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PRACTICE REVIEW

Paterson's Curse: the Attempt to Revive Metropolitan Planning in Melbourne

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Introduction

Historians of urban planning have charted a shift in planning philosophies in Western countries from the 'design' approach of the 1950s, to the 'systems' approach of the 1970s, to the 'market' or 'neo-liberal' planning of the 1990s (e.g. Taylor, 1998). Critics have pointed out that all three approaches share a bias against genuine community involvement in planning. Planners, with their expert knowledge of design, of urban systems analysis, or of the inherent superiority of markets, are entitled to overrule the community, which lacks the necessary expertise (Mees, 2000).

Various 'radical' critiques of 'modernist' planning (a term which encompasses the design and systems approaches) have emerged since the 1970s. Commentators writing from Marxist, feminist or post-modern theoretical bases are united in their critique of the concept of the 'public interest' on which modernist planning is based. By and large, however, these schools of thought have been unable to offer a cogent replacement for the concept, with the result (as Gleeson and Low, 2000 observe) that, whatever the intentions of the critics may be, the beneficiary is neo-liberalism, which offers the market as a replacement for the public interest.

Australian observers of planning have offered various responses to this dilemma. Inaugurating a series that ran in *Practice Review* over 2000–2001, the late John Paterson argued for acceptance of a market view which recognises the limitations of planning. "Less is more" and metropolitan planning should be confined mainly to land-use regulation to control "nasty externalities", infrastructure provision and research (Paterson, 2000, pp. 384–385).

Brendan Gleeson and Nicholas Low explicitly and passionately reject the market approach and call for a "revaluing" and "reinstating" of planning in *Australian Urban Planning: New Challenges, New Agendas* (Gleeson and Low, 2000). The ambition of their project can be seen from the breadth of the definition of the task of planning with which the book opens, namely: "The activity of governance required to make sure that all the services people need in a city are provided when and where the need occurs" (p. 12). Unfortunately, especially given the heroic nature of the challenge, Gleeson and Low devote considerably more space to asserting that such planning is *necessary* than to establishing that it is *feasible*, or indicating how the problems that led to a loss of confidence in modernist planning can be overcome.

The problem is brought into stark relief by Leonie Sandercock and John Friedmann's contribution to the *Practice Review* debate. "A so-called metropolitan strategy is first and foremost a political, rather than a planning, document", the authors tell us. "It sets out a new government's long-term vision, intentions and proposals for action." But the strategy must be based on a "continuing participatory process" that brings together "the relevant actors … government, corporate economy and civil society" in a way that ensures everyone, especially the powerless, has a say (Sandercock and Friedmann, 2000, p. 530). This sounds very nice, but how is it to be done at all, and in particular by a *new* govern-

ment—which, by definition, has not been around for long enough to engage in a continuing participatory process of any kind? Higher-level governments, even those that are not new, lack the skills and the inclination to share power effectively, which is the reason for the increasing popularity of the doctrine of subsidiarity (Gleeson and Low, 2000, pp. 213–215; Mees, 2000). Interestingly, the Vancouver Livable Region Strategy, which Sandercock and Friedmann cite as an example of the approach they advocate, was produced not by a State government, but through a voluntary, 'bottom-up' collaboration between local municipalities facilitated by a regional planning agency with more than a passing similarity to the erstwhile Melbourne & Metropolitan Board of Works (Mees, 2000).

David Yencken, who presided over a centralisation of planning power as secretary of Victoria's Department of Planning for much of the 1980s, suggested that some degree of independence from a State government may be required for a strategy process to be genuinely participatory, and the resulting plan to have broad 'ownership' (Yencken, 2000, pp. 247–248). But this is a relatively rare acknowledgement of the tension between the notion that a metropolitan strategy represents a government's vision, and the requirement for genuine participation (see also Arnstein, 1969). The more common approach is illustrated by Gleeson and Randolph (2003), who advocate a new metropolitan strategy for Sydney that would be "formulated at the highest level—as a joint initiative of the Premier's Department and the state planning agency", but also "distilled from an open public debate and transparently negotiated"—without indicating how the tension between these two goals might be resolved.

