

Executive Summary.

The New Rouse Hill is a significant urban achievement, comprising a major regional shopping centre (with a range of fresh food outlets) plus surrounding suburb with schools and extensive recreation facilities under the vision of a “city in a garden”. Although there has been no conscious attention to residents’ health there are obvious health co-benefits from its focus on environmental matters (eg. promotion of “green” travel and establishment of extensive riparian areas to achieve energy and water conservation objectives); the provision of extensive open spaces, pedestrian and cycle paths and active recreation facilities as part of the community title; and the close proximity of the Town Centre with the residential area.

However the extent to which participants avail themselves of these attributes is variable. Levels of physical activity and incidental social interaction are low; and disturbingly similar to the more conventional low-density, car-orientated suburbs that have led to current concerns about “lifestyle” diseases (even though high levels of satisfaction about New Rouse Hill are expressed by participants). Car use is high, only 60% achieve recommended levels of physical activity, and there is a lingering desire for a greater ability to meet people - all features risking future health issues.

This may be a passing phase: many participants are still establishing themselves. When participants were asked about what they needed to keep healthy responses were more about their behaviour than about any deficiencies in the built environment. It suggests a need for health-orientated interventions to be less about the provision of facilities and more about management, raising awareness of existing facilities, and encouraging use. The Study suggests:

- (i) a need to improve the detail of some elements of the overall structural layout and management. Eg. more direct rather than circuitous walking and cycling paths to the Town Centre, design of residential streets as “complete streets” to address safety concerns about cycling, better connections to existing and proposed regional cycling and walking routes, attention to rules and management relating to the community title recreation facilities, and infilling the vacant areas surrounding the Town Centre to increase visitation by walking and by creating a more dynamic and inviting local destination.
- (ii) using the existing single-ownership arrangements of the Town Centre, the “Green Travel Coordinator” position, the social interaction potentials of the Community Title system, and the imminent establishment of the North West Rail Link to better engage with the residential population to generate a major change in travel patterns and other health-inducing behaviours. Eg. drawing on the key role of schools and churches by encouraging access by walking, making walking to the Town Centre with a shopping trolley “trendy”, starting an evening walking group, a *Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design* audit to resolve lingering safety concerns.

Overview of findings and recommendations.

I think Rouse Hill is very good, kind of overall. I think they could spend a little bit more effort. Then they could really get what they intended from the area, if they just put a few more systems in place or stuff like that, to regulate things really. That's about it. Then they could get it to the stage where everything's as it was intended to be in the beginning. I don't think it would be too hard for them to achieve their initial goal of what they wanted for Rouse Hill.

1. The New Rouse Hill is a significant urban achievement, establishing within about five years one of Australia's largest regional shopping centres plus a surrounding suburb with schools and extensive recreation facilities under the vision of a "city in a garden". A key focus has been on environmental matters (energy and water conservation, riparian management, and "green" travel). There has been no conscious attention to residents' health. However there are obvious co-benefits from the environmental features (eg. the green travel initiative); there are extensive walking and cycling paths, and active recreation facilities as part of the community title, and the close proximity of the Town Centre with the residential area is conducive to active transport and incidental social interaction.
2. However the extent to which the Study participants avail themselves of these attributes is variable. Levels of physical activity and incidental social interaction are low. In this sense, New Rouse Hill is similar to the type of outer-urban, low-density, car-orientated dormitory suburb that results in lifestyles that are comfortable (there are high levels of satisfaction expressed by participants), but which have led to current concerns about an epidemic of "lifestyle" diseases. Participants currently present as healthy. However there is a risk that future health issues will arise as a result of their lifestyles. Car use is high, and only 60% of participants achieve recommended levels of physical activity. Participants also indicate some desire for a greater ability to meet people.
3. This may be a passing phase. Many participants are still establishing houses, gardens and social contacts at the same time as commuting. Time to make changes to perhaps previously-established lifestyle habits is limited. When participants were asked to nominate the things they should be doing, and needed, to keep healthy their responses were more about their own personal behaviours than about any deficiencies in the built environment. It suggests that any health-orientated interventions will need to be less about the actual provision of facilities and more about raising the awareness of existing facilities and encouraging use.
4. Here the Study suggests:
 - (i) there is room to improve in detail some elements of the overall structural layout of New Rouse Hill, both in terms of its physical shape and in terms of its management.
 - (ii) there are opportunities to engage with the residential population further in respect to encouraging different, healthier ways to use the built environment of New Rouse Hill.
5. In particular an increase in the use of "active" transport (walking and cycling) to access facilities within the local area would appear to be a good way to make some significant gains in levels of physical activity, as well as potentially achieving a co-benefit of

increased incidental social interaction as more people use the streets (which currently are very quiet).

