The whole of Perth is one city but with many governments. This division is at the heart of the city’s problems – lack of focus, lack of ambition and lack of leadership.
Dear Panel,

Thank you for providing FuturePerth with a copy of the Metropolitan Local Government Review Panel Issues Paper (October 2011) and providing us with an opportunity to offer comment.

FuturePerth is and has been a strong advocate for major local government reform in Perth. Our group commends the Minister for initiating this process and trusts that the panel will recommend bold, wholesale reform to this very important government level, which has a major impact on the way Perth grows and develops.

Please find enclosed our comments in regards to the review and the Issues Paper. We have recommended a major reconstruction of local government boundaries in the metropolitan area and associated changes.

Kind Regards

The Committee

FuturePerth Inc.

For information about FuturePerth, its committee and activities, please visit www.futureperth.org

Enc. FuturePerth Metropolitan Local Government Review Comments
Who are we?
FuturePerth is an incorporated association who loves our city yet is equally passionate about what it can become.

FuturePerth provides a voice for forward thinking advocating for development in Perth that is vibrant, integrated, sustainable and reflects the aspirations of creative, urban and active citizens. FuturePerth was established in 2008 and operates as a non-profit, non-partisan organisation, with members consisting of a variety of professionals and students from a wide range of fields including planning, law, architecture, health and hospitality.

Our four key policy priorities include major projects, the built environment, movement and governance.

We educate. We inspire. We collaborate. We showcase.

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 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.
Overview and Background
FuturePerth is and always will be a major advocate for local government reform in the Perth Metropolitan Region. This issue has proved to be a prominent discussion point during our meetings and when interacting with local stakeholders.

In May 2011 our ‘Why Not?’ publication advocated an expanded City of Perth boundary to coordinate planning and governance arrangements for Perth’s inner city. Similar comments were made during our workshop contribution for the draft Perth Capital City Planning Framework.

Our approach to reform is primarily concerned with the best outcome for the governance of our city. Existing structures, given their age and associated network of dependents, should not set the direction for the future. Reform will be painful for some; however the greater good should take precedence.

FuturePerth strongly urges the review panel to embrace a wholesale reform of local government in Perth. Incremental reform or minor boundary adjustments would represent a significant missed opportunity and be a breach of trust to the future citizens of Perth.
Our Thoughts on the Current Local Government Framework

Apart from a small number of excellent local governments and leaders, the current local government framework is largely dysfunctional and a restrictive force on Perth’s development.

FuturePerth recognises the many hard-working elected local government representatives and local government officers but appreciates the difficulties they face operating in the current system. Reform will enable our committed local government members to more effectively manage the development of our city.

Decision Making

We believe that democracy served by the current local government electoral system is limited by low turnout rates at local government elections. A small number of votes can have a highly disproportionate effect on local government decision making due to the current small size of local government electorates and ward systems.

This phenomenon is highly evident in smaller local governments across Perth, where policy is shaped by small, often trivial, local issues. Decision making is therefore often infected by a reluctance to endorse positions that may create any controversy. The cumulative effect of this system is that decisions do not respond to metropolitan level problems such as the need for infill development, integrated transport and the creation of high quality activity centres.

The recent implementation of Development Assessment Panels has sought to remedy some of these problems, local governments still have a major influence on the way our cities are planned and developed. Local governments are still responsible for initiating scheme amendments, preparing policies and the preparation of the actual Development Assessment Panel reports (in conjunction with the secretariat).

Risk and Varied Standards

A complicated layer of planning regulation across metropolitan Perth compounds decision making difficulties.

The myriad of town planning schemes, policies and other planning documents creates a complex and confusing web of regulation across the metropolitan area. For example, major shopping centres have different parking standards, development application documentation requirements are different for every local government and public art requirements are different.

The effect of red tape across the metropolitan area should not be underestimated. Combined with the peculiarities that come with each different local government structure and elected members, the situation creates risk, uncertainty and adds to costs and timeframes. Risk for developers is a strong deterrent and is creating a major lag in the development of our city.

Regional Collaboration and Leadership

The patchwork of local governments across the metropolitan area has no relevance to the movement of people and goods in our city, with borders based on decisions made in some cases over one hundred years ago. It would be extremely difficult for any local government in Perth to argue that their borders are the result of an ordered and logical process. The Mt Lawley Beaufort Street strip is divided by two local governments, as is the Perth Central Area north of Newcastle Street. Through the Capital City Planning Framework the W.A State Government has sought to overcome some of these issues, however strategic documents like this often fail at the implementation (i.e. local government) level.
Excellent examples of regional collaboration include the broad support for the Knowledge Arc light route from UWA to Curtin via the CBD. However in this case land use and land intensity changes will need to filter through several local governments, reducing efficiency and increasing red tape. We believe regional issues can only be considered by organisations with a regional perspective.

There is also a vacuum in the leadership of Perth itself with a constant lack of a representative leader of the greater metropolitan region. While the Lord Mayor of the City of Perth acts in some way to fill this gap, her powers (real, political and financial) are limited.

The whole of Perth is one city but with many governments. This division is at the heart of the city’s problems – lack of focus, lack of ambition and lack of leadership.
How Should Perth be Governed?

