



18 July 2024

Department of Infrastructure, Transport,
Regional Development, Communications and the Arts
GPO Box 594
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Via email: urbanpolicyinput@infrastructure.gov.au

To Whom It May Concern,

M9 FEEDBACK ON THE DRAFT NATIONAL URBAN POLICY

Please accept this feedback on the draft National Urban Policy on behalf of the Melbourne 9 (M9), an alliance of the nine inner-metropolitan Melbourne Councils - Melbourne, Darebin, Hobsons Bay, Maribyrnong, Merri-bek, Moonee Valley, Port Phillip, Stonnington and Yarra.

Together, M9 represents 1 in 5 Victorians and accounts for more than 30 per cent of Victoria's Gross State Product. Combined M9 Councils manage over \$15 billion worth of essential municipal and community assets.

Federal Government support

M9 welcomes the release of the draft National Urban Policy and acknowledges the support of the Commonwealth Government to create more liveable, equitable, productive, sustainable and resilient urban areas. We wish to particularly acknowledge the Prime Minister's commitment to cities policy as the last urban policy was released in 2011 while he was serving as the Minister for Infrastructure.

M9 would also like to recognise the financial investment provided by the Commonwealth Government in the 2023-24 Budget through:

- An \$11.9 million investment to establish a new Cities and Suburbs Unit;
- Funding of \$150 million for an Urban Precincts and Partnerships Program; and
- \$200 million for the roll-out of the Thriving Suburbs Program.

Role of local government

Councils have a broad remit; the communities supported by the nine Councils which make up the M9 region are diverse and have a range of different and important needs. The relative investment in services differs across Councils based on many factors and shifts over time. Overall, it is communities themselves that are best placed to determine what services and supports are most valuable to them.

M9 shares the Commonwealth Government's desire to ensure there is strong alignment and partnerships between, across and with governments. All three levels of government, along with communities and businesses, have a vital role in supporting urban policy and development.

We welcome the principle that city planning and governance must be collaborative and adaptive. **M9 stands ready to actively engage and partner with the Commonwealth Government to ensure legislative and policy changes relating to city planning and governance are beneficial for our communities.**



Draft National Urban Policy – general comment

The five key goals the Commonwealth Government has outlined for urban places are consistent with the vision of the M9. That is to ensure our cities are: liveable; equitable; productive; sustainable; and resilient.

It is imperative to note that any conversation about the future of urban areas must also address funding needs and mechanisms.

The local government sector is increasingly facing pressures around financial sustainability. Councils across the nation currently raise approximately 3-4 per cent of the total taxation collected by all levels of Government in Australia but are responsible for the maintenance of more than 30 per cent of all Australian public assets.

For M9 Councils in Victoria these financial pressures are heightened by rate capping with rate rises determined by the Victorian Government.

The Commonwealth Government has significantly more mechanisms to raise and distribute funding which will provide critical services to communities via Councils.

Furthermore, there are a significant number of plans and strategic frameworks within each of the M9 Councils that address key areas of the National Urban Policy. These include but are not limited to: Housing strategies; Health and wellbeing plans; Economic development strategies; Smart city frameworks; Open space strategies; Sustainable city strategies; and Active transport strategies.

M9 is calling for:

- **A review of funding requirements to ensure that federal funding opportunities are structured to facilitate local government participation, noting that it is a burden particularly on Councils in Victoria to provide matched co-contributions;**
- **Funding for Councils which is untied and flexible;**
- **The timing and quantum of Financial Assistance Grants to be revised; and**
- **Existing work within Councils to be taken into account in the development of the National Urban Policy.**

M9 look forward to working with the Commonwealth Government to deliver and support a National Urban Policy.

Objective 1: No-one and no place left behind

M9 welcomes the need to create equitable urban areas where everyone feels safe and secure, has access to housing, infrastructure, education and jobs.

