

# Liveability

## Critical Policy Brief

This briefing draws upon the expertise of RMIT's Healthy, Liveable Cities Group to inform policy makers and the wider community on critical challenges that affect the liveability of Victorians.

**By 2050, Melbourne's population is projected to grow to 8 million. If Melbourne is to retain its reputation as being among the world's most liveable cities, integrated planning is required across health, transport and planning sectors to promote liveability and walkability. While liveability is a prominent policy goal in Plan Melbourne 2017-2050, policy implementation is presently failing to address health, economic and environmental inequities.**

### Overview

Liveable communities are safe, attractive, socially cohesive and inclusive. They are environmentally sustainable, providing affordable and diverse housing close to public transport, walking and cycling infrastructure. Residents can readily access employment and education opportunities, as well as health and community services. Community engagement, health and wellbeing are supported through provision of public open spaces, recreational facilities and cultural events.<sup>1</sup>

Liveability provides significant benefits to the economy and our community. Walkable 20-minute neighbourhoods improve productivity by reducing car use, lessening road congestion and shortening transit times. Community health costs are reduced through enhanced participation in active travel and exercise, social inclusion and improved mental well-being.<sup>2</sup>

While these benefits are acknowledged in policies designed to promote Melbourne's liveability,<sup>3</sup> current policies for walkability, public transport and public open space would benefit from more clearly defined standards, more ambitious targets, and consistent implementation. This policy brief highlights the need for: specific policy standards with targets for implementation; the development of walkable neighbourhoods and provision of adequate public space; and the introduction of standards and targets for housing affordability, employment, access to healthy food and moderated access to retail alcohol outlets.



### Key Messages

- Liveability enhances the health and wellbeing of Melburnians, as well as supporting productivity.
- Walkable neighbourhoods are highly valued and underpin healthy liveable communities, yet current dwelling density targets in Melbourne are too low to achieve walkable communities. Walkable neighbourhoods would be better supported by a target of 25 dwellings per hectare, with an even higher target around activity centres.
- Delivering liveable communities requires a whole-of-government approach to ensure integrated planning, particularly across the health, transport and planning portfolios.
- Policies to promote liveability need to be supported by best practice, evidence-informed standards that can be measured spatially, with specific targets for implementation.
- Housing affordability, local employment, access to healthy food and moderated access to retail alcohol outlets are critical aspects of liveability. Specific spatial policy standards and targets are needed for these liveability indicators.

### Create High-density Walkable Neighbourhoods

Creating walkable, 20-minute neighbourhoods is a key goal of *Plan Melbourne 2017-2050*. To achieve this, housing development needs to occur close to services and amenities. Walkable neighbourhoods have high residential density supported by a well-connected and safe pedestrian street network. Yet Melbourne's current dwelling density target of 15 dwellings per hectare is considerably lower than the 25 dwellings per hectare that research evidence

suggests is most conducive to creating liveable communities — and only one in five Melbourne suburbs meet the insufficient 15 dwellings per hectare target.<sup>4</sup> If Melburnians are to regularly walk, they need somewhere to walk to. Melbourne is considerably short of its aim that 80-90% of residences be located within 1 km of an activity centre large enough to support a supermarket — only 40% of residences currently meet this target.<sup>5</sup>

Neighbourhoods that encourage walking, cycling and public transport use would be much better supported by a target of 25 dwellings per hectare, with an even higher target around activity centres.<sup>6</sup> Policies to increase access to activity centres need to be fully implemented. There is evidence that further reducing the distance threshold to 800m would deliver significant additional health benefits by encouraging uptake of active travel.<sup>7</sup>

The Victorian Planning Provisions stipulate that 95% of Melbourne residences be within accessible walking distance<sup>8</sup> of a bus stop, tram stop, or train station. RMIT research indicates that only 69% of residences and 14% of suburbs in Melbourne currently meet this target.<sup>9</sup> The frequency of services also has a considerable influence on whether people use public transport. New South Wales transport policies include standards for frequency of service and the time of day that these services operate. Adopting a similar approach in Victoria would further increase accessibility of public transport services.

## Plan for Public Open Space

Opportunities to access public open spaces, especially parks, are a highly valued aspect of liveability in our communities,

providing significant benefits for health and well-being. To realise these benefits, local parks need to be large enough to support physical activity. However, almost half of Melbourne's parks are less than 0.5 hectare in size, which is too small to encourage active recreation.<sup>10</sup> There is a significant opportunity to plan for public open spaces conducive to physical and recreational activity in new urban developments. This can be supported by setting a requirement that all residents have close access to a park of at least 1.5 hectares in size. Victoria could also consider differentiated guidelines for parkland related to its intended use and scale. Western Australia has specific guidelines for neighbourhood, district and regional parks.<sup>11</sup>

## Additional Liveability Targets

Liveability is influenced by the affordability of housing<sup>12</sup>, employment opportunities<sup>13</sup>, access to healthy food<sup>14</sup> and moderated access to retail alcohol outlets.<sup>15</sup> Yet, there are no specific policy standards and targets in these areas, which are important to address disparities in liveability, health and well-being across Melbourne and for delivering 20-minute neighbourhoods. Implementing policies to achieve progress in these liveability indicators would help ensure that residents throughout the city have access to walkable, mixed-use neighbourhoods that support health.

