

31 January 2013

Major Cities Unit  
Department of Infrastructure and Transport  
GPO Box 594  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Sir/Madam,

**Re: Discussion Paper: Walking, Riding and Access to Public Transport**

The Urban Taskforce represents Australia's most prominent property developers and equity financiers. We provide a forum for people involved in development and the planning of the urban environment to engage in constructive dialogue with government and the community.

We are pleased that the Commonwealth Government is progressing policy that will support active transport and encourage greater use of public transport. We argue that the implementation of such policy will rely upon a coordinated review of planning regulation along transport corridors and nodes. In summary, for there to be a significant take up of walking, cycling and public transport usage there must be:

1. a regional, cross local government boundary approach to planning;
2. a dramatic increase in residential density in the vicinity of transport corridors and nodes; and,
3. an adoption of land use flexibility to permit mixed use development in the vicinity of town centres, along transport corridors and nodes.

Effective utilisation of public transport and the encouragement of walking and cycling as an alternative means of transport is difficult in areas of low-density housing. Redevelopment of the existing low-density urban and industrial land must be encouraged if walking, cycling and public transport are to become real alternatives to the private motor vehicle.

Government must plan transport infrastructure on the understanding that new housing will be accommodated around new high quality public transport infrastructure. New compact, pedestrian-friendly, mixed-use neighbourhoods should bring together housing, workplaces, shopping and recreation areas within walking distance of the new transport services.

Transport infrastructure is costly. Hence we need to ensure that the new transport infrastructure is a success. This means, from day one, there should be sufficient numbers of people living and working in close proximity to transport corridors and nodes to ensure it is well utilised.

The Urban Taskforce supports policy that encourages walking, cycling and public transport usage, but urges Government to not consider transport in isolation to urban planning and development. As you would be well aware, the Sydney Metropolitan Strategy identifies locations in the vicinity of existing and proposed transport corridors that are ideal for increased urban development. These areas are in, or are in close proximity to centres of activity and well serviced by community infrastructure. When provided with upgraded public transport services, these locations will be ideal locations for appropriate higher density infill development that will not only enable additional housing needs of a growing Sydney to be met, but will at the same time provide opportunities for the creation of vibrant, healthy and liveable urban communities.

Below you will find the Urban Taskforce key issues for consideration in the development of transport planning policy.

## 1. **Land use planning is fundamental to good transport planning**

Government is planning for a significant proportion of Sydney's housing needs to be met through medium to high density homes within the existing urban footprint ("infill development"). If we have any hope of meeting expected housing demand within established inner and middle ring suburbs, government must show leadership by ensuring that all local areas serviced by existing or planned high quality transport infrastructure are supported by local planning laws that encourage additional residential development in a timely fashion.

The quality, positioning and price of public transport are clearly very important, furthermore, topography and access to walking and cycling facilities are determinants of usage, but they are not the sole determinants of the success of any new public transport service or infrastructure. The type of urban development that is permitted in the vicinity of the key transport nodes strongly influences usage.

In the most basic terms, if we want people to use new transport infrastructure, we need to provide more than just the physical infrastructure. What occurs in the vicinity of new services will have a measurable impact on usage. For instance, it is now well understood that "land use patterns have a significant influence on how well public transport services can be delivered and utilised".<sup>1</sup> By introducing more land use flexibility in the vicinity of new transport infrastructure, the infrastructure itself benefits in terms of patronage, and therefore viability. Therefore, Commonwealth transport policy must clearly encourage land use flexibility in the vicinity of planned or existing infrastructure such as walking paths, cycle ways, transport corridors or nodes.

### **Residential and employment density**

Improved transport infrastructure is a catalyst for urban renewal particularly where infrastructure is provided in existing inner urban areas. While we do not dispute the fact that new transport infrastructure has the potential to vastly improve and renew decaying urban areas, we are concerned with the desire of many local authorities to limit increases in urban density.

When government considers investing in new transport infrastructure, existing urban densities must be openly and transparently reviewed. We should not expect existing densities as low as 0.5:1 to 1.0:1 within 800 metres of transport corridors to remain the rule. Governments who invest in infrastructure upgrades must insist on higher population and employment density in the vicinity of critical and costly public transport infrastructure.

