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

Submitted via [urbanpolicyinput@infrastructure.gov.au](mailto:urbanpolicyinput@infrastructure.gov.au)

To Whom It May Concern

## National Urban Policy Consultation Draft

The Australian Sustainable Built Environment Council (ASBEC) believes that establishing a National Urban Policy presents a critical opportunity to:

- set a contemporary and ambitious vision for urban Australia that embraces the diversity, interdependencies, and uniqueness of our urban experience.
- support world-class urban outcomes for communities with a focus on practical opportunities to realise that vision through collaborative leadership and implementation.
- establish a substantive evidence base for long-term research, policy development and decision-making.
- focus implementation on a place-based approach that facilitates integrated land-use planning appropriately valuing broader community and economic benefits.

We recognise that the intent of the Policy is to better integrate an urban lens across policymaking to ensure future Australian Government policies, programs and investment are supporting sustainable growth in urban places.

ASBEC is a collaborative forum of peak bodies in the Australian built environment, focused on sustainable, productive, and resilient buildings, communities, and cities. Our [membership](#)<sup>i</sup> consists of industry associations, professional bodies, academia, non-government organisations and government observers who are involved in the planning, design, delivery, and operation of our built environment.

ASBEC has a longstanding focus on cities, infrastructure and urban-scale policy to support our vision of a sustainable, liveable, productive, equitable and resilient built environment. Our organisational purpose strives for policy development in alignment with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Our work in the urban space includes [Investing in Cities](#)<sup>ii</sup>, a platform supporting the productivity, liveability, sustainability and resilience of our cities; [Low Carbon, High Performance](#)<sup>iii</sup>, which outlines the potential of the built environment to reduce Australia's emissions; [Thriving Cities](#)<sup>iv</sup>, a policy platform identifying reforms that are needed at a national level to deliver broad and impactful outcomes for Australian cities; and [Bang for Buck](#)<sup>v</sup>, providing insight across all levels of government across Australia on practical interventions to deliver better community outcomes from infrastructure spending.

We appreciate the ongoing consultation with industry on these matters and ASBEC's inclusion in the Urban Policy Forum, as well as the Urban Policy Network. Noting the more detailed submissions and feedback that will be provided by ASBEC members, we offer our support for the draft National Urban Policy goals, objectives and principles and will focus this feedback on the National Urban Policy as it is further developed in the months ahead.

ASBEC suggests the following priorities in relation to the National Urban Policy:



- 1. Success of the National Urban Policy depends on effective implementation – the Australian Government is uniquely positioned to incentivise, coordinate and facilitate better urban outcomes across governments and with industry.**
- 2. Make a renewed commitment to update and implement the National Urban Design Protocol.**
- 3. Embrace the opportunity for embedding systems thinking to create place-based outcomes for our unique Australian communities.**
- 4. Support the National Urban Policy ambition with a clear intergovernmental collaboration framework, setting out responsibility and accountability mechanisms across government departments and jurisdictions.**
- 5. Explore opportunities for ongoing measurement and reporting to track progress against the National Urban Policy goals.**
- 6. Utilise existing knowledge to embed resilience, regeneration and repair strategies in settlements across the country.**

See the following pages for our detailed responses on the above priorities.

The quality of life we know and love in our cities and urban areas has been realised only because of the visionary planning, foresight and investment in infrastructure made by generations of Australians before us. More than ever before, we need more liveable, equitable, productive, sustainable and resilient cities and urban centres that embrace connection to country and better reflect the way we want to live.

There is a unique opportunity within the National Urban Policy to realise Australia’s potential transformative change in the current way urban environments are thought about, designed and built; where healthy communities and ecosystems can thrive together. A bi-partisan commitment to planning and delivering better cities and communities; to working collaboratively with the states and territories, and with industry, to prioritise and fund the infrastructure we need for a better way of life is now more urgent than ever.

We look forward to continuing to work with you to deliver more liveable, equitable, productive, sustainable, and resilient urban areas and communities in Australia.

