

International Travel - 40th Anniversary Sister City Celebrations - Guangzhou, China

File No: X014468

Summary

40th Anniversary Sister City Celebrations - Guangzhou, China

In 2026, the City of Sydney and Guangzhou, China celebrate the 40th anniversary of the establishment of our Sister City relationship.

In honour of the 40th anniversary, representatives of the Guangzhou Municipal Government and Guangzhou Municipal People's Congress, will visit Sydney from 16 to 18 September 2026.

Given the significance of this anniversary and the long-standing relationship between our 2 cities, it is proposed that a delegation led by Councillor Robert Kok and Councillor Zann Maxwell travels to Guangzhou to represent the Lord Mayor and the City of Sydney at civic events commemorating the 40th anniversary of the Sister City relationship, between 28 October and 5 November 2026.

The Councillors' Expenses and Facilities Policy (adopted by Council in December 2024) requires that overseas travel for Councillors be approved by Council on an individual trip basis.

Recommendation

It is resolved that:

- (A) Council endorse Councillor Robert Kok and Councillor Zann Maxwell in representing the Lord Mayor and the City of Sydney at the 40th Anniversary Sister City Celebrations in Guangzhou, China from 28 October to 5 November 2026
- (B) Council note that Councillor Robert Kok and Councillor Zann Maxwell will provide a report to Council after the travel
- (C) authority be delegated to the Chief Executive Officer to authorise minor variations to travel plans including dates and costs as required (increase of up to \$1,000 including GST).

Attachments

Nil.

Background

1. Founded in 1986, the Sydney-Guangzhou sister city relationship is one of the City's most active and enduring city partnerships. Spanning 40 years, it has provided the opportunity for furthering relations and mutual understanding across civic, cultural, people to-people, economic and trade sectors.
2. There has been a longstanding relationship with Guangzhou since the proclamation and establishment of the Sister City relationship.
3. Our sister city relationship is also central to the NSW Government's sister state relationship with Guangdong province, which aims to advance the state's trade, investment and business agenda in the region.
4. NSW Governor Margaret Beazley led a delegation to Guangzhou in December 2025 as part of a high-level trade and vice-regal mission to celebrate 46 years of the sister-state relationship between New South Wales and Guangdong Province.
5. Described as China's economic powerhouse, Guangdong province has an estimated GDP of US\$2 trillion and is the largest provincial economy within China. Guangdong includes Shenzhen, one of China's most important technology and innovation hubs
6. Guangzhou, with a population of around 19 million people, is the capital and largest city of Guangdong province. It is one of China's largest cities, the commercial centre of southern China, and a major transportation hub and trading port. Guangzhou has an estimated GDP of approximately US\$430 billion.
7. China is Australia's largest export market for goods and services accounting for about a third of Australia's total exports. In 2025 alone, the goods and services trade between China and Australia was valued at \$326 billion. The China-Australia Free Trade Agreement came into effect in December 2015.
8. China is also the source of a large proportion of our international students who contribute more than \$4 billion to the NSW economy each year. It is estimated that 40% of the 240,000 international students studying in our area are from China.
9. In the year to March 2026, NSW was the top Australian destination for Chinese visitors, attracting 585,000 travellers from mainland China, who spent \$5.4 billion and stayed 23.7 million nights. The vast majority of overseas travellers who come to NSW come to Sydney. (Source: International Visitor Survey, Tourism Research Australia). Tourism Research Australia forecasts China will be one of Australia's fastest-growing inbound markets by 2030, with average annual growth of 7.3%.
10. Delegations from Guangzhou have visited Sydney in 1988, 1998, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017.
11. In 2008, as part of a delegation to China with the NSW Premier, the Lord Mayor and Chief Executive Officer visited Guangzhou.
12. In 2011, a delegation from Guangzhou visited Sydney to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Sister City relationship.

13. In 2016, a delegation from Guangzhou visited Sydney to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Sister City relationship. The Lord Mayor hosted a reception for the Guangzhou delegation at Sydney Town Hall.
14. Also in 2016, the Lord Mayor visited Guangzhou to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Sister City relationship.
15. Our Sister City relationship with Guangzhou supports ongoing engagement between the 2 cities through cultural exchange, knowledge sharing and institutional connections. Continued engagement, including official visits, helps maintain the relationship, strengthen mutual understanding and preserve opportunities for future collaboration where there are shared interests and mutual benefit.
16. In honour of the 40th anniversary, representatives of the Guangzhou Municipal Government led by the Vice Chairman of the Standing Committee of Guangzhou Municipal People's Congress, will visit Sydney from 16 to 18 September 2026.
17. The Lord Mayor will host the delegation at Sydney Town Hall on 17 September 2026, including a Welcome to Country and Smoking Ceremony. An Eye Dotting Ceremony will be performed which involves the Lord Mayor and the Vice Chairman of the Standing Committee of Guangzhou Municipal People's Congress dotting the eyes of 2 lions gifted to the City of Sydney by Guangzhou Municipal People's Government to commemorate the 40th Sister City Anniversary, followed by a Lion Dance performance. A courtesy call and lunch reception as part of the official program will also be held.
18. Given the significance of this anniversary and the long-standing relationship between our 2 cities, it is proposed that a delegation led by Councillor Robert Kok and Councillor Zann Maxwell travel to Guangzhou between 28 October and 5 November 2026 to represent the Lord Mayor at civic events commemorating the 40th anniversary of the Sister City relationship .
19. Proposed events include signing ceremonies for the establishment of Sydney Guangzhou Sister Marathon and the establishment of Sydney Guangzhou Sister Art School. An official program is being developed.
20. Note that Council has delegated authority to the Lord Mayor to determine who should represent Council at civic, ceremonial and social functions where: a. the Lord Mayor is unable to attend; and b. Council has not determined its representative. The Lord Mayor has nominated Councillor Kok and Councillor Maxwell to represent the City.

Councillors' Expenses and Facilities Policy

21. The Councillors' Expenses and Facilities Policy (adopted by Council in December 2024) requires that overseas travel for Councillors be approved by Council on an individual trip basis.
22. For overseas meetings, conferences or seminars, a report or relevant material must be prepared for circulation to the Council and review by the public within 6 months of the travel undertaken.

Key implications

Strategic alignment - Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050 Continuing the Vision

23. Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050 Continuing the Vision renews the communities' vision for the sustainable development of the city to 2050. It includes 10 strategic directions to guide the future of the city, as well as 10 targets against which to measure progress. This report is aligned with the following strategic directions and objectives:
- (a) Direction 9 - A transformed and innovative economy -Sister City relationships contribute to the City of Sydney maintaining its position locally, nationally, and globally as a destination for business, investment, and talent.

Risks

24. This recommendation is within the City of Sydney's risk appetite which states:
- (a) We recognise the significance of our reputation as a valuable asset that influences stakeholder trust, business continuity and the short- and long-term achievement of our objectives.

Financial implications

25. It is proposed that the City cover air travel, accommodation, ground transport and incidentals, at an approximate cost of up to \$25,000 (including GST) for the travel to Guangzhou.
26. Funds are available within existing operational budgets, in accordance with the Councillors' Expenses and Facilities Policy.

Relevant legislation

27. Local Government Act 1993.
28. Local Government (General) Regulation 2021.
29. City of Sydney Councillors' Expenses and Facilities Policy.

Critical dates / Time frames

30. The Guangzhou invitation includes official engagements for the period 28 October to 5 November 2026. An official program is being developed.

EMMA RIGNEY

Acting Chief Executive Officer