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Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts
Urban Policy Unit

Via email: urbanpolicyinput@infrastructure.gov.au

A National Urban Policy for Australia

Australia Post welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft National Urban Policy (NUP). Developing a national urban policy offers numerous benefits including consistency, efficient resource allocation through agreed project prioritisation, promotion of sustainable urban planning practices, social inclusion and equity, and integrated infrastructure development. It also has the potential to improve the efficiency and productivity of Australia's freight system.

Australia's economy is underpinned by the efficient transportation of freight. Efficient freight movements enhance the overall productivity of supply chains, reducing costs and improving the reliability of product deliveries. A reliable freight system also facilitates access to broader markets, allowing businesses to expand their reach and connect to consumers both locally and internationally. Freight creates jobs in transportation, logistics, warehousing and related industries and promotes investment in infrastructure such as roads, railways, ports, and airports which can spur regional development and connectivity.

While the numbers vary, forecasts continue to indicate long-term growth in Australia's freight task, with population growth contributing to increased freight volumes in many supply chains. Between 2023 and 2050, Victoria's population is expected to grow from 6.9 million to 10.1 million, with Greater Melbourne projected to become the most populous city in Australia.¹ The National Freight and Supply Chain Review Report notes that Australia's freight task is expected to grow by 26 per cent between 2020 and 2050, with 964 billion tonne kilometres by 2050.² Last financial year, Australia Post delivered 2.5 billion items, reaching more than 12.6 million delivery points.³

Population growth increases demand for freight services and for housing. This dual demand and resulting density make planning decisions about transport network expansion, industrial land, terminals and depots more important than ever. This reality highlights the need to have freight policy principles embedded across government strategies and plans, including national urban policy. On this basis, we urge the Department to place greater focus on freight, elevating freight

¹ Information retrieved from ABS National, state and territory population, 2024 and Victoria in Future 2023.

² <https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/National-Freight-and-Supply-Chain-Strategy-Review-Report.pdf>

³ https://auspost.com.au/content/dam/auspost_corp/media/documents/2023-australia-post-annual-report.pdf

productivity as a standalone objective within the NUP. This new objective should be accompanied by robust, clear and measurable actions that will help prioritise and guide government investment and policy decisions.

The draft NUP includes one freight specific action. It says:

improve strategic planning at all levels and consultation between governments and industry to ensure better coordination between freight infrastructure and networks, land use planning and urban development.

Without additional detail, it is unclear how this statement will guide or inform government investment or policy decisions. We therefore encourage the Department to consider the following questions:

- **What does ‘improved strategic planning’ mean in practice?** Will government funding or project prioritisation decisions require prospective funding recipients to demonstrate alignment to NUP principles?
- **What does improved collaboration between governments look like?** The draft NUP refers to an interjurisdictional working group and an Urban Policy Forum; will these bodies continue to meet, and if so, what level of influence will they have on jurisdictional decisions in this space?
- **How will the conflicts between freight and residential land use be resolved?** Does the Department plan to draft a metric or evaluation template to help policymakers weigh considerations?
- **What benchmarks, targets or measures will be used** to review progress against the freight action, and assess the effectiveness of the NUP more broadly?

Governments have a key role to play in ensuring the freight system makes the best use of roads, railways, ports, airports, and intermodal terminals. Government policy, planning, investment, and regulation affect the cost, efficiency, productivity, and sustainability of the freight task. The development, maintenance, and management of the freight network is a shared responsibility between government, infrastructure owners, regulatory entities, and freight operators. To meet the growing freight task, substantial reform is required, including in urban policy. The NUP has the potential to serve as a higher order strategy that guides policy development across government if its principles inform decision making. Without the right level of detail, or an accompanying framework to help policymakers weigh competing considerations, there is a risk that the NUP will fail to deliver the change required to resolve the challenges outlined in the document.

Freight movement is complex, as are the policies and regulations that seek to manage the system. To ensure Australia’s urban policy is future-proofed and fit for purpose, the Government should work with industry and peak bodies to identify gaps, tensions and inconsistencies and use this evidence to develop short, medium and long-term actions. It should also leverage the

expertise of established interjurisdictional forums to develop criteria that is used to shape policy. This will take discussion in a more practical direction. A welcome outcome would be a strong evidence base, driven by up-to-date data and international best practice examples, which is used to inform policy development and educate stakeholders. Urban planning should expressly consider freight and supply chain integration and this consideration should be required across all levels of government. Without this, critical infrastructure and road design, including bridges, overpass lanes, and roundabouts, will fail to meet the needs of the transport, freight and logistics sector.

Outside of freight, Australia Post's interest in urban policy also extends to our retail and delivery network. Australia Post has one of the largest retail footprints in Australia with 4,271 Post Offices and a network that includes 14,934 street posting boxes and more than 57,000 parcel lockers.⁴ Australia Post infrastructure is embedded in communities across the country, and at times, the location of certain assets can be influenced by discussions with local government. For example, the location of parcel lockers or street posting boxes may be influenced by the views of the relevant local council. In this context, it would be helpful for urban planners and state and local government decision makers to have a broader understanding of supply chains, with consideration of mail and parcel delivery. To ensure consistency in decision-making, including at the local government level, the Australian Government consider options for a micro-credential that links freight and supply chain to broader urban design considerations.

If you would like to discuss this submission further, please contact Kat Burela, Head of Industry, Policy and Regulatory Affairs at kat.burela@auspost.com.au.

⁴ According to Australia Post figures for the year ending 30 June 2023.