



**CONSERVATION
COUNCIL** ACT REGION

Submission to the ACT Planning Authority

Draft Major Plan Amendment DPA-09 – Northern Gateway

October 2025

About the Conservation Council ACT Region

The Conservation Council ACT Region is the leading environmental advocacy organisation and hub for community groups in Canberra. Our mission is to protect nature and create a safe climate in the ACT and region.

Since 1981 we have been at the centre of the region's most important wins for wildlife, bushland and communities, encompassing over 40 member groups.

We are a non-profit, non-government organisation that runs campaigns, promotes and upskills local groups, undertakes research, advocates passionately, and engages and informs our community.

Our belief is in the power of collective action to create change.

For further information please contact:

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1. Overview and General Position

The Conservation Council ACT Region supports the Draft Major Plan Amendment DPA-09 – Northern Gateway. We believe this proposal aligns with the goals of the ACT Planning Strategy and Inner North and City District Strategy by facilitating greater urban densification within existing serviced areas, particularly along high-capacity public transport corridors such as Northbourne Avenue and the Federal Highway.

Increased density in well-located inner suburbs is a key measure to limit urban sprawl, which continues to fragment native habitats, increase transport emissions, and impose greater costs on infrastructure and services. Compact urban form enables a more sustainable, lower cost and a more liveable Canberra.

Our organisation has long supported policies that encourage greater density and sustainable infill, as outlined in our recent submission on the Draft Missing Middle Policy. We commend the ACT Government for progressing an amendment that reflects these principles and supports more housing diversity and sustainability outcomes.

2. Scope of the Amendment

The Conservation Council ACT Region questions the limited scope of the amendment, with proposed density changes limited to a very small strip of land along Northbourne Avenue and the Federal Highway.

Given the close proximity of the entirety of the suburbs of Downer and Watson to services, in particular light rail, we believe this amendment is too limited in scope and should be expanded. An obvious step would be to increase density alongside other major roads within these suburbs, particularly Phillip Avenue, Swinden Street and Antill Street. However, we believe that with proper planning, density changes could occur across the entirety of these suburbs.

3. Ensuring Integration with Public Transport Infrastructure

The proposed rezoning from RZ1 to RZ3 and RZ4 will enable higher-density development in proximity to the light rail corridor, one of the Territory's most significant public transport corridors. To maximise the sustainability benefits of this increased density, the Conservation Council recommends that the ACT Government further investigate the impacts of additional population density on light rail patronage and capacity.

In particular, we recommend that the ACT Government and Transport Canberra consider:

- Increasing light rail service frequency during peak periods, as well as inter-peak times.
- Adding additional carriages to current light rail vehicles to increase capacity.
- Lengthening existing light rail stops where necessary to accommodate longer vehicles.

Such proactive planning will ensure the Northern Gateway area remains well served by high-quality, efficient, and comfortable public transport, thereby reinforcing mode shift away from private vehicle use.

4. Prioritising Active Travel Connectivity and Safety

Higher residential densities must be supported by high-quality, accessible active travel infrastructure. This will take the pressure off both public transport services and roads. We strongly recommend that DPA-09 implementation be accompanied by an upgrade to active travel infrastructure in the surrounding area.

Priority should be given to:

- Safe and direct connections between new residential developments and light rail stops and other public transport in the area.
- Separated walking and cycling paths along the Federal Highway and Northbourne Avenue, providing safe routes for people walking and riding into Dickson and the City Centre. Of particular importance here is a safe, direct, cycling link that ensures new residents of these developments have the option to ride their bikes safely into the city (an option that is currently unavailable). We would be open to discussion about how this can best be achieved, but believe the Government should not shy away from the potential of reducing Northbourne Avenue to two lanes of traffic, which would supply sufficient space for a signature piece of cycling infrastructure: a car-lane wide protected bike lane along Northbourne Ave that would truly indicate the ACT takes cycling seriously as a mode of transport.
 - It is worth noting that while the Conservation Council supports the construction of the Garden City Cycle Route, which will eventually service this area, this route is not a replacement for a direct link down the Federal Highway and Northbourne Avenue. The Garden City Cycle Route, as proposed, is a meandering, non-direct, route, which, while connecting to other services, will not provide a commuter route for people living in the Northern Gateway.
- Upgrading infrastructure along Antill Street, Swinden Street and Phillip Avenue to create better connections between the Northern Gateway precinct and nearby neighbourhoods such as Dickson, Downer, and Watson, including the local shops. Active travel infrastructure along these routes are in particularly poor condition, which will limit movement between these new apartments/townhouses and local shops. Fixing this infrastructure will improve connectivity to local centres, reduce reliance on private cars and boost business to local shops.

Investment in active travel infrastructure will help reduce car dependency, lower living costs, reduce emissions, and create a healthier, more vibrant community.

5. Energy Infrastructure and Resilience

As Canberra transitions towards electrification, it is critical that new urban infill developments are supported by adequate electricity infrastructure. We note that in some existing infill areas, high demand from electric heating, cooling, and vehicle charging has caused brownouts and localised grid strain.

We therefore recommend that the ACT Government and Evoenergy undertake a proactive grid capacity assessment for the Northern Gateway precinct to ensure that the increased residential density can be supported without compromising energy reliability.

6. Water and Biodiversity Management

This proposed development is located in a site that could produce unintended consequences for the Sullivan's Creek Catchment, Inner North residential and commercial areas and Lake Burley

Griffin if not carefully managed. In particular, we recommend that the design incorporate the sound recommendations contained in the ACT Waterways Management Strategy, with a particular focus on on-site stormwater management, minimising nutrients leaving the site and minimising potential contributions to downstream overland flooding during extreme weather events.

Edge effects related to increased pollution by inappropriately disposed rubbish as well as non-contained pets such as cats also need to be considered due to the proximity to threatened ecological communities in the nature reserves of some of these areas, such as Mt Majura as well as Justice Robert Hope Park.

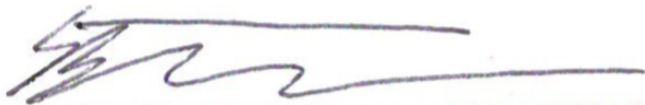
7. Conclusion

The Conservation Council ACT Region supports DPA-09 as a positive step towards creating a more compact, sustainable, and climate-resilient Canberra. However, we believe the scope of this amendment could be expanded to cover more areas within Downer and Watson.

We encourage the ACT Planning Authority, alongside other parts of the ACT Government, ensure the amendment is implemented alongside investment in public transport capacity, active travel infrastructure, energy resilience and water and biodiversity management, ensuring that the Northern Gateway becomes a model of sustainable urban development.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss this submission further or participate in future consultations relating to implementation planning.

Signed,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Simon Copland', written over a light-colored rectangular background.

Simon Copland
Conservation Council Executive Director