Despite the problems outlined above, Perth still remains one of the best places in which to live. This is no reason for complacency and therefore there are a range of changes that can take place to strengthen our city’s growth in the 21st century.

Large But Focused Local Governments

Fragmented local government creates a fragmented city. To rectify this, a consolidated number of local governments are required in Perth. This change is likely to have high transition costs and be a complex operation; however it will have the highest return of more effective governance.

FuturePerth members have work-shopped possible local government boundaries which best represent the different areas of our city. This would be complemented by possible overarching leadership solutions as outlined in the following section.

FuturePerth recommends local governments in the metropolitan region consisting approximately of the following (please note that the names are descriptive only – however it is recommended the use of hyphenated names be avoided):

- **City of Perth** – the expanded City of Perth would govern the CBD and the inner city, creating a body responsible for the heart of the metropolitan region and encapsulating major recreational, entertainment, education and civic facilities. Included in this municipality would be the CBD, Leederville, Mt Lawley, Maylands, East Perth, the Burswood Peninsula (inc. Burswood Stadium), the City of South Perth (inc. Curtin University), Victoria Park, UWA/QEII, Subiaco, Wembley, Scarborough, Stirling, Balcatta, Morley, Bayswater, Belmont, Perth Airport and Carlisle.

- **City of the Western Suburbs** (promoted otherwise as Riversea Council) - The western suburbs of Perth are currently the most local government fragmented areas in Perth. This local government would represent some of Perth’s most valuable areas, reflecting some of the common characteristics of this locality. The City of the Western Suburbs would incorporate Mosman Park, Cottesloe, Peppermint Grove, Claremont, Mount Claremont and Nedlands.

- **City of Fremantle** – An expanded City of Fremantle would take over the governances for a large part of the south-west metropolitan area. The municipality would take in areas such as North Fremantle, Fremantle, Melville, Booragoon, Murdoch, South Lake, Yangebup, Success, Munster and Coogee, generally bordered to the east by the Kwinana Freeway.

- **City of Joondalup** – An expanded City of Joondalup would take in a major portion of Perth’s metropolitan area, including Karrinyup, Trigg, Hillarys, Sorrento, Mullaloo, Ocean Reef, Currambine, Kinross, Joondalup, Carramar, Wanneroo, Sinagra, Wangara, Madeley, Warwick, Mirrabooka, Malaga, Ballajura, Alexander Heights and Landsdale.

- **City of Cannington** – The City of Cannington would take in major growth areas such as Clarkson, Butler, Alkimos, Eglinton, Yanchep and Two Rocks. An interim solution may be required for this area given the current phase of development the area is in.

- **City of Mandurah** – An expanded City of Mandurah would encapsulate the entire Peel Region.

FuturePerth has not determined the exact boundaries of each of the above.
City Leadership

Even with an expanded City of Perth and consolidated councils, there is still the need for an overarching leader of the metropolitan area. We propose several options, including:

- Metropolitan-wide voting for the Lord Mayor of the City of Perth – enabling a vote for the Lord Mayor by all metropolitan residents could assist in the Lord Mayor taking a metropolitan approach in their role; or
- A Mayor of Perth who would have a form of representations across all local governments – this person could sit with all mayor across all of metropolitan Perth in some sort of strategic Council or head a separate executive body, similar to the model employed by London; or
- An enhanced role for the Lord Mayor of Perth – possibly acting in combination with Option 1, it would be beneficial for the Lord Mayor of Perth to have a formalised role with the State Government in being responsible for the metropolitan region or as a key referral ‘agency’ in regards to major transport, redevelopment or land development projects.

Stronger Councillors

Elected members are critical to driving the direction of local governments, providing a voice for local issues and breeding talent for higher levels of local government.

It is therefore unacceptable that elected member compensation is set at an almost negligible amount by the Local Government Act. Wages should be set at a level that enables members to act in their roles in a full time capacity with appropriate allowances by an independent body such as the Salaries and Allowances Tribunal. This will remove situations currently where elected members are highly inaccessible due to the need to work in other roles. The change will also enable members greater time to learn and appreciate local issues.

Combined with the reduced number of local governments and resultant much higher elector to council ratio, it is considered that this change will ensure strong local representation.

Delegation is Key

With the major amalgamation of local governments, the volume of applications in which each local government will deal with will rise substantially. To reduce the impact of this, each local government should significantly increase the capacity of local government staff to determine applications through delegated authority. Local government meeting agendas are often filled with minor items such as patios, minor changes of land use and small variations to Residential Design Codes. Some local governments are much more effective in dealing with these smaller issues quickly and internally, however a consistent approach is required.

Development Assessment Panels and the New Local Governments

The major restructuring of local government will create some transitional requirements in regards to Development Assessment Panels.

FuturePerth is a strong supporter of Development Assessment Panels; however some adjustments and improvements can be made.

Firstly, each new metropolitan local government should have its own Development Assessment Panel, replacing the existing boundaries (assuming the number of Councils is reduced to 8-9 based on our recommendations).

Secondly, matters determined by Development Assessment Panels should be expanded. This includes items such as scheme amendments. Scheme amendments are often required in the event of major developments, and local governments as the gatekeeper to these changes are still obstructing development through complicating this process.