

27 February 2018

Director, Hunter Region  
Department of Planning and Environment  
PO Box 1226  
Newcastle NSW 2300

Dear Monica

**AECOM submission on the Draft Greater Newcastle Metropolitan Plan**

AECOM Australia Pty Ltd would firstly like to thank the Department of Planning and Environment (DP&E) for the opportunity to comment on the Draft Greater Newcastle Metropolitan Plan (The Draft Plan). By enabling industry and community to provide feedback, you have promoted engagement with the decisions being made about the future of our metropolitan area.

We are also pleased to see the connection between the Draft Plan and the Transport for New South Wales (TfNSW) Future Transport Strategy, and in particular the Draft Greater Newcastle Future Transport Plan.

Greater Newcastle has seen an increasing pace of change over the last five years, and we are now on the cusp on an exciting period of growth, opportunity, and reinvention. As a business and a team that is committed to the future of the region – we at AECOM are genuinely excited about the next evolution for our region. The clear actions outlined in your plan, and the natural flow from the Hunter Regional Plan 2036, set a clear path for this reinvention.

We can see the value in Professor Greg Clark's recommendation to form a Committee for Greater Newcastle. The cross-community collaboration that a group like this could facilitate will be key to establishing and promoting the fresh face of Newcastle and the region as we reinvent ourselves. It may also provide a platform for broad, ongoing consultation with a range of community groups – aiding discussions on the steps we face in achieving this reinvention.

Across the four key outcomes outlined in the Draft Plan we were particularly pleased to see focus being placed on initiatives that we believe are key ingredients for the success of Greater Newcastle. From improved transport connections – both within the region and connecting us to others; diversification of opportunities for the regional global gateways including the Port of Newcastle; exploration of initiatives to effectively and creatively re-use power generating sites and assist with the implementation of new generation technologies; the implementation of a public art strategy; and the notion of a precinct wide approach to transit oriented development at key train station locations – these are all critical to achieving the aspirations of Greater Newcastle. We support the need for strategic biodiversity certification for priority housing releases areas as outlined in the plan, and see this as critical to de-risking development.

We are excited about the potential for Greater Newcastle to establish itself as a hub for innovation. We have been exploring the value of innovation precincts through a range of recent project work, including developing an evidence-based framework for Innovation Precincts for the NSW Department of Industry and NSW Innovation Productivity Commission. Many of the success factors we identified are present in Greater Newcastle – giving us an excellent opportunity to differentiate ourselves and create further job growth and career prospects within our region.

We were also pleased to see the emphasis on enhancing the blue and green grid and the value of the urban tree canopy. Trees and parks transform the quality of life in Australian cities, but remain vastly undervalued. AECOM's 2017 Green Infrastructure Report (<http://www.aecom.com/brilliantcityinsights/brilliant-cities-insights-greening/>) detailed research into the value of street trees, seeking to understand the opportunity for Australian cities to use green infrastructure to create liveable, resilient cities that have healthier residents. Most importantly, we don't need to choose between a greener environment and greater development – carefully planned green infrastructure supports development in a number of ways. The opportunity for Greater Newcastle to improve amenity, reduce energy bills for consumers, improve health and wellbeing, minimise pollution, and aid in a reduced impact of extreme weather is both exciting and possible.

Building on links to the Draft Plan we agree that technology plays a crucial role in connecting communities, enhancing the customer experience, and ultimately shifting the way Novocastrians work, play and move around our region. To manage Greater Newcastle more efficiently, we will need a better understanding of how well it currently functions. Real-time information about every aspect of services and amenities across Greater Newcastle would enable faster, more effective decisions.

Our team is currently exploring the specifics of Digital Cities, where a virtual city is developed and managed by Government, which sees the bringing together of open data sources to inform urban performance, operability, user experience and optimisation of our existing and proposed assets. In addition, data captured by such a facility could be used to inform planning decisions - maximising asset efficiency, use of space and ultimately helping deliver the Draft Plan's desired outcome. The latest outcomes from our current body of work in this area will be released in April and we would be pleased to share this with DP&E and with the other stakeholders involved in implementing actions outlined in the Draft Plan and the Future Transport Plan.

Finally, we would like to commend the DP&E and all other contributors for creating a comprehensive, inclusive, and action driven strategy.

Yours sincerely



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