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Critical Health and Education Facilities Expand

Over recent years the Gold Coast's hospital and tertiary education facilities have been expanded, with plans underway that will greatly enhance the capacity of these critical human services.

With a current population estimated at 535,000 residents, the Gold Coast region stretching from Pimpama to the Tweed Coast has matured significantly over the past decade. Its economy is well diversified.

Two key sectors are health and education. At the 2006 Census they accounted for almost 35,000 workers in the Gold Coast region. This represented close to 16% of the total employed workforce of 221,139 persons.

Universities Expansion

The Gold Coast region is currently served by four universities: the Gold Coast campus of Griffith University at Southport; the Central Queensland University Gold Coast International campus at Southport; the private Bond University at Robina; and the Tweed campus of Southern Cross University. Together they account for more than 17,000 students and more than 1,000 staff.

Expansion activity includes:

Griffith University

- The School of Medicine and Oral Health located in a 12,000 square metre building adjoining Gold Coast Hospital – opened in 2005. It is linked to the Parklands campus by a fibre optic cable that facilitates broadband telemedicine;
- The steel cable pedestrian bridge linking the 26.5 hectare Parklands campus with the 43 hectare southern precinct, south of the

Smith Street Motorway – opened in February 2007;

- A new student accommodation village is being developed in the southern precinct in three stages, with a total of 517 fully furnished rooms progressively developed during 2007 for completion by January 2008;



Griffith School of Medicine & Oral Health at Southport, with Gold Coast Hospital in the rear

- Glycomics 1 building currently under construction in the northern precinct, expanding the Institute for Glycomics, which was established in 2000 to research the roles carbohydrates play in disease and ageing and to develop carbohydrate-based medicines. The Institute is also recruiting an additional 100 research staff; and
- Queensland Academy for Health Sciences, a high school college for students interested in health-related careers, under construction in the southern precinct for

completion in 2008. It features a 500-seat lecture theatre and seven science laboratories and will commence operations with up to 150 students in the first year.

Bond University

- The Faculty of Health Sciences and Medicine building opened in 2005;
- A new Law Faculty building opened in June 2007, featuring the latest technology used in Australian courts (an electronic evidence management system); and
- The Urban Development and Sustainability building is under construction for completion in mid 2008. It will house the new Mirvac School of Sustainable Development, which accepted its first students in January 2007.

Southern Cross University

- The master plan for a new Gold Coast campus spanning the NSW-Queensland border within the Gold Coast Airport site envisages access from the Gold Coast Highway and from the Tugun Bypass (on completion). Construction is expected to commence in late 2007 for completion in December 2008. The campus is proposed to accommodate 750 equivalent full-time students in 2009, increasing to 2,000 students by 2011.

The Tweed Heads campus of Southern Cross University opened in 2002 and is one of four existing campuses (others in Lismore and Coffs Harbour, plus the Hotel Management School in Sydney). Tweed Heads campus is noted for its marine sciences and surfing studies courses. Once the new Gold Coast campus is opened, the Tweed campus

is proposed to be utilised as a Graduate School of Management.

TAFE Expansion

In line with the need to ensure availability of technically trained workers, the Gold Coast Institute of TAFE is also proposed for expansion. One of the five campuses, at Ridgeway Avenue, Southport is to have a new 600-room facility. Construction is scheduled to commence in March 2008. The upgrade is being funded by a South Korean consortium, reflecting the importance of international students.

Gold Coast TAFE also has a new Marine Industry Training Centre at Coomera, due to open in February 2008 within the Gold Coast Marine Precinct. This is Australia's leading boat building precinct, employing approximately 4,000 people, with approximately 90 hectares out of 250 hectares developed since 2000. By 2010, it is estimated that marine services industry training could cater for 2,000 students per annum, more than double the current 700 students per annum.

Hospital Development

The Gold Coast is currently served by three public hospitals: the Gold Coast Hospital at Southport; the Tweed Heads Hospital; and the Robina Hospital which opened as a private hospital in 2000, but was acquired by Queensland Health in 2002.

The new 750-bed Gold Coast University Hospital adjoining Griffith University campus at Parklands is scheduled to open in 2012. Earlier this year, it was announced that the preferred site would no longer be south of the Smith Street Motorway, but on the eastern side of Griffith University. Construction is unlikely to commence

before late 2008. The new facility is expected to employ 5,500 staff and services are likely to include cancer, cardiac, trauma, neonatal intensive care and neurosciences.

