEQ's urban platform ready for future cycles of economic opportunity. Frequency and reliability of connections between as well as within SEQ's multiple centres will be essential to maximise the benefits of an integrating region. Rising vulnerabilities to climate risks also suggest more investment and innovation is required to adapt, mitigate, and also commercialise the region's expertise in resilience and disaster management internationally.

**Unscrambled brand and place identities** - SEQ as an administrative label does not command visibility as a distinct "place brand" or competitive identity in external markets. Most of the region's constituent cities and places have communicable assets but lack national and international recognition in their own right. Brisbane has been surfacing strongly as a popular and distinctive city, and gateway to the region for talent, investment and opportunities. Yet unlike most comparable city-regions, Brisbane is not yet fully accepted or utilised as the "attack brand". Localised competition risks diluting the potential to amplify the collective international reputation.

### **Fragile and fragmented governance of the region**

- Notwithstanding important instances of progress, the governance structures and coordination habits are less developed than in most peer city-regions – whether within, across, and between tiers of government, or between industry, research and education. The current result, despite much common goodwill and endeavour, is less ownership or directional consensus around SEQ's vision, path or proposition.

**The costs of low density are accumulating** - The result is less efficient connections than most of its peers, and less of the critical mass centres tend to rely on to develop mixed economies with gravitational pull. Less of the urban fabric is suited to the proximity and amenity needs of talent and innovators, and the 'high experience' expectations of visitors. The region is home to several very promising innovation precincts, with great potential to scale and mature in order to excel internationally. More broadly however, the indications suggest that current patterns of land use do not favour long-run competitiveness.

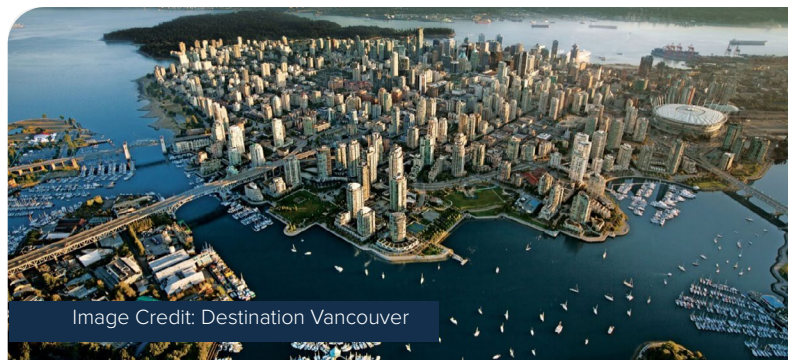


Image Credit: Destination Vancouver

## What globally competitive regions are doing to flourish

This comparative benchmarking not only reveals the rate of progress other regions are making, it also highlights the acceleration of projects, reforms, investments and collaborations that are being undertaken.

Many of these regions share with SEQ a context consisting of multiple cities and localities, whilst also being much smaller than the state government. Seattle (Puget Sound), Greater Manchester, South Holland and Singapore are showing pathways to grow the high value jobs base, sequence regional deals, and strengthen their city-regional brand.

### Common policy and strategy directions among SEQ peer regions and reference points

- 1 Intensification around transport stations and strategic hubs well beyond the region's main CBDs
- 2 A single regional innovation strategy organised around priority innovation districts, proactively convening the technology base
- 3 More mature arrangements for organising, resourcing and co-ordinating their growth effectively
- 4 Figuring out how to tell their regional story to the world in a courageous and positive-sum way
- 5 Targeted approaches to attract international talent and entrepreneurs motivated by mission
- 6 Pursuing a high calibre of visitor and cultural economy in order to drive trade and enterprise



## 📍 The big opportunities for SEQ

- ➔ **Use economic transition to deepen economic specialisation** - The region has some observed strengths, but these do not yet reveal themselves as globally distinctive or compelling. There is a clear opportunity to harness the current wave of technology and artificial intelligence (AI) to make overdue manufacturing upgrades viable and scalable. Demographic trends, and the attractiveness of the region to retirees, point to a need to excel in the grey economy - tourism, wealth management, and advisory know-how.
- ➔ **Use the emerging 'city-region consciousness' and appetite for cooperation to take collaboration to the next level** - This includes an enhanced city and regional identity. The DNA of SEQ with its history, diversity and personality can lend it a more distinctive cultural resonance and global reach.
- ➔ **Quality and resilience of place** - The region is starting to benefit from an improved business, social, digital and cultural environment. This is underpinned by modern facilities and amenities, a higher calibre of precincts and 'urban villages', and instances of very high-quality built environment and public realm. There is an opportunity to speed up the transition from 'big box' to 'whole place' and embed more social and environmental resilience into SEQ's growth model.
- ➔ **Become a stronger magnet for mobile prime-age talent as the diseconomies of other cities multiply** - This requires proactive positioning as well as accidental benefiting from dynamics in other cities and nations.
- ➔ **Adopt a decisively strategic position within the Asia-Pacific region** - Taking strategic advantage of the port in Brisbane and closer proximity to large and rapidly growing trading partners in Asia, in the way regions like Vancouver has done. Servicing of bilateral Asia-Pacific corridors of technology, trade and innovation has the potential to attract many more high-value jobs into the local ecosystem.
- ➔ **The 2032 platform** - Hosting the 2032 Games offers unique potential as a platform to place the region on a new growth trajectory, drive new infrastructure investment, attract additional private sector investment, and capture the interest and attention of a global audience. If harnessed correctly, the legacy benefits of the Games can extend into the following decade and beyond.
- ➔ **Sensitively support and spotlight First Nations cultures** - Supporting reconciliation and fostering opportunities for First Nations peoples to achieve their aspirations will ensure First Nations peoples and cultures become an integral part of SEQ's global standing and outward-facing identity. As the region matures, this genuine partnership will enhance both the region's brand and its visitor experience, demonstrating its commitment to diversity and inclusion on the world stage through celebration of unique Indigenous cultures and assets.

# ! The high risks of status quo for SEQ

Equally the direction of travel in many of the indices, and the wider competitive environment, point to several strategic risks if SEQ's trajectory does not benefit from intentional and strategic inputs over the next decade.

## Short-term risks

- Games leveraging is not ambitious and lacks sophistication, with limited perceived dividend for residents and limited global reputational enhancement or proposition.
- A growth management system that is lethargic and produces chronic shortages.
- Fail to meet demand for alternative housing and lifestyle choices. Mid-size corporates can't grow due to talent and affordability constraints.
- The momentum created by the foundation SEQ City Deal evaporates as changes in national policy direction becomes clearer.
- Growth is perceived by the community as uninspiring, costly and low amenity.
- Lack of strategic courage, know-how or/and collective will to succeed in future industries and foster the workforce and ecosystems they require.

## Mid-term risks

- Does not become a host for new industry sectors and high-value-added activities, or a major trade and innovation entrepôt. The region remains a third division player in the global innovation economy.
- SEQ becomes a microcosm of Los Angeles – locked in to traffic congestion, compromised liveability, corroded services, and unbridgeable social divides.
- Projection to the world of SEQ as a global city-region remains locked into a lower value leisure formula, with a focus on 'fun' rather than enrichment, innovation, and inspiration.
- Communities lose their authentic sense of place, do not build strongly localised interests and direction, and their stories and shared narrative become indistinct.
- Unremitting perceptions of housing 'emergency' and pressures for housing policy response consume policy debate and militate against the prospects for collaborative governance.
- SEQ's benefits to Queensland and Australia are reduced. Australia never accrues from the financial and soft power benefits of the nation's 'Big 3' global calibre economies.

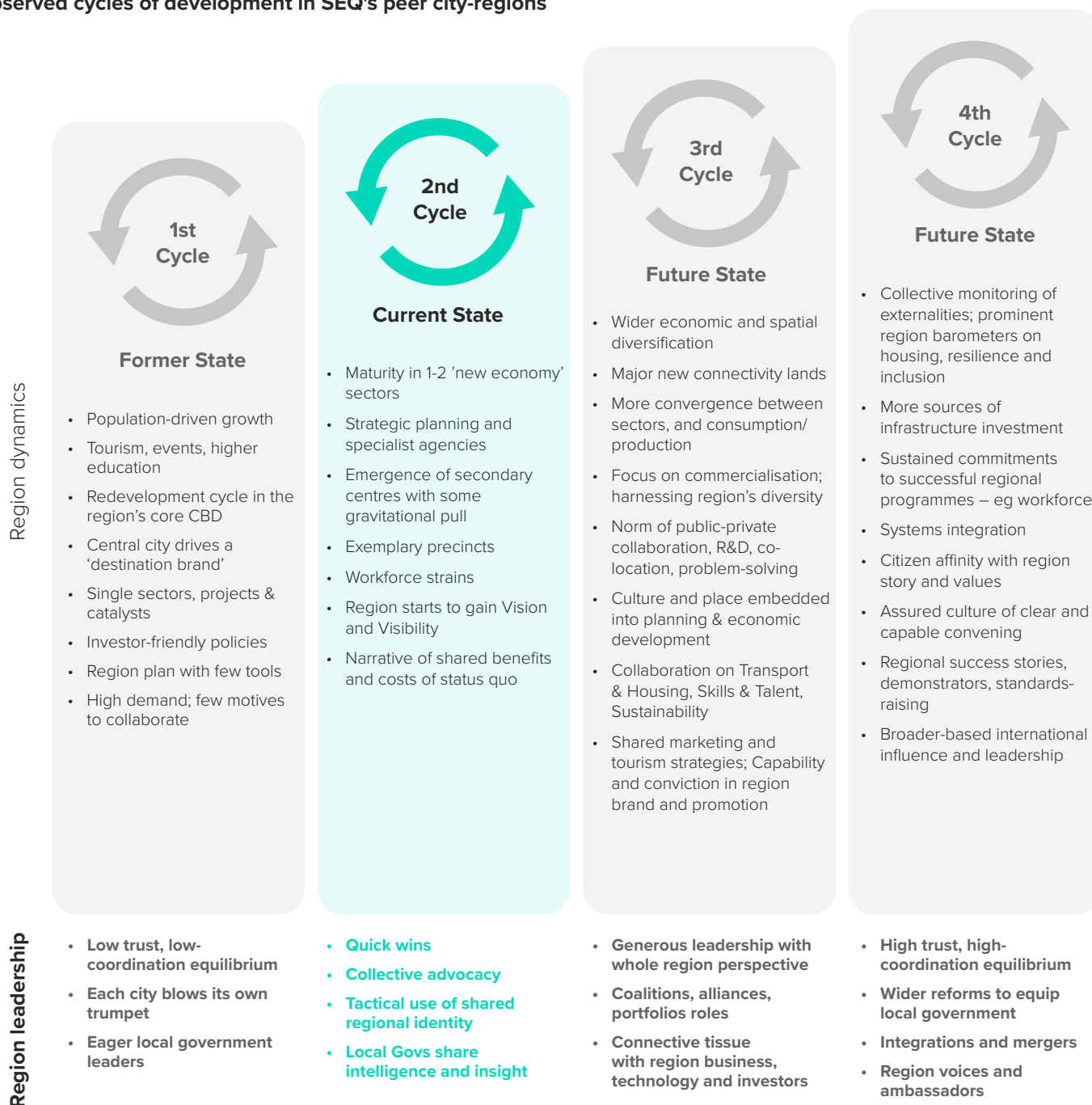
# Next steps: Imperatives for SEQ

As city-regions develop the scale and reach to become intentional players on the global stage, they tend to progress through distinct cycles of metropolitan and regional development (see Chart).

SEQ has been enjoying the fruits of a long first cycle of population growth and central business district (CBD)-driven investment. It is now experiencing some features of a second cycle (current state) shaped by new industries, agency coordination and long-term collaborative partnerships with higher tiers of government.

**SEQ's strategic agenda relates to how to shift decisively into the second cycle and then eventually adopt third cycle (future state) approaches**, when regions build serious corridor relationships internationally, tell their story with real confidence, and diversify the locations and leadership that drive the region.

## Observed cycles of development in SEQ's peer city-regions



# Recommended actions

A roadmap for SEQ's collective success relies on three core principles:

## Recognise the need to intentionally compete globally as one region

01



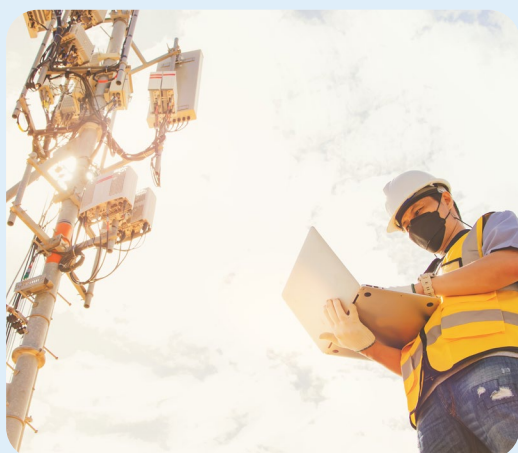
Image Credit: BEDA

SEQ is a region whose huge potential relies on a shared conviction in good growth, a competitive mindset, and a regional storytelling ambition. SEQ must build up, define and project a cohesive identity as a globally competitive city-region if it chooses to maximise the 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games. This is more than a single message or strapline. It is about multiple voices – public, civic and business – sharing the vision and confidence to communicate a story about the region to internal and external audiences and build the experience, places and policy to match.

### The need to compete

<i>Near-term (18 months)</i>	<i>Mid-term &amp; pre-Games (2027-2030)</i>	<i>Long-term (into 2032 &amp; beyond)</i>
<p><b>Identify calendar and catalysts</b> for region's international positioning, influence-building and diplomacy.</p> <p><b>Make SEQ real</b> - A sense of the SEQ experience and advantage needs places, examples, and people that embody it. Raising popular visibility is key. Widen the evidence base to include stories of companies and opportunities that rely on SEQ as a whole region.</p>	<p><b>First concrete and complementary city-region positioning</b>, distilling primary assets and joint messaging.</p> <p><b>Shared promotion of success stories</b> to build cohesion and confidence in region-place communications and marketing.</p> <p><b>Identify organisational capacity</b> and partnerships capable of adopting a recruitment and invitational mindset.</p> <p><b>Seek external validation</b> and challenge to any regional narrative activity.</p> <p><b>Careful step-up of visibility</b> – test approaches with particular internationally market-facing sectors - e.g. Real Estate.</p>	<p><b>Partnerships with government agencies.</b></p> <p><b>Recruit more</b> of the ambivalent larger corporates.</p> <p><b>Champions, exposure, alumni, events, and endorsements</b> from third parties.</p> <p><b>Build and test a narrative matrix</b> that speaks to different sectors.</p>





SEQ will never become a highly productive economy without stronger connections of all kinds – especially transport and digital. Achieving these requires deeper dialogue and consensus building about the right growth model for the region, and the specific projects and investments that can shift SEQ towards that desired future. A rigorous spatial and economic strategy to collectively drive focus, vision and prioritisation for the region, can help anticipate what new economies need and identify which infrastructure items can deliver the most returns in the form of a higher productivity economy. SEQ's network of innovation hubs and places are opportunities but need scale, specialisation, and connectivity, with the link to research excellence particularly important.

## Connectivity & economy

### Near-term (18 months)

**Expedite a Regional Economic & Employment Strategy** - Ensure it goes beyond naming industry sectors and clusters, with a focus on productivity, location needs (e.g. Districts, Zones & Corridors), economic identity, and a platform for investor friendliness. Use this to develop an emerging regional growth narrative.

**City Deal** development should then align with and reinforce this economic direction.

**Invite more scenario-testing, studies and dialogue** about trade-offs of the SEQ growth model. Reveal a stronger case for why more coordinated regional growth planning is needed and what management mechanisms are required.

**Identify specifically where and how new infrastructure can best** address SEQ's competitive risks & opportunities.

**Identify industry-specific** activities that have a whole of SEQ agenda and that are easy to get momentum on.

### Mid-term & pre-Games (2027-2030)

**More attention to policy integration** between:

1. Land use, housing and transport;
2. Fiscal and political; and,
3. Economic, social and environmental.

**Use large catalysts** likely linked to the Games (e.g. major transport projects, upgraded airports, housing investments, anchor institutions) to drive more strategic integration.

**Assess what kind of multi-centre strategy** can work in SEQ.

**Identify a small number of serious agenda-setting KPIs** capable of acting as a touchstone for the city-region (inc. social), with a monitoring framework attached.

**Identify and support the demonstrators** of more intensive and effective land use that can provide a template for alternative growth models.

**Engage with SEQ Group of Universities**, build up fresh collective approaches to skills programmes, pathways, and innovation incentives.

### Long-term (into 2032 & beyond)

Framework for a long-term economic delivery system.

**The next City Deals**, including opportunities to integrate infrastructure investment systems, and better utilise assets to support growth management.

Explore alternative revenue models and business models.

Promotion and diffusion of development and place management tools.

**Begin to consider the wider 'macro region'** (North/South) and how that will integrate as connections improve.

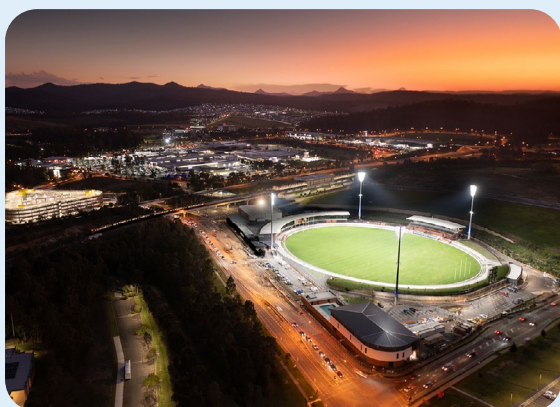


Image Credit: Ipswich City Council

SEQ must avoid falling into a low-coordination equilibrium. Achieving this demands stronger channels for collaboration across government and the private sector to align on desired outcomes and ensure swift, sustainable execution. Shared strategies need to be backed by faster decision-making, synchronised budget cycles, and long-term financial commitments that create fertile ground for effective partnerships. While large-scale governance reforms may take time, SEQ can make progress by innovating procurement processes, exploring new partnership models, and encouraging universities to take more active roles in anchoring the region's innovation economy.

### Continuous coordination and collaboration across the region

<i>Near-term (18 months)</i>	<i>Mid-term &amp; pre-Games (2027-2030)</i>	<i>Long-term (into 2032 &amp; beyond)</i>
<p><b>Maximise 'whole-of-SEQ' conferences and gatherings</b> to reach into the ecosystem.</p> <p><b>Identify small but broad cohorts from across Local Government Areas</b> to ensure they are briefed and made to feel part of a forward-looking SEQ agenda.</p> <p><b>Crib sheets/playbooks of good practice for Local Government Areas</b> around development, innovation &amp; identity.</p> <p><b>Audit awareness, affinity and ambition for SEQ</b> - Identify partners with the appetite, motivation, energy &amp; persuasive power.</p> <p><b>Look to enable strong SEQ-related working relationships</b> and collaborative partnerships between different departments of Queensland Government.</p>	<p><b>Build up regional coordination and convening power</b> - To include the business community. Insource collaborative tasks wherever possible.</p> <p><b>Increase pace and/or depth</b> of interaction with leaders beyond government – inc. ED, civics, sport, tourism, local governments, and major businesses.</p> <p><b>National engagement</b> - Pursue stronger dialogue and knowledge-sharing with national peer regions (Sydney/6 cities, Greater Melbourne) for learning and combined advocacy.</p>	<p><b>Use the post-Olympic/Paralympic international relationships dividend</b> to connect 'Team SEQ' up to more peer regions and global corridors.</p>



“

*These agendas are not one organisation or stakeholder's responsibilities. They point to a collectively owned and shared impetus, as well as coalitions, potential future reforms and capacity-building so that the consciousness and the 'guiding mind' for the region becomes better established.*

”





# 1. Growth, Opportunity & Prosperity



## Summary

**SEQ continues to experience faster population demand** and demographic change than nearly all international regions of its size and calibre. It is also now one of the more diverse populations among its peer group, which reflects its attractiveness as a place to live, study and retire. However, it also has a greater ageing population than most of its peers, placing a higher premium on attracting and accommodating talent.

**Population growth rather than productivity drives more of SEQ's economic performance** than in most peer regions. The whole region – even including the urban productivity engine of Brisbane – experiences a productivity gap versus international peer regions.

**SEQ's sector mix is still less conducive to long-run prosperity** - SEQ is diversifying its economy into more tradeable knowledge jobs. However, it is still playing catch up with others internationally, with a higher economic dependence on tourism and natural resources. Its advantages in higher education are yet to be translated into a higher productivity, higher investment economy which hosts multiple fast-growth frontier sectors.<sup>8</sup>

**Maintaining SEQ's affordability advantage is key** - SEQ has typically been a region with more opportunity to access jobs that can meet the costs of housing and high standards of living. However the medium-term picture, in line with national trends, is the region becoming more unaffordable more quickly than its peers, even as many other regions globally remain more expensive. This points to a need to expand the range and quality of work-live opportunities for new and existing residents.



## Growth, Opportunity & Prosperity

This section refers to the drivers of demand for a region, and the conditions that allow residents and new arrivals to access jobs, training and good wages, and for their businesses to access investment and achieve scale.

The spread of opportunity is important as well as the scale. More avenues for education, jobs, and entrepreneurship – and fewer people locked out of the fruits of an urbanising economy – mean more residents have the chance to thrive and stay in the region for longer.

This section includes measures of demographic change, workforce, social mobility, job creation and the ingredients to attract international business and investment.



Image Credit: BEDA

SEQ has been growing strongly and opportunities for work, education and investment have been improving relative to its group of global peer regions.

### Macro factors appear positive

Brisbane is the major driver of SEQ's improved global reach. The city is now among the 80 best connected locations in the circuits of the global services economy, albeit amid rapid improvement in Asia-Pacific cities such as Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, and other fast-growing hubs in Africa such as Casablanca and Nairobi. The overall scale and stability trajectory in Brisbane puts it among the top 5% of cities globally, with the Gold Coast in the top 12%.<sup>9</sup> The region's forecasted GRP growth rate of over 3% over the next 15 years compares very favourably with peers as varied as Barcelona Region and Greater Manchester.<sup>10</sup> The forecast size of Brisbane's urban economy in 2040 is set to be larger than Bangkok is today.

### More people are seeking SEQ's opportunity

Since 2000, SEQ has been experiencing successive cycles of population growth and diversification. Among peers, the region's population growth has been the fastest in the 21st century so far (+45% since 2004), driven mainly by overseas migration (notably from the U.K., New Zealand, India, China, South Africa and the Philippines) as well as high migration from within Australia.<sup>11</sup>

## Headlines

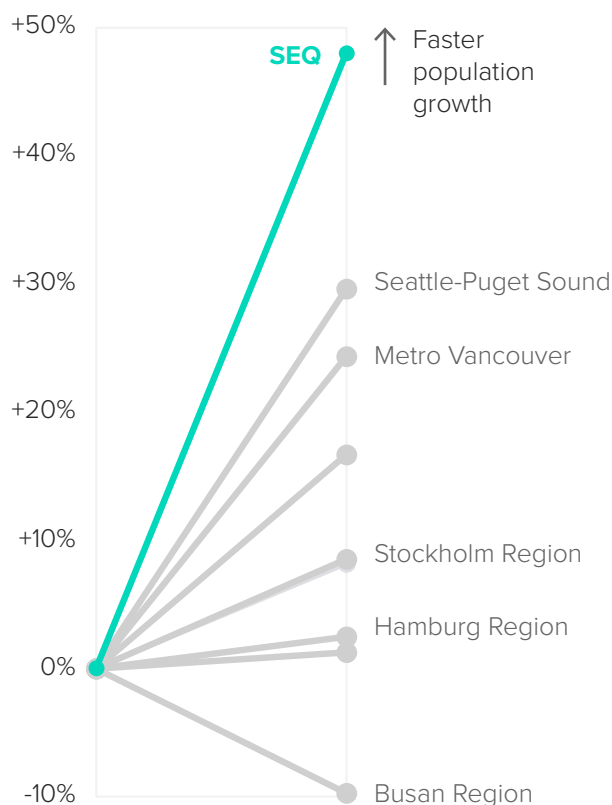
- ➔ SEQ maintains the fastest pace of past and future population growth among peer regions.
- ➔ SEQ has seen a more robust post-pandemic bounce back for investment, and strong signs in events and visitation.
- ➔ Affordability has been declining faster than other similar regions internationally.

## Surprises

- ! In 20 years' time, SEQ is on track to grow to the current economic scale that larger cities such as Bangkok enjoy today.
- ! Impressively SEQ has the second lowest income inequality among its English-speaking peers.
- ! SEQ's population is becoming more culturally diverse, although many other highly liveable regions globally have a much larger population born overseas.

## SEQ's population outlook outpaces the rest

Projected % growth of population to 2044



Source: TBoC Research based on local census data sources & UN WUP

The region is also on track for the fastest population growth over the next 15-20 years.<sup>12</sup> By 2046, SEQ is set to be home to almost 6 million people, a 48% increase from current figures.<sup>13</sup> By 2046, it is estimated that SEQ's population will be as large as the population of Singapore in 2024. Its pace of growth surpasses all other peer regions and is more than 30% faster than next-fastest Seattle/Puget Sound.