Bruce Moon (2000) argues that, despite protestations to the contrary, *Australian Urban Planning* is merely arguing for a reinstatement of 1970s-style modernist planning, although Low and Gleeson (2000) dispute this. One commentator who is unabashed about reviving modernism is Tony Powell, the Commissioner of the National Capital Development Commission—possibly the purest ever example of a modernist planning agency—from 1974 to 1985. Powell laments the "marked decline in the effectiveness of town planning Australia-wide", due to the replacement of "real town planning" such as the NCDC's 1984 *Metropolitan Canberra: Policy Plan/ Development Plan* by documents that "rely mainly on ambitious vision statements and promises of community empowerment, … economic growth and ecological sustainability". This is "[a] type of 'Clayton's town planning'" and "is the position that prevails in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane …" (Powell, 2003, pp. 114–115).

Whether or not one supports the process and priorities of the NCDC's planning of Canberra (and I do not—see Mees, 2001), it must be conceded that Powell's call for a revival of modernist planning is intellectually coherent and potentially implementable. The same can be said for Paterson's approach. By contrast, most of the academic prescriptions for 'radical' or 'insurgent' planning remain 'academic' in the pejorative sense of the word.

Planning Melbourne: from Kennett to Bracks

John Paterson was Secretary of the Department of Infrastructure (which administered transport and urban planning) in the latter years of the neo-Liberal Kennett government, which ruled Victoria from 1992 to 1999, and practised what he preached. Local development control was largely deregulated (Gleeson and Low, 2000, Chap. 5), and the metropolitan planning policies of the former government—notably on non-urban green wedges and district centres—were relaxed in the 1995 policy statement *Living Suburbs* (DPD, 1995).

Labor in Victoria was unprepared for government in 1999: the defeat of Kennett came as a shock to almost everyone. This weakness was particularly apparent in planning, where spokesman John Thwaites had only recently taken over responsibility for the portfolio, in addition to his much more burdensome role as Shadow Minister for Health. Labor's thin planning policy, *Planning for the Future*, was largely rhetorical and focused principally on addressing the concerns of residents who objected to urban consolidation. However, it did promise that "Metropolitan and regional development strategies will be prepared and integrated with a whole of government approach to planning. Land use planning will be tied to transport, environmental, social and economic planning" (ALP, 1999, p. 10).

Once in office, Thwaites moved quickly. In December 1999, he released a "State Planning Agenda" with the uninspiring title *A Sensible Balance*. This promised a Metropolitan Strategy for Melbourne, based on power-sharing, community participation and environmental sustainability. A follow-up Ministerial press release promised that the strategy would be based on Ecologically Sustainable Development principles and incorporate "widespread consultation". A key feature of the strategy would be "an integrated transport plan for Melbourne" (media release, 10 May 2000).

Thwaites, a former mayor of South Melbourne, was personally committed to planning, but had limited time (one afternoon a week in fact) for the job, due to the much heavier

workload in the health portfolio. He addressed this by appointing Professor Lyndsay Neilson Secretary of the Department of Infrastructure to replace Paterson. Optimism abounded in planning circles that a genuine revival of metropolitan planning might be on the cards (e.g. Yencken, 2000, pp. 246–247).

What followed provides an excellent case study of Australian metropolitan planning practice because the Minister, while supportive, was simply too busy to intervene. The outcome was therefore, to a much greater extent than in most other cases, genuinely the work of planners rather than politicians.[1]

The Result

The Melbourne Metropolitan Strategy process ran for 3 years, cost some $5 million and saw the involvement of around 5500 people (DOI, 2002a, p. 18). The result was the release in October 2002 (around 18 months late) of *Melbourne 2030: Planning for Sustainable Growth*, along with six "draft implementation reports" and an "advisory note".

The public and media response to the strategy has largely been one of apathy, which contrasts with the high level of public participation in the preparation stages. The major exception is *Age* newspaper columnist Kenneth Davidson, who delivered a scathing assessment. The strategy was merely "simply a restatement of the main elements of the Kennett government's 1995 planning document (Living Suburbs)" which had been "sugar-coated" with "phoney consultative processes and documents in warm, earthy colours, subliminally evocative of a sustainable environment, with lots of people enjoying caffe latte society …" (Davidson, 2002).

