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Project Manager  
Wheatbelt Land Use Planning Strategy  
Department of Planning  
140 William Street  
PERTH WA 6000

19 August 2011

Dear Sir/Madam

### **WHEATBELT LAND USE PLANNING STRATEGY – draft for public comment**

I am writing on behalf of the Physical Activity Taskforce (Taskforce) and provide comment on the above draft strategy.

#### **Background**

The 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 improve and increase opportunities for physical activity in Western Australia through increased policy coordination and collaboration.

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.

## Key Issues

The World Health Organisation<sup>[1]</sup> 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; and
- Ensure that physical environments support safe active commuting, and create space for recreational activity.

Increasingly, research<sup>[2]</sup> is showing us 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<sup>[3]</sup>, 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. In this regard, residential subdivisions that do not provide or integrate with surrounding pedestrian and bike networks should be discouraged.

This is increasingly critical in regional communities that do not have the same levels of infrastructure or services and programs as metropolitan areas, providing opportunities for increased levels of physical activity, particularly activities such as active transport requiring adequate footpaths and end of trip facilities. In all communities, it is important to encourage development patterns that demonstrate development principles which encourage healthy lifestyles for residents.

Accumulating evidence<sup>[4]</sup> also suggests that regular physical activity is effective in preventing and managing depression as well as other chronic diseases including cardiovascular disease and diabetes, issues common in regional areas. However, a significant majority of Australians are not active enough for good health.

In WA, over 40% of adults in 2006 were not active enough for good health. The findings from the *2009 WA Adult Physical Activity Survey*<sup>[5]</sup> 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; and
- One in five walked more than 10 minutes for transport in the previous week.

Compared with respondents from the Perth metropolitan area, those in the South West were 19% more likely, those in the Kimberley/Pilbara 34% more likely and those in the

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<sup>[1]</sup> *Global health risks: mortality and burden of disease attributable to selected major risks*. Geneva, World Health Organization, 2009. [http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2010/9789241599979\\_eng.pdf](http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2010/9789241599979_eng.pdf)

<sup>[2]</sup> Giles-Corti B, Kelty S, Zubrick S and Villanueva K, *How important is the built environment?*, Centre for the Built Environment and Health, UWA, Centre for Developmental Health, Curtin University and Telethon Institute, 2009.

<sup>[3]</sup> Giles-Corti B, *Increasing densities: Building communities not just buildings*, Centre for the Built Environment and Health, UWA, [http://www.planning.wa.gov.au/2010\\_Increasing%20density\\_WAPC.ppt.pdf?id=2203](http://www.planning.wa.gov.au/2010_Increasing%20density_WAPC.ppt.pdf?id=2203)

<sup>[4]</sup> National Heart Foundation of Australia, *Physical Activity and Depression*, 2007.

<http://www.heartfoundation.org.au/SiteCollectionDocuments/GP%20PA%20and%20Depression%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf>

<sup>[5]</sup> Saarloos D, Nathan A, Almeida O, Giles-Corti B (2008). *The Baby Boomers and Beyond Report: Physical Activity Levels of Older Western Australian 2006*. Perth, Western Australia: Western Australian Government.

Midwest/Goldfields 35% more likely to be inactive. Although high, people living in the Perth metropolitan area had a lower prevalence of overweight and obesity (53%) compared with respondents in other regions (South West 65%, Kimberley/Pilbara 62%, Midwest/Goldfields 63%).

Being active also has real benefits for our communities and for us as individuals. Active communities are more connected, demonstrate increased community participation, are more productive and reduce the environmental impacts of car dependence. Active living also reduces the risk of diseases as previously stated as well as depression and falls. The direct costs attributable to physical inactivity of these conditions is more than \$1.5 billion nationally a year.

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

### **Key Areas for Consideration**

The Taskforce is supportive of the intent to provide a land use planning strategy to guide the long term future of the Wheatbelt region. There are a number of comments for consideration by the WAPC in the strategy as follows.

- **General Comments**

The Taskforce supports the approach to evidenced based planning for future population growth through consideration of economic development, land supply and identification of regional infrastructure needs contained in the strategy and background report.

Whilst health outcomes are referenced within the strategic documents, there needs to be some acknowledgement of the contribution of physical activity, sport and recreation to the development of a range of spatial planning outcomes which include health in addition to sustainable and cohesive communities.

Under the New Public Health Act, there is a proposal to introduce public health assessments which are a form of Health Impact Assessments (HIA). This is supported by the Taskforce as planning decisions are instrumental in determining physical and social characteristics of neighbourhoods which impact on walkability, access to transport, social contact and recreational facilities which impact on physical activity opportunities. HIA is advocated by the World Health Organisation as a means of providing decision makers with necessary information about how programs, policies, projects or proposals will impact on health and wellbeing matters.

Given the projected population change, it is crucial this is accompanied by a supporting network of high quality accessible and effective social infrastructure which includes provision for all aspects of physical activity across the Wheatbelt area. It is critical to reference the challenge here regarding the allocation of suitable community infrastructure that meets the needs of an ageing population. All community infrastructure should be accessible, integrated and connected in accordance with design specifications. In many circumstances, the land is incapable of being used for the desired community purposes which impacts on the service planning of recreation and sporting facilities, services and programs that encourage regular physical activity, such as:

- Walking (footpaths, lighting, water fountains and signs)
- Cycling (bike paths, bike lockers, signs and showers)
- Public transport (safe shelter, lighting and signs)
- Social interaction (seating, shade, shelter and toilets) and
- Sport and recreation (including play equipment)

There are considerable implications for local governments as they will need to be able to undertake needs analysis in order to be provided with some indication of expectations regarding requirements for infrastructure and ongoing management and maintenance.