## SEQ is becoming a much more diverse and cosmopolitan region

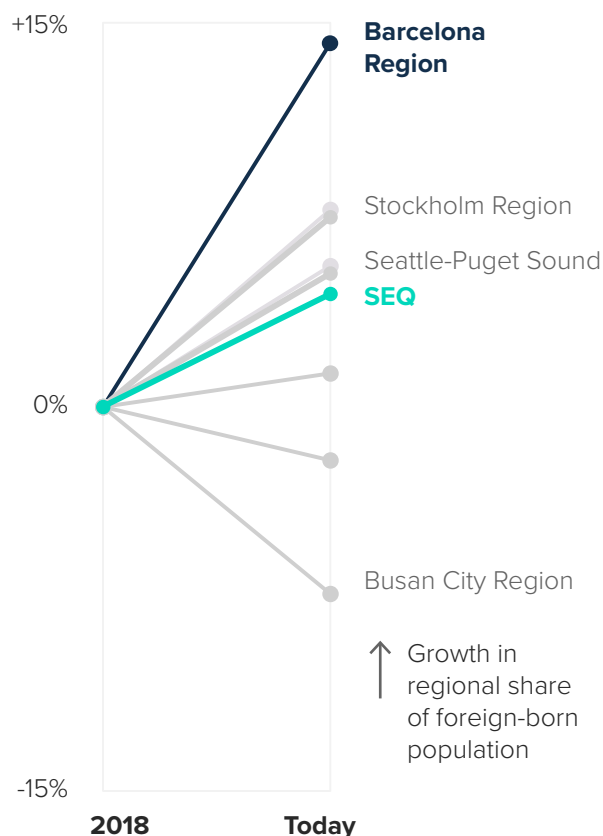
SEQ remains the third most diverse region, behind only Stockholm and Vancouver, based on the share of people born overseas, rising from 25% to 28% foreign-born since 2017.<sup>14</sup> This reflects the region's appeal for global talent alongside domestic newcomers.

## Corporates are attracted to SEQ's fundamentals

SEQ's largest city Brisbane is now impressively in the top 50 globally for attraction of regional headquarters, even amid very strong competition across the Asia-Pacific.<sup>15</sup> Demand for Brisbane and SEQ more widely has seen the region become the second-highest for central office rents among its peer regions, and highest recent year-on-year growth, reflecting enthusiasm for assets especially in urban cores.<sup>16</sup> The region plays host to the second

## Steady increase in diversity

% growth in share of people born abroad for each region



Source: OECD Data Explorer

highest growth since the pandemic among office markets in the Asia-Pacific, and significantly lower vacancy rates than most.<sup>17</sup>

SEQ is more often a hub for people seeking to be based for remote work, rather than a location whose corporates offer remote options. Brisbane was recently in the bottom three among international cities for the share of listed vacancies advertising opportunities for remote work.<sup>18</sup>

## Opportunities to invest in SEQ are improving, especially in real estate

SEQ is maturing as a location for national and international investment. For some time, real estate and infrastructure have led industrial and commercial foreign investment. The region is consistently a global top 50 location for cross-border real estate investment,<sup>19</sup> due to its attractive affordability, yields, and improvement potential.<sup>20</sup>

Yet in the last cycle, the scale of overseas investment into SEQ businesses was much lower than city-regions like Vancouver, Barcelona and Seattle.<sup>21</sup> There are now more promising signs of more success in medium-size investments – not just acquisitions – with AI projects on par with Vancouver.<sup>22</sup>

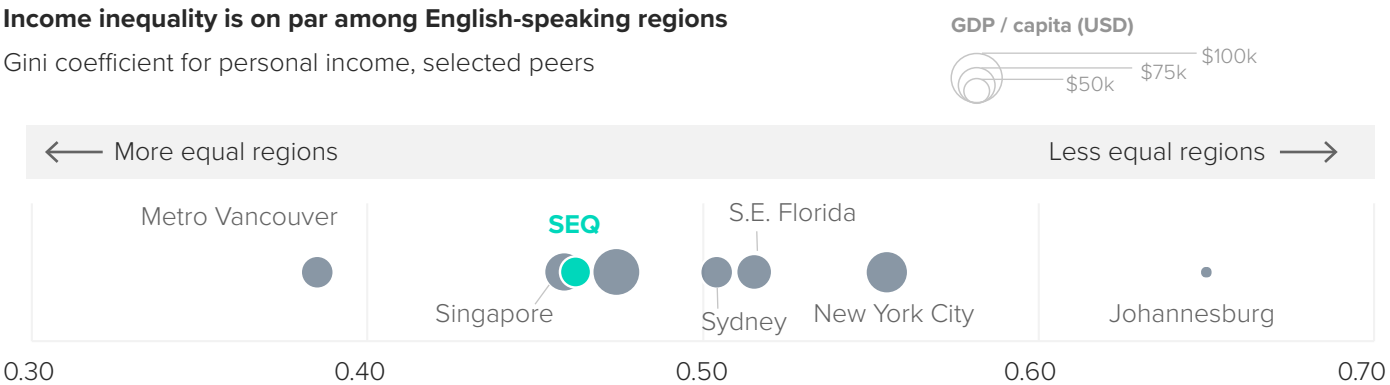
**SEQ remains a popular host and gateway region for international events** given its relative distance from international conference, trade show, and event circuits. A recovery trend is clear, with the number of events hosted back up to 5th among 10 peer regions that are nearly all very popular for rotating events.<sup>23</sup> The Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games is a major opportunity to drive further growth.

**Inequality is moderate and there is more participation in the workforce, especially among women.** More people play an active part in SEQ's labour market than in many regions. It is currently 4th among 10 peer regions for the share of people in jobs, and the highest outside of Europe. At the scale of Greater Brisbane – the closest scale available – income inequality is in the middle of an international comparison – its Gini coefficient (0.46) for income makes it more equal than Seattle/Puget Sound, but more unequal than San Diego and Vancouver regions.<sup>24</sup> Looking to the wider picture, income equality is on a par with Singapore's and stronger than Sydney or New York. However it is notable that since 2017 engagement in the workforce has been falling off faster than elsewhere.<sup>25</sup>



**Income inequality is on par among English-speaking regions**

Gini coefficient for personal income, selected peers



Source: TBoC Research based on local census data

SEQ has better-than-average gender equality in the job market, at 3rd among 10 peers for the gender gap between men and women in full-time work. The trendline over the last five years is encouraging, with a 33% fall in the gender disparity of work opportunities since 2019.<sup>26</sup>

**Affordability advantage remains but is smaller**

In a world of regions experiencing rapid housing cost inflation, housing is still slightly more affordable in SEQ, but costs are rising. People in SEQ still on average spend a lower share of income on rent than most peers and spend the lowest share of income on mortgage payments.<sup>27</sup> Rental affordability of one-bedroom CBD apartments has tended to track on par with peer regions in recent years, although availability of larger family-friendly three-bedroom units is lower.<sup>28</sup>

The region's recent price increases are faster than many of its peer regions, with some parts of SEQ more than doubling in price over a 5-year period, versus an average 25% increase in regions like Vancouver.<sup>29</sup> As a result, metropolitan Brisbane is now regularly among the 15 most unaffordable home ownership markets in the English-speaking world, on par with Miami but more unaffordable than Seattle.<sup>30</sup>

These rapid increases come alongside concerns about the impact of the 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games on housing and homelessness, with demand for hotel accommodation set to rise due to the Games.<sup>31</sup> While policy solutions to this anticipated increase – including public support for new hotel development – are debated, SEQ has the opportunity to link incentives for new development with increased capacity and social supports to prevent homelessness.

# Prosperity

For the purposes of this report, 'Prosperity' refers to the ability of a region to deliver economic growth over the medium and longer terms that is sustainable, broad-based and raises standards of living and well-being for residents across the age and income spectrum. It is shaped in part by spending power but also encompasses factors such as equitable access to good jobs, networks and opportunities. This section includes measures of income, productivity, life satisfaction, work-life balance and openness.



Image Credit: Queensland University of Technology

## Headlines

- ➔ Overall economic growth is driven by a growing population, not growing productivity.
- ➔ The size of SEQ's professional and highly educated workforce is smaller than its international peer group.
- ➔ Housing pressures have contributed to higher increases in youth unemployment and homelessness than other locations.

## Surprises

- ! Brisbane has among the 50 largest concentrations of millionaires in the world.
- ! SEQ's population is ageing faster than all but two peers.
- ! SEQ has 50% more jobs in the health sector than the peer city-region average.

Translating SEQ's rapid growth into success and prosperity for all residents and the whole population mix is a clear challenge.

At the top of the prosperity spectrum, Brisbane is a significant wealth hub, home to one of the 50 largest clusters of high-net-worth individuals in the world, with 27,200 millionaires. In a context of more wealth congregating in city-regions, this cluster is eclipsed by Miami, Seattle and Vancouver, which reflects other regions' successful attraction of successful entrepreneurs and wealth holders.<sup>32</sup>

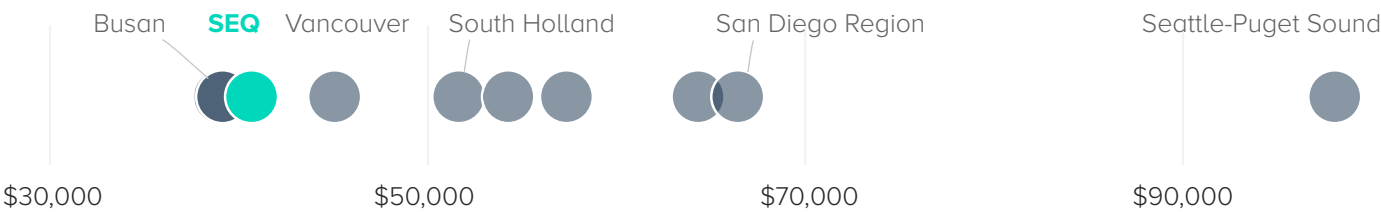
### Productivity fundamentals have room to improve

Productivity in SEQ remains 8th among 10 peer regions.<sup>33</sup> Since 2017, the region's path has tracked closer to lower-productivity peers of Busan and Barcelona, while South Holland and South East Florida have widened their advantage.<sup>34</sup> Labour productivity is also middling, despite the positive effect of commodities sectors on SEQ's figures.<sup>35</sup> The overall picture reflects limitations of the region's current sector mix, and an imperative to focus more squarely on what it will take to foster and retain high value businesses in the ecosystem.<sup>36</sup>



SEQ’s productivity is behind and the gap to many regions is large

GDP per capita for SEQ and peer regions, \$US



Change in Position since 2017	Increase	Decline	No change / new peer
	South Holland (+1)	Vancouver (-1) San Diego Region (-1)	Busan SEQ Seattle-Puget Sound

Source: OECD Data Explorer - metropolitan scale

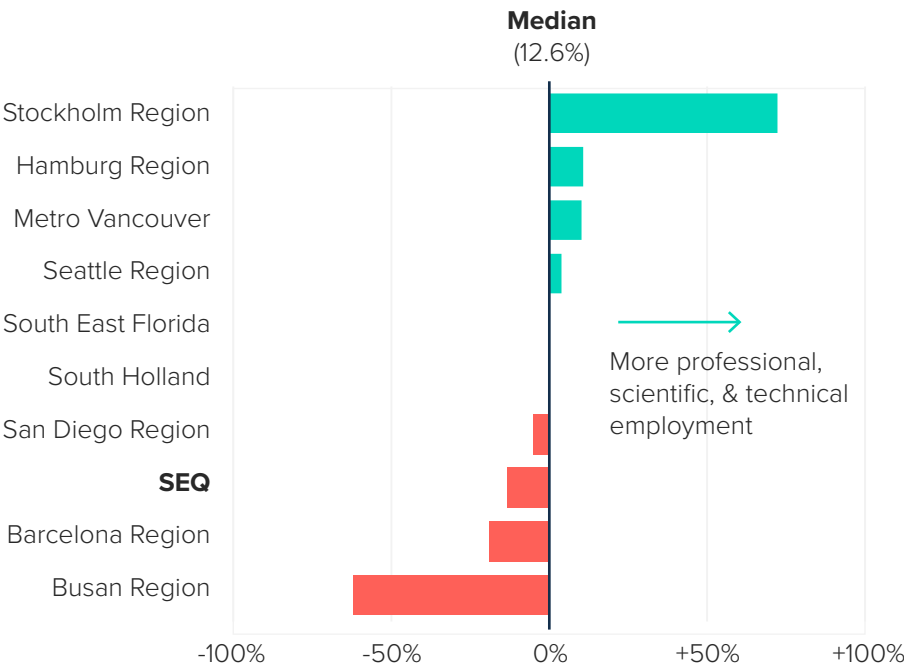
SEQ’s current sector mix is still evolving to support a high productivity, high innovation economy

Available comparative data suggests the region has the third smallest share of people working in professional and business services, 5% fewer jobs than average in manufacturing, four times as many of jobs in natural resources and a much more sizeable gambling industry than in other regions.<sup>37</sup> The region is also distinctive in maintaining an internationally significant outsourcing (Business Process Outsourcing) sector.<sup>38</sup>

In 2017, SEQ’s share of export-oriented sectors was the lowest of any peer at 54%. The region is specialising but still has smaller clusters of knowledge economy industries than its peer group. 7% of jobs are in financial activities compared to 9% on average among peers, and despite adding more than 40,000 people in professional and science roles in the last five years, the relative scale of this jobs base is 13% smaller.<sup>39</sup> This makes the forecast annual growth of the knowledge economy (4%+) in the region’s core across the current decade very welcome to ensure the region as a whole can compete against other international knowledge-rich regions.<sup>40</sup>

SEQ has fewer jobs in typically high-value industries

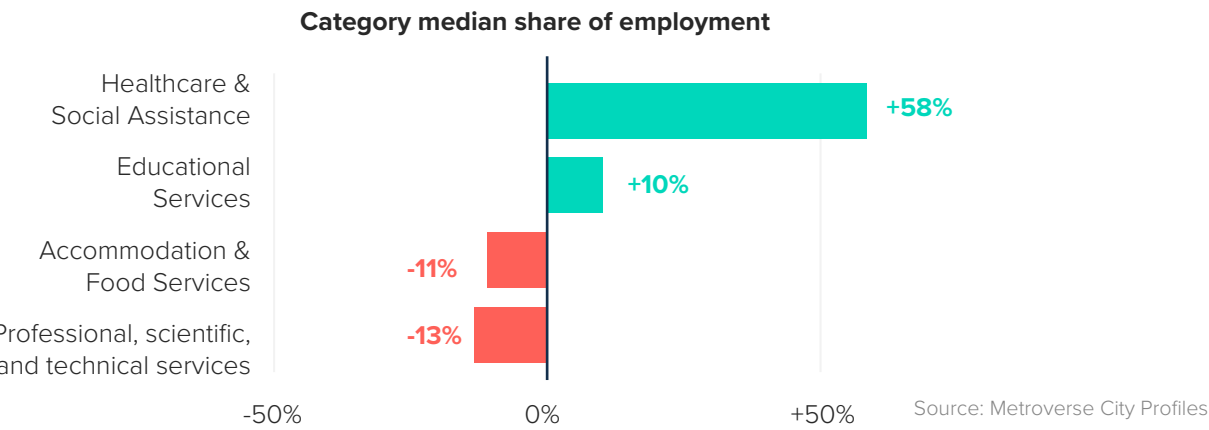
Employment in professional, scientific, and technical services, % divergence from peer median



Source: Metroverse City Profiles

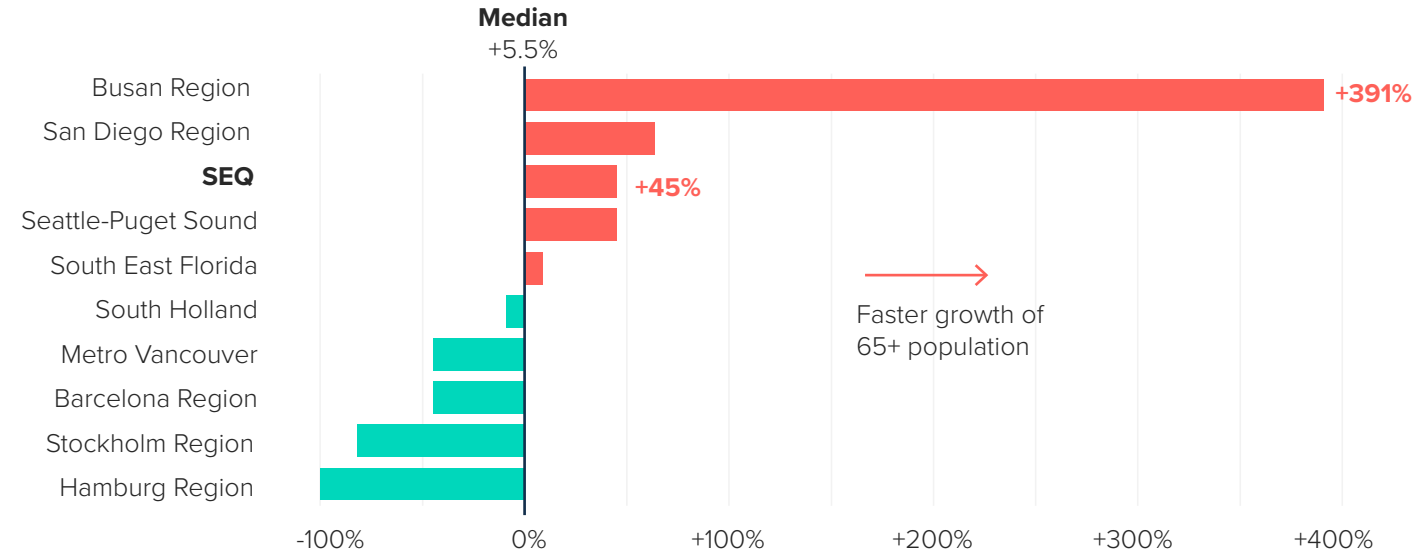
**SEQ relies more on jobs in education and health**

% deviation from peer category median share of employment



**SEQ has been ageing faster than most**

% deviation from median growth in share of 65+ population, since 2017



Source: OECD Data Explorer



Image Credit: Experience Somerset

In line with a broader national trend, jobs continue to be concentrated in healthcare, education and social care, with 50% more jobs in health than in peer regions. These sectors have experienced the third largest increase in jobs in SEQ in the past five years.<sup>41</sup>

**SEQ's ageing population is a growing factor**

SEQ is ageing faster than most other regions. Among its peers, SEQ is now 6th-highest for elderly dependency – that is, people in retirement – and the 4th highest share of people aged 65+ regardless of retirement status.<sup>42</sup> Only San Diego and Busan are ageing faster.

The region currently has a high share of working age population. However there has been a faster decline in the share of young newcomers since 2017 than five of its peers. The region now rates among the two regions with the lowest share of new residents under the age of 25.<sup>43</sup> And amid a recent international trend of declining workforce activity among young people, joblessness among young people in SEQ is now higher than in most peer regions.<sup>44</sup>

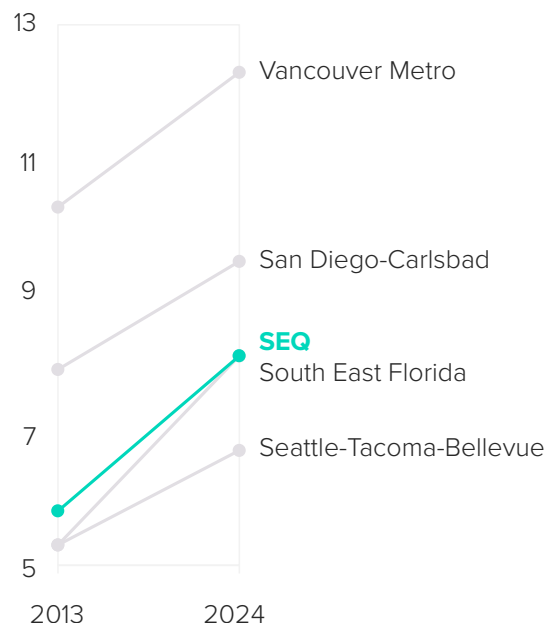
## Pricier essentials than most

Most metrics and surveys of affordability suggest SEQ has become more expensive more quickly than other regions, especially in the region's core. By price-to-income, the 10-year housing market trend in Greater Brisbane has also been among the sharpest of its peer group (see Chart). One demographic, students, rate SEQ's largest city Brisbane among the 20% hardest to afford.<sup>45</sup> Another, expats, now rate Brisbane's everyday living costs among the more expensive half of cities in the global corporate circuit, although it is still more affordable than most of its pricey peer group (3rd).<sup>46</sup>

The symptoms of housing stress are apparent. Latest census figures suggest that 10,000 people, 0.25% of the SEQ population, experienced homelessness on any given night.<sup>47</sup> Although contexts and definitions vary, this figure is in the same ballpark to rates experienced by Greater Vancouver (0.19%) and Greater Manchester (0.26%), city-regions that have become known for deep housing access challenges.<sup>48</sup> This is reflected in a more than 30% rise across Queensland in the number of people accessing homeless services since 2017.<sup>49</sup>

## Among the most unaffordable housing markets

Median multiple, last 10 years, SEQ and English-speaking peers



Source: Demographia International Housing Affordability'

## Co-ordinating city and region to reinforce prosperity: Hamburg Region

A region now of more than 5 million people, Hamburg is now among the 5 most prosperous and investable regions of its size in Europe.<sup>50</sup> Still regarded as one of the world's leading maritime hubs,<sup>51</sup> Hamburg has reinvented itself as a centre for chip manufacturing, port logistics, and green energy, channelling its high rate of public-private R&D collaboration to generate a lead position in growth markets.<sup>52</sup>

After a 20-year redevelopment cycle to double the size of the region's main city centre, attention has since turned to harnessing the whole region on economic development, spatial planning and sustainability. This includes:<sup>53</sup>

- 1 A single innovation strategy organised around priority innovation districts.** Hamburg's investment agency has convened a regional map of the ecosystem, its leading precincts, research-led universities, innovative companies and incubators all contributing to its innovation economy. An innovation alliance jointly managed by the economic and science agencies, has been set up to convene partners regularly across the region.
- 2 Skilled worker strategy.** The region has set up a coordination office to implement and promote best practices to secure skilled

workers. The Hamburg Welcome Centre is a one-stop-shop that provides services to foreign skilled workers – from German-language courses to work permits, job coaching and counselling.

- 3 Shared innovation and competence centres (e.g. for self-driving).** Four testbeds have been introduced across the region to promote fresh transport solutions.
- 4 Joint marketing and tourism strategy.** 20 tourism organisations and chambers of commerce across the region have produced a single regional tourism strategy. The various organisations share funds from regional grants and project partners to jointly implement measures around mobility, open data, spatial planning to improve the whole visitor experience, and create aligned marketing collateral for international markets.
- 5 Housing market monitoring.** Most recently the region is creating a single data platform to monitor the supply and demand in the whole housing market. This will create an evidence base to inform decision-making at the regional scale and improve the planning horizon for local governments. 29 indicators have been identified for consistent monitoring.



## 2. Place & Connectivity



### Summary

**SEQ's natural endowment continues to underpin exceptional access to clean air and green space.**

Yet with these figures declining since 2017 faster than most other regions, the region's growth model will need to uphold these liveability assets, including integrating nature into more of SEQ's built form.

**Other regions are benefiting from their next stage of rail investment** - with Barcelona standing out for regional transport, South East Florida gaining fast inter-city rail, and South Holland building out a multi-centre system. While Cross River Rail can be transformational, more is needed to develop more centres of gravity, and ensure the overall system of mobility will sustain lifestyle advantages.

**SEQ remains at a digital disadvantage** - Despite improvements to SEQ's connectivity to the global submarine broadband cable network, internet connections remain less competitive at the global scale due to national policy, limiting the region's ability to attract technology employers.

**International reach of SEQ has improved** via the region's ports and two significant international airports with expanding aviation routes which are set to drive not just visitors but talent and business attraction.

**SEQ shows all the symptoms of a car-oriented region** even though it is still marginally less congested than others. Fewer people can easily reach public transport corridors, uptake is lower, and distances between jobs and work are growing. Responding to this challenge will require infrastructure investment and focused spatial planning.





Image Credit: Tourism Noosa

Quality of place refers to the overall desirability and coherence of a city-region as a mosaic of discrete and distinctive living environments. It refers to urban design, district character, public spaces, availability of amenities and environmental quality. Together these contribute to the well-being of residents and visitors, and act as important signals to international talent and investors. Place is also a driver of collaboration and proximity, and therefore innovation.

This section includes measures of sense of place, localised pollution, access to core amenities, and ease of reaching green and open spaces.

### SEQ maintains a superior quality environment

SEQ still boasts more than 50% extra green space per person (198 sq. m) than its peer average, only surpassed by Seattle and Hamburg regions.<sup>54</sup> This is one of the reasons Brisbane is consistently rated among the most beautiful places to visit.<sup>55</sup> A much larger share of the region's green amenities is outside the core city – nearly 80% compared to less than 40% in South East Florida.<sup>56</sup>

### Pollution is low albeit rising

SEQ's green advantage still also applies to urban precincts – SEQ's main cities benefit from much lower fine particulate pollution than any other peer, with levels 30% lower than next-best Stockholm.<sup>57</sup> However, across the whole region, SEQ slips to 4th among peers (6.4  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ ), increasing more in the last five years than in any other peer region<sup>58</sup> suggesting that more growth is occurring in suburban areas where people are more exposed to airborne pollutants than in other regions.

