



Infrastructure and Place

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About Roads Australia

[Roads Australia](#) (RA) is the peak body for roads within an integrated transport system, representing an industry that contributes \$236 billion annually to the economy and supports 1.4 million jobs. RA brings industry, government, and communities together to lead the evolution of Australia's roads, integrated transport and mobility.

RA's members include all of Australia's transport agencies, road owners, major contractors and consultants, material suppliers, service and technology providers, and other relevant industry groups. RA's policy focus extends across five activity streams: Safety; Capacity; Transport Reform; Customer Experience; and Sustainability. Diversity and Inclusion is a commitment across each stream.

Background

Transport infrastructure links us to the places we live, work and play, but the relationship between infrastructure and place is a lot more complex than simply connecting up locations.

Place is an essential consideration in the planning, design, construction and operation of transport infrastructure and enables the

delivery of government policy outcomes and helps projects meet community expectations.

While there is enthusiasm amongst industry to incorporate placemaking principles in day-to-day operations, there is still some uncertainty around how to do it.

This webinar looked at infrastructure and place's intricate relationship, how it can be applied strategically and the value that can be achieved through incorporating indigenous knowledge in the design and planning of places.

Event summary

Over 180 people registered to join the webinar to hear from the following speakers:

[Will Fooks](#) – Market Leader, Urban Places, [Stantec](#)

[Carol Vale](#) – CEO, [Murawin](#)

[Louise McCormick](#) – Infrastructure Commissioner, [Northern Territory, Department of Infrastructure Planning and Logistics](#)

The webinar was hosted by [RA's Sustainability Policy Stream](#) Chair, [Marko Misko](#).

Infrastructure enabling place

Before we can consider and build on the relationship between infrastructure and place, there first must be a discussion around what the term ‘place’ means.

Stantec spoke to over 200 practitioners across Australia and New Zealand and uncovered a distinct category of people wanting to understand place. The responses demonstrated that although no one is against incorporating place, there is a lot of uncertainty around how to do it.

‘There is a shared recognition in the transport industry, that we have a responsibility to enable places, through working with others towards a common aspiration.’

- Will Fooks, Stantec

Will Fooks addressed this uncertainty by outlining his view on the concept of place. Using Trafalgar Square in London as an example, Will noted that place is not just about the buildings but also how it makes you feel.

However, designing using a feeling as a standard can be difficult. This difficulty can be overcome by designers remembering that transport infrastructure should be designed to enable place, rather than creating it.

Places are ‘created’ organically by communities, whereas our industry is tasked with ‘enabling’ places. This is an important distinction to appreciate.

Will used an example of designing for a night-time economy to highlight the different approaches.

Roads are often designed around peak hour traffic counts. This method does not consider the needs of any night-time economic activity taking place on that road and fails to analyse

the needs of people going to the area at night and their characteristics.

For example, outside a popular night-time venue there may be large queues of people. If the designer knows this, they can then accommodate by designing wider footpaths, keeping the queues safely away from passing traffic.

Incorporating place within transport infrastructure requires a change to previous ways of thinking.



In the 1950’s, planners were focussed on separating movement and place. But while that separation aimed for safer outcomes and was an appropriate solution at the time, it led to an intensified reliance on roads for cars only.

This reliance has caused more issues including increasing carbon emissions in the transport sector, despite action in other industries leading to decreases.

The separation also led to other consequences of large infrastructure – barriers to movement and social isolation. Either through the physical bulk, or by not including pedestrian crossing points, communities can be cut in two and access can be impeded.



By bringing movement and place back together, we can reduce the sector's impact on the environment and reduce movement barriers and social isolation.

Of course, alleviating industry's hesitancy over incorporating consideration of place in infrastructure requires more than just offering an understanding of the concept.

Stantec's research revealed a fear and tension between 'organic' outcomes and 'prescriptive' outcomes.

Organic outcomes are ones responsive to local context, whereas prescriptive outcomes have common language, are clear and have systematic processes.

A tension exists between balancing the flexibility necessary to enable place for unique communities and the need for clarity on what outcomes are expected. An ideal outcome would be in this middle ground between organic and prescriptive outcomes.

A further question to answer is how the outcomes resulting from considering place and infrastructure can be measured.

The Austroads report, [Valuing place in the road transport system](#), outlines clear steps to measure and understand place and the effectiveness of various outcomes.

These steps include measuring factors like dwell time, economy and behaviours within the street environment that can be locally specific, dependent on your location and your objectives.

Indigenous perspective of place

Carol Vale from national Indigenous-led consultancy Murawin highlighted the importance of place through an Indigenous perspective and how it can be embraced in placemaking.

