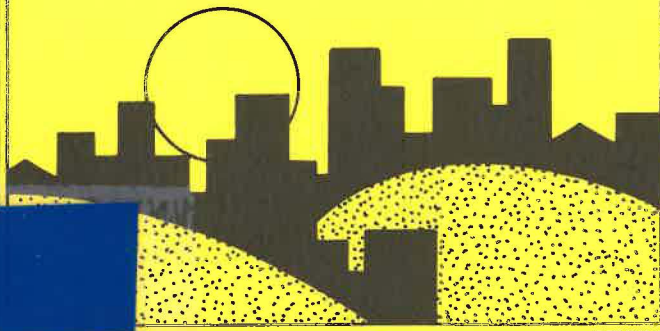


**THE PLANNING OF PLACES  
LIKE PERTH**

**Jeremy Dawkins**

**URU Working Paper No. 17  
October 1989**



**URBAN RESEARCH UNIT  
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*SERIES EDITORS:*  
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## METROPOLITAN PLANNING IN AUSTRALIA

### A URU Sponsored Seminar

Jeremy Dawkins' paper was a contribution to a two-day seminar on *Metropolitan Planning in Australia* organised by the Urban Research Unit in February 1988. The paper reproduced here is a revised and updated version of the original. This is the sixth publication of papers from the seminar to appear in this series. The foci of the seminar were the metropolitan plans or strategies which have recently appeared for four of Australia's largest cities. On the first day, papers describing the evolution and present state of planning policies and machinery in Melbourne, Adelaide, Brisbane, Perth and Sydney were discussed. On the second, a variety of metropolitan planning themes were addressed. These included 'Planning Objectives' and the 'Instruments of Planning', with an international perspective provided by Peter Self. A full list of the papers delivered at the seminar can be found in the endpapers of this publication.

In the view of the Urban Research Unit, the seminar was timely. Sydney has a new metropolitan strategy covering urban growth and change for a population of up to four and a half million. Adelaide is the subject of a new 25-year metropolitan development strategy. Perth's corridor plan has been the subject of a recent major review. Melbourne has seen the transfer of metropolitan planning from the Melbourne Metropolitan Board of Works to the State Government, and the appearance of a 10-year urban strategy as part of a new integrated system of Cabinet policy-making. In the present unfavourable economic and political climate for strategic government planning, this revival of Australian metropolitan planning holds considerable interest. What can the big cities learn from each other's plans or from overseas experience? How useful are long-term land use plans and how do they relate to problems of urban management and service coordination? How much 'planning' is possible as opposed to incremental change and *ad hoc* decisions? What time horizons should be used? How, and how far, will metropolitan plans be actually implemented?

In the discussion, it emerged that all big cities (except Brisbane) wanted to reduce the extent and the cost of further peripheral growth, and to encourage urban consolidation and the promotion of stronger suburban centres. All of them wanted to retain the vitality of the capital city and its central area. The seminar revealed that these goals will not be easy to achieve, and that further study of the methods of implementation would be well worthwhile.

The second day produced intensive discussion of the respective virtues and vices of statutory land use plans *versus* coordinated but pragmatic urban management systems. The machinery of State Government was given attention, as was the prospective role of local government, highlighted by the case of Brisbane. International experience suggested the key importance of land, housing and transportation policies for the achievement of metropolitan objectives, subjects which get too little attention in the Australian metropolitan plans. Some participants brought attention to the desirability of directing some growth to other centres in the same State. Others noted the weak understanding by planners of the property market and the need for more long-term evaluation of development costs and benefits.

The seminar achieved its aim of a useful review of the present state of metropolitan planning in Australia. In its wake, lies a formidable agenda for further research, comparison, evaluation and effective government action.

