

A submission in response to the

**Metropolitan Strategy Review
Sydney Towards 2036**

and the

Metropolitan Transport Plan

by the NSW Premier's Council for Active Living (PCAL)

May 2010

1. Purpose of this submission

This brief submission has been prepared by the NSW Premier's Council for Active Living (PCAL) in response to the Discussion Paper, *Sydney Towards 2036* for the Metropolitan Strategy Review and the Metropolitan Transport Plan. PCAL acknowledges the intention to fully integrate the two documents as an integrated plan with a planning horizon extended to 2036. A single response has been prepared (framed within the context of the Metropolitan Strategy Review) as the promotion of healthy urban design principles and active transport strategies impacts upon both documents.

2. NSW Premier's Council for Active Living (PCAL)

PCAL aims to encourage more people in NSW to be more active every day. The Council works with government, business and community partners to:

- promote greater involvement in active living across all population groups in NSW;
- build and strengthen the physical and social environments that facilitate and support active lifestyles that are built around individual, incidental everyday activity as well as more formal activities such as fitness and sports programs;
- ensure that government policies and strategies provide every opportunity for the citizens of NSW to embrace active living through all stages of their life.

PCAL comprises senior representatives from NSW Government agencies, and members from the business and community sectors. The Council provides an important forum for interagency and intersectoral collaboration through the promotion and implementation of active living principles. PCAL's priorities include active travel, healthy urban planning and the liveability of NSW cities and towns.

PCAL has developed a number of resources to facilitate implementation of Active Living / Active Transport at the local government level. *Designing Places for Active Living* is a web-based product which provides key design considerations for walking and cycling routes, public transport, streets, open spaces, shopping centres and workplaces as well as links to key references and other resources for more detailed guidelines and specifications. *Development and Active Living: A Development Assessment Resource* provides relevant matters (by NSW Planning Development Type) for consideration in the preparation of Local Environment Plans, Development Control Plans and in the assessment of major development applications.

3. Why Active Living Statement

There is a rapidly growing body of evidence which shows that being active in everyday life not only has substantial positive impacts on our individual health, but also offers environmental, social and economic benefits. However only just over half the adult NSW population meets the recommended level of at least 30 minutes of physical activity on most days of the week required to obtain health benefits¹.

¹ Centre for Epidemiology and Research. 2008 *Report on Adult Health from the 2004 New South Wales Population Health Survey*. NSW Department of Health, 2009.

PCAL has summarised in its 'Why Active Living Statement'² the key evidence demonstrating the benefits of active living and the individual and social costs of a sedentary lifestyle. Key points highlighted within the statement include:

- Inadequate physical activity is a serious health problem that results in poor health outcomes including a greater risk of obesity, heart disease, stroke, type II diabetes, colon and breast cancer, depression and more.
- These chronic conditions impose enormous direct and indirect health costs³ – heart disease, stroke and type II diabetes cost well over \$4 billion nationally in direct costs; obesity costs as much as \$2 billion⁴. Of these direct costs over \$1.5 billion is attributable to physical inactivity.
- Physical inactivity is a major contributing factor to obesity – approximately 25 per cent of school students are either overweight or obese – this figure has doubled in the past 20 years⁵. For the first time in living memory life expectancy in developed countries such as Australia may start to fall due to the obesity epidemic in children and youth⁶.
- In Sydney, 55% of all car journeys are less than five kilometres and 33% are less than three kilometres⁷.
- Since 1981, the proportion of children driven to school has doubled to more than 50%, while the share of children walking and cycling has almost halved to about 20%⁸. These car trips to school tend to be short and contribute significantly to the demand by families for a second car⁹.
- The transport sector is NSW's second-largest source of greenhouse gas emissions¹⁰. Car emissions are a major source of air pollutants which coupled with an inactive lifestyle, may lead to respiratory and cardiovascular diseases and early mortality¹¹.

The solution to these challenges is to create more supportive social and physical environments and policies so that people find it easier to incorporate physical activity into the routines of daily life.

4. The link between health, active living and the built environment

Infrastructure Australia in its State of Australian Cities Report¹² highlights that 'the design of urban environments can contribute to the health and well being of communities by supporting active living, physical activity through walking, cycling and using public transport and opportunities for social interaction'.

² NSW Premier's Council for Active Living, 2010, *Why Active Living Statement*. Available at www.pcal.nsw.gov.au

³ *The cost of physical inactivity – What is the lack of participation in physical activity costing Australia?* Medibank Private. August 2007.

