



A submission by AMTA to:

The Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional
Development, Communications and the Arts

on A National Urban Policy

4 July 2024



About AMTA

The Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association (AMTA) is the peak national body representing Australia's mobile telecommunications industry. It aims to promote an environmentally, socially and economically responsible, successful and sustainable mobile telecommunications industry in Australia. Please see www.amta.org.au



Introduction

AMTA welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission to the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts (DTIRDCA) in response to the Department's call for submissions, before it finalises its National Urban Policy (NUP).

We understand that the NUP will guide how the Australian Government can make our urban environment more liveable, equitable, productive, sustainable and resilient. The Department is seeking feedback on how government, industry and community can work together to improve our cities and suburbs, both now and for future generations.

The rise of mobile telecommunications in Australia's urban areas over the past 30 years represents one of the largest transformations to the way we live, work, learn and socialise. It has achieved near ubiquity in these urban areas through a combination of advanced infrastructure, widespread coverage, government initiatives, and competitive market dynamics.

Mobile telecommunications networks (together with telecommunications networks generally) have the capacity to contribute significantly to meeting the future challenges associated with the rapid expansion of housing, the need to improve productivity and progress disaster resilience.

Yet, there are significant challenges that should be acknowledged and addressed in the NUP. Mobile telecommunications infrastructure is increasingly important to the growth, development and wellbeing of our urban communities, and plays an essential role in times of disaster and disaster recovery. Delays in providing a service that is expected by the community and which are associated with lack of strategic planning, the development approval process and securing tenure must be overcome.

This was recognised as a national priority at a 2023 meeting of the Planning Ministers convened by Minister King. The communique for this meeting included:

Telecommunications planning

Planning Ministers recognised the need for a coherent approach for prioritising and accelerating planning and approvals for communications infrastructure, especially in rapidly growing suburban communities. The Commonwealth will establish a working group alongside a number of state and territory governments to develop options that achieve this goal¹.

AMTA welcomes the acknowledgement of mobile telecommunications' role in the draft NUP, and we provide the following observations and recommendations to further strengthen the policy.

¹ The Planning Minister's Communique 2023 is at: <https://minister.infrastructure.gov.au/c-king/communique/planning-ministers-meeting-2023-communicue#:~:text=Planning%20Ministers%20endorsed%20a%20governance,work%20through%20to%20July%202024.&text=Planning%20Ministers%20recognised%20the%20variety,cities%20and%20suburbs%20is%20sustainable>.

AMTA's recommendations

In summary, AMTA recommends that the National Urban Policy should:

1. Encourage further investment and refinement of grant guidelines in programs such as the Peri-Urban Mobile Program (PUMP) to fund telecommunications infrastructure that at that time is otherwise not economically viable. This will ensure coverage can be provided to emerging communities at an early stage and that there is access to Triple Zero emergency services.
2. Encourage innovative co-funding arrangements for shared infrastructure, such as government funding for sports reserve lighting co-located with mobile network infrastructure in growth areas.
3. Create an expectation on State Crown Land Agencies to consider the availability of Crown land for telecommunications infrastructure within urban areas or adjacent to growth areas at the time of structure plan preparation and prioritise these opportunities.
4. Encourage the States to consider 'in-kind' support for provision of mobile network infrastructure on crown land by minimising or waiving rents. At the very least rents should be the same as for other users of Crown land.
5. Encourage all jurisdictions to implement outcomes (as a priority) from the Mobile Telecommunications Working Group (MTWG) established by the 2023 Planning Ministers' Meeting (PMM). Progress should be monitored by the Minister.
6. Ensure that existing mobile network facilities are factored in during planning for new nearby developments in urban areas, so that there are no unintended consequences such as the blocking of existing service.
7. Include an additional action in Part 4 of the Policy whereby a presumption that approval for mobile infrastructure deployment should proceed (within set guidelines) unless council can justify why deployment cannot proceed within those guidelines. In addition, fees and charges associated securing such solutions including for permit application fees should be reasonable and set by State and Territory governments.
8. Elevate the importance of mobile connectivity to improve community safety across all urban locations, but particularly to existing disaster-prone areas and those that are emerging as a risk due to climate change.