It is imperative to ensure you are telling the first story first, which includes acknowledging the significance of country.

It is central to an Indigenous perspective because wherever we go, we are always on country.

For this place strategy, it's important that it is holistic, that it is grounded in the first story first, and then all other stories come after that.

- Carol Vale, Murawin

For Carol, when working with place and integrating Indigenous perspectives into projects, there are three critical things to remember:

Place taking

The acknowledgement that colonisation resulted in the notion of place being taken.

Place making

The infrastructure industry contributes to place making and an authentic aspect of place making is working with traditional owners and making sure what is important to them is captured and articulated in these projects.

Place keeping

Ensuring Indigenous people are present, visible and able to participate in these projects.

The impact Indigenous people have on transport infrastructure is clear. Much of our transport infrastructure, including roads, has been built on traditional Indigenous tracks and song lines.

Song lines, Carol explained, are a form of storytelling that instruct behaviours, attitudes and responsibilities and they are connected across the country.

An interesting connection between song lines and placemaking was raised during the Q&A section of the webinar. An attendee suggested song lines are the earliest conceptualisation of place making.

Carol outlined various projects and organisations that have successfully incorporated Indigenous perspectives:

[Indigenous Design Guidelines - The Level Crossing Removal Project](#)

[National Gallery Landscape Renewal](#)

[Connecting with Country - Government Architect New South Wales](#)



How it can be done

Louise McCormick demonstrated how government can incorporate place by outlining how Infrastructure NT have incorporated it into their infrastructure planning and investment system.

Last year, Infrastructure Australia released the Australian Infrastructure Plan, and one of the 9 recommended reforms was taking a place-based approach in infrastructure planning and investment.

The first step for the NT Infrastructure Strategy development was laying the right foundation to adopt a placemaking approach.

The strategy includes an infrastructure audit, plan and pipeline.

The NT Infrastructure Strategy created the vision and purpose for the organisation.

“Infrastructure investment that enables growth of the Territory economy and population and supports wellbeing and quality of life for all Territorians, underpinned by sustainability and resilience.”

- **Louise McCormick, Northern Territory, Department of Infrastructure Planning and Logistics**

Louise outlined that working closely with Investment Territory is crucial to the success of the strategy. The NT has investment and major projects commissioners who support private sector investment. This is balanced by Louise in her capacity as NT Infrastructure Commissioner advocating for the social needs of Territorians.

These varied groups with different objectives for NT view the entire infrastructure system through an ecosystem approach.

Infrastructure is viewed at four different levels of place:

- 1) National
- 2) Territory wide
- 3) Regional
- 4) Community

Each infrastructure investment is analysed by considering the effect it will have at each level of place.

Infrastructure NT is completing an infrastructure audit by engaging with communities right across the NT to understand the challenges and opportunities to achieving the growth vision.

A further aspect of community engagement is the establishment of regional economic committees in each regional centre. These committees allow communities to express their views of what place means for them.

This community input into the development of the infrastructure pipeline will support the development of enabling places that are ultimately created by these communities.

Movement and place is a clear framework now, even if it is applied differently across the country. This means industry participants should include it as part of projects moving forward.

“Every state is doing this so if you're not starting to do it, you want to think about how you're going to do it, because it's policy and happening.”

- Will Fooks, Stantec

Industry Challenge

Will Fooks outlined a key challenge for industry to address and overcome.

The collaborative and overlapping nature of the industry when planning, designing, constructing, and maintaining infrastructure requires a common definition of place.

The way people manage, operate, design, and maintain our transport system is based on rules, systems, processes and standards. It's a relatively self-cycling process which is updated incrementally with guidance limited to concept, an established existing user base and the 'status quo' maintained.

In addition to the traditional transport system, a new generation of multidisciplinary influencer has emerged. This new generation has different objectives and drivers for streets and are operating outside of the framework outlined above.

The two processes working simultaneously and separately creates tension.

People are talking different languages and asking for different things, leading to disappointment.

The challenge can be overcome by reconciling the two systems. Each group must attempt to understand where the other is coming from to achieve designs that optimise community benefits.

Parting Thoughts

The days of industry not accommodating place are gone and we're moving into a far more holistic view of our impacts.

Place will be an important component of economic returns but also for explaining why a certain investment is important.

While the concept is a change for industry and its incorporation may be challenging, it is one that will result in better community, environmental and economic outcomes.

Event outputs & next steps

A post-event survey was sent to attendees and the webinar received a + 26.6 NPS rating.

An overview of the “Infrastructure and Place” event and the broad themes addressed by each speaker was circulated via [RA's LinkedIn feed](#).