



Australian Institute of  
Landscape Architects

15/12/2020

The Hon Andrew Constance MP  
Minister for Transport and Roads  
Parliament House NSW

Dear Minister,

### **AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS' CONCERN OVER THE PROPOSED CLOSURE OF THE RMS/TFNSW CENTRE FOR URBAN DESIGN**

It has come to our attention from members that in the merger of Roads and Maritime Services (RMS) and Transport for NSW (TfNSW), the highly regarded "Centre for Urban Design" is being disbanded. The Australian Institute of Landscape Architects (AILA) is most concerned about the negative impact that this will have on the good design of our transport infrastructure, and the quality and liveability of our towns and cities.

AILA and its members request that the Centre for Urban Design and its staff are retained in the future remade TfNSW. This will enable urban design principles and the corporate knowledge developed over decades to continue to drive great outcomes for New South Wales and maintain it as a great place to live, travel to, and want to do business in.

### **WHY GOOD URBAN DESIGN IS CRITICAL TO THE QUALITY AND LIVEABILITY OF OUR CITIES**

Urban design sits at the heart of what Transport for NSW is all about. Transport for NSW is committed to providing 'successful places' with the 'liveability, amenity and economic success of communities and places enhanced by transport'. [1. NSW Government. Future Transport 2056. P17].

Good urban design is also recognised in NSW legislation: The 2018 amendment to the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act included a key phrase, "good design", elevating the importance of design in the planning system, including transport.

Successful places are a key goal of Transport and Government. The Centre for Urban Design, its highly skilled staff and its award-winning guiding document, "*Beyond the Pavement*" [2.TfNSW] and other key documents such as *bridge aesthetics* and *visual impact assessment guidelines*, play a vital role in driving good quality outcomes for our urban infrastructure. Urban design is not something that is added on at the end of a project. It is intrinsic to the built fabric of our towns and cities.

Urban design starts with making the right strategic decisions, about why, what and where we invest transport infrastructure.

Urban design is about protecting and improving the quality of life of communities—their liveability and attractiveness for investment—in terms of physical connections, healthy active transport options, access to facilities, noise minimisation, views, safety and security and sense of place.

Good urban design is about achieving memorable, not mediocre, infrastructure that serves a purpose to communities, regions, states and Australia.

Finally, good urban design impacts how people interact with the built environment, right through to the fine detail of how our cities work and what they look like.

#### WHY THE CENTRE FOR URBAN DESIGN AND ITS TEAM MATTERS TO GOOD BUILT ENVIRONMENT OUTCOMES.

The Centre's mission in improving and delivering better urban design outcomes is not only critical to creating better public domain spaces, but also for streamlining coordinated design processes. The team's high level of expertise is drawn from their experience in being involved on numerous projects in both urban and rural NSW areas over 20 years.

Transport infrastructure is currently being designed for a lifespan of 100-120 years. With such a long lifespan, the quality of design is paramount to liveable cities, where people will use, drive along and look at it for a century.

If infrastructure is put in the wrong place or done poorly – we have to live with it for a very long time. Without urban design input, we can end up with outcomes like the M2.

The poor-quality outcomes from the M2 and the reputational damage it did to the then RTA, drove the government to ask how it could be done better. This led to the development of “Beyond the Pavement” and what it represents. Transport infrastructure is not just about getting from A to B, it's about creating a quality public realm.



*M2/Cumberland Highway intersection – Source Google earth*

## WHAT LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS BRING TO THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Landscape architects, with their understanding of the landscape in which we all live and their broad design skills, are key players in the urban design process. They have a long history of working with engineers, from the work of Peter Spooner (Sydney Newcastle Freeway) and Bruce McKenzie (Great Western Highway) in the 20th Century to the work of many landscape architecture practices this century on the vast program of work underway. They have played an invaluable role in making better projects, which is often taken for granted - such is the way of much good unassuming landscape architecture.

Landscape architects and urban designers have been working co-operatively with the staff from what is now the Centre for Urban Design for over two decades. AILA's members have been:

- Providing strategic advice on how to best manage and fit roads into sensitive environments
- Connecting people and communities through better road design and effective pedestrian environments and linking cycle connections
- Undertaking visual impact assessments to better fit infrastructure into our landscape
- Collaborating with engineers on clever solutions for structures to make them not just functional, but attractive for their 100 year design life
- Co-operatively working the Centre for Urban Design on specialist design guidelines such as bridge aesthetics, shotcrete guidelines and others
- Designing transport infrastructure so they are also good places for people and not just cars.



*Newcastle Light Rail*

Good urban design is seamless, and designed for liveability, place and quality.

We show a set of images on the next page that illustrated great urban design led and generated outcomes.



Good urban design led outcomes: Clockwise from the top:  
Banora Point cutting, Cowpasture Road, Iron Cove Bridge, Hunter expressway, Lizard tree bridge – Hume Highway

## ABOUT AILA

The Australian Institute of Landscape Architects (AILA) is the peak national body for the Landscape Architecture. AILA champions quality design for public open spaces, stronger communities, and greater environmental stewardship. We provide our members with training, recognition and a community of practice, to share knowledge, ideas and action. With our members, we anticipate and develop leading positions on issues of concern in landscape architecture. Alongside government and allied professions, we work to improve the design and planning of the natural and built environment.

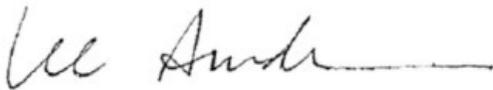
In operation since 1966, AILA represents over 3,500 landscape architects and promotes excellence in planning, design and management for life outdoors. Committed to designing and creating better spaces in Australia, landscape architects have the skills and expertise to improve the nation's liveability through a unique approach to planning issues via innovative integrated solutions. In doing so, landscape architects contribute towards better environmental, social and economic outcomes for all Australians.

## SUMMARY

In summary, to be a world-class liveable city and state, New South Wales, it is important for Transport for NSW to have a high-profile Centre for Urban Design.

Feel free to contact me if you would like further clarification on this matter.

Yours faithfully,



Lee Andrews  
**President of AILA NSW**

LEAD AUTHOR: AILA: Martin O'Dea, AILA

CC by email to:

Gladys Berejiklian - Premier of NSW

Rob Stokes - Minister for Planning and Public Spaces

Paul Toole - Minister for Regional Transport and Roads

Abbie Galvin – Government Architect NSW

Ben Stockwin – CEO AILA

## References

[1] NSW Government. 2018. Future Transport Strategy 2056.

[https://future.transport.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/media/documents/2018/Future\\_Transport\\_2056\\_Strategy.pdf](https://future.transport.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/media/documents/2018/Future_Transport_2056_Strategy.pdf)

[2] Transport for NSW. 2020. Beyond the Pavement 2020. Urban design approach and procedures for road and maritime planning design and construction. Centre for Urban design. <https://www.rms.nsw.gov.au/business-industry/partners-suppliers/documents/centre-for-urban-design/beyond-pavement.pdf>