## ABSTRACT

*Western Australia has a mature metropolitan planning system. Its latest product, 'Planning for the future of the Perth metropolitan region', is a good example of a metropolitan plan. Planning has achieved predictability and orderliness in metropolitan development, but the actual results fall far short of what is possible. A fundamental barrier preventing this system being used effectively is a failure, by planners, to understand the role of the state in managing metropolitan development. By understanding its role as the regulatory agency of the property industry, and by embracing the creative opportunities offered by statutory planning, the metropolitan planning body could—if it seeks change—be much better equipped to achieve broader objectives.*

## THE PLANNING OF PLACES LIKE PERTH<sup>1</sup>

Jeremy Dawkins<sup>2</sup>

Official metropolitan planning in Western Australia is thoroughly institutionalised in the administrative processes of the state, and is generally well regarded. After nearly four decades' experience, most people would regard official metropolitan planning as an essential part of urban development. Judged by its own standards, however, its track record is poor.

The planning industry has consistently set itself a number of aspirations or objectives. In metropolitan plans and policies, these become goals about efficiency, equity, coordination, urban enhancement, environmental protection, and the like. The results have come nowhere close to the goals. In this paper I wish to set down the nature of the failure. More importantly, I wish to consider the causes of failure. It may be that the expectations are wrong, and that there is a more constructive way of viewing the results of metropolitan planning.

The immediate background to this discussion is the publication by the State Planning Commission of Western Australia of a major regional planning document called *Planning for the future of the Perth metropolitan region* (WA SPC, 1987). This document is the product of the third major metropolitan planning exercise carried out by the Western Australian government since the war. The first resulted in a report by Stephenson and Hepburn, *Plan for the metropolitan region, Perth and Fremantle* in 1955 (Stephenson & Hepburn, 1955). The second resulted in the Metropolitan Region Planning Authority's *Corridor plan for Perth* in 1970 (WA MRPA,

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is a revised version of one presented to the URU-sponsored seminar, *Metropolitan Planning in Australia*, in February 1988 at The Australian National University.

<sup>2</sup> Jeremy Dawkins was Director of Planning and Development at the City of Fremantle until 1988. He was Deputy Chairman of the steering committee appointed in 1985 by the State Planning Commission to review the regional plan for Perth. He now lives in Sydney.

1970). Although this third exercise was described as a review of the corridor plan, in effect it produced a new metropolitan plan.

I shall ask what this new plan tells us about the state and nature of metropolitan planning in Western Australia. First, I shall describe the origins and content of the new plan, and discuss the way in which it was produced.

### **Planning Structures in WA and the Origins of the New Plan**

In Western Australia work on town planning legislation began in 1920 and produced the Town Planning and Development Act of 1928. The Act established the office of Town Planning Commissioner and the Town Planning Board to advise on town planning by-laws and schemes, and to regulate land subdivision. The Act is still in force. Its simplicity, indeed its naivety, has facilitated evolution and innovation in the statutory planning system.

Also in 1928, a Metropolitan Town Planning Commission was appointed to report on the planning and control of development in the Perth region. The Commissioners' report (WA MTPC, 1930) contained Perth's first regional plan, and much else besides. Their recommendations for new provisions in the Act and for the establishment of a regional transport authority were not acted on (Webb, 1983; Yiftachel, 1987).

Another Commission was appointed in 1951. It recommended new laws and structures for town planning, and the use of qualified professionals in state and local government (Yiftachel, 1987). Professor Gordon Stephenson of Liverpool University and J.A. Hepburn, the Town Planning Commissioner, were commissioned to prepare a regional plan. Their plan (Stephen & Hepburn, 1955) was highly regarded in planning circles and well received in Perth. Metropolitan planning has received good press ever since.



The Metropolitan Region Planning Authority (MRPA) was established in 1959. Its task was, in effect, to implement the 1955 report. Using the staff of the Town Planning Department, it was to formulate and administer a metropolitan region town planning scheme, and to acquire land for major regional requirements including arterial roads and regional parkland. These activities were (and still are) funded in part from the proceeds of a metropolitan region improvement tax imposed on all properties in the region which were subject to land tax. The new metropolitan region scheme was adopted in 1963. From the way it was written, it would seem that it was expected to become redundant when local planning schemes were introduced in all of the metropolitan municipalities. In fact, it was not superseded by local planning. It remains in force and performs two essential functions:

- it provides a mechanism for the reservation and acquisition of land for regional purposes; and
- more importantly, it gives the metropolitan planning body the option of direct control of all development.

