# THE INFRASTRUCTURE GOVERNANCE INCUBATOR

## FINAL REPORT

### 2024 FEBRUARY

THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

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# FIGURES AND TABLES

# COMMON ABBREVIATIONS AND TERMS

| | |
|---|---|
| **Capex** | Capital expenditure |
| **DCP** | Development Control Plan |
| **DPC** | Department of Premier and Cabinet |
| **DPE** | Department of Planning and Environment |
| **DPIE** | Department of Planning, Industry and Environment |
| **GCC** | Greater Cities Commission |
| **GSC** | Greater Sydney Commission |
| **GPOP** | Greater Parramatta and Olympic Peninsula |
| **LALC** | Local Aboriginal Land Council |
| **LGA** | Local Government Area |
| **LEP** | Local Environmental Plan |
| **NSW** | New South Wales |
| **Opex** | Operational expenditure |
| **PIC** | Place-based Infrastructure Compact (prev. GIC, or Growth Infrastructure Compact) |
| **PPO** | Planning Partnership Office |
| **SEPP** | State Environmental Planning Policy |
| **TfNSW** | Transport for NSW (also commonly referred to as 'Transport') |
| **Vic** | Victoria |
| **WPC** | Western Parkland City |
| **WPCA** | Western Parkland City Authority |

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## Further information

If you would like further information on this research or the Infrastructure Incubator Project, please contact Tooran Alizadeh at tooran.alizadeh@sydney.edu.au or Rebecca Clements at rebecca.clements@sydney.edu.au

## More information on the Infrastructure Governance Incubator project

sydney.edu.au/henry-halloran-trust/research-grants-and-programs/infrastructure-governance-incubator.html

**Composite cover image sources:** Draft Recognise Country Guidelines[1]/Western Parkland City website[2]/Delivering the Western Parkland City report[3]/St Marys metro station website[4]/Google Maps[5]

The University of Sydney

**The Henry Halloran Trust**

The Henry Halloran Research Trust at the University of Sydney

**PIA** Planning Institute Australia

Planning Institute of Australia (PIA), NSW & Victoria branches

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1  NSW Government. (2023). Western Sydney Aerotropolis Development Control Plan Phase 2. Retrieved from https://www.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/western-sydney-aerotropolis-DCP

2  NSW Government. The Western Parkland City. https://wpca.sydney/about/the-western-parkland-city (n.d.)

3  NSW Government. Delivering the Western Parkland City. (2019)

4  NSW Government. St Marys metro station. https://www.sydneymetro.info/station/st-marys-metro-station (n.d.)

5  Google Maps satellite image: Western Parkland City

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Key points: Governance of infrastructure planning and delivery**
– This project involved a **cross-sectoral view of infrastructure** to understand lessons beyond infrastructural siloes/distinct infrastructure sectors (such as transport, water, etc.).
– There is wide agreement that **governance is one of the most critical aspects of urban and regional infrastructure and planning** that is still comparatively under-developed and in need of significant research and policy reform, as well as open and transparent public discussion.
– Governance is highly complex and understood in diverse ways. There is growing recognition that we need to **move beyond narrow conceptions of governance** (such as top-down, government-centred, or siloed institutional perspectives) **towards wider conceptions encompassing the integrity of whole governance systems and emerging collaborative governance** approaches (accounting for all government and non-government actors including 'the absentee actors' – the ones sidelined or silenced in the decision making processes despite their rightful claims and connections).
– Many of the case study findings relate to **broader systemic issues in NSW infrastructure planning** that greatly impact and constrain place project possibilities.

**Key points: Planning on unceded Aboriginal land**
– Many **positive steps** have been taken so far, however there are still **major structural and procedural governance gaps** around First Nation voices in decision making, resourcing and capacity, and building respectful foundations, such as the colonial naming of Bradfield.
– Aboriginal voices should be **meaningfully empowered** in place governance beyond advisory roles.
– Governments should **improve their capacities for long-term relationship building** with Aboriginal custodians, groups, and organisations, and undertake **practices of truth-telling and deep listening** (with a focus on learning to listen and interrogating their capacity to hear what is being said).
– We champion existing calls for moves towards greater plurality in planning and infrastructure governance; specifically, **embracing coexisting systems of authority** – of First Nations governance and non-Indigenous governance systems – to foster planning systems founded in mutually respectful coexistence.

**Key points: Collaborative governance & integration**
– The City Deal approach represented **a largely welcome step forward** in experimenting with more collaborative cross-government, but its impact is highly **limited by key shortfalls** such as its short-term, project-based funding.
– Many **evolving structures, forums, and practices** have improved integration between government scales.
– While the City Deal focused on improved inter-government collaboration, there is a **significant gap regarding governance involvement of non-government actors/stakeholders** such as community organisations and groups.
– Beyond the Western Parkland City project boundaries, there is a need for **broader planning and infrastructure system transformations** (e.g., local funding capacities).
– Given the significant political risks of project failure, **systematisation of key governance changes** (such as local government funding reform) could help embed important governance/planning transformations beyond the project scale.

## Key points: Social legitimacy and capacity to address societal end goals

- There are **significant concerns around current capacities for implementation** of high-level goals without broader system changes and political leadership.
- **PICs, staging and sequencing, and joined-up investment priority** across sectors are seen as critical to effective place planning approaches but attention is needed to dealing with their major challenges (e.g., lack of political commitment, funding sources).
- **Chronic local government funding issues** are a major barrier to delivering vital social infrastructure.
- It is widely felt that the social legitimacy of the project requires **meaningfully involving local and community-based organisations in key decision-making spaces** much more than is currently performed.

## Key points: Governance accountability & transparency

- Given the deep legacies of mistrust throughout NSW planning, there is a need for **explicit policy and advocacy attention to embedding greater accountability and transparency** within NSW governance structures and procedures.
- Embedding **independent oversight roles**, especially place-based roles, matched with effective mechanisms for influence is critical.
- It is important to **clarify governance responsibilities** for ongoing visioning, stewardship, & oversight.
- Some participants raised various **transparency concerns about evidenced justifications** for wider strategic planning choices (e.g. the Three Cities region plan, or the choice for a new city vs. upgrading existing centres), **impacting the social legitimacy of the project** among key actors and agencies and their commitment to collaboration
- There is substantial appetite for **more transparent government publication** of key reports, reviews, business cases, etc.

## Key points: Political influence in infrastructure planning

- The various challenges revealed beg important questions about **how to better bring major political decisions in line with planning evidence, principles, and strategie**s. A further challenge is how to do this **without depoliticising planning practices and processes** to the detriment of achieving public good outcomes or making planning so technocratic that is loses sight of the inherently political nature of planning cities.
- There is a need for **systematisation of many critical project planning approaches** that protect public interests (e.g., early land acquisition timing) to mitigate the potential for major project failures at outset.
- Attention is needed to **evidence/accountability gaps** in high-level political decision-making (e.g., ministerial decision-making), particularly regarding the evidence-basis of major decisions that can upend strategic/democratic processes.
- There's need to **foster open debate on critical 'hard truths'** (e.g., growth scenarios, housing affordability, and funding capacities such as taxes) but questions remain over political willingness to drive this.

# PREFACE: ABOUT THE RESEARCH PROJECT

## Project background

The Infrastructure Governance Incubator was a multidisciplinary collaborative research project across three universities, funded by the Henry Halloran Research Trust across three years (October 2020 to October 2023). The research team was comprised of Associate Professors Tooran Alizadeh (project lead), Glen Searle and Dallas Rogers, and Postdoctoral Researcher Dr Rebecca Clements at the University of Sydney, Associate Professor Crystal Legacy at the University of Melbourne, and Associate Professor Liton Kamruzzaman at Monash University.

Through this project, our research aimed to investigate the planning and delivery of urban infrastructure in Australian cities, identify strengths and gaps in current practices, and assist in developing infrastructure governance approaches that minimise the incongruity between infrastructure planning and delivery enabling just and sustainable shaping of cities. This involved a focus on the planning, funding, and social legitimacy of infrastructure, acknowledging contexts of multiple crises, and the decolonisation of infrastructure governance, including attention to First Nations voices in planning.

## Project partners and advisory board

The Incubator project had a formal partnership with the Planning Institute of Australia's NSW and Victorian branches, and also formed an advisory board comprised of representatives from diverse planning and infrastructure organisations in NSW and Victoria. Across the three-year life of this research project, some board members changed as people shifted organisations and new representatives came on board, but we are grateful to everyone that took part in and gave their support to the project, including:

– Eamon Waterford (Committee for Sydney/ Department of Enterprise, Investment and Trade),
– Ehssan Veiszadeh (Committee for Sydney),
– Elle Davidson (University of Sydney),
– Gabby McMillan (Planning Institute of Australia Vic),
– Gareth Hately (Planning Institute of Australia Vic),
– Graham Currie (Monash University),
– Joanna Kubota (Western Parkland Councils/The Parks),
– John Brockhoff (Planning Institute of Australia NSW),

– Jonathan Spear (Infrastructure Victoria),
– Kieron Hendicott (Infrastructure NSW/ Department of Regional NSW),
– Kirstie Allen (Department of Planning, Industry and Environment/Gyde consulting),
– Norma Shankie-Williams (Willoughby City Council),
– Rae Dufty-Jones (University of Western Sydney),
– Roberta Ryan (University of Newcastle/ Department of Planning and Environment),
– Sarah Hill (Western Parkland City Authority),
– Suresh Cuganesan (University of Sydney),
– Tim Mileham (Victorian Planning Authority).

While the Incubator's research remained independent, the advisory board were instrumental in helping to inform and support the project, including participating in planning workshops for the original project proposal, advocating for and supporting the project, offering suggestions for potential case studies, research focuses and approaches, assisting with stakeholder connections, relationship building and developing new collaborations, and in many cases participating in the research sharing their knowledge as stakeholders or guest speakers in public talks and podcasts.

## Research approach

The Incubator's core research approach involved a systematic review of infrastructure governance literature and an in-depth case study of the Western Parklands City in Western Sydney.

At the outset of the project in late 2020 and early 2021, an initial literature review was undertaken to understand some of the key challenges identified in infrastructure governance research and relationships to crisis. This formed a preliminary research agenda used to further shape the aims and methods of the research, published in a paper available here: https://doi.org/10.1080/08111146.2022.2040980

Following from this, a systematic review of a wider body of infrastructure governance literature was undertaken to develop an empirical cross-sectoral understanding of current research knowledge gaps. This systematic review

thematically analysed 384 academic papers using NVivo software and provided an evidence base for determining the research focus areas of the case study. More detail on the systematic literature review is available here in the published academic paper and the Incubator's background report:

– *Infrastructure Governance Incubator Background Paper (2021)*: sydney.edu.au/henry-halloran-trust/research-grants-and-programs/infrastructure-governance-incubator/research-outputs.html

– *A Systematic Literature Review of Infrastructure Governance: Cross-sectoral Lessons for Transformative Governance Approaches (2022)*: https://doi.org/10.1177/08854122221112317

The Incubator's major case study research represented its core activity across the project's three years. The Western Sydney Parklands in Western Sydney, NSW, was selected as the case study site in close consultation with the Incubator's advisory board, who assisted with compiling a shortlist of candidates and offering thoughts into the most compelling projects for further research. The Western Sydney Parklands were selected for a range of reasons, including the scale of the project ambitions and challenges and novel governance approaches being deployed, such as the Western Sydney City Deal and Place Infrastructure Compacts (PICs).

