



# Submission on the Greater Adelaide Regional Plan

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251 Morphett Street, Adelaide, SA 5000

08 8226 3355 | [commissionercyp@sa.gov.au](mailto:commissionercyp@sa.gov.au)

**Greater Adelaide Regional Plan**

State Planning Commission

Email: [plansasubmissions@sa.gov.au](mailto:plansasubmissions@sa.gov.au)

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback in relation to the State Government's call for views on its Greater Adelaide Regional Plan Discussion Paper.

As the inaugural Commissioner for Children and Young People for South Australia, I promote and advocate for the rights, interests and wellbeing of all children and young people living in South Australia and help to bring about improvements to the systems that negatively impact on them most.

I have heard from many children and young people about what they like and dislike about their local environments, the difficulties they have moving around, and their concerns about needing fast internet access and charging facilities wherever they go. Where young people live, the facilities available to them locally, and their ease of access to school, activities and employment have an enormous impact on their lives and can mean the difference between getting on well in life and being impoverished. However, their views are seldom considered.

The voices of children and young people will be critical to the success of the Greater Adelaide Regional Plan. I recommend that the State Planning Commission engages meaningfully and appropriately with children and young people to thoroughly understand their unique and diverse current needs, and their valuable perspectives as the voice of future generations.

Their desire for places in which they live, learn, earn, and play to be connected, creative and confident requires an inter-agency, coordinated approach to planning that meets their priorities:

- Greener, climate resilient environments;
- Child and youth friendly places and spaces;
- Access to high quality internet and Wi-Fi connections, and charging facilities; and
- Well-connected places where they can walk or cycle to school, university, work and activities, or safely, easily and cheaply access direct public transport.

If you have any questions or need any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

**Helen Connolly**

Commissioner for Children and Young People  
Adelaide, South Australia

## Introduction

Under the *Children and Young People (Oversight and Advocacy Bodies) Act 2016*, each State authority ‘must, in carrying out its functions or exercising its powers, protect, respect and seek to give effect to the rights set out from time to time in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child’.

The question of how and where Greater Adelaide should grow needs to consider the views of children and young people. Not only do under-18s form 23 per cent of the SA population<sup>i</sup>, they also represent the interests of future generations. If we want to live in a place that supports our children and young people and is an attractive place to stay and raise children, we might reverse the brain drain and the risks associated with the aging SA population.

In my conversations and interactions with thousands of children and young people during my time in office they have raised several concerns with me about where they live and how it impacts their lives. They have also told me what they need and would like access to locally in order to live better, more connected, supported, healthier and happier lives. I have provided these insights here to help inform the Greater Adelaide Plan.

Priorities for young people in relation to their local areas focus on:

- Greener, climate resilient environments;
- Child and youth friendly places and spaces;
- Access to high quality internet and Wi-Fi connections, and charging facilities; and
- Well-connected places where they can walk or cycle to school, university, work and activities, or safely, easily and cheaply access direct public transport.

## Greener, climate resilient environments

South Australian children and young people consistently raise concerns about climate change in the context of conversations about poverty, health, education and transport.<sup>ii</sup> This highlights the significant impacts of climate change on children and young people’s daily lives, the people, places and animals they care about, and how they feel about the future.

Children and young people are deeply protective of their ability to be outdoors and want more parks and recreational facilities that take advantage of South Australian biodiversity.

Children and young people recognise the impact of climate change and pollution on their local community. They recognise the importance of trees and green spaces to improve the appeal of their local area and address air quality issues and heat stress. They have many ideas on how to address climate and environmental challenges, and they want the tools to empower them to do so themselves.

## Child and youth friendly places and spaces

When asked what a youthful place is, young people have told me that it is somewhere where ‘anything is possible’, where ‘tribes’ of young people can get together to try out

new ideas, express themselves and just 'be young and hang out' without fear of being hassled, judged or moved on.<sup>iii</sup>

New developments and infill rarely take these needs into account and this shows. In 2020, the Australian Urban Observatory found that liveability is poor beyond Adelaide's inner suburbs, in terms of economic, social, environmental and health objectives, as well as the availability of affordable housing close to public transport.<sup>iv</sup> This included access to childcare, community centres, libraries, GPs, sporting facilities, swimming pools schools, museums, cinemas and theatres.

Committing to providing child friendly and child safe environments for children and young people is not merely something that is 'nice to do'. It is a requirement under international conventions that are embedded in State Legislation.

Young people have told us they want spaces that are well planned, have open borders, allow connections virtually and physically, are open, inclusive, public, and welcoming. They want places which offer things to do and places to be, including somewhere that you can speak your mind, stand up for what you believe in and express your rights.

They would like to have the opportunity to experience and have opportunities to participate in creative pursuits locally and young people spoke about the significance of seeing more colour, art and greenery, both from an aesthetic perspective, and in terms of the pride and optimism this generates.

