SUBMISSION ON OUTER METROPOLITAN PERTH AND PEEL SUB–REGIONAL STRATEGY TO THE WESTERN AUSTRALIAN PLANNING COMMISSION ON BEHALF OF THE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY TASKFORCE BUILT ENVIRONMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE – DECEMBER 2010

BACKGROUND
The Physical Activity Taskforce (Taskforce) was established in 2001 and coordinates a cross government approach for the development and implementation of a whole of community physical activity strategy for Western Australia (WA).

Bringing together the expertise of a number of State government departments, local government entities, leading academics and community representatives, the Taskforce mission is to provide a strategic direction to increase and maintain the proportion of physically active people in WA through increased policy coordination and collaboration.

The current Taskforce Strategic Plan outlines the social, environmental, economic and health benefits of improving the physical activity levels of WA’s citizens as a whole by supporting, providing and promoting physical activity through a multi-sectoral approach by:

1. Promoting active public policy;
2. Raising public awareness, developing skills, knowledge and understanding for engagement in physical activity;
3. Providing environments and opportunities for physical activity across all populations and communities; and
4. Promoting partnerships.

A fundamental part of this role is to influence the built environment and ensure physical activity is an integral part of any current and future planning process, hence this submission. The Taskforce recognises that the planning system is undergoing fundamental changes. Changes that can make a direct contribution across a range of policy areas, as well as influence the development of environments that are accessible and conducive to physical activity and healthy lifestyles.

The Taskforce is already committed to supporting the strategic priorities for planning reform through the integration and development of land use policies with other policies and programs that have significant potential to impact on physical activity. The Taskforce sees this as an opportunity to achieve physical activity outcomes and contribute to the wider outcomes of partners across the sectors of health, transport, education, sport and recreation, environment and community safety through increased levels of health, reduced levels of crime, improved quality of the built and natural environment and increased opportunities for participation in sport and recreation.

In support of this, earlier this year the Taskforce established the Built Environment Advisory Committee (Committee) to help achieve these outcomes.
The Committee provides strategic management and coordination for the implementation of the Physical Activity Taskforce Built Environment Strategy. The aim of the Committee is to influence the built environment to support physical activity and add value to the work of other agencies through an integrated approach.

Membership of the committee comprises representatives from a range of State, local and non-government agencies that influence the built environment. This includes senior officers across multiple disciplines representing local government, the Taskforce and Departments of Sport and Recreation, Transport, Planning, Health, and Education.

It is important to note that the Taskforce, through its members and stakeholders, addresses the broad spectrum of physical activity, encompassing incidental physical activity such as climbing the stairs, active transport such as walking and cycling, recreation and structured sport.

The objectives of the Committee are:

- To provide and foster a forum for cross-agency collaboration to bring about a more integrated, coordinated and enhanced response to influence the built environment in WA.
- To create more supportive environments for physical activity by addressing community design, policy and transport planning.
- To utilise the evidence base from a wide range of sectors to identify the broad range of factors that influence physical activity in the built environment.
- To create a shared understanding across sectors of the relationships between key factors in the built environment that influence physical activity.

The Committee has identified seven strategic priorities in the built environment strategy for 2010/11:

1. Policy and Strategy – influencing the integration and development of relevant policies and programs.
2. Coordination – an integrated approach by agencies to influence the built environment to support physical activity.
3. Resources – identifying and developing appropriate resources that support physical activity in the built environment.
4. Professional Development – providing opportunities and guidance on the integration of physical activity and the built environment into planning and design.
5. Recognition – influencing quality accreditation schemes and awards to encourage developments that impact positively on health and physical activity.
6. Advocacy – promoting the importance of the built environment and recognising the role it can play on physical activity.
7. Research – building the evidence base between the built environment and physical activity.

One such professional development opportunity organised recently was a free seminar for local government officers on Community Infrastructure Planning and how to apply the State Planning Policy (SPP). An overview of the SPP 3.6 Developer Contributions for Infrastructure and how this policy can be interpreted to inform the planning process was presented. A local government provided a practical example of how councils can successfully apply the policy and what it means in reality. A panel session followed the presentations to provide a discussion forum on the issues faced by local government in applying this policy.
The Committee also provides leadership and coordination to a *Schools Working Group* that is currently focusing on school site planning and shared use agreements between the Department of Education and local governments.