The research methods primarily involved undertaking 56 semi-structured stakeholder interviews (53 distinct participants and three follow-up interviews), most from 2021 to late 2022, with one in 2023. Interviews were complemented with desktop policy document and media analysis. Interview participants were initially identified through existing project contacts then through snowball sampling. They included diverse stakeholders from local, state, and federal government authorities, infrastructure and planning organisations, consultants, academics, community infrastructure and service organisations, community advocates, politicians, and First Nation representatives from major government authorities, Local Aboriginal Land Councils, and Traditional Custodian groups. Participants' professional roles were also diverse, including existing and former C-level executives, senior directors and managers, planning commissioners, consultants, local government officers, and many others (seen in Figure 1).

Interviews were premised on protecting participant anonymity through mindful reporting; an important aspect of this research which facilitated many interviewees (typically those with ongoing roles) to disclose personal or professional opinions they might not have otherwise shared. For this reason, no identifying information will be made available about participants. The Interview questions aimed at understanding the strengths and challenges of the planning and delivery of the WPC, semi-structured around the themes identified through the original literature reviews (such as planning, funding, social legitimacy, and decolonisation), and tailored for each participant's role/experience. Further themes emerged inductively through analysis of responses, such as the importance of diverse forms of accountability and attention to the political dimensions of the project.

# Interviewee categories

**Federal/state/local government participants:**
(Current and former)
- Top C-level executives
- Commissioners
- Department heads, directors, general managers
- Senior staff in infrastructure & planning
- Politicians

**First Nations participants:**
- Within government positions
- Local Aboriginal Land Council (LALC) representatives
- Other participants who work closely with local Traditional Custodians
- Traditional Custodians

**Other relevant stakeholders:**
- Infrastructure/planning consultants
- Land-owner representatives
- Western Sydney community/issue advocates
- Planning/infrastructure academics

# Interviewee sector
## 53 participants

- Local government* 19%
- NGO / consultant / community org 13%
- Academic 13%
- Federal government 4%
- State government 51%
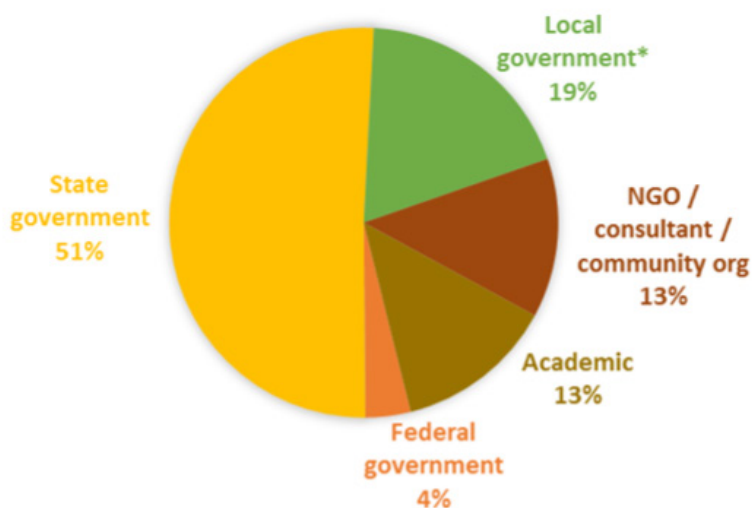
*\* Category includes regional-scale LALC interviewees*

**Figure 1** Interviewee role types and the proportion of major sectors represented.

## Limitations

The report findings must be viewed with a level of caution regarding several research limitations. Firstly, the primary data source for the case study was stakeholder interviews, and efforts were made to validate key claims through the complementary policy and media analysis where possible with publicly available information or triangulated data. However, in many cases further validation was not possible, particularly regarding unpublished documents or reporting of internal organisational matters or personal experiences.

Secondly, the primary case study in this research, the Western Parkland City project, is still in early stages and continuing to evolve in complex ways, particularly given the breadth of political actors and factors involved and the long-intended development horizon. The Incubator's data collection and analysis took place across only two to three years, and many major governance changes occurred after the 2023 NSW state government election.

Lastly, the scope of the Incubator's research was broad, seeking insights into major governance challenges and successes across planning and infrastructure sectors, governance tiers, and covering a wide range of topics. As the intention was to learn primarily from existing stakeholder experiences and insights, including their own framings of problems, solutions, and contexts, this research is not intended to be a comprehensive examination of any given factor, but rather to gain insights into some of the most important areas for further research and policy work.

## Structure of the final report

The report begins with an executive summary, and several preliminary sections outlining the context of the Incubator research project. Following this is a brief description of the major case study, the Western Parklands City project. The core of this report is comprised of several main chapters that each deal with one of the major areas of findings:

- Chapter 1: Planning on unceded Aboriginal land
- Chapter 2: Collaborative governance and integration
- Chapter 3: Governance accountability and transparency
- Chapter 4: Political influence in infrastructure governance
- Chapter 5: Social legitimacy and capacities to deliver on societal end goals

The final section shares further Incubator research projects and outputs such as scholarly papers[123], media pieces, and podcasts.



Figure 2 Artist's impression of the new footbridge at St Marys Station, subject to detailed design. Source: www.transport.nsw.gov.au

1  Tooran Alizadeh et al., "Infrastructure Governance in Times of Crises: A Research Agenda for Australian Cities," *Urban Policy and Research* 40, no. 1 (2022/01/02 2022), https://doi.org/10.1080/08111146.2022.2040980, https://doi.org/10.1080/08111146.2022.2040980.
2  Rebecca Clements et al., "A Systematic Literature Review of Infrastructure Governance: Cross-sectoral Lessons for Transformative Governance Approaches," *Journal of Planning Literature* 38, no. 1 (2023), https://doi.org/10.1177/08854122221112317, https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/08854122221112317.
3  Rebecca Clements, Glen Searle, and Tooran Alizadeh, "Epistemic silences in settler-colonial infrastructure governance literature," *Geographical Research* 1, no. 15 (2023), https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-5871.12601, https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/1745-5871.12601.

# CASE STUDY CONTEXT

The Western Parkland City (WPC) is a major development project in outer Western Sydney premised on a restructuring the metropolis to spatially 'rebalance' employment, industry, and transport in Greater Sydney towards the west.

The WPC project is centred on the greenfield development of an 11,200ha growth area called the 'Aerotropolis' involving a new Western Sydney airport and an adjacent new city centre (currently named Bradfield) focused on advanced manufacturing, training, and agribusiness, among other industries. This urban centre was originally conceived as the 'third city' of the 2018 'Metropolis of Three Cities' Greater Sydney plan[4], which was revised in 2022 as a broader regional 'Six Cities' vision[5]. The WPC is also premised on generating regional growth amongst the adjacent established suburban centres within Western Sydney. The Aerotropolis and its surrounds are on Dharug, Dharawal and Gundungurra Country.

The governance and investment for the WPC was catalysed through a City Deal agreement signed in March 2018 (adapted from City Deal models in the UK) involving three government tiers; federal, state, and eight local councils (Penrith, Fairfield, Liverpool, Camden, Campbelltown, Wollondilly, Blue Mountains, and Hawksbury). The Western Sydney City Deal involves various funding/co-funding packages over 20 years to deliver on 38 original commitments which include overarching planning goals such as a 30-minute city and major infrastructure projects such as a new north–south 'Airport Link' rail line, rapid bus services, smart digital technology such as 5G connectivity, and a housing package. Other novel governance approaches include a Planning Partnership Office (PPO) involving local and state governments developing planning frameworks, and the use of Place-based Infrastructure Compacts (PICs), a strategic planning model intended to align planning for growth, infrastructure, and services at a place level.

The planning and implementation of the WPC involves a wide range of key government authorities. At the time of the Incubator's research, the Greater Sydney Commission (GSC, later renamed the GCC or Greater Cities Commission) and Western Parkland City Authority (WPCA) were key authorities overseeing the planning and delivery of the WPC – both of which were dissolved after the mid-2023 state government election. Other key government agencies include the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment and other government infrastructure agencies (e.g., Transport for NSW) at the state level, the eight local governments involved in the City Deal, and other new organisations such as the Planning Partnership Office and the Western Parkland Councils/The Parks, among others. The project also encompasses lands and jurisdiction of several Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALCs).
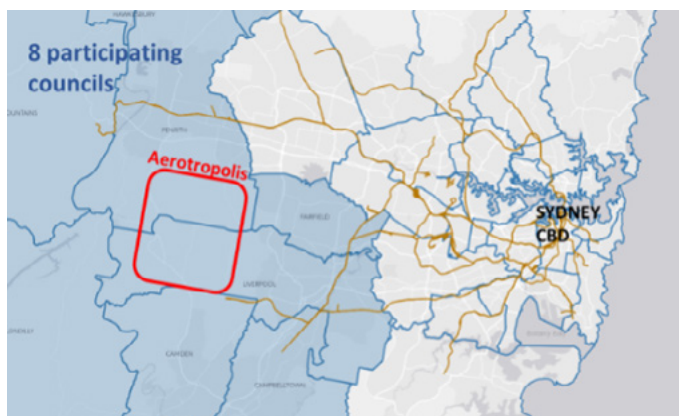


**Figure 3** A map showing the approximate location of the Aerotropolis (red) and the jurisdiction of the eight local councils engaged in the City Deal (blue) relative to the existing eastern harbour Sydney CBD and current rail network (brown).
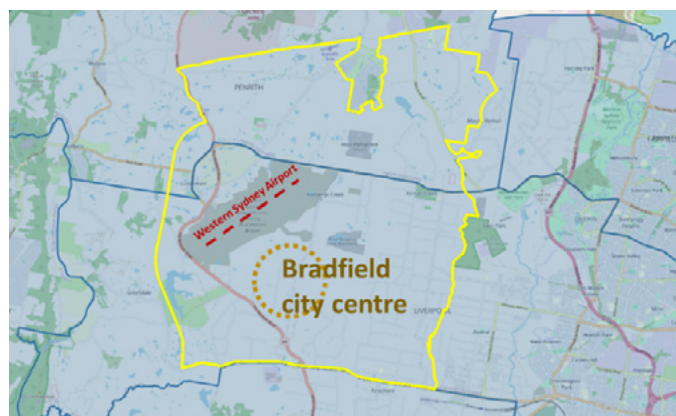


**Figure 4** A map indicating the Aerotropolis greenfield development area (yellow) with the new airport (red) and adjacent city (brown).

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4  Greater Sydney Commission. A metropolis of three cities: the Greater Sydney region plan. (2018).
5  NSW Government. Six Cities vision. https://www.nsw.gov.au/building-our-way-forward/what-were-building/six-cities-vision (n.d.)

The WPC was selected as an informative case study due to:

– Its use of several novel governance approaches (e.g., City Deal and Place Infrastructure Compacts)
– Taking place on unceded Aboriginal Country, with Western Sydney having the largest urban Aboriginal population in the country
– Being premised on spatial/equitable rebalancing of the metropolitan region and redirecting growth/jobs
– The major environmental challenges of greenfield development in a place highly vulnerable to climate change impacts such as heatwaves



**Figure 5** An artist impression of the Western Parkland City's new urban development[6].



**Figure 6** The Nepean River in Western Sydney. Source: Western Parkland City Authority website

6  NSW Government. The Western Parkland City. https://wpca.sydney/about/the-western-parkland-city (n.d.)

# CHAPTER 1: PLANNING ON UNCEDED ABORIGINAL LAND

**Key points**

- There have been some positive steps towards supporting Indigenous voices throughout the project, including the award-winning Recognise Country guidelines, Indigenous-led design projects, and new Indigenous roles within some key government authorities to support engagement efforts.
- This is starkly contrasted with the disrespectful "Bradfield" naming, seen universally by participants as a shameful decision.
- While participants indicated growing organisational support, they also expressed frustrations with frequent under-resourcing for important and complex engagement and relationship building work attempting to bring diverse Aboriginal communities into processes such as committees.
- This work is immensely complex, and entangled with settler-colonial legacies which produce trauma and conflict, including through poorly designed legislative land rights frameworks.
- The significant scale of this complex relational work is frequently in tension with the tight timelines imposed by current planning project norms, and the orientation towards "informing" rather than "listening to (and acting upon)" or "empowering" Aboriginal groups (e.g. Traditional Custodians).
- Typically voluntary, poorly resourced, and over-burdened, Aboriginal groups (e.g. Dharug land management groups, LALCs) have to work so much harder to compensate for confusing or unintegrated governance, lack of stability in constantly changing relationships.
- The importance of governments learning to listen was emphasised, requiring the capacity/openness to hearing what is being said even when uncomfortable or inconvenient, and procedural/political capacities for reflecting, changing and responding. In reality, Aboriginal groups are typically brought on late in processes after decisions are made.