Young people said that having a local central hub for young people to gather is critical to their needs. This hub would ideally be an all-weather structure, open and centrally located, with space to sit on the ground, as well as other seating. The hub should be big enough for high volumes of young people to gather, and for it to be 'neutral territory'.

Creating spaces where groups of young people can coexist and connect but are also able maintain their independence is considered critical. A space that is neutral, communal and owned by young people has the hallmarks of an ideal youth hub. The hub must also have interconnectivity, Wi-Fi and phone charging stations, with access to high-quality Wi-Fi seen as essential.

Access to speciality shops and precincts are a major reason for young people to travel to specific localities, with many young people expressing the view that clustering fashion, music and coffee together is the best way to activate areas in which young people will gather.

Regional young people in particular say they want more investment in public spaces and places where they live, which need to be welcoming to children and young people. They want more fun activities in the community outside schools, and opportunities to be creative. Swimming pools, jetties and better playgrounds are priorities for them.

### **Access to high quality internet and Wi-Fi connections, and charging facilities**

Digital access is increasingly seen as an 'essential' utility that we rely upon with the same predictability as electricity, clean water, and effective sewage systems. Public health policy in many jurisdictions nationally and globally, including in South Australia, is increasingly recognising digital inclusion as a social determinant of health. As such, digital

access is a means of realising fundamental rights set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), including the rights of all children to a quality education (Articles 28 and 29) healthcare (Article 24), information (Article 13), play (Article 31) and participation in decisions that affect their lives (Article 12). It is also central to safety, citizenship and social and economic participation in work, education, and the community.

Based on my extensive consultation with young people, I have found that they don't make a hard and fast distinction between what bits of their lives are online and offline. They describe technology as a 'part of life now'; the way they connect to the people and places they care about, the services they need, and their worlds of learning, earning, and play. Online is simply another place where they exist, it is part of their everyday life.

Digital access covers all aspects of young people's complex and busy lives. It includes learning, working, volunteering, travelling, gaming, having fun, and maintaining social connections to family, friends, team mates, work mates and school peers.

Access to fast and reliable phone coverage, internet and wireless connectivity is vital to almost every part of the lives of children and young people at home, at school, in the workplace, and everywhere they go. Internet access is essential to children and young people. It enables them to complete their homework, to stay in touch with friends and family. No development should under-estimate the importance of fast, cheap and reliable internet and Wi-Fi access.

Current rates of access are poor in SA in comparison to the other states.<sup>v</sup> Indigenous young people are particularly digitally excluded as well as those in regional and remote areas.

In my 2020 Devices and Digital Data Survey<sup>vi</sup>, I asked how often not having a stable internet connection was a problem. 36/254 said it was 'Always a problem' and 110/254 said it was 'Sometimes a problem'. The most common problem areas included Munno Para and Munno Para West, Smithfield, Davoren Park, Gawler, Salisbury and Adelaide itself.

Children and young people have complained to me that their digital access is unreliable and described having internet connections that 'can disconnect regularly'. Although they may not speak about the 'Internet' per se, they highlight their frustration at the barriers and negative effects of not being able to fully participate online. They described difficulties completing homework due to poor connection. The impacts of limited access to the internet extend beyond a student's time at school. Children and young people's participation in their community, their social lives, and their pursuit of future work or study opportunities, largely depends on the degree of digital access they have.

In most areas of work, young people are expected to have a smartphone and reasonable access. For example, in entry level jobs in hospitality and retail, young people are expected to use technology to manage rostering or finding people to cover or swap shifts, and to receive and respond to compulsory training requirements.

Many young South Australians rely on free public Wi-Fi in public shopping centres, fast food outlets and libraries to complete important 'life admin' tasks. These include



organising transport, accessing online banking, taking or swapping shifts at work, completing homework, and booking health or other appointments. Children and young people describe using public Wi-Fi ‘wherever I can’. As a result, access to high-quality free Wi-Fi and phone charging stations are seen as essential features of public spaces for young people.

‘Data dead zones’ are a common concern for young people, who complain about areas where there is no Wi-Fi access. While children and young people living in regional areas are particularly affected by this, there are also numerous ‘dead spots’ of poor mobile phone reception and Wi-Fi connection in metropolitan Adelaide. Where public Wi-Fi is available, it’s often not fit for purpose; it’s unreliable, slow, and often has poor security, meaning connection to important services such as mobile banking apps is restricted.

Many children and young people living in regional areas have told me that they live in places where there is poor or no internet or phone reception at all. This can be further exacerbated by limited free public Wi-Fi and limited transport to independently access digital infrastructure made available in community facilities.