Academics and planners have, however, been falling over one another in their eagerness to praise *Melbourne 2030*. Nicholas Low of Melbourne University is much more positive than Davidson, arguing that the change of direction is genuine:

> Melbourne 2030 represents a new course from the helm … [It] promises a greener city … cynicism is not warranted. Melbourne 2030 deserves a warm welcome from planners, and those who made it have reason to be proud of their efforts. It is a better plan than we have seen for at least thirty years. (Low, 2002, pp. 5–6)

Low's colleague Ruth Fincher sees the new strategy as "a real signal of the complexity of thinking about the development of the city as a whole", in contrast with the 1990s when "planning was very much understood as the exercise of development control on individual blocks of land blocks of land" (*Urban Planning Street Cool*, media release, 27 February 2003). Gleeson and Randolph (2003) support this optimistic assessment. Planning Institute of Australia Victorian President Peter Tesdorpf (2002) says: "It's [*sic*] values, principles and key directions are right on target", while PIA Past President Bernadette George (2002) praises both the Department's consultation programme and the content of the strategy.

I will consider *Melbourne 2030* in the reverse order to George, first examining the content, then the process. In particular, I will compare it with the Kennett government's *Living Suburbs*. Both Low and George use the subject-headings in the published strategy report to structure their analysis, but this approach has limitations. In particular, it makes more difficult the task of separating rhetoric from reality, which is essential to assess whether Davidson's more cynical assessment is valid. I will therefore consider the content of *Melbourne 2030* using headings derived from Powell's (2003) description of "the essence of metropolitan planning", namely, the shape and form of residential development; transport infrastructure; and distribution of employment and retailing. This is a narrower scope than most academic definitions of the scope of planning, such as the one given by Gleeson and Low and discussed above. Most of these broader definitions are vulnerable to the criticism implicit in the title of Wildavsky's (1973) famous paper "If planning is everything, maybe it's nothing" (cf. Yencken, 2000).

Content of Melbourne 2030

Presentation

Melbourne 2030 covers 192 pages compared with *Living Suburbs*, which ran for only 72, but the two documents bear many similarities. Perhaps the most striking for the reader is the many photographs of smiling families, historic buildings and other 'feel-good' subjects. These are matched by the constant repetition of 'feel good' statements about integration and sustainability throughout both reports, making it difficult to discern what actual decisions the documents record. *Melbourne 2030* has many more such photos and blandishments than *Living Suburbs*, which is a major reason for its greater length.

The second major similarity is the structure. Both reports commence with a "vision", and then list a series of "strategic directions" (*Living Suburbs* has five; *Melbourne 2030* nine). The directions are remarkably similar: for example,

Living Suburbs direction 1 is "Provide a business environment conducive to sustainable economic growth", while *Melbourne 2030* direction 4 is "A more prosperous city". Listing the policies under the heading of strategic directions was presumably intended to provide greater strategic focus than a direct concentration on traditional topics like growth corridors or district centres, but actually produces the opposite effect, especially in the case of *Melbourne 2030*. This is firstly because some of the principles are extremely vague (e.g. No. 5: "a great place to be"), and secondly because splitting the functional areas over a number of themes prevents explicit consideration of alternative courses of action, and the basis for choosing between them. For example, transport has its own "direction" (No. 8), but is also dealt with in Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 6 and 7; because the freeway proposals are not mentioned in the transport chapter, but are instead hidden away in the "prosperous city" chapter (No. 4), a false impression is created of the degree of priority the strategy accords to public transport (see discussion below).

Urban Consolidation

Melbourne 2030 advocates "a more compact city" (the title of direction 1), i.e. "an increasing proportion of housing to be developed within the established urban area, particularly at … sites that are well located in relation to activity centres and public transport" (p. 57). Local councils will be required to "develop appropriate local planning policies" to implement this (p. 57). This support for urban consolidation represents no significant change from *Living Suburbs*, which advocated "higher residential densities … not only in the inner suburbs … but also in growth areas" (p. 58); "higher density development along tram routes and near railway stations" (p. 61) and "centres offering a range of activities … integrated with medium-density housing" (p. 67).