- Many participants expressed desires to build towards empowering Aboriginal voices in meaningful positions of decision-making influence, however there were instances of government reluctance to even support "advisory" roles for First Nation committees.
- "Listening" also means "listening to Country", and so part of earning trust with Custodians and demonstrating commitment to relationship building is inherently embedded in the commitment to sustainability, protecting Country, etc.
- Commitment to developing cross-cultural understandings and approaches is highlighted as a key approach to establishing respectful relationships on equitable foundations.
- Land ownership is a critical and material way to facilitate building Aboriginal power and sovereignty in infrastructure planning and delivery. A range of current barriers to effective land ownership and management need to be addressed.
- Attention is needed to the many fundamental issues with several key NSW legislative frameworks that represent enormous, widespread barriers to meaningful Indigenous involvement in place planning and also reproduce legacies of displacement and division.
- We champion existing calls for moves towards greater plurality in planning and infrastructure governance; specifically, embracing coexisting systems of authority – of First Nations governance and non-Indigenous governance systems – to foster planning systems founded in mutually respectful coexistence.

## Positive steps to improving First Nations voices in the WPC

There have been some positive steps towards supporting Indigenous voices throughout the project, including the award-winning Recognise Country guidelines[7], Indigenous-led design projects, Indigenous procurement practices, new Indigenous roles within some key government authorities to support engagement efforts, and Indigenous reference panels such as the Koori Perspectives Circle.

Many Aboriginal interviewees spoke about making the most of new opportunities and spaces, regardless of limitations, to make differences to their communities and Country.

*I really am using my platform here, which was always the plan to elevate my community and the members within my community to make sure that they're getting a fair go and also to just break the cycle in some cases. And even if I can do that, for one person, I've made a difference. (Aboriginal participant)*

*We realised that our Knowledge is a resource, and it's something these people need now, since we have frameworks like Connecting to Country and Working with Country ... So, we've become a resource... So that balance of power has already shifted there. (Aboriginal participant)*

*The great thing is that people within DPIE are beginning to realize how important it is to engage Aboriginal people early in their projects. But it's still a very piecemeal, reactive project by project basis. (Aboriginal participant)*

## Disrespectful Bradfield naming

The positive steps are starkly contrasted with the disrespectful "Bradfield" naming – a name reflecting a historical colonial figure with no place connections. There was a clear consensus among interview participants that this was a shameful decision, out of touch with contemporary place naming approaches and "a devastating mistake, and a lost opportunity", "regretful", "a male, pale, stale example of colonial thinking – really insulting". The naming process itself was called into question. Participants felt that "the original public naming competition lacked any reference to Culture or Aboriginal languages", and that the name "doesn't even meet Liverpool City Council naming policy". There is still great interest in seeing the name changed to re-establish a foundation for respect and place connection.

*It's hard when we're dealing with the name Bradfield. I die a little inside every time I say it. How can I say that we're coming at this the right way, when I can't even say that we can consider changing the name. I don't feel like we're starting on the right foot. (Aboriginal participant)*

*Looking at the Geographical Name Board's own set of criteria about how they pick bloody names, how did that even get through? He has not contributed to Country, he does not contribute to Country, he has no connection to that Country. Never did any significant thing in, on, or around that Country. But we'll just go with it anyway. Because, well, I don't know why... Can we not begin to look at Country and what Country offers, and can't we begin to come up with dual naming that's applicable to place, that honours place, that that encourages balanced power and real equity and real access... When we set things up with a name like that, it just sets the tone for what that place is going to be. And that's really sad. (Aboriginal participant)*

## Under-resourcing of some roles and tensions with the rush of planning

While Aboriginal participants in government roles indicated growing organisational support generally and some indicated strong support from many colleagues and those in higher roles, others also expressed frustrations with frequent under-resourcing for important and complex engagement and relationship building work attempting to bring diverse Aboriginal communities into processes such as committees. Aboriginal participants in governments roles often spoke about the added cultural and time load of being one of the few Aboriginal staff within an organisation and being asked by many colleagues about Aboriginal issues beyond their role's remit.

*I think my bosses have my back ... they shield me a lot from above, which is [great], because I can just do my thing. I don't know about once [they] leave (Aboriginal participant)*

*I was supposed to have [more staff], but the budget, I think, got cut ... (Aboriginal participant)*

*The cultural load is very heavy. Because you get every single person from the organization calling for everything Aboriginal, every bit of advice, or "can we do this?", "what does it mean if we change this?" and plus all the other stuff that I've got to do so... And then because resources are so stretched, and we're so busy, and systems aren't really in place yet ... I do wear a lot of hats (Aboriginal participant)*

In addition to sufficiently resourcing people and groups to undertake challenging planning and relational work, participants emphasised the fundamental tensions in government rushes to make change. For governments to better approach relationship building, interviewees pointed out the need to move away from the 'quick win' mentalities in planning in favour of longer-term outcomes,

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acknowledging that "engagement and co-design, co-working with Aboriginal groups requires time, patience, and a good understanding of what you want to achieve and listening to what others want to achieve".

*Because government has to move faster than community ... things get put on our lap like, "we need this by a month" or "we need this within three months" and that hardly gives us time to gather and collate our community's expectations and feelings and Knowledges. So, when we get back to them and say, "we're not really happy with this" or "how you went about the consultation process for this", it's like, "well, we can't go backwards now, we've already spent this much money because we did it". Well, yeah, there's your problem. (Aboriginal participant). The pace that things are moving is ridiculous... too much, too late... You've kept Aboriginal people out of the planning and design world for 100 years. You've kept them off Country, you've suppressed Culture and messed it all up. And now you're going to Aboriginal people and saying, "We want you to bring Culture and engage with this system that you know nothing about. And make it all look nice and neat. And it's just [sighs] overwhelming ... Aboriginal people also need support to build competency to engage with the planning systems ... the pace of expected change puts overwhelming burden on Aboriginal people to sort all the complex colonial legacies out without adequate support. (Aboriginal participant)*

### Recognising legacies of trauma, mistrust, and exclusion

Participants expressed the immense frustrations of attempting to work with governments in NSW – interactions and barriers that often represent re-traumatisation of already traumatised people.

*You have CONSTANT re-traumatization of people through even the simplest projects ... intergenerational trauma isn't just a legacy of the past. It is a very real and ever-present set of relationships in the simplest elements of the planning and development processes that have transformed the cultural landscapes of Western Sydney and are doing it at an extraordinary pace. (Indigenous organisation representative)*

Typically voluntary, poorly resourced, and over-burdened, Aboriginal groups (e.g. Dharug land management groups or LALCs) have to work so much harder than many others to try and work around or compensate for confusing or unintegrated governance. The lack of stability in constantly changing relationships was frequently noted as not only exacerbating the confusion of government processes and relationships but also represented an institutional memory loss that frequently put any cultural relationship building progress back to square one.

*We've met with people and you get so far with ministers, and they organise meetings ... how can we change that legislation so that we're not having these conversations continuously in the next 10 or 20 years, around Country and equality and access and all those sorts of things ... you do all that work, and then all of a sudden you turn around the minister has been shifted, there's been a reshuffling you're like, "Oh my God, we have to start all over again". (Aboriginal participant)*

*Instability is not ours [Aboriginal groups']. It's the government's. The churn in the public sector is huge. And it makes it very difficult for planning to be consistent. (Aboriginal participant)*

This work is immensely complex, and entangled with settler-colonial legacies which produce trauma and conflict, including through poorly designed legislative land rights frameworks.

Various development and planning processes also led to substantial burdens placed on Indigenous people. For example, when Indigenous Cultural Knowledge is desired through planning system processes, First Nation groups are often suddenly asked to share their Cultural Knowledge, which subsequently becomes the developer or agency's knowledge in ways rendered inaccessible to Aboriginal communities. One interviewee reflected that "rather than sharing power, they take control, which is an old colonial view".

### Systemic issues with overarching legislative frameworks: Authority and land ownership

There are many fundamental issues with several key NSW legislative frameworks that represent enormous barriers to diverse, meaningful Indigenous inclusion in planning and reproduce legacies of displacement and division. The Aboriginal Land Rights Act's designation of exclusive authority to LALCs fails to support inclusion or recognition of Traditional Custodians. In Western Sydney for example, Dharug Traditional Custodians are left with "no legislated voice for Country". While acknowledging "a positive shift in recent times as Dharug people have been engaged more than ever ... and especially much earlier in the process", the cultural and material implications of lacking formal or legislated voice in planning was a central concern.

*The government are thinking they're doing the right thing [engaging with the Land Council]. But in actual fact, they're just further dividing the community. So what I'm trying to do is engage with and think outside the box. (Aboriginal participant)*

*There's an Aboriginal lore... a system that was complex that had its own governance and to regulate. And then there's the Western system, and what we've always done is required the Aboriginal system to come this*

*way, and that's what effectively the Land Rights Act sits. (Aboriginal participant)*

*Since when can White Governments give Cultural authority to anyone? This is what the [Aboriginal Land Right] Act gives to LALCs ... which is a reflection of lack of understanding the difference between Cultural authority versus legislative authority. (Aboriginal participant)*

*The root of the problem is the colonial courts [legislation] and the approaches designed to constrain Aboriginal access to land and rights. (Aboriginal participant)*

Further structural issues come from the extensively documented issues[8] with NSW Aboriginal Cultural Heritage legislation, further reproducing cultural authority issues, and the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act which burdens Aboriginal landholder organisation, already highly resource limited, with onerous management and development requirements[9]. While the Aboriginal Land State Environmental Planning Policy (SEPP) introduced in 2019 to improve planning approval processes was welcomed by interviewees as "a first step in the right direction", it was seen as not addressing the fundamental issues at higher legislative levels. Many felt Aboriginal landholders required a distinct legislative status recognising the context of redressing historical and ongoing dispossession and disadvantage but spoke of meeting resistance to such change.

*One of the Aboriginal leaders talks about the "black box". Government is happy when you stay in the "black box", they're very unhappy when you get out of it. And once you're out of it, you then get treated like everybody else. There is no thought that First Nations people should be advantaged.*

Land ownership is a critical and material way to facilitate building Aboriginal power and sovereignty in infrastructure planning and delivery. Intentional and effective reforms are needed at a system level (beyond individual projects/waivers) to remove these chronic barriers and facilitate effective Indigenous-led land use and development. In NSW, a range of current barriers to effective Indigenous land ownership and management need to be addressed, including:

- Inherent conflicts designed into the current land rights frameworks that exclude Traditional Custodians
- Transfers of degraded land ("environmental liabilities") without sufficient resourcing to heal Country and undertake projects

- The burden of regulatory/planning barriers to the use of land (e.g., biodiversity offset requirements)
- Participants emphasised the need for Aboriginal organisations undertaking development (such as Local Aboriginal Land Councils or Traditional Custodian organisations) to be recognised within legislation, planning processes, and through relationships with government as distinct actors with exceptional circumstances and rights, not as just another development group.

