Submission to the Walkable NSW Discussion Paper

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"The measure of a successful community is not how quickly people can drive through it, but how easily people can participate in everyday life."

Executive Summary

The Greater Western Sydney Advocacy Network (GWSAN) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the **Walkable NSW Discussion Paper**.

We strongly support the NSW Government's recognition that walking should become a central part of how we plan, design and invest in our cities and communities. Walking delivers significant benefits for public health, environmental sustainability, economic productivity and community wellbeing.

However, we believe the discussion paper presents an opportunity to take an even broader view.

Walking is often described as a mode of transport.

We believe it is much more than that.

Walking is the infrastructure that connects people to opportunity.

Every journey begins and ends on foot. Whether travelling by train, bus, bicycle or private vehicle, walking provides the connection between people and the places that shape everyday life. It determines whether children can safely reach school, whether older people remain independent, whether workers can access employment, whether local businesses attract customers and whether communities remain healthy, resilient and socially connected.

For this reason, walkability should not be viewed solely through the lens of transport.

It should be recognised as a fundamental component of social equity, economic participation and community wellbeing.

This is particularly important for Greater Western Sydney.

As Australia's fastest growing metropolitan region, Greater Western Sydney continues to accommodate significant housing growth while also experiencing some of the State's greatest transport and infrastructure challenges.

Residents consistently describe disconnected footpaths, unsafe crossings, limited shade, poor access to public transport and neighbourhoods where driving has become the only practical option for many everyday trips.

These are not simply transport issues.

They are barriers to opportunity.

The Walkable NSW Strategy provides an opportunity to address these barriers by placing people, not vehicles, at the centre of planning and investment decisions.

GWSAN recommends that the final Strategy be guided by five key principles:

- Walking is access to opportunity.
- Communities should be planned around complete journeys rather than individual projects.
- Walking infrastructure should be delivered alongside housing and public transport.
- Success should be measured through improved accessibility rather than infrastructure outputs.
- Investment should prioritise equity, climate resilience and long-term community wellbeing.

Walking is one of the simplest forms of movement.

Its contribution to society, however, is profound.

Key Recommendations

GWSAN recommends that the NSW Government:

1. Recognise walking as essential social and economic infrastructure.

The Walking Strategy should move beyond increasing walking participation and instead focus on improving access to education, employment, healthcare, public transport and community life.

2. Establish a NSW Missing Links Program.

Prioritise the completion of disconnected walking and cycling networks that prevent people from safely completing everyday journeys.

3. Integrate walking with housing, transport and land use planning.

Walking infrastructure should be delivered as essential enabling infrastructure rather than being added after development occurs.

4. Improve first and last kilometre connections.

Investment in public transport should always include high-quality walking access to stations, bus stops and surrounding destinations.

5. Develop Walkability Scorecards.

Measure success through improved access to opportunity rather than kilometres of infrastructure delivered.

Responding to the Walkable NSW Discussion Paper

GWSAN welcomes the discussion paper's recognition that walking supports healthier communities, reduces congestion, improves environmental outcomes and contributes to stronger local economies.

We particularly support the paper's acknowledgement that walking should become an increasingly important part of everyday travel as New South Wales grows.

However, we believe the Strategy can become even stronger by reframing its central purpose.

Much of the discussion paper approaches walking primarily as a transport mode.

While this perspective is important, it does not fully capture why walkability matters.

People rarely walk for the sake of walking.

They walk because they are trying to reach something that matters.

- A school.
- A workplace.
- A train station.
- A café.
- A local shop.
- A friend's home.
- A doctor's appointment.
- A park.

Walking therefore enables participation.

This distinction is important because it changes how success should be measured.

Rather than asking:

"How many people are walking?"

The Strategy should also ask:

"Can people reach the opportunities that shape everyday life?"

This subtle shift has significant implications for planning and investment.

A neighbourhood with extensive footpaths may still perform poorly if those paths fail to connect residents to schools, public transport or community facilities.

Likewise, a relatively modest investment that completes a missing pedestrian connection may dramatically improve accessibility even though very little additional infrastructure has been constructed.

The Strategy should therefore prioritise access over infrastructure quantity.

Key Insight

Walking is not an end in itself.

Walking is the connection between people and opportunity.

Greater Western Sydney

The Walkability Test Case

Greater Western Sydney presents one of the greatest opportunities to demonstrate the success of the Walkable NSW Strategy.

Home to more than 2.7 million residents and accommodating a significant proportion of New South Wales' future housing growth, the region is increasingly central to the State's economic future.

At the same time, Greater Western Sydney continues to experience structural challenges that limit walkability.