In addressing the possible actions made under this objective, **M9 calls on the Commonwealth Government to provide long-term, sustainable funding to Councils for community infrastructure.**

Typically, asset repair and renewal is considerably more costly than building new infrastructure and M9 would like to see the re-consideration of the balance of funding available for local government infrastructure projects, to provide more support for asset renewals and upgrades. More specifically, **M9 seeks funding for infrastructure renewals and upgrades.**



In addressing the lack of social and affordable housing in the region, M9 would also like to see the Commonwealth and Victorian Governments:

- **Establish sustained and diverse funding streams to enable long-term social and affordable housing delivery.**
- **Deliver new supported social housing and resourcing for assertive outreach to address the homelessness and rough sleeping need across the M9 region.**

Objective 2: All people belong and are welcome

M9 understands the need to ensure design in urban planning fosters inclusive environments be it celebrating First Nations culture, or increasing accessibility in tourism, arts and cultural facilities and sporting infrastructure.

We welcome engagement and collaboration to empower communities to play their role in shaping the future of these urban places, including through investing in community arts, celebrations of culture and activation of public places.

Objective 3: Our urban areas are safe

Each Council across the M9 region is seeking to enhance climate resilience and disaster preparedness, as well as working to increase crime prevention strategies.

Community safety or perception of safety is hard to quantify and measure. M9 is particularly interested in the Policy's possible action to support research and reporting on national urban safety priorities, including indicators that measure access, safety and cohesion in cities in a placemaking context. Informed research and reporting in this area would be extremely beneficially for our Councils.

Objective 4: Our urban areas are sustainable

As a region, M9 supports the Commonwealth Government's goal to achieve net zero emissions by 2050. Furthermore, all M9 Councils have declared or acknowledged a state of climate emergency that requires urgent action by all levels of government.

Inner-metropolitan areas are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of flooding due to the impervious surfaces and high densities that are characteristics of the inner-urban environment. It is apparent that further disaster mitigation is essential, but this is not a challenge that a single sector alone can resolve.

Further to the possible actions listed, M9 would like to see the following solutions:

- **More sustainable funding mechanisms for local government infrastructure and assets in response to the climate crisis.**
- **Investment to train and upskill the workforce who will play an important role in climate resilience.**
- **Good quality data to ensure informed planning, action and decision-making.**

Objective 5: Our urban environments and communities promote health and wellbeing

It is important, particularly in an inner-metropolitan setting, that the community has access to open and green spaces and other areas that support health and wellbeing.

Delivering and maintaining active transport infrastructure, park and public spaces, along with planting and maintaining trees requires significant investment from Councils. Acknowledging the Commonwealth Governments recently announced \$100 million National Active Transport Fund, **the**



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M9 is seeking an increase in funding support for community assets such as bicycle and walking paths.

Furthermore, M9 supports the need for major urban transport infrastructure investments such as Melbourne Metro 2 to support growth and accessibility of the M9 region.

Objective 6: Our urban areas promote productivity

M9 recognises the importance of ensuring each region harnesses local assets, knowledge and character to drive economic growth. M9 strives to ensure communities can meet most of their daily needs within a 20-minute return walk from home, with access to safe cycling and local transport options. We understand to accommodate a diverse community, the region will need a diverse range of housing options. Actions should be taken to ensure job densities and growth can occur alongside housing growth. Considerations should be made to support economic development-led place-making projects that enable commercial, job and service growth where required.

M9 supports the Commonwealth Government's intent to invest in productivity initiatives as listed in the draft Policy.

Conclusion

M9 recognises the Commonwealth Government's commitment to create more liveable, equitable, productive, sustainable, and resilient urban areas. As the level of government closest to the community, local government is a vital part of this conversation.

More support is required from the Commonwealth Government to ensure Councils are equipped and enabled to continue to deliver local infrastructure and services that will accommodate urban growth and development.

Thank you for receiving this feedback on the draft National Urban Policy. Should you require further information, please contact M9 Executive Officer Emma Langoulant at: m9@melbourne.vic.gov.au.

Yours sincerely,