If you have any further queries, please do not hesitate to contact me via [alison.scotland@asbec.asn.au](mailto:alison.scotland@asbec.asn.au) or on

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Yours sincerely

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Alison Scotland  
**Executive Director**

## Priority 1

### ➤ **Success of the National Urban Policy depends on effective implementation – the Australian Government is uniquely positioned to incentivise, coordinate and facilitate better urban outcomes across governments and with industry**

The Australian Government is in a unique position to drive better outcomes from urban policy. This can be through its own investments in infrastructure projects, implementation of fiscal incentives, and applying an understanding of spatial implications of major funding, investment, migration, monetary and taxation policy decisions. The opportunities should not be lost to use the National Urban Policy goals, objectives and principles to set an ambitious vision for urban Australia. The National Urban Policy presents an opportunity to incentivise, coordinate and facilitate outcomes that maximise value for money from the Australian Government's infrastructure investments and outcomes for communities. These outcomes should help drive both the sustainable transition sought for our existing cities and help grow new regional cities and towns in line with the focus of this policy.

The Australian Government can show leadership through its national coordination of ministerial bodies to drive outcomes. We appreciate the leadership of the Planning Ministers Meeting but recognise that implementation of the National Urban Policy goals and objectives relies on interaction and engagement across other bodies such as the Building Ministers Meeting, Environment Ministers Meeting, Energy and Climate Change Ministerial Council, and Housing and Homelessness Ministerial Council.

The Australian Government is also in a unique position to leverage its purchasing power and infrastructure spend to drive the adoption of measures that measure and deliver better outcomes on projects and for communities. Opportunities for the Australian Government to continue to strengthen its work in supporting our cities include:

- Leveraging the value of infrastructure investments and measuring success
- Building on the regular State of the Cities report to ensure measurement of what matters
- Delivering projects under the urban and regional Precincts and Partnerships Programs
- Using cities to help meet our international commitments to reduce emissions

The Australian government should ensure that national implementation mechanisms, such as Infrastructure Australia's Infrastructure Plan, are updated to recognise the priorities in the national urban policy vision. The Australian Government can utilise the efficacy of these plans as they focus on reforms and policy recommendations that will deliver better infrastructure outcomes for Australian communities, and include strategic priorities such as social considerations, sustainability, resilience and place-based outcomes for communities. These mechanisms should be implemented through effective engagement, planning, decision-making, funding and execution across electoral cycles with support from the community and industry. A National Spatial Masterplan could further augment the Infrastructure Plan and in parallel outline a new vision for the infrastructure needs of the nation, transparently identifying key growth areas and infrastructure priorities in line with the roles and responsibilities of the Australian Government and in collaboration with the states and territories. Critical to the realisation of this vision is funding.

ASBEC also notes that Infrastructure Australia's [Strengthening Communities](#)<sup>vi</sup> paper provides a Rubric as a tool to guide to undertaking a place-based analysis and collecting an evidence base that will help determine how to achieve better outcomes for a community. The Rubric can be used to inform planning, reform and investment, in addition to identifying opportunities across sectors to build and strengthen a place's foundations.

To achieve the goal of an equitable, prosperous and net zero economy by 2050, Australia will need to ensure we have an appropriately sized and skilled clean economy workforce within the next few decades. The Australian Government has a clear role to play, by investing in frameworks for desired skills and expertise for a clean economy, including professional development and certification, alongside traditional VET and higher education frameworks.



As renewable energy infrastructure development gears up, there is a need to make sure that skills in common with demand-side activities (such as engineering, electrotechnology specialists, systems analysis and designers) are able to be deployed to critical areas of the transition – in both energy supply and energy demand management. The Australian Government has a role to play in continuing to understand workforce needs (such as by continuing the Australian Energy Employment Report and Clean Energy Generation initiatives), and by ensuring skills development programs are directed towards meeting the needs of the energy transition.