Like the 1928 Act, the region scheme is simple, even crude. It contains zones, but no zoning table, and no development standards. It is nevertheless a very useful planning tool. It provides for major regional land uses, it integrates local schemes and it regulates the urban-rural boundary. It contains development control and other powers, some of which have not yet been fully used. Its simplicity poses few constraints on the use of these powers in new ways as circumstances change.

As a zoning scheme, it was no substitute for strategies and policies for dealing with rapid population growth accompanied by rising rates of vehicle ownership. To cope with metropolitan expansion, the MRPA quickly produced and adopted the corridor plan (WA MRPA, 1970). This simple document advocated the maintenance of wedges of 'rural' land separating growth corridors, each containing a peripheral 'subregional centre' to ensure a high degree of self-containment. After investigation by an honorary Royal Commission, a change of government and an

examination by Paul Ritter—whose report (1972) demolished the corridor plan and offered a much more sophisticated alternative—the Tonkin Labor government adopted the corridor plan in 1973. Pleased to have a regional plan at last, the MRPA proceeded to commission studies of each corridor and of each subregional centre, but never again attempted to review or revise the corridor plan itself.

Compared with its equivalents in other states, the MRPA was an effective body. Because its members included the heads of relevant government departments and representatives of groups of municipalities it was able to plan and coordinate urban expansion. It was set up as an independent authority, like most planning bodies of that time; its role in determining the use of land was seen to require a degree of juridical independence. It also had some of the characteristics of Sydney's Cumberland County Council, with its five local government members. Its independence ensured that the MRPA was not an efficient instrument of government policy, nor a dependable source of technical or political advice. Indeed, a number of regional planning controversies were significant electoral liabilities for the Court and O'Connor coalition governments (1975-1983).

With the election of the Burke Labor Government in 1983, the Town Planning Department, the Town Planning Board and the MRPA were amalgamated to become the State Planning Commission. An element of independence was preserved through the Commission, which consisted of an executive chairman and four part-time members, one of them from local government. The government intended that the Planning Commission should be somewhat more like a department than was the MRPA: the commissioners are appointed by the government and are subject to ministerial direction. The aim was to make the planning system both faster and more responsive to government priorities. Other than that, the restructuring of the planning bureaucracy was not inspired by urban policy or any sort of planning agenda. Specifically, the review of the corridor plan was not in the government's program. This lack of urgency was partly a manifestation of that phenomenon whereby regulatory systems, once in place, have a high degree of permanence because stability in the ground rules is more important than perfection. Thus, even though the corridor

plan was not achieving its stated objectives, was increasingly outdated and was subject to some professional criticism, there was no momentum towards changing it.

Moves for a review came from a few of the young professionals in the department. These sentiments found their way into the ALP platform. This in turn led to a commitment to review the corridor plan, although at the political level the matter was not of great moment. The review was announced by Planning Minister Bob Pearce in May 1985, and commenced in earnest towards the end of that year.

### **The New Metropolitan Plan**

The results of the review of the corridor plan were published in November, 1987, as a major publication entitled *Planning for the future of the Perth metropolitan region* (WA SPC, 1987). This document took the form of a report by the Review Group, with a 'preferred strategy' recommended for adoption by the Planning Commission. Neither the Commission nor the Government has taken a position on the new regional plan. Instead, the Minister announced a period of public comment *stretching beyond the elections, which were due early in 1989*. In mid-1989, the Commission and the new Planning Minister, Pam Beggs, were considering reports on the public submissions—some thousand of them—and the Commission was cautiously developing policies arising from the Review Group's report.

The descriptive material in the report was of a high quality, and should form a useful reference point for future decision-making. The first chapter outlined the background to the 1970 corridor plan and its present review. The second chapter succinctly assessed the political climate, the social climate and the economic climate of the state. This chapter discussed, for example, the 'increasing tendency on the part of state governments to bypass the planning system when they believe that it is providing unwarranted constraints on development'. It predicted that unemployment would remain at around ten per cent, and suggested that 'the increasing proportion of married women in the workforce, rising crime rates, the growth of tourism

and the progressive extension of retail trading hours are likely to cause modifications in the existing urban structure of Perth'. It also looked at the implications of a large public sector debt in times of high interest rates and continuing susceptibility to fluctuations in commodity prices. One issue not examined in this 'climates assessment' was the physical climate: even in 1987 the evidence for the greenhouse effect still seemed too difficult to assess.

