Urban & Regional Stories

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Planning the Long Game: Green Corridors and Digital-Native Plans

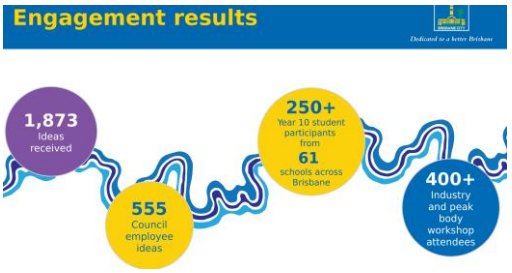
How Brisbane and Madrid are rebuilding the frameworks that shape their cities

This factsheet draws on the two CoP 16 deep-dive webinars on integrated urban planning: the Green and Gold Grid (Brisbane, 20 April 2026) and Sueña Madrid (Madrid, 11 May 2026). Both cities are working on the same problem from opposite ends. Brisbane uses a fixed deadline, the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games, to convert long-term aspirations into deliverable projects; Madrid replaces a rigid 1997 plan with a flexible, continuously updated one. Each case is set out as the challenge faced, the solution applied, and the lessons learned.

1. Brisbane: the Green and Gold Grid as Early Legacy

THE CHALLENGE FACED

As Host City of the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games, Brisbane is leveraging the opportunity to accelerate city-shaping investments in connectivity, public realm and sustainability across the city. Rapid population growth in Brisbane is driving the need for strategic investment in infrastructure, open space and urban greening that supports a more connected and liveable city. Consistent with the IOC's "New Norm", Brisbane is focused on maximising the long-term legacy of Games-related investments to deliver enduring benefits for communities.



Results of the "Brisbane Making Our Mark" engagement process – Provided by Brisbane City Council

THE SOLUTION APPLIED

Legacy planning as a city-shaping exercise

- **A considered approach to legacy:** Brisbane's legacy journey follows a listen, plan, deliver approach from now until 2042, with the city now moving from listening into planning and delivery. A legacy framework with four criteria helps define Brisbane's approach and guide decision-making - accelerating what Brisbane loves, delivering beyond the Games, delivering beyond the venues, and being uniquely Brisbane.
- **Engagement at scale:** three phases of "Brisbane Making Our Mark" produced more than 1,800 ideas from more than 400 industry and peak-body workshop attendees, 250 Year 10 students from 61 schools and 9,000 Council employees. The third phase (citywide) reached more than 940,000 people and generated almost four million impressions, giving leaders the confidence to progress initiatives through the legacy plan. The Green and Gold Grid was the most popular of 56 ideas showcased during the citywide engagement.
- **The Green and Gold Grid:** an idea proposed by Brisbane's design institutes for a connected and walkable network of streets and public spaces linking key Games venues and destinations. The Green and Gold Grid offers an opportunity to integrate active transport, urban forest and recreation outcomes with delivery of priority links before the Games and additional links in the years beyond.

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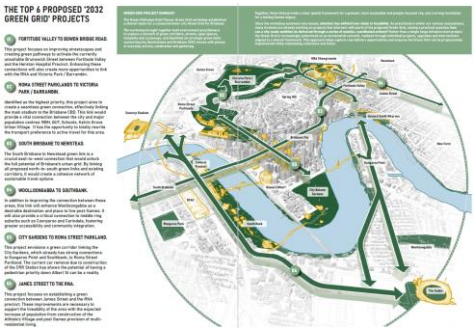
- **Evidence before intervention:** multi-criteria spatial analysis undertaken by design institutes considered population growth, park networks, natural water systems, transport corridors, venues and key destinations to propose corridors that can deliver the most benefit to residents, businesses and visitors.
- **Street typologies:** Four typologies have been proposed by the design institutes, which are designed to be built incrementally as funding and partnerships are unlocked, enable flexible application in different street environments. The typologies will be further refined by Council as the Green and Gold Grid early legacy initiative is implemented.
- **Delivery through partnership:** tactical urbanism, adaptive re-use of leftover infrastructure space and phased delivery ahead of 2032, with private developers, professional institutes and civic organisations contributing in kind, through land and through advocacy — extending what Council could deliver alone.
- **Digital enablement:** a spatial layer to showing integration with other Host City Readiness activities and the use of StoryMaps is assisting with planning and collaboration.

Broader industry engagement undertaken by Brisbane's design institutes to inform the Brisbane Making our Mark submission



The top 6 proposed '2032 Green Grid' projects as identified by Brisbane's design institutes in their Brisbane Making our Mark submission. These projects will be further refined by Council as the Green and Gold early legacy initiative is implemented.

LESSONS LEARNED & INSIGHTS

- **A deadline is a helpful catalyst:** the Games convert long-standing aspirations into funded, dated and deliverable legacy outcomes.
- **No single indicator system is needed to start:** the Green and Gold Grid combines multi-criteria analysis, expert workshops and opportunistic alignment with land-use change and partnerships.
- **Partnerships are critical to enable delivery:** the Green and Gold Grid demonstrates how industry led action can create and refine an idea, and the value of advocates in progressing early legacy initiatives.