[Every Building Counts](#)<sup>vii</sup> (developed by Property Council of Australia and Green Building Council of Australia, supported by ASBEC) includes the following recommendations in relation to building Australia’s clean energy workforce:

- Grow the workforce and invest in a skills, research and education agenda necessary to futureproof and transform the built environment.
- Urgently grow skills and market readiness for electrification.

## **Priority 2**

### ➤ **Make a renewed commitment to update and implement a national urban design protocol**

Liveable, vibrant cities are critical to our prosperity as a nation. One of the key instruments to deliver liveable, vibrant cities is best practice urban design. We urge the Australian Government to deliver best practice urban environments through a renewed commitment to adopt and champion *Creating Places for People: An Urban Design Protocol for Australian Cities*. An urban design protocol connects the vision in the national urban policy to planning at state/territory and local levels.

[Creating Places for People: an urban design protocol for Australian cities](#)<sup>viii</sup> (the Protocol) is a national reference for best practice urban design. It was conceived following the recognition of cities by COAG in 2011, when it agreed to a reform objective ‘to ensure that Australian cities are globally competitive, productive, sustainable, liveable, socially inclusive and well placed to meet future challenges and growth.’

The Protocol was developed with contributions from key government agencies, business and community stakeholders and provided broad principles for urban design that recognise a location’s unique characteristics and the needs of the people who use it. Informed by the Australian Government’s previous urban design strategy, it was supported by a framework, principles, case studies and model processes to achieve the best outcomes in urban design<sup>ix</sup>. When applied, the Protocol provided a perfect avenue to deliver the Government’s urban agenda. At the time, nearly 50 organisations across governments and industry pledged to be champions of the urban design protocol.

ASBEC is the custodian of the Protocol and we encourage the Australian Government to materially support this resource to ensure that it remains effective, up to date, and can be more widely promulgated across industry, government and the community.

In addition to investing in tools like the Urban Design Protocol, it is also important to leverage existing industry best-practice and measure and deliver outcomes through support for third party verification and rating tools. Credible tools include Green Star, NABERS and the IS rating tool.