A chapter on trends and issues presented good material on, for instance, population, employment structure, job location, existing housing, housing requirements, land and infrastructure, commercial centres, industrial location, transport, and environmental resources. In the examination of each of these and other factors, there was an explicit attempt to isolate the issues and to spell out the implications for metropolitan planning—all of it illustrated by a large number of maps, graphs, charts and tables. The analysis was based on a population of 1.7 million, which would occur in 2021 (plus or minus about five years). For this analysis, the region divides readily into seven areas: the central area, the inner suburbs, the middle suburbs, and four outer sectors.

Twenty-eight 'objectives' were then presented. In the words of the report, these objectives 'have been applied to the evaluation of alternative development patterns to determine a preferred strategy for the metropolitan region'. Of course, it was not really a linear process. The objectives can be seen as a list of criteria or aspirations taking shape towards the end of the planning process and summarising its main concerns. The objectives were grouped under six headings: metropolitan structure, land and housing, economic development, transport and accessibility, environment and natural resources, and coordination and flexibility.

Similarly, the 'alternative strategies', which were examined next, were not really comprehensive, or comparable, or capable of rigorous testing. They were included principally because they are part of the received approach to the preparation of regional plans. This section of the report presented the findings of some very detailed work on constraints to development, with a composite constraints map derived from many sieve maps. It examined the

issue of overall density and the implications of a policy of containment. It looked at four options for centres and job distribution: centralisation in the central area and inner suburbs; centralisation in the Perth-Fremantle corridor; decentralisation to the peripheral subregional centres; and a middle ring strategy. Although the differences are relatively marginal—and some sort of mix is inevitable—there is little doubt that policies to favour middle-ring locations would be both realistic and worthwhile.

Finally, there were four somewhat artificial options for urban expansion: continued corridor growth, peripheral expansion, easterly expansion (an additional 350,000 people in the hills) and coastal expansion (the onrush of the new suburbs to the north, and a priority for the Perth-Bunbury corridor to the south). An attempt was made to cost the roads and infrastructure which would be required for each option. For example (and this says something about development costs on the flat sandy plains of the Perth region), the cost per lot was \$15,600, \$13,300, \$16,400 and \$14,300 respectively. In the end, the 'preferred strategy' had to be a package of proposals based on informed judgement and a feel for what might be feasible.

The report then presented the preferred strategy. This was done with considerable specificity and detail. This chapter is almost as long, and as well illustrated, as the entire document presenting the metropolitan strategy for Sydney (NSW DEP, 1987).

The major elements of the strategy are as follows.

#### *Urban Containment*

Selected areas of land adjacent to existing urban land should be progressively released. This recommendation is a departure from the corridors and 'rural wedges' which have determined urban development since 1973. So are we back to peripheral sprawl? The many advantages of 'a more compact urban form' are given, but one of the biggest risks is that the long-standing legitimacy of a planned urban boundary will be undermined. There are also proposals for regional densities, and for new

ways of funding backlog sewerage in the postwar suburbs, to allow redevelopment or infill at higher densities.

### *Employment Location*

With its fairly high and uniform levels of accessibility, Perth will probably continue to have a highly dispersed pattern of employment centres. Nevertheless, the report advocates various measures to encourage the location of jobs in the middle suburbs, including the designation of preferred employment locations where planning should assist land assembly, improve infrastructure and permit diverse and mixed development.

