

General Manager  
North Sydney Council  
PO Box 12  
NORTH SYDNEY NSW 2059

25 May 2020

Dear Mr Gouldthorp,

**RE: Military Road Corridor Planning Study – Draft Future Directions Report**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on North Sydney Council’s Military Road Corridor Planning Study – Draft Future Directions Report.

Northern Sydney Local Health District (NSLHD) Health Promotion is committed to ensuring that the built environment has a net-positive impact on the health and well-being of individuals and the wider community. In this context, we commend North Sydney Council for redesigning the Neutral Bay precinct to create a more connected, accessible and liveable neighbourhood into the future.

There is a strong relationship between people’s health and the built environment<sup>1</sup>. The way people move within, to and from a city can have a considerable impact on the health and wellbeing of the community. This Draft Future Directions Report for the Neutral Bay precinct incorporates key built environment initiatives that will support human health by increasing physical activity and connecting and strengthening these communities. The proposed design addresses three of the major risk factors for chronic disease which are physical inactivity, social isolation and obesity<sup>1</sup>. The benefits of active travel also extend beyond the health of the community, with the health of the environment improving through reduced emissions.

The Military Road Corridor Draft Future Directions Report focuses on connecting people and places. We particularly commend Council’s approach to placemaking and creating environments people want to be in. A sense of community and belonging within the places where people live, work and travel are influential determinants of mental and physical health<sup>1</sup>. Being ‘out and about’ presents opportunities for incidental interactions which promotes connection, increases perceptions of safety and decreases feelings of loneliness and isolation, all of which have proven links to positive mental health<sup>1</sup>.

Demand for quality open space is expected to increase significantly throughout the North Sydney LGA, particularly with the proposed increased density in Neutral Bay. This Future Directions Report for the Military Road Corridor provides innovative concept plans to retrofit quality open spaces within the public domain, significantly increasing the quantity of public space.

Research suggests that planning for public space should consider multiple users. Design for multiple uses is important in ensuring that a range of user groups are able to use public spaces throughout different times of the day<sup>2</sup>. The success of the proposed public space will be in their ability to engage the various users of Neutral Bay including families, young people, older adults, workers and visitors. Planning for the public domain should incorporate facilities such as community gardens, performance spaces, playgrounds, outdoor dining areas, green spaces dedicated to passive and active recreation and exhibition spaces.

**Recommendations:**

1. The public spaces within the Planning Study cater to a diverse range of user groups

<sup>1</sup> Kent, J., Thompson, S.M., and Jalaludin, B., Healthy Built Environments: A review of the literature, Sydney: Healthy Built Environments Program, City Futures Research Centre, UNSW

<sup>2</sup> NSW Health, Healthy Urban Development Checklist - A guide for health services when commenting on development policies, plans and proposals, 2009 (Available at: <https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/urbanhealth/Publications/healthy-urban-dev-check.pdf> (Accessed 23/1/2019))

We endorse the approach of improving connectivity and reducing vehicular movements and traffic throughout Neutral Bay. In particular, the pedestrianising of Barry Street, the closure of Young Street to deliver a new 700m<sup>2</sup> plaza and improvements to permeability through the network of laneways and through-site links aligns with the Australian Government's Urban Design Protocol. This protocol provides a framework that sets out the principles of good contemporary urban places<sup>3</sup>. Health Promotion supports the proposed trial closure of Young Street in 2020 and welcomes any opportunity to partner with Council on a [Streets as Shared Spaces](#) initiative to activate this space. The *Streets as Shared Spaces* program aims to increase the amount of public space and improve local streets and paths as shared spaces for people and transport. Councils are encouraged to apply for grants for temporary activation projects to deliver short-term improvements to local streets, paths or public spaces.

#### **Recommendations:**

2. [Apply for a Streets as Shared Spaces grant to activate the public space created by the trial Young Street closure](#)

The resulting increase in community connectedness and physical activity levels (and reduced car-dependence) offers not only the obvious health (i.e. decreased risk of obesity, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, as well as anxiety and depression), social (i.e. social interaction and sense of community) and environmental benefits (i.e. improved air quality, reduced traffic congestion and noise pollution), but also makes financial sense.

A review conducted in 2010 of the internationally available evidence identified an economic benefit ratio that averaged 13:1 for walking and cycling interventions<sup>4</sup>. More recently, an Australian study found a 30% lower requirement for hospital care being associated with 4,300 extra steps per day (approximately 40 minutes of walking), which equates to a saving of \$550 in annual hospital bed costs per person<sup>5</sup>.