### Sprawl is a challenge to SEQ's place advantages

The region's built-up area has grown outwards more since 2010 than any other peer region, and the region's built-up density is the lowest among all its peers.<sup>59</sup> As a result the region's major urban growth centres currently lack scale, intensity or critical mass even compared to North American regions, and typically are less than 30% the density of regional centres in Europe.<sup>60</sup>

## Headlines

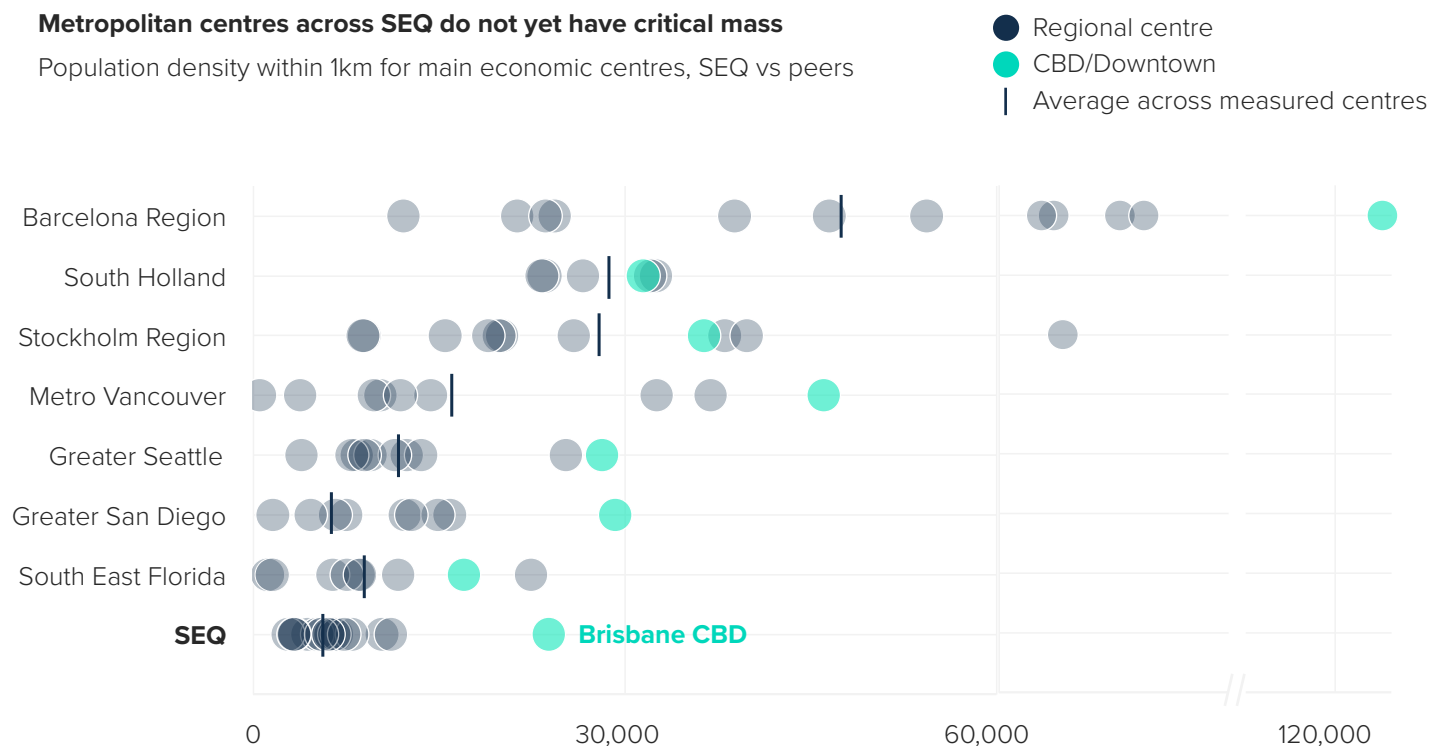
- ➔ SEQ's climate, nature and aesthetic appeal are rated as clear advantages and a strong foundation to manage future growth.
- ➔ SEQ lacks critical mass in most of its urban centres, which limits performance in terms of place amenity and connections.
- ➔ SEQ's development spreads clusters widely, challenging widespread access to education, leisure and work

## Surprises

- ! SEQ has 50% more green space per person than the peer average.
- ! Human experience of fine grain pollution is now only just above SEQ's peer average.
- ! SEQ's full spectrum of communities have less access to shopping, food, and drink, making variety and depth hard to achieve in most regional centres.

## Metropolitan centres across SEQ do not yet have critical mass

Population density within 1km for main economic centres, SEQ vs peers



Sources: GHSL. For each city, centres selected based on local reports.  
Data for Busan & Hamburg unavailable or not comparable.

One effect of this model is a lower range and depth of place amenities across the region. Compared to the peer median, SEQ underperforms on proximity to many core urban amenities, and also has a lower share of amenities concentrated in the region's largest city. This creates a liveability, appeal and talent attraction challenge as the region grows. The region's largest city still has room to absorb new amenities while many of SEQ's other cities have not yet reached a critical mass to develop into fully fledged mixed economies with gravitational pull.<sup>61</sup>



Connectivity refers to how easily and effectively people get around, reach other places and get online. Continual work is needed to enhance the speed, reliability and flexibility with which people, goods and information can move around. Connectivity is about the whole city-region, not just the inner city – as this shapes larger productivity, health and social outcomes. Connectivity also acts as the platform for businesses to operate by allowing them to draw on a larger labour pool and customer base.

This section includes measures of road traffic congestion, modal split, visitation and digital connections.

### SEQ's car dependence is becoming more entrenched

Although SEQ is marginally less congested than its peer average, only SEQ's American peers South East Florida and San Diego choose the car more often.<sup>62</sup>

Over the last six years, the share of SEQ residents choosing sustainable or active transport has declined in line with wider global trends.<sup>63</sup> In 2024 the region has the third lowest overall share of journeys made by sustainable or active transport, below Seattle (25%), Stockholm (59%), and Barcelona (69%).<sup>64</sup>

At the scale of Brisbane, car dependence places the largest city in the SEQ region among the top 5% most congested cities in a group of dozens of cities across the U.S., Australia and Europe. At the same scale, Gold Coast does slightly better but remains congested by global standards, despite its smaller scale.<sup>65</sup> These city-level performance metrics dovetail with regional studies to suggest congestion is getting worse across scales in SEQ.

Typical public transport commute times in core parts of SEQ of 45 minutes and average distances of 11 km are approaching those of much larger regions, such as Sydney, Singapore, and South East Florida. However, only 13% of SEQ residents say that they experience long wait times while commuting by public transport, compared to 45% in South East Florida, or even Seattle, where the figure is 18%.<sup>66</sup>

## Headlines

- ➔ SEQ remains in line with the lowest-performing North American peers for the all-round functionality and performance of its regional mobility system.
- ➔ Although highly interconnected across jobs, education, and leisure, SEQ's reliance on the car undermines the impact of public transport investments.
- ➔ Transport ridership has recovered more slowly than other peer regions.
- ➔ Digital infrastructure has begun to converge to the peer average, but digital downloads are slower than average, and truly regional digital innovation strategies are yet to be seen.

## Surprises

- ! SEQ's largest city achieves CBD public transport connectivity on par with the best peer regions, and bike infrastructure is 20th out of 150 cities globally.
- ! At a regional level, road congestion isn't improving relative to peers, and there are few developed alternatives to the car.
- ! Despite digital advances, other global regions are also benefiting from substantial investment. SEQ's lower baseline means it will have to work harder to keep up.

**Access to public transport routes tails off faster in SEQ than in other regions**

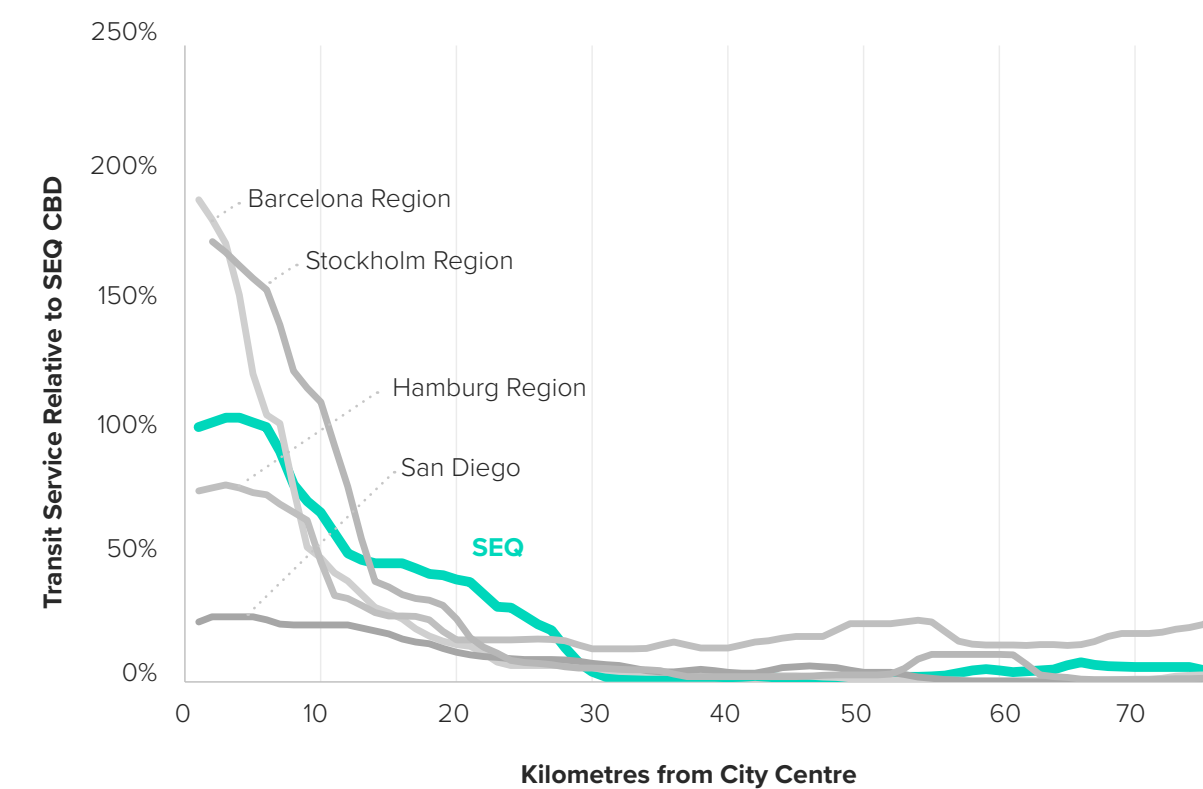
The region’s depth of public transport network – rail, buses, and ferries – is on par with peers near the centre of the region. In SEQ’s metropolitan core, the network concentration and population of the catchment area surpasses Hamburg, Seattle, or San Diego.<sup>67</sup> With 4 million passenger trips each week, SEQ-wide satisfaction tends to be fairly high, notwithstanding concerns of affordability, reliability and frequency.<sup>68 69</sup>

Overall system effectiveness does not match its potential, with the public transport offer around Brisbane recently rated as performing the lowest of Australian capital city-regions for 7am-7pm availability and access.<sup>70</sup> As a result, Brisbane is in the bottom half globally for access to public transport and is last among peers.<sup>71</sup>

Transport access then drops to a much lower scale more quickly around SEQ (see Chart), suggesting that connections around locations such as Moreton Bay, Ipswich, Logan and Gold Coast are consistently weaker than we see in most peer regions.

**SEQ has plenty of connections near its core, but options tail off more quickly**

Concentration of public transport options among selected peers, adjusted for population<sup>1</sup>



1 Based on the number of public transport stops across train, metro, tram, bus, and ferry and the population served by those stops. Source: TBoC Research based on Global Human Settlement Layer



Image Credit: Brisbane City Council



**SEQ’s main centres are less easily and frequently connected than other regions, even allowing for ongoing improvements**

Travel speeds by car are typically 27% faster than in peer regions. Yet public transport journey times between SEQ’s major centres take much longer than in peer cities. This is not only a factor of longer distances – average speeds on public transport are 11% slower. SEQ’s inter-city connections are only about as time-efficient as the least well connected regions of Seattle-Puget Sound and South East Florida.<sup>72</sup>

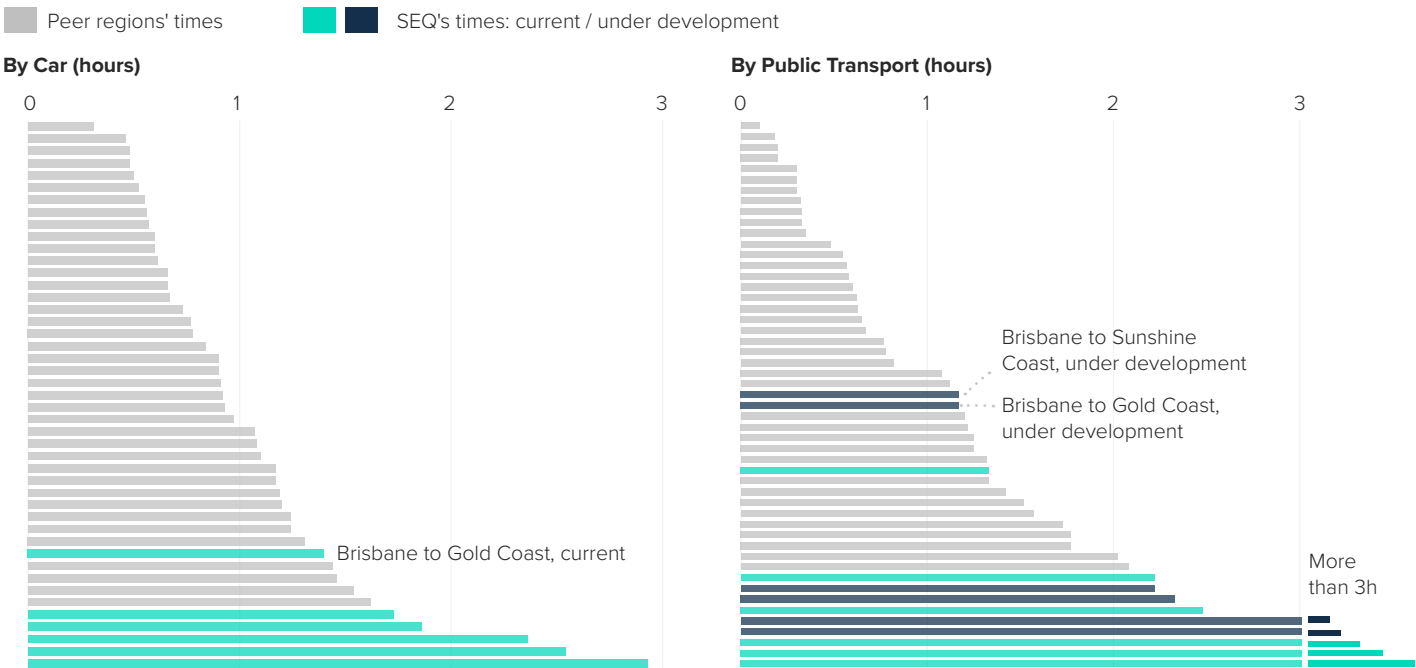
The regions that have achieved a higher-speed system with reliable, frequent journey times under 60 minutes have also tended to experience a much higher take-up of rail by commuters, residents and visitors. While the average of selected peers achieves the standard of a “45-minute” region by car, SEQ’s public transport performance hews closer to a 120-minute region. Across four regions surveyed for standard journey times between major centres, trips tended to take longer in SEQ.<sup>73</sup>

**SEQ’s transport network serves fewer people relative to its scale and reach**

The overall scale of SEQ’s transport network is larger than that of the Seattle and Vancouver regions combined (across rail, metro, bus, tram, and ferry). However, even adjusted for this greater spatial coverage, SEQ’s physical network remains underutilised relative to its best performing peers. SEQ’s network user efficiency is comparable to Seattle/Puget Sound’s – for every 1000 riders on a kilometre of SEQ’s system, Seattle manages 999,<sup>74</sup> though the comparison is starker against successful European regions. For every kilometre of public transport service, Stockholm Region moves about 3 times as many commuters as SEQ, albeit has a higher regional population density. This makes it easier for regions like Stockholm to optimise the return from public infrastructure investment.

**Journeys between major centres take longer, but new public transport will help**

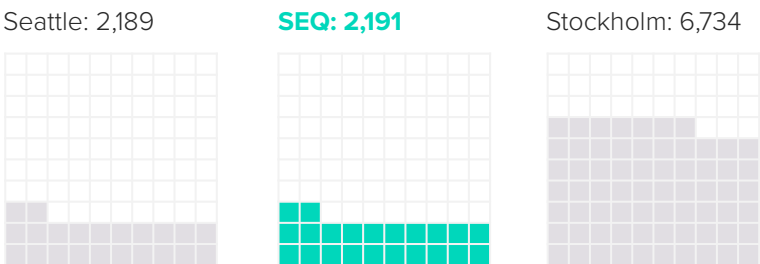
Average journey time between major centres, vs. peers



For international comparison purposes, times are based on analysis of peak & off-peak services; some journeys may be faster than cited figure.  
Source: TBoC Research based on Google Maps

**SEQ’s transport network has scale but moves fewer people**

People moved per kilometre of transport network, 2023 for selected peers



Source: TBoC Research based on local transport agency data

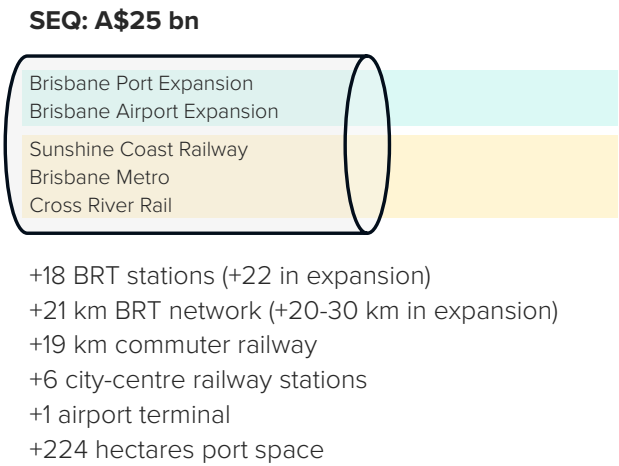
**SEQ’s current infrastructure pipeline is needed but modest**

Large-scale transport investments like the Brisbane Metro and Cross River Rail will close the gap by considerably expanding the range of feasible cross-region journeys for education, work, and leisure, connecting more passengers to the rail network and new mass transport options such as bus rapid transit (BRT). With a greater proportion of its population within 30-45 minutes of Brisbane, and increased connectivity across the region, SEQ can expect ridership to rise and the downward trend in scores to shift toward higher-rated peers Seattle and Vancouver, which are 6th and 5th respectively for sustainable transport share. In Los Angeles County, a similar set of cross-core investments led to a 31% increase in ridership across three formerly disconnected rapid transit lines.<sup>75</sup> The recent announcement of

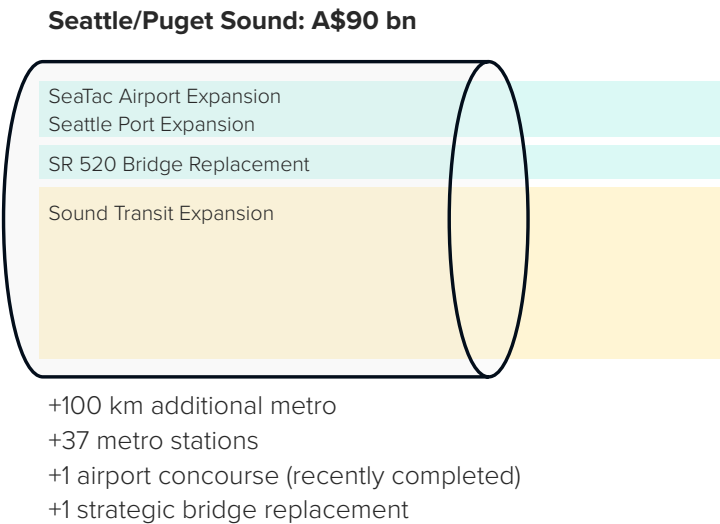
commitment to a business case to support the expansion of Brisbane Metro by a further 22 stations will help add momentum to this long-term effort to increase sustainable mobility, both in time for the 2032 Games and beyond.

These investments form a core part of the region’s current transport pipeline of A\$25 bn (including the Direct Sunshine Coast Railway and the Melbourne-Brisbane Inland Rail link) which together constitute overdue investment in the region’s pace of growth.<sup>76</sup> Other regions are increasing their rate of investment more quickly – for example, in Seattle/Puget Sound, cumulative investments in mobility, ports and airports over the next 20 years reach more than A\$90 bn and is set to include much larger new infrastructure items, such as an additional 100km of rail rapid transit and 37 new rapid transit stations.<sup>77</sup>

**SEQ’s infrastructure pipeline in context**



Source: BEDA, Brisbane: State of the City; TBoC Research based on local reports'



**Cycling infrastructure is better than many places, but overall uptake is limited**

The metropolitan core of SEQ rates an impressive 20th of 150 globally for the total concentration of bike routes, and 9th among larger English-speaking city-regions for the availability of low-stress cycle routes.<sup>78</sup> Yet overall, SEQ still has the 3rd lowest share of journeys made by bicycle.<sup>79</sup>



Image Credit: Brizzly Pix

**SEQ is improving aviation connections but has to compete with others that are more in reach**

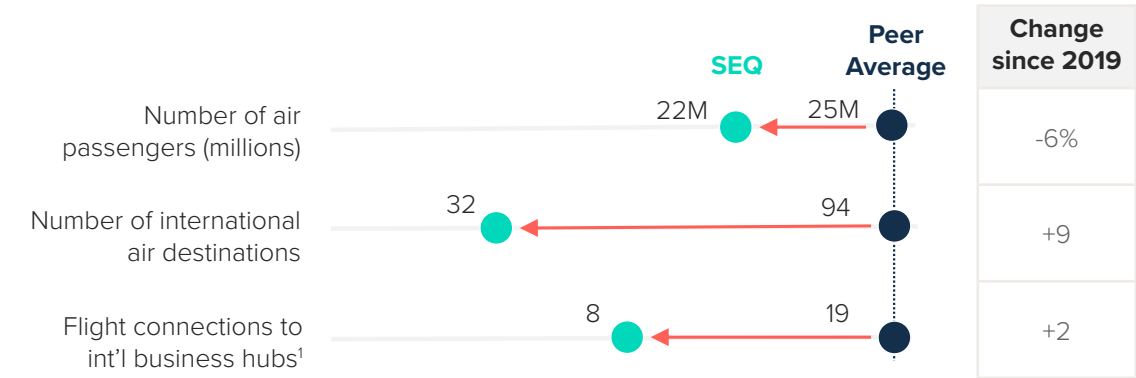
The region’s airport passenger traffic last peaked in 2018, when the region was among the top half of peers for passenger volumes. With the pace of change in post-pandemic success story regions such as South East Florida and San Diego, SEQ has dropped to 8th among 10 for overall air passenger throughput.<sup>80</sup>

One of SEQ’s advantages is that it has 4 airports, including two sizeable international airports, only surpassed by South East Florida. For international hubs reachable directly from SEQ, the region is still among the two least connected regions, yet its range of locations has grown markedly since 2017, from 23 to 32. With new connections to Kuala Lumpur, Osaka, Tokyo, Seoul, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Dallas among others, SEQ’s reach is strong given the distances to key markets.

SEQ’s competitive volume and variety of air passengers



SEQ’s global reach has room to catch up, but destinations are increasing



<sup>1</sup> Connected hubs defined by Top 50 rating in GaWC (2024) World Cities 2024. Source: TBoC Research based on airport statistics & FlightsFrom

Trade throughput potential

The Port of Brisbane continues to grow its trade roles, handling 1.6m TEU worth A\$50 bn, and with an anticipated growth rate to 2050 faster than most regions.<sup>81</sup>

By global standards there is significant room to grow the port’s trading roles. Currently the Port is not only less than one fifth the scale of megaports like Busan, Hamburg and Rotterdam – it processes less than half of Port of Vancouver’s 3.5m TEU and generates only just over 60% of the jobs sustained (115,000+) and a smaller fraction of trade value (A\$300bn+).<sup>82</sup> Like many mid-sized global ports, Vancouver’s is focusing on quality as well as efficiency. In tandem with UAE investors, the port is also completing a A\$380m upgrade in a key port terminal, raising capacity by 60% to 1.5m TEU while also improving electric shipping connections.<sup>83</sup>

While the Port of Brisbane is nationally competitive, international comparisons portray its efficiency among the bottom 20% of 400+ global rated ports, while other

peer regions’ ports excel.<sup>84</sup> Longer-term efforts to better connect the port to Australia’s national rail network, such as the 61km PortConnex tunnel, could help the port gain the scale and efficiency needed to match its global peers.