Large distances between destinations.

Low-density urban form.

Historic investment patterns that prioritised roads.

Extreme summer temperatures.

Fragmented walking networks.

Limited tree canopy.

Rapid residential growth.

While considerable investment has been made in major transport infrastructure, many communities continue to experience poor pedestrian connectivity between homes, public transport, schools, parks and local centres.

These experiences demonstrate that successful walking environments cannot be created solely through major infrastructure projects.

They require attention to the everyday details that determine whether walking feels safe, comfortable and convenient.

Greater Western Sydney therefore represents an important test.

If the Walkable NSW Strategy succeeds here, it will provide a model capable of being replicated across the State.

If it does not, many communities will remain dependent upon private vehicles despite continued investment in transport infrastructure.

"The infrastructure is fantastic.

It just doesn't end anywhere."

The Lived Reality of Walkability

One of the strongest messages emerging from GWSAN's community engagement is that walkability is experienced very differently depending on where people live.

For many residents across Greater Western Sydney, walking is not a lifestyle choice. It is a necessity.

Children walk to school.

Young people walk to bus stops and railway stations.

Older residents walk to local shops and healthcare services.

Parents walk with prams to parks and childcare.

Workers walk between transport interchanges and workplaces.

Yet these everyday journeys are often made more difficult than they need to be.

Residents consistently describe environments where walking feels secondary to vehicle movement. Rather than being continuous and intuitive, walking routes are fragmented, indirect and frequently uncomfortable.

The issue is rarely the complete absence of infrastructure.

Instead, it is the accumulation of many small barriers that make walking less attractive, less convenient and, in some cases, less safe.

A missing crossing.

A footpath that suddenly ends.

A station without direct pedestrian access.

A park separated by a four-lane road.

A bus stop without shelter.

A street without shade during summer.

Individually these may appear minor.

Collectively they determine whether people choose to walk or drive.

This distinction is important.

Communities are not asking government to build iconic walking infrastructure.

They are asking government to complete the everyday journeys that matter most.

"The infrastructure is fantastic. It just doesn't end anywhere."

"There are pedestrian paths that literally lead to nowhere."

"Connect our parks, cafés, schools and stations."

"Walking shouldn't stop where the engineering contract ends."

The Nature of the Problem

The discussion paper rightly identifies walking as an important part of the transport system.

However, the challenges limiting walkability are not simply transport challenges.

They are structural planning challenges.

Across Greater Western Sydney, walking outcomes are influenced by decisions relating to housing, transport, land use, public health, infrastructure sequencing and urban design.

Improving walkability therefore requires coordinated action across government rather than isolated infrastructure projects.

Through GWSAN's engagement, five structural issues consistently emerge.

1. Walking is still treated as secondary infrastructure

Roads are rarely delivered after development.

Water, sewer and electricity are never considered optional.

Yet walking infrastructure is frequently delivered progressively, after communities have already become established.

This reinforces long-term dependence on private vehicles and increases the cost of retrofitting infrastructure later.

Walking should instead be recognised as essential enabling infrastructure that is delivered from the outset.

2. Networks are incomplete

Communities rarely experience an absence of infrastructure.

They experience an absence of continuity.

A high-quality shared path has limited value if it ends before reaching schools, stations or town centres.

A railway station remains inaccessible if the final crossing is unsafe.

A park remains disconnected if surrounding streets discourage walking.

The Strategy should therefore prioritise network completion rather than simply expanding network length.

3. Walking is separated from housing growth

Greater Western Sydney continues to accommodate significant residential growth.

Too often, however, housing is occupied before supporting walking infrastructure has been completed.

Residents establish travel patterns based on driving because viable alternatives do not yet exist.

The consequences of this sequencing are long-lasting.

Once car dependence becomes embedded, changing behaviour becomes significantly more difficult.

Walking infrastructure should therefore be delivered as part of the first stage of community development rather than the final stage.

4. Walking is affected by climate

The discussion paper appropriately recognises the importance of comfortable walking environments.

This issue is particularly significant for Western Sydney.

Extreme summer temperatures reduce walking participation and disproportionately affect children, older people and those with chronic health conditions.

Shade is therefore not an aesthetic enhancement.

It is essential walking infrastructure.

Likewise:

- tree canopy
- drinking fountains
- seating
- green corridors
- cool public spaces

should all be recognised as critical components of the walking network.

5. Success is measured incorrectly

Transport agencies traditionally measure infrastructure delivery.

Kilometres of pathways.

Number of crossings.

Funding allocated.

While these measures are useful, they reveal little about whether communities have become genuinely more walkable.

GWSAN recommends that success instead be measured through improved access.