### Empowering First Nations voices and learning to listen

The immense scale of the complex relational work needed to build meaningful relationships and partnerships with Indigenous communities and organisations is frequently in tension with the tight timelines imposed by current planning project norms, and the orientation towards "informing" rather than "listening to (and acting upon)" or "empowering" Aboriginal groups (e.g. Traditional Custodians). There were instances of government reluctance to even support "advisory" roles for First Nation committees. Aboriginal groups are also typically brought on late in processes after decisions are made. Many participants expressed desires to build towards empowering Aboriginal voices in meaningful positions of decision-making influence.

*I'm supporting Aboriginal voices being empowered on these projects ... there's still no authority in the decision-making. So, they don't get to say whether something happens or something doesn't happen. The power always still exists in lies with the government ... although there's been a lot of progress, it still feels a little one way, or within windows, and then someone else always gets to decide what happens with what is heard or not, rather than actually having a space at the decision-making table. (Aboriginal participant)*

*I think there is a real important thing where we need more First Nations representatives in executive roles. (Aboriginal participant)*

*It's really hard because there's so many people making decisions ... I feel like everything is very siloed. My thinking is that it should sit somewhere up with the minister ... or some sort of governance model that would sit across all of the different agencies doing different things that would then provide that conduit and endorsement to the Minister. (Aboriginal participant)*

The importance of governments learning to listen was emphasised. Such listening requires the capacity and openness

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8   Kylie Lingard et al., "Are we there yet? A review of proposed Aboriginal cultural heritage laws in New South Wales, Australia," *International Journal of Cultural Property* 28, no. 1 (2021).

9   Naama Blatman, "Why is it so hard for Local Aboriginal Land Councils to develop land when the public needs are huge?," *The Conversation* (11 July 2023). https://theconversation.com/why-is-it-so-hard-for-local-aboriginal-land-councils-to-develop-land-when-the-public-needs-are-huge-195366.

to hearing what is being said even when uncomfortable or inconvenient, and the procedural and political capacities for reflection, and then changing and responding. Richie Howitt's work[10] on 'deep listening' is an informative resource for considering what meaningful 'listening' might involve. While this is a complex task, some participants suggested relational conditions to project advancement:

*That will only make a difference if the voices are listened to ... I actually think it's quite simple: that you impose relational conditions. So, if you've got a good relationship, your project can proceed. What does a good relationship look like? How do you monitor good relationships? How do you go through that procedure?*

"Listening" was also emphasised as meaning "listening to Country", therefore place planning projects inherently embedding real commitments to sustainable outcomes and protecting Country is itself a part of earning trust with Custodians and demonstrating commitment to relationship building. An interviewee gave the following example of such rushed thinking manifesting in poor, short-term planning for water infrastructure:

*There's this disconnect between what's causing the problem, and how you might produce a different outcome. So, we end up with a proposition that: "Oh well, the thing to do is to drown another 2000 hectares of heritage landscapes by raising the Warragamba Dam wall. And that will free us up more land, more residential development on the floodplain". (Indigenous organisation representative)*

Commitment to developing cross-cultural understandings and approaches was highlighted as a key approach to establishing respectful relationships on equitable foundations. Such approaches included spending time proactively and respectfully building relationships, establishing principle of engagement agreements between groups/organisations, and creating spaces for mutually communicating values and shared interests or conflict resolution.

*It owes a lot to dispute resolution ... you create a space in which those interests can be shared, rather than in conflict. And that's a huge challenge for the dominant culture. Because the dominant culture in those spaces, particularly in relation to land use, planning wants to fall back on its own rules every chance it gets because it's created no structural space for Aboriginal values. There's no Aboriginal values in the legislative schemes. There's no Aboriginal values in the political structures. (Aboriginal participant)*

## Towards co-existing governance systems

Given these findings and the Incubator's broader research on decolonising infrastructure governance[1], we champion the work of existing planning scholars[2] who call for a recognition of plurality in Australian planning approaches; specifically, building space and capacity for coexisting systems of authority – of First Nations governance and non-Indigenous governance systems – to foster planning systems founded in mutually respectful coexistence.

At its heart, this transformation requires negotiations of more equitable, plural power structures and understandings, while at the same time proactively building relational governance capacities to reflect, learn, and reimagine together while acknowledging and accepting the inevitability of sometimes uncomfortable and agonistic politics. Fostering plurality involves unsettling many existing assumptions about prevailing government sovereignty and making space for greater First Nations self-determination. This must be led by and centre First Nation authorities and communities. We hope this research contributes to and supports this broader politics of change.

1 Rebecca Clements, Glen Searle, and Tooran Alizadeh, "Epistemic silences in settler-colonial infrastructure governance literature," *Geographical Research* 1, no. 15 (2023), https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-5871.12601, https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/1745-5871.12601.
2 Libby Porter and Janice Barry, Planning for coexistence?: Recognizing Indigenous rights through land-use planning in Canada and Australia (New York: Routledge, 2016).

## Learning from Indigenous-led infrastructure approaches: Roads To Home

Several participants spoke highly of the Roads To Home project as a local NSW example of successful Indigenous-led infrastructure planning and delivery. James O'Keefe (Department of Planning and Environment) speaks about the project in our 2022 Festival of Urbanism session: https://youtu.be/X9wQsDqXuzo?si=GFVUSQkjupgc9jJs

10 Richard Howitt, "Ethics as first method: Reframing geographies at an (other) ending-of-the-world as co-motion," *Environment and Planning F* (2022).

# CHAPTER 2: COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE AND INTEGRATION

**Key points**

- From what is widely acknowledged to be an existing highly siloed and fractured planning context in NSW, the Western Sydney City Deal is generally seen by most participants to be substantial progress towards improving practices of multiscale government integration, bringing three levels of government to the table in a place-based project.

- There are a range of key shortfalls in the existing City Deal approach, including its focus on funding specific short-term project-based commitments, and that the overall funding committed to-date is likely inadequate for the reality of the major place ambitions.

- The enormous ambition of this project is not matched by existing governance capacity, potentially setting the project up for failure, or greatly diminished place outcomes that don't overcome Sydney's business-as-usual planning approaches.

- This context of funding and resource scarcity exacerbates the existing legacies of competition between authorities/sectors.

- While the City Deal focused on improved inter-government collaboration, there is a significant gap regarding governance involvement of non-government actors/stakeholders such as community organisations and groups, and organisations with key roles in infrastructure delivery such as social housing providers.

- Better cross-agency integration was reportedly hampered by a lack of clarity around key agency roles in planning and development amongst the key governance changes of the City Deal.

- Great emphasis was placed on the project risks related to political energy and attention to the WPC and reliance on particular 'champions'. Initial enthusiastic commitment to the City Deal is at risk of waning over time as priorities change, people leave key positions, and after elections (such as major governance changes in 2023).

- As the project has evolved, practices of integration have been improved in degrees through new forums, alliances, and networks, the resourcing of specific roles key to building collaboration, staff secondment practices, and particular committee regulations

**Diverse forms of integration are identified in infrastructure governance research[1]:**

- Integrated planning and action between government scales and infrastructure/planning authorities

- Alignment of strategic planning goals and infrastructure selection and provision

- Interpretation of high-level visions to master planning scales, local levels, and regulations

- Cohesion across different infrastructure types/sectors

- Alignment of infrastructure commitments and the funding to actually implement them

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1  Clements et al., "A Systematic Literature Review of Infrastructure Governance: Cross-sectoral Lessons for Transformative Governance Approaches."

## The City Deal: A welcome step for collaboration with key limitations

From what is widely acknowledged to be an existing highly siloed and fractured planning context in NSW[11], the Western Sydney City Deal was generally seen by most interview participants to represent substantial progress towards improving practices of multiscalar government integration, bringing three levels of government to the table in a place-based project. Some remained sceptical the approach as is could facilitate transformative collaboration.

> I was fairly sceptical about the concept of City Deals. It seemed to be a fashionable, but fairly [shallow] idea... Actually, it turned out to be quite a successful forum for collaboration between different levels of government. (Senior state government representative)

> They parcel out the money in chunks to different councils and projects. There needs to be a new governance structure ... that makes them collaborate together, where they can see the connective tissue between projects. (Ex-state government official)

One of the most highly praised outcomes of the City Deal was the 'seat at the table' given to local governments. While still acknowledged as limited in a wide range of ways, most felt local governments had at least a foundation to build on and were able to demonstrate their effectiveness in decision making and project delivery.

> It showed that the local government was mature enough and capable enough to get in the room and argue for its own needs and own interests... and capable enough on the back end to actually deliver on those. What we found through the process was that despite the fact that it was multifaceted and difficult, the actual decision-making framework for the councils stood up and was able to accelerate more quickly than state and Federal government... in terms of key decision points. It kept that honesty in the discussions that councils weren't the third-tier partner, we were an equal partner in the process and an equal partner in the outcome. We showed that the ways of progressing big decisions through local government can actually be used and worked effectively within the ambit of the system that's there for them ... if you deal with us as equals, we will deliver. (Local government participant)

There are a range of key shortfalls in the existing City Deal approach that participants emphasised. Firstly, the Western Sydney City Deal funding is organised around specific short-term project-based commitments, limiting in some ways its capacity to drive transformational changes in long-term place-based infrastructure and planning integration (beyond major infrastructure changes themselves such as the new rail line). A second shortfall frequently identified is that the overall funding committed to-date is likely inadequate for the reality of the major place ambitions. This context of funding and resource scarcity exacerbates the existing cultures of competition between authorities/sectors.

Many participants feel that the reform opportunity provided by the City Deal approach to-date needs to encompass broader systemic attention to transforming NSW's existing systems of infrastructure governance. It was suggested that rather than viewed as the primary mechanism in and of itself, it is instead viewed as a catalyst for a proactive undertaking of system-wide reforms.

> The City Deal does not solve infrastructure planning in Sydney, it does not. If the state government wanted it to do that, it would give itself authority to go and acquire land and land bank, it would give itself better pathways to deliver trunk infrastructure. there's no cheaper time to buy land than today, or 10 years ago. The government did not set up a structure in the City Deal to accelerate the purchase and holding of land in southwest Sydney for growth. It did not set up structures in the City Deal to deliver sewer and water to these release areas that they wanted to unlock ... It goes to solving and implementing large infrastructure projects ... And it puts some funding in for local projects in each of the councils. And it looks at economic activation ... but it's not dealing with the fundamental underpinnings of infrastructure planning that it would need to facilitate. (Local government representative)

There was widespread interest among many participants in pursuing approaches to systematising the successful elements of governance experiments. Recent work by Croeser et al[12] and in the Innovating Cities podcast series[13] offers insights into how innovative policy and governance experiments might be designed at the outset for potential enduring systems change.

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11  Patrick Harris et al., "City deals and health equity in Sydney, Australia," *Health & Place* 73 (2022/01/01/ 2022), https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2021.102711, https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1353829221002070.

12  Croeser, Thami, Clement, Sarah, Fernandez, Marta, Garrard, Georgia E., Mell, Ian, & Bekessy, Sarah A. Action research for transformative change. Sustainability Science, 1–6 (2024)

13  Rogers, Dallas. 'Innovating Cities' series. *City Road Podcast.* (2024): https://www.uow.edu.au/the-arts-social-sciences-humanities/research/access/podcasts-videos/innovating-cities/

## PICs a critical place-based integration approach, limited in practice

Participants generally viewed the Place-based Infrastructure Compacts (PICs, or GICs) as an important evidence-based planning tool for integrating infrastructure across a place basis, aligned with growth. In practice however, participants felt the impact of the completed PIC process in the WPC had been limited through a range of factors:

- Some argued that the PIC process exposes the significant infrastructure cost of quality planning, and therefore wasn't met with the subsequent investment as a result of this huge cost.
- The Western Sydney PIC had been fundamentally diminished relative to the prior GPOP PIC which was more effectively paired with business cases.
- A lack of effective governance (committed funding, and an empowered implementation body) to enact the outcomes from the PIC, which are complex.
- Some saw a mismatch in the growth scenarios used by the GSC through the PIC process and the WPCA in their Blueprint to identify an investment approach.
- The PIC processes not being aligned with the timing of district planning processes.

