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Re: Submission - South Australia's 20-Year State Infrastructure Strategy - Discussion Paper

The South Australian Council of Social Service (SACOSS) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the State Infrastructure Strategy Discussion Paper.

SACOSS is the peak non-government representative body for health and community services in South Australia, a sector which includes around 1,000 organisations with a combined revenue of \$4.6bn in 2021 per annum and employing some 50,000 South Australians.

SACOSS undertakes policy and advocacy work in areas that specifically affect disadvantaged and low-income households in South Australia. The provision, type and location of infrastructure is crucially important to these households as it facilitates not just the economic growth generally, but the opportunity to participate and benefit (or not) from that development.

In our [submission to the 2023-24 State Budget](#), SACOSS called for bold interventionist approach to economic development. In that context, we are pleased to see the vision of the [South Australian Economic Statement](#) and the Infrastructure Strategy Discussion Paper in planning for strategic investment to promote development. We are also particularly pleased to see the Discussion Paper has a much broader agenda than the existing 2020 Infrastructure Plan, not least in including explicit consideration of the energy transition and decarbonised economy.

Attached to this letter is a table which provides briefs answers and link to SACOSS work relevant to the specific questions in the Discussion Paper. However, we also wish to make an overarching comment around the need to always include social planning as a core part of any infrastructure planning process. This is directly relevant to Consultation Question 7, but it applies more generally to a range of areas in the Discussion Paper.

By its size and nature, infrastructure has major social impacts – as recognised in the definition suggested in the Discussion Paper of infrastructure sustaining and enhancing “the

economy *and liveability* of South Australia”. However, while there is some scope in the Objects and Principles of *Planning, Development and Infrastructure Act 2016*, for consideration of some social issues, and there is a desire in the Discussion Paper (Section 6.1) for coordination of planning, this often does not include planning for key social services and the community infrastructure that is required to support them. Further, the envisaged planning is at a general level and does not require assessment of the specific impacts of any particular project.

As an example, with significant development opportunities in the Upper Spencer Gulf including the potential Hydrogen Hub, there is a substantial planning effort from both the State government and relevant local councils. While this development and planning is welcome, most of the current plans focus narrowly on economic growth and the infrastructure and workforce required to enable that growth. There is consideration of population growth and housing needs, but not of the social implications of that growth and the health and community services needed to ensure that the growth makes a positive contribution to existing communities and that no one is left behind.

In our next State Budget submission (forthcoming), SACOSS will argue for additional resources for further planning in the Upper Spencer Gulf to consider and provide for a broad array of social impacts and services, including:

- The local economic impacts of booms and busts in the construction phases of the development plans;
- The impact of increased population on:
 - Demand for childcare, schools and the qualified staff in those professions
 - Demand for health services including GPs, community health services (including mental health supports) and hospital infrastructure;
 - Demand for other community services such as disability supports, homelessness services, gambling help and family supports;
- The impact of increased demand and inflationary pressures on current residents on low and fixed incomes, and the support services for those residents;
- Additional demand for social services likely to arise from an influx of people with limited connection to the area and fewer support networks.

While this planning is needed and should be done, it will still be retrofitting into existing plans and development. This relegates key social impacts to responses to infrastructure development rather than being a key part of the infrastructure planning and approval.

The social impacts of infrastructure development need to be included in the planning process from the start. Further, a social impact statement should be prepared for all significant infrastructure projects – both to facilitate better planning and to ensure that the infrastructure will have a positive impact on the local community.

Curiously, SACOSS raised this issue in its response to the 2010 State Infrastructure Plan Discussion Paper, and our experience with the social impacts of infrastructure since, confirm that increased consideration of social impacts is still required.

Accordingly, the primary recommendation of this submission is that:

- ***consideration of the social impacts of infrastructure development should be included in the planning process, and***
- ***a social impact statement should be prepared for all significant infrastructure projects.***

Beyond that, we refer you to the table following for responses to particular questions in the Discussion Paper.

If you require any further information about any issues raised in this submission, please contact our Senior Policy and Research Analyst, Dr Greg Ogle at greg@sacoss.org.au or on 8305 4229.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in grey ink, appearing to read 'RWomersley', is positioned above the printed name.

Ross Womersley, CEO

Responses to Specific Consultation Questions

Topic	Question	SACOSS Response
Section 5.2 Question 3	Water Supply How can we enable a sustainable and affordable water supply into the future?	Priority must given to ensuring all South Australians have access to affordable and sufficient drinking water, and SACOSS' Submission to the SA Water 2024-2028 Regulatory Business Proposal outlines key steps in making water more sustainable and affordable.
Section 5.3 Question 4	Energy Transition How do we realise the opportunities and mitigate risks with transforming our transmission and distribution infrastructure for the future?	SACOSS made preliminary comment on AEMO's Integrated System Plan , but has put fuller proposals in a comprehensive submission on the government's Green Paper on the Energy Transition . (See Q16 below)
Section 5.4 Question 5	Digital Connectivity What are the barriers to increased adoption of digital technology to improve productivity?	As the SACOSS Connectivity Costs , and the forthcoming Keys to the Digital World reports show, for many in the community, insufficient income and low levels of digital capability exist at levels which many "connected" policy makers struggle to see or even imagine. (See SACOSS interviews with three people struggling with digital inclusion). Infrastructure spending needs to be matched with capacity building and affordability measures to enable access and usage.
Section 6.1 Question 7	Coordinated Planning How can South Australia better coordinate infrastructure investment to support a growing population?	As above, social impact assessment and community infrastructure that supports wellbeing should be part of all decisions on significant infrastructure investment.
Section 6.2 Question 8	Affordable Housing What can be done to support sufficient, fit-for-purpose housing to improve housing affordability?	The SACOSS submission to the state parliament's Economic and Finance Committee Inquiry into housing availability outlines a range of proposals including on tax changes, financing models, energy standards and most relevantly significantly greater investment in public housing.

Section 6.4 Question 10	Health and Wellbeing What investments would support a more efficient and productive health system that meets our growing and changing needs?	The SACOSS submission to the Legislative Council's Select Committee on Health Services (2022) highlights the need for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investment in public health, disease prevention and health promotion • Creation of healthier public environments for all children, particularly in relation to food marketing and the promotion of healthy diets; and • a health equity lens to be applied to all preventive health initiatives.
Section 8.2 Question 16	Decarbonised Energy System How do we maintain an affordable, reliable and secure energy system through the energy transition?	SACOSS' Submission to the Green Paper on the Energy Transition contains 38 recommendations, including on electrification, the role of rooftop solar (and network implications), on natural gas and hydrogen, and on meeting transition costs through progressive means (e.g. government budgets) rather than adding to regressive energy bills.
Section 9.1 Question 20	Planned Resilience How do we better account for the impacts of climate change in our infrastructure, to support improved resilience?	SACOSS' recent Submission to the SA Parliamentary Inquiry on the River Murray Flood Event 2022-23 includes recommendations regarding the maintenance of public and private levies.
Section 9.2 Question 21	Critical Infrastructure What are the critical resilience issues that South Australia needs to address?	SACOSS in collaboration with Red Cross leads a Disaster Resilience Reduction funded project aiming to build resilience of the social and community sector in supporting people most at risk in emergencies. Reports of the project's work can and SACOSS work on climate change resilience can be found on our website .