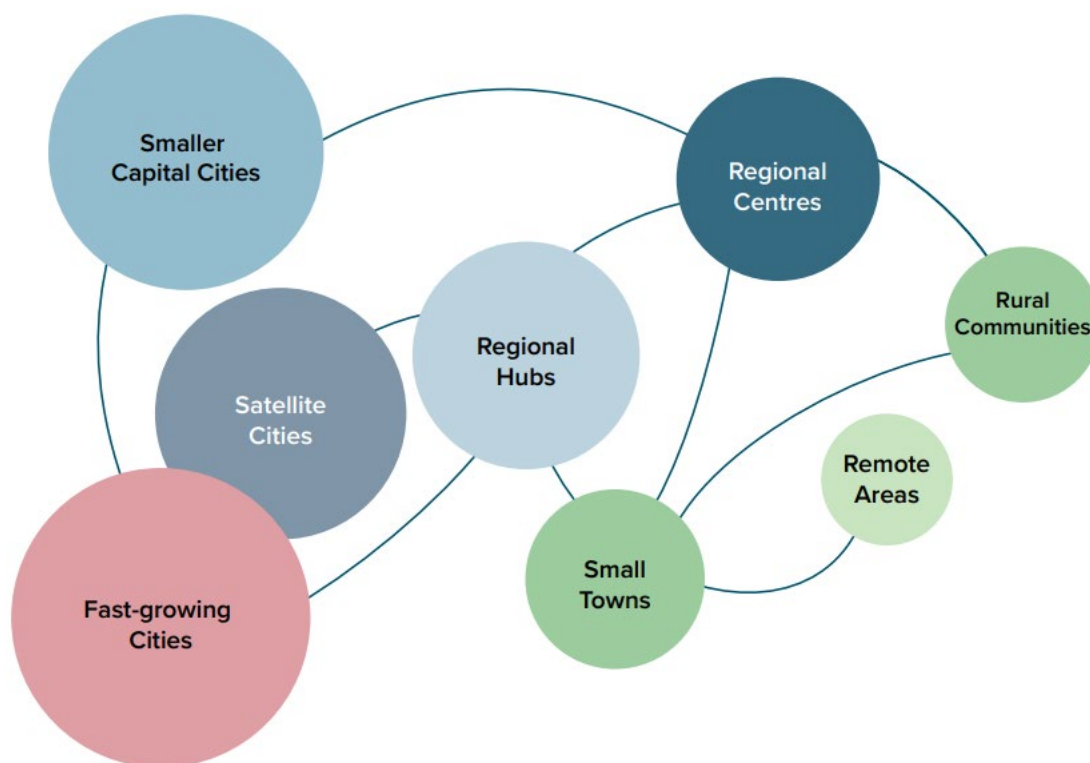
## **Priority 3**

### ➤ **Embrace the opportunity for embedding systems thinking to create place-based outcomes for our unique Australian communities**

The National Urban Policy presents a rare opportunity to set a contemporary and ambitious vision for urban Australia that embraces the diversity, interdependencies, and uniqueness of our urban experience.

Australia is a land of diverse and interconnected places. Each of these places, ranging from highly urbanised

cities to small towns, rural communities, and remote areas, offers a unique combination of natural resources, climates, industries, and businesses. This diversity is a national strength, and an important part of Australia's identity. Moreover, each place interacts with each other in different ways, creating a complex network of relationships and spatial influences; something that is not recognised or addressed at a coordinated national level. The National Urban Policy is an opportunity to embrace this complexity and our globally unique urban identities. Infrastructure Australia's community classifications and interdependencies provides a contemporary reference point:



Infrastructure Australia. 2023. *Regional Strengths & Infrastructure Gaps*. Page 26

The planning, delivery and operation of Australia's infrastructure is being made more complex because of the interdependencies between social, economic and environmental domains. Top-down, centrally led or sector-based responses can be less effective at meeting the needs of communities, especially when dealing with issues that cross jurisdictional or departmental boundaries, or are influenced by local contexts.

By contrast, a place-based approach to infrastructure planning, delivery and operation considers the distinct characteristics of an area and considers the multiple and interrelated challenges, opportunities and needs that a place presents. It also recognises the importance of collaboration and participation of local stakeholders and explores how best to utilise the resources, strengths and capacities of the local community and the broader region.

Governments must do more to elevate place when planning community-centric, high value infrastructure, by seeking to first understand the interconnected needs of a place and using this to guide decisions about infrastructure, alongside other place-based interventions.

In Australia, a lack of consistent guidance for infrastructure needs assessments and place-based model agreements and frameworks has resulted in varying levels of service delivery and access to resources. Infrastructure Australia delivered the *Regional Strengths and Infrastructure Gaps*<sup>x</sup> project to provide an

overall national view of priority infrastructure needs across regional Australia. However, needs vary from place to place and the *Strengthening Communities* rubric noted above is also available as a flexible tool for governments to support informed, collaborative place-based planning and decisions about investments. Both of these resources are designed to help governments better identify and leverage the unique features of Australia's regions.

A network view of place by its nature requires governments to take a coordinated approach, across multiple jurisdictions and/or levels of government to plan and deliver infrastructure. This has the potential for multiple benefits, such as:

- Working together to plan and progress shared goals, such as co-locating projects to achieve broader benefits.
- Monitoring and coordinating integrated responses to multi-sector and multi-jurisdictional challenges such as broader shifts in the economy and environmental shocks and stresses.
- Adopting clear sequencing for projects.
- Considering innovative funding models, such as coordinated approaches to seeking large scale value capture.
- Enabling packages of investment projects at a scale which could attract international investment<sup>xi</sup>.

#### **Priority 4**

- **Support the National Urban Policy ambition with a clear intergovernmental collaboration framework, setting out responsibility and accountability mechanisms across government departments and jurisdictions**

ASBEC commends the Australian Government's creation of the focussed Cities and Suburbs Unit, facilitation of intergovernmental collaboration on urban policy, and commitment to regular updates of the State of the Cities Report. Ongoing consultation on the delivery of this policy with industry through the Urban Policy Forum and Network, as well as community and first nations, is imperative. The Cities and Suburbs Unit will need to ensure it collects and maintains an ongoing evidence base to support policy development and solutions across governments and portfolios. We encourage the Australian Government to ensure the Cities and Suburbs Unit is resourced sufficiently to maintain this important facilitation process.