*The PIC Framework ... was disruptive in a positive sense ... because it's essentially requiring agencies to move away from what might have been their forward plan or the way they normally do things ... but also ... in terms of people being called to account. People having to change their plans, people having to coordinate, people having to do things differently to the way they normally do them"*

*There's no one willing to spend this level of money. (State government representative)*

*The cost scares them ... there's something about the lack of deliberate, coordinated planning that enables growth to happen. Because if people knew the full requirement of a civilized place making, they'd run away from it. (Planning consultant)*

*The Growth Infrastructure Compact, and ourselves, looked at how we would stage this thing and that was quite controversial because every landowner wanted everything rezoned that minute, obviously. The main road of Luddenham ended up being called the Golden Mile because the prices were just [laughs]. Federal government was supposed to look at value capture. By the time they'd done that, the gate was open and the horse was out of the gate long way away. I think the real problem is when we make plans ... as soon as you land use plan, you zone. And then everyone's going "my*

*values gone up. Let's get going" ... The Department of Planning had people hammering at their doors ... the GIC was saying, "you can only release enough land to go with infrastructure". And then there was pressure from landowners to get going and zoning. So, I think probably the outcome is compromise between the two of them. (State government representative)*

## Major project risks: Political attention and reliance on champions

Great emphasis was placed on the project risks related to political energy and attention to the WPC and reliance on particular "champions". Initial enthusiastic commitment to the City Deal is at risk of waning over time as priorities change, people leave key positions, and after elections (such as major governance changes in 2023).

*Everything needs concentrated effort, it needs champions, it needs to not be seen as a as a great project of its time, this is a 20-year commitment. So, it really needs people to stay the course and take it to the next level. (State government representative)*

*These structures, once they're personalized, they're weakened. They need to be above personality" (Senior state government participant)*

*The problem is that unless you feed them and unless you are better than we've been at understanding how people get burnt and exhausted and retire and resign and change, if the conception of the Deal is based on the mutual integrity and trust of a dozen people or so, once those people change, then the potential integrity of the long-term elements of the City Deal change. (Senior state government participant)*

## WPC integration improvements: New collaborative institutions, roles, and practices

As the project has evolved, practices of integration have been improved in degrees through:

- Experimenting with new forums, committees, and networks for inter-government collaboration bringing together local government voices/interests, and opportunities for knowledge-sharing and joint projects (e.g. Western Parkland Councils, & Planning Partnership)
- The resourcing of particular roles designed to facilitate collaboration between authorities (e.g. Camden council's Dir. of Customer & Corporate Strategy)
- Practices of staff secondment which promote knowledge sharing and relationship building.
- Specific examples of successful forums demonstrating the importance of statutorily required regular involvement of key players influencing funding levers, etc. (e.g., the GSC's Infrastructure Delivery Committee)

*Without that statutory forum, there is no way that we could have achieved across the bureaucracies and the people working together what we achieved ... that was the lever that made a massively material difference. (State government participant)*

Some of the new organisations and roles emphasised they in a changing governance landscape, they ended up playing vital roles of identifying and filling gaps, particularly where responsibilities were unclear.

### Persistent barriers to infrastructure integration: Role clarity, staging and sequencing, funding

Participants described a wide range of key barriers to greater infrastructure integration, some of which relate to ongoing, persistent integration issues in NSW planning governance, and some more specific to the particular WPC approach. Many are highly complex and require concerted attention to untangle or reform. These include:

– Effective staging and sequencing of infrastructure was consistently noted as lacking, yet vital for effective integration

– The large scale of early land release creating delivery challenges for relevant agencies

– A lack of resolution of pre-existing legacies of poor collaboration between key authorities

– The lack of long-term funding is a chronic issue amongst many agencies, creating time-consuming delays or resulting in a lack of capacity to undertake planning and delivery

*We've got concurrently land being released and developed concurrently across the whole region ... that creates challenges for us just in meeting community expectation and being able to prioritize and deliver that infrastructure in a timely way that meets developer needs, community needs and government needs. So I think, for me, the approach in the land release itself across large parts of Western Sydney, each in their own master plan but in totality creates a significant investment pipeline for [infrastructure agencies], and for others, to deliver the infrastructure system to support that across a such a large geography and to find the time to then develop business cases, go through assurance, seek funding from government and deliver them and then to operate them in perpetuity. (Senior state infrastructure agency representative)*
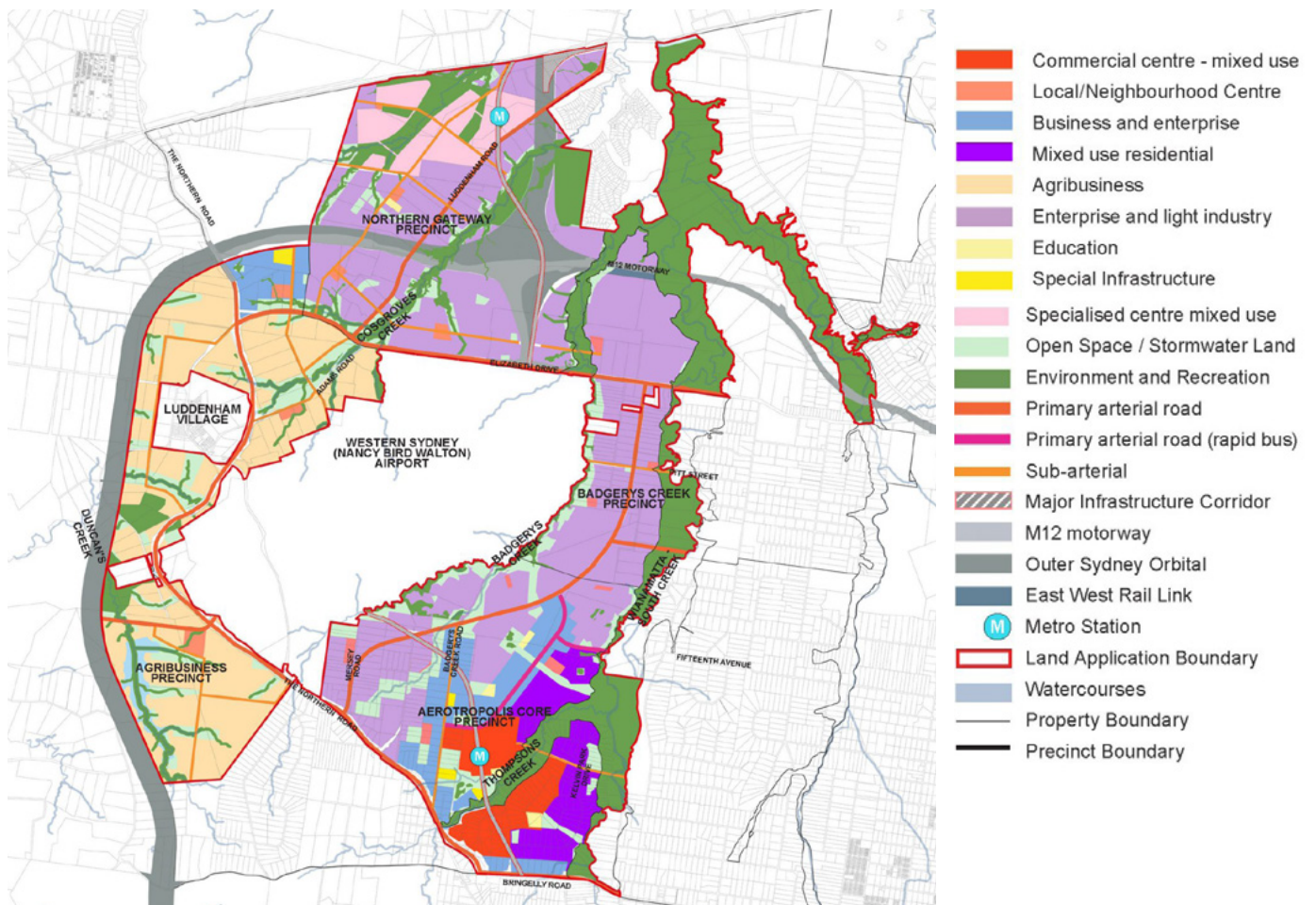


**Figure 7** Western Sydney Aerotropolis Precinct Plan March 2022. Source: www.planning.nsw.gov.au

# CHAPTER 3: GOVERNANCE ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY

**Key points**

- Need for explicit policy and policy advocacy attention to embedding greater accountability and transparency within NSW governance structures and procedures.

- There are deep legacies of mistrust throughout NSW planning and infrastructure governance contexts that play out at project level.

- Participants have raised multiscalar accountability issues across the planning system, with many pointing to a lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities in the governance of the WPC.

- This makes interacting with decision-making contexts most difficult for those outside of formal governance, with implications for the social legitimacy of projects

- Some participants raised various transparency concerns about evidenced justifications for wider strategic planning choices (e.g. the Three Cities region plan, or the choice for a new city vs. upgrading existing centres), impacting the social legitimacy of the project among key actors and agencies and their commitment to collaboration

- Embedding independent organisations and roles (i.e. the Independent Community Commissioner) into the governance systems has been seen as important to strengthening accountability. To speak truth to power and critique status quo arrangements, these roles are reliant at times on a level of comfort with potentially burning professional bridges, such as late career stages or forms of professional distance.

**Multiple intersecting social understandings of accountability are identified in our forthcoming journal article:**
***Meaningful public accountability in collaborative infrastructure governance: Lessons from Sydney's Western Parkland City**, including:*

- Institutional openness and transparency

- Clear and ongoing communication

- Social legitimacy and community engagement

- Governance coherence (clear roles and responsibilities)

- The capacity for effective implementation (responsibilities matched with resources and mechanisms of influence)

## Legacies of mistrust in NSW infrastructure planning

There are deep legacies of mistrust throughout NSW planning and infrastructure governance contexts. A recent national survey by ANU researchers[14] revealed low levels of public trust in the selection and planning of infrastructure, demonstrating the need for more open and public governance processes. Accountability and transparency are key to opening up the structures and processes of governance to scrutiny and helping to maintain public interests. There's a need for explicit policy and advocacy attention to embedding greater accountability and transparency within NSW governance structures and procedures, both at a broader systems level and through major place projects such as the WPC.

While approaches such as the City Deal make some ground regarding building inter-government and inter-agency accountability, interviewees emphasise the huge challenges of building foundations for trust with local communities in Western Sydney.