AMTA's observations of the draft National Urban Policy

Part 4 Australian Government Objectives

AMTA welcomes inclusion of 'Objective 6: Our urban areas promote productivity', which is summarised on page 21:

'Improving labour mobility and addressing income inequality are critical for enhancing economic equity and workforce participation. Efficient, reliable transport networks and equal access to digital infrastructure can connect people to jobs and services, therefore contributing to work-life balance. Strategic urban freight and land use planning improves logistics and protects

residential amenity. Embracing emerging technologies such as automated vehicles and intelligent transport systems offers potential for increased efficiency and sustainability’.

One of the ‘key urban challenges’ identified in this section (page 36) is:

Digital connectivity: Uneven access to digital connectivity, Internet and mobile phone access, particularly in lower income households, exacerbates inequalities and limits access to services and employment, including remote work opportunities.

Mobile networks promote productivity

AMTA notes that the Australian economy continues to undergo a profound shift towards digitalisation, with information technology including AI and communications becoming increasingly intertwined. Mobile devices have evolved into indispensable extensions of individuals and businesses across all sectors leveraging digital tools for various functions, driving productivity and innovation. In an urban context, this translates into increasing demand and densification of mobile network infrastructure in urban areas. This development requires that telecommunications infrastructure sites be located much closer to residential areas. Consequently, the options for siting the infrastructure especially in expansive urban areas are significantly reduced.

Mobile networks are essential infrastructure in these urban areas, connecting Australians to emergency, education, health, and government services. Economic modelling from Deloitte estimates that 5G will increase Australia’s GDP by \$67 billion (in 2022 dollars) by 2030². Accelerating 5G adoption could also bring huge economic dividend, with modelling showing that if we maintain our current global leadership in terms of adoption of 5G devices, the uplift to Australia’s economy is worth \$27 billion by 2030 (in 2022 dollars).

5G technology serves as a transformative enabling capability in urban areas including employment precincts. For example, 5G provides high-speed data transmission, low latency, and the ability to connect a vast number of devices simultaneously, driving unprecedented opportunities across various industries in Australia’s urban areas. From smart cities to telemedicine, autonomous transportation, robotics and industrial automation, 5G enables a seamless flow of data, creating a foundation for real-time decision-making and connectivity that is indispensable in the digital age. Government policy must provide support for the early provision of 5G technology in emerging urban areas.

Much of the planning reforms required to ensure more streamlined deployment of 5G infrastructure will equally be applicable to future 6G technology. By streamlining regulations, addressing infrastructure challenges, and promoting investment and adoption of 5G, we can set the stage for a seamless transition from 5G to 6G when the time comes.

Government Investment in Mobile Network infrastructure

In Part 4 Government Objectives, a ‘possible action’ is to ‘*Invest in supporting infrastructure, such as: – telecommunications infrastructure’.*

AMTA notes that at present the location and timing for the deployment of mobile telecommunications infrastructure is primarily a commercial decision determined by a mobile network operator having identified areas which would provide the greatest network coverage and service for end-users.

² *5G Unleashed: Realising the potential of the next generation of mobile technology.* Australian Mobile Telecommunications 2022. Deloitte Access Economics. <https://amta.org.au/5g-unleashed-deloitte-accessseconomics/#:-:text=The%20report's%20economic%20modelling%20estimates,uplift%20in%20economic%20benefit%20over>

AMTA welcomed Minister Rowland's release of a revised 'Telecommunications in New Developments Policy (TIND) in February 2024, expanding the scope from the provision of fixed voice and broadband services to include the need for developers to engage in the strategic planning process so that opportunities for mobile infrastructure including towers can be included.

Whilst the early strategic planning for mobile infrastructure in new developments is vital, we note that providing this infrastructure in advance of land release and development of dwellings is rarely cost-effective. AMTA encourages Government investment and co-contributions, particularly in areas where a need for service has been identified in advance of development and where there is a net-community benefit but no current business case for a mobile operator. To this end, AMTA welcomed acknowledgement in the TIND, which states *"There may also be Australian Government funding available to MNOs and MNIPs in certain locations, such as peri-urban and regional areas"*. We note that Australian Government funding is available in peri-urban³ areas, and AMTA encourages the NUP to consider expansion and further innovation in this funding program.

