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WalkSydney Inc

Monica Gibson
Deputy Secretary, Planning, Land Use Strategy and Housing
NSW Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure

Via email: tod.program@planning.nsw.gov.au

Dear Ms Gibson,

Transit Oriented Development Program

As the peak body advocating for walking in the Greater Sydney region, WalkSydney welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback and input on the NSW Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure's (DPHI) Transit Oriented Development Program (TOD Program).

WalkSydney recognises the NSW Government's focus on lifting housing supply by planning for high density residential and mixed use precincts. In the TOD Program document, DPHI identifies eight precincts (Bankstown, Bays West, Bella Vista, Crows Nest, Homebush, Hornsby, Kellyville and Macquarie Park) to be master planned and rezoned by November 2024.

In this rapid timeframe, WalkSydney asks the NSW Government to carefully put pedestrian-friendly design at the forefront of its planning for the TOD Program. When Australians visit international cities they admire, like Barcelona, Paris, Tokyo, London or Buenos Aires, they admire places not from the perspective behind the wheel of a car, but as pedestrians on footpaths.

Too often, high density development in Sydney has been done in places where most expedient and with as little as possible community participation. As Figure 1 shows, this has resulted in development that is not desirable to walk through, and contributes to community hostility to further development.

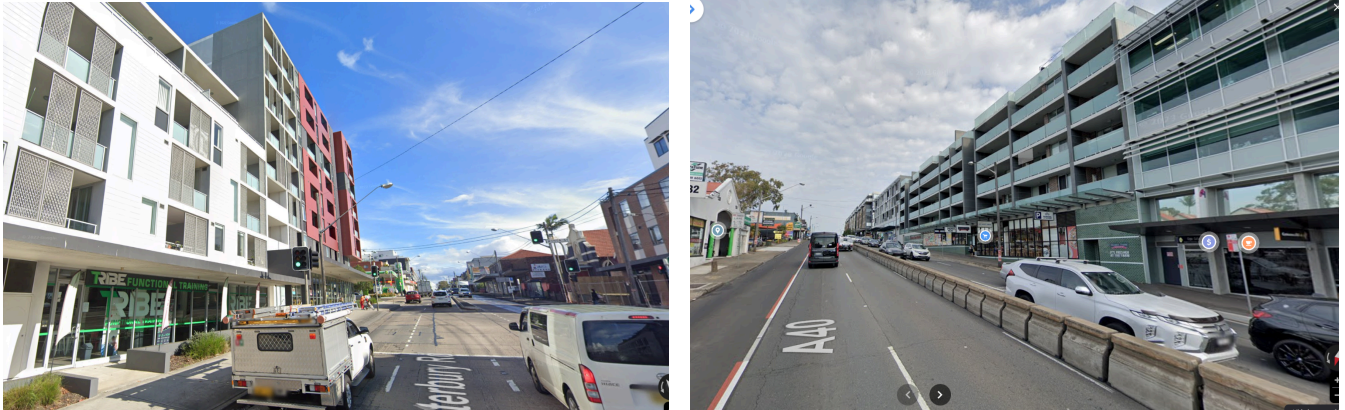


Figure 1 - Dense urban development poorly integrated with the surrounding roads and streets. These places are hostile to spend time and undesirable places of business.

But NSW has also successfully planned and delivered pedestrian-friendly places in Sydney. Places like the Inner West and Green Square (where only 19% of people drive to work, 41% use transit, and 12% walk or cycle - ABS Census 2016). DPHI can use these places as templates to ensure TOD Precincts are successful and will become desirable, attractive, and productive places to live, work, and walk.

With these examples in mind, WalkSydney has identified recommendations under four key themes for DPHI's implementation in the TOD Precinct program.

1. Allow and encourage small, denser, mixed use urban forms

- Adopt a form-based approach to buildings
- Enable and encourage mixed-use form
- Convert minimum to maximum parking rates

2. Encourage local centres around transport, as a buffer to residential uses

- Exclude land that is considered near 'Busy Roads and Rail'
- Exclude land more than 1200m from existing (or imminent) schools
- Require non-residential active frontage for buildings over 3 storeys, ideally fine grained spaces perfect for small businesses and not for profits.

