

7 Crompton Street  
Hamilton NSW 2303  
15 February, 2018.

Director  
Hunter Region  
Department of Planning and Environment  
P O Box 1226  
NEWCASTLE NSW 2300

Dear Sir/Madam

**DRAFT GREATER NEWCASTLE METROPOLITAN STRATEGIC PLAN (GNMSP)**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this draft Plan.

While the draft Plan balances a comprehensive approach with the necessary focus on key areas, I would like to see closer attention to the needs of people with disabilities, particularly in relation to the accessibility of pedestrian walkways.

It is pleasing to see that several areas of the Plan reference the importance of unobstructed pedestrian pathways and pedestrian amenity. However, this is fairly general. I am an older person who has, in the past 5 years, had my mobility severely constrained. I now walk only with the aid of a walker, or a mobility scooter, and am finding daily the range of activities open to me reduced because of physical access issues.

The Newcastle City Council has a Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2016-2019. The Strategic Vision outlined in this Plan accords with that of the draft GNMSP. Its key strategic objectives are:

- Connected city (relating to public transport and pathways)
- Caring and inclusive community
- Vibrant and active public places
- Liveable and distinctive built environment.

According to the Disability Plan, 5.9% or 8,727 of the population of the City of Newcastle reported needing help in their day to day lives due to disability (2011). This is thought to be an underestimate and of course represents only a portion of Greater Newcastle.

Since 2013, Newcastle has been a trial site for the roll out of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). This has significantly enhanced participation of people with disabilities in the community, as carers assist them with shopping, and enjoying recreation and entertainment. In addition, there are older people like myself who in increasing numbers, hope to continue to live active and useful lives, despite some disability.

One of the key messages from public consultations held to inform development of the Disability Plan concerned Public Domain Improvements. The following extract reflects my concern perfectly:

Stakeholders highlighted the importance of the public domain in enabling them to participate in an inclusive society. The public domain includes footpaths, kerb ramps and way finding to broad precincts such as beaches, ocean baths, parks, shopping strips and transport infrastructure. Community members reported the need for Council to better communicate and deliver on the design, upgrade and maintenance of both small and larger scale public domain improvements. Design faults and ageing infrastructure can result in a visually impaired person finding themselves in the middle of an intersection or a wheelchair user unable to get onto the footpath on the opposite side of the road. (p.17).

Among other strategies and actions proposed, the Disability Plan includes the following:

Identify priority locations to undertake pedestrian access and mobility plans to inform accessible paths of travel between major facilities and services (Strategy 6, Action b) p. 23)

I reference these as examples of considerations that are highly relevant to many initiatives in the draft GNMSPP, especially **Outcome 2: Enhance environment, amenity and resilience for quality of life.**

I would like to see reference to the special needs of people with disabilities and seniors AT LEAST in the following locations under Outcome 2:

- The introduction p. 37
- Principles especially 3 and 4, p. 38.

In closing, the Draft Plan provides an exciting vision of what Greater Newcastle can become in the decades ahead. While it might be assumed that words like 'inclusion' and 'diverse populations' incorporate people with disabilities and seniors, the position of these groups in our community is far from secure and established. I encounter this regularly when I want to attend a meeting or function and find there are steep stairs or several steps to be negotiated (impossible for me without sympathetic assistance), or when I struggle to find a safe kerb ramp within reasonable distance without going far out of my way. It is for these reasons that I make a case for specific reference in this Plan to the needs of people with disabilities.

Kind regards

Ruth Cotton.