**For further information contact Dr Lucy Gunn**

**[lucy.gunn@rmit.edu.au](mailto:lucy.gunn@rmit.edu.au)**

*Authors: Dr Lucy D Gunn, Julianna Rozek, Dr Jonathan Arundel, Associate Professor Hannah Badland and Professor Billie Giles-Corti*

<sup>1</sup> Lowe M et al (2013) Liveable, healthy, sustainable: What are the key indicators for Melbourne neighbourhoods? Melbourne: Place, Health and Liveability Research Program, University of Melbourne.

<sup>2</sup> Davern M et al (2018) 'Using spatial measures to test a conceptual model of social infrastructure that supports health and wellbeing', *Cities & Health*, 1(2), 194-209.

<sup>3</sup> See Plan Melbourne 2017-2050, Outcomes 4 and 5.

<sup>4</sup> Arundel J et al (2017) *Creating liveable cities in Australia: Mapping urban policy implementation and evidence-based national liveability indicators*. Melbourne: Centre for Urban Research RMIT University; Boulangé C et al (2017), 'Examining associations between urban design attributes and transport mode choice for walking, cycling, public transport and private motor vehicle trips', *Journal of Transport & Health*, 6:155.

<sup>5</sup> Arundel J et al (2017) *Creating liveable cities in Australia: Mapping urban policy implementation and evidence-based national liveability indicators*. Melbourne: Centre for Urban Research RMIT University.

<sup>6</sup> Boulangé C et al (2017), 'Examining associations between urban design attributes and transport mode choice for walking, cycling, public transport and private motor vehicle trips', *Journal of Transport & Health*, 6:155; Gunn LD et al (2017), 'Designing healthy communities: Creating evidence on metrics for built environment features associated with walkable neighbourhood activity centres', *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*, 14(1):164.

<sup>7</sup> Gunn LD et al (2017), 'Identifying destination distances that support walking trips in local neighborhoods', *Journal of Transport & Health* 2017; 133-141; Murphy M et al (2018), 'Local Food Environments, Suburban Development, and BMI: A Mixed Methods Study', *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 15(7):1392; Trapp G et al (2012), 'Increasing Children's Physical

Activity: Individual, Social, and Environmental Factors Associated with Walking to and from School', *Health Education & Behavior*, 39(2) 172-182.

<sup>8</sup> Within 400m of a bus stop, 600m of a tram stop, or 800m of a train station.

<sup>9</sup> Arundel J et al (2017), *Creating liveable cities in Australia: Mapping urban policy implementation and evidence-based national liveability indicators*. Melbourne: Centre for Urban Research RMIT University, p. 41.

<sup>10</sup> Koohsari J et al (2018), 'Are public open space attributes associated with walking and depression?', *Cities*, 74: 119-125.

<sup>11</sup> Western Australian Planning Commission, Department of Planning (2015), *Liveable Neighbourhoods: Draft 2015*, Perth; Western Australian Department of Sport and Recreation (2012), *Classification Framework for Public Open Space*, Perth.

<sup>12</sup> Badland H et al (2017), 'Examining associations between area-level spatial measures of housing with selected health and wellbeing behaviours and outcomes in an urban context' *Health & Place*, 43, 17-24.

<sup>13</sup> Badland H et al (2016) 'Conceptualising and Measuring Spatial Indicators of Employment Through a Liveability Lens', *Social Indicators Research*, Vol.127(2), pp. 565-576.

<sup>14</sup> Feng X et al (2018) 'Modest ratios of fast food outlets to supermarkets and green grocers are associated with higher body mass index: Longitudinal analysis of a sample of 15,229 Australians aged 45 years and older in the Australian National Liveability Study', *Health & Place*, Jan 2018, Vol.49, p.101.

<sup>15</sup> Kavanagh A et al (2011), 'Access to alcohol outlets and harmful alcohol consumption: A multi-level study in Melbourne, Australia', *Addiction*, 106(10), 1772-1779; Mhurchu N et al (2013), 'Monitoring the availability of healthy and unhealthy foods and non-alcoholic beverages in community and consumer retail food environments globally', *Obesity Reviews*, 14(S1), 108-119.