3. Make TOD Precincts exemplars of child-friendly, family-friendly development

- Adopt a default 30km/hr speed limit in roads and streets in TOD precincts
- Make walking and cycling a safe and attractive transport mode
- Increase the requirements for family apartments in these developments

4. Approach the transport task with a truly 'transit oriented' lens



- Adopt a mode-share target no more than 36% car mode share and use this mode share in the design and modelling specifications within the precinct
- Government to lead by example, with place-based funding
- Invest in climate friendly infrastructure

Recommendations in Detail

1. Allow and encourage small, denser, mixed use urban forms

a. Adopt a form-based approach to buildings

The NSW Government's 'pattern book' initiative reflects that when imagining future development, the community resonates much stronger with tangible examples of buildings, rather than obscure rules. The NSW Government should build on this by taking a form-based approach to planning policy, rather than focusing on height and FSR.

By adopting (and codifying) a similar urban form that is observable in many established walkable areas across the world, from hutongs and kampongs to London terraces and New York brownstones, the typically 'terrace' form - zero setbacks to the side, minimal setback to the front, 4 - 6m wide modules typically in a 2:3 ratio of width to height - not only will the community embrace the outcome being offered, but Government can also demonstrate the flexibility of this form to deliver a range of housing types (the 'London Terrace' spans from house to 3 units).

Developers also stand to benefit from this. In Greater London, where FSR is not used as a control, if a developer can get more dwelling space using a more efficient layout within a built form, the government is welcoming of this (it is, in fact, London Plan Policy - see Figure 2 below)). Such an approach gives the flexibility to developer to determine the best land use mix of housing and parking, rather than forcing prescriptive outcomes through rigid controls.



Policy D3 Optimising site capacity through the design-led approach

The design-led approach

- A All development must make the best use of land by following a design-led approach that optimises the capacity of sites, including site allocations. Optimising site capacity means ensuring that development is of the most appropriate form and land use for the site. The design-led approach requires consideration of design options to determine the most appropriate form of development that responds to a site's context and capacity for growth, and existing and planned supporting infrastructure capacity (as set out in [Policy D2 Infrastructure requirements for sustainable densities](#)), and that best delivers the requirements set out in Part D.
- B Higher density developments should generally be promoted in locations that are well connected to jobs, services, infrastructure and amenities by public transport, walking and cycling, in accordance with [Policy D2 Infrastructure requirements for sustainable densities](#). Where these locations have existing areas of high density buildings, expansion of the areas should be positively considered by Boroughs where appropriate. This could also include expanding Opportunity Area boundaries where appropriate.

*Figure 2 - Policy D3 of the London Plan 2021 **requires** maximising site capacity through design, the antithesis of our FSR-led approach.*

A form-based (or, at least, envelope-based) approach can also avoid one of the biggest risk of the current SEPP, which is that the housing types fail to achieve the 35dw/ha minimum required to make these areas operate as denser, more urban forms. It would discourage low density options like dual occupancies, while encourage patterned developments like terraces. In any case, dual occupancies should not be permitted within 1200m of TOD Precinct centres.

b. Enable and encourage mixed-use form

One of the biggest barriers to walking is a lack of places to walk to. TOD Precinct controls need to promote and make accessible a wider range of land uses - from retail and commercial to community infrastructure. At the very least, high density development should be permitted as 'shop top housing' rather than 'residential flat buildings'.

As an example, the [St Mary's Town Centre Structure Plan](#) shows how residential uplift needs to be pared with other uses to make successful places -



as it stands, less than half of the St Marys catchment is within walking distance of a supermarket or school.

c. Convert minimum to maximum parking rates

We strongly recommend that DPHI does *not* require a minimum parking provision in these same walkable and high-transit areas, and instead sets maximum rates of provision.

Every car space adds 18-36sqm to a building envelope, with associated imposed construction costs and lost opportunities for alternative uses. Recent research done for Transport for NSW on parking reform indicates these zones should have 0.5 to 1 car space per dwelling *maximum*, and *zero* minimum parking rates.

Strong policy is needed to curtail the growth of car traffic in dense environments and promote walking. Otherwise, future residents will find traffic grows with development, frustrating initiatives to promote walking and undermining the benefits of government investments in transit and upzoning.