*People's local experience in Western Sydney is not defined by the Greater Sydney Commission vision. it's*

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14   Next Generation Engagement. (2023). Australian Perspectives on Infrastructure. Retrieved from http://www.nextgenengagement.org/australian-perspectives-on-infrastructure/

*defined by the existing infrastructure and services and structural inequalities of their community in their community. (Community advocacy organisation representative)*

*The number one thing is for people to feel like their engagement is worthwhile. Like 1000s of people participate in giving feedback within the bloody planning portal on infrastructure. I often speak to people who do <u>do</u> that and they say, "we know we have to, but they won't listen to us" ... I think that there has to be some sincere evidence that participation leads to results ... Every time there is another application for this project that is so undesired by the community, every time that erodes trust between the community and the state government, and then they can come to them next week and say, "we're going to do the Western Parklands City, this is fantastic" (Community advocacy organisation representative)*

## Prevailing accountability issues and lack of governance clarity

Participants have raised multiscalar accountability issues across the NSW planning system as ever-present through the WPC project. These include:

– A lack of clarity around, and some overlap between, roles and responsibilities of key government authorities

– Disconnects between authority responsibilities and their resourcing/powers/capacity for decision-making and implementation (especially regarding local government resourcing)

– Limited meaningful representation of broader community organisations and groups in governance spaces

– Inter-agency and public communication issues, including community legibility of planning governance

– The need for greater independent oversight across many areas

– Public transparency and publication of key reports, evidence bases, and infrastructure business cases

One of the most widespread criticisms among participants was a lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities for key authorities. Some participants acknowledged that in experimental governance, a lack of clarity is expected and potentially allows for greater flexibility in building new approaches. Nevertheless, participants largely felt frustrated that there was a lack of clarity around the remit of key authorities, and that this was matched with the resources and mechanisms to make change. For some, the lack of governance clarity impacted accountability through unclear or overlapping governance functions, or through shifts of functions from elected bodies (such as local governments) to non-elected bodies (such as the

WPCA). For others, the lack of governance clarity extended to there not being a clear governance structure to drive and oversee the WPC project as envisioned. Some felt the lack of governance clarity made interacting with decision-making contexts most difficult for those outside of formal governance, such as community groups, and has significant implications for the social legitimacy of projects.

*The biggest thing for me, who is arranging and managing the infrastructure that is going to support not just the secondary airport, but the redevelopment of the Aerotropolis? To which there is astounding silence. (State government representative)*

*This might sound controversial, but I don't think there is a Parklands City project... there's a Bradfield activation project, and then there's the development of the centres in the Parklands City. But they clearly don't have the governance to have a Parklands City project... you'd need to you need to ration, you'd need to prioritize, you'd need to leverage each other's investments... I think there's this disconnect, where you might have a whole of government vision, then whole of government grants, and then do centralize delivering. So when you say governance, governance being decision-making, accountability... I don't think there is a whole of Parklands City governance for this stuff. (Consultant)*

## Public transparency and publication

Many interviewees emphasised the importance of governments becoming more transparent and making more key planning documents and reports publicly available, such as infrastructure business cases. There was clear interest from many government stakeholders in seeing that happen due to public interest value, improving the social legitimacy of government, and improving knowledge sharing. Some participants raised transparency concerns about evidenced justifications for wider strategic planning choices (e.g., the Three Cities region plan, or the choice for a new city vs. upgrading existing centres), impacting the social legitimacy of the project among key actors and agencies and their commitment to collaboration.

*My personal view is that the more transparent you are, the more accountable you are... we should be publishing our business cases, the strategic planning work that has underpinned those, and the evidence that has afforded those and we've got a long way to go. (Senior state government official)*

*I think every study and everything they should do should be in the public domain. I think that there's no excuse to say it's commercial-in-confidence ... I don't know how you'd make it more transparent, because with these big dollops of money like an airport and the metro, those business cases are very tightly held. (State government official)*

*It can be often tempting to want to hide your dirty laundry or try and make sure you've got all your ducks in a row before you say anything publicly. But that works against actually collaborating in a really honest fashion, because you often need to know, "what's the problem?" or "what are the obstacles?" to be able to then help. But if they're trying to work it all out before they say anything, then nothing ever moves forward. I think all three levels of government are guilty of doing that. (Government representative)*

A key example is the three-year City Deal Review, part of the original Deal commitments undertaken by an independent university research centre. It involved the creation of an evaluation framework in late 2020 with the review itself completed in the first half of 2021 – neither have been published as of February 2024. Participants involved generally reported that the review process was sound and resulted in much needed and useful recommendations for governance, amongst other aspects. Some felt publication had been delayed/withheld by state government because of discomfort with findings, and many questioned that it would ever be publicly released (especially unlikely after the 2023 state government change).

*The reason it hasn't been released is it made some pretty strong recommendations that I don't think the state government's prepared to respond to. (Former state government official)*

*I think that's a big issue that the full report should be made public, that the recommendations should be made public, and then the three levels of government are held to account to deliver on those recommendations, because how else do you see change happen than that way? So, I would hope that that happens in the future, because I think it was quite independent and pragmatic, the advice that is given in the recommendations. (Local government official)*

*It ended up very ugly at the end where [the state government] wanted to change the report ... Basically, the councils ... said that they couldn't change it. And you can't have an independent evaluation if it's not going to be independent ... the report remained the way it was finalized. But there were a lot of difficult meetings about that. (Participant involved in the Review)*

*I'm very unhappy with them about it. Because it was an agreement that it would be published ... (Participant involved in the Review)*

## The importance of independent actors and organisations

Further to pre-existing formal independent organisations such as Infrastructure Australia and Infrastructure NSW, embedding independent organisations and roles, such as the GSC Commissioners and the Aerotropolis Independent Community Commissioner) into the governance systems at place level was seen as important to strengthening accountability. While the GSC Commissioners were seen as important roles at the outset, many reported experiencing significant constraints on their agency, particularly in the earlier years of the GSC. The Independent Community Commissioner had a significant level of autonomy with direct lines to ministerial power, and to-date appears to have demonstrated compelling successes in revealing governance shortfalls in community engagement and institutional processes. To speak truth to power and critique status quo arrangements, these roles are reliant at times on a level of comfort with potentially burning professional bridges, such as late career stages or forms of professional distance. A major challenge is establishing genuinely independent bodies and actors with material powers given frequent resistance from existing government authorities.

*If some of the things [the commissioner] suggested didn't happen, the whole policy would fall over. Because it doesn't have the social license. [The commissioner] saved it from completely hitting the wall because the media would have been so terrible in the run up to an election, that the whole policy would have gone down ... There's a lot to be said for an independent person who can [escalate issues to political levels]. (Government official)*

# CHAPTER 4: POLITICAL INFLUENCE IN INFRASTRUCTURE GOVERNANCE

**Key points**

- The various challenges revealed beg important questions about how to better bring major political decisions in line with planning evidence, principles, and strategies. A further challenge is how to do this without depoliticising planning practices and processes to the detriment of achieving public good outcomes or making planning so technocratic that is loses sight of the inherently political nature of planning cities.

- Though challenging, there is a need to address accountability gaps at political/ministerial levels, particularly regarding the evidence-basis of major decisions that can upend strategic/democratic processes.

- Major political decisions have at times been disconnected from long-term strategy or accountability obligations, such as major land rezonings in the Aerotropolis occurring before value capture mechanisms were in place.

- Other participants have raised concerns about the capacities in NSW planning to protect infrastructure spending decisions from pork-barrelling.

- This suggests the importance of embedding integrated and strategic governance from the outset of major planning projects (especially establishing sound strategies and capacities for public land acquisition), and that principles and key strategic commitments are protected through transparent accountability mechanisms from opportunistic or fragmented decision making.

- There are deep concerns around the need to open public debates on hard decisions around key challenges, and a lack of capacity in governance and higher political levels to do so.

- Acknowledging and discussing the reality of project failures in such a complex context and governance environment with many unknowns. In part demonstrated through the changes arising from the COVID pandemic and floods, altering key planning contexts and political attentions, e.g. the viability of the airport as a cornerstone industry, the relationship between jobs and commuting, and the priorities of wider government attention and investment.

- Questions around who is capable and willing to drive debate among the public and within the planning system about our critical need for greater public value capture and investment, including the challenging questions about housing, land taxes, developer/landowner profit, etc.

- How to approach a discussion about requiring greater accountability from decision makers, as well as discussions that engage with questions about the distribution of power?

## Top-down governance approaches and pre-determined decisions

While the City Deal structure broadened tri-government involvement in general WPC governance, participants still felt the overall project governance was still too top-down, particularly regarding the overall regional strategy, key infrastructure selection, and project scope. Plans have often been criticised as being pre-determined, with high-level political involvement setting deals and major infrastructure decisions in place before public announcements or the possibility of wider engagement around different options.

*The first [GPOP PIC] was actually looking at evaluation of precincts in terms of staging, but also in terms of content. The second one was actually just looking at staging with a scenario that was already spatially determined. There was no questioning about "do you do north-south rail?" or whatever. So, it happened AFTER those decisions had already been made. Ideally, it would happen before. (ex-GSC Commissioner)*

*The CORE reason for [impacts on] the community is that they're not consulted, they did not get a say, and the decisions are top down, not bottom up. (Community advocacy organisation representative)*

*All of this is causing concern and anxiety and a feeling of not having any power, disenfranchisement from the whole process. That this is all been decided at the highest level, the monies have been made available, the process is on a freight train (Local government representative)*

## Disconnect and accountability gaps in high-level political decisions

Participants highlighted many major political decisions that were at times disconnected or at odds with long-term planning strategies or other project accountability obligations, such as major land rezonings in the Aerotropolis occurring before any value capture mechanisms could be put in place, and the scrapping of the draft Design & Place SEPP impacting state environmental outcomes of new development.

*We can't keep releasing land without that infrastructure… it's quite nonsensical, really. (Local government participant)*

*[The Design and Place SEPP] was very much supported and we're extremely, extremely disappointed that two years of work's basically being flushed down the drain without any consultation and without any sort of proper evaluation of all the responses that were received. So obviously, that's an immense challenge, I think, to the New South Wales planning system that a minister has that sort of power to be able to do that." (Participant involved in the SEPP)*

*The developer lobby is immensely strong. And obviously, the current minister is susceptible to those sort of arguments … (Advocacy organisation representative)*

Other participants raised concerns about the current planning systems' capacities to protect infrastructure spending decisions from state-level pork-barrelling, and also from the counter 'gravitational political forces' of powerful actors such as development lobbies.

*I don't think there is there is any kind of big conspiracy … but there are gravitational forces that work on decision makers, which come from what might broadly be described as a political environment … the Western Sydney lobby, which involves a lot of landowners, who have a vested interest in getting governments at different levels to increase the value of their land, so that they can bank that land … they are seen to be powerful players whose opinions matter. I don't think governments are captured by them. But I think governments are conscious of them and are influenced by them. And some ministers … are far more sensitive to their needs than [others]. (Planning representative)*

*I see [corporate power] manifesting in the decision to not ban black roofs. I see it in the clear evidence that the roof surface temperature can be 30 degrees higher, and the inside the roof can be 10 degrees hotter. And it will increase heat related deaths, if we continue building houses, and black roofs will increase people's electricity costs … I see the role of corporate power in when the Planning Minister changed … The Property Council and other lobbyists were not subtle in their delight, that they got their way in saying that, like "do not touch what we do". And so, I think that that is for me one of the clearest recent manifestations of corporate power. And it will kill people. (Community advocacy representative)*

These views ask challenging questions about how to better bring major political decisions in line with planning evidence, principles, and strategies. A further challenge is how to do this without depoliticising planning practices and processes to the detriment of achieving public good outcomes or making planning so technocratic that is loses sight of the inherently political nature of planning cities. This may involve strategies to rebalance or shift power dynamics or finding ways to embed integrated and strategic governance from the outset of major planning projects, and that principles and key strategic commitments are somewhat protected through transparent accountability mechanisms from opportunistic or fragmented decision making.

## Driving debates on hard truths

There are deep concerns around the need to open public debates on "hard truths" around key challenges for planning in NSW, and a lack of capacity in governance and higher political levels to do so. These include important questions of public interests in infrastructure development, affordable housing need, major funding shortfalls for infrastructure provision, capturing value from development, taxation, and the need for changes to who currently benefits and loses in NSW planning systems. There are widespread questions around who is capable and willing to drive debate among the public and within the planning system on challenging topics about housing, land taxes, developer/landowner profit, public value capture and investment, etc.

