



BUILDING OUR COMMUNITY'S  
HEALTH & WELLBEING

# **Sustainable Sydney 2030 Strategic Plan**

City of Sydney

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**Submission**

May 2008

## 1. ACON

ACON is a community-based non-government organisation promoting the health and wellbeing of a diverse gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) community, and a leading agency in HIV/AIDS policy development and program delivery. ACON provides education, health promotion, care, support, and advocacy services for members of the GLBT community, including drug users and Indigenous people, to sex workers and all people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA).

ACON is home to the Community Support Network (CSN), the Positive Living Centre (PLC), the Lesbian and Gay Anti-Violence Project (AVP) and the Sex Workers Outreach Project (SWOP). ACON has an office in the City of Sydney as well as branches in Illawarra, Northern Rivers, Hunter and Mid North Coast.

## 2. GENERAL COMMENTS

ACON commends the City of Sydney for the development of the Sustainable Sydney 2030 Strategic Plan, and welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback.

ACON has long enjoyed a strong relationship with the City, reflective of the role that ACON plays within the GLBT community and the inclusive approach that the City has taken to one of its largest and most prominent communities. In recent years, ACON has provided input to a number of City of Sydney strategies, including:

- *Social Policy and Plan* (2006);
- *Homelessness Strategy* (2007);
- *Safe City Strategy* (2007);
- *Drug and Alcohol Strategy* (2007);
- *Oxford Street Safety Strategy* (2006); and
- *Night Trading Premises Strategy* (2006).

Of particular note is the *Oxford Street Safety Strategy* (released November 2006), which had a great deal of input from ACON's Anti-Violence Project (AVP) during the development of the document.

ACON would hope that the issues addressed in the plans and strategies above are integrated and inform aspects of the *Sustainable Sydney 2030 Strategic Plan*. In its current form, it is unclear as to the relationship between these strategies and the *Sustainable Sydney 2030 Strategic Plan*. For example, the *Night Trading Premises Strategy* has implications in relation to safety, public transport (including night services), town planning, and the concept of activity hubs. In another example, the Activity Hub of Kings Cross is described without reference to its historical and cultural position in relation to sex work, drug and alcohol issues, and as a focus of services to the homeless in the City.

## 3. COMMENTS ON THE CONSULTATION MESSAGES

ACON is pleased to see that the consultation has captured messages that we would particularly endorse, including that Sydney is a city:

- *That is respectful of diversity-cultural, religious, age, gender, sexuality and family structure;*
- *That offers affordability and social diversity;*
- *With walkable streets;*
- *Where people feel a sense of belonging, connected to the local village, shops and people in the streets; and*
- *That includes Indigenous people in its future.*

As an organisation based within an important community in the City, ACON shares these visions for the future, and believes that they are likely to support health and wellbeing outcomes for the communities we serve. In addition, the focus on liveability is welcomed, as a goal which captures both environmental and social values that are sustainable.

The intention to be diverse and inclusive, with a proactive approach to achieving relative equality amongst the people of the city is supported. In particular the focus on affordable housing is seen as responsive to the needs of a diverse GLBT community, Indigenous people, the ageing and those with poorer health.

#### **4. COMMENTS ON THE “STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES” SECTION**

##### **Indigenous people**

The Plan does not explain how the relationship between Indigenous people and the land itself, and the related intrinsic position of importance these communities have to Sydney’s future, are to be sustained and developed through to 2030. The City appears to acknowledge and value Indigenous history and culture in terms of creating access to this in interpretive work, however the living communities and their relationship to the land, and the City as a community and place are less apparent in the Plan.

Although there is an Indigenous statement at the forefront of the document, this has not flowed through in terms of leading to actions in all parts of the Strategic Plan. For example, Indigenous people are not specifically mentioned in the 2030 Vision statements on pages 14 and 15, or in the section on strengths and challenges. The section of the plan that focuses on the new green zones, and green network of open spaces, does not relate to the history of the land, nor the potential for people to use this land for cultural purposes, with the exception of the Indigenous cultural interpretive landmarks through the city centre. The right to use the planned green zones and networks need to be better articulated for key populations, such as Indigenous people and youth, who may lack access to other social spaces.

