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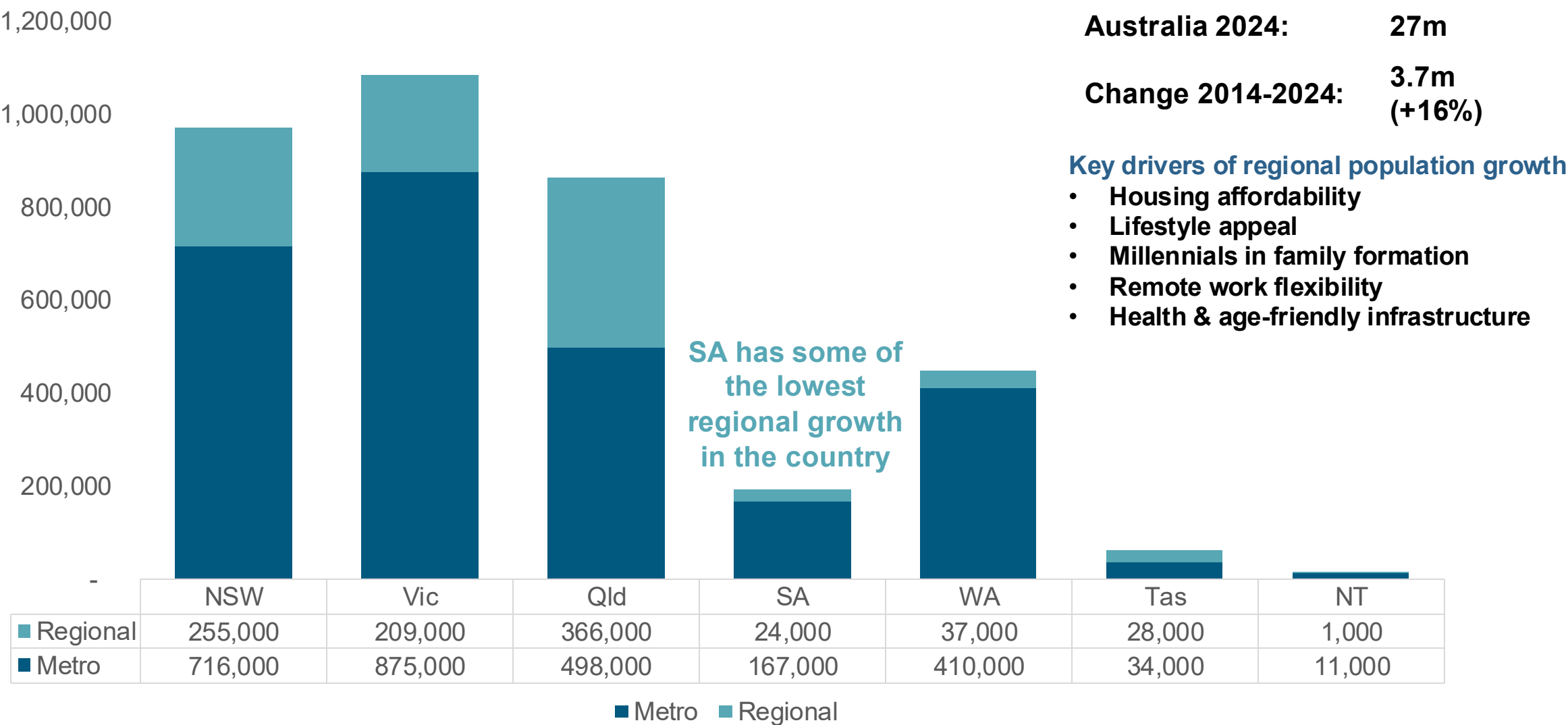
Unlocking Regional Potential: South Australia's demographic shifts, opportunities and challenges

