

## ***Living City* – What’s your plan?**

A submission by members of the Canberra tourism and business events industry

Australian Hotels Association ACT Branch

Canberra Convention Bureau

Meetings Events Australia (ACT)

Tourism Industry Council (ACT & Region)



## Introduction

The Canberra tourism and business events industry has a vested interest in ensuring Canberra is set apart from other cities and that as a destination, it grows stronger in its capacity to attract people, organisations and events.

Canberra needs an injection of charisma and vitality to create an active social city domain that attracts both visitors and locals. Above all, the *Living City* plan must have as its basis strong local participation to remain viable for those who live here, as well as for those who visit.

This paper provides an overview of the tourism and business events industry's vision for the city. While we do not provide the solutions, the ideas and directions we put forward are critical when considering the future of our city and the sustainability of our industry.

## Our vision

The transformation of derelict or disused areas in other cities provides a valuable model for our vision. Southbank in Melbourne or Darling Harbour in Sydney for example are excellent examples of how such areas can be changed into vibrant precincts that attract residents and visitors right around the clock.

What lies behind these success stories is the notion of a village. Our residents must want to come to the city centre as much as our visitors. Locals should flock to an area that is seen as *the* social hub, where there are human dynamics – not just business – and where there are activities, services and access for all ages, budgets and tastes.

A sense of community and ownership is the foundation of our vision. It is the basis on which all successful interaction is developed and is fundamental to creating a lively, vital city centre that attracts and keeps people close to its source.

The personality of Civic must be its people, so *Living City* must address what are seen today as basic requirements for a living, breathing and beating city heart.

## The changes

### Getting to the heart

- Canberra lacks an obvious city centre. Its shopping and business precincts are separate and cover a dispersed area, and travelling between buildings and across town is difficult for locals and visitors. A model with greater integration and better traffic and pedestrian access would link these dispersed areas and offer a combination of attractions.
- A greater emphasis on mixed use is required, with more residential accommodation, local shops and restaurants to suit all budgets and offset the current retail and business emphasis. Simple, but important features

that are seen in all cities around the world also need to be added: an after hours chemist, newsagents, grocery stores, internet cafes, bureau de change, dry cleaners and laundromat.

- A 2000 Canberra visitor satisfaction survey by the University of Canberra's CRC for Sustainable Tourism found Canberra's weather was one of its least appealing aspects. Covered walkways, and easier, covered access to buses and taxis will ensure people can still be out and about even when the weather turns grey. The design of walkway must ensure they do not deteriorate over time and become an eyesore – walkways around Belconnen Mall for example were a poor choice and have become an ugly scar on the centre's urban landscape.
- Good parking options close to all of the city's amenities would help improve access and encourage more people to the area. Currently, most parking is concentrated at the back of the Canberra Centre meaning a long walk to reach facilities on the other side.
- Access to the city centre must be smarter to ensure pedestrian traffic flow feeds people to the right areas. For example, City Walk delivers pedestrians at night to an area where there is little to no activity. Streetscapes could be more cleverly designed to direct traffic flow to the areas where people want to be such as restaurants, shops and transport.
- An information kiosk and 'Half Tix' facilities would draw more people to the city and make accessing Canberra's arts and entertainment scene easier and streamlined. Residents and visitors would be able to learn what activities are on through one centralised point and purchase tickets, some at reduced rates, on the spot.

### **Building local identity**

- The city centre must have local participation to ensure restaurants, shops and other facilities remain viable for their operators. A key part of the planning process must include initiatives and facilities to attract Canberrans out of the suburbs and into their city.
- Drawing residents to the city centre means creating a meeting place and social hub. An Olympic pool upgrade to create an aquatic leisure centre is essential to this plan, together with other amenities such as easy and central bike hire.
- A sense of place and capital could be better built through community arts and entertainment programs. Garema Place for example, could be more effective if, in addition to the large screen, infrastructure such as a stage and seating, was available to allow outdoor cinema and shows.
- Creating a Central Park atmosphere for Glebe Park with sports, arts and entertainment would provide a focus for the city centre and a vital and vibrant area for people to gather.