2. Encourage local centres around transport, as a buffer to residential use

Train and Metro stations are good locations for focusing development - but this alone will not make developments successful. DPHI needs to embed transit-oriented design and delivery throughout the planning of these places, maximising services and activities within walking distance while minimising local car trips.

a. Exclude land to make a buffer from busy roads and rail lines

The SEPP should exclude residential uplift within 60m of a rail line, or within the 'acoustic assessment' threshold of a busy road, as per established [NSW Government guidance](#). These residences are well-known to have poor amenity, and affect only 1% of the catchment.

The upside of this exclusion is that this land can provide some of the local centre uses needed to support residential uplift and encourage walking and cycling for short trips, complementing the public transport proximity for longer trips, like supermarkets. This is the model that cities from Tokyo to



London have adopted, and already exists in DPHI's [Improving Transport Choice](#) policy.

b. Exclude land further than 1200m from an existing school

Not all uses can be accommodated next to roads and rail lines however, particularly not sensitive land uses, like schools. DPHI should exclude land that is over 1.2km from existing primary schools, to encourage walking in TODS and reduce future cost to government. The NSW Government's recent welcome investment in active transport infrastructure connected to schools needs to ensure homes are accessible to schools, not just the other way around.

3. Make TODs exemplars of child-friendly, family-friendly development

Our housing crisis is not just one of affordability, but also amenity and diversity. Apartment buildings typically cater only to single people and couples, due to the lack of 3-bedroom apartments or child-friendly facilities like play areas, or storage for prams. Making a child-friendly city also extends to the street - these dense urban areas rely more heavily on their streets as public spaces for kids to congregate and play. Those streets should be safe and friendly for all ages, by design.

a. Adopt a default 30km/hr speed limit in roads and streets in TOD precincts

WalkSydney's primary priority is making the urban default speed limit 30km/hr. The benefits of a 30km/hr speed zone are:

- Reduced road trauma and significantly safer roads. The risks of death and serious injury between a vehicle and a person walking or riding are reduced by 70% when the speed limit is reduced from 50 km/hr to 30 km/hr.
- Safer street environments enable children to play and connect eg: walk to school independently and with their friends!
- Creating a healthy street - travel times differences between active modes - walking and riding and driving become insignificant, reducing reliance on vehicles and encouraging active modes of travel.

TOD Precincts are prime locations to accelerate this change and demonstrate the benefits of a 30km/hr speed limit. Ideally set 30km/hr limits on all roads



and streets within a 1.2km radius of stations will encourage safe and comfortable walking and cycling, and save lives. Almost no-one has died in NSW in a 30km/h zone, while half of all road deaths and grievous bodily harm is done by cars driving *at* 50km/h, the default speed zone.

WalkSydney encourages DPHI to work closely with Transport for NSW to ensure 30km/hr limits are in place in TOD Precincts when the SEPP is made, so that as populations increase dramatically, vehicles (including construction traffic) is calmed to create safe environments and attractive places where people to want to live.

b. Make walking and cycling a safe and attractive transport mode

On streets where the environment cannot be shared due to vehicles, DPHI should work with TfNSW to ensure that the state invests in adequate walking and cycling infrastructure to meet the future needs of the projected population. This means footpaths wide enough to be “Level of Service B” under NSW’s Walking Space Guide, and separated cycling from walking (and cars), including primary routes to the station.

Much of the needed infrastructure is already scoped: for example, Sydney Metro has walking and cycling plans for each new Sydney Metro West station precinct, and the NSW Government could make a welcome investment to deliver these plans.

c. Increase the requirements for family apartments in these developments

The Apartment Design Guide requires at least 10% of apartments to have at least three bedrooms. Developers are often reluctant to provide any more than this minimum, as it can be more profitable to provide a higher proportion of investment grade one and two bedroom apartments within a development. These smaller apartments are rarely suitable for children.

Since the requirement was introduced in 2002, housing affordability in Sydney has significantly worsened, and the old assumption that families don’t live in apartments is no longer relevant. This isn’t just about a lack of choice: families are increasingly seeing the benefits of density living close to amenities and services, and where children can walk to friends and school.