Can residents reach schools safely?

Can older people access healthcare independently?

Can young people reach employment without relying upon a private vehicle?

Can families comfortably walk to parks during summer?

Ultimately, walking exists to improve participation.

That should become the Strategy's principal measure of success.

Key Insight

Walking infrastructure should be measured by the opportunities it creates, not simply the assets it delivers.

Where the Current System Falls Short

The Walkable NSW Discussion Paper presents a strong vision.

The challenge lies in implementation.

Without changes to planning, investment and delivery, many of the barriers experienced by communities will remain.

GWSAN has identified four implementation gaps that should be addressed within the final Strategy.

Gap One

Planning and delivery remain disconnected

Transport planning, land use planning and housing delivery frequently occur through separate processes.

Walking is often considered after major decisions have already been made.

Result

Communities inherit disconnected walking environments that require expensive retrofitting.

Gap Two

Investment favours major projects

Large transport projects receive significant attention and funding.

Smaller walking projects capable of delivering substantial community benefits often struggle to attract equivalent investment.

Result

Communities continue to experience missing links despite significant infrastructure expenditure.

Gap Three

Community knowledge is underutilised

Residents understand the everyday barriers affecting their neighbourhoods.

However, local knowledge is not always systematically incorporated into planning and evaluation.

Approaches such as GWSAN's Observation Sprints demonstrate how lived experience can complement traditional engineering and transport analysis.

Result

Infrastructure is sometimes delivered without fully understanding how people actually move through places.

Gap Four

Walkability is everyone's responsibility—but nobody's priority

Walking influences outcomes across transport, planning, housing, health, environment and local government.

Yet responsibility is fragmented across multiple agencies.

Result

Projects are delivered in isolation rather than as part of a coordinated network.

The final Strategy should establish clearer governance arrangements that encourage integrated planning and shared accountability.

Recommendation One

Establish a NSW Missing Links Program

Issue

Across Greater Western Sydney, communities consistently identify small gaps that prevent complete journeys.

Examples include:

- missing pedestrian crossings
- incomplete footpaths
- disconnected shared paths
- unsafe station access
- inaccessible bus stops.

While individually modest, these barriers significantly reduce walking participation.

Action

The NSW Government should establish a dedicated Missing Links Program that:

- identifies priority gaps across NSW
- partners with councils to deliver projects quickly
- prioritises schools, stations, parks and local centres
- publicly reports on annual progress.

Outcome

A connected walking network that supports complete journeys rather than isolated infrastructure projects.

"Small gaps prevent entire journeys."

Recommendation Two

Integrate Walkability into Housing, Planning and Infrastructure Delivery

Issue

The way communities are planned has a lasting influence on travel behaviour.

Across Greater Western Sydney, residential development has frequently occurred ahead of the infrastructure needed to support walking. New residents often move into neighbourhoods where schools, parks, public transport, shops and community facilities are either incomplete or poorly connected. Footpaths may terminate unexpectedly, crossings are missing, bus services remain limited, and the public realm lacks the comfort and safety needed to encourage walking.

This sequencing creates structural car dependence.

People naturally choose the easiest and most reliable option available. If walking is inconvenient from the day a community is established, driving becomes the default travel choice. Over time, these patterns become embedded, increasing congestion, transport costs and greenhouse emissions while reducing opportunities for everyday physical activity.

The Walkable NSW Strategy should recognise that walkability begins long before the first resident moves into a neighbourhood.

Action

The NSW Government should:

- Require all major precincts and urban renewal projects to prepare a Walkability Assessment alongside transport and infrastructure planning.
- Ensure walking infrastructure is delivered before or at the same time as new housing.
- Embed walkability within strategic planning, precinct planning and infrastructure sequencing.
- Require developers to demonstrate safe walking access to schools, public transport, parks and neighbourhood centres.
- Prioritise complete neighbourhoods where daily needs can be met within a comfortable walk.

Outcome

Communities that are designed around people from the outset rather than requiring expensive retrofitting once development is complete.

Key Insight

The easiest place to create a walkable community is before it is built.

Recommendation Three

Prioritise the First and Last Kilometre

Issue

Walking and public transport should never be considered separately.

Every public transport journey begins and ends on foot.

Yet for many residents, the greatest barrier to using public transport is not the service itself but reaching it safely and comfortably.

Community engagement consistently identifies:

- poor pedestrian access to railway stations
- indirect walking routes
- unsafe crossings
- limited lighting
- insufficient shade
- disconnected bus stops
- poor wayfinding.

Investment in rail and bus infrastructure delivers only part of the journey.

Without high-quality walking environments surrounding stations and interchanges, many people continue to rely on private vehicles.