Digital connections remain a challenge across the region

SEQ remains the only region among its peers where typical internet download speeds are below the overall global average (by contrast, San Diego boasts speeds double the world average). In Australia this challenge is by no means unique to SEQ.<sup>85</sup> SEQ currently hosts 10% of Australia’s data centres, with the opportunity to benefit from anticipated growth in this sector thanks to abundant green energy resources.<sup>86</sup> However SEQ’s fundamentals depend on future connectivity, meaning that optimising the region’s sole existing and two planned submarine cables to expand the reach of digital infrastructure will be key for SEQ to grow its digital economy, boost firm competitiveness, and improve the performance and efficiency of public assets.<sup>87</sup>



## Port cargo traffic scale and trendline among SEQ's peers

### Trendline

▲ Growth ▼ Decline ▶ Flat  1 m TEU

#### Busan Region ▲

23 m           

#### South Holland ▲

13.5 m       

#### Hamburg Region ▼

7.7 m    

#### SEQ ▲

1.6 m      5 m (planned)

#### Metro Vancouver ▲

3.5 m  

#### Barcelona Region ▼

3.3 m  

#### Seattle/Puget Sound ▲

2.8 m  

#### South East Florida ▶

1.1 m 

\* San Diego and Stockholm ports do not host sufficient TEU to be featured  
Source: TBoC Research based on local port statistics

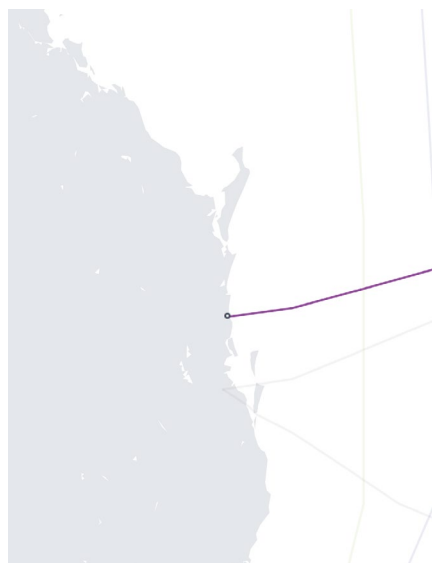


Figure: Digital Submarine Sea Cables in SEQ and peer city-regions

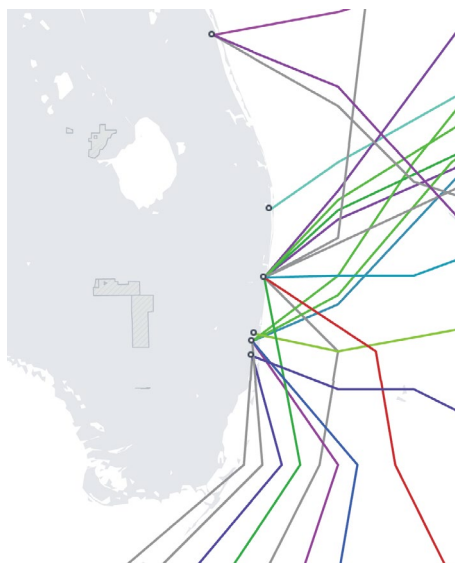
#	Region	Direct submarine cable to region	Number of cables	Number of cables added since 2012	Number of other cables within 200km
1	Miami (South East Florida)	Yes	16	6	3
2	Stockholm Region	Yes	8	3	1
3	Busan City Region	Yes	7	3	9
4	Seattle Region	Yes	5	0	7
5	Metro Vancouver	Yes	3	3	7
6	Barcelona Region	Yes	3	3	1
7	South East Queensland	Yes	1	1	0
8	San Diego Region	Yes	1	0	11
9	South Holland	No	0	0	12
10	Hamburg Region	No	0	0	8

Source: TBoC Research based on Telegeography

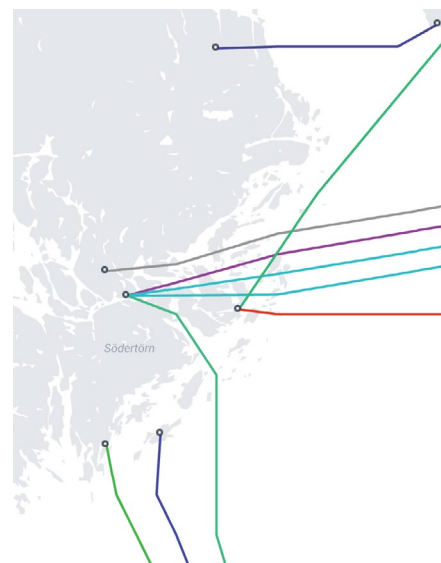
#### SEQ



#### South East Florida



#### Stockholm



There are many examples of city-regions – from Liverpool to Seoul to Helsinki - that are working together to install large whole region ultrafast digital networks for the benefit of businesses, that connect digital assets spanning data centres, exchanges, landing stations, and cloud technologies.<sup>88</sup>

### 3. Talent & Innovation



#### Summary

**SEQ's advanced education fundamentals are all there** - Compared to most, SEQ has higher-performing universities, stronger research output, and more breadth and depth of academic programmes. Among its peers, SEQ is home to the second highest number of students enrolled in top institutions.

**The city-region's scientific capabilities are starting to convert into bigger wins** - In relative terms, the enterprise value of promising companies has really picked up since before Covid, driven especially by Brisbane's applied R&D strengths.<sup>89</sup> Yet because others are also growing their ecosystems from a much higher base, the city-region as a whole does not yet enjoy a depth of firms who possess global reach or high growth potential. Access to capital and propensity to commercialise remain evident gaps. There is however room for the global perceptions of which places are the innovation hotspots to catch up to the strengths that reside in the region.

**SEQ's enterprise community is diversifying and has become more inclusive** to women than many. However, the broader pathways to entrepreneurship and well paid jobs appear more limited. There are very welcome pockets of collaboration between industry, academia and government but evidence suggests other city-regions do this at more scale and consistency. These raise the question of whether SEQ's ecosystem needs periodic tweaks or more far-reaching approaches to incentivise structures and cultures of cross sector collaboration.

**In other regions, knowledge anchors are playing a very active role** in fostering and convening the region's innovation partners. The trajectory is towards more agile partnerships with industry leaders and pioneers that ensure education and training curricula match needs, practical pathways for staff and students to turn ideas into ventures, and opening more university spaces such as labs or makerspaces into shared facilities.



Knowledge refers to a region's educational outcomes, labour market participation, and attraction of international talent. Amid a disrupted labour market, more attention is being paid to the readiness of new workers and graduates, how well the city retains its skilled talent base, and whether skills supply is keeping pace with demand.

This section includes not only international students and higher attainment, but also skills that serve scientific and digital industries, and the partnership between education providers, businesses and innovators.

### Headlines

- The region's concentration in science and technology research is entering the top global echelons.
- By nearly all global standards, SEQ attracts an impressive international base of students and faculty from abroad. There is room to enhance perceptions among would-be employers.
- Rates of attainment, skills progression and commercialisation point to imperatives around lifelong learning, skills acquisition and translation.

### Surprises

- ! SEQ hosts more top programs and more top universities than any peer region.
- ! Recent upticks in university enrolments surpass all English-speaking peers, as trends flatline elsewhere.
- ! The impact of SEQ's academic research is constrained by a lower track record of collaboration observed across sectors and disciplines.

### Talent

#### **SEQ's breadth of well-performing universities is a clear international advantage**

Higher education is a clear competitive advantage shared across the region. SEQ ties top with Stockholm for the most consistently top-500 rated universities in the region,<sup>90</sup> and the median rated position of SEQ universities is 5th among 10 peer regions.<sup>91</sup>

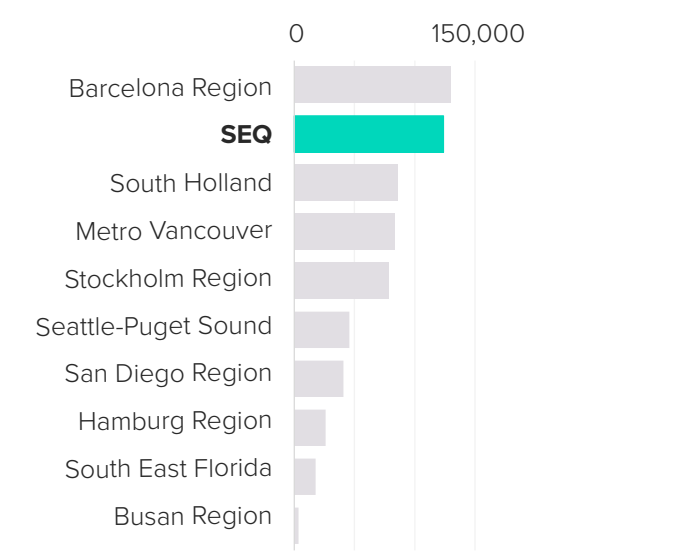
#### **Teaching and research specialisms are internationally recognised**

SEQ has 59 university programs rated in the top 300 of their field globally, more than any other peer region. This impressive breadth is almost double that of the regions of Vancouver, San Diego and Seattle.<sup>92</sup> The advantage is especially visible in top-tier programs at the University of Queensland, including in biotechnology (#10 in the world), mining and mineral engineering (#19), and food science (#23).<sup>93</sup> Shared prowess is driving Brisbane into the top 25 globally for the concentration and quality of its science and tech research base, on par with Stockholm and Seattle.<sup>94</sup> SEQ is home to one of the world's top 10 best specialised hospitals in paediatrics,<sup>95</sup> while Brisbane punches above its weight in the top 40 globally for its research institutions, and top 60 for rate of publications and patents.<sup>96</sup> The sheer range of quality higher education available surpasses the vast majority of mid-sized regions globally.



**SEQ educates more students in internationally esteemed universities**

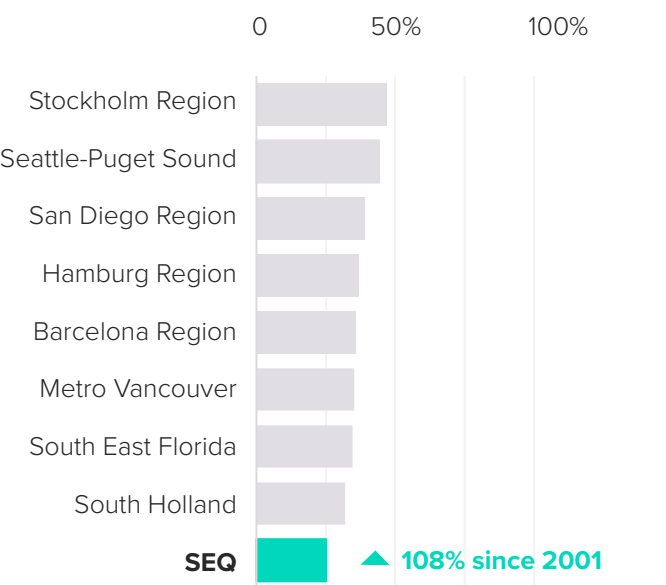
Number of students enrolled in Global Top 500 universities



Source: TBoC Research based on university statistics & QS (2024) – International students

**Fewer people have university degrees**

% share of people with university degree



Source: Informed Decisions. Note: some definitions may vary.

**A magnet for international students**

SEQ continues to stand out for the scale of student intake at universities of international standing. It was the #1 student hub among its peers in 2017, and although it has since been overtaken by the Barcelona region, it maintains one of the largest concentrations of students in the world, relative to size. The pace of growth continues while many other regions have plateaued. SEQ is 3rd of 6 measured peers for growth in university enrolment in the last five years, bucking the trend among English-speaking peers.<sup>97</sup>

**The international student market is an enduring success**

SEQ's total number of international students at high-calibre universities was already ahead in 2017, and has stretched much further ahead (+52%) of 2nd place Vancouver, with triple the depth of international student pool than the average peer. Brisbane is a major driver of this appeal - it is among the top 15% globally for student appeal, on par with Stockholm, and ahead of all other core city peers except Vancouver.<sup>98</sup> Brisbane's own growth (+32%) in university enrolments since 2018 is very impressive by international standards.<sup>99</sup>

SEQ is also above average for the share of international academic staff, clustered in a top tier alongside Stockholm, Vancouver, and South Holland regions.<sup>100</sup> Perceptions are positive too – the region's university reputation and lifestyle appeal put it top among peers for the attraction of international students and faculty.<sup>101</sup>

**Early career preparation and transition is a challenge in SEQ**

A lower share of graduates from SEQ universities find paid employment soon after they graduate than in peer regions. Here, SEQ is 8th of 10 peers.<sup>102</sup> Lower employment may reflect lower perceived employability among hiring businesses: SEQ's universities overall are also 8th of 10 peers for their reputation among employers.<sup>103</sup>

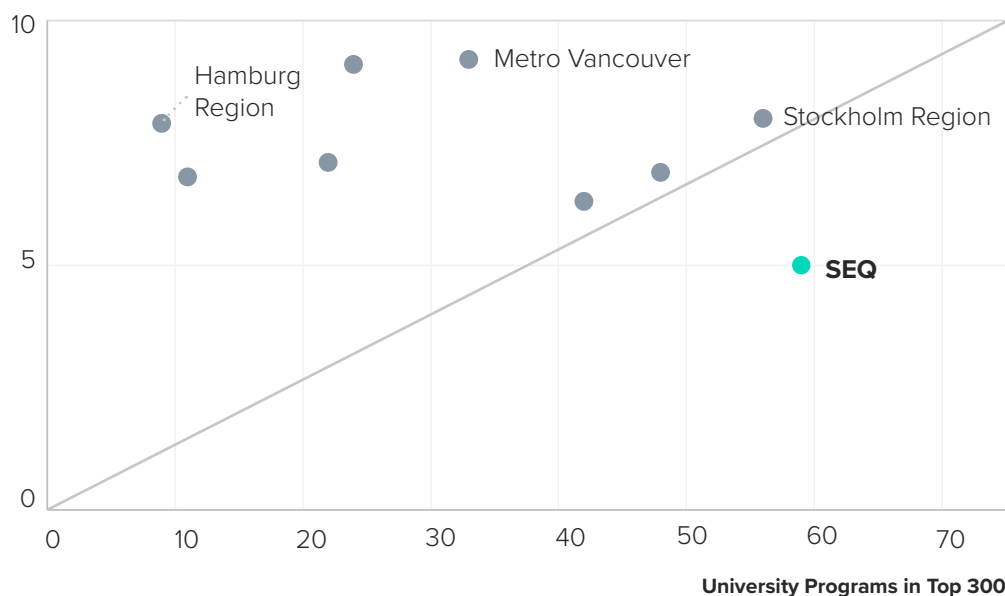
Despite its education strengths, only 1 in 4 residents in SEQ have completed a bachelor's degree, which puts SEQ last among 9 peers for higher education attainment.<sup>104</sup> This partly reflects the later roll-out of mass higher education in Australia compared to other nations. While this has been consistently growing in recent years, it is still significantly behind peers (25% vs. 38% on average), and the gap may struggle to close given recent affordability and uptake challenges.<sup>105</sup>



# Superb range of programs, weak record of collaboration

Industry-academia collaboration score vs. the number of world-class university programs

Industry-Academia Collaboration



Source: TBoC Research based on Leiden & Shanghai Ranking

## Research is respected but less collaborative

Scientific research produced by SEQ's universities gains a lot of influence and credibility, with the region's universities 4th of 10 regions for how often their articles are cited.<sup>106</sup> The rate of top-quality international citations has risen since 2017, to 12.6%.<sup>107</sup> SEQ's university research does however have some limitations in reach, with the region 6th of 10 for the breadth of its international research network.<sup>108</sup>

## Alternative progression pathways are essential

35% of the SEQ population over the age of 15 have not completed a tertiary or vocational qualification, which is much higher than most peer regions. This indicates that a higher-than-average share of people migrating to SEQ have limited or not-recognised qualifications, which suggests attention is needed on skills, jobs and talent pathways.<sup>109</sup>



Image Credit: Krista Eppelstun

## Innovation

Innovation means the scalable ideas, services and companies that arise from the city-region's networks of institutions, entrepreneurs, IP creators and investors. Innovation ecosystems rely on wider enablers and ingredients. These include the infrastructure to support interaction and learning, the relationships that exist between research and commerce, the funding to support firms to grow, and the diversity of a city's innovation communities.

Measures include the rate and volume of start-ups and risk capital, as well as the growth of companies into value-creators and job-creators, and the size and maturity of industry specialisms.



Image Credit: BEDA



Image Credit: BEDA

## Headlines

- ➔ Through the pandemic years and beyond, SEQ has joined the rest of its peers in successfully producing a unicorn.
- ➔ The city-region has gained some international recognition for specialisations in domains such as edtech, energy and medtech.
- ➔ Signs of weaker ties between academia and industry emerge quite consistently as a likely constraint on innovation spillovers and spin-outs.

## Surprises

- ❗ SEQ is currently among the top 20 fastest growing regional tech ecosystems by percentage change in value since 2020.
- ❗ SEQ's ability to sustain growth at scale across its founder and investor community is more fragile than most, given recent venture trends.
- ❗ Positive impressions of SEQ's lifestyle do less to move the needle against high performing innovation regions, who also attract investors with their own genuine competitive and quality of life advantages.



In the past 10 years, SEQ has made some catch-up progress in building its innovation ecosystem. The region has successfully produced its first unicorn (Go1 in 2021) and has attracted several high-profile acquisitions such as Microsoft's acquisition of Clipchamp. Important initiatives to grow innovation in the region include the AUD\$150 million SEQ Innovation Economy Fund,<sup>110</sup> Brisbane Business Hub serving over 30,000 businesses,<sup>111</sup> and funding programmes for ventures in health tech, advanced manufacturing, bushfire response and geo-analytics.<sup>112</sup>

### **SEQ's innovation system is in 'catch up' mode from a lower base**

The region achieved one of the largest accelerations in attracting risk investment into growth businesses, as measured by 10-year growth in venture capital investment.<sup>113</sup> The region has seen the fastest growth in ecosystem value over the past decade among its peers, and the fastest growth in tech jobs in Australia.<sup>114</sup> Yet the overall scale of internationally recognised start-ups and scale-ups is still only half the size of its peer regions, and comparable to third tier innovation economies such as Pune or Frankfurt-Rhein-Main.

**Recognised specialisations** include ed-tech, transport-tech, energy, and social and leisure applications, which comprise a larger share of technology-led companies in SEQ than in other regions.<sup>115</sup> Med-tech and life sciences is also a definite growth area although here the competition

for spin out and scale up business is very fierce among knowledge-intensive city-regions, especially in North America. Fin-tech is another area of strength, including success stories such as neo-banks Alex Bank and WLTH, and mobile payment platform Sniip.

Some creative niches are notable – Brisbane rates an impressively high (13th globally) for animation careers.<sup>116</sup> It is notable that the most successful whole-region ecosystems tend to have a larger creative industries share (often clustered near high-amenity medium-density environments) among their overall pool of investable companies, than SEQ currently does.<sup>117</sup>

Despite the city-region being home to a bigger share of firms who use foundational technologies, the region does not register on the global radar as often as expected in advanced manufacturing, semiconductors, telecoms and health tech. Here the region is currently only 6th among 10 peers.<sup>118</sup> This broadly reflects a lower breadth of companies across the spectrum of growth stages.

Scanning the economies of SEQ's peer regions point to a common strategic shift in recent years: to prioritise specific industries that build on clearly evidenced and established strengths; to combine the capabilities that reside in the region as well as core city; and to crystallise a proposition that speaks to differentiating cultural and competitive advantages, rather than narrower cost and convenience benefits (see Table on following page, priority sectors).



Image Credit: BEDA



**Table: Priority sectors in 2024 among SEQ's peer city-regions**

City-region	Established competitive advantage	Priority emerging sectors	Competitive unique selling proposition
<b>Barcelona Province</b>	Digital, biotech, aeronautics	Sustainable mobility, deep tech, gaming, climate tech	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Openness and organisation for investment</li> <li>• Depth of research institutions and technical talent</li> </ul>
<b>Busan Region</b>	Marine logistics, financial services, shipbuilding, fisheries	Maritime technology, fintech, green energy robotics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Super hub' port status</li> <li>• First-mover appetite</li> <li>• Creative industries, film and events advantage</li> </ul>
<b>Seattle</b> (Puget Sound Region)	Aerospace, cleantech, precision manufacturing	Artificial intelligence, life sciences, maritime	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Innovation for people and planet</li> <li>• Technology talent</li> <li>• Tight innovation culture</li> </ul>
<b>Stockholm Region</b>	Health, fintech, energy, music, gaming	Enterprise software, transport, food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exceptional digital connections</li> <li>• Startup ecosystem</li> <li>• Strength-in-numbers mentality</li> </ul>
<b>Hamburg Region</b>	Maritime, logistics, civil aviation, renewable energy, food, media	Smart energy, sustainable materials, life science, bioeconomy, CO2-free mobility, artificial intelligence, laser, green hydrogen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Broad base of sectors</li> <li>• Tech transfer and applications</li> <li>• Public capacity as a partner and enabler</li> </ul>
<b>Metro Vancouver</b>	Agri-tech, apparel, trade, green economy, life sciences	Watertech, virtual reality, circular economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unique region liveability mix</li> <li>• Strategic position via Asia Pacific, Canada, and West Coast.</li> <li>• Independent and outdoor spirit</li> </ul>
<b>San Diego Region</b>	Aerospace, cleantech, cybersecurity, defence, pharmacology, genomics, medical devices, wireless, tourism	Digital media, artificial intelligence (cross cutting)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concentration of elite research institutions and industry links</li> <li>• Embodied creativity, maker culture</li> <li>• Military innovation</li> </ul>
<b>Miami</b> (South Florida)	Aviation, life sciences, 'Wall Street South' tourism, trade, logistics	Digital media, back-office technology, simulation tech, tourism tech	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attractive tax arrangements for business and individuals</li> <li>• Can-do culture</li> <li>• International trade and reach into Latin America</li> </ul>
<b>South Holland</b>	Aerospace, maritime, biotech (esp. biofuels), cybersecurity, agritech	Sustainable marine, green energy, robotics, automation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Superb access to European market</li> <li>• High skilled talent pool</li> <li>• Scale of economic and climate transition</li> </ul>
<b>South East Queensland</b>	Biomedical, defence and aerospace, energy transformation, agriculture and food processing innovation, manufacturing across all sectors	Agritech, nanotechnology, robotics and artificial intelligence and quantum technologies, decarbonising technologies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rapid growth</li> <li>• Strategic location within Asia Pacific</li> <li>• Lifestyle and liveability</li> </ul>

## A more gender-equal startup scene

The share of startups founded by women is an area where SEQ has made more progress than most. Here, SEQ is first among its peers – and 20% above its next-closest peer. Women currently found 24% of growth companies in the region.<sup>119</sup>

## Cities are the main crucibles of innovation and Brisbane is increasingly a driver of SEQ's ecosystem

Brisbane is up 30 places in global rankings of innovation ecosystems since 2021 and is among the top 20 fastest growing innovation ecosystems by enterprise value since the pandemic.<sup>120</sup> Brisbane is SEQ's major cluster of R&D-leading companies and scientific infrastructure for applied research, and in scale terms holds its own against other peer regions' largest cities, at 5th.<sup>121</sup>

## Venture capital has grown significantly from a low baseline

SEQ's US\$14 bn in additional venture capital attracted over the last decade represents a bigger dollar increase than in any other region except South Holland.<sup>122</sup> The investor community is still developing, and in the recent global investor pullback, SEQ's year-on-year growth position was 6th among its 10 peers.<sup>123</sup> Data suggests that overall scale and concentration of risk capital still remains about a 5th of its peers' average.<sup>124</sup> Stockholm by contrast currently attracts 40 times more venture capital.<sup>125</sup>

## Lag in startup funding and founding

Successful startup growth is a comparative disadvantage for SEQ and since the pandemic hit, SEQ is still seeing new companies set up at a lower rate than every peer except Busan. The improvement arc is visible in SEQ with the post-pandemic vs. pre-pandemic trend proving more positive than some peer regions, however; the frequency of these firms attracting significant funding (US\$1m+) is far lower than all its peers at 4%.<sup>126</sup>

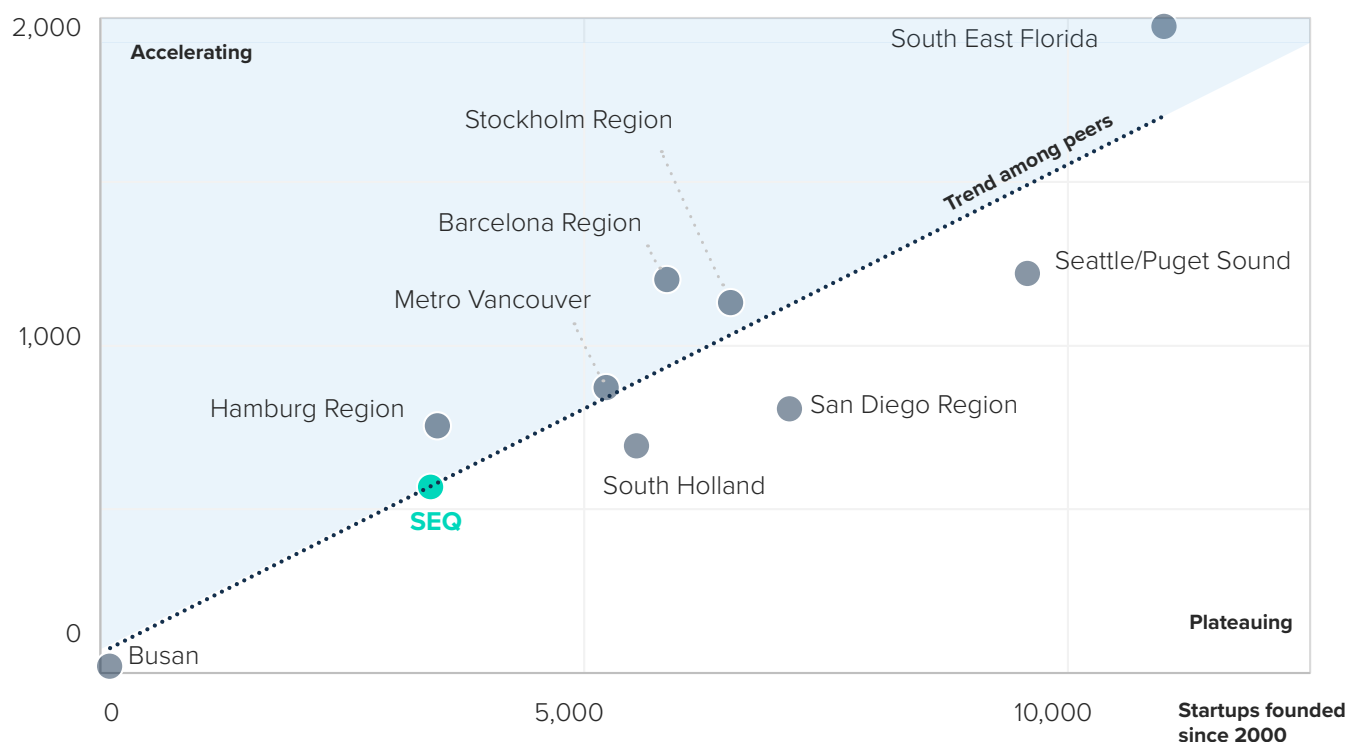
## Connections to industry are softer

SEQ ranks last among its peers for how much its universities are rated as collaborating with partners in industry.<sup>127</sup> This is one factor in why the region generates patents at less than 10% the rate of San Diego (6,000 patents per million people vs 551).<sup>128</sup> Compared to the most successful innovation ecosystems globally, Greater Brisbane has significantly less companies in late stages of funding. The gap also exists for companies in early stages of funding, although it's less significant (8% vs. 13%).<sup>129</sup>

## Recent SEQ startup growth in line with long-term trend

Number of startups founded since 2020 vs. long-run pattern since 2000

### Startups founded since 2020



Source: Dealroom

# Case study

## Seattle (Puget Sound)



Facing a critical need to transition from a waning industrial economy dependent on Boeing in the 2000s, the Puget Sound region around Seattle was able to establish itself as a significant global technology hub. This was despite it being the third largest region on the U.S. West Coast, after the Bay Area and Los Angeles. The region's lifestyle and laid-back culture was appealing for visionary developers and entrepreneurs to establish a presence in and around Seattle CBD, which came to serve Amazon, Expedia, Starbucks, and Costco among many others.