- Attractive landscaping, shade management and places where people could stop would encourage residents, visitors and business people to come outside, sit and enjoy the city's beauty.

## **Infrastructure**

- A central authority must be responsible for all aspects of maintaining the city, from street and footpath cleaning, to ensuring pathways and streets are well lit, toilets are safe and pleasant to use and that the drug culture is dealt with and removed.
- Our buildings need to have greater variety and diversity of architecture and aesthetics to create more mood and atmosphere for the city. They must also be cleaned-up and cleared of graffiti to make the environment welcoming rather than intimidating.
- Restaurants, cafes and bars must have greater freedom to develop their outdoor areas to make them more attractive and to provide protection from the elements. The current arrangements mean that proprietors must take their chairs and tables inside each night limiting creativity in their set-up.
- The development process must be made simpler and greater incentives introduced to attract high quality design. The development of Melbourne's Docklands for example, used a single authority to streamline approvals processes allowing high quality, integrated design to be developed in an efficient and effective manner.
- New digital signage should be introduced to celebrate and promote the city's activities (including cultural and sporting events), celebrate our accomplishments (such as major milestones) and promote our national status. Better street and directional signage would also help visitors find what they need.
- More lighting and more visible policing also needs to be introduced to create a feeling of safety and security throughout the city.

## **A new convention centre**

- The city's convention centre must be just that – a convention centre located within close proximity (no more than five-minutes walk or a short shuttle ride) to the city's facilities including hotels, restaurants, shops, transport and other amenities.
- Access must be easy for visitors, general traffic and large trucks. That means having good pedestrian links from the city centre and good access to transport including buses and taxis, good street and directional signage, and easy access for general traffic and over-sized delivery vehicles.

- The current *Living City* plan has the convention centre by the lake – at least a kilometre from the city. This discourages delegates away from the city centre and would remove valuable indirect delegate expenditure from our economy if not appropriately supported with a transport service for delegates. Access to the city's amenities is well documented as a major consideration for event organisers.
- If the centre were to be sited by the lake to take advantage of Canberra's views, a shuttle service would need to be provided to ensure the facility was linked with the city's centre and essential amenities. The service would need to run at intervals of about every 15-minutes.
- Coffee shops and restaurants must be located outside, but very close to the convention centre to encourage people to wander into the city heart.
- The tourism industry is currently developing a position paper, which details the critical attributes and considerations required for a high quality convention facility.

### **Mixing business and pleasure**

- A 2004 National Visitor Survey by Tourism Research Australia found that the most favourite activities of visitors were dining at restaurants, visiting friends and relatives, shopping and then site seeing. That means access must be easier for those who will usually be on foot.
- Our city must have a good mix of restaurants, transport and shops that cater for all styles and budgets and that are located close to each other.
- It takes a lot of time and effort to access transport in this city. Taxis are hard to find and expensive, and the bus interchange is a long walk and can be intimidating for visitors. But better public transport will ensure people can travel quickly and affordably to all areas of the city as well as our national institutions. For example, a city shuttle that stops at hotels and attractions would make it easy to hop on and off, and would provide a valuable link between the areas on either side of Northbourne Avenue.
- Public art and cultural installations throughout the city areas would help build a sense of community and break down the barriers between the city's business and social aspects.

### **Hotels**

- A recent survey by US investment bankers Smith Barney found travellers have high expectations for hotel quality and are demanding better deals on accommodation. Industry experts are also finding this pattern being replicated in Australia. The number one, most requested attribute for a hotel is proximity to the CBD, business appointments and transport.

- According to *Corporate Directions* magazine (Autumn 2005), upscale, international standard hotels rate highly for business travellers because of price, availability, facilities including multiple phone lines and security.
- A mix of accommodation standards from three to five star hotels is required including all suite hotels with self catering amenities.
- High volume hotel options (300 rooms) make the best sense for conferences and events because more people can stay in the heart of the city and major conferences and events can be better organised because delegates are kept together instead of being spread across town.