Comment

The Link Scheme Amendment and Draft Design Guidelines

January 2009
Dear Tony,

Please find enclosed FuturePerth’s submission in regards to The Link Scheme Amendment and Draft Design Guidelines.

Our submission is not particularly lengthy, we do not seek to provide comment on every matter, and we only wish to express our utmost support for the speedy advancement of this project as a whole and provide brief feedback.

Regards

Sean Morrison
Chairman
FuturePerth Inc.
Who are we?

FuturePerth is an incorporated association devoted to supporting development and action that enhances the vibrancy and livability of Perth.

We are pro-good-development group consisting of planners, students, engineers, business people, tourism operators and everyday people.

We have been incorporated since early 2007 and operate as a non-profit, non-partisan organisation.

FuturePerth looks forward to providing comment on future EPRA projects and undertakings.

Vision

To provide a voice of progressive thinking to ensure that development in Perth is livable, vibrant, integrated, connected and of a high amenity.

Objectives

To promote the economic and social development of Western Australia and to lend support to similarly minded organisations where appropriate.

To promote the Perth central area as the primary area in the State for entertainment, retail, office, residential and recreational purposes.

To promote the densification and growth of suburban development nodes.

To promote the investment in and expansion of the public transportation system in Perth and Western Australia and the discouragement of policies which further motor vehicle dependence.

To promote the diversification and growth of metropolitan regional centres.

To promote urban regeneration projects.

To provide a voice for pro-development, progressive, forward thinking people and to dispel unfounded arguments by anti-development groups or individuals.

To generally support a reduction in the growth of urban sprawl and encourage the consolidation of development within the existing Perth urban area.
Background

The sinking of the railway lines that have divided the Perth CBD and Northbridge for over a century has always been a contentious issue. Since the post war period, a plethora of plans, ideas and concepts have been floated yet nothing has materialised. With the commitment of the State Government and a sound master plan, as well as reduced heat in the construction market, the timing is right to fulfill a century long vision.

FuturePerth recognises that the current EPRA master plan ‘The Link is a result of four years of planning as well as extensive community and stakeholder input. The current master plan generally reflects the aspirations of the wider Perth community as well as the Perth City Council and non government organisations, FuturePerth included.

In terms of sinking the railway lines, FuturePerth would ideally like to see both the Fremantle and Joondalup lines sunk to the Mitchell Freeway however understand that costs and technical limitation may not enable this to happen in which case, FuturePerth would be satisfied with the two lines being sunk to west of Lake Street.

Scheme Amendment

Support is given to proposed insertion of the three clauses which enable the creation of three distinct precincts and their statements of intent. Further support is given to the detail of these precincts including land uses, built form and public realm and their flexibility in that the statements do not restrict the evolvement of the precincts over time due to market factors and changing preferences.

FuturePerth believes EPRA should reconsider the proposed west to east staging of the project and instead opt to develop the eastern end of The Link (Horseshoe Bridge Plaza Precinct and the bus station) immediately after the railway lines are sunk. And while recognizing this is out the Scheme area, it would be fitting that a substantial upgrade of Perth Central Train Station would take place in conjunction with development of The Link. EPRA is encouraged to work with the City of Perth and the Public Transport Authority to do this, so that the current tired and uninspiring state of the station better reflects the aspirations of the project area. A new, architecturally unique roof structure is suggested as one way of achieving this.

Maximum car parking provisions as outlined in section 7.0 of the Link master plan are strongly supported given The Links proximity to the Perth central stations, Wellington Street Bus Station and also the free CAT bus service. We commend EPRA for seeking to limit the proliferation of car use, both for the associated urban design and sustainability benefits.
Design Guidelines

The design guidelines are generally sound and we feel will assist in creating a lively precinct. The emphasis on ensuring active street frontages is particularly encouraged – along Roe and Wellington Street this is crucial. We trust that EPRA will, as in the design guidelines say, judge all proposals on their merits in good faith.

An emphasis on public art is encouraged, FuturePerth would like to see design competitions or similar for prominent public features in the open space areas, as well innovative, technology based art such as LED footpath lighting and interactive information displays.

FuturePerth also recommends that EPRA include up lighting and/or feature lighting on building roofs and facades in development conditions so that The Link maintains its presence in the city skyline in night and day. Innovative lighting, including the use of colour, the time or temperature in a display or highlighting interesting architectural features will also assist in portraying a sense of vibrancy within the precinct and city area as a whole. Given the precincts close proximity to Northbridge, the entertainment centre of the city, it is particularly important to portray this sense of vibrancy. We also strongly encourage the incorporation of electronic signage and advertising. While the proliferation of advertising can cause problems in some cases, it is more than appropriate in an intense urban setting.

In terms of height, we support the podium and tower style type development proposed, and believe the maximum building heights should be adequate, especially in the current market. We do, however, encourage EPRA to use its discretionary clause to ensure that exemplary buildings of greater height than that permitted are not discouraged for the plans sake. This is particularly apparent for those buildings along Wellington Street given significant buildings such as one40william, Raine Square and Telstra Exchange will/already add bulk to that part of the city. The landmark building proposed at Horseshoe Bridge should also not be constrained by the plan, with a focus on good design and making a statement rather than bulk or scale.

In regards to the Perth Arena/Milligan Street precinct, FuturePerth believes a future Perth Arena/Northbridge/Westend Train Station should be taken into consideration in the master plan and during the development stages of the project. We believe such a station would alleviate pressure from Perth Underground and Perth Central and be useful to Westend, West Perth and Northbridge workers and visitors. Planning for this station would demonstrate prudence and long-term thinking, given the Perth CBD working and visitor population will continue to surge, as will public transport use.
We strongly encourage the use of roof top gardens in The Link. In addition to their aesthetic benefits, such gardens can dramatically improve the energy efficiency and sustainability credentials of buildings. We hope that such gardens are included as development conditions upon approval, and not considered as optional extras.

Conclusion

The Link is a significant opportunity not only to reconnect the CBD to Northbridge but to create high quality public places shaped by urban design whilst bringing to the city a much needed residential population boost. The Link master plan generally satisfies the needs of FuturePerth and as such, is supported by the group.