Hari Hara Priya Kannan

**Adelaide
05 September 2025**

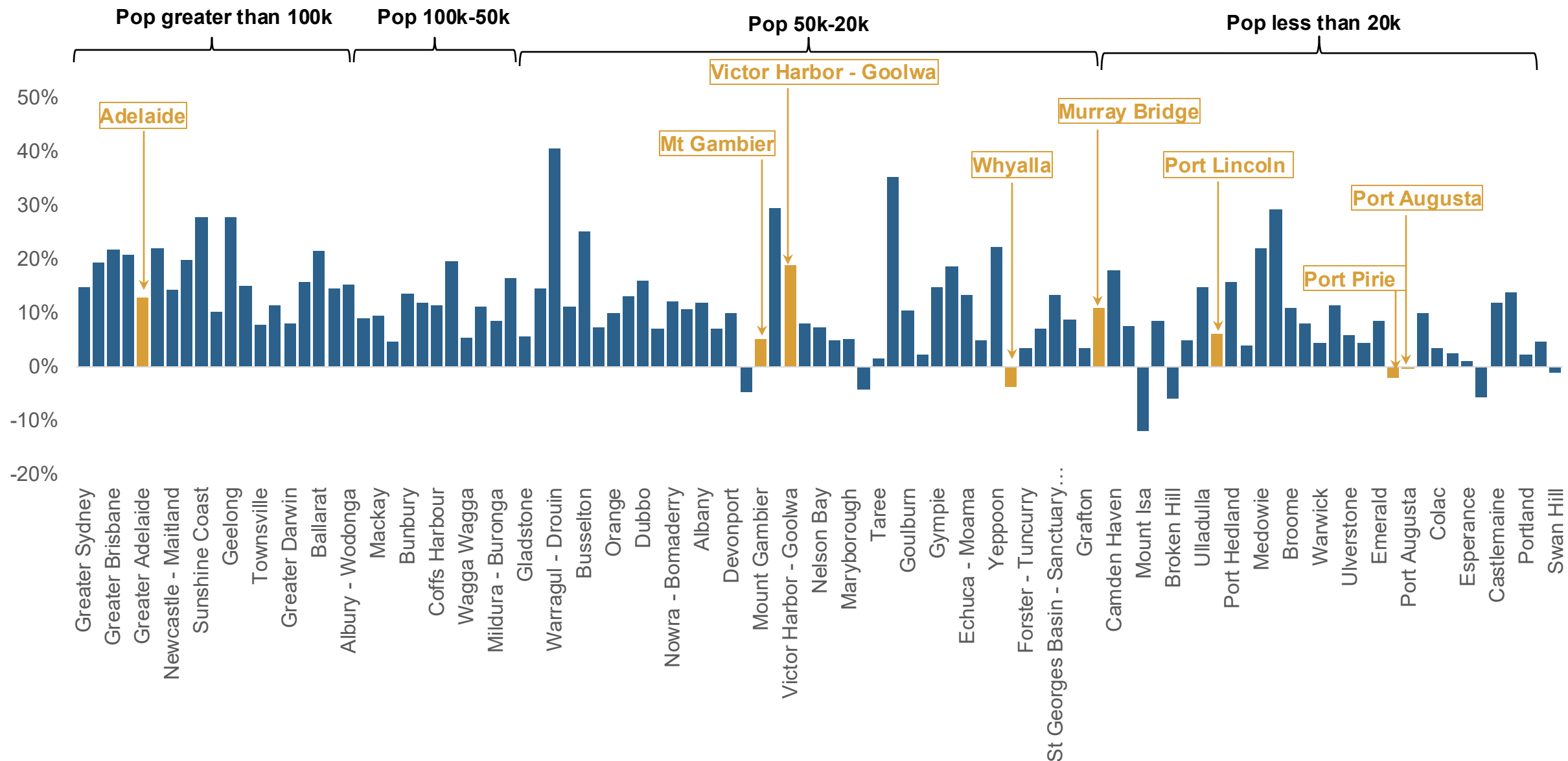


Regional growth isn't equal — and South Australia is falling behind

