NORTHERN ALLIANCE FOR GREENHOUSE ACTION

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The Secretary
Environment and Planning References Committee
Legislative Council
Parliament House
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Dear Secretary

Inquiry into Environmental Design and Public Health

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Review. The Inquiry provides an excellent opportunity to review and explore the links between environmental design and public health, and to reinforce and strengthen policy and legislative support for extended and integrated responses to both.

Addressing these issues is even more urgent and critical in the context of climate change mitigation and adaptation, which present huge and complex challenges to our established ways of life.

Background

The **Northern Alliance for Greenhouse Action** (NAGA), which began operating in 2002, is an alliance of Moreland Energy Foundation and the nine councils spanning the northern metropolitan region of Melbourne from the CBD to the rural/urban fringe (see footer). The Alliance covers a quarter of Melbourne's population; the region spans major industrial, commercial, and residential areas, activities and types, as well as forests, agriculture, and water catchments on the urban fringe.
NAGA shares information, coordinates emission reduction and adaptation activities, and cooperates on the research and development of innovative projects. NAGA's goal is to achieve significant emissions abatement by delivering effective programs and leveraging local government, community and business action. NAGA and its members have demonstrated significant emission reduction innovation at the local government and regional level. NAGA also establishes partnerships and linkages with state and federal government agencies and departments, local government and industry associations, research institutions, community groups and consultants, to facilitate climate change action in the northern metropolitan region.

NAGA is working to ensure urgent, regional action in our transition to a climate-changed, low-carbon future.

City size; greenfields and infill development

Melbourne's population and its geographic footprint have been growing, and are forecast to continue to expand. The growing size, and resulting urban sprawl, as well as poorly designed urban form leads to a number of problems, including:

- car dependency, and energy intensive lifestyles[1]
- social marginalisation, and limited access to economic opportunity
- environmental degradation of vulnerable ecosystems on the urban fringe, as well as alienating productive agricultural land close to city boundaries (with implications for food security issues)
- higher infrastructure costs for all levels of government.

[1] For example: Dodson, J., & Sipe, N. (2008). *Unsettling Suburbia: The New Landscape of Oil and Mortgage Vulnerability in Australian Cities, Urban Research Program Research Paper 17.* Griffith University. http://www.griffith.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/88851/urp-rp17-dodson-sipe-2008.pdf

Australian cities are some of the largest cities in the world, with the lowest urban densities[2]. As a regional grouping of councils that stretches from the central business district to the urban-rural fringe, NAGA members support the continued development of plans, pilots and demonstration developments to illustrate the opportunities associated with establishing more compact development using a variety of building types (such as townhouses and apartments) rather than primarily expanding on the urban fringes. In addition, there is support for further developing concepts and measures for 'transit-oriented design', whereby transport, housing and social infrastructure should be concentrated in and around activity centres and along transport corridors so that jobs and services are located near where people live.

Zoning

Vibrant, liveable cities incorporate a range of uses, green spaces and community spaces, and a diversity of housing choices, with employment and residential areas closely linked. Urban form can contribute to addressing public health as well as sustainability and liveability objectives, including climate change impacts such as heat island effect, through provision of green spaces, refuges, and community spaces. Good urban design elements also incorporate enhanced mobility; these are explored below.

Transport, mobility, linkages

Many cities have struggled to incorporate private car use into cities; despite this, Melbourne's large size and lack of other transport options, as well as residents' patterns of travel have reinforced private car dependency. This in turn has led to expensive infrastructure demands and productivity losses due to road congestion, as well as health and community impacts. Most notable is the inability of public transport infrastructure to keep pace with city growth.

There are international examples of cities that have tackled mobility issues through a range of environmental urban design and policy approaches, demonstrating liveable, sustainable, productive cities where private car use has been controlled or even removed to create opportunities for establishment of walking, cycling and public transport, as well as public spaces for communities to gather. Examples include car-free Times Square New York (as part of PlaNYC), congestion taxes in London, and cycling and walking in Copenhagen. Key to implementing these changes in transport is leadership and commitment, and provision of infrastructure (cycling lanes, accessible and integrated public transport, traffic control systems biased to pedestrian movement, etc). As well there is a need for changes to people's expectations about travelling around the city, including the expectation that sustainable modes of transport must often be combined for any one journey (eg walking and cycling to and from public transport).

On a smaller scale, for individual developments, there are opportunities to reconsider and reframe issues such as the current statutory provisions for parking which specify minimum parking rates for land-use development. Changing this approach from a minimum to a maximum number of allowed car spaces could contribute to a shift in car ownership and use, and encourage active transport modes that support public health objectives, particularly in areas well-serviced by alternative transport modes (public transport, cycling and walking).

NAGA and its members are keen to play an active leadership role in pursuing urgent, regional action in our transition to a climate-changed, low-carbon future; the contribution of environmental design to improving public health outcomes is part of this transition. I look forward to the development and release of the Committee's final report.

Please contact me if you would like to discuss any of the issues raised in more detail.

Yours sincerely

Judy Bush

Executive Officer

The views represented in this submission do not necessarily represent the views of all NAGA members individually.

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[2] Kelly, J., 2010, *The Cities we need,* Grattan Institute, Melbourne, pp 8 www.grattan.edu.au