### *Pattern of Centres*

The strategy provides for a hierarchy of five levels of centres, called (somewhat inappropriately) the Perth central area, major regional centres, regional centres, district centres and local centres. Fremantle and the four peripheral centres which were designated 'subregional centres' under the old corridor plan will now be called major regional centres. Perhaps the most significant proposal of the new report is for the designation of two more such centres, Osborne Park and Cannington. These are both middle-ring districts with major retail facilities, industry zones which are becoming complex mixtures of retailing and commerce, adequate supplies of under-utilised land, and high levels of accessibility. Osborne Park, in particular, has the qualities which have traditionally led to the development of a vigorous central business district. Specifically, it has highly fragmented land ownership, very complex patterns of land use, and a wide range of intensity and age of development. Previous regional planners have not known what to do about these places. Even acknowledging their existence ran the risk of undermining the corridor plan orthodoxy. The need now is not simply to acknowledge them, and seek to regulate them, but to use a repertoire of planning measures to facilitate and guide their development into something the region needs: two high-order centres, one north and one south of the river.

### *Industry*

One of the significant achievements of earlier regional planning, in Perth as elsewhere, was the creation of large industrial zones beyond the built-up areas. Such zones must be planned well before they are needed, that is, when the older industrial zones still have a high proportion of undeveloped land. The strategy identifies seven sites for future industrial zones, totalling 2,700 hectares, and recommends that another 1,300 hectares be identified to meet the projected need for land. At Perth's stage of development, future demand for industrial land will come not only from growth in this sector, but also from processes of succession in all of the older industrial zones; firms will migrate outwards as the bigger sites are redeveloped for more intense uses, and eventually for commercial and even office uses.

### *Transport*

Transport planning in Perth is reasonably sophisticated, and coordination is much better than it used to be. The strategy includes proposals for inter-agency arterial roads and public transport strategies, and an annual metropolitan transportation program for consideration by the budget management committee of the cabinet. Recommendations are made concerning specific arterial roads and public transport services. In a somewhat hopeful vein, the strategy seeks to shift trips from the inner areas to the major regional centres, to increase densities in areas of high accessibility and along public transport routes, and to reduce urban expansion in areas not already served by a committed road network and the public transport system.

### *Metropolitan Open Space*

Useful research was carried out into major vegetation systems, wildlife habitats and ecosystems, and significant landscapes. With these in mind, opportunities were sought to provide linkages between existing and proposed areas of open space, and also opportunities to incorporate privately-owned land by means of management agreements, conditions of approval and the like. The result was a network of 'metropolitan parks' based on the very extensive areas of regional open space, state forests and the like; one of the proposed metropolitan parks comprised the Swan and Canning rivers and the adjacent public land. The report recommends that

the management of all this be in the hands of a regional parks authority, possibly an additional role for the Planning Commission.

#### *Rural and Non-urban Areas*

The remaining land in the region is divided into planning areas, rather like broad land use zones. Some of these provide for 'extensive agriculture', which, on the banksia scrubland, often means no use at all. Other areas are intended to protect ground water reservoirs (therefore allowing continued use, but minimal intensification), access to basic raw materials (such as sand, limestone, hard rock, clay, etc.), landscapes (in particular, the Darling scarp), availability of land for rural living, availability of land for intensive agriculture (particularly on the fringes of the region), and the area covered by the existing Swan Valley policy, which seeks to protect viticultural, heritage, recreational and tourism resources.

The penultimate chapter was devoted to proposals for a metropolitan development program, which would generate a rolling five-year plan for infrastructure and land development. Responsibility for the program would rest with a cabinet committee and an interdepartmental committee, serviced by the Planning Commission. The final chapter concluded that 'the metropolitan region scheme should be retained generally in its present form', supplemented by a statutory policy statement, physical plans for key areas, functional policy statements, some changes in delegations to councils, and perhaps some intervention by the Planning Commission to assemble land in the major regional centres.

#### **The Production of the Plan**

The management of Australia's metropolitan regions has come a long way since the previous generation of regional plans. There are many players—such as the road builders, the utilities and the big developers—who engage in sophisticated planning of their own. The information base is reasonably comprehensive and up-to-date. Experience has been gained in trying to implement the earlier plans. For all these reasons, there tends to be agreement as to the major issues facing any given region. So how should a



contemporary metropolitan planning project proceed? It would have been reasonable to expect that the review of the corridor plan would exhibit the following three qualities.