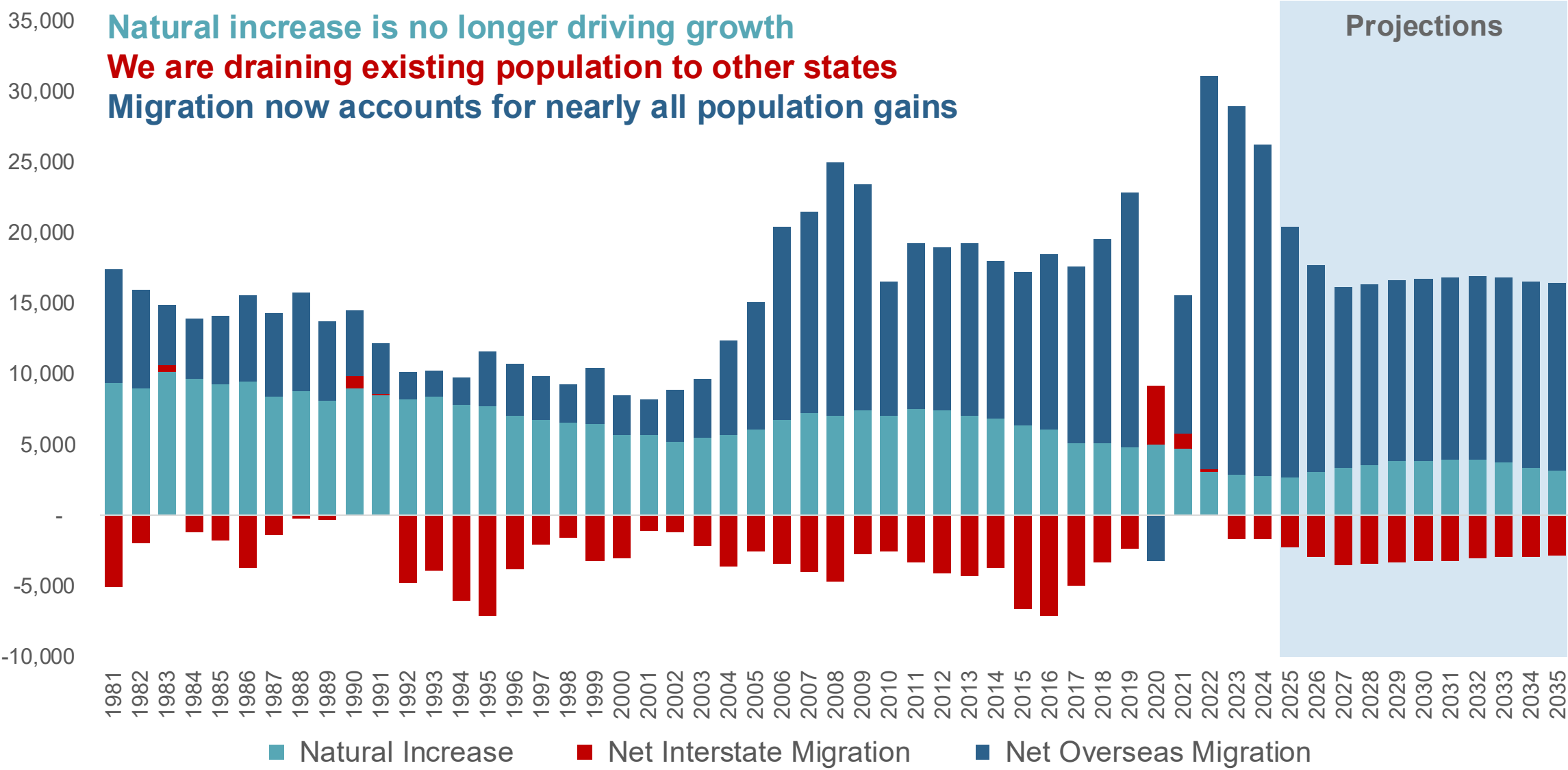


Change in estimated resident population by State between 2014 to 2024; Source: ABS