In addition, the Committee is also overseeing the development of *Healthy Active by Design* guidelines specifically for WA. The Taskforce in partnership with the Heart Foundation, commissioned this project to provide guidance to assist planners, urban designers, engineers and developers to apply strategic planning tools and design specifications to support physical activity in the built environment. This project builds on the national planning guide *Healthy Spaces and Places*.

The project is currently in Phase 1 and an audit and literature review of policy and existing guidance has been undertaken to identify gaps, omissions and implications for consideration in the final guide. Consultation workshops with key stakeholders are currently taking place to clarify issues and needs and ensure these are reflected in the final planning tool. A number of representatives from the Department of Planning have been involved with this consultation process.

**KEY ISSUES**

The World Health Organisation\(^1\) identified physical inactivity as the fourth leading risk factor for global mortality (6% of deaths globally). In its 2010 report on global recommendations for physical activity for health, it urges Member States to implement national guidelines on physical activity and encourages them to develop and put into practice policies and interventions that:

- develop and implement national guidelines on physical activity for health;
- introduce transport policies that promote active and safe methods of travelling to and from schools and workplaces, such as walking or cycling;
- ensure that physical environments support safe active commuting, and create space for recreational activity.

Increasingly, research\(^2\) shows that the built environment impacts in some way on our health and wellbeing, in particular, active lifestyle choices. The planning and design of neighbourhoods - houses, shops, schools, parks, roads, recreational and community facilities - can positively influence the way we behave.

One key stakeholder of the Taskforce, the Centre for the Built Environment and Health (CBEH) at the University of Western Australia has been involved in a number of studies that examines the impact of the built environment on health. The Centre also considers the positive relationship between increasing density and physical activity\(^3\), as well as the co-benefits for health through investing in issues such as active transportation that also have positive economic, social and environmental benefits.

Accumulating evidence\(^4\) also suggests that regular physical activity is effective in preventing and managing depression as well as other chronic diseases including cardiovascular disease and diabetes. However, a significant majority of Australians are not active enough for good health including children and young people.

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The Taskforce has commissioned two surveys, the *Western Australian Child and Adolescent Physical Activity and Nutrition Survey* (CAPANS) and the *WA Adult Physical Activity Survey* that considers the physical activity levels of these population groups. In WA, over 40% of adults in 2006 were not active enough for good health. The preliminary findings from the *2009 WA Adult Physical Activity Survey*\(^5\) indicate concerning results:

- 9% decline in people walking for recreation since 1999
- 10% decline in people walking for transport since 2006
- only half of physically-active adults walked more than 10 minutes for recreation
- one in five walked more than 10 minutes for transport in the previous week.

There is also a particular concern with levels of overweight and obesity. Since 1999, the number of Western Australians above a healthy weight has increased by 11%.

Interestingly, those respondents who were ‘insufficiently active’ and ‘inactive’ rated their local neighbourhoods less positively with the use of streets and footpaths lower in 2009 than in all previous survey years.

Findings from the 2008 CAPANS\(^6\) which gathers information on physical activity participation, dietary intake and body measurements also raise concerns. The first CAPANS was conducted in 2003. In 2008, Edith Cowan University was contracted to track trends and identify emerging issues.

These trends identified that less than half of the school students interviewed reported undertaking the recommended minimum 60 minutes of physical activity daily for good health. Participation was lowest amongst secondary school girls with only 10% meeting the national guideline.

Key findings from the 2008 survey include:

- The percentage of participants meeting the daily physical activity guidelines (60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity per day) are:
  - 41% primary boys and 27% primary girls
  - 38% secondary boys and 10% secondary girls.
- Almost all respondents reported participating in sport/exercise/dance, active play and school sport or PE over the 7 days prior to survey.
- The numbers of students reporting at least one session of active transport (i.e. walking or cycling) in the seven days prior to the survey included:
  - 46.5% of primary school boys and 43.1% of primary school girls
  - 50.9% of secondary schoolboys and 43.2% of secondary school girls.