Neither strategy provides any substantive measures to direct higher-density housing into the preferred locations—for example, by restricting it in other places. *Melbourne 2030* retains the pro-developer "performance-based" approach, which allows higher-density development anywhere in Melbourne provided certain design requirements are met or "considered". This approach has already been shown to be completely ineffective in channelling development to preferred locations (Buxton and Tieman, 1999).

Equally importantly, neither *Living Suburbs* nor *Melbourne 2030* seeks to restrain the sprawling of non-residential land uses, which account for the majority of urbanised land in cities like Melbourne. Although Melbourne currently has a large supply of partly or fully vacant industrial land, *Melbourne 2030* actually proposes that even more such land be zoned, because this is "a key competitive strength" (p. 78). In other words, residents are to bear all the burden of urban consolidation, while industry will be encouraged to continue to sprawl.

Distribution of Employment and Retailing

Centres policy has a chequered history in Melbourne. The MMBW's original planning scheme in 1953 designated six suburban sites adjacent to railway stations for major employment and retail sub-centres, but the Board did not engage in an active land-assembly programme to provide the large sites required by developers. Beginning with Chadstone in 1960, most shopping malls were located in free-standing sites that developers acquired fortuitously—in contrast with Sydney, where stronger adherence to policy, together with proactive land assembly by the Cumberland County Council, ensured that most major sub-centres are in designated, rail-based locations. The MMBW's second major plan, released in 1971, quietly dropped the district centre policy, but it was revived in 1980 as concerns about oil depletion and pollution saw renewed concern for transit-oriented development. The 1980 policy, which sought to restrict major new office and retail developments to 15 rail-based District Centres was pilloried by academics and development interests (Mees, 1998) and progressively dismantled.

Living Suburbs formalised the new approach, advocating that development be encouraged to locate in "activity clusters, ranging from major regional centres [i.e. malls] to smaller neighbourhood ones [and also] the shopping strips …" (p. 67). Developments outside existing centres would only be permitted if they could demonstrate a "net community benefit".[2] In other words, the previous policy of *compelling* major developments to locate in *rail-oriented* centres was watered down to one of case-by-case assessment favouring existing centres generally, including car-based malls.

The actual effect of this policy was to create a regulatory advantage for the proprietors of large shopping malls (most of them car-based), by making development in smaller centres and other locations (even those located on the rail or tram system) more difficult. An example of the bizarre effects of this policy can be seen in the 1998 controversy over a proposed Readings cinema complex in the suburb of East Burwood. The complex was to be located opposite a small-ish strip shopping centre, adjacent to a tram route which operates frequently until midnight, every day of the year. An inquiry panel assessed

this application under the *Living Suburbs* policy and found it wanting, because East Burwood shopping centre was too small to count as an "activity cluster". The cinemas instead were built at the far end of the car park at Chirnside Park shopping mall. They are 400 metres from the nearest shop and the only form of public transport access is infrequent buses which do not operate at all in the evening, when cinemas are busiest.

The *Melbourne 2030* prescription for "activity centres" is in essence the same as *Living Suburbs*. The draft implementation plan for centres concedes as much:

> Concentration of activity within centres has been a significant component of metropolitan activity centres policy for many years, largely administered through the application of general policy on a case-by-case basis. *Melbourne 2030 reinforces this position*, but aims to provide greater clarity about how out-of-centre proposals should be considered … (DOI, 2002b, p. 24, emphasis added)

The promised "greater clarity" is to come in the form of assessment criteria which ensure that "out-of-centre proposals are only considered where the proposed use or development is of net benefit to the community …" (DOI, 2002c, p. 4). This is, of course, precisely the same formulation as the regulations associated with *Living Suburbs*.

