

Submission
No 75

**INQUIRY INTO DEVELOPMENT OF THE TRANSPORT
ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM**

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

Response to Dept of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure Transport Oriented Development SEPP

INTRODUCTION

I strongly object to the proposed changes outlined in the Transport Oriented Development Program (TOD or “proposal”) to develop new and affordable housing within walking distance of public transport in 31 locations across Greater Sydney.

This is developer driven planning that is undemocratic, undermines heritage and environmental protections in the affected areas, and will not deliver affordable housing. Significant elements of environment, sustainability and heritage should not be sacrificed for an unproven outcome. The proposals outlined in the TOD are not fit for purpose, unworkable, embarrassing, shoddy, and unprofessional.

Population growth is not sustainable. Governments should be spending their time and money researching other ways to house people already in need rather than continuing to just pack them in, all in the name of economic growth. Governments stubbornly refuse to acknowledge there are limits to growth. Traffic congestion, transport capability, extra facilities, achieving zero emissions and zero waste, are limiting factors. When does the spiral of growth stop?

OBJECTIONS

1. ISSUES WITH THE TOD DOCUMENT

The TOD is flawed on many levels.

Proposed changes of this kind would normally have a consultation process where the public could comment before a final document is put forward. Why was that not done this time? What’s the rush? It appears that the NSW government does not want to know what its constituents want for their communities.

There is no information in the TOD about how these proposals will be implemented and there is a perceived rush to implement them.

There are no studies noted to justify the plan.

Where is the research on where people want to live? Where someone lives is affected by where they work, their income, cost of renting/buying, their social lives, and age. It’s not necessarily about availability of housing stock.

Where is information on the “new design criteria” which includes building separations and setbacks etc?

Where is the new “pattern book of endorsed housing designs”?

2. HERITAGE

We can’t ignore heritage areas or individual properties. These properties contribute to making the areas places where people want to live.

Heritage listing is the community recognising that something is of value and worth keeping. Page 11 of the TOD states “a merit-based assessment will continue to apply to developments in these locations and relevant heritage controls will apply to the extent they are not inconsistent with the new standards.’ This really means the TOD will over-ride existing provisions regarding protection of built heritage, as well as specific provisions aimed at preserving town character. This will threaten the built character of many areas and undermine their value and attractiveness to residents.

Heritage is not just about built history. It also includes the nature of the area ie the trees and wildlife. Heritage can also be about the human history of an area ie why the area was settled in the first place, local personalities and where they lived and worked, what they did for the area.

Some recent media comments:-

- Sydney Morning Herald (SMH) 16/1/24 – “It is a way of helping to ensure important places are maintained into the future and requiring new elements to be well considered. Heritage can and must be part of the solution. In many instances, it sets the standard of what we should aim for in terms of liveability. By destroying conservation areas, Sydney will not only be destroying perfectly good existing housing but a vital part of its soul.”
- SMH 9/1/24 letters – “Levelling our oldest, densest suburbs and removing the little architectural heritage we have won’t make housing more affordable. The market has created and continues to drive unaffordable housing.”
- SMH 10/1/24 – “Heritage doesn’t exist without community – it’s a social, cultural value. Heritage operates because certain people in the community believe it actually contributes to our understanding of ourselves, it makes places distinctive; it gives them a sense that these areas are worth keeping. If we think these areas aren’t worth keeping that says something about us.”
- SMH 10/1/24 letters– “The heritage argument is a distraction from the bigger questions of taxes, population growth, infrastructure, developing regional centres and planning beyond the immediate.”

3. ENVIRONMENT

Proposed changes to planning controls include “no minimum lot size or lot width”. Doesn’t that mean there will be little or no space for trees and overshadowing will be at a maximum? Do the people of Sydney really want to live like that?

There will be multiple environmental issues with increased population – sewer, stormwater, local flooding, weeds, use of water resources, loss of biodiversity, erosion, loss of tree canopy. Do the environments of the areas affected by TOD have the capacity to deal with a higher population?

With the inevitable increase in hard surfaces, in high rainfall events this will lead to flash flooding, with pollutants, rubbish and weeds being flushed into the surrounding waterways. There will be no space for additional stormwater controls, particularly in the much smaller blocks.

Effects of climate change such as higher temperatures, changes to rainfall, more fires etc will be even more prevalent with the increased extent of hard surfaces and the loss of vegetation.

Increased population means increased waste. It is inevitable some rubbish will end up in watercourses and flow into surrounding bushland and waterways. The inability to adequately address stormwater management, as noted above, will further exacerbate this problem. Where is a proposal to address general waste management? In an age where we as a larger community are trying to achieve zero emissions and zero waste, it seems nonsensical to shove people into dense

accommodation where they will be even more estranged from the natural world than they are already, and then expect them to understand that zero waste is not only possible, but best practice.

Again, page 10 states “Relevant environmental controls will apply to the extent they are not inconsistent with the new standards.” This really means the TOD will over-ride existing provisions regarding protection of the environment.

With a massive increase in population in Sydney generally, visitation to the National Parks and natural areas will inevitably increase. Will these visitors respect the natural places they are visiting, and can those places survive such constant visitation?

4. TRANSPORT

What provisions are being made to address the increased congestion that must surely occur with such an increase in population? In most areas roads are already congested.

Have any traffic studies been done to assess if relevant areas can manage an increase in the number of vehicles on the roads?