Seattle's shift into high value sectors has been enabled by its ability to attract outsiders who easily identify and belong with the ethos of the region. This, plus the cluster of postgraduate

research institutions, saw the region create an "ever-compounding geek synergy" of coders, engineers, and big ambitious thinkers.

Seattle's success has given rise to other suburban cities succeeding well beyond Downtown Seattle. Early in the growth cycle, the Puget Sound region established a regional economic strategy, to understand foundations, promote strengths and address weaknesses for long term success. The city of Tacoma has become the hub for maritime investment, startups, and mentorship, enabled by research institutions who are empowered to pursue economic development collaborations that lead to marketable products.

“

**The most successful regions are those that have solved the talent question.”**

**– Brian Surratt, CEO Greater Seattle Partners**



For over 25 years, the Puget Sound has benefited from a regional council – the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) – that meets monthly, conducts long-term planning including for economic development, and collects regional data to inform public policy. It convenes a wide cross-section of local government, business, trade associations, venture capital, research institutions and civic leaders to engage in metropolitan business planning that targets exports in key industries. The PSRC is distinctive in the U.S. for its noticeably clear data analysis of its regional strengths and weaknesses and the strategies to address these. This became a key source of credibility, expertise and convening power. It also came to coordinate economic development and develop clear channels between transport and economy to ensure complementarity.

Coordination is a key metric of success in the Puget Sound region - PSRC is obliged to report annually on how well coordination is going – public-public and public-private. A dedicated Partnership inventories the areas where coordination is happening and identifies a robust network of interagency staff that meet regularly and coordinate between agencies. The PSRC's coordination function also provides technical support to local government-led workshops.

## Success factors:

**Maintained the best of its early industries** - the people and capabilities embedded in the region's valuable container-shipping businesses, and high calibre manufacturing plants.

**A research-oriented university able to propel itself** - as an engine of science, discovery, and enterprise. The University of Washington has been one of the first to partner with firms like Boeing and Microsoft on executing industrial research with staff side-by-side with faculty and students.

**Diversifying capital sources** - combining risk capital, defence-related spending, and more recently the spare capital of tech billionaires expanding upon that base.

**Turning liveability into stickiness** - The region became popular with people seeking adventure and creativity, and who found it possible to build businesses while staying true to their own style and interests. This was especially timely as technology and creative industries converged, allowing more people to stay and succeed.

**Openness to trying things in new ways** - with the region's relative geographic isolation giving rise to a pretence-free culture that infuses its businesses.



## 4. Sustainability & Resilience



Image Credit: Tourism and Events Queensland

### Summary

**SEQ inherits a sustainability advantage over other regions** - A higher quality natural environment and a greener energy mix support its strong performance in many measures, including three co-located UNESCO Biospheres. Brisbane is already recognised for its standout progress towards the goals of the UN's 2030 Agenda and New Urban Agenda.

**The region holds huge promise in renewable energy and green infrastructure** - The rapid pace of clean energy investments sees others globally – especially with decisive higher tier policies - move faster on adoption of new infrastructure or consumer behaviours. Continued focus will help SEQ catch up to other regions who have so far progressed faster in overall emissions reduction.

**The region's growth model may need adapting to maximise resilience** - SEQ's big advantages of green space protection and tree cover are starting to trend in less positive direction. Meanwhile there is a stronger norm in other less well naturally endowed regions to prioritise land-use intensification in well-connected locations.

**Emerging risks on the horizon** - While SEQ has a lower urban heat island effect than some peer regions, figures point to more potential risks of heat stress, water supply vulnerabilities, heavy rainfall, and flooding than others. Mitigating these as far as possible will be a key part of the city-region's long-run liveability and economic ambitions. SEQ also has the chance to turn its already substantial track record of adaptation and disaster management into a much larger exportable expertise.





Image Credit: Reuben Nutt

Sustainability refers to how green a city-region's space and infrastructure is, and how responsible it is about its resources now and in the future. It relies in part on the behaviour and cooperation of residents, businesses, and investors. Cities that compete on quality of life also have to demonstrate they are welcome to newcomers and committed to a cleaner and less carbon-intensive environment.

This section includes measures which look at the sustainable credentials and potential of cities' infrastructure, energy, and land use.

### Headlines

- ➔ Many trendlines point to a cleaner, greener future for SEQ if it can fully deliver on its green energy potential.
- ➔ The region benefits from sustainability commitments and leadership across multiple sectors, systems and cities.
- ➔ Lock-in to unsustainable sprawl and higher than average water risks emerge as sharper challenges than most.

### Surprises

- ! SEQ's universities have stronger collective sustainability credentials than nearly everywhere else.
- ! Progress in clean energy capacity is on the cusp of being world leading.
- ! The share of development since 1980 that is low density (77%) is double the share of many peers.

### SEQ's electricity mix is cleaner and greener

SEQ has the 2nd greenest electricity generation among its peers, with carbon emissions 39% lower than the median. Adjusting for the carbon intensity of its grid, SEQ here rates 4th of 10 peer regions.<sup>130</sup>

Large scale investments in renewables demonstrate SEQ's abundant access to green energy potential. The doubling of the MacIntyre / Herries Ridge wind farm capacity to up to 2,000 MW at peak will mean the region soon becomes home to (currently) one of the world's five largest onshore wind farms. The 24 hours of green power storage via the A\$6 bn Borumba project would likely elevate SEQ up the energy capacity charts, complementing the overall Queensland clean power portfolio of over 10,000 MW,<sup>131</sup> including close to 600,000 homes across SEQ with rooftop solar.<sup>132</sup>

The race is on among liveable city-regions to scale up renewable capacity. Hamburg is home to over 12,500 MW of wind capacity already, and South Florida is benefiting from the state's 13,000 MW of solar capacity. There are opportunities for SEQ's cities and local governments to work more with international peers and partners to solve issues of renewable electrical generation, demand management, and storage.<sup>133</sup>



**The sustainability priority is upheld by SEQ institutions and businesses**

The region’s sustainability bona fides are anchored by the efforts of its largest city. The City of Brisbane has led the urban implementation of United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a data-driven and planning effort for which it received a 2023 Global Award. To scale up across the wider region will rely on alignment, resource-sharing and co-implementation.

Meanwhile there is a higher concentration of certified B-corporations in SEQ than most of its peers, behind only Vancouver and Seattle regions.<sup>134</sup> For all-round sustainability of their educational and research programs, SEQ’s universities together place an impressive third among its peers.<sup>135</sup> More office buildings are green, with Brisbane third among 30 Asia Pacific cities in this area.<sup>136</sup> For these reasons, cities in SEQ often rate highly in the Asia Pacific region for their ability to meet the likely needs of citizens and businesses.<sup>137</sup>

SEQ tends to be rated less favourably in areas that rely on national settings, or on multi-player coordination with service providers and consumers. For example other comparators are usually rated more consistently sustainable in visitor economy practices.<sup>138</sup> And as of 2024, electric vehicle adoption is taking place at about half the rate or less of leading Northern Hemisphere peer regions. This presents a carbon handicap given SEQ’s higher rates of car use.

**Higher water risks**

SEQ is more susceptible than other top city-regions to water supply constraints. It uses a higher share of its available water supply, up close to the more arid environments of San Diego and Barcelona regions for how close demand comes to outpacing supply. Demands on watersheds are set to grow.<sup>139</sup> And only San Diego surpasses SEQ for year-to-year variability of water supply, which is why the Californian region is pursuing a major

expansion of desalination infrastructure.<sup>140</sup> The SEQ City Deal has recently funded local efforts to identify water security solutions and pilot approaches to managing the region’s irregular supply.<sup>141</sup>

**Lower densities make resource sustainability harder**

The region has the largest built-up area with the least efficient use of land of any of its peers, at about half as dense as South East Florida and a quarter as Barcelona region.<sup>142</sup> At the sharpest contrast, Busan region’s largest metropolitan centres accommodate 2 million more people than SEQ’s in one third of the built area.<sup>143</sup>

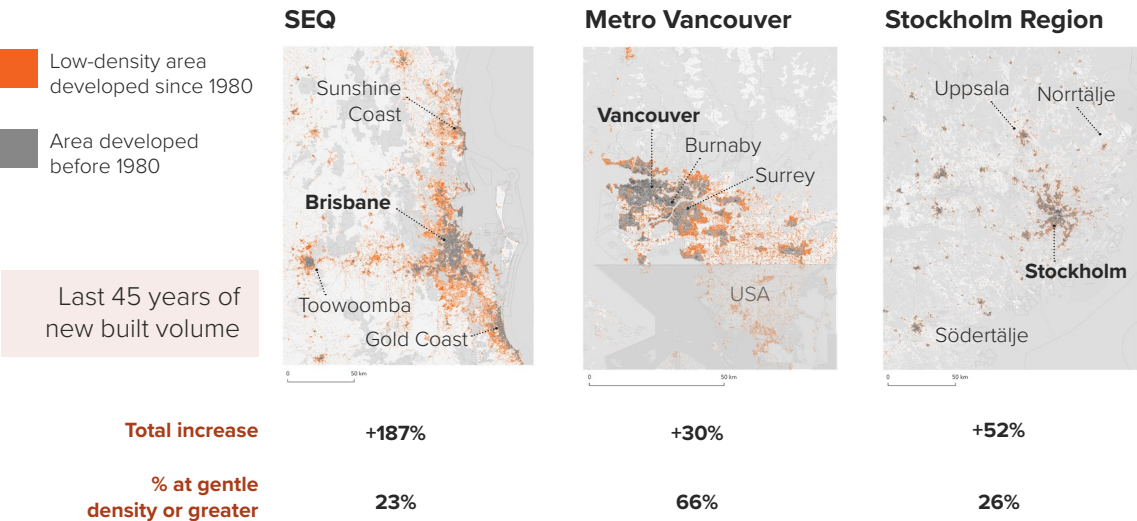
Most leading regions decoupled population growth from additional building space some time ago. Since 1980, SEQ has tripled its built volume (i.e. total built cubic area), outpacing its growth in population, while in peers like Stockholm and Vancouver, population growth has outpaced building growth.<sup>144</sup> 77% of what has been built in SEQ over the last fifty years has been low or very low density. In Vancouver, the share is 34%, and typical figures in comparable European regions are closer to 20%.<sup>145</sup>

Continuous expansion without population concentration is likely to incur future fiscal and environmental costs. ShapingSEQ 2023 targets 70% consolidation of existing developed areas - an increase of 10% - and 60% of new housing at “gentle density” or above.<sup>146</sup> By global standards these targets appear to be a minimum threshold for the region to achieve a sustainable overall built form.

**Momentum for more compact growth**

There are signs SEQ is making adjustments. The efficiency of the region’s built form – in terms of accommodating more people in less space - improved by an impressive 21% in the last 10 years.<sup>147</sup> This reflects the fact the city-region is both suburbanising at the edges while also finding solutions for a rapidly growing population with a range of denser housing formats in urban areas and precincts.

**Figure: Development patterns in SEQ and sample peer city-regions since 1980**



Source: TBoC Research based on Global Human Settlement Layer



Image Credit: Gary Cranitch @ Queensland Museum

Resilience refers to a region's ability to anticipate, withstand, recover from, and adapt to shocks, stresses, and disruptions while maintaining essential functions and services. It means treating threats and crises as a chance to reorganise and reinvest so that the region is better equipped for the challenges ahead.

Data that is comparable across regions is much scarcer than other pillars. This section mainly includes measures of vulnerability to shocks, rather than social bonds and behaviour, or the strength of institutions.

### Headlines

- SEQ is rated as more exposed to climate hazards such as extreme heat, bushfires, and flooding than many peer city-regions.
- SEQ's demonstrated capacity and capability to respond to crises elevates its overall resilience to a level on par with other regions.
- Intensifying trends indicate that SEQ's adaptation investment and resourcefulness will be essential.

### Surprises

- ! 3% more of the region's population is exposed to a 100-year river flooding event than the average share among other peers
- ! SEQ's urban heat island effect is 0.7 degrees lower than its peer average
- ! Tree cover is an advantage but has declined over three decades more than in all but two peer city-regions.

### Heating up

SEQ is more exposed to very hot days than most peers. In the last five measured years, SEQ experienced more days of high heat stress than any other peer city-region except South East Florida.<sup>148</sup> High heat stress is not especially exacerbated by the urban environment, however; across SEQ the urban heat island effect is 0.7 degrees lower than its peer average elsewhere, while for example in South East Florida the effect is as high as 4.8 degrees Celsius.<sup>149</sup>

### Elevated risks from bushfire and river flooding

Natural hazards exacerbated by climate change mean SEQ must contend with elevated levels of bushfire and flooding risk. In SEQ, fire seasons are becoming more severe. The region is a leader in the resilient design and planning standards that can reduce loss in the most hazardous areas.<sup>150</sup>

SEQ residents are also rated as having a higher-than-average risk exposure to flooding than global peers. As the flooding of 2011 and 2022 demonstrated, river flooding remains a major risk along the length of the Brisbane River – albeit some low-lying regions like South Holland and Hamburg have even higher risks.<sup>151</sup> For coastal flooding, the population risks are currently rated much smaller, with a fifth fewer people exposed to a 100-year event than the median of peer city-regions.<sup>152</sup>

### SEQ's green basin will be a climate resilience bulwark

Tree cover is one of SEQ's great strengths, but it is notable that the rate of loss over the last 30 years is the third highest among its peers. North American regions have performed better, while the Barcelona region has managed to increase its share of tree cover over this period.<sup>153</sup>



## 5. Experience & Culture



### Summary

#### **Outdoor lifestyle drives world-class liveability -**

SEQ continues to rate among the world's 20 most liveable region locations, reflected in higher resident satisfaction and more magnetism among Asian talent and international students. The whole region offer consistently stands up against some of the best in the world for climate, family-oriented lifestyle, and choice of outdoor and offbeat experiences.

**Narrower range of urban experience -** Other city-regions have a higher concentration of global flagships and a broader range of highly differentiating experiences. One consequence of this is a narrower association of SEQ locations with nature and lifestyle, and a less clear narrative around its people, histories, culture, diversity, and creativity. SEQ's talent and visitor magnetism points to opportunities for development.

#### **SEQ's experience is broadly and thinly spread -**

The advantage to this is a good range of consumer amenities available to the region's existing population. The trade-off of less amenity clustering in Brisbane compared to the typical trend in other global lifestyle beacons may be that the region finds it harder to be perceived as having destinations with a compelling intensity.

#### **Culture and heritage assets are not fully utilised -**

SEQ boasts international calibre cultural attractions, design capability, a vibrant events calendar, and a significant Indigenous population. However, other regions tend to have achieved more depth, creative milieu, popularity, and global resonance than SEQ so far has, including cultural hotspots beyond their CBD. SEQ's collective diversity and First Nations' heritage can lend it a more distinctive cultural identity and global reach.



## Experience



Image Credit: Visit Sunshine Coast

Experience refers to the magnetism, memorability and seamlessness of the interactions, engagements, and encounters that residents and non-residents have in city-regions. It encompasses aesthetics, amenities, access, safety, diversity, public spaces, entertainment, and the overall sense of place. These contribute to creating positive and persuasive experiences for residents and visitors.

This section includes measures of visitor perceptions, appeal to different demographics, safety, and wellbeing.

## Headlines

- SEQ's all-round lifestyle appeal is magnified by post-pandemic family and work preferences.
- Visitor economy is now recovering faster and with more year-round appeal than other high performers.
- The spread of visitors across major SEQ destinations matches up fairly well to other other popular city-regions internationally.

## Surprises

- ! SEQ's locations are often perceived as under-rated versus other global destinations.
- ! Pound for pound, other peer city-regions have more of every kind of activity concentrated in their region's core than SEQ currently has in Brisbane.
- ! On paper, SEQ's wide distribution of outdoor and indoor amenities means in principle more suburbs have more to offer than in some European or North American regions where the offer is more narrow or concentrated.

### A liveability leader

Across a full suite of liveability factors, Brisbane has consistently rated among the world's 20 most liveable urban locations over the last 10 years. Acknowledged advantages for Brisbane, the Gold Coast and the whole region include climate, family friendliness, access to nature, sporting infrastructure, and well-regarded healthcare.<sup>154</sup> SEQ also has one of the lowest murder rates among its peers, with only Hamburg and Stockholm regions performing better.<sup>155</sup>

On perceptions, SEQ rates highly on resident life satisfaction, and by visitors the city-region is more likely to be regarded as under-rated once they have spent time.<sup>156</sup> SEQ has become especially popular among talent across Asia.<sup>157</sup> Locally, liveability remains a priority area for regional investment under the SEQ City Deal.<sup>158</sup> SEQ's nearby natural assets, including the Scenic Rim, have begun to be reflected more widely in international media post-pandemic, driving visitation there to record heights.<sup>159</sup>

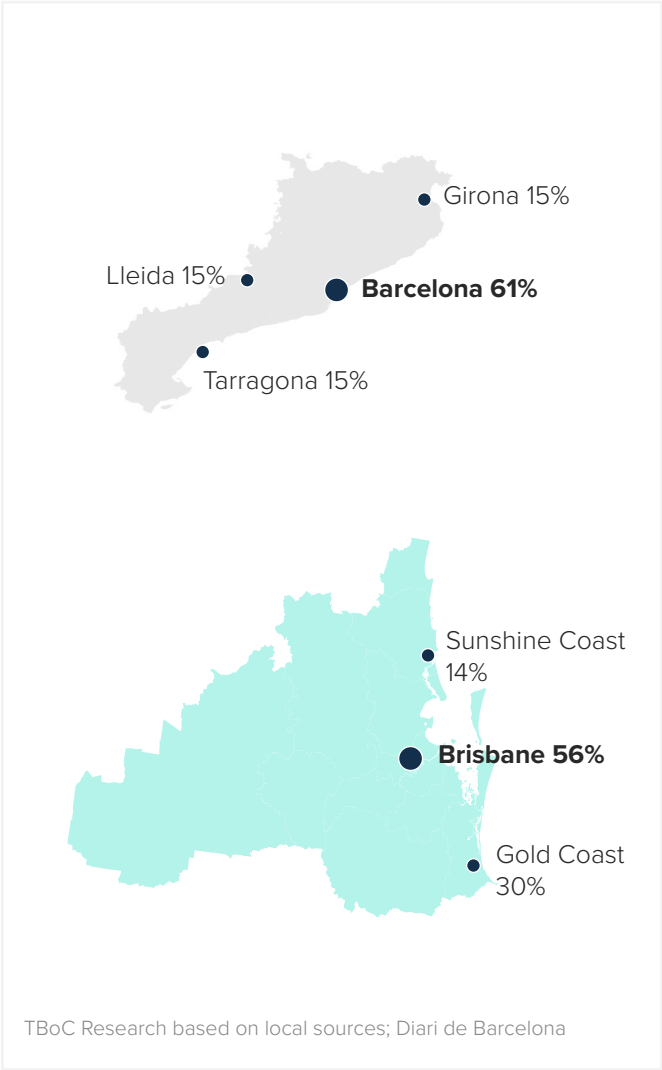
**By global standards, SEQ’s destination scale has room to grow, building on its more balanced year-round and spatial profile** - After visitation in SEQ initially recovered more slowly post-pandemic than regions globally,<sup>160</sup> international visitors in the 2023/4 period reached the 39 million visitor nights set in 2019.<sup>161</sup> Brisbane’s share in the visitor economy relative to the rest of the region is fairly close in line with regions like Barcelona.<sup>162</sup>

The region’s potential visitor growth capacity is put into context by the fact popular Northern Hemisphere peer regions attract well over double the per capita rate of visitors and have also been experiencing a faster rate of increase over the last 20 years.<sup>163</sup>

**Amenities are plentiful but more dispersed** - SEQ boasts a larger overall array of amenities than many of its peers, speaking to the carrying capacity that comes with an exceptional year-round outdoor climate. Adjusted for population, SEQ has double the rate of outdoor choices than its peer group, and a wider range of food & drink, shopping, cultural activities, markets and visitor attractions.

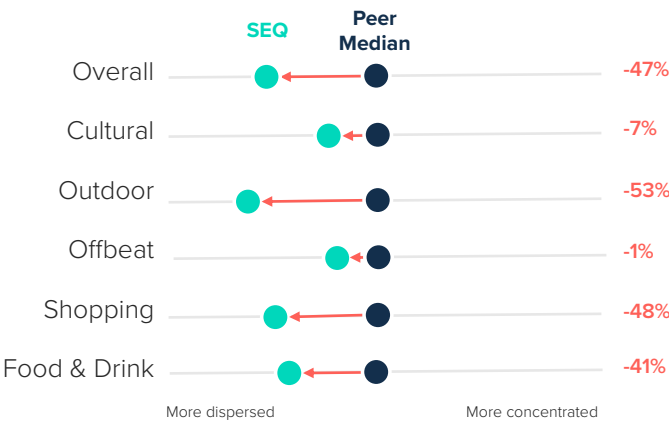
What is striking is that these are significantly more dispersed than in most peer cities, even adjusted for SEQ’s geography and population. This speaks to the popularity of many different suburbs for getting outside, shopping, and food & drink, which is a big lifestyle draw. While cultural and more alternative experiences do cluster in Brisbane, other central cities tend to cluster these even more.<sup>164</sup> One question this raises is whether Brisbane has enough of the critical mass it needs in the ‘high experience’ end of the economy to achieve its potential as an all-round top-tier global destination serving the region.

**Figure: Illustrative comparison of spread of international visitors across Barcelona Region and SEQ**



**SEQ's amenities are more dispersed**

Concentration of amenities in a region’s largest city vs. the next largest centres



Source: TBoC Research based on TripAdvisor



Image Credit: Jesse Smith

Culture refers to the history, geography, identity, values, traditions, and artistic expression that shape the region's identity. It shapes social interactions and residents' sense of belonging.

This section includes measures of the regions' arts and culture scene, and the mix and quality of amenities that shape appeal to residents, visitors, and other users.

### Headlines

- ➔ SEQ has a high-performing cultural cluster in central Brisbane.
- ➔ The region has internationally recognised prowess in education and architecture, with room to grow the scale, visibility and local application of its creative industries.
- ➔ SEQ is more reliant than most on its lifestyle, climate, and nightlife appeal, rather than its cultural, historical, and creative offer.

### Surprises

- ! SEQ has among the top 20 largest Indigenous populations in the OECD, higher than Vancouver.
- ! Access to cultural institutions and amenities is constrained by SEQ's pattern of development.
- ! Visitors and locals are keen on the region's cultural offer, but externally the city-region does not register as widely as a first-choice for culture.

SEQ already has some important assets and advantages to underpin its future cultural performance and creative reputation: its international calibre museums and theatres, and its openness to talent and tolerance that leads to the freedom of expression that supports creativity. The region is also home to a significant Indigenous presence by international standards.

#### **SEQ possesses a wide suite of cultural competence.**

The range and patronage of cultural institutions in SEQ is comparable and competitive internationally (see Chart). There is a strong balance between museums, performing arts, theatres, and cultural centres among SEQ's top attractions, many clustered in Brisbane's South Bank. The region also hosts more internationally recognised architects and architecture firms, with Brisbane rated among the top 50 cities globally for architecture innovation.<sup>165</sup>

While others benefit from long-standing and world-renowned flagship museums and designed spaces, SEQ's mix of cultural highlights align more closely with those of regions like Vancouver, Stockholm, and Hamburg, all of which have been working hard to build up their cultural offer.