Living in an area with no or poor reception, can really dim down a child or young person’s connection to community, and the people they care about. Without a reliable connection, children and young people describe feeling ‘lost’ and ‘unsafe’. They may be ‘caught out’ without money if they cannot access online banking to transfer money from their savings to their spending account. They may not be able to plan their public transport journey without access to bus timetables, or the option to recharge a MetroCard online.

### **Well connected places where they can walk or cycle to school, university, work and activities, or safely, easily and cheaply get direct public transport**

#### Fit for purpose public transport

Wherever Greater Adelaide grows, it must provide good, regular, safe public transport links. Transport is one of the top five issues young people across the State have raised with me repeatedly. The major challenges young people identify as barriers to having their transport needs met are cost, accessibility and safety.<sup>vii</sup> Transport is central to how young people experience their community and means that these barriers impact on their capacity to participate fully in almost every aspect of their lives.

Almost 1 in 5 of all Adelaide Metro patrons are primary or secondary students.<sup>viii</sup>

There are strong links between children and young people’s mobility and their overall social inclusion and wellbeing. Children and young people are among the most transport disadvantaged members of their community. Without alternative modes of transport (such as having a driver’s license or parents, friends, and caregivers to give them a lift), children and young people can become socially excluded or isolated.

I frequently hear that children and young people in the northern and southern suburbs never visit Adelaide because neither their parents nor schools can afford to take them.

Transport disadvantage has a demonstrable impact on school attendance, gaining and maintaining employment, as well as on a child or young person’s capacity to make and

maintain their social connections. This is further exacerbated for those who have a disability, low socio-economic status or geographical remoteness.

Planning is one of the tools the State Government has which it can use to improve the lot of those who are least well off and to improve equity and fairness. By adopting public health and wellbeing as key principles in how planning is undertaken the positive impact of any new growth and expansion of existing developments can be optimised.

Public transport routes in Greater Adelaide primarily travel along major arterial routes in a hub and spoke configuration. Many young people have expressed that they need to travel against the grain, both within and between suburbs, often for relatively short distances. This means they may lose hours from their day taking two buses or a bus and a train to travel the three or four kilometres needed to get to university, or to a part-time job that offers them crucial work hours after school or on weekends.

Young people in regional centres describe how poor access to public transport limits their ability to access education, employment and social activities. Young people in regional areas are concerned about the lack of job opportunities. Reliance on public transport that may not be regular, cheap or reliable can be a real barrier to seeking and keeping employment. Many young people said they regularly travel 1-2 hours each day to attend school, sport and work.

### Walkability

We cannot expect children to play outside and run around if there is nowhere safe for them to go that they can get to without a car.

We know that some areas of Adelaide are entirely reliant on private car travel. The Global Observatory of Healthy and Sustainable Cities<sup>ix</sup> found that Adelaide ‘does not appear to have transport planning policies incorporating health-focussed actions or air pollution policies related to transport or land use planning.’ Only 54% of residents have nearby access to public transport stops with regular services and no neighbourhoods in Adelaide have the population density levels recommended by the World Health Organisation to increase physical activity.<sup>x</sup>

As a result, South Australian children and young people are some of the most obese and least active in the world: According to the 2021 South Australian Population Health Survey 12.6 per cent of children are obese.<sup>xi</sup> The Australian Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines recommend that children aged 5–17 years should do at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous intense physical activity every day<sup>xii</sup> – in 2021, a quarter of children aged 5–17 years reported meeting this level.<sup>xiii</sup>

Physical activity in children and young people is vital – childhood is the most sensitive period of human development in which to promote long-lasting health-enhancing behaviours. The benefits of regular exercise include better health and fitness, better mental wellbeing, improved physical literacy, and the long-term prevention of chronic disease.

Active travel to school is an easy way for kids to be physically active as part of their daily routine. However, poorly designed infrastructure, distance, lack of safe footpaths and

road safety concerns are a barrier to walking and cycling in many neighbourhoods, including Adelaide itself. Any areas of growth must address these issues.

Fear of road accidents means parents are reluctant to let their children outside by themselves – a look at their local area will often lead them to conclude that it is not safe for children to play, cycle or even walk there. In Australia, transport injuries are the most common cause of death and the second most common cause of injury resulting in hospital admission for children aged 0–14 years.<sup>xiv</sup> Across SA, there 218 road crashes in 2020 resulted in a pedestrian casualty, of which 38 were under the age of 18.<sup>xv</sup>

The Australian Urban Observatory (part of RMIT) has provided walkability data for Adelaide’s metropolitan suburbs.<sup>xvi</sup> The ‘walkability’ of a route is calculated based on the proximity of schools/other destinations; street/path connectivity; and dwelling density.<sup>xvii</sup> Planned growth areas like Hackham are deemed car-dependent, with Sellicks Beach having one of the worst walkability scores in Greater Adelaide, meaning it is entirely car dependent.

We also know that places like Goolwa and Victor Harbor, Murray Bridge, Gawler and the Inner North are extremely dependent on car transport.