#### *Process Rather Than Endstate*

These days, a metropolitan planning exercise could be expected to focus on how the region changes. The planners should have an image of their task such that they do not produce a report with a land use plan, but rather they respond to processes of urban development and change by devising policies, criteria and tests to be applied to these processes. This is not to suggest that the processes are not concerned with land use or with spatial distributions and locations: maps would be a necessary way of understanding the issues and illustrating the proposals. Rather the image of metropolitan planning would be that of an ongoing process, involving many public and private organisations; the planning body interacts in decision-making rather than simply implements a plan. Accordingly, the planning exercise would sharply focus on the nature of the decision-making processes: what sort of decisions are made about the type and location of urban development, and by whom.

#### *Issues Rather Than 'Research'*

Metropolitan planning no longer starts with a blank page, as it did for Stephenson and Hepburn. The planners do not have to argue a case for planning; at the same time, they cannot claim to be the only source of plans. They do not have to justify their plans by claiming that the plans are exhaustively comprehensive, scientifically objective, or durable in the long term. This means that they do not need to spend the first half of the exercise researching the regional data so as to technically derive 'needs' and 'objectives'. Instead, they can start with ideas. The method could be one which began by defining issues so as to focus the work (including some carefully targeted research) onto those processes which mattered most. More importantly, the planning exercise might itself be an opportunity to actually change those processes in desirable directions, or to create new decision-making structures. As an example, the work on a new plan might provide sufficient justification for Treasury to prepare accounts or budgets in new formats, or for Main Roads to modify their models, recast their

costings or participate in new decision networks. In other words, the review of the corridor plan would not be a backroom exercise but an intensification of the interactions in which the Planning Commission already engages.

#### *Organisational and Staff Development*

Such a project would necessarily be carried out in-house rather than by consultants or experts brought in for the purpose. In any event, it ought to be carried out internally because (a) regional planning is the Planning Commission's business; (b) if it lacks skills and experience, it needs to acquire them; and (c) the Commission will have to carry on with the process after the completion of the review.

On this question of who would conduct the review, some members of staff and others had urged that consultants be engaged to write a report; one wanted someone from Toronto. Nevertheless, the Planning Commission made the right decision. It established a considerable team drawn from various parts of the organisation, directed by a senior planner and supplemented by individuals from the Water Authority, the Main Roads Department, the Department of Industrial Development, the Department of Employment and Training, the Environmental Protection Authority, Homeswest (the housing commission) and a planner seconded by the City of Canning. A steering committee was appointed. Its members were Professor Max Neutze (chairman), Tony Lloyd (Assistant Under-Treasurer), Tony Powell, Ray Turner (Managing Director of Town and Country WA Building Society) and myself. This was called the Review Group, and it was responsible for the production of the new metropolitan plan. The Review Group met for one or two days about every two months to guide and monitor progress.

In other respects, the exercise did not proceed as might have been hoped. This was partly due to the style and methodology called for by those who expected 'needs' to be objectively derived from compilations of regional data. This is a trap that must be familiar to all planners. If imagination is suspended in favour of 'research'—if data-gathering displaces issues, ideas and arguments—it is very difficult to move on to creative problem solving.

A momentum is developed in which there is never enough information. The work does not lead to insights, syntheses, ideas or propositions, or ever get to the point where proposals can be rigorously tested. As the information builds up it gets harder, not easier, to make decisions, or even to define the issues.

More significantly, it became apparent that the MRPA/Town Planning Department had lacked experience in the practice of metropolitan regional planning. There was simply no body of expertise applicable to the present task. This should not have come as a surprise. The MRPA had invested most of its resources in statutory planning at the level of the (municipal) town planning scheme. It had failed over a decade to produce any kind of employment location policy or much more than window dressing in the direction of a centres policy. For a decade it had pretended that the burgeoning and scattered commercial and retail development was all 'light industry', while doggedly producing glossy commissioned reports on the subregional centres which were not developing. As noted above, it had not attempted to monitor or revise the corridor plan in the fifteen years since it was written.