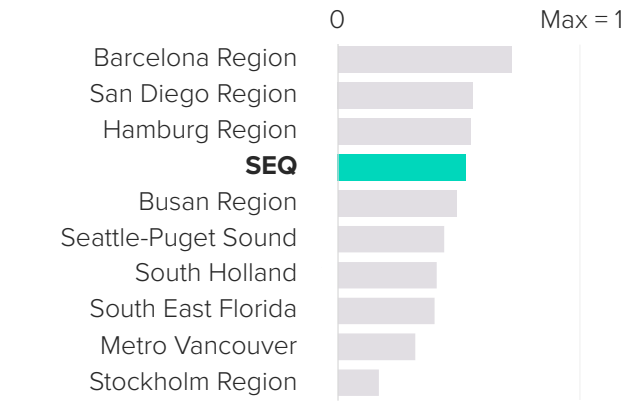
#### **First Nations art, cultures, foods, and music are supported by an internationally significant population of First Nations peoples.**

3% of people in SEQ identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, making the region one of the 20 largest regions by Indigenous population among global peers. The 100,000 people that reside in SEQ who identify as First Nations peoples represents a larger proportion than that of Greater Vancouver and 60% the size of Seattle-Puget Sound.<sup>166</sup>



SEQ’s cultural highlights drive visitation & salience

Score, how many visitors and media mentions a region’s top cultural amenities generate

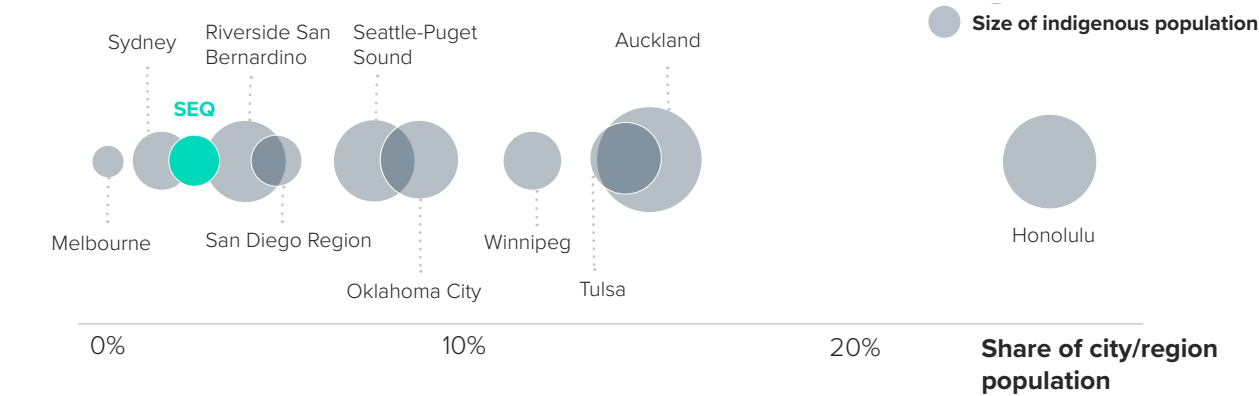


Source: TBoC Research based on analysis of local reports & Google Reviews’



Image Credit: Damien Bredberg

SEQ’s share of indigenous population is in the top-20 among higher-income regions



NB: Based on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in SEQ. Source: TBoC Research based on local census data. NB: Based on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in SEQ.

**Where SEQ’s cultural performance tends to fall short is in depth and resonance.** Against highly liveable mid-sized regions, SEQ does not inherit the same scope of historical icons and cultural amenities. The gaps that emerge in comparison are:

- **Global perceptions of SEQ’s largest cities are more narrowly associated with its subtropical climate,** outdoor lifestyle, beaches, or nightlife, while its distinctive peoples, cultures, histories, diversity, and creativity are less visible.
- **Global culture circuits.** Other comparable regions tend to have deeper concentrations of cultural institutions and more one-off cultural experiences.<sup>167</sup> SEQ’s main cultural flagships also rate 6th of 10 peers for recognition internationally in scale, patronage, and recognition in global media.
- **Fewer distinctive and recognised suburban hotspots** for culture that are innovative and hold transnational appeal. Most cultural institutions and amenities are primarily concentrated in Brisbane, with some additionally in the Gold Coast. While appetite and appreciation for the arts and culture is broadly in line with other leading regions, participation in SEQ is more constrained by issues of access.

- **Smaller scale or global visibility of creative industries** (e.g. screen, architecture, design, fashion) that serve business-to-business (B2B) and business-to-consumer (B2C) markets internationally. The region is not among the top 100 rated hotspots for creative sectors. Despite having some leading arts education institutions, it currently has a lower profile of film, music, design, or fashion industries.

Other successful peer regions have been embedding culture into whole-city regional plans. This sometimes includes relocating key assets, supporting the cultural ecosystem, and enlisting arts and culture organisations in the implementation of regional health and crime strategies. Powerful cultural stories are more common parts of a city-region proposition, as well as low-cost initiatives such as culture maps and passes, and consistently embedding culture into precinct development.<sup>168</sup>

Examples of distinct emphasis on how peer regions approach culture are summarised in the following table.

With these examples in mind, the DNA of SEQ, including its position as a leading population centre of Indigenous people and its rapidly increasing cultural diversity over successive cycles, can lend it a more distinctive cultural identity and global reach.

**Table: Four kinds of emphasis in peer regions' cultural strategies and investments**

Connect the region to the cultural core	Private and philanthropic cultural investment	Space utilisation	Integrating culture and visitor economy
<p>Large budgetary resources for new and upgraded libraries, cultural programming.</p> <p>Community-led.</p> <p>Indigenous and minority support and access.</p> <p>Long-term continuous focus.</p> <p>Dedicated Entertainment Districts and Arts Districts near to main CBDs.</p>	<p>Co-investment into special events and cultural flagships.</p> <p>Studios and public art.</p> <p>Use of culture-led business improvement districts (BIDs) and development areas.</p> <p>General obligation bonds.</p> <p>Investment in spaces that support new income streams and innovative business models.</p>	<p>Heritage of CBDs.</p> <p>Subsidised spaces for local artists.</p> <p>Innovative partnerships with building owners/landlords.</p>	<p>Cultural attractions and wayfinding for tourists.</p> <p>Promotion of music.</p> <p>Independent artists.</p> <p>Development of region's cultural identity.</p> <p>Leadership and convening roles for culture across the city-region.</p>
Barcelona Vancouver	Stockholm/East Sweden, South Florida	Busan	Hamburg

## Miami (South East Florida) and the role of culture as an agent of economic transition

Miami-South East Florida has shown how upgrades to art and culture infrastructure can transform its tourism profile and attract multi-lingual and cosmopolitan populations for a longer stretch of their career. These cultural improvements have been enabled by a strong culture of Regional Planning spanning the three main cities in the region. This has overseen investment in infrastructure, public space, pedestrianisation and improved safety.

Once viewed as a cultural backwater, the cultural offer of the region is increasingly considered alongside North America's arts and culture heavyweights. The arrival of Art Basel well beyond Downtown Miami in the early 2000s coincided with the opening of landmark cultural institutions, the rise of a street art scene, and a boom of high-quality creative workspaces. Art Basel spawned 15 separate satellite art fairs celebrating all kinds of creative art forms.

The diversification of cultural destinations to a wider set of neighbourhoods in the city-region (including Wynwood and the Design District) is an important accomplishment by Miami. It is energised by an entrepreneurial cohort of developers and enabled by enhanced financial tools and district management bodies run by the private and public

sector. One culture-specific business improvement district represents over 400 property owners across 50 city blocks and has been working together to build Wynwood's reputation as a globally recognised centre for arts, culture, design, and innovation. More broadly, many more mixed-use projects across the region enlist local artists to help design facades. This reflects a high level of business support for culture in the region. A survey by the region's Beacon Council found that 81% view the arts as important to growing their business.

Large-scale events such as Art Basel, prizes and incentives have been important in attracting artists to visit, present and stay in the region, alongside the role of the cultural infrastructure in providing focal points. Art Basel has provided both an organising brand for cultural investment, and a means to recruit public and private investors to support art-based investment at different scales.

There is a strong link between the city-region's cultural revival and its resurgent reputation as a place to conduct business, innovate, and raise families. As Miami develops its role as a hub city for Latin America and the Caribbean, culture underpins its claim to host other high-order functions.



# In depth: The competitive outlook for SEQ



As highly liveable, mid-sized cities mature into multi-sided regions, there is commonly a recognition of a need to position and compete intentionally, protect accumulated advantage, and get better organised.

From a policy perspective, many of SEQ's peer city-regions are currently pursuing opportunities to play more decisive roles in their national economy, and create more choice in the transport and housing system. Three kinds of growth strategies are especially visible in the mid-2020s:

**1** Metropolitan and inter-city connectivity

**2** Port and marine innovation

**3** New tools for effective housing supply



## New regional connectivity

Rail connections between the largest centres in a multi-city-region has been followed through as a priority in a number of places, in order to provide competitive alternatives to the car.

South Florida's new Brightline now connects Miami and Orlando 30 times a day via a 400km route in three hours, making it the fastest train outside the Northeast of America. This service – the first private passenger rail service in the U.S. for over 100 years funded by tax-exempt bonds - now offers a 30-minute reduction in travel time compared to driving. Importantly the service connects Miami to all the largest urban centres in the region – including Fort Lauderdale and West Palm Beach – and provides the reliability of on-train digital connections via SpaceX's Starlink to support knowledge worker commutes.

## Port and marine innovation

Many of SEQ's peers are using their port's strategic location and prioritising these ports' speed advantages and operational roles for global companies.

**Seattle** is using the advantage of the fact its deep-water ports are two days closer to Asia than California ports, to develop a strong maritime cluster and shape a collective

focus on green shipping. Major industry suppliers such as Corvus Energy have set up offices and battery factories. The Port of Everett continues to make upgrades to seaport facilities and green the supply chain, including dock electrification for future plug-in capabilities.

Meanwhile **Busan** is using its recent surge in foreign investment to translate its port and submarine cable hub status into an edge in finance and technology innovation. Its Metropolitan Government has an annual budget of A\$10bn and is focusing its resources to support a new financial centre, and a designated blockchain regulation-free district capable fostering fintech companies. Near to the port, Busan is also prototyping a 15-acre floating community, with United Nations backing. And the city also hosts a 3 sq. km A\$5bn national demonstrator for smart cities, carried out by a special purpose company with co-investment from local governments, the region's development agency, major water provider and private developers.

## South Holland: Reinvestment into a strong public transport backbone

Already a public transport-rich region, South Holland aims to almost double journeys on public transport by 2040. Three new tram lines, more frequency on metro lines, and emission-free buses are all part of the mix. However, better inter-city connections are viewed as especially critical.

The 60km Leiden-Dordrecht line is a cornerstone, connecting four of the region's mid-sized cities along a loop. It involves four new railway stations, more railway tracks and station upgrades. The ambition is to offer a sprinter service which runs every five minutes along parts of the line.

The rail operator is committed to a highly intensive transit orientated development (TOD) within walking distance of hub stations – accommodating up to 240,000 homes in the vicinity of the line. A big effort is being made to raise the standard of placemaking so that these railway villages will be seen as the most attractive new locations in the region to live.



Image Credit: Unsplash

## New coordinated funding tools for housing supply

One of the clearest examples of government becoming more permanently and strategically committed to the housing challenge is found in the **Greater Vancouver** region. The provincial government (British Columbia) has committed to over A\$1.5bn a year to build homes for lower-income people, including a strong focus on Indigenous populations. Key to this new approach in Vancouver is the new A\$500m B.C. Builds program, which is designed to speed up the production of quality low and middle-income housing. The focus is on small-scale, multi-unit housing through zoning changes, proactive partnerships, and much more strategic use of public land. It has created a full inventory of available public or First Nations lands where it can partner with private developers to build below-market housing and units with rent-to-own schemes. Informed by models in Singapore and Japan, it intends to create larger volumes of social housing, supportive housing, rental housing, and affordable home ownership.

### Coordinating to compete: the regional imperative

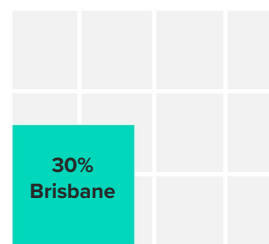
SEQ is not alone in having a context where its core city is the driver of the regional economy and so looks to cooperate with surrounding governments in the city-region. Indeed, most other regions tend to have more local governments of smaller scale and capacity than SEQ (see Chart).

Looking at the city-regions in this study with a complex collaboration environment, many have looked to deepen their mechanisms to better organise regional growth, development, and global promotion. Stockholm (55 local governments) is nearly 20 years into a branding and growth management alliance. Seattle (three Counties, 77 cities and towns, and nine Indigenous tribes) has found a public-private partnership model to tell the whole region's story and spirit. Busan and Barcelona also have both metropolitan governance arrangements as well as investment attraction and coordination arms that operate across government boundaries (see Figure).

Looking at SEQ's competitive imperatives, we identify four areas of initiative among relevant international city-regions, that SEQ can learn from.

- 1 Successive phases of governance and local government fiscal reform (Greater Manchester)
- 2 Collaborative and coordinated Economic Development (Busan)
- 3 More collective leadership from the business and university sectors (South Holland)
- 4 Investment attraction and promotion (Singapore)

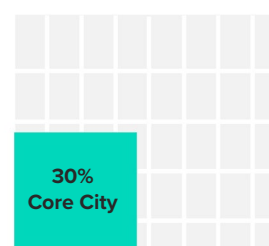
### SEQ



### 12 LGAs

330,000 inhabitants per LGA

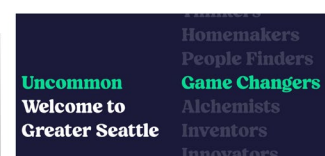
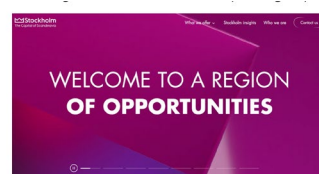
### Peer average



### 39 LGAs

160,000 inhabitants per LGA

Source: TBoC Research based on local government data





## Regional identity of Greater Manchester and decade of city deal investment

Image Credit: Marketing Manchester



As Manchester has evolved into a Greater Manchester city-region, its identity has become about place making as much as place marketing, harnessing the power of civic and planetary responsibility. After a long period scarred by deindustrialisation, economic malaise, bombing and unsuccessful Olympic bids, Manchester has successfully embarked on a 25-year process of public-private partnership to simultaneously build a viable metropolitan governance and tell a more diversified message to the world.

Collaboration has worked hard to understand how the world saw the city and how a growing metropolis of Greater Manchester saw itself. The ultimate goal of the brand process was to bring the city together through a shared vision, values, and actionable route map that everyone could grasp, own and respond to – individually and collectively. The response was at a city-region scale (not city central). The city's core idea of "Original Modern" became the basis for a deeper identity, linking the city-region to the great urban, industrial and inventive challenges of every age, where "great minds meet".

In this age, those challenges relate to our digital lives, cutting edge new materials, social inclusion, and healthy ageing. These have gained much sharper storytelling prominence, as has the city-region's social, scientific, and creative history, without diluting established narratives about art, design, music and sport.

This also has provided a route to a wider set of stories and opportunities to be told about the more socially disadvantaged fringes of the city-region. It has also revealed more strongly the binding values and principles that are shared across Greater Manchester.

Manchester has a very high performing mixed revenues system for building identity into all interactions, which reflects its mature culture of shared leadership among politicians, business leaders and university Vice-Chancellors.

Much is oriented around MIDAS, (the inward investment promotion agency for Greater Manchester) which astutely leverages its institutions' capacity and partnership working expertise. The umbrella Growth Company– a non-profit economic development agency - also helps to ensure strong and consistent messaging surrounding a diverse set of opportunities.

Greater Manchester has pioneered an important model of city-region governance in the UK. It is a Combined Authority of 10 local governments. The first 2009 City Region Pilot was an initiative aimed at testing and demonstrating the benefits of devolving more powers to city-region level. The pilot was instrumental in laying the groundwork for the subsequent devolution deals and the formation of the Combined Authority. In total, seven deals have extended the toolkit for the region to shape its own approach to its distinctive needs in skills, transport and services, and fostering a shared regional identity that local politicians buy into for mutual benefit. See Table below.



	Purpose	Tools
<b>Deal 1</b> 2012	Clear strategic leadership - Directly elected Mayor chairing the GMCA.	Revolving Infrastructure Fund - 'earnback' mechanism to incentivise pro-growth by allowing the region to retain a proportion of the increased tax revenues generated.  Powers over transport, business support, employment, and skills support.  Control over a A\$500m Housing Investment Fund to deliver 1,000+ homes per year.
<b>Deal 2</b> 2014	More control over healthcare to improve outcomes at every stage.	Devolved A\$ 11.5 bn on health and social care budget to Greater Manchester.  A\$ 870 m Health and Social Care Transformation Fund
<b>Deal 3</b> 2015	Optimise public land to serve growth.	Greater Manchester Land Commission.  Responsibilities for Fire and Rescue.
<b>Deal 4</b> 2015	Transport to provide more access to jobs in the CBD.	Bus reform - deliver bus franchising.  Regional Transport Strategy aiming for full integration of rail services.
<b>Deal 5</b> 2016	More efficient and effective use of public money to deliver local services.	Life Chances Fund – A\$ 150m + directed towards locally developed and commissioned Social Impact Bonds projects.  Devolution of Criminal Justice.  Pilot of 100% business rates retention.
<b>Deal 6</b> 2017	Boost productivity by increasing the travel-to-work area of the region.	A\$ 500m fund for intra-city transport.  Mayoral Capacity Fund – worth A\$ 10m per year.
<b>Deal 7</b> 2023	'Trailblazer' deal to spread economic growth to more locations in the region.	Greater control over post-16 technical education, as well as housing.  A GM Baccalaureate – intended to encourage study of subjects which are most valued by Greater Manchester employers.  A\$ 250m in brownfield funding.

#### Factors of Greater Manchester's success:

- Strong and consistent advocacy from civic leaders (with support from industry) to the central government, maintaining momentum and driving progress toward securing future deal generations and investments.
- Local government leadership committed to policy development, rooted in evidence, expanding fiscal autonomy, simplifying funding, and enhancing collaboration between central and local governments.
- Ability of local partners in the region to develop proposals that are credible and bold, for higher-level government ministers to follow and enable.
- A regional constitution that requires a high level of agreement and frequency of priority-setting among members. This leads to coordinated policies and initiatives and a more mature cross-party approach to decision making.

## Busan and the growth platform for Busan City Region



Image Credit: Unsplash

Busan is the major city at the heart of a multi-centre region known as the BUG Megacity (Busan-Ulsan-Gyeongnam Megacity). This region has been well connected by transport but organisationally fragmented in the past. Now it benefits from a metropolitan economic alliance that aims to combine the strengths of the major cities and localities into a region with the magnetism to compare to Greater Seoul, South Korea's capital.

This regional approach reflects a shift away from central government promoting the needs of individual cities alone. Instead, partners are pursuing a bottom-up economic collaboration over competition. The Megacity model unites the culture, port, and technology hub of Busan, with the industrial capacity of Ulsan, and the rural lifestyle and agricultural/commodities resources of Gyeongnam.

Amid challenges institutionalising the alliance due to political concerns from second city Ulsan that Busan would be the primary beneficiary from these arrangements, a regional economic strategy has been the initial area of progress.

A team of researchers and innovation districts across the region together set out a development strategy for the region to turbo-charge its specialisations in green shipping, digital aviation, hydrogen, underpinned by a R&D Special Zone

and a regional innovation platform of local governments and universities. The region is building collaboration via joint research programs, pooling resources, and knowledge exchanges between city and academic institutions. The region has also laid out a comprehensive rail and bus improvement plan, and an aim to drive culture-led tourism through integrated promotion, fares, and journey-mapping.



Source: TBoC Research; GeoBoundaries



## South Holland: University alliances with local government and industry



Image Credit: Unsplash

In mid-sized regions internationally, institutions and major firms have often become the anchors of long-term solutions and partnership building.

In 2021, 80 leading stakeholders from the South Holland region's business community, universities, and government (both local and provincial) joined forces to produce an integrated growth agenda around more broad-based prosperity. This shared focus commits all partners over the next decade to building 200,000 homes, adding 120,000 new jobs, and training 55,000 new people for the new economy.

In response to the shared growth vision for the region in 2022, in 2023 four major universities came together for the first time with the region's cities, major businesses and the province to address major practical issues around health, social care, AI and sustainability.

The South Holland Impact Alliance (ZHIA) brings the consortium of university leaders together to pool resources and combine projects. ZHIA also provides a forum for a wider array of leading

institutions across the public and private sectors to engage reciprocally, thanks to broad-based existing ties between South Holland's universities and partners across the region.

A key demonstrator project is Vitale Delta, an interdisciplinary effort that focuses on delivering integrated healthcare improvements across the region through deeper partnerships between researchers, government, and technological partners. For example, tech platforms are being funded to make possible the remote monitoring of and support for chronic diseases across the region, and collaborations between local governments and care homes to facilitate supervised physical activities among elderly populations.



## Singapore: from investment promotion to ecosystem curation



Singapore's 60-year transformation is well known, however; more recently the city has started to become a major hub for medical technology and precision engineering, now attracting the highest share of venture capital value to GDP in the world and shifting decisively to high-quality FDI. The Singapore Economic Development Board (EDB) has been the critical public body as an independent statutory board with a hybrid set of roles. The EDB possesses many advantages over other regions' typical investment promotion and 'one-stop shop' services, including:

- **Autonomy to be strategy-first and outcome-focused** - EDB is provided institutional flexibility to play the role as chief coordinator and facilitator among other agencies in government for how to attract the capabilities Singapore needs in priority sectors. This gives it the opportunity to drive 10-year-long overarching strategies, create roadmaps for specific sectors, and play the roles of project manager and fund disperser to execute specific priorities.

- **Industrial land** - EDB prepares "plug-and-play" infrastructure and serviced land sites to enable companies to kick off faster with labs and data centres, working closely with the public developer JTC laboratories.
- **Latitude** - Scope to introduce customised fiscal and tax incentives to investors, as well as specific talent visa schemes.
- **Investment capacity** - An active global venture investor and a risk taker since setting up its corporate venture investment arm. It has made over 200 investments together with other government-linked companies (e.g. Temasek) in targeted tech sectors (digital, engineering, urban solutions, advanced manufacturing) via a number of its sub-funds, and advises central government on new technology trends.

This means that EDB is not just focused on 'winning' foreign investments to grow priority sectors. It is continuously engaged in designing an ecosystem capable of delivering and sustaining this growth.



# In depth: City-regions and the digital imperative



Regions and the cities within them are increasingly recognising that there are positive relationships between digital connectivity, accessibility, equity, and coordination across a region, and economic development outcomes. This forward momentum is developing both at the frontier end of the economy, as a driver of broad-based productivity, and as an increasing priority to provide more pathways for people to take part in the digitising economy.

With this in mind, four very different governance contexts demonstrate the different adaptations regions have made in the last 20 years, including some of SEQ's peers:

- 1 Stockholm Region** – using a fibre infrastructure platform to raise the innovation capacity of corporates, start-ups and institutions across 25 local governments.
- 2 Greater Manchester** – coordinating public and private partners across local governments to create new support initiatives for digital inclusion.
- 3 South East Florida** – pursuing a wide-ranging culture and strategy of digital innovation, with local governments acting as astute customers of smart applications.
- 4 Singapore** – identifying local advantages as a bridge to wider regional economies and building governmental infrastructure to support digital connectivity investments.



## Connecting digital to innovation



Image Credit: Unsplash

Over the last 30 years, the Stockholm region has established itself as one of the most innovative in Europe: the launchpad for Spotify, Klarna, Mojang, and Skype, among others. Coordinated digital infrastructure focused on the commercial portion of the economy has been an essential foundation for this unexpected transition.

In 1994, Stockholm created competition-neutral IT infrastructure designed to meet future communication needs as well as spur choice and competition. The aim was to lower network costs, raise competition and reduce disruption to citizens. The network called 'Stokab' – built with very little public subsidy – quickly established hundreds of corporate and institutional customers, including the digital platform for all City of Stockholm services and a future proof network spanning 25 other local governments.

The network of 2 million kilometres of fibre in 9,900 optical cables served each premise with point to point 'dark fibre' access lines, with cross-connecting nodes supporting redundancy. Point to point is viewed as key to be secure in a digital environment that is increasingly shaped by quantum. This network supported rapid 5G deployment – with Stockholm possessing the fastest 5G download speeds in 2022 in Northern Europe and encouraging alternative operators to compete with major players.

The fibre network has dramatically improved the quality and reliability of communications within and between businesses in the Stockholm Region, enabling the region to grow the innovation economy, creative industries, and the event economy. Among the noted effects include:

- A significant rise in R&D centres setting up in the region.
- Connecting-up labs across the region such as Ericsson's to the north and KTH more centrally to improve scientific collaboration.
- Raising Stockholm's reputation for excellent connectivity for major events such as Champions League matches or roving events such as Marathons.
- Supporting early deployment of 5G for healthcare services such as ambulance videos in remote areas, remote monitoring, home care, and digital training across hospitals.
- The network partnership between Stockholm Region and Stokab has also led to earlier solutions development in areas such as monitoring traffic emissions and enforcing traffic rules.
- Encouraging local governments to launch open data initiatives so that third party developers can build useful citizen services.

Stockholm's success has paved the way for many more European regions to see rapid digital connections as the platform to grow the innovation ecosystem. Its successful implementation is said to have relied on a consensus on the need for better connections, a patient and gradual approach to deployment and returns, and transparent pricing policies.



## Coordinating the digital services that can serve inclusion



Image Credit: Marketing Manchester

Responding to what it sees as an entrenching ‘digital divide,’ Greater Manchester has taken decisive steps toward becoming a more digitally inclusive city-region. Its efforts focus on coordinating local and city-region government, businesses, and communities to improve access and up-skill residents.

As its Combined Authority of 10 local governments matured, its evidence base has diagnosed the cross-cutting ways that digital exclusion across Greater Manchester amplifies social inequalities and undermines economic potential and skills development. With no single infrastructure item or silver bullet possible, the region had to develop a flexible, collaborative plan.

Greater Manchester Digital Inclusion Taskforce now serves as the lead coordinating partner of a rich ecosystem of digital support. Its 180 members, who meet bi-monthly, are drawn from numerous public agencies, charities, and private companies across the region. This governance framework prioritises delivery of digital services, affordable connectivity, devices, and skills training for vulnerable groups like older adults and low-income households. In particular, it:

- Builds out connectivity infrastructure in public places, including free public Wi-Fi across town centres, high streets, and public transport, ensuring better internet access in underserved areas.
- Leverages local partnerships with educational institutions to up-skill residents.
- Offers a common framework to evaluate how impactful digital inclusion initiatives are.