In relation to innovation, the Governments' objectives in the NUP could be advanced with co-funding of shared infrastructure. For example, government funding for sports reserve lighting in a growth area (otherwise funded by Council at a later date) and co-located mobile network infrastructure (otherwise funded by mobile network operators at a later date) could translate into a substantial social, environmental and financial 'multiplier' and colloquially a win-win.

Use of Crown Land as a form of 'in-kind' government investment

In addition, we also note that in the implementation of the NUP, government could create an expectation on Crown Land Agencies to consider the availability of Crown land for telecommunications infrastructure within urban areas or adjacent to growth areas at the time of structure plan preparation. This could be in the form of 'in-kind' support.

The actions of the Government as landlord can cause the business case for tower locations to become marginal or negative. For example, in States like New South Wales where 53% of land is Crown Land and Western Australia where Crown land owned and managed by the Government accounts for over 90% of all land in the State, Government is in a unique position to reduce the cost of providing telecommunications infrastructure by minimising rents on Crown lands.

At a minimum, rental or license arrangements should be minimised, non-discriminatory, and promote site sharing by not imposing unreasonable charges. Protracted pre-approval assessment processes could also be streamlined along with the need for planning approvals.

This would have the additional benefit that the effects of co-funding from all levels of Government would be more effective as grants would not be blunted by unreasonable Crown rents.

Streamlining the rollout of mobile telecommunications infrastructure in urban areas

Also, in Part 4 of the NUP under the heading 'Our urban areas promote productivity', there is reference to *'Improving connection between people and goods through efficient, low-cost, accessible and active transport options and expanded telecommunications connectivity...'* (Page 36).

³ Details of the Peri-urban Mobile Program (PUMP) is available at: <https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/media-technology-communications/phone/mobile-services-coverage/peri-urban-mobile-program>

AMTA points to mobile telecommunications being a lever for access to the economy regardless of geography. The technology often ‘steps-up’ when physical transport options are limited, providing the potential for people to work and be educated remotely.

Possible actions to expand telecommunications connectivity are identified on Page 38 and include “Collaborate with state, territory and local governments to:

“– streamline and facilitate the rollout of telecommunications infrastructure in greenfield developments and urban fringe areas (already underway through the Planning Ministers’ Meeting)”

“– develop a nationally coordinated approach to mobile telecommunications provision to improve access to modern telecommunications in new developments”.

We make the following observations to reinforce the importance of these possible actions.

“– streamline and facilitate the rollout of telecommunications infrastructure in greenfield developments and urban fringe areas (already underway through the Planning Ministers’ Meeting)”

In response to this, AMTA welcomes the imminent release of the outcomes from the Mobile Telecommunications Working Group (MTWG) that was established as a result of the 2023 Planning Ministers’ Meeting (PMM), where the Communique of the meeting identified the need for improvements to planning for mobile telecommunications in new developments and growth areas. It is anticipated that the outcomes of the MTWG will include principles that when applied by the jurisdictions will consistently streamline and facilitate the rollout of telecommunications infrastructure in greenfield developments and urban fringe areas.

AMTA stands ready with the mobile industry to work with State and Territory Governments when the outcomes of the MTWG are released. We have developed several initiatives that can be found in the [2021 AMTA 5G State and Territory Readiness Assessment](#), and [AMTA’s Model Framework for State and Territory reform](#). These initiatives will significantly improve consistency across the jurisdictions.

AMTA notes that State and Territory government urban strategic planning for mobile network infrastructure has been a public policy ‘blind spot’ since the rollout of networks hit scale in the late 1990s, primarily due to the perception that it was wholly regulated by the Commonwealth.

All of the focus was on statutory assessment of development applications with little regard for the accommodation of mobile telecommunications infrastructure into strategic planning including Precinct Structure Plans’ (PSPs) in growth areas. Whilst inclusion of mobile in the TIND will assist moving forward, there are PSPs that are over ten years old that are still guiding development with no regard for the need for mobile network infrastructure.

The current challenge of finding suitable sites for towers and antennas in brownfield and greenfield residential areas is a very real one. The progressive densification of mobile network infrastructure in urban areas to respond to demand and use the best available radio spectrum has meant that sites for this infrastructure including towers and antennas need to be much closer to where people live. It follows that acceptable options for siting the infrastructure are diminished particularly in expansive urban residential areas. As previously noted in this submission, Minister Rowland’s release of a revised TIND in February 2024, expanding the scope to include the need for mobile infrastructure including towers is a welcome first step. As noted in the NUP, further coordination between all jurisdictions is ‘already underway through the Planning Ministers’ Meeting’.

