

3 PERCEPTIONS OF CONTEMPORARY ADELAIDE

In conjunction with the Planning Strategy, this report seeks to improve the urban structure and character of the metropolitan area according to five qualities. Three of these qualities - legibility, distinctiveness and enjoyability - are only relevant in terms of how spaces are perceived by people. As such, it is necessary to understand how residents and visitors perceive the metropolitan area.

A 'snapshot' of perceptions of the physical character of the current metropolitan area is presented below. This has been generated by adapting the analytical techniques of the North American town planner, Kevin Lynch. He categorised elements of urban structure as edges, paths, districts, nodes and landmarks. This snapshot is also based on market research conducted for Planning SA in early 2003. A summary of the market research is available in [Appendix 2](#). Some other historical and contemporary writings on perceptions of Adelaide are presented in [Appendix 3](#).

Schedules of each of the elements presented in the following series of perceptual maps are available in [Appendix 4](#).

3.1 Edges

The metropolitan area is constrained by strong geographical boundaries – the hills and the sea. These form strongly perceived edges to the metropolitan area. In addition to the change in slope, often quite dramatic, the boundary between the plains and the hills is reinforced by the change from built-up area to bush or farmland (in most parts of the escarpment) and the double ridgeline that adjoins the central sector.

[Figure 33: Edges: major perceptual boundaries of the metropolitan area](#)

3.2 Routes

People navigate through cities by using a mental map that is an abstraction of reality, using physical markers to aid memory and decision-making. These markers may be major structures such as a multi-storey building, or smaller structures such as a distinctive house or a road sign. The plan below shows the major routes used by Adelaideans as they navigate through the metropolitan area.

[Figure 34: Routes for locals: major pathways of the metropolitan area as experienced by residents](#)

Visitors to the metropolitan area arrive by road, rail, air and sea. Most of the routes taken by visitors from terminals or highways into central Adelaide are afterthoughts to Light's original layout. These afterthoughts include Glen Osmond Road, the Southern Expressway, Sir Donald Bradman Drive and Lady Gowrie Drive.

[Figure 35: Routes for visitors: routes through the metropolitan area as experienced by visitors heading to the central city](#)

Although most visitors to the state visit central Adelaide, some travel straight from a plane, train or bus terminal to other major tourist destinations such as Kangaroo Island, the Barossa, and the outback.