### **Engagement with Children and Young People**

Many of the people who are currently being consulted about the GARP will not be in power and may not even be alive in 30 years’ time. It is essential that children and young people from across Greater Adelaide are engaged effectively, so that they can provide their unique insights into the region and its long-term needs both as young people today and as future adult populations.

It is important to hear firsthand from children and young people from a variety of backgrounds, including:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people;
- Children and young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds;
- Those with caring responsibilities;
- LGBTQIA+ young people;
- Children and young people with a disability;
- Those living with chronic illness; and
- Children and young people living in relevant metropolitan and regional communities.

Understanding the nuances and complexity of young people’s experiences provides insight into where the State Planning Commission and other agencies need to focus their coordinated efforts.

Our young people have unique perspectives on what makes a place tick. They provide lived insight into how to attract and retain young talent; how to be resilient, how to be clean and green; and how to ensure our actions are inclusive and visionary. Young people have developed views about both the benefits and negative aspects of growing up in different parts of the Greater Adelaide. They know what they want, and they would like



to be invited to participate in meaningful opportunities to share their ideas with decision makers and community leaders.

All children have the right to have a say on all matters that affect them and for their views to be taken seriously. In making decisions about children their best interests should be the primary concern, as well as their right to be safe and to be free from discrimination.

<sup>i</sup> South Australia: 2021 Census All persons QuickStats, ABS, <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/4>

<sup>ii</sup> The Things That Matter 4: Views of 8-12 year olds on life, school and community, CCYP, July 2023, <https://www.ccyp.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/The-Things-That-Matter-4.pdf>

<sup>iii</sup> Youthful Adelaide: What young people have said will make Adelaide more youthful, CCYP, April 2019, <https://www.ccyp.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Youthful-Adelaide.pdf>

<sup>iv</sup> Liveability Report for Adelaide, Australian Urban Observatory, 2020, [https://auo.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/AUO\\_Scorecard\\_Adelaide.pdf](https://auo.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/AUO_Scorecard_Adelaide.pdf)

<sup>v</sup> Australian Digital Inclusion Index 2022, <https://www.digitalinclusionindex.org.au/dashboard/National.aspx>

<sup>vi</sup> My Digital Life: Understanding the impact of digital poverty on children and young people, CCYP, August 2021, <https://www.ccyp.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/My-Digital-Life-Understanding-the-impact-of-digital-poverty-on-children-and-young-people.pdf>

<sup>vii</sup> Safe and Sound: Views and experiences of young people on public transport, CCYP, June 2023, <https://www.ccyp.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Safe-and-Sound-Report.pdf>

<sup>viii</sup> Department for Infrastructure and Transport. 2021- 2022 Annual Report. Available at [https://www.dit.sa.gov.au/about\\_us/governance\\_reporting/annual\\_report/dit-annual-report-2021-22-online-version](https://www.dit.sa.gov.au/about_us/governance_reporting/annual_report/dit-annual-report-2021-22-online-version)

<sup>ix</sup> Healthy and Sustainable City Indicators Report: Comparisons with 25 cities internationally: Adelaide, Australia, Global Observatory of Healthy & Sustainable Cities, 2022, [https://rmit.figshare.com/articles/report/Adelaide\\_Australia\\_Healthy\\_and\\_Sustainable\\_City\\_Indicators\\_Report\\_Comparisons\\_with\\_25\\_cities\\_internationally/19614009](https://rmit.figshare.com/articles/report/Adelaide_Australia_Healthy_and_Sustainable_City_Indicators_Report_Comparisons_with_25_cities_internationally/19614009)

<sup>x</sup> *ibid*

<sup>xi</sup> SA Health, 2021. South Australian Population Health Survey 2021 Annual Report – Children. Available at <https://www.wellbeingsa.sa.gov.au/assets/downloads/SAPHS/SAPHS-2021-AnnualChildren-Report.pdf>.

<sup>xii</sup> Department of Health. 2019. Australia's Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines and the Australian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines. Available at Physical activity and exercise guidelines for all Australians | Australian Government Department of Health

<sup>xiii</sup> SA Health, 2021. South Australian Population Health Survey 2021 Annual Report – Children. Available at <https://www.wellbeingsa.sa.gov.au/assets/downloads/SAPHS/SAPHS-2021-Annual-ChildrenReport.pdf>

<sup>xiv</sup> Car and Road Safety, Kidsafe, <https://kidsafe.com.au/car-road-safety/>

<sup>xv</sup> SAPOL data: <https://data.sa.gov.au/data/dataset/road-crash-data>

<sup>xvi</sup> Walk Score: <https://www.walkscore.com/AU-SA/Adelaide/Adelaide>

<sup>xvii</sup> Walkability, Australian Urban Observatory, <https://auo.org.au/portal/metadata/walkability/>