Progress began with regional government putting its own digital services on the path to a unified look, feel, and function to ease access. The Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) next built a Digital Skills Map of where residents can access digital support and get online for free. Their effort was undergirded by a new regional approach to digital lifelong learning - the Digital Skills Framework – which equips residents with essential know-how, focusing on boosting digital confidence among disadvantaged communities.

The DIT also launched pilot programs to directly reach vulnerable or digitally excluded residents. Serving as the coordinating partner between telecoms and social housing providers in Greater Manchester, the DIT helped facilitate a standardised physical specification and service contract for fibre optic services in social housing, giving telecoms the needed confidence to invest more in infrastructure. The next aims are scaling up these kinds of successful pilots to the regional scale.

### Digital infrastructure to serve a growing enterprise economy



Image Credit: Unsplash

South East Florida has used its role as a telecommunications gateway between the Eastern U.S., the Americas, and the rest of the world, to pursue a wide-ranging culture and strategy of digital innovation.

The region is home to the Network Access Point (NAP) of the Americas (located near the airport and Downtown Miami), one of the world's few Tier-IV network access points serving traffic between the U.S. and Latin America, with areas dedicated to federal government customers with strict access control protocols.

Demand for the region as a hub has seen it host booming technology sectors. South Florida's tech economy now contributes US\$26 bn to the region's economy, with more than double the number of tech businesses as SEQ. Companies like Oracle, Palantir, and Hewlett Packard moved their offices to the region in the last five years.

This rapid growth has created talent gaps in cybersecurity, generative AI, blockchain, and mixed reality tech, and the challenge of ensuring that South East Florida meets this demand with the infrastructure, workforce, and inclusiveness it requires.

The region's cities and local governments are deploying technology and trying to bridge deep divides in digital access across the region. Initiatives prioritise improving internet access, advancing smart city infrastructure, and fostering economic growth by integrating real-time data analytics, smart mobility solutions, and ultrafast broadband connectivity.

The key areas of focus have been:

#### 1. Convening and coordinating

The region has recognised the need to assemble a diverse stakeholder base through events and collaborative platforms. Chief among these is the South Florida Tech Hub which operates as a nonprofit membership association focused squarely on attracting and supporting tech businesses and fostering a skilled talent pool. The Hub's activities across the region - with over 100 events per year - are primarily funded through membership dues of over 150 companies, plus execution of state government grants.

The Hub has proven the most effective convening entity to date at:

- Partnering with schools and tech companies to provide the most career-ready training programmes for students.
- Assembling senior industry and academic stakeholders in monthly Committee formats to address issues like skills and talent.
- Acting as a hub for commercialisation and scale-up of new technology areas like climate technology.

#### 2. Expanding the acquisition of digital skills, training, and foundations

South East Florida has become very proactive at addressing not only the current skills gap but also paying attention to the technical competencies of its residents. The region assembled 66 regional partners, including 10 universities, to focus on climate technology skills



over a 10-year period, while Miami has spearheaded a Tech Talent Coalition to train over 1,000 residents in AI, software, and data analytics over 3 years. Important initiatives across the region include Flamingo Coders and Code Palm Beach to introduce 17-18 year old students to computer coding technology and careers in STEAM, with the help of volunteers from major tech companies from entry level developers to Chief Technology Officers.

### 3. Cities in the region as customers of smart applications

Many of the individual cities of South East Florida have focused on the opportunity to become 'smarter' using data and tech-enabled infrastructure to better manage the city's services and operations. The most significant areas include:

- **Pedestrian, mobility, and freight data** - Cities in the region such as Miami, West Palm Beach and Fort Lauderdale are partnering up with tech companies to integrate real-time city and smartphone data in order to improve road safety, detect risks on the road, streamline waste collection, speed up the flow of traffic through dynamic parking pricing, and improve the experience and impact of outdoor work. This also includes digital twins.
- **Visitor experience and wayfinding** - through digital Wi-Fi and touch screens offering answers, walking routes and transport options.
- **Safety and public trust** - While some cities in South East Florida are working with companies to use recognition and analytics data to better support law enforcement, and analyse licence plate readers to deter crime, along with facial recognition, video analytics, and AI tools in supporting law enforcement, others are trialling an open-source communication standard to increase transparency, legibility, and accountability of digital technology to locals and visitors in public places.

### 4. Pursuing digital equity and inclusion

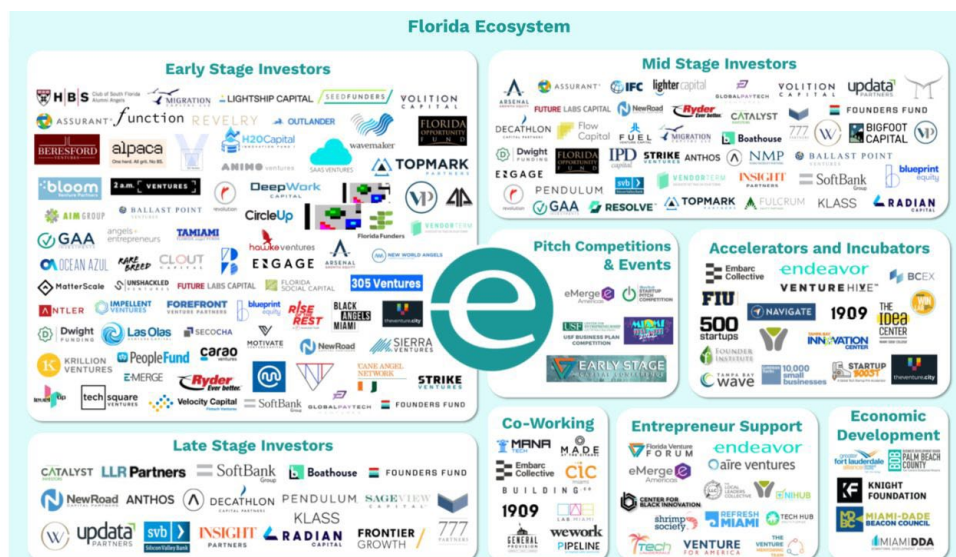
South East Florida is actively aiming to bridge the digital divide so that the digital acceleration in the region creates better jobs and opportunities in the urban and rural centres. Key initiatives include Miami Connected which provides broadband to 300,000+ disconnected households and digital literacy skills for newly connected families, with federal joint funding; and **Connecting Rural Communities** by renovating multi-purpose community buildings, to provide skills and pathways towards more than 20,000 new high-paying jobs over the next decade.

The region is also starting to deploy to use digital technology and data across boundaries, moving beyond piecemeal city-by-city activities. Local governments in the region see an opportunity to maintain or improve service levels, while saving money. There is increasing propensity from business owners and residents in South East Florida to favour the efficiency that these initiatives bring. A shared vision has emerged of the value and achievability of 'smart' solutions and their wider links to economic outcomes.

Lessons from Miami (South East Florida) include:

- Local government leaders eager to trial and assess scalable technologies,
- Proactive educational institutions,
- Medium-term commitments to workforce,
- Clear and capable convening,
- Harnessing the immigrant-driven community to put women and minorities more firmly at the heart of initiatives, and
- Investor-friendly policies.

### The regional ecosystem that the Tech Hub looks to convene





## Proactive policy and coordination for the digital economy



Image Credit: Singapore Unsplash

Singapore's digital development success is rooted in a proactive, government-driven approach that capitalises on a pragmatic view of regional opportunities. Singapore has long involved itself in coordinating the development of the digital sector, with digital infrastructure initiatives spanning the last 30 years. But Singapore's digital boom only gathered momentum after the government developed a comprehensive and responsive policy for digital businesses.

Responding to the rise of smartphones in the early 2010s, Singapore scaled up its digital development goals, identifying a new technological and geographic 'window of opportunity' to roll out these mobile platforms and services to markets across South East Asia. Moving beyond physical infrastructure, Singapore began to build a machinery of government and finance to attract and retain digital businesses.

Policymakers first defined clear and realistic medium-term digital policy goals. They then developed a "whole-of-government" strategy focused on attracting digital firms and talent to Singapore's open and supportive business environment.

Singapore next developed specialist financial support, with a state-owned venture capital firm seeding international and domestic investment with more patient state capital. De-risking investment in Singapore leveraged relatively small investments for force-multiplied effects.

The state also stepped in to coordinate networks of technology firms, investors, and skilled talent in lieu of having an established 'organic' ecosystem.

What Singapore did not do is also instructive:

- Singapore did not insist upon owning innovation from the start – they adapted and added value to existing technologies, allowing entrepreneurs of all nationalities to use Singapore as a base to reach markets across South East Asia.
- Anchor companies such as Sea Group (initially valued at over US\$100 bn) and Grab (\$14 bn) were encouraged to list locally and founders were encouraged to relocate to Singapore, however; Singapore has taken a moderate view on the 'nationality' of technological innovations themselves.
- Instead, Singapore has viewed digital development through the lens of longer-term economic outcomes rather than prioritising entrepreneurship for its own sake.

Building on fundamentals, recognising opportunities, and responding with good policy have led Singapore to top-tier tech cluster status – with more venture capital per head than any other country, and second in some rankings only to Silicon Valley.

# Clear strategic imperatives for SEQ to consider



## **Prioritise a spatial and economic strategy to collectively drive regional focus, vision and prioritisation**

Regional spatial planning for future industry requirements, including a focus on scale and location of industrial land, plus opportunities for repurposing of brownfield sites in CBD/CBD-fringe for new economy activities. SEQ's network of innovation hubs and places are opportunities but need scale, specialisation, and connectivity, with the link to research excellence particularly important.

## **Conviction and coordination around global brand identity for the region**

SEQ needs to confidently crystallise its role in the world, what the region wants to stand out for, and what its profile could and should be (particularly ahead of 2032). SEQ is a region with enormous distinctiveness, endowments and advantages. This needs ambition, skilful messaging, synchronised data, and coordinated sharing and storytelling with internal and external audiences. International regions of SEQ's scale do not usually rely solely or primarily on government as the agent of change - civic institutions are essential to build brand coordination and then to ensure the place experience matches and continually aspires to that identity.

## **Identify and build momentum around the next region-shaping projects**

SEQ requires consensus and conviction around the next two cycles of catalytic infrastructure that will generate the most return and can attract the attention of policymakers and investors. This will provide an important signal

about where the region wants to go and what it wants to become. A collaborative process is necessary to identify and sort these catalysts, imbue them with credible detail, and then raise the profile and energy around them.

## **Maximise the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games**

The Games present a once-in-a-century opportunity to improve SEQ's internal and external connectivity, shaping regional mass-transport connectivity to facilitate the Games and re-introducing SEQ to a global audience of spectators and sponsors. This requires a dedicated international strategy lead by the city-region, setting out how SEQ will work with higher levels of government and partners locally and internationally to deliver on its international vision, by coordinating activity around shared international ambitions.

## **Pursue mechanisms for regional governance, co-ordination and partnership**

SEQ must escape the risk of falling back into a low coordination equilibrium. This relies on more channels to talk across government and with the private sector to identify the outcomes everyone wants to see on the ground, and then equip shared strategies and commitment with speed of decision-making, budget cycles and financial durability that expand the sweet spot for the collaboration to forge. In lieu of larger reforms, leaders in SEQ can pursue more innovation into procurement and partnership approaches, and universities can play more proactive set of roles to 'anchor' the innovation economy.





## Appendix & Data Glossary



## Core data sources used for this report

**A substantial portion of data has been drawn from City, Regional, National, and International ID Community Profiles for South East Queensland and constituent Local Government Areas.**

Other sources for particular segments of analysis include:

- **Dealroom** – a platform provider capturing localised data on tech-enabled companies, venture capital and industry specialisations.
- **Google** – especially for data on mobility.
- **JLL** – for investment and commercial performance.
- **Local Government Area** data within South East Queensland.
- **OECD** – Interactive Metropolitan Database for figures on economic and spatial trends.
- **Regional and National Airport, Port and Transport Agencies** – for port and airport data and data on regional transport coverage.
- **TripAdvisor** – for data on cultural attractions and amenities.
- **World University Rankings** data from QS, Shanghai Ranking, Times Higher Education and Leiden University.

# South East Queensland



## SEQ's Local Context

SEQ comprises a richly varied economic and spatial geography – from high-growth cities, coastal communities, inland gateways, biodiverse rural areas, and natural icons and resources. These diverse settings and centres are spread across 12 local government areas.

### Brisbane

- Australia's largest local government area by population, with over 1.2 million people.
- A corporate and financial hub and an international centre for higher education.
- A major visitor and events destination, now hosting over 50 million visitor-nights a year.
- Knowledge and experience economies are experiencing major growth in the lead up to hosting the 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games.
- Ongoing Brisbane Metro and Cross River Rail projects will grow inner-city mobility and boost demand on suburban rail backbone.

**Core message:** *A city alive with opportunity; the growth engine of the 21st century. (BEDA).*

### Moreton Bay

- 500,000 residents with the 5th fastest population growth in Australia.
- Growth trajectory towards a \$40 bn economy and 100,000 new jobs over the next 20 years.
- Freight, marine, health and robotics driving a diversifying economy.
- Capacity for new mixed use recreation, tourism and innovation destinations such as North Harbour and The Mill.
- New Moreton Bay campus of University of the Sunshine Coast.

**Core message:** *"Just Down the Road". "A Brighter Future" ([Visit Moreton Bay](#), [Invest Moreton Bay](#))*

### Gold Coast

- Home to 700,000 people, growing 2% per year.
- Attracts over 12 million visitors annually to its beaches, nightlife and entertainment.
- Growing international profile since hosting Commonwealth Games in 2018.
- A 20 kilometre light rail system and an airport that welcomes 6+ million travellers.
- Expanding into life sciences, health and technology across multiple investment zones including projects such as Gold Coast Health and Knowledge Precinct.

**Core message:** *"Epitomises Australia's international identity". "It's Yours to Experience". ([Experience Gold Coast](#), [Invest Gold Coast](#))*

### Ipswich

- Population of 210,000, and Queensland's fastest growing city.
- Oldest provincial city in Queensland, attracts tourists with its cultural history and over 6,000 heritage-listed sites.
- Increasing presence as a filming location for domestic and international film and television.
- Home to two universities and over 550 parks

**Core message:** *"Leading the way in tourism, sport, industry, technology, education and residential development." ([City of Ipswich](#))*



### Lockyer Valley

- 2,200 km<sup>2</sup> agricultural region recognised as one of the ten most fertile farming areas in the world.
- Local UQ Gatton campus leads Queensland in agricultural and veterinary sciences.
- Population of 42,000; rural lifestyle appeal will see it grow by over 20% by the end of 2020s.
- Over 3,500 businesses.
- Centre of agribusiness with strong investment focus on sustainable water and food production.

**Core message:** “Take a breath of fresh air” ([Luvya Lockyer](#))

### Logan

- 370,000 residents, half under the age of 34.
- Strategic location with high road and rail connectivity.
- Significant population and cultural centre of SEQ’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- Industry growth in construction, manufacturing, healthcare and transport.

**Core message:** “Experience Different” ([Explore Logan](#), [Invest in Logan](#))

### Noosa

- Outstanding beach lifestyle appeal, and an international hub for tourism and experience.
- Population of 54,000 yet attracts 2 million visitors per year, spending [A\\$1.7bn](#).
- Strong economic focus on sustainable tourism, natural environments, landscape preservation and enriching experience.
- Home to Hastings Street, voted Best Main Street in Australia.
- A UNESCO biosphere, with 35% of the LGA protected as national park, reserve or conservation area

**Core message:** “Find your inner Noosa” ([Visit Noosa](#))

### Redland

- Population of 160,000 strategically located between Brisbane and Gold Coast.
- Key strengths in healthcare, education, agriculture, and manufacturing. A\$2bn in exports.
- Gateway to seven distinct islands including North Stradbroke Island.
- Lifestyle and tourism appeal supported by new investment in visitor infrastructure and water mobility at Weinam Creek and Dunwich.
- Strong environmental reputation backed by more than 1,400 conservation areas.

**Core message:** “The Jewel of South East Queensland” ([Visit Redlands Coast](#), [Invest Redlands Coast](#))

### Scenic Rim

- A centre for ecology, ecotourism and sustainable travel.
- Home to the Gondwana Rainforests (a UNESCO World Heritage Site).
- Hub for major Inland Rail development from Melbourne to Brisbane.
- Successful wine and equine industries, plus conservation areas and parkland.
- A centre of SEQ's drive toward renewable energy: one of the largest onshore windfarms in the world, plus several hydroelectric dams to provide renewable energy storage & demand management.

**Core message:** *"A network of unique rural communities"; "An innovative and progressive economy attracting growth and investment"* ([Visit Scenic Rim](#), [Invest Scenic Rim](#))

### Somerset

- Community of 26,000, with a 1-hour driving catchment of over 1 million.
- Specialises in agriculture and value-added food production and tourism. Food and beverage is 20% of the economy.
- An emerging hub for lifestyle-oriented remote employees, benefiting from destination development and revitalisation.
- Resilience leader in establishing the Somerset Lockyer Water Collaborative to improve water security and production.
- Popular outdoor recreation destination, home to Australia's longest recreational rails-to-trails project providing 161 km of safe walking, running, and cycling.

**Core message:** *"Find Yourself in Somerset"; "Brisbane's Gateway to Queensland Country"* ([Experience Somerset](#), [Somerset Economic Development](#))

### Sunshine Coast

- SEQ's northern gateway with 350,000 residents, recognised member of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves by UNESCO.
- Leader in digital connectivity with fastest regional internet connections and nearby submarine fibre optic connections to Asia-Pacific.
- Maroochydore growing into a major city centre hub for technology and business.
- Growing aviation specialism with international runway and future expansion capacity at Sunshine Coast Airport.
- Strategic focus on 7 high-value industries including aviation and aerospace; clean technologies; professional services; and education.

**Core message:** *"Find Your Sunshine Moment"; "The smart place for business"* ([Visit Sunshine Coast](#), [Invest Sunshine Coast](#))

### Toowoomba

- Queensland's largest inland city, population of 160,000.
- Trade crossroads of Australia with the development of Inland Rail and Toowoomba Trade Gateway
- Centre for advanced manufacturing, resources, wind, solar, healthcare and construction.
- International connectivity and aerospace specialism anchored by Wellcamp Airport with cargo focus on Asia-Pacific and passenger connectivity across QLD and NSW.
- Major defence hub with \$550 m Wagner Corp. and Boeing Australia investment in Wellcamp Aerospace & Defence Precinct to manufacture stealth aircraft.

**Core message:** *"Enterprise thrives in Australia's largest inland regional city."* ([Visit Toowoomba Region](#), [Toowoomba and Surat Basin Enterprise](#))

# Glossary

<b>AI</b>	Artificial intelligence
<b>B2B</b>	Business to Business
<b>B2C</b>	Business to Consumer
<b>BC</b>	British Columbia
<b>BIDS</b>	Business Improvement Districts
<b>BioTech</b>	Biotechnology
<b>BIV</b>	Business Interruptions Values
<b>Bn</b>	Billion
<b>BPO</b>	Business Process Outsourcing
<b>Brisbane 2032</b>	Brisbane Olympic & Paralympic Games 2032
<b>BRT</b>	Bus rapid transit
<b>CBD</b>	Central business district
<b>City-Region</b>	A metropolitan core area with adjacent cities, towns and rural areas, forming an integrated system functioning as a single economic unit, where daily activities (commuting, trade, and social interactions) extend beyond administrative boundaries of the central city.
<b>COMSEQ</b>	Council of Mayors South East Queensland
<b>EDB</b>	Singapore Economic Development Board
<b>Ed-tech</b>	Educational Technology
<b>ESG</b>	Environmental, Social and Governance
<b>FDI</b>	Foreign Direct Investment
<b>Fin-tech</b>	financial technology
<b>GDP</b>	Gross domestic product
<b>GRP</b>	Gross regional product

<b>ICCA</b>	International Congress and Convention Association
<b>JLL</b>	Jones Lang LaSalle
<b>inh</b>	Inhabitants
<b>km</b>	Kilometres
<b>LA</b>	Los Angeles
<b>LGA</b>	Local Government Area
<b>MedTech</b>	Medical technology
<b>MIDAS</b>	Greater Manchester's inward investment promotion agency
<b>MV</b>	Metro Vancouver
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>Prop-tech</b>	Property Technology
<b>QS</b>	Quacquarelli Symonds World university Ranking
<b>R&amp;D</b>	Research and development
<b>SEQ</b>	South East Queensland
<b>SDA</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>TOD</b>	Transit orientated development
<b>U.S.</b>	United States of America
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
<b>VC</b>	Venture Capital
<b>ZHIA</b>	South Holland Impact Alliance



# In brief: about city-region benchmarking



## Why city-regions do it

**50+ cities and regions over the last 10 years** have chosen to develop and utilise 'outside in' benchmarking for strategic purposes at regular intervals. At the wider metropolitan and regional scale this includes Amsterdam, Bilbao, Birmingham, Manchester, Melbourne, New York, Oslo and Vancouver.

### They DO use this work to:

- Look to the whole global context.
- Understand medium-term patterns.
- Reveal and refresh the strengths and opportunities to become more durably competitive.
- Build a clearer story of the whole region's capability.
- Reach more consensus about the region's big picture priorities.

### They do NOT use this work to:

- Substitute for local data and government analysis.
- Pass judgement on current city, region or state government leadership.
- Focus on their immediate neighbours and competitors.
- Assess the merits of immediate policy choices.



## Where does the data come from?

**Draws on respected databases** of indicators, national statistics, census data, and data platform aggregations, complemented by specific sources on cities and urban areas.

**Includes an improved range of data** now available to compare whole regions – including across mobility, innovation and land use.

**Also uses 'best fit' data** - where this is the most insightful data available. Metropolitan, 'functional area', or multi-city scale data is used where this accurately reflects the overall state of play among all peer regions.



## What input changes have occurred between 2017 and 2025 benchmarking?

**2 new city-regions** - Seattle (Puget Sound) and Stockholm Region reflect SEQ's current international trajectory.

**Wider range of data** at the metropolitan and regional level captures SEQ's scale and reach.

**Adjusted framework** based on 10 pillars to reflect breadth of themes such as innovation and resilience.

**More visual insights** of SEQ's key trends in contrast to peers.



## What principles apply?

**It's all relative** - A city-region's improvements on the ground may not get picked up if others are improving even faster. The reverse is also true.

**Perception also matters** - Some measures reflect the subjective views of local and global audiences.

**Time lags** - Real improvements to infrastructure, services or demand can take 1-2 years to register.

**Results are not 'down to government'** - City-regions' performance is strongly shaped by macro and audience factors beyond government control. Benchmarks do not assign blame or responsibility.

# Typology of Peer Regions

## Dispersed, multi-centre, nascent coordination

**South East Queensland** A fast-growing and fusing region consisting of multiple distinct centres, characterised by riverside Brisbane, several coastal centres, along with inland cities and towns.

**South East Florida** Elongated coastal region of 150 kilometres of waterfront urbanisation and inland suburbs. At least four successful economic centres north of Miami, benefiting from recent infrastructure and coordination catalysts.

## Connected, single-centre, coordinated

**Barcelona Region** A dense, mid-rise, and monocentric city, surrounded by a light industrial and agricultural region highly specialised in tourism, agriculture, and food production.

**Hamburg Region** Classic single-centre city-region. A large well-resourced city government surrounded by mainly rural regions specialising in logistics, wind power and clean tech.

**Stockholm Region** Hub-and-spoke harbour city surrounded by well-connected regional towns and cities. Mid-rise, medium densities, compact and a long established regional planning framework.

## Suburbanising, mid-coordination

**Metro Vancouver** Geographically constrained region with a compact, high-density CBD serving as the main hub for jobs, culture and visitation. Radial transit system to a small number of very rapidly growing sub-centres, especially Burnaby and Surrey. Some metropolitan growth planning and co-ordination focusing on resilience, sprawl and economically sustainable land-use.

**San Diego Region** Largely suburban and coastal region that spills over the border with Mexico. Specialised in transborder trade, manufacturing, defence and life science industries. World-class knowledge institutions with centre of gravity shifting back towards main CBD and mixed use environments. Capable regional governance and economy agencies leading major new effort to sustainably connect up the region and deliver inclusive growth.

## Multi-centre, coordinated, contested

**South East Korea** Highly urbanised, dense and technology-rich trading region pivoting around Busan City Region, complemented by large neighbouring industrial city of Ulsan 50 kilometres north, and neighbouring rural Gyeongsang inland. Benefits from efforts to reform citywide governance and improve joint working among the largest cities.

**Seattle/Puget Sound Region** One of North America's more compact core cities, that has specialised in tech and aerospace. Prosperous inner-ring suburbs shaped by relationship with water. Second city has major port roles. Regional planning focuses on addressing high-cost pressures, housing affordability and transport equity.

**South Holland** Compact medium-density region comprising two main cities (Rotterdam and The Hague), two large university towns (Leiden and Delft) and well connected over a green belt to the wider region of Amsterdam and Utrecht. Multiple overlapping scales of metropolitan and regional governance aim to accelerate housing supply and circular economic transition.

