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Department of Planning and Environment  
Level 2 26 Honeysuckle Drive  
Newcastle 2300

Dear Madam/Sir

### **Draft Greater Newcastle Metropolitan Plan - Comments**

I welcome the NSW Government's initiative in preparing a Greater Newcastle Metropolitan Plan, and recognising the status of Australia's seventh largest urban area.

The plan should play an important role in contributing to improved governance arrangements for land use planning within the area, and the Hunter Region generally.

#### **General comments**

While it is commendable that the need for a metropolitan plan has been recognised, it is far from clear what the purpose of this plan actually is. Furthermore, the exact area to which the plan applies remains unclear, as is the relationship between planning for Newcastle and for the Greater Sydney Metropolitan Area.

The Draft Greater Newcastle Metropolitan Plan on exhibition is a curious blend of marketing, wishful thinking, unexplained jargon, and lack of commitment. Sorely missing is any data or analysis justifying how the area currently operates, the future challenges expected, improvements that are needed, and how these should be prioritised.

My review of the document on exhibition leads me to the conclusion that the most important content of the draft plan appears to be:

- Ten 'catalyst areas' identified to drive regional growth and transformation by magically creating jobs.
- Collaborative governance - a critical element of the plan, is largely the responsibility of a development authority without appropriate legislative responsibilities and capabilities to carry out this role.
- Thirteen 'strategic centres' are identified, of which only five have good transport links. Only seven of these align with 'catalyst areas'.
- Four 'urban renewal corridors' are identified, based around existing roads and renamed 'priority multimodal corridors' without definition or explanation. Only three of these align with 'strategic centres'.
- Of the 'priority housing release areas' identified, none is aligned or closely linked with a 'strategic centre' or 'catalyst area' or a proposed transport link.
- Freight and transport improvements identified in the plan are unclear and meaningless, do not reflect actual transport patterns, and do not even consider links to eight of the 'strategic centres'.
- Government agencies and local governments are encouraged to 'align' their plans, but without any responsibility or program.

Significant inconsistency in strategic thinking is apparent in the above. In addition, the plan ignores significant and inevitable challenges facing the area including:

- Community needs arising from demographic change such as population ageing, and servicing needs.
- Responses to natural hazards and risks such as flooding and sea level rise.
- Requirements for renewal of ageing infrastructure such as roads, water and sewer, electricity transmission, and telecommunications.
- Rapidly increasing traffic congestion.
- Steadily increasing community health costs, linked to inactive living.
- Transitioning to zero carbon emissions, at site, precinct and metropolitan scales.
- Continuing loss of regional biodiversity, and natural ecosystems that support the quality of life locally and regionally.

The issues above should be addressed in an effective strategic land use plan. Disappointingly, my review of Draft Greater Newcastle Metropolitan Plan indicates that it will do nothing to respond to the major challenges identified above, and is likely to worsen existing problems. In particular, it strongly reinforces Newcastle as a car based city, contrary to international trends suggesting that private car usage in cities has peaked.

### **Structure & presentation**

The substance in the plan could have been presented much more succinctly and understandably. Jargon and statements are made that are unworthy of a serious plan document, such as the "arc of lifestyle centres", "priority multimodal corridor", and "city frame".

Maps are a key element of the plan, but are particularly poorly presented and often inconsistent with one another, failing to show important features. They also do not show roads and railways consistently. Walking catchments around railway stations are hypothetical, not actual or potential (as an example, Metford Station can only be accessed from the south, and roads and pedestrian walkways limit access considerably), keys are inconsistent and many elements are not explained.

### **Specific recommendations**

The first priority for the Greater Newcastle Metropolitan Plan should be to align land use planning with long term transport connectivity and future infrastructure planning. The plan should include the following actions:

1. Recognise in an action that rail underpins the public transport system and must be given a high priority.
2. Recognise that the Greater Newcastle Metropolitan Area should include destinations within 1 hour travel time of Newcastle, especially Singleton which are functionally part of the Metropolitan Area.
3. Show railway lines and railway stations on all maps in the plan.
4. Propose a new railway station between Metford and Victoria Street to service the new Maitland Hospital in the East Maitland Catalyst Area.
5. Investigate the Hunter LinkRail transport proposal, linking Glendale, Kurri-Kurri and Maitland along existing rail corridors, and protect this corridor through land use planning measures.
6. Include a map showing proposed long term public transport connectivity, including the alignment of a future east coast fast rail link, Glendale Interchange, bush priority routes, ferry links, links to Williamtown Airport, and a flood free Newcastle Freight Rail bypass, preferably along the proposed Hunter LinkRail alignment.

The plan must also protect regional biodiversity areas as a priority. This is not given adequate recognition in the plan, and a specific strategy and related actions should be included in the section on Outcome 2 to achieve this. A key strategy should be to identify new conservation areas with high biodiversity values to be protected in public ownership within the plan area.

### **Conclusions**

The Draft Greater Newcastle Metropolitan Plan represents a step forward in ensuring that land use planning governance is relevant for future challenges facing the area. Implementing the recommendations above in the final plan will contribute to the emergence of Newcastle as a dynamic, integrated and liveable metropolitan area.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. If you have queries in relation to the details of my comments, please feel free to contact me at T 6571 1208 or E lep@calli.com.au.

Yours sincerely

Martin Fallding  
**Principal, Land & Environment Planning**