The existing 426 beds at Gold Coast Hospital three kilometres to the east of the Parklands site are to be absorbed into the new facility. It is anticipated that health services will continue to be provided post 2012 on the four-hectare Southport site, with various options currently being explored by Queensland Health.

Development activity is also occurring at the Robina and Tweed Hospitals:

- Robina Hospital has recently opened its new Emergency, Intensive Care and Renal units, with an additional 450 employees, bring the total to 1,000 employees. Stage Two of the proposed expansion will see the 185-bed hospital increase to 364 beds by 2010. (The Emergency unit at Southport Hospital has also been upgraded this year); and
- A new Clinical Research building is proposed for Tweed Hospital, incorporating an 80-seat auditorium and laboratory for the use of Bond and Griffith University students, as well as a breast screening facility and a 30-bed medical ward.

The other notable expansion of health infrastructure currently underway in the Gold Coast region is construction of a nine level specialist medical centre of 5,786 square metres on the corner of High and Queen Streets at Southport. Due for completion in May 2008, it is anchored by the cancer treatment specialist, Wesley Radiology and Oncology.

The Gold Coast region has a number of private hospitals and day surgery facilities. In fact private (overnight) hospital beds currently represent half of the total supply of available beds, as indicated in Table 1 on the next page. The dependence on the private sector is unusual in the national context, with public hospital beds usually accounting for two-thirds of the total beds available.



Robina Hospital's Emergency department

The three largest private hospitals are the John Flynn Private Hospital at Tugun; Allamanda Private Hospital at Southport; and Pindara-Gold Coast Private Hospital at Benowa. There are also two leading day surgeries, Pacific Private Hospital at Southport and Tweed Day Surgery at Tweed Heads.

Over the past decade the length of hospital stays has generally fallen, due to day surgeries and high technology equipment. However the Gold Coast, with a rapidly growing and ageing population, needs the capital infrastructure that is planned. It also needs the increase in trained health services personnel being assisted by the education initiatives discussed above.

The advent of regular 'bypass' of emergency facilities by ambulances

due to the shortage of beds highlights the need for the planned capital works.

Those aged 65 years plus are projected to more than double in number by 2026, from 15% to 21% of the population from Pimpama to the Tweed Coast. It is estimated that people in this age group consume approximately four times the health services as younger people.

Provision of Beds

Table 1 shows that currently the Gold Coast region from Pimpama to the Tweed Coast is served by over 1,600 public and private hospital beds, reflecting a ratio of 3.1 beds per 1,000 residents. This is below the average of 4.0 beds per 1,000 persons available nationally (source: the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Australia's health 2006*). The Gold Coast region has only 1.6 public hospital beds per 1,000 residents, well below the national average of 2.7 public hospital beds per 1,000 persons.

This under-provision of beds is more critical if the visitor population is considered, with the Gold Coast attracting an average of over 100,000 visitors per day. Numbers are even higher in peak holiday periods. This floating visitor population reduces the current provision of hospital beds from 3.1 beds to 2.6 beds per 1,000 persons.

By 2012, the total population of the Gold Coast region from Pimpama to the Tweed Coast including visitors is projected to exceed 690,000 persons, so that the proposed augmentation of beds would represent a ratio of 3.2 beds per 1,000 persons.

Table 1 does not make any allowance for an increase in private sector overnight beds, although the existing hospitals may have some capacity to increase bed numbers before 2012. There are plans for new private medical facilities at Southport and Hope Island, but it is understood that these are most likely to be day surgeries or medical suites.

Table 1 - Gold Coast Region Available Hospital Beds* Per 1,000 Population

	2007	2012
Residents	535,000	591,000
Plus Floating Visitor Population	635,000	691,000
Public Hospital Beds	831	1,364
Private Hospital Beds	815	815#
Total Hospital Beds	1,646	2,179#
Ratio Per 1,000 Residents		
Public Hospital Beds	1.6	2.3
Private Hospital Beds	1.5	1.4
Total Hospital Beds	3.1	3.7
Ratio Per 1,000 Persons Including Visitors		
Public Hospital Beds	1.3	2.0
Private Hospital Beds	1.3	1.2
Total Hospital Beds	2.6	3.2

* overnight beds only, excludes day surgery beds

assumes no additional overnight private sector beds are completed by 2012

The addition of approximately 533 public beds across the Gold Coast region over the next five years will only just address the shortfall of 600 beds identified in July 2007 by Doctor Phillip Morris, president of the Gold Coast Medical Association.

Future development of a major public hospital at Coomera, possibly specialising in paediatrics, being considered by Queensland Health, will be needed for the Gold Coast region to more adequately address its future health needs. Additional private sector beds would also assist.