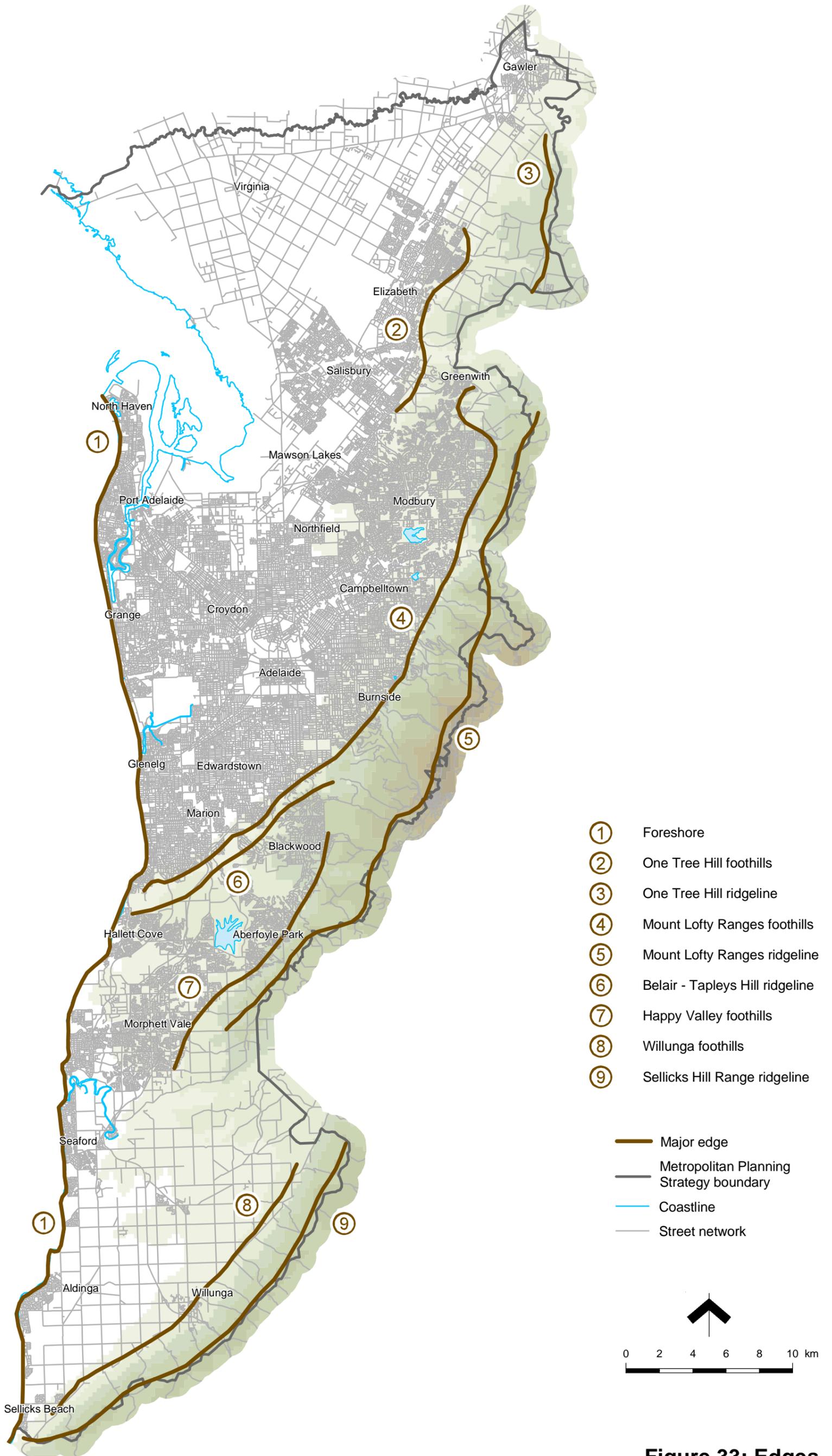


Figure 33: Edges

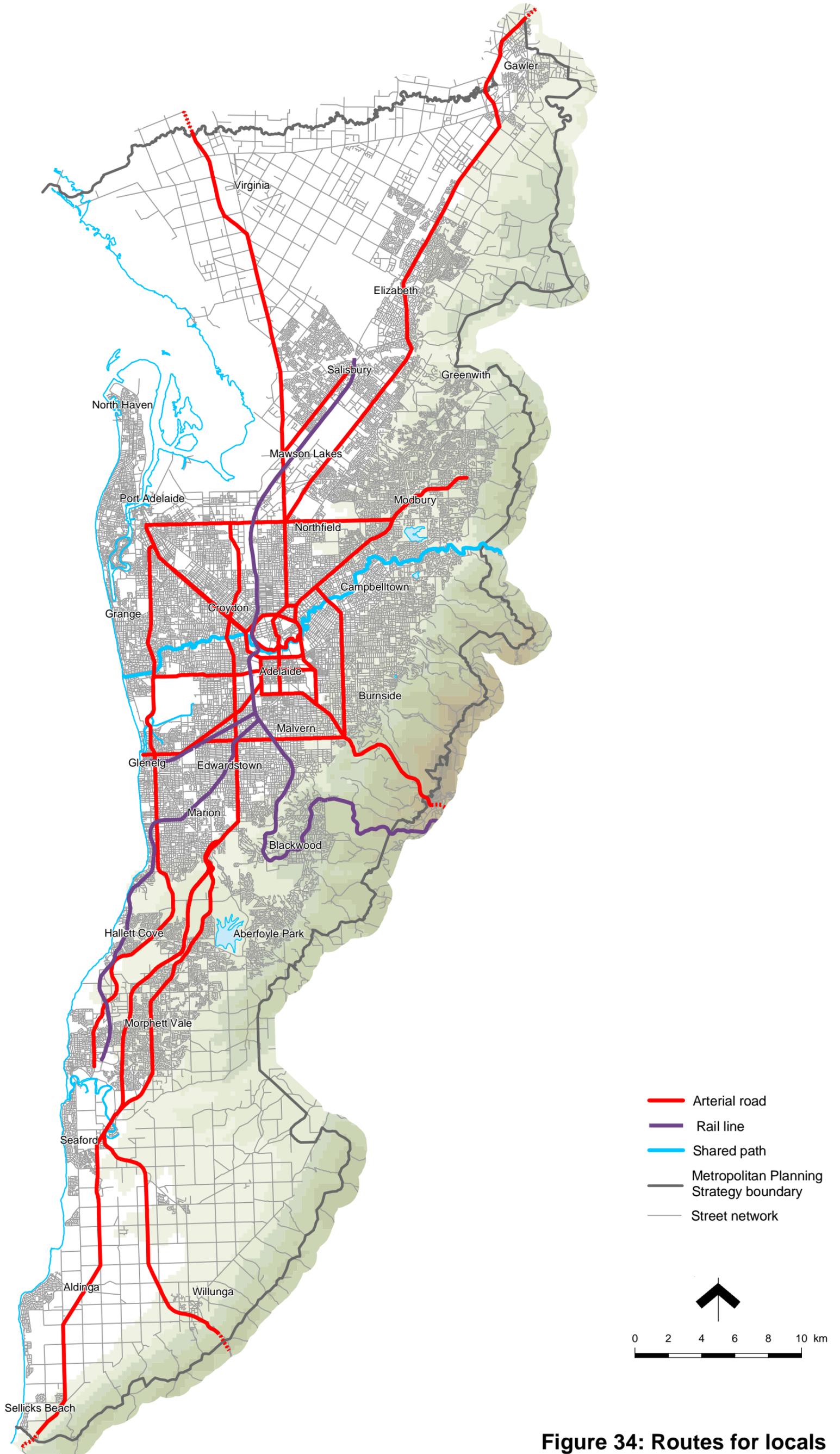


Figure 34: Routes for locals

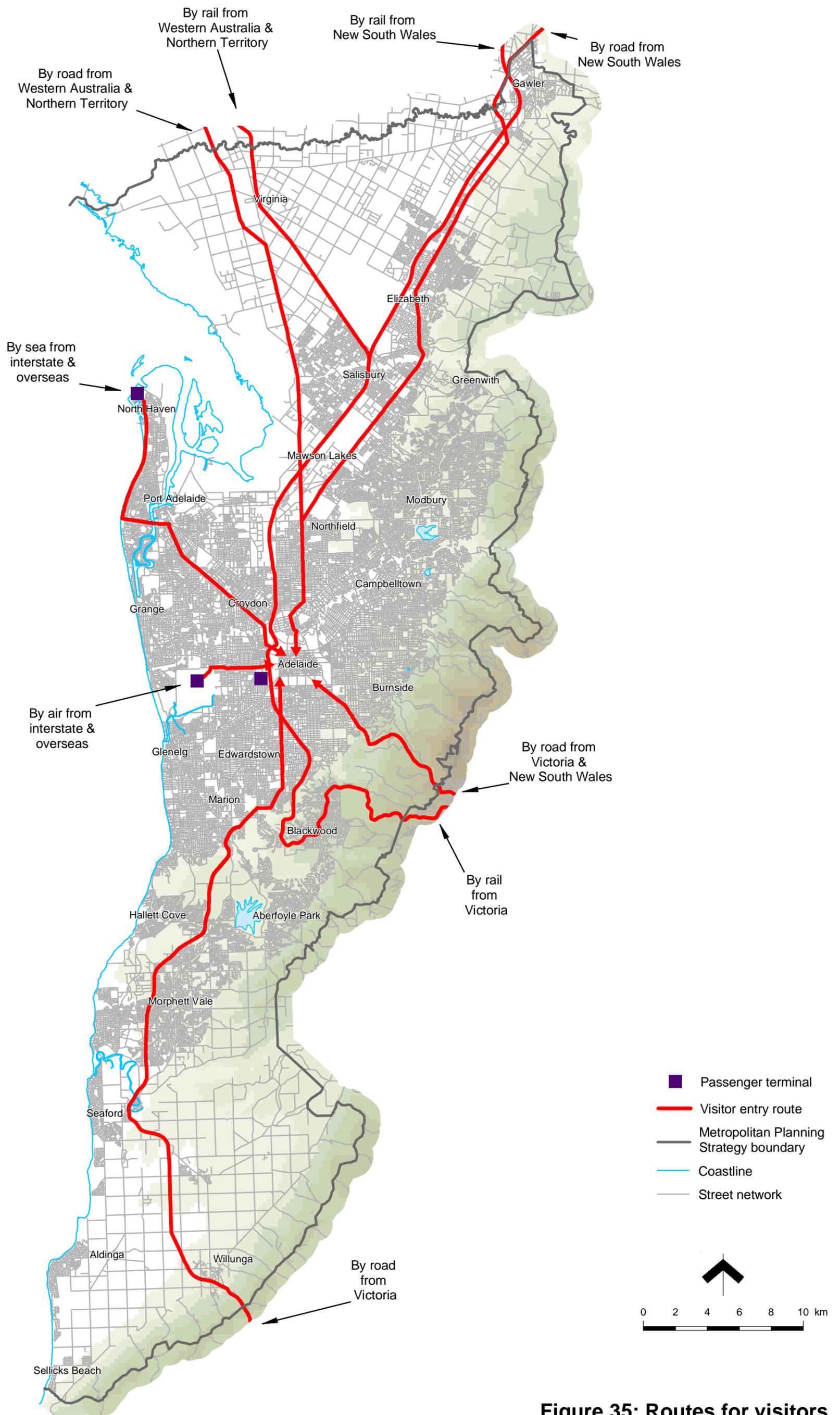


Figure 35: Routes for visitors

3.3 Activity centres, nodes and landmarks

Some places in urban areas are more important than others. Those include places of intense interaction (activity centres), the intersection of major transport routes (nodes) and places that are visually prominent (landmarks).

Activity centres are typically town centres, but may also include transport interchanges, stadia, and so on. Activity centres typically include private and public buildings, public transport, parking spaces, public spaces and community facilities. They attract high numbers of people and a majority of all trips in metropolitan Adelaide are made to and from them. They are important in people's perceptions of the metropolitan area. This importance may be generated by a centre's size, strategic location, symbolism or historic associations.