⁴ *The Growing Cost of Obesity in 2008: Three years on*. Report by Access Economics for Diabetes Australia. 2008. Available from <http://www.diabetesaustralia.com.au/Pagefiles/7832/FULLREPORTGrowingCostOfObesity2008.pdf>

⁵ *Schools Physical Activity and Nutrition Survey (SPANS) 2004: The Short Report*. NSW Centre for Overweight and Obesity. Sydney, 2006.

⁶ Olshansky SJ et al. *A potential decline in life expectancy in the United States in the 21st century*. *New England Journal of Medicine*. 2005; 352:1138-1145.

⁷ *Sustainable Cities (Report of the Inquiry into Sustainable Cities by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage)*. The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, August 2005.

⁸ *Sydney Metropolitan Strategy – City of Cities: A plan for Sydney's Future*. NSW Department of Planning, Sydney, December 2005.

⁹ Smith and Scott, 2006

¹⁰ *NSW State of the Environment 2006*. NSW Department of Environment and Conservation, Sydney, Dec 2006.

¹¹ *NSW State of the Environment 2006*. NSW Department of Environment and Conservation, Sydney, Dec 2006.

¹² Major Cities Unit (2010), *State of Australian Cities*, Major Cities Unit, Infrastructure Australia, Commonwealth of Australia. Available at: www.infrastructureaustralia.gov.au/mcu.aspx

Characteristics of urban environments that have demonstrated links to increased physical activity include;

- Mixed land use and higher density
- Footpaths and cycleways and facilities for physical activity linking key destinations
- Street connectivity and design
- Transport infrastructure systems, linking residential, commercial and business areas
- Neighbourhood aesthetics, including access to public open space¹³.

Australian research¹⁴ has also demonstrated a negative relationship between urban sprawl and physical activity. For example, people living in outer Sydney suburbs tend to be 30-50% more at risk of being overweight and 40-60% less likely to be adequately active than inner-city counterparts. Furthermore, a higher proportion of people in the lowest socio-economic groups live in areas characterised by poor urban design, and inadequate infrastructure¹⁵.

There is widespread agreement that there are benefits in modifying the built environment to encourage healthy, active and more liveable communities¹⁶. COAG's National Criteria for capital city strategic planning systems includes addressing health, liveability and community wellbeing¹⁷. Infrastructure Australia in its State of Australian Cities Report recommends active living related indicators such as 'the proportion of people not engaged in sufficient physical activity to confer health benefit' and 'access to quality open space' as active living related indicators of liveability¹⁸.

The NSW Division of Local Government's Long-term Integrated Strategic Planning Reform Manual also includes evidence based active living indicators (pg 52-54). The intention of the indicators is to provide local councils with a selection of evidence-based measures that will help demonstrate progress towards the development of more supportive environments for active living.

There is a growing body of evidence demonstrating the positive economic advantages of investment in active transport infrastructure. For example, at the request of the NSW Premier PCAL oversaw the development of an updated NSW BikePlan. Background studies were commissioned to inform development of the BikePlan including a cost/benefit analysis of financial investment in select cycling programs and projects in NSW. Results demonstrated significant positive returns from proposed shared-pathway infrastructure development due to health, environmental and congestion reduction co-benefits.

¹³ National Heart Foundation of Australia, 2009. *The built environment and walking*, Position Statement prepared on behalf of the National Physical Activity Program Committee (Chief authors: Gebel, K., Bauman, A., Owen, N., Foster, S., Giles-Corti, B.)

¹⁴ Garden, F. and Jalaludin, B. (2008) *Impact of Urban Sprawl on overweight, obesity and physical activity in Sydney, Australia*. Journal of Urban Health

¹⁵ Giles-Corti B. and Donovan, R. (2002). *Socio-economic status differences in recreational Physical activity levels and real and perceived access to a supportive physical environment*. Prev Med; 35(b): 601-11

¹⁶ National Heart Foundation of Australia, 2009. *The built environment and walking*, Position Statement prepared on behalf of the National Physical Activity Program Committee (Chief authors: Gebel, K., Bauman, A., Owen, N., Foster, S., Giles-Corti, B.)

¹⁷ Council of Australian Governments Communiqué from meeting 7 December 2009

¹⁸ Major Cities Unit (2010), *State of Australian Cities*, Major Cities Unit, Infrastructure Australia, Commonwealth of Australia. Available at: www.infrastructureaustralia.gov.au/mcu.apsx

5. Prioritisation of Walking and Cycling

PCAL supports the current incorporation of active living considerations within the Metro Strategy Review and Metropolitan Transport Plan such as; the intention to fully integrate the two documents as an integrated plan with a planning horizon extended to 2036 (Metro review Direction three), the reduction of car reliance by improved active transport options (public transport, walking and cycling) and a focus on providing better amenity and design in centres and urban renewal areas via the delivery of walkable neighbourhoods in mixed use areas (Metro Review Directions six and nine).