The Australian Government should leverage the unique roles of every sphere of government, industry and community and how they can work together in developing best-practice urban centres and cities. Different spheres of government hold different roles and responsibilities in ensuring the liveability, equitability, productivity, sustainability and resilience of our cities and urban communities. Each sphere of government must identify the areas in which it can deliver the greatest impact and where it can assist or remove barriers for other stakeholders. We can only maximise the potential of our urban centres and cities through a coordinated approach which leverages all available powers.

While state, territory and local government are primarily responsible for planning and delivery of cities and towns, a national policy can define a strong and clear role for the Australian Government and establish a vision for Australia's cities and towns, as well as meaningful and ambitious targets for equity, liveability, sustainability, resilience, emissions reduction, economic prosperity, and better governance.

The Australian Government should empower state, territory and local government to deliver effective integrated land-use infrastructure planning, services and programs that deliver measurably improved outcomes for communities across the nation. Taking a place-based approach, the Australian Government could drive a coherent set of longer-term regional plans – that are consistent in the planning and population assumptions, climate and environmental performance benchmarks and infrastructure demand parameters applied to guide growth or change for places and communities. We note that guidance on place-based



approaches to infrastructure business cases exist within Infrastructure Australia, and this information can be readily shared with state/territory and local governments.

There are communities around Australia that are already looking for ways to solve problems and create more sustainable, equitable, liveable, productive and resilient places in which to live and work. A growing number of best practice and world-leading examples exist across Australia, which can in turn inform and encourage further best practice urban design. We encourage the Australian Government to work with ASBEC's members, including state and territory land development agencies, local governments and industry associations, who can provide many best practice examples and case studies.

In *Investing in Cities*, ASBEC calls for the Australian Government to capitalise on the elements of its cities which perform well against global benchmarks and learn from the successes of other cities around the world, in order to reap substantial, tangible and simultaneous benefits in economic, health, social, and environmental policy. The four priority recommendations aim to ensure we are maximising the benefits created by being the world's most urbanised nation:

1. Better leverage the unique roles and responsibilities of all those with a stake in our cities.
2. Measure and report success.
3. Deliver best practice infrastructure planning and new investment.
4. Create sustainable places for people supporting best practice building and urban design.

*Investing in Cities* created the basis for an ongoing conversation with governments to support better urban centres and cities. The desired outcome will be cities that deliver greater productivity, increased resilience, reduced impact on our environment and a higher and more equitable standard of living for all Australians.

ASBEC's *Thriving Cities* policy platform remains relevant and identifies reforms that are needed at a national level to deliver broad and impactful outcomes for Australian cities:

1. **Invest in improved policy and governance**, including a National Settlement Strategy, continuous improvement of city funding programs and better procurement.
2. **Deliver more balanced business cases** to realise better value from our infrastructure investments.
3. **Improve housing outcomes** for more affordable, equitable and sustainable living.
4. **Adopt key recommendations** of House of Representatives Standing Committee on Infrastructure, Transport and Cities *Building Up and Moving Out*<sup>xii</sup> report.

## **Priority 5**

### **➤ Explore opportunities for ongoing measurement and reporting to track progress against the National Urban Policy goals**

Ongoing data collection is essential in informing decision-making and measure progress. The State of the Cities report presents a valuable opportunity to begin to build a more comprehensive system of reporting the contextual and success indicators that help us understand our cities. The collection and communication of data evidencing the achievement of desired targets and outcomes better indicates how the benefits of infrastructure, urban development and regeneration are experienced at the human scale.

The community's support, or frustration with infrastructure projects and urban renewal, will in part be determined and understood through the extent to which outcomes are delivered and communicated. Using the State of the Cities report, this approach should help drive business case development at a local level, and explain to communities the benefits of the Government's investments over the longer-term in the context of their city's own unique characteristics.