Because of the metropolitan area's structure of rectangular grids, most arterial intersections are of relatively equal importance. However, intersections at the edge of these grids, especially where two grids meet, become much more important. Add to this a highway or motorway, and the node becomes of metropolitan significance.

In any city, navigation and orientation are dependent on distinctive buildings, structures and landscaping, as these help to create an easily read environment. This is fundamental if people are to find their way easily within or between areas.

Landmarks, that is, distinctive features visible from a distance, provide reference points and help create a sense of place. Landmarks of metropolitan significance need to be visible from a large part of the metropolitan area. The Adelaide metropolitan area has remarkably few metropolitan landmarks. Relevant landmarks include the central city skyline, Port Stanvac chimneys, and the Torrens Island power station chimneys.

[Figure 36: Activity centres, nodes and landmarks: major activity centres, nodes and landmarks of the metropolitan area](#)

3.4 Areas

The metropolitan area contains a number of areas within it that are clearly perceived as having a strong character, and often clearly understood and agreed boundaries. These areas have a strong 'sense of place' and are often the locations that people from elsewhere have heard about.

An example of an area with a strong character clearly perceived by Adelaideans is the 'leafy Eastern suburbs'. These suburbs are in the inner and middle east and south-east, where rainfall is higher, soils deeper, summers slightly cooler, and topography more varied than the suburbs elsewhere. The area is characterised by gently sloping ground, almost no industry, large houses set in large gardens, a regular rectangular grid of streets, and wide streets shaded by rows of relatively large trees.

The plans below show the built-up and open space areas that have a strong 'sense of place'. They also reveal that much of the metropolitan area does not have a strong sense of place. Put another way, much of the metropolitan area could be anywhere in the metropolitan area.