6. Two features of the development of New Rouse Hill can assist:
 - (i) the development process is not yet complete. The potential of the North West Rail Link to generate a major change in travel patterns should be used as an opportunity to increase local walking and cycling. “active” transport modes . The infill of the periphery of the Town Centre will change the “no-man’s land” feel of this area and has the potential to provide “activation” opportunities and hence increased destinations to walk and cycle to (consistent with the “city in a park” vision). The completion of links in walking and cycling tracks within the wider local area will increase the variety of destinations and length of routes and hence time taken in active exercise.
 - (ii) the particular ownership and governance arrangements. The Community Title arrangement provides the opportunity for direct access in local governance, adoption of targeted policies relating to health, and for social interactions. The single ownership and management of the Town Centre can permit explicit management policies that assist health outcomes. Existing dedicated positions tasked with community development and “green travel” can assist in implementing behavioural change initiatives.

7. Examples of specific actions include:
 - drawing on the key role that schools, and to some extent churches, play in New Rouse Hill by encouraging people to walk there as an essential component of the experience.
 - “outside the box” initiatives such as giving all households a shopping trolley to encourage more people to walk to the Town Centre; starting an evening walking group.
 - rectifying gaps between local and regional walking and cycling routes, and the promotion of scenic walking and cycling destinations.
 - less circuitous links across the Caddies Creek open space, to promote active transport, plus an associated campaign to “leave the car at home”.
 - a *Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design* audit with a commitment to action any deficiencies, to resolve lingering safety concerns by residents.
 - active establishment of the Community Associations to facilitate resolution of outstanding management issues with the community recreation facilities.

8. The Study suggests participants are knowledgeable about and have excellent access to fresh foods. There is still the potential to draw on a stated interest by participants to grow more of their own foods by re-invigorating the existing community garden spaces, which in turn can assist social interaction; and to promote the sourcing of foods direct from farms in the region.

Physical Activity
“Getting people active”

Facilitating “active transport”

Description

Personal mobility levels are high. But although scale, topography and T-way facilitates active transport the propensity to use these modes is highly variable -some use them a lot; others very little, defaulting to their car. A perception that one needs to use the car to carry home shopping. The T-way only caters for some work destinations

The traditional street layout, but with reduced dimensions, has not increased feelings of safety for cyclists, even with low traffic volumes (frequency of driveway crossings and narrow carriageways are of concern).

Centre drainage swales inhibit walking. The central open space seen by some as an obstacle due to circuitous routes and some safety concerns.

“Management” of facilities contributes - not knowing if time-slots are available for tennis court or doctor means people use a car to reduce any wasted time.

Use of Parklea Markets and other surrounding facilities encourages car use (quick to drive to, too far to walk or cycle).

Response

The imminent North West Rail should assist the active transport viability. To maximise this, the directness, comfort and safety of linking walkways, footpaths and cycleways should be reviewed and upgraded if necessary (consider particularly the central open space routes).

Use the Town Centre Green Travel Coordinator position to actively promote walking for all internal trips in New Rouse Hill. Include associated “management” of facilities, and “aids” like personal shopping trolleys.

Consider managing internal roads as “complete streets”, and as an early trial area for a 40 (or 30) km/h speed limit.

Facilitating recreational physical activity

Description

There is good provision of a variety of recreation facilities. Usage is then largely dependent on individuals’ actions.

Propensity to use community-title tennis court hindered by not being able to book time-slots (the community room system cited as a better model), and use of other facilities may be hindered for older children and teenagers by rules relating to key-access.

Access to the neighbouring oval area not direct/obvious.

Some suggestions of a need for more organised exercise groups/classes.

Cycle path system currently disjointed and incomplete and frequency of driveway crossings and narrow carriageways cited as a safety concern on roadways. Cycle path along Windsor Road often subject to broken glass litter.

There are different opinions as to whether there is sufficient variety and length of walking routes within and extending beyond the estate to encourage walking for recreation.

Response

Resolve management issues about access to community title recreation.

Determine whether comment about need for organised exercise groups/classes is due to a lack of these facilities or lack of knowledge/ publicity of classes that do exist (either at the private gym or at the community centre) – and action accordingly.

Opening of swimming pool on eastern side of estate will assist greater physical activity by residents there.