SA is missing the middle: No large regional cities to share the load

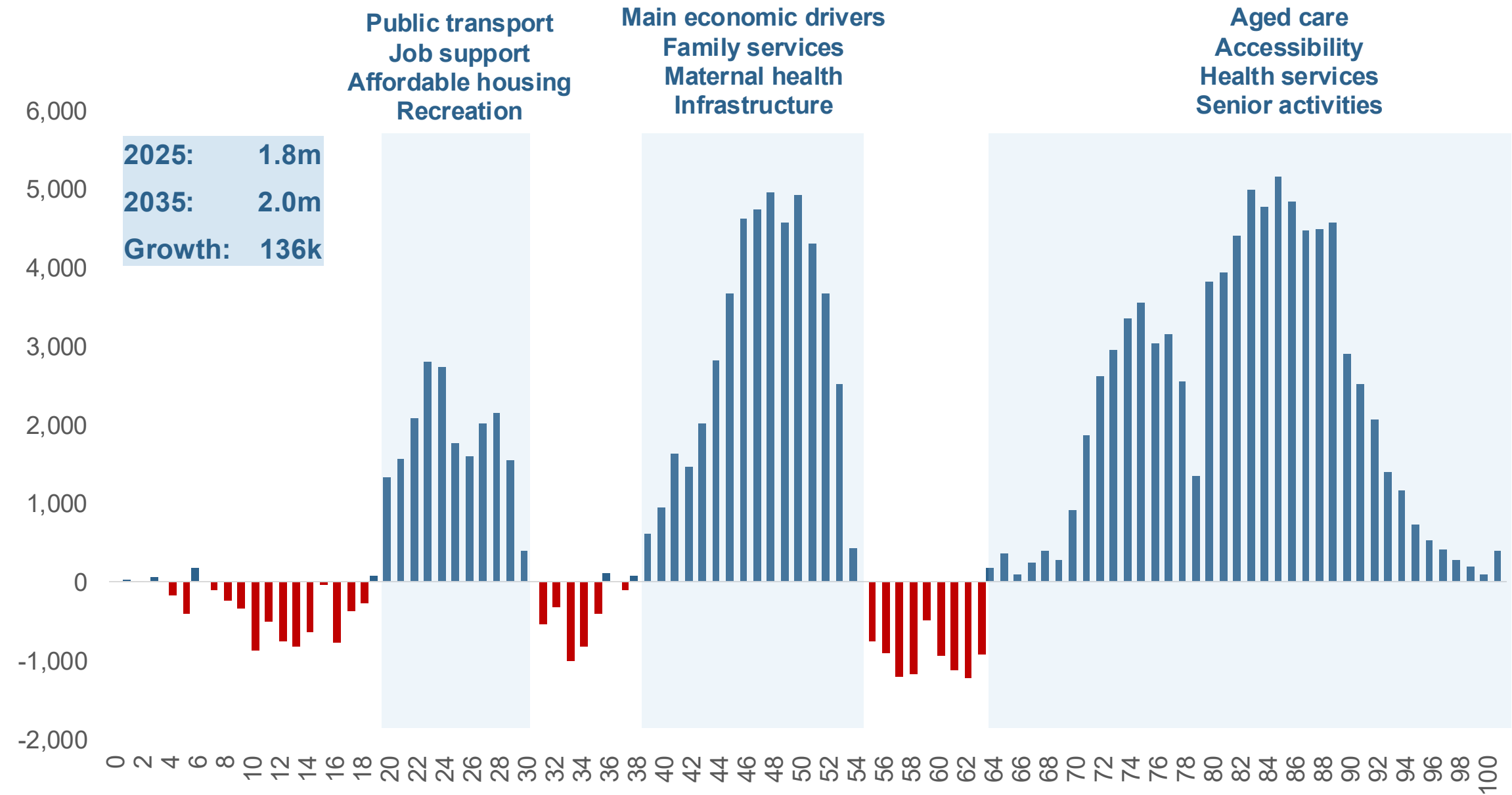


Migration is the lifeline of South Australia's population growth

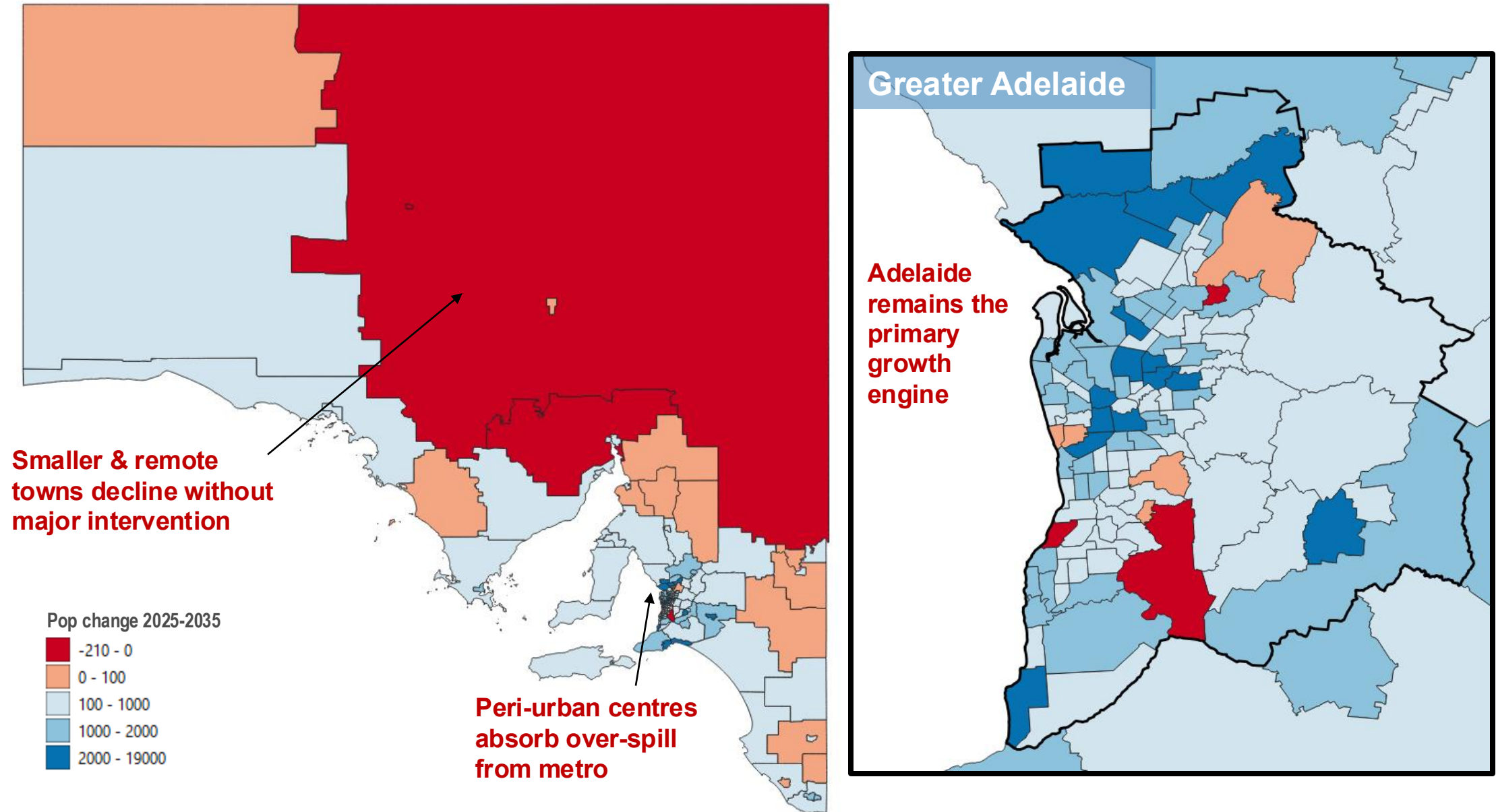


Net annual change in population by components of growth in Australia from 1981 to 2030; Source: ABS & CFP

SA's Growth Is Age-Heavy —Missing Working-Age & Young Families



South Australia's growth story is localized — not statewide



Projected population change by SA2 in South Australia between 2025 and 2035; Source: Planning SA







Growth hubs are our best leverage points for future planning

Top 12 suburbs with largest growth				
Rank	Suburb	2025	2025-2035	(%)
1	Victor Harbor	17,800	4,800	27%
2	Murray Bridge	19,900	3,700	18%
3	Goolwa - Port Elliot	13,200	2,100	16%
4	Light	10,600	1,700	16%
5	Yankalilla	7,400	1,400	19%
6	Nuriootpa	7,800	1,300	17%
7	Murray Bridge Surrounds	4,100	1,200	29%
8	Mount Gambier - West	15,500	1,200	7%
9	Port Lincoln	17,400	1,100	7%
10	Strathalbyn	8,400	1,100	13%
11	Mount Gambier - East	15,800	1,100	7%
12	Barossa - Angaston	6,900	900	13%
Total SA		1,890,200	184,200	10%







Top 12 suburbs with fastest growth				
Rank	Suburb	2025	2025-2035	(%)
1	Murray Bridge Surrounds	4,100	1,200	29%
2	Victor Harbor	17,800	4,800	27%
3	Mallala	3,800	700	19%
4	Yankalilla	7,400	1,400	19%
5	Murray Bridge	19,900	3,700	18%
6	Nuriootpa	7,800	1,300	17%
7	Goolwa - Port Elliot	13,200	2,100	16%
8	Light	10,600	1,700	16%
9	Moonta	5,600	800	15%
10	Wallaroo	4,800	700	14%
11	Strathalbyn	8,400	1,100	13%
12	Barossa - Angaston	6,900	900	13%
Total SA		1,890,200	184,200	10%

**Top 12 suburbs (SA2) with the highest and the fastest change in projected population between 2025 and 2035 in regional SA;
Source: Planning SA**