The development of the previous National Cities Performance Framework underscored the challenges in delivering an ambitious policy agenda. For example, it was clear that not all data and indicators were appropriately measured at a city level, and it wasn't an effective tool to evaluate specific investments and priorities across all levels of government.

Using the State of the Cities report meaningfully could create an opportunity to more explicitly inform the design of UPPP and RPPP projects and create a direct connection between the performance of a city, and the projects and investments that help improve that performance against targeted policy priorities over time.

Not all indicators should necessarily be collected across every city. Given the diversity of Australian cities, and the challenges in collecting data across all indicators for every city, it is appropriate to consider a taxonomy of Australian cities that provides a structure for data collection and indicators across different types of cities. For example, the data available for Sydney and Melbourne is likely to be very different than that available for Townsville and Launceston and the contextual issues these different types of cities face will demand different indicators to inform policy development.

## **Priority 6**

### **➤ Utilise existing knowledge to embed resilience, regeneration and repair strategies in settlements across the country**

ASBEC members, City of Sydney and City of Melbourne council, have both undertaken significant work in mapping out solutions to achieve liveable, equitable, productive, sustainable and resilient cities. This includes being active participants in global climate action initiatives such as C40, a global network of nearly 100 mayors of the world's leading cities that are united in action to confront the climate crisis, and the Rockefeller Foundation's 100 Resilient Cities program. The Australian Government should work with bodies such as City of Sydney and City of Melbourne to share learnings and embed strategies in settlements across the country.

The Australian Government should also help to lead strategic development of greening Australia's urban areas and leveraging funding to enable this. ASBEC recommends a National Urban Green Infrastructure Strategy be developed in partnership with industry, community, state, territory and local governments to support the valuation, funding and delivery of bundled green and blue infrastructure assets across all levels of government to deliver the Australian Government's goal of greener, more resilient and sustainable settlements. A national urban-greening strategy should also integrate with nature-based solutions, urban ecological regeneration and Connection to Country principles.

We also recommend the use of the more neutral term 'settlements' - as used and defined in the Australian Climate Change Adaptation Standard (AS5334-2013) and use of the terms urban green, blue and grey infrastructure - as defined in the Standards Australia Urban Green Infrastructure - Planning and Decision Framework (SA HB:214-2023).

Understanding interconnected issues in an urban environment is also very important, for example, how building design can impact urban water systems and decrease a community's resilience to changing climate conditions (e.g. heavy rainfall or droughts). An integrated approach to planning for resilience is essential to effectively prepare for and respond to shocks and stresses that have the potential to cause significant disruption. This approach requires collaboration between different government sectors and across levels of government, as well as a systemic, cross-sectoral and cross-government consideration of the risks and solutions.

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<sup>i</sup> [https://www.asbec.asn.au/membership/current\\_members/](https://www.asbec.asn.au/membership/current_members/)

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.asbec.asn.au/research-items/investing-in-cities/>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.asbec.asn.au/research-items/low-carbon-high-performance-report/>

<sup>iv</sup> <https://www.asbec.asn.au/research-items/thriving-cities/>



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- v <https://www.asbec.asn.au/research-items/bang-buck-delivering-better-business-cases-realise-value-infrastructure-investments/>
- vi <https://www.infrastructureaustralia.gov.au/publications/Strengthening-Communities>
- vii <https://everybuildingcounts.com.au>
- viii <https://urbandesign.org.au/downloads/>
- ix <https://urbandesign.org.au/>
- x <https://www.infrastructureaustralia.gov.au/publications/2022-regional-strengths-and-infrastructure-gaps>
- xi Infrastructure Australia, Plan for Place-based Outcomes for Communities, <https://www.infrastructureaustralia.gov.au/publications/2021-australian-infrastructure-plan>
- xii [https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/House/Former\\_Committees/ITC/DevelopmentofCities/Report](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Former_Committees/ITC/DevelopmentofCities/Report)