DPHI could require at least 25% of apartments to have at least three bedrooms to allow more families the opportunity of the benefits of density living. Other measures are also required, such as larger second bedrooms for study desks, pram storage in apartments and play equipment in common areas.

By allowing children to grow up in urban areas, they will also form habits and preferences early in life for walking that will keep them healthier, happier, and more productive for longer, and reduce infrastructure and health costs to government in the long term.

4. Approach the transport task with a truly ‘transit oriented’ lens:

a. Adopt a car mode-share target of 20 - 35% in TOD Precincts

This figure is equivalent to what has already been achieved in the Inner West and Green Square, and is within the Climate Council’s recommendations for sustainable and transformative decarbonisation. This would mean **avoiding** widening roads for future projected car growth, decimating the urban character of the precinct before it becomes a true TOD Precinct.

The Epping Bridge case study shows the fallacy of trying to deliver infrastructure in infill precincts that makes it ‘easier’ to drive. Short term transport planning for the Epping Urban Activation Precinct, 10 years after the precinct was rezoned, has resulted in a \$220 million Commonwealth and NSW Government bridge upgrade to make traffic flow easier and, inevitably, make the pedestrian experience in this major densifying center much worse.

b. Ensure government leads by example

It’s critical DPHI delivers on good land use and transport principles in TOD Precinct master plans, and works with Transport for NSW to embed best practice transport planning in the *design and delivery* of TOD precincts.

The TOD Program is an enormous opportunity for the NSW Government to show how it is leading Australia and the world in best practice, whole of precinct transit planning. Too often, the interests of individual agencies are limited by the fare box and land titles.

Government must ensure DPHI, Transport for NSW, Sydney Metro and councils come together to make whole of precinct plans to support uplift.



Precinct planning will involve some lateral thinking - like *how can better pedestrian design across a 1.2km radius encourage more people to use Sydney Metro?*

This means places that feature transit infrastructure like:

- More scramble crossings at major intersections outside stations, automated and short wait times, and no pedestrian bridges or fences;
- ‘Microhubs’ for collective solutions for services like deliveries, cycle parking, and microgrids; and
- Requiring rear lanes for mixed use blocks or consolidated blocks to reduce waste collection and deliveries on street.

c. Invest in climate-friendly infrastructure

The NSW Government has set aside \$520 million for community infrastructure in TOD Precincts. At least 20% of this investment should be set aside for critical active transport infrastructure like wider footpaths, pedestrianised streets and laneways, upgraded crossings, and separated cycleways on busy roads.

The United Nations¹ and the Climate Council² have said governments must spend at least 20% of their transport infrastructure budgets on active transport infrastructure to help meet our legislated emissions reduction targets and make streets safer for all. By making this commitment, the NSW Government could set a trajectory towards this important target. Spending should also be determined in close collaboration with the relevant local councils and advocacy groups who know the needs of the precincts best.

WalkSydney would welcome further discussions with DPHI on these priority recommendations, and would appreciate being part of a targeted consultation on specific mechanisms or plans being considered. As a community, grass roots organisation, made up of experts and generalists WalkSydney’s broad base want to encourage and support any policy underpinning a TOD Program that improve walking in Greater Sydney.

WalkSydney is the peak body advocating for walking in the Greater Sydney Region.

WalkSydney’s vision is for walking to be the first choice for short trips around Sydney.

WalkSydney has three key asks:

- ❖ *30 km/hr urban default speed*

¹ UN [Environment Program : Investment in Walking and Cycling in Road Infrastructure](#)

² [Shifting gear: The path to cleaner transport | Climate Council](#)



- ❖ *streets that are safe and easy to cross*
- ❖ *pedestrian priority over cars*

WalkSydney is a member of the **Better Streets** coalition, an collection of hundreds of community organisations advocating for better streets in Australia

Yours Sincerely,

Marc Lane, Tegan Mitchell and Michael Bishop
President and Board Members, WalkSydney

CC: The Hon. John Graham MLC, Minister for Roads
The Hon. Jo Haylen MP, Minister for Transport
The Hon. Paul Scully MP, Minister for Planning and Public Spaces
Anna Bradley, A/Deputy Secretary, Cities and Active Transport, Transport for NSW
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