*It does come to sort of a maturity in our dialogue with the development industry and with the community around being upfront and having this realistic voice. There's not always political appetite to do that. There's at times a preference to either stay silent on that or to abandon the implementation and the upkeep of plans, because of the some of the hard truths associated with it. (State government representative)*

*We're not clear enough about how value is created, and what is the legitimate share of the public and private sector to that value. I think there's a fundamental failure of discussion about this. (Planning consultant)*

Participants also emphasised the importance of acknowledging and discussing the reality of project failures, particularly in such a complex context and governance environment where there are many unknowns. This aspect of uncertainty impacting the foundations of the project has been in part demonstrated through the changes arising from the COVID pandemic and floods, altering key planning contexts and political attentions, e.g. the viability of the airport as a cornerstone industry, the relationship between jobs and commuting, and the priorities of wider government attention and investment.



**Figure 8** Protesters outside the electorate office of Planning Minister Anthony Roberts in Lane Cove on Monday. Photo credit: Marijs Vrancken. Source: www.smh.com.au

# CHAPTER 5: SOCIAL LEGITIMACY AND CAPACITIES TO DELIVER ON SOCIETAL END GOALS

**Key points**

- There are major tensions between the resources and attention given to the WPC's greenfield development and the expected growth in established centres. Many participants expressed that the current focus on growth in greenfield areas (PICs/ infrastructure planning) doesn't adequately account for the type of growth occurring/ expected to occur in established urban areas.

- With the expanded remit of the WPCA (from the original Aerotropolis Authority), and greater local government voice in governance, the balance of this focus had improved over time, but remained in tension.

- One major issue is limitations on the type of funding local governments can access for important infrastructure development and upgrades in their established areas (e.g. contribution funds and how they can be applied).

- It is widely felt among our research participants that it is important to meaningfully involve local and community-based organisations in key decision-making spaces.

- Widely acknowledged among participants that social/community infrastructure (inc. enabling services in greenfield developments) is not yet adequately planned for or prioritised against traditional/major/"hard" infrastructures.

- Many participants noted the capacity for building social legitimacy tends to be stronger in local governance scales such as councils, social infrastructure orgs, and community organisations with established long-term place relationships and more direct accountability processes.

- To-date community infrastructure organisations and other NGOs have tended to be less meaningfully included in the project governance; sometimes only in the initial stages, or only with weak engagement forms, or none at all unless they deploy existing advocacy resources and funding themselves (perpetuating unequal access to decision making spaces/influence).

- Local councils appear to be successfully demonstrating their capacities to act and think regionally beyond their borders through building effective networked relationships, working alongside and through multi-council representative bodies (e.g., Western Parkland Councils).

## Risks of economic focus dominating other goals

A major focus underpinning the WPC project is attracting industry to boost employment opportunities in Western Sydney. Despite general participant agreement that this is important to restructuring the metropolitan region (including addressing transport imbalances), there were significant concerns that the economic focus had so far overly dominated governance priorities at the expense of attention to other important forms of inequity, including affordable and public housing, public health, integrating social services, etc. Many also felt the industry focus carried a risk of prioritising private sector interests over public interests given prevailing power dynamics shaping planning in NSW, often privileging business and developer interests and economic priorities.

*Initially it was all about economic development of the West for the benefit of the West ... but you also need to have a deep dive within the region to understand what's going on. And the problem with that was that means you have to address disadvantage, and you have to address the existing challenges on the ground that are there. And that was completely forgotten about. (Academic)*

*The government has taken a neoliberal view that by establishing jobs, it can support social outcomes. (State government representative)*

## Disconnects between high-level priorities, knowledge, and implemented outcomes

There was widespread concern among participants about the capacity of the WPC project to address major societal challenges such as sustainability, resilience, equity, and health, despite high-level goals and principles. Many of these concerns related to general NSW planning system approaches. The reasons were diverse, from a lack of governance capacity such as funding at implementation levels, to maintaining political will, to political power imbalances. While there were mixed opinions, many fundamentally questioned the nature of a massive greenfield development given its serious environmental concerns such as water management and extreme heat.

*What we're really struggling with in New South Wales and across Australia, really, is that sort of increasing challenge of climate change and natural disasters and ensuring that we build resilient infrastructure, and that we're building that into our urban planning and design. Equally, the National Construction Code and sort of like, the way we manage our electricity, infrastructure, that all of those bits ... a lot of change will be needed really, really quickly. And that's one of the key challenges ... but at the moment, there doesn't seem to be a lot of political will to make the changes. (Local government organisation representative)*

*In 2018, the Greater Sydney Commission said "[Urban heat] is a massive priority" ... And for some reason, those high-level priorities just translated into "Let's plant more trees", which is just not going to be enough. So, from those high-level objectives to actually stuff that's being implemented on the ground, there was a massive disconnect. And that was partly due to political will. Planting trees is a pretty easy thing to do or get your head around ... So, five years down the track, we've planted a lot of trees, whereas we knew that even then that that was not going to be enough ... t's just very fractured the way all of that was implemented. (Planning representative)*

*I'm hoping that some bits and pieces [of the Design and Place SEPP] will resurface. But the development that's happening in Western Sydney particularly is massive. If we don't get this stuff right as soon as possible we're missing the boat. Even if this comes into play again in five years, that's a massive missed opportunity. We know that what we're putting in place now is just not up to scratch. I think there's pretty much consensus across many sectors about that. (Planning representative)*

*It is surprisingly hard to push industry to accept changes to building controls ... and I think we really need to bite that bullet and say what is required to build healthy, cool suburbs, etc. We've got to get it through into the infrastructure, into the building codes, into our energy policy, etc. I just I would be lying if I said I knew how to do that. (State government representative)*

*You've got generations of Aboriginal people that have lived there who are from different countries. So, they got moved there in the context of Western policies, and they've just established themselves in that community... There is a deep concern of the next wave of relocation, because if everything develops around them, are they gonna get stuck in this time warp and their housing and situation doesn't change... they can't find their way into the new market, they're not considered in this planning. (Aboriginal participant)*

## Tension between greenfield development and expected growth in established centres

Many participants expressed that the current focus on growth in greenfield areas took too much focus and investment away from adequately planning for the type of growth occurring or expected to occur in established urban areas, creating major tensions throughout the WPC project. Many expressed that over time, with the WPCA getting an expanded remit and scope (from the original Aerotropolis Authority) and greater local government voice in governance, the balance of this focus had improved, but remained in tension.

*The focus has been on Penrith up north, and the creation of the Aerotropolis, which seems to be sucking the infrastructure spend out of the existing centres instead of supporting the structure that exists and that hierarchy of centres (Local government official)*

*I think [the WPCA's] role really is also to make sure that the community infrastructure has an appropriate place within the levels of priority. Do you need more housing development if you don't have a school nearby? Those are fairly basic questions. In my time there, I didn't see the Authority grappling with that. It was probably more focused on the development of Bradfield. But it was missing the bigger picture. (Ex-state government official)*

*[The Aerotropolis] has taken a lot of the focus away from state government agencies around infrastructure planning, timing, delivery, and funding ... the balance there has been very heavily focused upon the Aerotropolis for quite a while to the disadvantage of other areas. I think that that's been a real bugbear for local government and I don't think it's not something that's been solved yet. (Local government official)*

## Local government funding capacities a major barrier

One of the major issues frequently emphasised by participants was chronic local government funding capacities, a widespread issue across NSW. This includes a reliance on local rates, tied grant funding, and limitations

on the type of funding local governments can access for important infrastructure development and upgrades in their established areas (e.g., Development Contribution and Infrastructure Contribution funds and how they can be applied). Many also emphasised that available funding sources delivered cap-ex funding, but not critical op-ex funding (such as for service improvement, maintenance, and organisational resourcing), particularly important in areas planned for regional growth.

*There needs to be a thorough review of the way government resourcing is structured at the moment ... we continuously see that more responsibilities are being put to council but the resourcing to go with it, it's just not there. Councils want to do better, but there are limits, period. it needs to be resourced appropriately. And at the moment, there's a lot of mechanisms that actually prevent councils from doing better. (Planning representative)*

*You've had an environment the last 10 years that both state and local government have gone to more tied grant funding... it was in the City Deal... that often means that the priorities that local government are able to deliver are ones that are being led by federal or state government as opposed to what their communities are saying they need... it's definitely been a big move over the last 10 years, and what it does is it reduces the capacity for the local authorities to be much more influential with their communities about changing their areas. So, they're much more reliant on external programs ... that makes it very difficult for them to actually fund and invest in how the transition happens. They basically focus more and more on managing the day-to-day and their current asset base, and they're less able to have flexibility, to be creative and do things differently. So that really undermines their ability to be a major player in the transformation. (Government representative)*

*Social infrastructure is going back to the local governments in these areas. And you've potentially got local authorities that are very, very small ... So, you're asking what is quite a small entity with limited financial resources to borrow and other things to manage significant billion-dollar investment in actually establishing Growth Areas ... a lot of the infrastructure delivering locally is affecting the ability for those Growth Areas to be released. (Local government representative)*

*It's more around the physical nature of getting the land, getting funding for buildings, things like that. Whereas there probably hasn't been as much focus on the sort of community development side. The councils are probably interested in that. But because they can't fund it through development contributions, a lot of the*

*social infrastructure locally that they will probably drive with the community development teams just isn't sort of getting off the ground ... they're basically not able to fund social infrastructure in Growth Areas, there's no have funding stream for them. (Local government representative)*

### Gaps in advancing visioning work for Western Sydney and the Parklands City

Many participants expressed frustration around various gaps in visioning for both the WPC project and the overarching long-term vision for Western Sydney. There was acknowledgement of the challenging work that had been done through existing regional strategies, metropolitan restructuring goals, and various plan articulations at lower scales to shift metropolitan visioning over to a focus on Western Sydney, particularly by the GSC. Nevertheless, some felt place visions had not been adequately advanced beyond the high-level goals, without a clear governing body to undertake that work as the GSC had moved its focus to other parts of the city, and the WPCA did not have a remit to do the visioning work needed. Others felt visioning gaps came from rushed governance, overly focused on the City Deal and commitments and not paying adequate attention to broader aspects of planning and their articulation into clearer, integrated goals.

*As someone who's lived and worked in Western Sydney all of my life, I'm really fearful of the outcome. I'm really fearful that, without the coordination that we've talked about, without the long-term strategy, without the sequencing, without the coordination of infrastructure, and I am really fearful about what we're creating for future generations. And I believe that, we're in dire need of all of those things, but we're also in dire need of a coordinated vision for Western Sydney, what is the Western Sydney that we want to create into the future? ... the City Deal, it was such an extraordinary achievement to get the three levels of government at the table ... then we dived, dived, whatever, straight down into the commitments, and we missed, we missed that overarching vision piece. And we missed the measurement piece around those indicators. (Local government participant)*

### Social legitimacy through diverse community representation and attention to social infrastructure

Participants expressed diverse opinions about the level of formal community participation sought throughout the WPC project and in the broader region plans. Nevertheless, many emphasised the importance of greater attention to building social legitimacy for projects like these in diverse ways. For example, many felt the capacity for building social legitimacy tends to be stronger in local governance scales such as councils, social infrastructure organisations, and

community organisations with established long-term place relationships and more direct accountability processes. Community infrastructure organisations and other place-based NGOs have tended to be less meaningfully included in the WPC planning and governance; sometimes only in initial stages, or only with weak engagement forms, or none at all unless they deploy existing advocacy resources and funding themselves (perpetuating unequal access to decision making spaces/influence). Many felt there was significant value in finding ways to meaningfully involve local communities and community-based organisations in key governance spaces across the project horizon.