A second example of a historical ‘blind spot’ is the lack of consideration of the impact of new higher density development in urban areas on existing freestanding and rooftop mobile antenna sites. In many

established urban areas, there is a densification including the establishment of multi-level apartment buildings that have a significant impact upon the ‘radio propagation’ of existing mobile networks including the blocking of signals from antennas that are in adjacent land or on an adjacent rooftop. There is no certainty that the industry will be notified of new multi-level development through strategic or statutory planning processes, so relocations of impacted antennas that will be blocked or where service will be disrupted has become increasingly reactive, sometimes with a significant impact on service. States and Territories should consider how their statutory planning processes can require consideration of impact upon service of antennas on adjacent lots from new development.

The use of ‘digital twins’ in the planning process can enable visibility of the potential impact of new development on existing mobile network facilities. For example, this could include the use of available datasets including AMTA’s Radio-frequency National Site Archive⁴ to increase visibility of the location of existing mobile network facilities so that these can be factored in during planning for new developments.

“– develop a nationally coordinated approach to mobile telecommunications provision to improve access to modern telecommunications in new developments”.

As noted above, AMTA welcomed Minister Rowland’s release of a revised TIND in February 2024, expanding the scope from the provision of fixed voice and broadband services to include the need for developers to engage in the strategic planning process so that opportunities for mobile infrastructure including towers can be included. Under the new rules, all new housing developments of 50 house lots or more should include consideration of mobile coverage during planning processes. The changes place expectations on developers to actively consider the inclusion of mobile infrastructure in new developments to help ensure residents have access to a reliable mobile service in a timely manner.

However, consistent with several of the Principles in Appendix A of the NUP, AMTA notes that further work is required to address implementation of the TIND. This includes:

- the need for additional guidance from State and Territory statutory land agencies on how developers should execute the expectations within the TIND – in the same way these agencies provide guidance to other essential infrastructure in new developments such as water, storm water and electricity;
- arrangements for inclusion of fibre infrastructure for mobile site backhaul into the strategic planning process;
- prioritisation of power connections to new mobile telecommunications facilities; and,
- the need to use land for mobile infrastructure not in the control of developers such as Crown Land and land owned or managed by councils.

An additional possible action in Part 4 of the NUP - Prioritisation of mobile infrastructure in urban areas

Whilst inclusion of mobile in the TIND is a welcome development, the industry is continually confronted with ‘no go areas’ for network infrastructure in established suburbs and growth areas. In these areas the only option to establish network facilities is often on Council land and industry is confronted with outright refusals from council officers to even contemplate leasing land or exploring innovative solutions such as co-locating antennas and lights on structures⁵. There seems to be no council policy

⁴ AMTA can discuss the licencing of access to data from the Radio-frequency National Site Archive (www.rfnsa.com.au) for inclusion in Government digital twins.

⁵ Hume City Council – one of the largest growth area Councils in Australia has recently refused to consider Amplitel’s request to lease land in Vantage Boulevard, Craigieburn. This is just one example of many.

position to guide officers, so decisions are made at their discretion. We also note that processes for progressing leases with local government can be protracted due to legacy regulations that require advertising and multiple internal approval processes including leasing as well as the planning approval process.

Whilst the industry understands councils' pre-disposition to lock out infrastructure from open space areas, a rethink is required as community expectations have changed. The public now expects that mobile connectivity is available, reliable and has sufficient capacity. This expectation cannot be met unless council discretion to refuse an application for telecommunications infrastructure is limited to within a new set of pre-agreed guidelines. The choice is between meeting the public's expectations or retaining unfettered council discretion, and at present the former is clearly coming at the expense of the latter, with the result being to disadvantage residents of these communities.

It is not uncommon for infrastructure to be located in Council Reserves amongst other elevated structures such as light poles, and where this has occurred it has been via a lengthy and hard-fought process over several years. But more often than not, councils refuse outright to consider solutions such as establishing a new pole that can accommodate both sports reserve lighting and mobile antennas.

The industry is confronted with additional challenges regarding loss of existing sites due to lease/property tenure expiry and landlords being unwilling to renew the tenure for various reasons including redevelopment plans. In that context access to Crown and Council land/infrastructure in an expeditious and cost-effective manner provides a potential partial solution and is therefore critical.