##### **GLBT people and communities in a global, connected city**

While the plan acknowledges the diversity of the communities that exist within the City, there is little recognition of the important role that the GLBT community has played, and will continue to play, in shaping the identity of Sydney. Richard Florida, an international expert in economic competitiveness and cultural innovation, found that “Global Cities” cherish, involve and promote diversity, and particularly so for their GLBT communities. Valuing diversity and embracing the GLBT aspects, sub-culture and sub-populations of a city, is an important marker of a truly Global City. Given that the plan seeks to firmly

position Sydney within this category, it is important that it makes reference to the value that the City of Sydney places on the city's GLBT community, and the work that it plans to do to support that community.

Sydney is internationally known for the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, with the event recognised as one of, if not the premier GLBT pride event in the world. This plays a large role in Sydney's status as a world city. In addition, Sydney is also internationally known and respected for its response to HIV/AIDS and the engagement of the GLBT community in the response. HIV/AIDS and our response to it, through ACON and other organisations, institutions and services, has shaped our perception as a world city. Simply using the terminology, "diversity" fails to capture or convey the importance of those two fundamental Sydney persona in making Sydney what it is.

As the leading city in Australia regarding GLBT issues, the City may also like to consider how it can help facilitate a specific sub-strategic plan for GLBT residents and visitors.

## **5. COMMENTS ON THE 'MAKING IT HAPPEN' SECTION**

### **Measuring community cohesion and social capital**

ACON has questions about how the proposed targets will be measured. How does the City intend to measure diversity, acceptance, tolerance and inclusiveness? What are the benchmarks specifically about GLBT issues? How will they be reliably measured?

Similar questions apply for Target 10 at page 34 of the Plan. ACON suggests that measuring whether *people can be trusted* is not, by itself, a sound measure of community cohesion or social capital. Further, ACON proposes that measures could include:

- how included people feel;
- how readily they think they can participate in city events;
- whether a gay or lesbian couple experiences good neighbourly behaviour; and
- the level and nature of homophobia, sexism, ageism, racism or violence experienced by sub-populations that may experience discrimination.

### **Vibrant local communities and economies**

ACON supports the concept of Activity Hubs for the City of Sydney. However, ACON questions how the City can help develop those particularly around the 2010/2011 and 2042/2043 postcodes which specifically meet GLBT needs. The City should also not presume these are the only postcodes in which GLBT people live and as such services needs to be developed throughout the city which address our needs, and allow us to participate in the community and City life.

The City's planning instruments need to be cognisant of the unique GLBT character of Oxford Street and King Street and assist in creating spaces in which GLBT people can socialise and 'feel at home'. Community development activities and spaces may need to be created or developed to meet those needs.

Safety is a major issue for the GLBT community more so than many non GLBT people, including the aged. Without safety how can we feel a sense of belonging? The development of a permanent resource and community centre out of which the AVP and safe place project can operate would be a valid response. It might also have space for community meetings and community groups more generally, who find it difficult to afford space around the 2010/2011 area, or have a role in promoting GLBT tourism in the City.

There is also a need to recognise that not all GLBT people are from upper socio-economic strata. There are GLBT individuals and sub-populations experiencing poverty and social disadvantage. The City's vision for the future, including services need to be sensitive to these people and the services they require.

Related to this is the impact that the rising cost of housing within inner-city areas such as 2010/11 is having on where GLBT people live, and consequently, the nature of the GLBT community within the City of Sydney. The need to move away from 'gay' areas such as Darlinghurst/Surry Hills and Newtown, may impact on the ability of some GLBT people to access services that are relevant to their needs. In planning for the future of housing in the City, it important that this potential impact is recognised. In particular, this could mean an increase in homelessness amongst GLBT people in the inner-city when there are virtually no services to meet their needs.

### **Implementation through effective governance and partnerships**

ACON welcomes the partnership approach outlined in the Plan, as it is the only viable way to achieve such an ambitious project and indeed demonstrates in a concrete way the key ethos behind the Plan. Given our strong and successful relationship with the City of Sydney, ACON looks forward to continuing to work in partnership towards 2030 to achieve a Global, Green and Connected City.

For further information on the issues raised in this paper, please contact David Scamell, Manager, Policy, Planning and Research at [dscamell@acon.org.au](mailto:dscamell@acon.org.au) or on 02 9206 2048.