Being active is good for our health. The 1996 US Surgeon General's report on Physical Activity and Health\(^7\) concluded then that people of all ages can benefit and improve the quality of their lives and enhance their physical and mental health through a life-long practice of moderate intensity physical activity.

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The benefits to be gained from a more physically active community are wider than physical and health benefits alone and, as previously mentioned, include social, environmental and economic outcomes:

- reducing the risk of chronic diseases
- managing weight
- improving social capital, skills and networks by reducing isolation and loneliness
- reducing traffic congestion
- reducing crime
- producing health savings
- assisting in the management of anxiety and
- assisting young people to develop healthy musculoskeletal tissues and cardiovascular systems.

Increasing physical activity levels also has real benefits for families and communities and for us as individuals. Active communities are more connected, cohesive and productive, and reduce the environmental impacts of car dependence. Active living also reduces the risk of breast cancer, depression and falls. The direct costs attributable to physical inactivity which contributes to these conditions is estimated to be $13.8 billion nationally per year.

Prioritising physical activity has multiple benefits for government. In support of this, the Taskforce is currently developing a Physical Activity Outcomes Framework for WA. This lists the outcomes government is seeking to influence by increasing physical activity and improving the health and wellbeing of individuals. The Framework will also assist agencies to focus their planning on key priorities; identify opportunities for sharing and coordination as well as show agencies how they are contributing to the achievement of these outcomes. The measures to achieve planning outcomes are included in the Framework.

Attached at Appendix 2, is a snapshot of current research and guides relating to the built environment and its impact on healthy active lifestyles. This has been compiled by the Taskforce Secretariat that supports and coordinates the activity of the Taskforce and Built Environment Advisory Committee.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS
The Committee welcomes the release of the sub-regional strategies that are integral to achieving the objectives outlined in Directions 2031. It provides further comment below to strengthen the themes identified and to increase physical activity and healthy living in the built environment.

- **Liveable** – living in or visiting our city should be a safe, comfortable and enjoyable experience. Planning for increased density must be fundamentally supported by design. The design of houses, streets, public open space and neighbourhoods should support and provide for physical activity opportunities as well as the provision of associated services and facilities. The master planning of new housing, mixed-use developments, and retrofitting of existing areas has a vital role in providing opportunities for creating physically active and healthy communities through high quality planning and design. The Committee would like to see included in the strategy more convivial mixed-density environments that encourage walking and cycling. The Committee also calls for a review of the current Designing Out Crime Planning Guidelines to support the development of safe communities.

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• **Prosperous – our success as a global city will depend on building on our current prosperity.** Planning for activity centres should also promote healthy active lifestyles and ensure provision of public open space, recreational facilities and appropriate infrastructure for other nodes of active transport such as cycling and walking. There is growing evidence that suggests walkable and pedestrianised areas are more profitable places that encourage people to stay longer, benefitting local communities. The Committee would like to see key industrial employment lands also cater for the wider needs of workers, encouraging healthy active lifestyles.

• **Accessible – people should be able to easily meet their education, employment, recreation, service and consumer needs within a reasonable distance of their home.** Planning for transit oriented development will also need to consider active transportation, including provision of infrastructure for cycling and walking. Well connected streets and communities will be critical in ensuring resident’s needs are met within a reasonable distance of home. The Committee encourages the development of inter-connected pedestrian and cycle networks, where residents have access to frequent, proximate public transport services.

• **Sustainable – we should grow within the constraints placed on us by the environment in which we live.** The Committee is pleased to note here the reference to use best practice urban design to encourage physical activity. The development of the *Healthy Active by Design* resource will be a key tool in achieving this particular strategic priority. Any strategic land use planning should consider and include the principles of healthy and active community design. The Committee would like the Western Australian Planning Commission and the Department of Planning to consider the role and status of the *Healthy Active by Design* resource currently being developed and to adopt its principles in future planning and policies, in particular the impending review of Liveable Neighbourhoods.

• **Responsible – we have a responsibility to manage urban growth and make the most efficient use of available land and infrastructure.** Planning for urban growth also requires the provision of adequate social and community infrastructure to support healthy and active lifestyles – public open space, sport, recreation, schools, and cultural facilities should also be considered. The provision of such infrastructure is, in most cases, an after-thought and priority normally given to essential services including utilities. The Committee would like to see the inclusion of social and community infrastructure and associated expansion of partners reflected in the strategy.