2. Madrid: Sueña Madrid and Digital-Native Planning

THE CHALLENGE FACED

Madrid is the second largest metropolis in Continental Europe, with 3.46 million inhabitants in the city and 6.98 million in the metropolitan area, and the wider region is expected to reach 10 million. The city has absorbed more than 250,000 new residents in recent years, yet its urban development plan dates from 1997 and the city no longer has land available for traditional growth. The planning framework itself is the obstacle: complex processing taking 10 to 12 years for final approval, mandatory reports, a high level of litigation caused by a lack of participation, and a plan that is all-encompassing, rigid and predictive — an urban crisis in which land takes 25 years to develop.

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THE SOLUTION APPLIED

A flexible, participatory "plan of plans"

- **Built on an open participatory process:** more than 800 participants across 30 sessions in 26 working groups, over 200 participants in 38 focus groups, more than 200 agents in technical meetings, a macro survey with 4,047 participants, over 50 collaboration agreements and more than 800 proposals through the Web Dream Form, with three administrations collaborating.

- **A metropolitan, convergent plan:** a supra-municipal approach that transcends administrative delimitation and aligns existing strategies, addressing ten urban challenges from housing and climate neutrality to culture, heritage and normative strategy.

- **Four axes around urban balance:** Urban Transformation for a rebalanced and competitive city, Housing for a liveable and welcoming city, 4D Urbanism for regulatory strategy and digitalisation, and Sustainability for a sustainable and adaptable city.

- **Two housing strategies, not one:** some 115,000 new homes for around 300,000 inhabitants are still to come in the peripheral developments, built at low densities of roughly 20 to 35 dwellings per hectare; alongside this, neighbourhood regeneration pursues intensification and re-densification of the existing city.

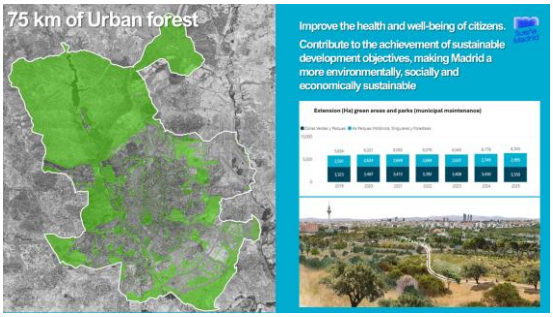
The four axes of the city model, built around urban balance – Provided by Madrid City Council

- **Regeneration already under way:** the M-30 buried and a former highway turned into a 7.5 km linear park along the Manzanares, restoring the river ecosystem and reconnecting neighbourhoods; heritage buildings rehabilitated for new uses; new residential areas after the stadium relocation; renaturalised school environments; and a 75 km urban forest.

- **Sustainability targets:** climate neutrality and zero pollution by 2050; a sponge-city approach to the water cycle with expanded use of reclaimed water; intermodality and active modes in mobility; and circularity targets of 13% waste reduction by 2025 and 15% by 2030 against 2010 levels, recycling of 55%, 60% and 65% by 2025, 2030 and 2035, and landfill capped at 40%, 20% and 10% over the same horizons.

- **Digitally native planning:** a Strategic City Simulator that adds the time factor beyond the spatial 3D dimension, keeps the city diagnosis continuously updated and supports performance-zoning able to evolve with future society needs, with 180,000 monthly users and 950 datasets. The stated principle is adaptability: city-making is treated as a never-ending activity, so the plan adapts to change rather than predicting it.

Madrid Río: burying the M-30 and turning the corridor into a 7.5 km linear park – Provided by Madrid City Council



The 75 km urban forest, connecting existing green areas around the city – Provided by Madrid City Council

LESSONS LEARNED & INSIGHTS

- **Rigidity is the real constraint:** when approval takes more than a decade, flexibility and performance-based rules matter more than the precision of the forecast.
- **Participation reduces litigation:** the high level of legal challenge under the 1997 plan is attributed to a lack of participation, which the new process addresses directly.

3. Comparative insight

Brisbane: a deadline as leverage

940,000+ **people reached**

Engagement at scale gave leaders the confidence to commit to long-term legacy planning and implementation.

Madrid: flexibility as the goal

10–12 **years to approve a plan**

A rigid, predictive 1997 plan gives way to continuously updated, performance-based planning.

Shared insight: both cities are moving from fixed master plans towards frameworks that enable change over time; modular projects, phased investment and continuous diagnosis. Both put large-scale public engagement at the centre. The webinars closed on exactly this common ground: green grid implementation and housing density.

4. Recommendations

Drawing on both cases, the following priorities support cities planning for the long term.

1. **Engage before you decide.** Large-scale, structured participation and the advocacy of external champions can give leaders the confidence to undertake for long-term planning — and, in Madrid's case, what reduces litigation.
2. **Prioritise with spatial evidence.** Multi-criteria analysis of local factors such as growth, movement patterns and environmental condition.
3. **Design for incremental delivery.** Typologies and phased tactics let a network start small and grow as funding allows, instead of waiting for a complete scheme.
4. **Plan to adapt, not to predict.** Continuously updated diagnosis and performance-based rules keep a plan usable over the decades it takes to build a city.

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Sources: Lat Studios and Brisbane City Council, "The Green Grid. Brisbane's Early Legacy Initiative"; Madrid City Council, Australian Institute of Architects, Australian Institute of Landscape Architects, Planning Institute of Australia, Design Instititue of Australia " Green Pathways Gold Places 2032 Green Grid 'Brisbane: Making our Mark' Submission", "Madrid Strategic Plan. Together we build the future of Madrid"; IURC CoP 16 meeting minutes reports, 20 April and 11 May 2026.