[Figure 37: Built-up areas with strongly perceived character](#)

[Figure 38: Open areas with strongly perceived character](#)

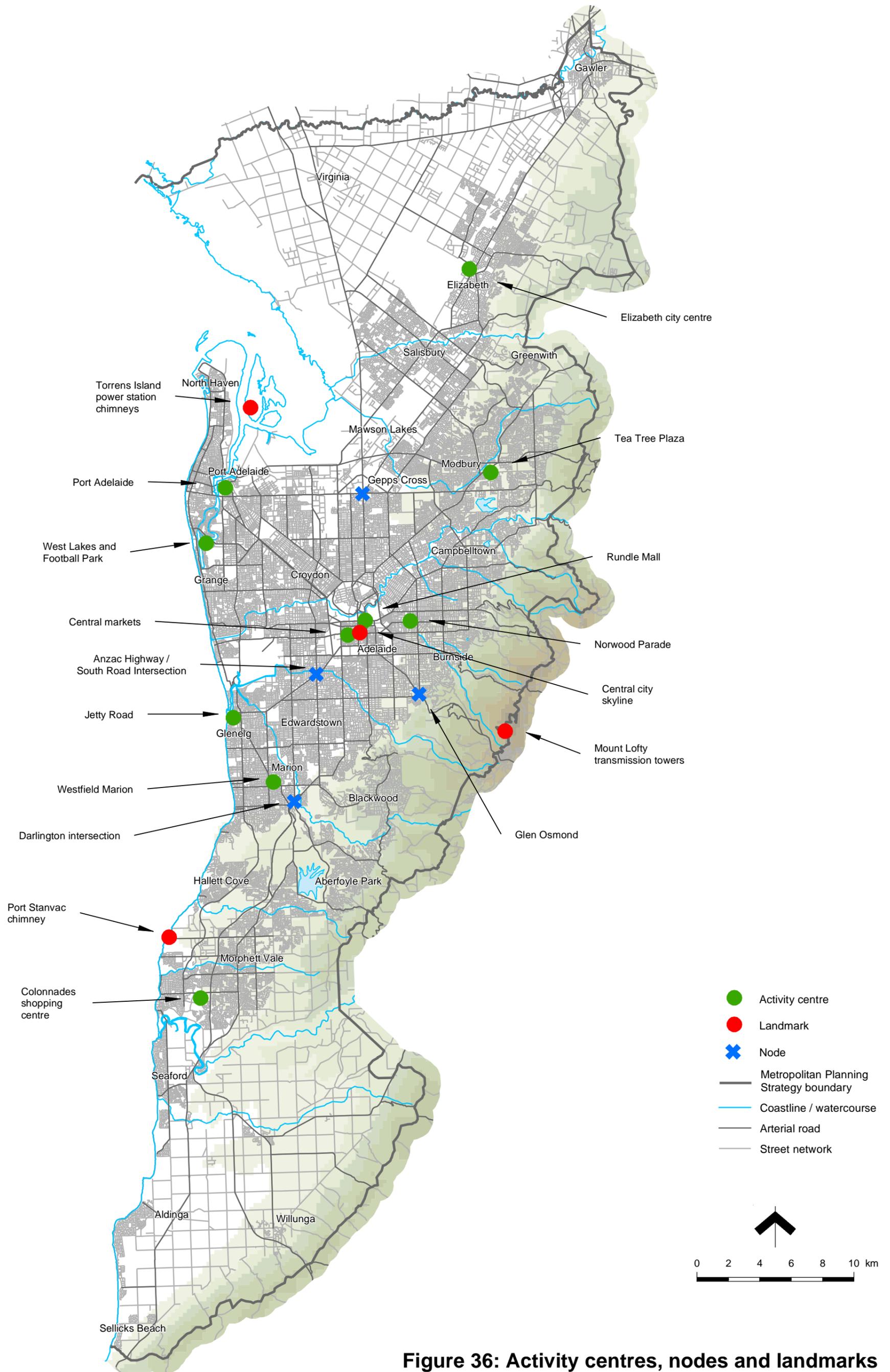


Figure 36: Activity centres, nodes and landmarks

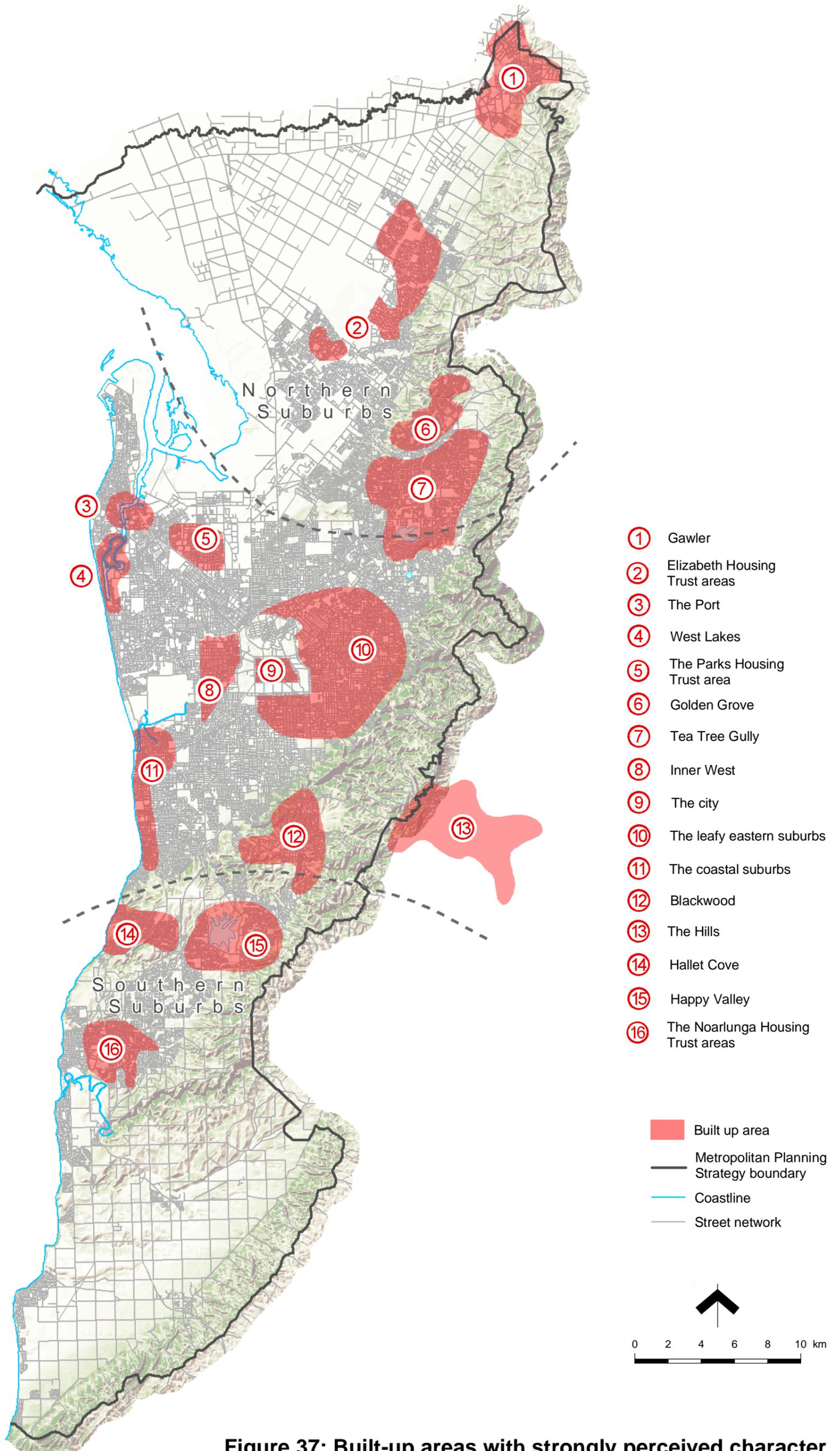


Figure 37: Built-up areas with strongly perceived character



Figure 38: Open areas with strongly perceived character

3.5 Summary of perceptions

A map of the fundamental elements shaping resident's perception of the urban area can be gained by combining the previous maps together. This is shown below.

The natural structural elements of coast, hills and the plain make up a significant part of the contemporary character of the urban area. Similarly, Light's major structural elements of the North and South Adelaide urban areas, the Park Land ring, the major radial routes and the arterial road grid over the plains, are all central to the character of the metropolitan area.

