

Canberra Light Rail Stage 2B

Urban Infill Capability Assessment

Final Report prepared for ACT Government
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CONFIDENTIAL: ACT GOVERNMENT



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Report available from:
deakinresidents.asn.au

Purpose of Mecone's urban infill capability assessment *

- **Understand the potential for residential and employment intensification in the corridor adjacent to Light Rail stage 2B**
- **Provide guidance on the appropriate built urban forms, dwelling diversity and density for future urban development for land adjacent to Light Rail stage 2B corridor, predominately at a precinct level**
- **Provide dwelling and employment forecasts under various scenarios to 2046, to inform the ACT Government's future planning**

* Mecone p 1

Study area covered by Mecone report

The five areas identified as having the greatest potential for urban intensification and employment growth are: *

- **1. West Deakin**
- **2. Curtin Horse paddocks (ACT land component only, along Yarra Glen)**
- **3. Phillip/ Woden Town Centre**
- **4. Mawson**
- **5. Remainder of the corridor (including Deakin, Yarralumla, Hughes and parts of Forrest).**

- **Note: Boundary of study area defined as land within approximately 800 meters of the Light Rail Corridor**
- Mecone p 1

Mecone report findings

There is a base case and two additional intensification scenarios.

However, the report says that the **existing planning framework** (the 'base case' scenario) **has significant capacity for growth**, from around 13,100 to 23,800 dwellings and from 31,300 to 78,900 jobs.

More specifically:

“Whilst increasing densities around transit nodes such as the future LR Stage 2B stops is a sound planning principle in general, **the need for catalytic changes to the planning controls in the Study Area is not considered critical when purely considering the capacity for growth that already exists in the (planning) controls.**” Mecone p 3

The Mecone report does not provide support for the ACT Government to change zonings or other planning controls

Comments on the Mecone report

The Mecone Report:

- **does not examine the merits of intensification in a 2022 Canberra context**
- **repeats the ACT Government's claim that there is an increasing demand for people to live close to jobs and services**
- **admits that additional infrastructure would be needed to support their forecasts for intensification, but says this was not within the scope of their project. This infrastructure includes water, electricity, schools, opens space, etc (Mecone p 4)**
- **says that additional light rail stop would be needed to serve a 4-8 storey development along Yarra Glen near the horse paddocks (Mecone p41) (this additional stop would increase travel time on the Light Rail route)**
- **recognises that green spaces and large canopy trees are highly valued by the Curtin community (Mecone p 17) (no similar comments in relation to Deakin or Yarralumla)**
- **acknowledges that Yarralumla Creek is flood prone (Mecone p 41) (but this is not reflected in their intensification maps)**

Deakin

The Mecone Report:

- **suggests that West Deakin commercial activity could be “amplified” (4-6 storeys) and could also include higher-density residential development (Mecone P 50) (the car park adjacent to Kent Street get special mention)**
- **reports that the prospects for development activity in Deakin are strong, with continuing infill development (Mecone p 79)**
- **notes that the potential for intensifying land uses across Deakin and Yarralumla could be challenging given high existing property values (Mecone p 79)**
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North Frame area intensification scenario

The red zones are proposed for “extensive uplift”. Mecone has not specified heights in Deakin but elsewhere in the report, red zones are 3-4 or 4-8 storeys (medium and high scenarios respectively).

Mecone p 83

Intensification

- **Some literature on intensification is poor quality (1,2)**
- **Some of it is strong on assertion and lacking in hard evidence**
- **Greenhouse gases emitted by cars are often cited as justifying intensification**
 - **The advent of electric vehicles will soon make these concerns irrelevant**
- **The working-from-home phenomenon is not addressed**
- **Urban heat island effects are rarely mentioned in papers advocating intensification**
- **In suburbs like Wright, urban heat is going to be an issue (11)**
- **Intensification is predicted to double the climate change costs for cities like Canberra (1)**

Intensification – Findings from the literature

- **The case for intensification lacks a rigorous evidence base (1,2)**
- **Claims that higher housing density results in lower energy and water consumption are not supported by the evidence (4,5)**
 - **Occupants of higher density housing (in Canberra and elsewhere) do not receive bills for individual water consumption and have no incentive to conserve water**
- **Higher densities have not reduced travel demand nor have they increased the use of public transport (6,7,8)**
- **Higher density housing is less likely to use solar hot water or photovoltaic cells (1)**
- **Increasing density does not result in increased community engagement (9)**
- **There is more disputation between neighbours in higher density housing (9)**
- **Advocates of intensification “are tone deaf” to the preferences of citizens (10)**

Intensification in the Canberra context 1

The Mecone Report fails to understand that historic planning decisions work against their urban intensification proposals. Canberra planning has been based around:

- The Y Plan (not mentioned by Mecone) with separate town centres (Woden, Tuggeranong and Belconnen) and rapid transit roads linking them**
- The Garden City concept**

Having people live close to where they work is not a viable concept in the current age of job mobility

There is strong evidence that intensification reduces the supply of affordable housing (10)

Intensification in the Canberra context 2

Canberra residents have indicated a clear preference for low density detached housing (12,13)

The factors that influence this preference include:

- **Providing children with a backyard where they can play under supervision**
- **Room for a vegetable garden and a compost heap**
- **The ability to dry laundry outside rather than in a clothes dryer**
- **Avoiding the problems of more dense housing:**
 - **Poor quality construction**
 - **Little use of passive solar design**
 - **Difficult Bodies Corporate**
 - **Noise and crime issues**
 - **Lack of privacy**

Conclusions

The Mecone report:

- **does not justify intensification along the light rail stage 2B route**
- **does not provide a justification for intensification in Inner South Canberra**

Intensification is a flawed concept

- **It lacks an evidence base**
- **It is unnecessary in Canberra**
- **It will likely increase greenhouse gas emissions in Canberra**
- **Leaving intensification to the market will result in poor outcomes**
- **It puts the Canberra's Garden City concept at risk**
- **It will make Canberra a much less attractive place to live**

References

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