Planning Institute of Australia
[NSW Division]

Proposed Changes to State Environmental Planning Policy No. 64 – Advertising and Signage (SEPP 64)

Submission to the Department of Planning

25 May 2007
SUBMISSION BY

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PURPOSE

This submission is made by the Planning Institute of Australia [PIA] NSW Division to the NSW Department of Planning in relation to the Proposed Changes to State Environmental Planning Policy No. 64 – Advertising and Signage (SEPP 64)

The submission has been prepared by David Hartmann, the Institute's representative on the NSW Transport Chapter Committee.

At the time of this submission the office bearers of the NSW Division are Anthony Newland [President] and Greg Woodhams and Julie Bindon [Vice President’s], Tony McNamara [Treasurer] and Monique Roser [Immediate Past President].

INFORMATION

Who is making the submission?

The Planning Institute of Australia [PIA] is a voluntary subscription based member organization with 4500 members.

The New South Wales Division of PIA has 1400 members.

The Planning Institute is the peak body representing professions involved in planning Australian cities, towns and regions.
The Planning Institute of Australia (PIA) appreciates this opportunity to comment on the proposed changes to SEPP 64 and the proposed introduction of new guidelines for transport corridor advertising and signage.

The proposed changes represent a worthwhile opportunity for the NSW Division of the Planning Institute to comment on the role of advertisement in our communities. This submission incorporates the opinion of the transport, urban design and social planning chapters of PIA.

It is acknowledged that the proposed changes to SEPP 64 will intensify the control of advertisement along transport corridors as essentially an activity of state significance. However, whilst further control on the placement and impact of advertisement is proposed, an overall increase in the extent of advertisement is likely. The inclusion of sporting fields, freeways and tollways may add immeasurably to the overall content of advertisement in the environment. Ministerial approval for advertisement along rail corridors, by or for the RTA/Railcorp and along certain road corridors may, with concerted effort, limit proliferation of advertising.

The proposed changes and new guidelines do not provide debate on the role or acceptance of advertising in our community. The effectiveness of advertisement versus other means of product awareness or disseminating community information is also avoided. A test for advertising necessity is limited under the policy and guidelines where advertising content is unregulated and further exempted from ongoing consent. The content of advertising is as important as the structure itself. The guidelines should consider content (in addition to safety matters) and its role from urban design and local character perspectives. It is noted that the guidelines repeat but do not seek to test the adage that advertisement can improve amenity and provide needed simulation.

The subjectivity of the policy in addressing matters of visual impact remains. The guidelines provide little in the way of numeric tests to gauge impacts on skylines, scenic views or local character. The guidelines do not introduce any new or innovative tools (such as 3D modelling) for assessing visual impact or even encourage the development of less subjective means within the industry to establish and mitigate impacts.

In addition to the suggestions in the above paragraph, the following initiatives are also recommended for consideration in finalizing the proposed changes and guidelines:
As part of the safety criteria under the guidelines consider the inclusion of a sight distance test to ensure overhead signage (particularly bridges) is viewed from an appropriate minimum distance to the structure.

Include a monitoring and review process similar to that required under the Major Projects SEPP.

Reconsider the approach to removing hazardous new signs under Section 3.3 of the Guidelines. The notion that approvals could be rescinded may affect the government’s ability to successfully implement the policy, and uncertainty surrounding approval is not a positive outcome for business. Where new advertisements are perceived to have a potential safety implication that is difficult to ascertain, the duration of consent should conditioned. The potential to review all new signs on safety grounds should not become a standard condition and where such concerns exist applicants should be informed upfront.

Increase the transparency of the net public benefit test by including this aspect into an annual policy monitoring and review process. Consult with local council and community groups regarding net public benefits prior to consent.

Consider whether key signage locations with a high change over of content should be exempted from development consent in order to secure a continuing net public benefit. Under the current guidelines and policy, a net public benefit is only likely every 15 years based on consent duration.

Provide an indication of how any funds collected through the net public benefit will be expended and what nexus will be developed to collect funds or indeed achieve maximum and equitable community benefits.

Ensure that net public benefits are not used to overcome other fundamental environmental impacts which would otherwise result in a refusal.

Re-establish the previous RTA pedestrian bridge construction program which relied on advertising revenues for its funding base and undertake a comprehensive review of critical locations for such connections.

Limit the approval of signage along freeways and toll ways until a memorandum of understanding can be reached with relevant local councils (individually or collectively through regional and sub-regional plans).

This submission is intended as a constructive dialogue with government to improve policy where necessary and recognize the positive outcomes of state planning initiatives. In this regard, the proposed changes do introduce a number of important positives including:

- New safety planning criteria
- Greater transparency for government owned structures
- Introduction of new public benefit outcomes

We look forward continuing our dialogue with government on this matter and representing the views of planner across the state.
The Institute would welcome an opportunity to constructively discuss this broader issue with the Department and Minister.

I would be pleased to discuss the matters raised in this submission with you further.

Yours faithfully,

Anthony Newland  
President  
Planning Institute of Australia  
(NSW Division)