



Secretary

File Reference: 0596
Contact: Ben Cebuliak

Mr Keir Delaney
Secretary
Environment and Planning References Committee
Legislative Council, Parliament House, Spring Street
Melbourne VIC 3002

Dear Mr Delaney

Re: Inquiry into Environmental Design and Public Health

I refer to the letter from Mr Richard Willis, Secretary Council Committees, dated 17 May 2011 and thank you for the invitation to respond to the Environment and Planning References Committee's inquiry into Environmental Design and Public Health in Victoria.

The Department of Infrastructure and Transport welcomes this inquiry and supports a focus on preventative health in the design of the built environment. This submission will particularly focus on items 1, 3 and 4 in the Terms of Reference:

- 1) *Review the evidence of the contribution of the natural and built environments to the promotion of health and wellbeing*

The Australian Government acknowledges the important link between environmental planning and design and public health.

In March 2010, the Australian Government, through my Department's Major Cities Unit, produced the *State of Australian Cities 2010* report available from <www.majorcities.gov.au>. This report brought together research and evidence from across Australia on issues related to the function of our cities. Chapter 6, pages 94-98, discusses the impact of the built environment on public health.

In December 2010 the Australian Government released a discussion paper *Our Cities –building a productive, sustainable and liveable future*, and an accompanying background and research paper *Our Cities – the challenge of change*. In these documents the Australian Government noted that the way our cities are planned, designed and built has a profound influence on the health, well-being and quality of life of the people who live in them (*Our Cities – the challenge of change*, pages 99-103 and *Our Cities –building a productive, sustainable and liveable future*, pages 48-49).

- 3) *Assess the extent to which these factors are currently taken into account in the environmental planning and design in both the public and private sectors, and their effectiveness, with particular reference to new growth areas*

The Australian Government recognises that there is a correlation between urban planning, car usage, and increasingly sedentary lifestyles across our communities. "Many urban and suburban environments

are car dominated, and so are not conducive to either incidental exercise (for example walking for local errands or to public transport) or recreational exercise.” (Australian Government, *Our Cities, Our Future*, page 56).

This phenomenon is particularly apparent in new growth areas, where relative distances travelled are greater; there are fewer transport alternatives; and where planning typologies tend to favour low-density, single-use developments which are less conducive to walking and cycling.

4) *Determine opportunities to influence environmental planning and design for health, including consideration of the role of legislation, guidelines and public-private partnerships, and the costs and benefits of various options*

In June 2009 the Australian Government’s Preventative Health Taskforce published its National Preventative Health Strategy which included, as one of its action areas, to “Drive environmental change throughout the community to increase levels of physical activity and reduce sedentary behaviour.”

In May 2011 the Australian Government released *Our Cities, Our Future – A National Urban Policy for a productive, sustainable and liveable future*, which establishes the Australian Government’s objectives for our major cities with populations over 100 000. It recognises that “The planning and design of local neighbourhoods and urban centres affect a community’s wellbeing and is a major factor in determining quality of life of our population. Contributing factors to the amenity of a neighbourhood include access to green and open space, water and air quality, pleasant streetscapes, and opportunities for recreation and social interaction.” (Australian Government, *Our Cities, Our Future*, page 56).

The National Urban Policy clearly identifies that active travel and public transport are key factors in improving the productivity, sustainability and liveability of our cities. It articulates the Commonwealth Government’s overarching commitment to active travel (walking and cycling) and public transport in our major cities, including the following:

- The *Nation Building II* program, which commences in 2014-15, will need to apply the principles and objectives of the National Urban Policy and align with the COAG capital city strategic planning systems criteria.
- The Liveable Cities program (\$20 million) includes the support of projects which incorporate walking and cycling infrastructure to enhance local networks.
- There are a number of related objectives – such as reducing dependency on cars and improving transport options – for which active transport is articulated as a means to achieve these objectives.
- The Australian Urban Design Protocol (currently being developed by the Major Cities Unit within the Department of Infrastructure and Transport in consultation with key industry and government stakeholders) will highlight public health as a key factor in the urban design context.

Once again, I thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Environment and Planning References Committee’s inquiry into Environmental Design and Public Health in Victoria.

The contact officer in my Department, on this matter, is Dorte Ekelund, Executive Director – Major Cities Unit. She can be contacted on (02) 6274 8183 or via email: dorte.ekelund@infrastructure.gov.au.

Yours sincerely,



Mike Mrdak

29 June 2011