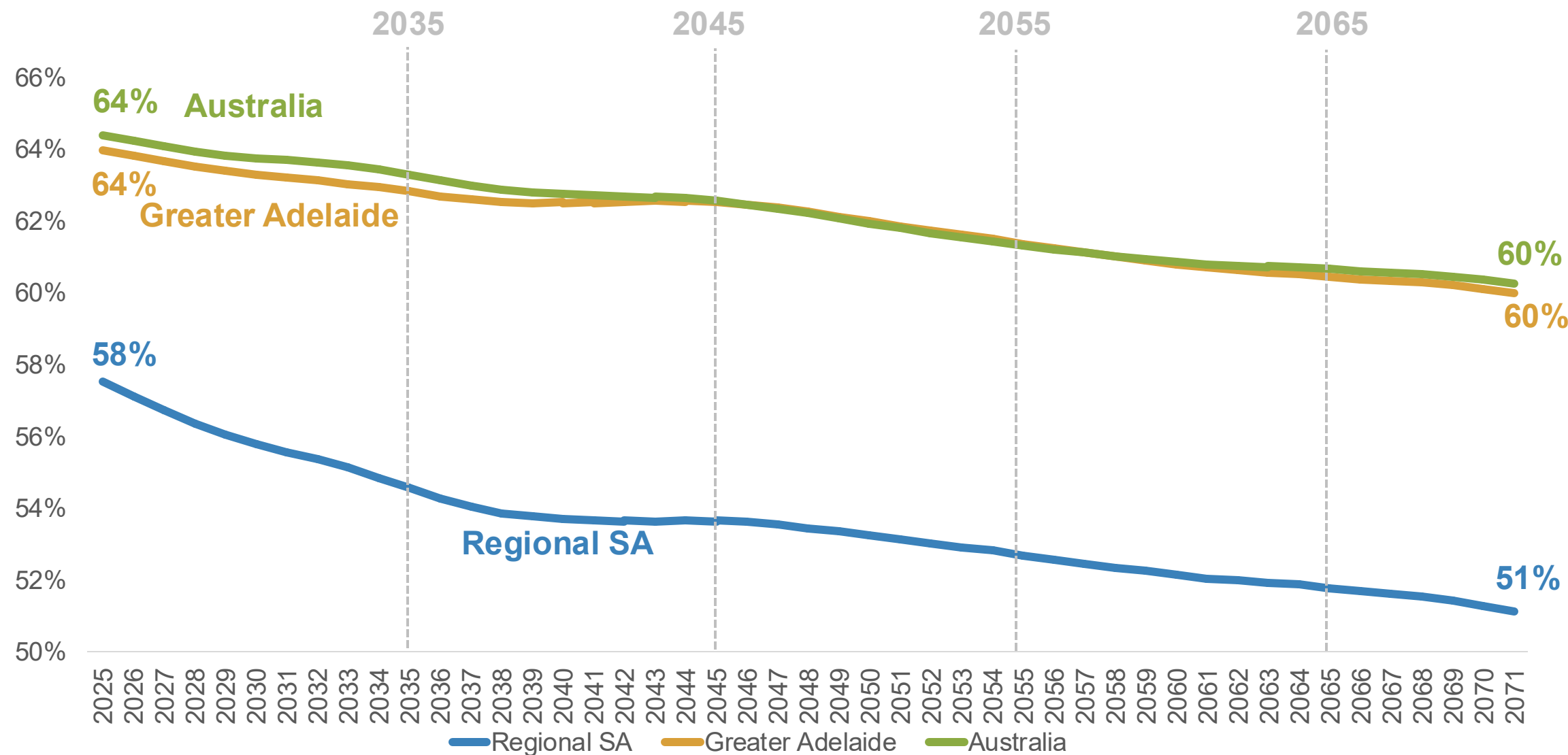
Strategic investment in growth hubs pays dividends

Benefit	Proof on the Ground
More efficient service delivery	 Murray Bridge hospital upgrade is now servicing a wider catchment due to its growing population. Economies of scale allow better clinical capacity.
Attraction of skilled workers and younger families	 Victor Harbor has become attractive for young families post-COVID due to remote work flexibility and better schooling options.
Greater return on infrastructure (lower cost per capita)	 Geelong's rail link to Melbourne unlocked housing supply and increased property value with minimal per capita spend.
Stronger business ecosystems and local job creation	 Barossa Valley's tourism and wine cluster supports local cafés, tours, supply chains — enabled by population growth.
Easier to attract public and private investment	 The Whyalla Steelworks upgrade triggered \$600m+ in investment due to stable infrastructure and transport connections.
Unlocks housing supply without metro sprawl	 Mount Barker is now one of SA's fastest-growing residential corridors — absorbing overspill from Adelaide with diverse housing.

Growth comes with trade-offs: Let's plan for them

Risk / Trade-Off	Local Voices & Experiences
Smaller towns may lose population to larger centers	 Peterborough and Coober Pedy have seen population decline as younger residents migrate to Whyalla or Port Augusta.
Infrastructure may lag if growth outpaces planning	 Goolwa–Port Elliot 's recent housing surge strained local roads and water systems. Council now playing catch-up.
Land use conflicts or resistance to densification	 Mount Gambier 's medium-density rezoning faced strong local opposition from long-term residents.
Perception of inequity from remote towns	 Far west towns like Ceduna or Oodnadatta may feel ignored if Murray Bridge receives all attention/investment.
Regional planning coordination required	 Barossa–Light–Gawler corridor needs aligned planning across councils to avoid duplicated or mismatched infrastructure.
Risk of concentrating growth in too few locations	 If too much is funneled into Murray Bridge , other towns like Naracoorte or Port Pirie risk long-term stagnation.

Without action, Regional SA's workforce will shrink dramatically



Projected working age(15-64) population as a proportion of total population 2025-2071; Source: ABS

South Australia faces a 50,000-worker shortfall this decade

State	Workforce 2024	Projected workforce 2034	Workforce growth 2024-34 (‘000)	Working age population growth 2024-34	Labour force participation rate	Workforce available (‘000)	Shortage
NSW	4,470	5,000	520	590	66%	390	-140
Vic	3,720	4,350	630	730	68%	490	-130
Qld	2,930	3,320	400	400	68%	270	-130
SA	940	1,040	90	60	62%	40	-50
WA	1,600	1,830	230	190	69%	130	-100
Tas	290	320	30	10	62%	10	-30
NT	140	160	20	20	73%	10	-10
ACT	270	320	50	40	73%	30	-20
Australia	14,360	16,330	1,960	2,030	67%	1,360	-600

Projected employment and population growth between 2024 and 2034 by state; Source: National Skills Commission and ABS

Families drive regional economies — and they're not growing



Household type	Greater Adelaide	Regional South Australia	South Australia
Family	407,900 +10%	114,900 +1%	522,800 +8%
Group	23,500 +12%	4,500 +6%	28,000 +11%
Single person	167,600 +12%	57,600 +8%	225,900 +11%
Total	599,000 +11%	117,700 +3%	776,700 +9%

What do regions need to have to attract and retain each generation?



