

Smart City Expo World Congress 2025, Barcelona, Spain

The Australia–New Zealand Smart Communities Delegation representing government, planning, engineering, digital, research, universities, non-profits and industry joined more than 27,000 global leaders at the largest ever Smart City Expo World Congress (SCEWC) in early November 2025.

This year's theme, **"The Time for Cities"** underlined the global shift: towns and **cities must lead**, enabled by adopting a secure and digitally mature approach to ensuring our cities are safe, sustainable, resilient, vibrant and productive within a responsible AI framework. The new AI-Enabled Cities zone highlighted the pace of change and the urgency to deliver low-risk, high-impact pilots that can scale.

Despite fielding a broad delegation, Australia and New Zealand remain **underrepresented**. We had **no joint formal national presence**, and our presence continues to rely on volunteer leadership from the Australian Smart Communities Association (ASCA), Institution of Public Works Australasia (IPWEA) and Smart Cities Council Australia and NZ (SSC ANZ), alongside self-funded industry and community leaders.



This underrepresentation matters. The Expo and key smart cities forums provide **direct access to global manufacturers, innovators, investors and policymakers** unavailable at home. It is where nations shape the systems, standards and technologies that will define the next decade of urban, regional and rural development.

Our message is clear: **Australia and New Zealand are not at the table at the scale required and we are missing out.**



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This limits our ability to:

- **Influence** global policy, standards and regional alignment
- **Engage** early with leading AI, digital, spatial and smart-infrastructure innovators to address our national needs
- **Position** Australian and New Zealand excellence and exports on the world stage
- **Shape** the solutions urgently needed for housing, climate resilience and productivity

A Call to Action

ASCA and SCC ANZ calls on all Australian and New Zealand Governments, and national industry and professional associations to commit to a **strategic uplift in Australia and New Zealand’s global smart-cities and sustainable communities’ engagement.**

Australia and New Zealand need a **sovereign capability** in the digitisation of cities and places that that strengthens our competitive edge, accelerates export potential, improves the quality of place for people, and ensures Australia and New Zealand are shaping not simply adopting global systems and standards.

The time for Australia and New Zealand’s cities is now. Our global leadership starts with showing up together.

We call for a united commitment to expand the ANZ presence at **SCEWC 2026**, including:

- **Structured study tours** with DFAT, Austrade, MFAT and NZTE to leading global cities as part of participating in the next SCEWC 2026 conference
- **A curated ANZ-hosted event** close to the SCEWC 2026 conference in collaboration with FIRA Barcelona – the event organiser, highlighting shared challenges, innovations and investment opportunities

To accelerate Australia and New Zealand’s transition to inclusive, sustainable and technology-enabled communities, we propose four priority actions that strengthen local innovation, shared infrastructure, long-term capability and global leadership.

- **Accelerate Local Innovation**
Expand town and city innovation grants and Smart Place funding to help councils pilot AI, IoT, digital twins and regenerative design with universities and industry—embedding inclusivity, resilience and regeneration to generate industry-ready IP.
- **Build Shared Testbeds and Trusted Infrastructure**
Establish secure digital infrastructure and shared testbed corridors that enable cross-jurisdictional collaboration and trusted data sharing.



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- **Sustain Skills and Capability**

Guarantee long-term funding for digital and place-making skills, knowledge transfer, and the ongoing operation and maintenance of smart assets.

- **Strengthen ANZ Global Leadership**

Coordinate and elevate Australian and New Zealand participation across APAC, UN, EU and regional programs on inclusive, sustainable and people-centred cities.

Key Insights from the Congress

Artificial Intelligence is now essential to city operations. Used for mapping, modelling and decision-making across transport, development, assets and services.	Climate technologies with measurable savings are securing investment. Solutions that cut emissions and costs are scaling rapidly.	International collaboration opportunities are expanding. Partners in the EU, Asia and North America are seeking ANZ engagement on standards, pilots and joint innovation.
Cybersecurity is non-negotiable. All city systems (sensors, platforms, digital twins, AI tools) must be secure by design.	Governments are reforming digital service delivery at speed. Focusing on user experience, integrated data and more efficient operations.	Nature-based and regenerative design is becoming mainstream. Cities are prioritising cooling, biodiversity, water resilience and ecosystem restoration.
Digital twins are now fully operational tools, not demonstrations. Supporting live flood response, traffic management, asset planning and long-term resilience.	Procurement is evolving to enable innovation. Emphasis on interoperability and avoiding long-term vendor lock-in.	Standards and interoperability are critical. Scalable solutions depend on shared frameworks, common data layers and compatibility across jurisdictions.

Around the world, nations are collaborating and investing boldly in net-zero electrification, regenerative place-making, e.g., serendipity-enabled (engineered by chance) innovation precincts, smarter mobility, environmental protection, people-first design and resilient infrastructure.

Australia and New Zealand risk falling behind with its cities facing a variety of uniquely intensifying pressures: rapid densification, housing unaffordability, ageing infrastructure, extreme heat, worsening natural disasters, workforce/talent constraints and slow productivity growth. Governments at all levels are navigating tighter budgets while expectations for data governance, service digitisation and emissions reduction rise.



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Local governments carry growing asset and regulatory burdens with fewer resources. Meanwhile, our manufacturing and start-up ecosystem remains fragile without national support to scale.

Looking Ahead

We return from Barcelona with a unified commitment: **to build smart, inclusive, resilient cities where technology serves people, sustainability is embedded, and no one is left behind.**

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