In short, the approach to this planning exercise was both old-fashioned and tentative. It did not, from the outset, go straight to the central issues and problems for urban development in the Perth region. It did not concentrate on processes, with a view to influencing their outcomes, let alone seize the opportunity to initiate new procedures and structures for decision-making. The proposals came so late that they remained generalised and untested, when what was needed—and would have been possible in the time—was concrete measures ready for executive action.

What was lacking was a focus on intervention. The Planning Commission has a specific set of tools or powers with which to guide urban development towards chosen outcomes. The planners need to understand the extent and limits of these powers so as to use them effectively. They need to direct their enquiries and their plans towards the matters which lie within their jurisdiction. This is not to say that they should take a narrow view of their jurisdiction: one of the Commission's powers is to seek to influence other

agencies. The Commission can try to persuade other agencies, and the government generally, to use any measures relevant to achieving the chosen outcomes. Plans which ignore the available powers are at best a waste of time and at worst counterproductive.

Long experience tells us that many plans, particularly metropolitan plans, have been ineffectual—to the point, perhaps, that governments question the entire system. So why do practitioners have such difficulty in focussing on the available powers, and directing their planning and problem-solving towards the things which they can influence? The answer, in my view, is that planners are loath to accept that the essential powers of planning agencies are statutory planning and development control.

The professionalisation of planning has been built around claims that it can produce better cities and happier societies, through comprehensive planning, goal setting, and the coordination of everything. Plans tend to have objectives of this kind, and some planners sound as if their proper role is to be the conscience of society. Land use planning, zoning and development control, on the other hand, are written off as crude, negative, inflexible and definitely *passé*. Worse, these functions are often regarded as being too limited in scope to warrant serious attention. In disparaging the essential powers of planning agencies, planners are ensuring that their plans remain ineffectual.

It is possible to retain the grand goals and the comprehensive interest and still intervene effectively. To enable this to be done, planners must see themselves as statutory planners. If the creative possibilities of statutory planning were better understood, the new plan for Perth would be much more than simply some good analysis and some fine suggestions. The first step in making the most of the regulatory powers of planning agencies is to understand where those powers came from and what purposes they serve.

## **The Role of the State in Metropolitan Planning**

As will be apparent from the earlier discussion, effective metropolitan planning is well institutionalised in Western Australia. There have been regional plans formally adopted by governments since 1955. There has been formal coordination through the MRPA since 1959, together with a regional improvement tax and a statutory regional planning instrument. There has been a formal metropolitan strategic plan covering directions for growth and sub-regional centres since 1970. Direct planning and regulation of urban development takes place at both the local and regional level within organisational arrangements which permit evolution and innovation, and which have largely avoided demarcation disputes. The planning legislation is characterised by simplicity and openness, thus accommodating innovation. Metropolitan planning issues are regularly covered by the media (and have been for at least four decades). The requirements of metropolitan planning (the urban/rural boundary, developer contributions to infrastructure, the staging and structure of land development, etc.) have been accepted by the property industry.

This state of affairs did not arise because somebody thought it would be a good idea, or because it served some noble or progressive social purpose, or because it suited the planning profession. There is clear evidence that these arrangements were demanded by those most affected: the major land and property developers in particular, but also the agencies building highways, water and sewerage systems, the power grid, schools.

The major players had every reason to demand that land use be planned, and that the plans be enforced. The return on their investment is highly dependent on what other development does or does not take place around it, that is, on externalities. The degree of risk is a function of the extent to which any subsequent development has to adhere to a set of rules. The larger and more fixed the investment the more desirable it is to have durable ground rules: any rules are better than none at all. Even for the entrepreneurial, the adventurous or the unscrupulous, it is the existence of the ground rules that creates the rewards of a special advantage.

It follows that, for the major players, there are two aspects of metropolitan planning that really matter:

- the physical planning of networks and land uses; and
- the enforceable regulation of actual urban development.