In summary, the NUP should include an additional action in Part 4 whereby a presumption of approval for deployment should proceed (within set guidelines) unless council can justify why deployment cannot proceed within those guidelines. This would include amendments to both State and Territory legislation for planning, and in relation to Crown land tenure arrangements.

An additional possible action in Part 4 of the NUP – Mobile connectivity to improve community safety

AMTA supports elevating the importance of mobile connectivity in the NUP to improve community safety (Part 4, (p.21) Objective 3) across all urban locations, but particularly to existing disaster-prone areas and those that are emerging as a risk due to climate change. In disaster-prone areas, new telecommunications infrastructure should be given a priority build agenda to support ongoing mobile connectivity for the community and emergency service organisation during a time of crisis.

Appendix A

AMTA welcomes the inclusion of shared principles in Appendix A of the NUP to guide decision-making as it relates to investments in, and policies for, urban development. We note that the principles have been developed to support all governments to achieve this vision.

At the July 2023 Planning Ministers' Meeting (PMM) the need for improvements to planning for mobile telecommunications in new developments and 'growth areas' formed a part of the PMM Communique. As a result, a Mobile Telecommunications Working Group (MTWG) was established and was co-led by the Commonwealth and New South Wales and included senior communications and planning officials from each jurisdiction. We understand that the outcomes of the MTWG will soon be released and will

be 'principles based'. AMTA has advocated for a range of principles several of which we expect will align with those in Appendix A of the NUP.

For example, Principle 6 includes:

- develop “interconnected urban centres that leverage technology for the benefit of communities, businesses and the environment”.
- “embrace digital city technologies and innovation to improve urban efficiency, enhance services, and address contemporary challenges. This includes digital infrastructure, data-driven decision-making, and technology solutions that contribute to sustainable urban development”.

AMTA encourages the Department to apply these principles when seeking to prioritise and accelerate planning and approvals for communications infrastructure in rapidly growing suburban communities. This could be a useful early test case once the NUP is adopted. This is consistent with Principle 4 in Appendix A which includes a need for ‘clear and consistent frameworks to measure progress and monitor implementation of plans, policies and programs in cities.

Appendix B

In Appendix B of the NUP, there’s a list of ‘National Initiatives Underway’, and AMTA deem several of these as being critical to ensuring timely provision of mobile network service in developing urban areas usually near the fringe of cities. These include:

- *“Telecommunications in new developments policy - Outlines expectations for property developers to ensure that developments have modern telecommunications infrastructure to provide, as relevant, fixed and mobile broadband and voice services”.*

As outlined in this submission, AMTA welcomes the recent inclusion in February 2024 of mobile telecommunications infrastructure in the TIND.

- *“Peri-Urban Mobile Program - Targets longstanding mobile phone coverage and reception issues in the urban fringes of Australia’s capital cities and large regional cities through government co-investment in mobile phone infrastructure”.*

Through programs such as the Peri-Urban Mobile Program (PUMP) Government plays an important role in funding infrastructure that is otherwise not economically viable at a point in time. This is because the building costs, power connections, land tenure and development application fees are high and there are insufficient returns to make a business case for extending tower networks into sparsely populated areas without some form of Government funding support.

Establishing facilities via ‘PUMP’ funding will ensure that carriers can provide coverage to emerging communities at an early stage and there is access to Triple Zero emergency services, and this also contributes to providing mobile home broadband in places where fixed line infrastructure is not readily available.

AMTA welcomes reference to these ‘National Initiatives’ in the NUP.

Conclusion

AMTA welcomes the opportunity to provide comment and input into the National Urban Policy, principally to encourage greater certainty around the expansion of mobile connectivity and incentivise investment in mobile telecommunications infrastructure in urban areas.

Mobile networks have the capacity to contribute significantly to meeting the future challenges associated with the rapid expansion of housing, the need to improve productivity and progress disaster resilience.

Improvements in Government co-funding programs, streamlined planning laws and inclusion of mobile infrastructure in strategic land use planning will support and encourage continued investment in telecommunications.

Once the National Urban Policy is finalised, AMTA encourages the Government to consider how the States and Territories will align to implement measures in the Policy that support mobile telecommunications, and how success will be measured.