Gen Alpha

Born after 2017
Age 0 – 6
8% of pop

Life stage

- Early childhood development
- Strong digital & tech literacy
- Regions need:**
- Childcare & early learning
- Safe playgrounds & parks
- Community spaces for families



Gen Z

Born 2000-2017
Age 7 – 24
22% of pop

Life stage

- Education & Career
- Focus on mental health
- Regions need:**
- TAFEs, unis, Co-working spaces, creative zones
- Mental health support services
- Affordable rentals & public transport connectivity



Gen Y

Born 1982-1999
Age 25 – 42
26% of pop

Life stage

- Family formation, homeownership
- Career progression & childcare needs
- Regions need:**
- Affordable homes
- Career pathways
- Family infrastructure
- Flexible workplaces



Gen X

Born 1964-1981
Age 43 – 60
22% of pop

Life stage

- Peak career, leadership roles
- Balancing ageing parents & teenage children
- Regions need:**
- Local business support, strong job market
- Upskilling programs in digital & tech
- Reliable infrastructure



Baby Boomers

Born 1946-1963
Age 61 – 78
17% of pop

Life stage

- Transition to retirement & active ageing
- Social connection
- Regions need:**
- Social activities & volunteering
- Health & wellness programs, lifestyle
- Opportunities to mentor, share knowledge, stay involved