**KEY RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Physical Activity Taskforce Built Environment Advisory Committee recommends that:

1. The importance of physical activity and the correlation between the built environment and levels of physical activity are acknowledged and articulated in the final sub-regional strategy.

2. The strategy reflects further the key considerations and findings outlined in this submission, in particular expanding the themes and objectives and sub-regional strategic priorities.

3. The Western Australian Planning Commission and Department of Planning considers the development and role of the *Healthy Active by Design* guidelines as a key tool in achieving the objectives outlined by Directions 2031 and includes further details in the final strategy.

4. In consultation with local governments, further guidance and support is provided to councils in interpreting and implementing the sub-regional strategy and associated policies.
5. The increased consultation and engagement of key stakeholders including the Physical Activity Taskforce and the Built Environment Advisory Committee is considered in future planning, particularly in the finalisation of the strategy and in the impending review of Liveable Neighbourhoods.

6. The recommended changes detailed in Appendix 1 are reflected in the final sub-regional strategy.

CONCLUSION

In planning for population growth and housing affordability, the Committee’s vision is to see realised the development of neighbourhoods that provide more supportive environments for physical activity and healthy living that are inclusive, and promote health and wellbeing through opportunities and access to physical activity.

The State of Australian Cities Report (2010) by Infrastructure Australia clearly articulates the rapidly growing body of evidence demonstrating the impact of our cities upon active living choices and the subsequent liveability, health and social inclusion of residents. The report indirectly highlights that being active in everyday life not only has substantial positive impacts on our individual health, but also offers environmental, social and economic benefits.

The opportunities that the design of more supportive urban environments for active living provide to the health and wellbeing of our communities as noted in the Infrastructure Australia report are also increasingly being acknowledged by other sectors. For example, the National Preventative Health Taskforce in its final 2009 report Australia: the Healthiest Country by 2020 acknowledges the role of ‘urban design, infrastructure, public transport and planning sectors in shaping active, connected, safe and healthy neighbourhoods.’

The challenge now is for States to act on the evidence and provide strategic planning policies and guidance that address community design and transport planning. The COAG’s Capital Cities Strategic Planning Systems criteria clearly outline that planning systems should be integrated and across functions – land-use and transport planning, economic, and infrastructure development, environmental assessment and urban development as well as across government agencies.

The criteria go on to say that systems should also address significant policy issues including health, liveability and community wellbeing. The development of WA’s planning system and corresponding strategies and policies provides a unique opportunity to shape the State’s urban environment.

In this submission, the Committee has provided a number of practical recommendations relating to amendments in the Strategy and has outlined a number of key areas for consideration. The Committee looks forward to the release of the final Outer Metropolitan Perth and Peel Sub-regional Strategy and to working with the Western Australian Planning Commission and the Department of Planning in improving the quality of life for all Western Australians.

Appendix 1 - overleaf
Suggested amendments to the Outer Metropolitan Perth and Peel Sub-regional Strategy

1. Page 123 – Liveable – point 1.2 should include active transport opportunities.

2. Page 124 – Liveable – add a new action point 2.9 ‘Promote physical activity and wellbeing through urban design and recreational provision’. Lead agency PATF and partners to include Department of Planning, Transport and, Sport and Recreation.

3. Page 126 – Liveable – Sub-regional Strategic Priorities – add a new priority 5 ‘Plan for active and accessible communities’. This should reference the Healthy Active by Design (HABD) guidelines and draft Accessible Communities Study undertaken for the Departments of Planning and Transport and should be reflected in the remainder of the strategy.

4. Page 127 – Prosperous – ensure activity centres also support healthy and active lifestyles, and provide for other nodes of active transportation such as cycling and walking.

5. Page 129 – Accessible – include in point 14.3 meeting people’s health needs and in the actions section the above point regarding other nodes of transport.


7. Page 130 – Sustainable – include the application of the HABD guidelines.


9. Page 132 – Responsible – consider broadening the membership of the proposed Alliance Working Group to include physical activity stakeholders.

10. Page 133 – Responsible – include here the provision of guidance and better support to local governments in implementing the planning reforms.