It should be noted that doubling of density can reduce the number of cars and vehicle miles travelled per household by 25 per cent.<sup>2</sup>

If densities are not sufficiently high, transit stations will not attract enough passengers.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, without an appropriate mix of complementary land uses, people will be less inclined to use the public transport, as their ability to access a variety of destinations will be limited.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, most urban services cannot be provided unless there are a certain number of people that can make them viable.<sup>5</sup>

The significance of population and employment densities as predictors of travel behaviour is undisputable. Studies reaffirm that residential density as being the most important built environment element which influences travel choices.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Alford, G., 2006, Integrating Public Transport and Land use Planning – Perspectives from Victoria. *Australian Planner*, Vol. 43, No. 3, pp. 6-7.

<sup>2</sup> Leck, E., 2006, The Impact of Urban Form on Travel Behaviour: A meta-Analysis. *Berkeley Planning Journal*, Vol. 19, pp. 37-58.

<sup>3</sup> Pushkarev and Zupan 1977, in Cervero, R., Ferrell, C., and Murphy, S. 2002, Transit-Oriented development and Joint Development in the United States: A Literature Review. Transit Cooperative Research Program. Research results digest. October 2002—Number 52 [[http://onlinepubs.trb.org/Onlinepubs/tcrp/tcrp\\_rdd\\_52.pdf](http://onlinepubs.trb.org/Onlinepubs/tcrp/tcrp_rdd_52.pdf), accessed 7 April, 2008].

<sup>4</sup> Cervero, R., Ferrell, C., and Murphy, S. 2002, Transit-Oriented development and Joint Development in the United States: A Literature Review. Transit Cooperative Research Program. Research results digest. October 2002—Number 52 [[http://onlinepubs.trb.org/Onlinepubs/tcrp/tcrp\\_rdd\\_52.pdf](http://onlinepubs.trb.org/Onlinepubs/tcrp/tcrp_rdd_52.pdf), accessed 7 April, 2008].

<sup>5</sup> Newman, P., 2005., Transit Oriented Development: An Australian Overview. Paper presented at the Transit Oriented Development Conference. Fremantle, Western Australia 5-8 July 2005.

[<http://www.patrec.org/conferences/TODJuly2005/papers/Newman%20paper%20REV.pdf>, accessed 7 April, 2008].

<sup>6</sup> Leck, E., 2006, The Impact of Urban Form on Travel Behaviour: A meta-Analysis. *Berkeley Planning Journal*, Vol. 19, pp. 37-58.

### **Diversity of land uses at transport nodes**

We must accept that walking, cycling and public transport often cannot compete with the private motor vehicle. This means that to make these modes of transport attractive to users, the infrastructure must provide access to a wide variety of destinations. That is, a customer must be given a reason to use alternative modes of transport.

Extensive research on this issue is available and the general consensus is that along with an increase in residential and employment density, a mixed land use around transport nodes has become accepted practice as a means of increasing usage rates.<sup>7</sup>

Simply having grocery stores and other services within easy walking distance from homes tends to encourage walking, cycling and public transport use. It is widely agreed that urban centres supported by mass transit should be diverse in their land-use compositions. Furthermore, mixed use can be an effective revitalisation tool. For example, a plan that provides the opportunity to build medium rise apartment blocks with non-residential uses at ground level, in the right location, supported by good quality mass transit, walking and cycling paths is an attractive redevelopment opportunity for a developer.

Consideration must also be given to those that will be relied upon to make redevelopment happen, including financiers and developers.<sup>8</sup>

It's crucial that state environmental planning policies and local environment plans be amended to ensure that, at each new transport node and along transport corridors all the land uses that are necessary for a viable, attractive and desirable centre are permissible. Fundamentally, plans need to be developed that reflect diversity. The benefits of mixed-use zoning are articulated in the Urban Taskforce report *Liveable Centres*.<sup>9</sup>

Local plans must include elements and/or policies that:

- promote diversity of use;
- emphasise compactness;
- foster intensity;
- provide for accessibility; and,
- create functional linkages.<sup>10</sup>

Successful places include a mix of uses, including jobs, retail and hospitality services, apartments and other attractions all coexisting within a definable location working together to make a centre attractive and successful.<sup>11</sup>