The TOD assumes that people will get out of their cars and travel by other means. It is still difficult to go across the city on public transport, or out of it, in a timely manner, with or without changing modes of transport. It's easier, quicker, and cheaper to get in the car.

What about catering for the increase in electric vehicles that will come with an increased population? Will there be more electric vehicle charging stations created? Electric car charging stations should be compulsory in all new builds.

5. FACILITIES & RESOURCING

The proposal does not appear to consider existing infrastructure eg sports fields, parks, schools, hospitals, waste management, medical facilities. Are these services sufficient for an increased population? Where would new services be located? Would the relevant areas be able to accommodate the required expanded services?

What about schools? Will we be required to build vertical schools with no playgrounds, where children grow up without having run around, fallen over and scraped their knee, or climbed a tree? They will have little or no connection with nature and the outdoors. This may also have adverse health outcomes.

Will aging infrastructure cope with extra supply issues eg water, power, sewer, stormwater? Existing facilities face significant limitations so the addition of more facilities may actually not be possible.

What about solar power? Solar power should be compulsory in all new builds. What about community batteries?

I note the TOD mentions funding for provision of adequate additional infrastructure on p 11. Will this be enough? What is the current ability of local Councils to fund and resource these changes?

6. HEALTH

Increased urbanisation has multiple effects eg closeness to other humans, noise, pollution, road congestion, increases in temperature, lack of natural places to escape to. This proposal therefore encourages a separation from nature, something that has been proven to affect our physical and

mental health. Mental health is part of the bigger problem of unsatisfactory modern living. These changes won't fix that. They will just make it worse.

Where is the planning for new parks to cope with all these people? In some areas there are not many now. Open space with fresh air is essential to our well-being. Covid 19 was proof of this, with many people escaping their houses to seek rejuvenation.

With taller structures there will be more overshadowing, limiting sunlight, something of great importance, especially in winter.

Together with climate change this proposal will cause an increase in disasters, even on a small scale eg an increase in ground water being funnelled down streets and overflowing drains causing local flooding, and the accompanying increased stress levels. Emergency services will be increasingly required to solve these local problems, causing more stress for those staff and volunteers. Safety is a big issue here for both emergency services personnel and residents.

7. OTHER

There is no orderly and rational land and infrastructure development evident in the proposal. Worse, it overturns many years of careful planning for the Councils affected.

All the time and effort (and financial resources) invested in developing these local plans, by Councils and community volunteers, will be overturned if the proposed reforms are implemented. This undermines the community's goodwill and confidence in the state's planning system.

Not everyone wants to live near the CBD of Sydney, or commutes there. Some people live in certain places because it's leafy or has larger housing blocks, NOT because it's near infrastructure or the CBD. Where households choose to live can represent a willingness to pay, financially or in other ways, relative to other locations.

I note an article in the Sydney Morning Herald 20/2/24 stating that houses, the most expensive form of accommodation, are outselling apartments at an increasing rate. This is Australia wide but the widest gap is in Sydney. "People want space and they are prepared to pay a premium for space." In any plan for the future, perhaps this should be taken into account.

OTHER WAYS TO ADDRESS THE HOUSING CRISIS

Housing is now an investment opportunity, not a human need, with many properties simply representing a tax deduction. Until that mode of thinking changes we will struggle to adequately address the housing crisis.

Australia is in desperate need of tax reform. The removal of negative gearing and changes to capital gains tax are attracting media attention and need to be seriously considered by the federal government in the immediate future.

First and foremost though is to reduce immigration to sustainable levels. This country cannot cope with a massive population. Our distances are too vast and some resources eg water, too few. Projected population figures quoted in the media in recent times are total madness. Our environment will struggle to survive. Water resources are struggling now, as is the provision of energy. We are currently still arguing about the development of renewable energy resources vs continuing with coal. And it's all aimed at economic growth, apparently the most desired state to be in. No consideration seems to be given to whether our people will actually be any better off. And that's without considering the influence on climate change with a much greater population.

Population increase is an economic argument rather than for any practical reason that would benefit the people of Australia.

We could also look at utilising existing properties. Financial incentives could be investigated that would release unoccupied houses or regular holiday let properties for permanent use. Greater regulation of Airbnb's may also help by removing them from the short term accommodation market.

Social housing needs to be addressed if we are to house the neediest Australians. The increase in housing proposed in this proposal will not help the homeless or those on the lowest incomes. Social housing needs to be seen as a basic government provision and should be built by government, and not left to developers who will only build for profit.

Overall, for the proposal of affordable housing at transport hubs to work, strict legislation must be put in place. The prices for "affordable" new dwellings must be capped, the quality of the build has to be certified, and Investors and overseas buyers must be locked out.

Build to rent schemes could also be investigated.

It has been suggested that current large areas of vacant land be used for housing. Perhaps in some places these areas would be better utilised as open spaces with the health benefits that come with that.

CONCLUSION

I call for the NSW Dept of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure to withdraw this proposal. The proposal will decimate local planning authority and is the death knell of local democracy. Are we living in a democracy? The proposals are not protecting the interest of current and future residents of Sydney and will place the long-term liveability of our city at risk. Increased supply is not necessarily the answer to the housing crisis and other options should be considered before such drastic action as proposed is contemplated.

The idea that a one-size-fits-all rezoning proposal will solve the housing problem in Greater Sydney is nonsensical.

If this proposal goes ahead I will not be voting for the Labor party in future NSW and Federal elections.