PCAL notes that a comprehensive body of evidence exists that demonstrates the urgent need to build more supportive environments for active living. The benefits of building healthy and active communities are multifactorial and include individual and community health and improved liveability of our cities via reduced traffic congestion and greenhouse gas emissions and improved air quality.

PCAL therefore recommends it would be beneficial that planning for healthy and active communities be given more prominence and support for its application in local planning and development. While many of the principles are consistent with best practice in local planning, the longer term objective would be that creating supportive environments for physical activity is accepted as part of mainstream planning. PCAL's ongoing engagement with local councils, developers and consultants through healthy planning workshops and forums has demonstrated that strengthened guidance and direction in the development of more supportive environments for active living would significantly assist in achieving such increased acceptance.

PCAL recommends that the implementation of the combined plan needs to ensure the prioritisation of walking and cycling for short trips in urban centres to support transport related walking and cycling, public transport use and active recreation. PCAL recommends a number of implementation strategies including;

- **The development of a Dept of Planning Active Living Position Statement.** The purpose of the consolidated Active Living Policy Statement would be to provide best practise guidelines to help define walkable, bikeable and liveable communities and explain the role of planning in active transport. The Position Statement would be a stand alone document highlighting why active living is relevant to councils, the relevant sections within subregional strategies and would also reinforce relevant statutory considerations such as Director General Requirements.
- **Preparation of a range of statutory tools to complement implementation of the Active Living Position Statement content** including Director General Requirements, a specific 117 Direction and explicit statements in final subregional strategies to accentuate active transport strategic intent.
- **Utilisation of existing active living related planning tools by the proposed Sydney Metropolitan Development Authority.** A Range of key NSW specific healthy urban design guidelines have been developed to help create active, healthy and sustainable communities. Recommended tools include; *NSW Planning Guidelines for Walking and Cycling*, *Designing Places for Active Living*, *Development and Active Living: A Development Assessment Resource* and the *Healthy Urban Development*

Checklist: A guide for health services when commenting on development policies, plans and proposals by the NSW Dept of Health.

- **Development of a NSW Walking Strategy.** The purpose of a NSW Walking Strategy would be to increase walking for transport and recreation for as many people as possible to as many places as possible. Strategies to increase walking would in turn impact upon the achievement of State Plan targets such as 'increased share of journey to work trips by public transport' due to the walking trips required at either end of public transport trips. It is also recommended that the existing Active Transport Target within the State Plan be expanded to include a walking measure and that the development of a whole of government walking strategy be overseen by the NSW Premier's Council for Active Living.

Finally, in response to Section 11 of the Metro Review asking 'what issues should the next Metropolitan Plan focus on', PCAL recommends that an additional direction be added 'Creating Healthy and Active Communities.' The inclusion of health and active living as a major priority would be consistent with other State Strategies such as the South East Queensland Regional Plan and the Adelaide Plan. Furthermore, in the absence of a health specific related direction within the current Metro Review PCAL recommends explicit acknowledgement of the health impacts of implementation of the final integrated plan upon relevant proposed directions such as:

- Direction 2: Making Sydney climate change ready
- Direction 3: Integrating land use with transport
- Direction 6: Strengthening a City of Cities
- Direction 9: Achieving Renewal

PCAL **recommends** these directions then be linked to actions designed to produce positive health outcomes.

6. PCAL Recommendations

PCAL's response to the Sydney Towards 2036 Discussion Paper and the Metropolitan Transport Plan is as follows:

Supports key elements of both documents and the vision articulated for Sydney Towards 2036

Supports full integration of the Metropolitan Transport Plan with the metropolitan Strategy

PCAL **recommends** it would be beneficial that planning for healthy and active communities be given more prominence and support for its application in local planning and development.

PCAL also **recommends** the plan should be strengthened to ensure the prioritisation of walking and cycling by the inclusion of the following implementation strategies:

- The development of a Dept of Planning Active Living Position Statement.
- Preparation of a range of statutory tools to complement implementation of the Active Living Position Statement content

- Utilisation of existing active living related planning tools by the proposed Sydney Metropolitan Development Authority
- Development of a NSW Walking Strategy and walking target within the State Plan

Finally, in the absence of a health specific related direction within the current review PCAL **recommends** explicit acknowledgement of the health impacts of implementation of the plan upon relevant proposed directions such as:

- Making Sydney climate change ready
- Integrating land use with transport
- Strengthening a City of Cities
- Achieving Renewal

PCAL **recommends** these directions then be linked to actions designed to produce positive health outcomes.