[Figure 39: The perceived structure of the metropolitan area](#)

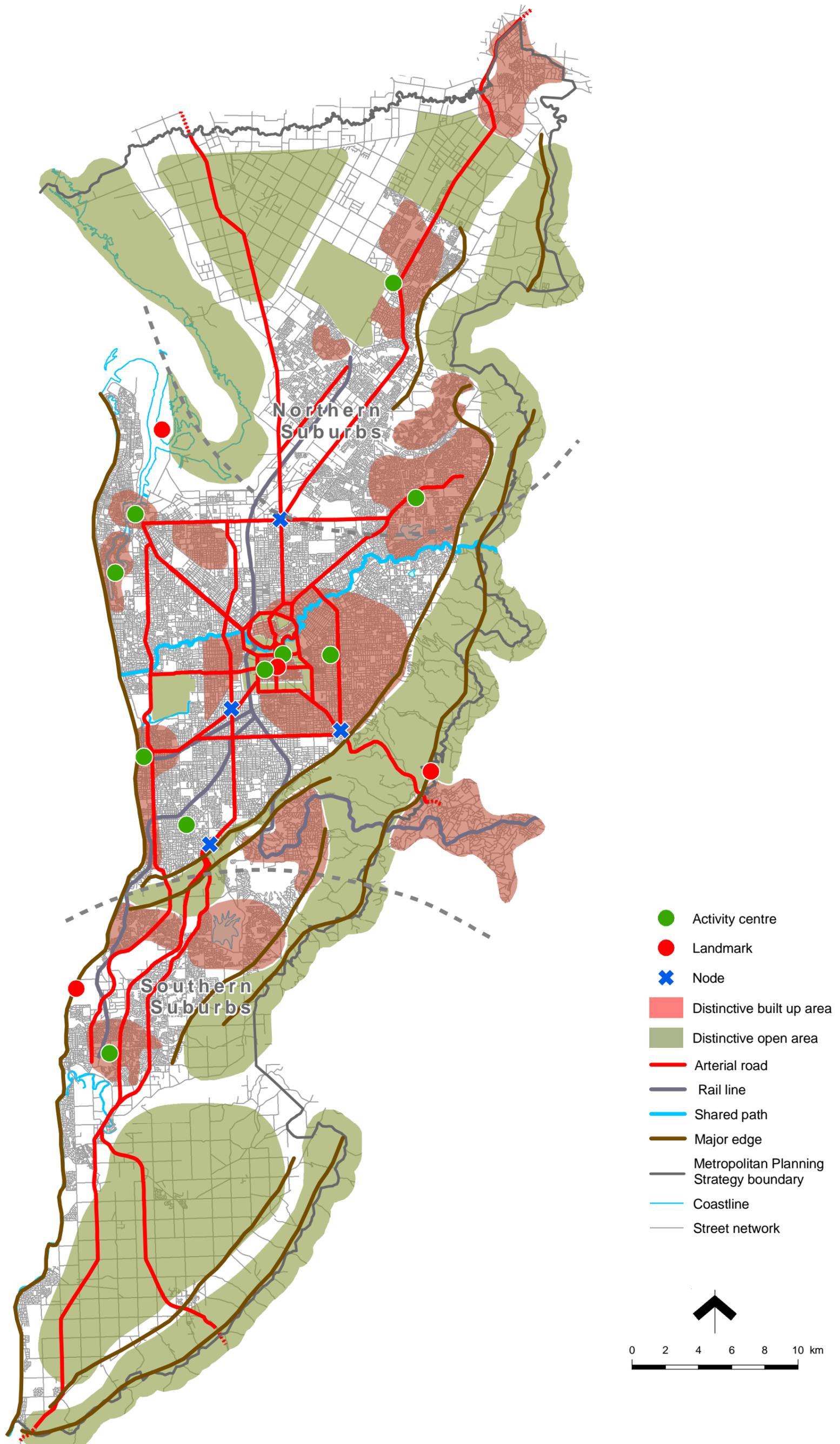


Figure 39: The perceived structure of the metropolitan area