## **2. Shift planning power from local to regional levels**

Encouraging mixed-use neighbourhoods along public transport corridors and nodes makes environmental sense and are much talked of at local, state and Commonwealth Government levels. However, talking about increased density and land use mix is much easier than planning for it. Unfortunately, it is local government that has the real planning powers to permit development that supports sustainable urban environments. But it is this same tier of government that is most easily influenced by local residents who are the first to voice their strong opposition when new sustainable development is proposed in their "backyard". These local

<sup>7</sup> Joshi, H., Guhathakurta, S., Konjevod, G., Crittenden, J. & Li, K., 2006, Simulating the Effects of Light Rail on Urban Growth in Phoenix: An application of the UrbanSim Modelling Environment. *Journal of Urban Technology*, Vol. 13, No. 2, pp. 1-21.

<sup>8</sup> Freestone, R., 2008, Better Planning and Research for Mixed-Use Developments. *Australian Planner*, Vol. 45, No. 1, pp. 14-15.

<sup>9</sup> The report is available on the internet: <<http://www.urbantaskforce.com.au/attachment.php?id=2375>>.

<sup>10</sup> Glass, G., 2005, Honey I sunk the railway line. Do you want me to tidy up the rest of the town?. Paper presented at the Transit Oriented Development Conference. Fremantle, Western Australia 5-8 July 2005.

[<http://www.patrec.org/conferences/TODJuly2005/papers/Glass.G.pdf>, accessed 7 April, 2008].

<sup>11</sup> Newman, P., 2004, *Metropolitan Strategy*. Paper presented at the Sydney Futures Forum. Sydney 19 May, 2004.

officials and residents are vocal in their general support of increased residential density and land use mix, provided it occurs elsewhere.

Developing vibrant mixed use centres supported by good walking, cycling and public transport infrastructure requires a local government willing to be innovative by encouraging and responding to development opportunities.<sup>12</sup> However, by nature, local government is closely tied to local issues, which on occasion makes it difficult for this level of government to look at the bigger, regional picture. If implementation is going to be left to local councils, there will be much less achieved as projects are generally watered down by local reactions.<sup>13</sup>

It is widely accepted that local government has difficulty dealing with metropolitan planning challenges and planning transport infrastructure will not work well if not coordinated across local government boundaries. The absence of regional planning makes it difficult to implement planning policy needed to create new high-density development clusters around transport nodes and corridors that span across local government boundaries.

It is undeniable that implementation of regional land use policies, such as increasing land use mix and residential density along a transport corridor is virtually impossible unless there is a significant shift in land use planning authority from local government to a higher level organisation.<sup>14</sup> To enable appropriate planning around the proposed transport corridors and nodes to occur, there is an urgent need to shift planning powers for development in strategically important locations away from local governments that are unfortunately hostage to NIMBYs. Essentially the Commonwealth and State Governments must intervene to ensure that its strategic metropolitan aims for centres supporting, and supported by, proposed infrastructure improvements are implemented via a clear statutory planning mechanism that requires appropriate density and land use mix in appropriate locations. This could be achieved in consultation with local councils, but should not be left entirely to local government to implement, as invariably, if it is just left to local government the regional perspectives are lost.<sup>15</sup>

The Urban Taskforce is committed to an integration of land use and transport planning and thank you for providing us with the opportunity to offer our comments. Should you require any further clarification of the content of this correspondence, please feel free to contact me on telephone number 9238 3927.

Yours sincerely

**Urban Taskforce Australia**



Chris Johnson, AM  
Chief Executive Officer

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Newman, P., 2005., Transit Oriented Development: An Australian Overview. Paper presented at the Transit Oriented Development Conference. Fremantle, Western Australia 5-8 July 2005.

[<http://www.patrec.org/conferences/TODJuly2005/papers/Newman%20paper%20REV.pdf>, accessed 7 April, 2008]

<sup>14</sup> Downs, A. 2005, Smart Growth: Why we discuss it more than we do it. *Journal of the American Planning Association*. Vol. 71, No. 4, pp. 367-378.

<sup>15</sup> Newman, P., 2006, Transport greenhouse gas and Australian Suburbs: What Planners can do. *Australian Planner*, Vol. 43, No. 2, pp. 6-7.