> *A lot of those [community] organizations ARE engaged [in thinking of Western Sydney's future since COVID] and this is a perfect opportunity to take advantage of that, to work with those organizations. And I think that's one of the things that again, too, is missing in the Parklands City ... talking about the vision and talking how they're going to be involved in getting them thinking of the future. And not just how we did things in the past but we are great thinkers of the of the future ... we need some more structures to get people more involved in that. (ex-GSC Commissioner)*

It was also widely acknowledged among participants that social and community infrastructure (including enabling services in greenfield developments) is not yet adequately planned for or prioritised relative to traditional or "hard" infrastructure such as major rail lines or roads. Many felt our planning systems are still not set up to give adequate priority to important community infrastructure and enabling services, despite the increased recognition of these needs after the COVID pandemic. Many funding challenges were raised, from issues of priority, to funding limitations that preclude social infrastructure, to a lack of general funding to build social infrastructure organisation capacity (such as operational expenditure).

> *That early provision, that equity across the region, that infrastructure that is high quality. I don't think the Compacts perhaps deal with so many of those things that that we need to get to ... The Compact deals with a very traditional infrastructure ... a lot is missing in the social infrastructure in those place-based Compacts. And it's a good attempt, and it's a start, but we need to go further. (ex-GSC Commissioner)*

> *In the local framework, ultimately, a lot of the hard infrastructure can be included in contributions plans, a lot of the soft stuff, you can only deliver what's called "base level embellishment" for things like open space. For things like community facilities, and cultural facilities, libraries, bigger leisure centres, those sorts of things, that infrastructure is what's called "non-essential infrastructure" under the current local*

> *contributions framework, meaning you can't put the infrastructure itself in contributions planning. Councils can collect money to buy the land for the things, but they can't actually BUILD the things. So straight away there's an emerging gap. (Consultant)*

> *We don't [have the right funding mechanisms to deliver social infrastructure] and it's a huge gap... I think we need different systems ... We seem to be very constrained on how we deliver green and blue infrastructure at a local scale ... and then we also have infrastructure contributions funding mechanisms that aren't very well suited to collect sufficient money to actually purchase very expensive land for land hungry infrastructure, blue and green infrastructure needs. We also have local government very constrained in its access to funds to provide the same ... at the same time, we're creating enormous wealth in the value of land, and we're not accessing that wealth. (Planning representative)*

> *In the context of a not-for-profit, or social infrastructure or social service provider, they have a battle to get their social infrastructure, and then they have a battle to provide services within that infrastructure. And something like West Invest, which is a grant program related to those areas impacted by COVID, provided no money for service delivery. But it may be the case that there were adequate facilities in places that needed services with a bit of op-ex, not cap-ex. So I think there's this simplification of how to meet the needs of people that create that creates a bias that does not lead to outcomes and could, in fact, cost us more. (Social infrastructure provider)*

# INFRASTRUCTURE GOVERNANCE INCUBATOR RESEARCH OUTPUTS

The Incubator project has produced, and continues to produce, a wide range of academic and public policy-oriented research outputs, some of which are outlined below.

**Find updates** about upcoming papers, reports, and other outputs from the Incubator and its partners here: sydney.edu.au/henry-halloran-trust/research-grants-and-programs/infrastructure-governance-incubator.html

**Transforming Infrastructure Governance – City Road podcast series**



The Transforming Infrastructure Governance podcast series is hosted by Dallas Rogers as part of the City Road Pod. The series comprises of seven episodes focused on major infrastructure governance challenges, informed by the Incubator's research.

In this series, we shine a light on some of the key challenges and opportunities for transforming the way we think about and do infrastructure governance, such as:

– who should be involved in decision making?
– how can we better collaborate with communities?
– how do we address planning on unceded Indigenous land?

**Podcast series available here**: https://cityroadpod.org/2023/05/03/infrastructure-governance-series/

| Episodes |
|---|

**Episode 1: Transformation of what?**
Tooran Alizadeh, Rebecca Clements

**Mini Episode: A systematic review**
Liton Kamruzzaman, Rebecca Clements

**Episode 2: Planning on Unceded Land**
Tooran Alizadeh, Rebecca Clements
*Guest:* Elle Davidson, University of Sydney

**Episode 3: Fragmentation to integration: Towards collaborative governance**
Glen Searle, Crystal Legacy
*Guest:* Joanna Kubota, The Parks

**Episode 4: Meaningful accountability**
Tooran Alizadeh, Rebecca Clements
*Guest:* Roberta Ryan, University of Newcastle

**Episode 5: The politics of infrastructure governance**
Dallas Rogers, Crystal Legacy
*Guest:* James Murphy, University of Melbourne

**Episode 6: State of Australasian Cities plenary session**
Tooran Alizadeh, Rebecca Clements, Crystal Legacy, Glen Searle, Liton Kamruzzaman, Dallas Rogers, and Elle Davidson
*Plenary discussant:* Jago Dodson, RMIT

## Festival of Urbanism public talks

Each year from 2020, the Infrastructure Governance Incubator took part in or hosted a public event at the Festival of Urbanism, bringing together a variety of experts from research, policy, and advocacy spaces to provoke critical discussions on the future of infrastructure. Each talk is available online, as are summaries of the panel presentations published within the annual Festival of Urbanism Review.

### 2020 Festival of Urbanism: Incubator project launch



A conversation with Tooran Alizadeh, hosted by Peter Phibbs. Video: festivalofurbanism.com/events/fou2020/incubator-night

### 2021 Festival of Urbanism: 'Endangered Infrastructure' panel presentations
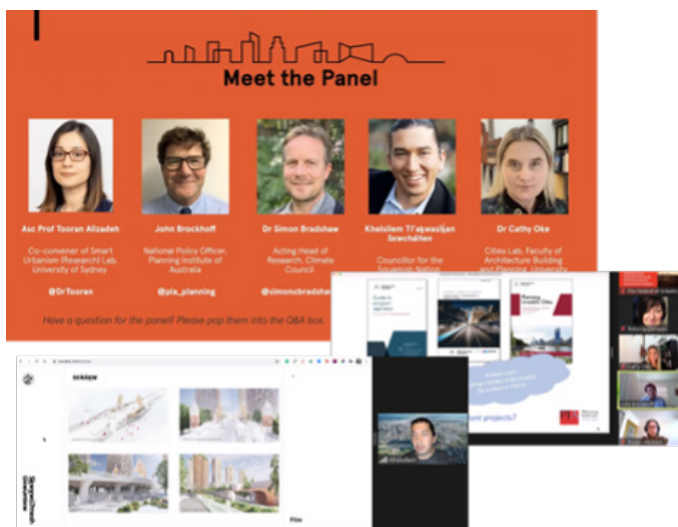


*Panellists:* Khelsilem Tl'akwasiḵan Sxwchálten (Councillor for the Squamish Nation, Canada), Dr Cathy Oke (University of Melbourne), John Brockhoff (Planning Institute of Australia), Dr Simon Bradshaw (Climate Council) Video: festivalofurbanism.com/events/fou2021/endangered-infrastructures-discussion-led-by-the-hht-infrastructure-governance-incubator

### 2022 Festival of Urbanism: 'Future Infrastructure' panel presentations



*Panellists*: Haruka Miki-Imoto (Urban, Resilience and Land Global Practice, World Bank), Prof Tim Bunnell (National University of Singapore), James O'Keefe (Department of Planning and Environment), Dr Aidan While (University of Sheffield). Video: https://youtu.be/X9wQsDqXuzo?si=GFVUSQkjupgc9jJs

### Publications



**The Festival of Urbanism Review 2021:** sydney.edu.au/content/dam/corporate/documents/henry-halloran-trust/festival-of-urbanism-review.pdf

**The Festival of Urbanism Review 2022:** sydney.edu.au/content/dam/corporate/documents/henry-halloran-trust/festival-of-urbanism-review-2022.pdf

## Practitioners-in-Residence

In 2023, the Henry Halloran Research Trust funded two Practitioners-in-Residence to work for six months with the Incubator on innovative infrastructure governance projects.

**Estelle Grech** (Committee for Sydney) is looking at scaling up funding for active transport infrastructure in her project, 'Is it easier to build mega, than mini infrastructure projects in Sydney?: A cycling infrastructure case study'.

**Susie Young** (Placewise urban design), working closely with Megan Hills, explored the potential for bringing together First Nations knowledges and western scientific practice, and the benefits of collaborative thinking processes for living infrastructure governance.

## Public-led Smart Cities project

In 2021, the NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE, now the Dept of Infrastructure and Environment, or DPE) partnered with the Incubator co-funding the first plug-in research project, 'Public-led Smart Infrastructure'. This six-month project was completed in early 2022, resulting in two policy reports on the Barcelona and Manchester case studies and a journal publication (under review).

## Published journal articles

In addition to the below, several other journal articles are currently under review or in production.

## Infrastructure Governance in Times of Crises: A Research Agenda for Australian Cities (2022)

Urban Policy & Research: https://doi.org/10.1080/08111146.2022.2040980

- Proposes an infrastructure governance research agenda focused on the integration of planning, funding, and social legitimacy of projects, and the reality of multiple ongoing crises.
- Calls for First Nation voices at the heart of infrastructure decision-making.

## A Systematic Literature Review of Infrastructure Governance: Cross-sectoral Lessons for Transformative Governance Approaches (2022)

Journal of Planning Literature: https://doi.org/10.1177/08854122221112317
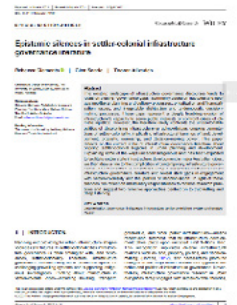
- Interrogates infrastructure governance literature across sectoral boundaries.
- Identifies a range of gaps: infrastructure governance on unceded First Nations land, the societal end goals of infrastructure, and understandings and applications of integrated governance.

## Epistemic silences in settler-colonial infrastructure governance literature (2023)

Geographical Research: https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-5871.12601 *OPEN ACCESS*

- Contrasts ongoing settler-coloniality in Australian infrastructure development with systematic literature review.
- Reveals stark gaps in engagement with settler-coloniality and the politics of decolonization.
- Reflects on professional responsibilities to for more reflexive research involving truth-telling and deep listening.

## Meaningful public accountability in collaborative infrastructure governance: Lessons from Sydney's Western Parkland City (2024)

Urban Policy & Research: *Accepted/Forthcoming*

- Reveals multiple intersecting social conceptions of accountability, including institutional openness and transparency, clear and ongoing communication, social legitimacy and community engagement, governance coherence, and the capacity for effective implementation.
- Emphasises the need for multidimensional, and contextually and collaboratively developed understandings of accountability towards rebuilding foundations for public trust, and the importance of embracing relational and systemic approaches.
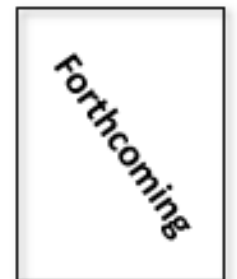
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# HENRY HALLORAN RESEARCH TRUST

The Henry Halloran Research Trust was established in 2013 through the generous gift of developer and philanthropist Warren Halloran. The Trust aims to become a leading voice and advocate for the advancement of liveable cities, thriving urban communities, regional planning and sustainable development. The Trust seeks to:

– Support scholarly research into critical policy issues relevant to current practice in Australian and international urban and regional policy, planning and land management.

– Promote collaborative cross-disciplinary engagement of local and international scholars, practitioners, and industry and government partners.

– Support and inform policy dialogue and academic, professional and public debate through research publication and public events that encourage inspirational thinking about how to better manage urban and regional development.

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