## **Wheatbelt Regional Profile**

- **Regional opportunities and challenges - Point 1.3 - P2**

The Taskforce supports the opportunities and challenges identified, but suggest that provision of social infrastructure is listed as a separate point as this can play a fundamental role in contributing to sustainable community development outcomes.

Employment self-sufficiency is supported, but this needs to be appropriately served from an accessibility perspective in town centres. If employment opportunities are closely located to residential areas, this will reduce reliance on cars as long as there is adequate provision of public transport and opportunities to walk and cycle.

- **Public transport - Point 8.1.4 - P79**

The Taskforce is supportive of identification of transport infrastructure characteristics and needs of the region. Whilst public transport is acknowledged, no reference is made to active travel which should be promoted in accordance with the Be Active Australia Framework for Health Sector Action for Physical Activity as this relates to physical activity undertaken as a means of transport. It includes travel undertaken by foot, bicycle and other non-motorised vehicles. Use of public transport is also included in the definition as it includes some walking or cycling to pick up and from drop-off points.

In larger centres it is critical that transport infrastructure requirements address the movement network and the need for a proposed expansion of the walking and cycling network. The utilisation of integrated transport strategies which identify proposals for transport related infrastructure to and from and between destinations should be referred to here in addition to the 'public transport strategy'. District and Local Structure Plans should demonstrate how the movement network will support cycling and walking networks which provide high quality safe and convenient routes through to new and existing urban areas and improve links between urban centres.

- **Social and community infrastructure - P91**

The Taskforce is supportive of the specific reference to community infrastructure and inclusion of sporting and recreation facilities. This should also reference parks, open space and recreational play space which should be accessible, integrated, well designed and connected in providing for a broad range of community services in accordance with acceptable minimum design specifications. Development proposals and projects should be required to identify the phasing of sport, recreation and community infrastructure based on population growth, demographics and potential usage profile. In addition they should be required to demonstrate that developer contributions to local governments are sufficient to construct, maintain and manage the facilities in accordance with existing policy and practices.

- **Health - Point 8.5.1 - P92**

Whilst preventative health is referenced, there is also a need to reference the challenge associated with the impact of urban growth on existing and future population health. It is critical that planning components which consider chronic disease prevention recognise health as a sustainable driver of the urban form and provides accessible infrastructure which maximises the opportunity for the community to engage in formal and informal physical activity.

The Taskforce is currently working with the Heart Foundation and Departments of Planning, Transport and Sport and Recreation to develop design guidance for active living within urban development and recommends approaches which may be considered in the evolution of the urban form. This project is known as *Healthy Active by Design* and builds on the National Healthy Spaces and Places resource. It is proposed that once these guidelines are finalised, they are utilised as standard practice across planning frameworks.

- **Education and training Point 8.5.2 P93**

The Taskforce agrees that education and training are essential for sustainable communities and suggests that further consideration is given to dual use opportunities and co-location of educational facilities. Both dual use opportunities and co-location of educational facilities with other institutional and compatible uses in appropriate locations should be considered. Provision is to be determined by an assessment of need and opportunity based on current and future estimated demographics and should determine the ability of an education facility to service a local community with regard to:

- Art
- Health
- Libraries
- Sport and Recreation
- Lifelong learning

With careful planning of educational facilities opportunities exist through co-operative planning, design and management to more effectively plan joint provision of facilities particularly for extended community use. This provides the benefit of a more integrated educational system and ensures that wherever possible duplication is avoided and utilisation is maximised.

## **Wheatbelt Land Use Planning Strategy**

- **Community P6**

The Taskforce is supportive of the principles, objectives, strategies and actions identified in particular the reference to healthy vibrant communities. With regard to the WAPC policy position, there does need to be careful planning around the location of rural living precincts to ensure the following factors are considered in relation to urban design considerations:

- Mixed land use, including housing, retail, commercial, education, sport and recreation
- Connected street networks with opportunities to walk and cycle
- Access to recreational and sporting facilities and infrastructure
- Attractive, safe and welcoming environments
- Well connected integrated public transport services

- **Economy and Regional Development P7**

The Taskforce is supportive of the principles, objectives, strategies and actions identified. With regard to the creation of agribusiness precincts, it is critical that these are located in areas that have access to necessary infrastructure including transport. It is also desirable that where possible, these are located close to housing.

- **Infrastructure P11**

The Taskforce is supportive of the principles, objectives, strategies and actions identified. With regard to the provision of land for community infrastructure, requirements for social infrastructure which includes physical activity should be developed through a review and analysis of the current and projected demographics which would influence the scope and location of community infrastructure provision.

Social infrastructure provision for physical activity must address both passive and active needs in addition to accommodating organised sport. Facilities such as hard courts, community centres, playing fields, indoor stadiums and aquatic centres all contribute to participation and physical activity levels within communities.

## **Conclusion**

In this submission, the Taskforce has provided a number of comments for consideration by the WAPC in relation to the Wheatbelt Land Use Planning Strategy

The Taskforce has welcomed the opportunity and looks forward to continued working on the implementation of these policies. In the meantime, if further clarification is required in relation to the key considerations outlined in this submission, please contact Jo Del Prete on 9492 9632 or e-mail [jo.delprete@dsr.wa.gov.au](mailto:jo.delprete@dsr.wa.gov.au).

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jo Del Prete', with a long horizontal stroke extending from the end of the name.

Jo Del Prete  
Manager, Physical Activity Taskforce Secretariat