Action

Transport for NSW should adopt a **First and Last Kilometre Framework** that:

- prioritises walking access within at least one kilometre of major public transport interchanges
- improves pedestrian crossings around stations
- expands shade, seating and lighting
- improves accessibility for people with disability
- integrates secure bicycle parking and end-of-trip facilities
- strengthens connections to schools, hospitals and town centres.

Outcome

Improved access to public transport, reduced car dependence and greater confidence in choosing sustainable travel options.

"Every public transport journey begins and ends on foot."

Recommendation Four

Measure Access to Opportunity

Issue

Traditional transport measures focus on infrastructure outputs.

Kilometres of pathways.

Number of crossings.

Capital expenditure.

While these indicators are important, they provide little insight into whether people's lives have actually improved.

Communities experience walking through access.

Can children walk safely to school?

Can older residents reach healthcare?

Can young people reach employment?

Can families comfortably access parks?

The Strategy should therefore shift from measuring infrastructure delivery to measuring improved opportunity.

Action

Develop an annual **Walkability Scorecard** for every local government area using indicators such as:

- access to public transport
- access to schools
- access to parks
- access to healthcare
- access to supermarkets
- access to community facilities
- pedestrian comfort
- shade coverage
- accessibility
- community satisfaction.

The Scorecards should be publicly reported to encourage transparency and continuous improvement.

Outcome

A stronger evidence base that measures whether investment is genuinely improving access rather than simply increasing infrastructure provision.

Key Insight

The success of walking infrastructure should be measured by the opportunities it creates—not the kilometres it adds.

Recommendation Five

Recognise Walking as Climate, Health and Economic Infrastructure

Issue

Walking delivers benefits far beyond transport.

It contributes to:

- healthier populations
- lower healthcare costs
- improved mental wellbeing
- stronger local businesses
- reduced congestion
- lower household transport costs
- increased social interaction
- improved climate resilience.

Despite these benefits, investment in walking is often assessed only through transport budgets. This undervalues the significant contribution walking makes across multiple government portfolios.

Action

The Walkable NSW Strategy should formally recognise walking as:

- transport infrastructure
- preventative health infrastructure
- climate adaptation infrastructure
- economic infrastructure
- social infrastructure.

Future investment should prioritise:

- tree canopy
- shaded streets
- drinking fountains
- seating
- public toilets
- green corridors
- accessible public spaces
- safer crossings.

These elements should be considered essential components of every walking project rather than discretionary enhancements.

Outcome

Communities that remain healthy, resilient and economically productive while encouraging walking as the easiest everyday travel choice.

"Comfort is infrastructure."

Delivering the Strategy

The Walkable NSW Strategy should establish a clear implementation framework supported by measurable objectives, dedicated funding and strong partnerships.

GWSAN recommends six implementation priorities.

1. Complete Networks	Prioritise connectivity over isolated projects.
2. Invest Where Need Is Greatest	Direct funding towards rapidly growing communities and areas experiencing the greatest walkability gaps.
3. Strengthen Local Government Partnerships	Provide councils with long-term funding certainty, technical support and consistent design guidance.
4. Embed Walking Across Government	Integrate transport, planning, housing, health and climate policy.
5. Improve Evidence	Combine transport data with lived experience through Observation Sprints and community engagement.
6. Report Progress Publicly	Publish annual Walkability Scorecards demonstrating improvements in access, connectivity and participation.

Conclusion

The Walkable NSW Discussion Paper presents an important opportunity to rethink the role of walking within New South Wales.

For GWSAN, the central question is not:

"How do we encourage more people to walk?"

It is:

"How do we create communities where walking is the easiest way to participate in everyday life?"

This shift in perspective is fundamental.

Walking is not simply a transport mode.

It is the foundation upon which access to opportunity is built.

It determines whether people can reach education, employment, healthcare, public transport, local businesses and community life.

As Greater Western Sydney continues to grow, decisions made today will shape travel behaviour for generations.

Communities planned around connected walking networks will be healthier, more productive and more resilient.

Communities planned around vehicle dependence will face increasing congestion, poorer health outcomes and reduced access to opportunity.

The Walkable NSW Strategy has the opportunity to establish a new benchmark for integrated planning by recognising that walkability is essential infrastructure.

GWSAN encourages the NSW Government to adopt a Strategy that places people at the centre of planning, measures success through improved access to opportunity and delivers complete, connected and climate-resilient walking environments across New South Wales.

Walking is not about transport.

Walking is about opportunity.

Communities that walk well, live well.

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Creating fairer, healthier and more connected communities through evidence-based advocacy.