Ensure future stages of development results in well-connected, interesting and legible walking and cycling routes, and increase awareness of cycling and walking routes in the area.

Social Interaction.
 “Connecting and strengthening communities”

**Facilitating incidental
n’hood interaction**

Description

Interaction with neighbours is low, but respondents are generally happy with this; but unclear whether this will lead to future health problems (or whether sufficient interaction is gained through other ways). That said, there is also some desire for additional ways to meet people.

Pedestrian and other activity in residential streets is low, though more so within the open space areas, and there appears to be a reasonable propensity for residents using the Town Centre to run into people they know.

Response

A successful “active transport” strategy will assist in increasing pedestrian volumes in streets and hence potential for incidental interactions.

Opening of the swimming pool on eastern side should create an additional potential for interaction there.

**Making community
spaces**

Description

Residential streets are quiet with low or no apparent informal surveillance.

“Open” design of Town Centre is well-liked.

There is a good range of formal community spaces & facilities. Playground areas and library cited as important. Opening of swimming pool on eastern side should create an additional community space.

Various governance and social etiquette issues cited – use of pool area, booking of tennis courts, anti-social behaviour in the central open space (and concerns by external parties about potential restrictions in the Town Centre public space policies).

Response

Design street frontages in future precincts to increase street activity/interactions (eg. direct verandahs, courts and shop fronts to the streets).

Implement community title governance system to allow management and etiquette issues to be dealt with.

Design subsequent stages of Town Centre to include potential for more informal (less controlled) uses.

Consider possible usefulness of a men’s shed or workshop as an additional social space.

**Build for crime
prevention**

Description

Feelings of personal safety and security is high, but with important exceptions:

- rumours of house break-ins.
- the lake and amphitheatre in the central open space have become teenage haunts, making others uncomfortable.
- the Town Centre acts as a regional meeting place for some groups, requiring past police presence; a recent stabbing brawl was nearby. These issues may increase with the new rail link.

Residential streets have low pedestrian volumes and low apparent informal surveillance. Street lighting is considered adequate, but only just.

Response

Conduct a *Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design* audit, with an commitment to act on deficiencies.

A successful “active transport” strategy will assist to increase pedestrian volumes and hence feelings of security. Design street frontages of new development to maximise casual surveillance potential.

Engage with youth population and provide “things to do”.

Consider a Town Centre police station as part of the new rail interchange.

Nutrition
“Providing healthy food options”

Facilitating access to healthy food.

Promote responsible food advertising.

Description

High personal mobility levels and a large choice (shops in the Town Centre, the Town Centre farmers’ market, Parklea Markets, and nearby farm shop) means access to fresh food sources is high.

There is a high level of awareness of the importance of healthy eating, including some querying of the “freshness” of supermarket and Parklea Markets foods.

Limited potential to grow own foods given small yard areas.

Some interest in a community garden, though the existing garden at Mungerie House appears to be in limbo and is not listed as a Community Association facility.

The purpose and permitted use of the Town Centre “kitchen garden” is unclear.

Description

There is a wide variety of food premises within the Town Centre. Although the fresh food shops are located down arcades off the main streets, there is no particular over-presence or advertising of non-healthy foods.

The supermarkets have good promotion of fresh foods as part of current marketing strategies.

The opportunity to use community gardens to promote fresh foods and responsible diet is not really utilised – the community garden at Mungerie House appears to be in limbo, and the purpose and permitted use of the Town Centre “kitchen garden” is unclear.

Response

Use the single-ownership and management structure of the Town Centre to ensure continued and perhaps expanded provision and emphasis on healthy food through explicit leasing and promotion policies. Dovetail such promotions with associated “active transport” strategies encouraging walking and cycling to the Town Centre.

It would be worthwhile:

- for the Community Association to re-invigorate the community garden at Mungerie House.
 - to re-design the Town Centre “kitchen garden” to be more inviting and “legible.”
- Promote the use of local farmers markets and regional farm-based food sources.

Response

Use the single-ownership and management structure of the Town Centre to promote healthy food via leasing policies which:

- ensure visual prominence of healthy food shops and reduce relative prominence of other food shops.
- exclude “fast food” take-away food shops on the future development lands surrounding the Town Centre.
- do not allow over-prominent advertising of non-healthy (energy-dense-nutrient-poor (EDNP)) food.

To assist the presence of healthy foods it would be worthwhile to re-invigorate the community garden at Mungerie House and re-design the Town Centre “kitchen garden” to be more inviting and “legible.”