Improved walking and cycling conditions and shifts from motorised to non-motorised modes of transport can also increase both retail activity and property values. A discussion paper commissioned by the National Heart Foundation of Australia identified various studies confirming street design quality can add an average of 4.9 per cent to retail rents of premises and well-planned active travel improvements increase customer visits and local business activity<sup>6</sup>. The discussion paper also cites a 2010 study on the economic impact on residential, retail, office and industrial properties concluding that a 10 point increase on a 100 point walkability scale increases property values by 5 to 8 percent.

Whilst the proposed strategies improve connectivity within the Northern and Southern areas of Neutral Bay, the physical barrier of Military Road remains. As stated in the report, the community engagement process identified that 90% of respondents want to see improvements to the Military Road environment including better road crossing opportunities. Priority should be given to pedestrians at all signalised crossings in the Planning Study, to improve connection between these two zones.

#### **Recommendations:**

3. [Ensure pedestrians are prioritised at all signalised crossings in the precinct along Military Road](#)

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<sup>3</sup> Australian Government, *Creating Places for People – An Urban Design Protocol for Australian Cities*. Available at: <https://www.urbandesign.org.au/protocol-framework/principles/walkable/> (Accessed 16/4/2019)

<sup>4</sup> Davis, A., *Value for money: an economic assessment of investment in walking and cycling*. Bristol Department of Health, 2010. Available at [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/242744386\\_Value\\_for\\_Money\\_An\\_Economic\\_Assessment\\_of\\_Investment\\_in\\_Walking\\_and\\_Cycling/download](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/242744386_Value_for_Money_An_Economic_Assessment_of_Investment_in_Walking_and_Cycling/download) (Accessed 22/01/2019)

<sup>5</sup> Ewald, B.D., Oldmeadow, C., and Attia, J.R., *Daily step count and the need for hospital care in subsequent years in a community-based sample of older Australians*. *Med J Aust*, 2017; 206 (3): 126-130

<sup>6</sup> National Heart Foundation of Australia, *Good for Business: The benefits of making streets more walking and cycling friendly*. Discussion Paper, 2011

As the second priority in the modal hierarchy recommended within the abovementioned Urban Design Protocol, it is essential that cycling connections are also considered and prioritised in this planning process. To avoid potential conflict between cyclists and other road users, NSLHD Health Promotion finds merit in the construction of a separated bi-directional cycleway along Military Road connecting Mosman with Neutral Bay and beyond into the North Sydney CBD. This would improve east – west connectivity for cyclists. Ensuring adequate bike parking facilities throughout the precinct and ensuring development controls mandate sufficient bike storage within all new developments will encourage cycling as a convenient method of travel for both local residents and commuters.

**Recommendations:**

4. Advocate for a separated bi-directional cycleway along Military Road and detail how this would integrate into the various sites within the proposed Neutral Bay Precinct.
5. Ensure development controls require sufficient bike storage facilities for all new developments within the precinct

Exposure to second-hand smoke can negatively impact on the amenity of public spaces. We commend North Sydney Council's current smoke-free CBD policy, which aims to improve the health of smokers and non-smokers, and improve the amenity of the North Sydney CBD.

In addition to the obvious health benefits generated from a reduction in second-hand smoke exposure, the implementation of a smoke-free policy can be expected to provide the following outcomes:

- A reduction in smoking litter
- Improved amenity, both within the open space and the surrounding residential buildings
- Increased patronage and time spent at retail businesses
- Greater compliance with the Smoke-Free Environment Act 2000, particularly in regards to the commercial outdoor dining areas

However, the Smoke-Free policy is currently limited to the North Sydney CBD. The Military Road Corridor Planning Study presents an excellent opportunity to broaden the policy to incorporate all public open spaces within the North Sydney LGA.

**Recommendations:**

6. Extend the current Smoke-Free CBD Policy to all public open spaces in the North Sydney LGA

We appreciate the opportunity to provide comment on the Military Road Corridor Planning Study – Future Directions Report. Should you have any queries about this submission please contact me on 9462 9568. We look forward to continuing our work with North Sydney Council to support projects that benefit the health, wellbeing and safety of the community.

Yours sincerely,

Jonathon Noyes  
Health Promotion Officer  
Northern Sydney Local Health District