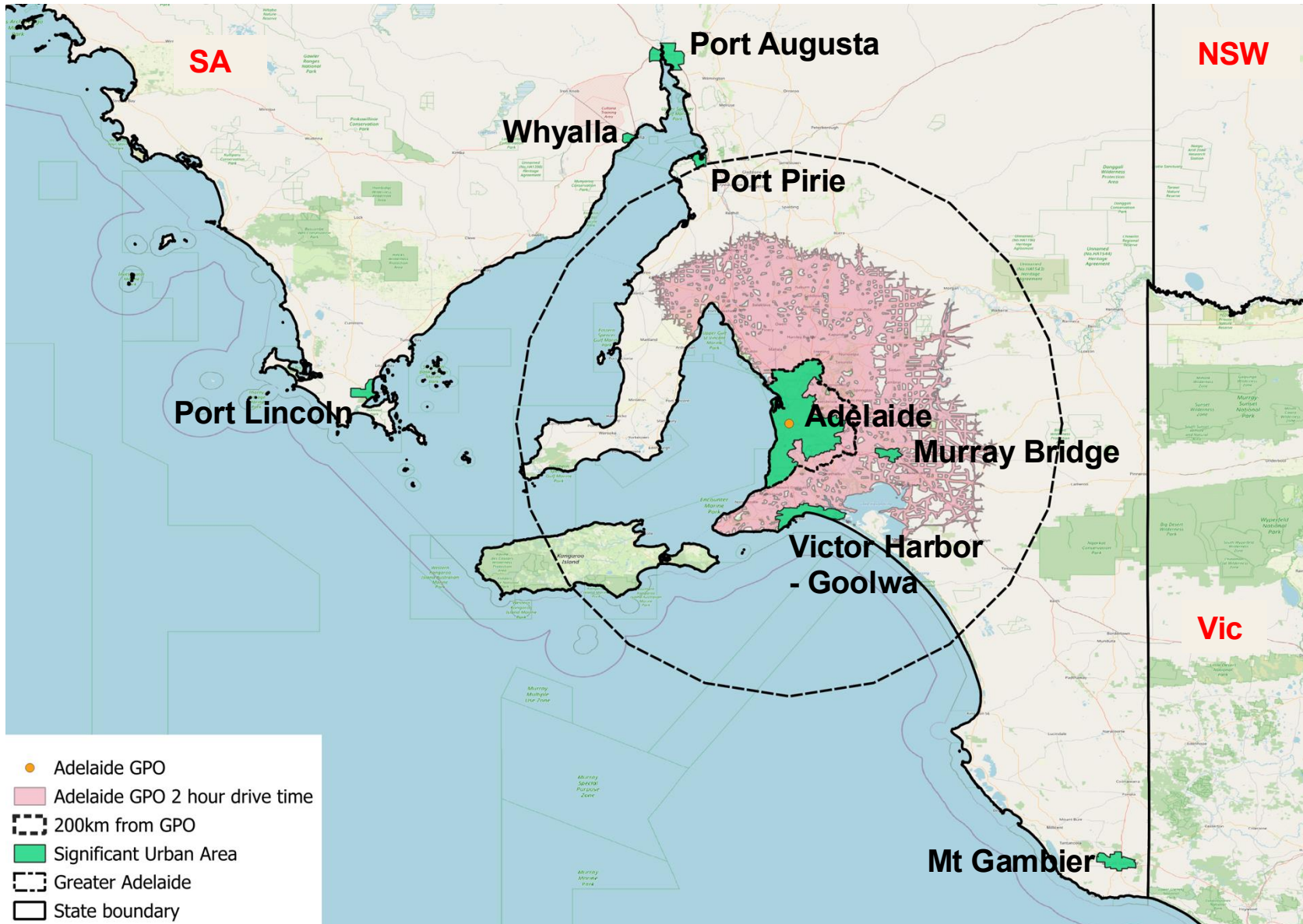
Pre-Boomers

Born before 1946
Age 79+
6% of pop

Life stage

- Advanced age
- Need for independence and social connection
- Regions need:**
- In-home care & support
- Community groups to combat isolation
- Accessible medical & transport facilities

SA's regional centers are few and small — but full of potential



Top Regional Centres

- Adelaide (GCCSA): 1.4m
- Mount Gambier: 31k
- Victor Harbor - Goolwa: 30k
- Whyalla: 33k
- Murray Bridge: 22k
- Port Lincoln: 17k
- Port Pirie: 12k
- Port Augusta: 14k





Source: based on ABS SUA 2024

Geographic definition of Greater Adelaide (inc 2-hr drivetime access) & regional towns, 2021 Census

Satellite cities don't just happen — they're built

	Catalyst	Impact	SA Insight
Geelong (Pop 2024: 309k)	Public sector relocation <ul style="list-style-type: none">• TAC – 2006• ABS Facility - 2016• WorkSafe – 2018 + City Deal	Jobs, GRP growth (+64% since 2008), innovation precincts (\$370 million investment)	Target state agencies + invest in regional infrastructure
Toowoomba (Pop 2024: 152k)	Transport infrastructure (Wellcamp Airport 2012 – freight, pilot training) + Events (hosting key 2032 events such as equestrian)	Job growth (+24k between 2015-2025), Logistics hub, cohesive planning, event-driven growth	Build connectivity + plan around regional opportunities
Launceston (Pop 2024: 92k)	Strategic urban planning + tech focus (Gigabit city – high speed internet), (pending \$2.1 billion AI Data Center)	Walkability, future industries (+67% job growth in IT & Tech since 2015), civic revitalisation	Promote tech hubs + amplify town center + coordinated growth

Regional towns can anchor major enterprise with the right infrastructure, incentives, & local ecosystem

Company / Region	Key Move or Operation	Why It Worked / Lesson for SA
 Cotton On – Geelong	HQ relocated to regional city	Taps brand heritage + state support = economic uplift
 Maas / Fletcher – Dubbo	Entirely regional-based multibillion operations, demonstrates cutting-edge innovation, scale, and export capacity from regions	Logistics + heritage = scalable business outside capitals
 Aland – Gosford	Large-scale regional mixed-use development - \$375 million mixed-use project in regional Gosford	Regional urbanism fosters investment and liveability
 Activ8me	Began in SA but moved HQ to Melbourne	Mission alignment and regional values can drive success

Main takeaways for South Australia's regional future

1. Growth is localized — invest where momentum exists



Most growth is occurring in Adelaide and a handful of peri-urban hubs (Victor Harbor, Murray Bridge, etc.)

Smaller towns risk decline without strategic intervention

A focused growth strategy can unlock scale, infrastructure returns, and long-term sustainability

2. Workforce shortages are real — and worsening



Regional SA's working-age share is falling faster than the rest of Australia

SA faces a 50,000-worker shortfall this decade

We must retain youth, attract skilled migrants, and expand flexible upskilling pathways

3. Families and young workers need the right conditions



Family households are stagnating outside metro; housing affordability and livability matter

Regions must cater to each generation's needs — from Gen Alpha playgrounds to Gen X health infrastructure

Livable towns = stronger economies and talent retention

4. SA can lead with smart regional activation



Growth hubs can power the broader state if coordinated across councils and connected to jobs

Satellite city models, hub-based investment, and targeted enterprise attraction work

This is SA's opportunity to reimagine regional success — with people at the center



Hari Hara Priya Kannan



THE AUSTRALIAN 



hariharapriyakannan



hari@tdgp.com.au



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