There may be non-statutory and non-physical aspects as well: 'strategies' and 'policies' may be helpful and even self-fulfilling. Similarly, non-regulatory measures, such as consultation and coordination, may be essential to success. Even high-minded aspirations which relate to matters outside the jurisdictions of any of the parties may well be worth stating. In the end, however, metropolitan planning is an intervention by the state to provide an 'orderly market' for land and property development.

The metropolitan planning system exists to provide a regulated environment for urban development. This requires the presence of the two mechanisms noted above: physical plans and development control. Like any other system of rules, metropolitan planning can be judged on its intrinsic efficacy, that is, its qualities of clarity, comprehensiveness, consistency, adaptability, flexibility, enforceability, etc. Quite separately, the system can be judged on its content: centres or districts or zones; constraints on CBD growth; densities of residential development; the location of highways, etc. Thus, on the one hand, regulation *per se* has the potential to increase economic activity and other less tangible forms of wealth, if it is efficient. On the other hand, it is the content (or more specifically the incidence) of the actual regulations which determines the distribution of that wealth—a fact understood by more developers than planners.

Developers need to know about the extensive power and scope of the regulatory machinery. Those who run the system, however, seem unaware of what can and cannot be achieved through it. The new metropolitan plan for Perth demonstrates a lack of vision about the possibilities and the techniques. The cause of this fundamental deficiency can be found in the prevailing attitude towards land use planning and development control. The

very terms still carry the pejorative connotations imposed on them since the early seventies.

A persistent uneasiness with statutory planning can be seen in the operations of the State Planning Commission, where statutory planning—which after all is the core function of this arm of the state and consumes most of its resources—enjoys a lower status than other activities. One manifestation of this can be seen in the Commission's corporate plan, the content of which seems to have come mainly from the planners themselves. In the many words about state planning, regional planning, development, implementation and the like there is no mention of the central functions of land use planning, land use regulation and development control.

During work on Western Australia's draft Planning Act, Planning Commission staff had difficulty in seeing the metropolitan region scheme not only as a crude zoning plan but also as the source of the Commission's powers to effectively and unilaterally intervene in urban development. As a result they were prepared to relinquish these powers. The same attitudes were evident in the review of the corridor plan. Until the closing stages of that exercise the metropolitan region scheme was dismissively described as a negative and inflexible zoning scheme. There was an inclination to write it off, and with it the Commission's most promising powers.

So here is a serious problem: planners do not like the powers available to them, and are therefore unable to explore imaginative ways of making them more effective, and as a consequence are unable to agree on their role. While planning is taught as a profession concerned with strategies and policies, most practitioners are actually engaged in statutory planning in local government, seemingly resigned (or perhaps happy) to be the enforcers of planning schemes. This in turn may have something to do with the sad fact that few of the bright and committed students are enrolling in the planning schools.

Metropolitan planning would be so much more effective if it was understood that its unique function—its jurisdiction—is to regulate the location and spatial distribution of networks and land uses. It can seek to

influence these in a variety of ways including persuasion, advocacy, subsidies, incentives and direct involvement in development by government agencies and government-owned developers. It would be much more effective, however, if it recognised the extensive and creative opportunities that arise from the mere existence of a regulatory system. Through this regulatory system metropolitan planning can inexpensively and directly intervene in private development, which will of course always constitute the great bulk of urban development activity.

The major private players in urban development make effective use of the regulatory system. They understand that regulation, in establishing 'orderly marketing' in land and property development, also creates opportunities to modify the content of the rules to alter their incidence, thereby changing the winners and losers. My point is that official metropolitan planning can do the same thing.

Accepting the limits while embracing the possibilities of statutory planning would not make less urgent a style of planning which focuses on processes and interactions. It is precisely this regulatory approach which treats metropolitan planning as a complex ongoing process involving diverse relationships between many participants. Making the most of statutory planning would not lessen the need for hard facts, good research, good ideas; rather, it would identify the parameters most susceptible to intervention. Nor would a clear understanding of the metropolitan planning body as a regulatory agency (as opposed to being the conscience of society or the source of correct ideas) entail any retreat from the broader social and economic objectives of metropolitan planning. On the contrary, this approach would focus its planning onto achievable objectives and enable its actions to be aimed at the most strategic targets.



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