# References

1. The Business of Cities (2017) – Benchmarking SEQ in a Global Context: <https://seqmayors.qld.gov.au/documents/1r5V80I7ssQy0MeSQNFX>
2. Queensland Government & Council of Mayors South East Queensland (2019) – TransformingSEQ: [https://s3.treasury.qld.gov.au/files/TransformingSEQ\\_CityDealProposition\\_Final\\_2.pdf](https://s3.treasury.qld.gov.au/files/TransformingSEQ_CityDealProposition_Final_2.pdf)
3. In 2000, there were fewer than 70 city-regions worldwide whose economies consistently registered as internationally connected and competitive. Today that number is more than 300 and heading towards 500. The number of financial centres with the assets and perception to be rated as internationally significant has doubled, from 43 to 86. 10 years ago, just 12 ecosystems in Europe and North America absorbed more than \$300m of venture capital. This has since increased fivefold, to 67. And more second tier regions with distinct specialisms have emerged (e.g. in advanced manufacturing, creative industries, education, trade, logistics, energy, tourism, health, and culture).
4. UNCTAD (2023) – World Investment Report: <https://unctad.org/publication/world-investment-report-2023>.
5. The Business of Cities and Greater Cities Commission (2022) – Greater Cities: The Global Experience of Planning, Preparing and Promoting the Multi-City Region.
6. UN World Urbanisation Prospects (2018), Oxford Economics (2020); International and national statistics databases.
7. Calculated using Elo ratings algorithm. List of most globalised cities based on Globalization and World Cities Research Network (GaWC)
8. Such as South Holland Region or Seattle-Puget Sound.
9. Oxford Economics (2024) – Global Cities Index: <https://www.oxfordeconomics.com/global-cities-index/>; Globalization and World Cities Network (2024): The World According to GaWC: <https://gawc.lboro.ac.uk/gawc-worlds/the-world-according-to-gawc/world-cities-2024/>
10. The Business of Cities Research based on Brisbane Economic Development Agency (2024) – Brisbane: State of the City: <https://cdn.coronis.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/15123139/Brisbane-State-of-the-City-Report-compressed.pdf>.
11. The Business of Cities Research based on local census data sources: .id Informed Decisions (2023) and UN World Urbanization Prospects (2018)
12. United Nations (2018) – World Urbanization Prospects: <https://population.un.org/wup/Publications/> & The Business of Cities Research based on local census data sources (2024)
13. Australian Government: Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications (2020) – South East Queensland Research Project: <https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/bcarr-population-growth-housing-and-housing-affordability-seq-placemats.pdf>.
14. OECD Data Explorer – Foreign born population [Accessed in June 2024]: <https://data-explorer.oecd.org>
15. fDi Intelligence (2022) – fDi Benchmark: <https://www.fdiintelligence.com/content/data-trends/bankable-luxembourg-shines-as-best-regional-hq-80840>.
16. JLL (2024) – Global Office Market Dynamics: <https://www.jll.co.uk/en/trends-and-insights/research/global/gmp/global-office-market-dynamics>.
17. Knight Frank (2024) – Asia-Pacific Office Highlights: <https://www.knightfrank.be/research/asia-pacific-office-highlights-q2-2024-11342.aspx>
18. Forbes (2023) – New Research Examines Job Postings Offering Remote Work Options: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/josephbrazel/2023/09/26/new-research-examines-job-postings-offering-remote-work-options/>
19. JLL (2024) – Global Real Estate Perspective: <https://www.jll.co.uk/en/trends-and-insights/research/global/gmp>
20. CBRE (2024) – Global Investor Intentions Survey: <https://www.cbre.com/insights/reports/2024-global-investor-intentions-survey%E2%80%8B>
21. JLL (2024) & fDi Magazine AI Projects (2024)
22. Ibid.
23. ICCA (2023, 2024) – Country & City Rankings
24. The Business of Cities Research, based on local census data
25. OECD Data Explorer – Labour force participation rate [Accessed in June 2024]: <https://data-explorer.oecd.org>
26. OECD Data Explorer – Gender disparity in labour participation [Accessed in June 2024]: <https://data-explorer.oecd.org>
27. The Business of Cities Research, based on local census data
28. The Business of Cities Research, based on Numbeo data
29. Domain (2024) – ‘People love living here’: South-east Queensland suburbs where house prices doubled in five years: <https://www.domain.com.au/news/people-love-living-here-south-east-queensland-suburbs-where-house-prices-doubled-in-five-years-1263167/>
- RPM (2024) – SEQ house and land prices rise but remain below the established median house price: <https://www.rpmgrp.com.au/seq-house-land-prices-rise-but-remain-below-the-established-median-house-price/>
- BIV (2023) – Home equity in Greater Vancouver has increased more than \$400K since 2018: <https://www.biv.com/news/home-equity-metro-vancouver-has-increased-more-400k-2018-report-8273203>
30. Demographia (2024) – International Housing Affordability: <http://www.demographia.com/dhi.pdf>
31. Brisbane times (2024, May 18) – Queensland needs ‘thousands more hotel rooms’ before 2032 Games: <https://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/national/queensland/queensland-needs-thousands-more-hotel-rooms-before-2032-games-20240517-p5jei2.html>
32. Henley & Partners (2024) – Private Wealth Migration Report: <https://www.henleyglobal.com/publications/henley-private-wealth-migration-report-2024>
33. OECD Data Explorer – GDP per capita, adjusted for purchasing power [Accessed in June 2024]: <https://data-explorer.oecd.org>
34. Ibid.
35. The Business of Cities Research, based on local census data
36. Stephen King (2023) – I helped write the Productivity Commission’s 5-year productivity review: here’s what I think Australia should do: <https://theconversation.com/i-helped-write-the-productivity-commissions-5-year-productivity-review-heres-what-i-think-australia-should-do-201378>.



37. Metroverse City Profiles (2024) – What is my city's economic composition? <https://metroverse.cid.harvard.edu/>
38. TBoC Research based on Tholons Global Innovation Index (2021)
39. Metroverse City Profiles (2024) – What is my city's economic composition? <https://metroverse.cid.harvard.edu/>
40. Brisbane Economic Development Agency (2024) – Brisbane: State of the City: <https://cdn.coronis.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/15123139/Brisbane-State-of-the-City-Report-compressed.pdf>.
41. Metroverse City Profiles (2024) – What is my city's economic composition? <https://metroverse.cid.harvard.edu/>
42. OECD Data Explorer – Dependency ratio [Accessed in June 2024]: <https://data-explorer.oecd.org>
43. OECD Data Explorer – % of 15-29 y.o. as share of new movers [Accessed in June 2024]: <https://data-explorer.oecd.org>
44. OECD Data Explorer – Unemployment rate [Accessed in June 2024]: <https://data-explorer.oecd.org>
45. QS (2024) – Student Affordability
46. Mercer (2024) - Cost of Living City Ranking: <https://www.mercer.com/insights/total-rewards/talent-mobility-insights/cost-of-living/>
47. Australian Bureau of Statistics (2023) – Estimating homelessness: Census, 2021: [https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/housing/estimating-homelessness-census/2021/20490do005\\_2021.xlsx](https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/housing/estimating-homelessness-census/2021/20490do005_2021.xlsx)
48. The Business of Cities Research based on local census data.
49. UNSW City Futures Research Centre (2024) – Breaking Ground: Progress update and assessment of Queensland's housing crisis: [https://www.qcross.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Report\\_Breaking-Ground\\_Progress-update-of-Queensland-Housing-Crisis\\_web.pdf](https://www.qcross.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Report_Breaking-Ground_Progress-update-of-Queensland-Housing-Crisis_web.pdf)
50. fDi Intelligence (2024) – European Cities and Regions of the Future 2024: <https://www.fdiintelligence.com/content/rankings-and-awards/european-cities-and-regions-of-the-future-2024-the-winners-83483>
51. Lloyds List (2024) – One Hundred Container Ports: <https://www.lloydslist.com/one-hundred-container-ports-2024>
- Menon (2024) – The Leading Maritime Cities of the World: <https://www.menon.no/the-leading-maritime-cities-of-the-world-2024/#:~:text=Singapore%20has%20a%20strong%20performance,as%20well%20as%20finance%20%26%20law>
52. European Commission Directorate-General for Research & Innovation (2023) – EU Regional Innovation Scoreboard: <https://projects.research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/en/statistics/performance-indicators/european-innovation-scoreboard/eis-2024#/ris>; Deep (2024) – European Startup Heatmap: <https://startupheatmap.eu/city-search/>
53. IKM – Hamburg Metropolitan Region [Accessed in June 2024]: <https://deutsche-metropolregionen.org/metropolregion/hamburg/?lang=en>.
54. OECD Data Explorer – Green space per person [Accessed in June 2024]: <https://data-explorer.oecd.org>
55. The Business of Cities Research based on Rough Guides, Premier Inn, & Travel + Leisure data
56. The Business of Cities Research Based on TripAdvisor data
57. IQAir (2024) – Air quality in the world: <https://www.iqair.com/gb/world-air-quality>
58. OECD Data Explorer – Air pollution [Accessed in June 2024]: <https://data-explorer.oecd.org>
59. Demographia World Urban Areas (2024); OECD Data Explorer – Built-up area [Accessed in June 2024]: <https://data-explorer.oecd.org>
60. Population density (inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>) within 1 km radius of designated regional centres. The Business of Cities Research based on analysis of EU-Copernicus Global Human Settlement Layer.
61. The Business of Cities Research based on TripAdvisor Data
62. The Business of Cities Research based on Google Mobility Insights data
63. Ibid.
64. Ibid.
65. INRIX (2023) – Global Traffic Scorecard: <https://inrix.com/scorecard/>
66. Moovit (2022, 2023) – Public Transit Insights: [https://moovitapp.com/insights/en/Moovit\\_Insights\\_Public\\_Transit\\_Index-countries](https://moovitapp.com/insights/en/Moovit_Insights_Public_Transit_Index-countries)
67. The Business of Cities Research, based on analysis of the concentration of public transport stations and the local population served.
68. Cisco (2015) – South East Queensland: A Smart Region: <https://firebasestorage.googleapis.com/v0/b/council-of-mayors.appspot.com/o/publications%2F8LXjirkFmbdnZi2HimMV?alt=media&token=f27f5e44-45f6-844f-74433dfbd251>.
69. RACQ (2023) – Public Transport Survey Report: <https://www.racq.com.au/-/media/project/racqgroup/racq/pdf/advocacy/member-and-community-surveys/public-transport-survey-2023---fy23.pdf?rev=bd2d7114aee14982bab3cd2b98b9713f&hash=E53AC350F754CC91FB543D0F83D9D249>
70. Climate Council (2024) – Next Stop Suburbia: Making shared transport work for everyone in Aussie cities: <https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Next-Stop-Suburbia.pdf>.
71. UN-Habitat (2024) – Urban transport: <https://data.unhabitat.org/pages/urban-transport>
72. The Business of Cities Research based on average travel times between SEQ's major centres as compared to those of peer regions.
73. Ibid.
74. The Business of Cities Research, based on spatial analysis of transit agency data.
75. Los Angeles Metro (2024) – One year in: a look back on some of our favorite Regional Connector moments: <https://thesource.metro.net/2024/06/17/one-year-in-a-look-back-on-some-of-our-favorite-regional-connector-moments/>
76. Brisbane Economic Development Agency (2024) – Brisbane: State of the City: <https://cdn.coronis.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/15123139/Brisbane-State-of-the-City-Report-compressed.pdf>.
77. The Business of Cities Research (2024) based on local planning data.
78. The Business of Cities Research based on Kayak, OpenStreetMap, and People for Bikes data
79. The Business of Cities Research based on Google Mobility Insights data.

80. The Business of Cities Research (2024) based on airport statistics.
81. Forecasts to double in impact and jobs supported up to 2050; Port of Brisbane (2022) – Port of Brisbane’s economic contribution: <https://www.portbris.com.au/major-projects/port-of-brisbane-s-economic-contribution>
82. Port of Brisbane (2023) – Origin Destination Study 2023: <https://www.portbris.com.au/origin-destination-study1>
83. The Business of Cities Research based on local port statistics; AGBI (2023) DP World completes \$260m Vancouver port expansion – <https://www.agbi.com/logistics/2023/05/dp-world-completes-260m-vancouver-port-expansion/>
84. World Bank (2023) – Container Port Performance Index 2023: <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/099060324114539683/p17583313892300871be641a5ea7b90e0e6>  
Brisbane’s performance is partly reflective of wider inefficiencies common to Australian container ports, which one report estimated cost the economy A\$600 million per year
85. OECD Data Explorer – Internet speed [Accessed in June 2024]: <https://data-explorer.oecd.org>
86. Mandala Partners (2024) – Empowering Australia’s Digital Future: [https://mandalapartners.com/uploads/Empowering-Australia's-Digital-Future---Report\\_October-2024.pdf](https://mandalapartners.com/uploads/Empowering-Australia's-Digital-Future---Report_October-2024.pdf)
87. Data Center Map (2024) – Map: <https://www.datacentermap.com/>
88. See for example the LCR Connect initiative: <https://lcrconnect.com/>
89. Nature Research Intelligence (2023) – Global Innovation Hubs Index: <https://www.nature.com/articles/d42473-023-00420-1>
90. The Business of Cities Research based on QS, Leiden, Times Higher Education and Shanghai Rankings of global universities
91. Ibid.
92. Ibid.
93. TBoC Research based on Shanghai Ranking. The University of Queensland is home to 21 world-top-100 university programs, while Queensland University of Technology has 3 and University of Southern Queensland has 1.
94. Nature Research Intelligence (2023) – Global Innovation Hubs Index: <https://www.nature.com/articles/d42473-023-00420-1>
95. Newsweek (2024) – World’s Best Specialized Hospitals 2024, Pediatrics: <https://www.newsweek.com/rankings/worlds-best-specialized-hospitals-2024/pediatrics>
96. Nature Research Intelligence (2023) – Global Innovation Hubs Index: <https://www.nature.com/articles/d42473-023-00420-1>
97. TBoC Research based on university statistics and QS (2024) – International students
98. QS (2024) – Best Student Cities 2024: <https://www.qs.com/rankings-released-qs-best-student-cities-2024/>
99. Brisbane Economic Development Agency (2024) – Brisbane: State of the City: <https://cdn.coronis.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/15123139/Brisbane-State-of-the-City-Report-compressed.pdf>
100. QS (2024) – World University Rankings 2025: <https://www.topuniversities.com/world-university-rankings>
101. Ibid.
102. Ibid. Based on the results of the EmployerReputation survey conducted each year.
103. QS (2024) – World University Rankings 2025: <https://www.topuniversities.com/world-university-rankings> based on the results of the Employer Reputation survey conducted each year.
104. Informed Decisions (id.) (2023) – Community Profile: <https://profile.id.com.au/comseq>
105. Mark Western (2024) – Advancing Equity in Australian Higher Education: <https://gjia.georgetown.edu/2024/02/15/advancing-equity-in-australian-higher-education/>; Jason Clare (2024) – Release of the Australian Universities Accord: <https://ministers.education.gov.au/clare/release-australian-universities-accord>.
106. Leiden Ranking (2024) – Leiden Ranking 2024: <https://www.leidenranking.com/ranking/2024/list>
107. Ibid.
108. QS (2024) – World University Rankings 2025: <https://www.topuniversities.com/world-university-rankings>
109. TBoC Research based on local census data
110. Queensland Government & Advance Queensland (2024) – SEQ Innovation Economy Fund: <https://advance.qld.gov.au/grants-and-programs/innovation-economy-fund>
111. Choose Brisbane (2023) – Business Hub celebrates third year supporting Brisbane enterprise: <https://choose.brisbane.qld.au/news/business-hub-celebrates-third-year-supporting-brisbane-enterprise>.
112. Advance Queensland (2024) – Sunshine Coast’s Innovation Leaders Take Centre Stage: <https://advance.qld.gov.au/innovation-in-queensland/innovation-stories/sunshine-coasts-innovation-leaders-take-centre-stage>; Advance Queensland (2024) – Unlocking innovation in the Gold Coast to Shape the future of healthcare: <https://advance.qld.gov.au/innovation-in-queensland/innovation-stories/unlocking-innovation-in-the-gold-coast-to-shape-the-future-of-healthcare>.
113. Dealroom (2024) – 10-year growth in VC investment: [data not publicly available]
114. Queensland Government (2023) – Spotlight on Queensland: [https://www.tiq.qld.gov.au/getmedia/818a98ec-56bc-409a-b611-06680cc3a751/Spotlight-on-QLD-report\\_2024\\_v1\\_DIGITAL.pdf](https://www.tiq.qld.gov.au/getmedia/818a98ec-56bc-409a-b611-06680cc3a751/Spotlight-on-QLD-report_2024_v1_DIGITAL.pdf)
115. Dealroom (2024) – Specialisations: [data not publicly available]
116. Animation Career Review (2023) – Top 20 Cities Worldwide for Animation Careers: <https://www.animationcareerreview.com/articles/top-20-cities-worldwide-animation-careers>
117. Dealroom (2024) – Specialisations: [data not publicly available]
118. Nature Research Intelligence (2023) – Global Innovation Hubs Index: <https://www.nature.com/articles/d42473-023-00420-1>
119. Dealroom (2024) – Share of startups founded by women: [data not publicly accessible]

120. Startup Genome (2024) – The Global Startup Ecosystem Report 2024: <https://startupgenome.com/report/gser2024>; 6 core cities among SEQ's 9 peer regions are currently rated in a higher tier of more mature ecosystems.
121. Nature Research Intelligence (2023) – Global Innovation Hubs Index: <https://www.nature.com/articles/d42473-023-00420-1>
122. Dealroom (2024) – Venture capital: [data not publicly available]
123. Ibid.
124. Dealroom (2024) – Venture capital: [data not publicly available], Startup Genome (2024) – The Global Startup Ecosystem Report 2024: <https://startupgenome.com/report/gser2024>
125. Dealroom (2024) – Venture capital: [data not publicly available]
126. Dealroom (2024) – Number of startups: [data not publicly available]
127. Leiden Ranking (2024) – Leiden Ranking 2024: <https://www.leidenranking.com/ranking/2024/list>
128. Cornell/WIPO (2024) – Cluster ranking 2024: <https://www.wipo.int/documents/d/global-innovation-index/docs-en-2024-gii-2024-clusters-top100-ranking.pdf>
129. Dealroom (2024) – Stage of funding: [data not publicly available]
130. The Business of Cities Research (2024) based on OECD economic output per kilogram of emitted carbon dioxide from electricity generation; NB: Carbon intensity does not account for primary fuel combustion such as car petrol, gas stoves, or heating fuels.
131. Queensland Government (2024) – Queensland's renewable energy targets: <https://www.energyandclimate.qld.gov.au/about/initiatives/renewable-energy-targets>.
132. Queensland Government (2024) – Renewable energy in South East Queensland: <https://www.energyandclimate.qld.gov.au/energy/renewable-energy-in-your-region/south-east-queensland>; Such investments will help propel SEQ toward Queensland's 2035 green energy targets; Queensland Government (2024) – Queensland's 2035 Clean Economy Pathway: 75% by 2035: [https://www.epw.qld.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0028/48493/queensland-2035-clean-economy-pathway.pdf](https://www.epw.qld.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0028/48493/queensland-2035-clean-economy-pathway.pdf).
133. Brisbane Times (2023, 12 October) – Power play: Brisbane council looks to generate its own electricity: <https://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/national/queensland/brisbane-eyes-solar-farm-to-pave-a-cool-route-to-clean-energy-20231012-p5ebs5.html>
134. The Business of Cities Research based on data from B Corporation compared to regional populations.
135. QS (2024) – World University Rankings 2025: <https://www.topuniversities.com/world-university-rankings>
136. CBRE (2023) – The Green Building Premium: Does It Exist?: [https://mktgdocs.cbre.com/2299/96cfd5f-9a51-4205-ac0c-c5707356648f-2084607075/APAC\\_The\\_20Green\\_20Building\\_20.pdf](https://mktgdocs.cbre.com/2299/96cfd5f-9a51-4205-ac0c-c5707356648f-2084607075/APAC_The_20Green_20Building_20.pdf)
137. ThoughtLab (2024) – Smarter Cities 2025: <https://thoughtlabgroup.com/smarter-cities-2025/>
138. Global Destination Sustainability (2023) – GDS-Index: <https://www.gds.earth/index/trends-insights/>
139. World Resources Institute (n.d.) – Aqueduct Water Risk Atlas: <https://www.wri.org/applications/aqueduct/water-risk-atlas>
140. World Resources Institute (n.d.) – Aqueduct Water Risk Atlas: <https://www.wri.org/applications/aqueduct/water-risk-atlas>; San Diego County Water Authority (n.d.) – Seawater Desalination [Accessed in June 2024]: <https://www.sdcwa.org/your-water/local-water-supplies/seawater-desalination/>.
141. See for example the Lockyer Valley-Somerset Water Collaborative, recipient of A\$10.8 m from the SEQ City Deal in 2024: <https://lvandswatercollaborative.com.au/>
142. Demographia World Urban Areas (2024); OECD Data Explorer – Built-up area [Accessed in June 2024]: <https://data-explorer.oecd.org>
143. Ibid.
144. The Business of Cities Research, based on analysis of EU-Copernicus GHSL.
145. Ibid..
146. Queensland Government (2023) – ShapingSEQ 2023: <https://www.planning.qld.gov.au/planning-framework/plan-making/regional-planning/south-east-queensland-regional-plan>
147. OECD Data Explorer – Population density [Accessed in June 2024]: <https://data-explorer.oecd.org>
148. OECD Data Explorer – Population exposure to heat stress [Accessed in June 2024] - <https://data-explorer.oecd.org>
149. OECD Data Explorer – Urban heat island effect [Accessed in June 2024] - <https://data-explorer.oecd.org>
150. Queensland Government (2020)– State of the Environment Report 2020: Fire weather and associated bushfire hazard: <https://www.stateoftheenvironment.des.qld.gov.au/climate/climate-observations/fire-weather-and-associated-bushfire-hazard>; Australian Journal of Emergency Management (2024) – Urban design and wildfire engineering at the wildland-urban interface: <https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/ajem-october-2024-urban-design-and-wildfire-engineering-at-the-wildland-urban-interface-a-review-of-international-urban-planning-and-building-requirements/>
151. OECD Data Explorer – Population exposure to river flooding [Accessed in June 2024] - <https://data-explorer.oecd.org>
152. OECD Data Explorer – Population exposure to coastal flooding [Accessed in June 2024] - <https://data-explorer.oecd.org>
153. OECD (2020) – Change in tree cover in cities and their commuting zones: [https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/urban-rural-and-regional-development/oecd-regions-and-cities-at-a-glance-2020\\_959d5ba0-en](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/urban-rural-and-regional-development/oecd-regions-and-cities-at-a-glance-2020_959d5ba0-en)
154. 'Economist Intelligence Unit (2024) – Global Liveability Index 2024; World Happiness Report (2024) – <https://worldhappiness.report/ed/2024/>; BCW (2023) – 2023 Ranking of Sports Cities: [https://www.bcw-global.com/assets/BCW-Ranking-Sports-Cities\\_Report2023.pdf](https://www.bcw-global.com/assets/BCW-Ranking-Sports-Cities_Report2023.pdf)
155. The Business of Cities Research based on local crime data
156. The Business of Cities Research based on data from Tripadvisor
157. ECA International (2024) – Singapore retains pole position as no. 1 place for Asians to live for 10th consecutive year: <https://www.eca-international.com/news/january-2024/singapore-retains-pole-position-most-liveable>
158. Council of Mayors SEQ (2024) - Multi-million-dollar boost to liveability in South East Queensland: <https://seqmayors.qld.gov.au/news/multi-million-dollar-boost-to-liveability-in-south-east-queensland-20240801>



159. Courier & Mail (2023, 1 January) – Scenic Rim surges after Lonely Planet's global plug: [https://archive.is/https://www.couriermail.com.au/subscribe/news/1/?sourceCode=CMWEB\\_WRE170\\_a\\_GGL&dest=https://www.couriermail.com.au/lifestyle/tourism-boom-for-scenic-rim-after-lonely-planets-ringing-endorsement/news-story/a746537dcf685b789df61109817c874e&memtype=anonymous&mode=premium&v21=GROUPA-Segment-1-NOSCORE](https://archive.is/https://www.couriermail.com.au/subscribe/news/1/?sourceCode=CMWEB_WRE170_a_GGL&dest=https://www.couriermail.com.au/lifestyle/tourism-boom-for-scenic-rim-after-lonely-planets-ringing-endorsement/news-story/a746537dcf685b789df61109817c874e&memtype=anonymous&mode=premium&v21=GROUPA-Segment-1-NOSCORE)
160. Informed Decisions (id.) (2023) – South East Queensland: Visitor nights [Accessed in June 2024]: <https://economy.id.com.au/comseq/tourism-visitor-summary>.
161. Informed Decisions (id.) (2023) – South East Queensland: Visitor nights [Accessed in June 2024]: <https://economy.id.com.au/comseq/tourism-visitor-summary>; Choose Brisbane (2023) – Brisbane booms as interstate tourists set spending records: <https://choose.brisbane.qld.au/news/brisbane-booms-as-interstate-tourists-set-spending-records>.
162. The Business of Cities Research (2024) based on Diari de Barcelona (2024) – Catalunya acull el triple de la seva població en turistes el 2023 i els estrangers es dupliquen en dues dècades: <https://www.diaridebarcelona.cat/w/catalunya-acull-triple-seva-poblacio-en-turistes-2023-i-estrangers-dupliquen-dues-decades>.
163. Ibid.
164. The Business of Cities Research based on TripAdvisor data
165. Higher School of Economics (2023) – HSE Global Cities Innovation Index: <https://gcii.hse.ru/mirror/pubs/share/825769733.pdf>
166. The Business of Cities Research based on local censuses & Informed Decisions (id.) (2023)
167. The Business of Cities Research based on TripAdvisor data
168. The Business of Cities Research based on a study of SEQ + peer regions' cultural districts, policies, and most visited institutions.

## Images

**Cover Image:** Brizzy Pix, Visit Sunshine Coast, Gary Cranitch @ Queensland Museum and BEDA

**Full Document:** Experience Somerset, Brisbane City Council, Unsplash, Destination Vancouver, BEDA, Ipswich City Council, Queensland University of Technology, Tourism Noosa, Redland City Council, Brizzy Pix, Krista Eppelstun, Tourism and Events Queensland, Gary Cranitch @ Queensland Museum, Visit Sunshine Coast, Jesse Smith, Damien Bredberg, Marketing Manchester, Reuben Nutt, Experience Somerset