Clarity (of a kind) is added by the fact that *Melbourne 2030* actually lists 105 "Major Activity Centres", of which the 25 largest are designated "Principal Activity Centres". No explanation of the basis for selection appears anywhere in *Melbourne 2030* or the accompanying Draft Implementation Plan dealing with activity centres (No. 4). The list simply appears to be based on retail floor space, with no distinction between privately owned, car-based malls and traditional rail- and tram-based centres. Thus, Chadstone, Melbourne's largest single-owner car-based mall is a Principal Activity Centre, and the East Burwood K-Mart is a Major Centre, while Glenferrie, a traditional strip centre based around a tram route and a railway station and incorporating Swinburne University, is not listed at all. This appears to mean that if Readings seeks to open a cinema complex at Glenferrie, the firm will be encouraged instead to go to Chadstone or K-Mart because, according to *Melbourne 2030* (p. 46), this will "reduce the number of private motorised vehicle trips", "improve access by walking, cycling and public transport" and "provide focal points for the community"!

Transport

The Kennett government was an unabashed supporter of urban freeways, but felt obliged to at least make token gestures to sustainability and social equity. *Transporting Melbourne* (DOI, 1996), the companion to *Living Suburbs* dealing with transport, outlined proposed public transport improvements first (in Chapter 5) and road projects second (Chapter 6), as if the latter were somehow less significant. This is an old Melbourne trick, dating back at least as far as the 1969 Transportation Plan, which visiting British transport economist J. M. Thomson described as:

> an unconvincing piece of work. It is based on the earlier American transportation study techniques, by now thoroughly discredited, and it was presented with all the glib political cliches one has learned to distrust. The public relations document bears the labels 'Train', 'Bus', 'Tram', 'Car', in that order, and begins with a description of the railway plan, followed by those for trams and buses. Lastly mentioned are the highway proposals. At the very end are given the costs [86% for roads and car parking; 14% for public transport] … Clearly the plan is a highway plan, not—as it is called—a comprehensive transport plan. (Thomson, 1977, p. 137)

Melbourne 2030 uses the same presentational technique. The transport chapter (No. 8) discusses public transport proposals first and roads last, but does not even contain a list of the freeway proposals. These are hidden away in Chapter 4 ("prosperous city"), and are presented in a map headed "Enabling efficient freight movement" (p. 84; fig. 35).

The central transport element of *Transporting Melbourne* and *Living Suburbs* was a proposed "metropolitan orbital corridor", a ring-freeway encircling the metropolitan area. This was to be formed from the Western Ring Road (then under construction and since completed) and the proposed Scoresby Freeway in the east. The final link between the two arms was proposed to go through the environmentally sensitive Yarra River valley 'green wedge'. This controversial link had been abandoned by the State government in 1981, but the unpublished draft of *Living Suburbs* revived it by recommending a study to select a route. This proposal proved too controversial, however, and was dropped from the final version of the strategy, leaving a ring-freeway with a hole in the middle. As well as the Orbital, *Transporting Melbourne* proposed four new freeways—the Craigieburn, Hume, Deer

Park and Hallam/Pakenham bypasses (pp. 64–66). The document also contained some modest public transport proposals: "possible extension of [rail] electrification" on four lines (p. 53); "expansion of the tram network" on four lines (p. 55) and a limited network of cross-suburban "smart bus" routes (p. 57). To underscore the apparent emphasis on public transport, *Transporting Melbourne* set an ambitious-sounding target of "patronage growth of up to 50 per cent over 15 to 20 years" (p. 52). But there was no indication of how this target had been calculated, or why, let alone how it was to be achieved, which leads one to conclude that it was little more than a public relations gesture.

The parallels between *Melbourne 2030* and *Living Suburbs/Transporting Melbourne* extend beyond the presentational sleight-of-hand discussed above. The draft *Melbourne 2030* also contained a reference to studying possible routes for the final stage in the ring-freeway, but as with *Living Suburbs*, this reference was deleted from the final version of the document (*The Age*, 31 October 2002). Another ambitious-sounding patronage target is introduced without justification or analysis, namely: "By 2020, the government intends that public transport's share of motorised trips within Melbourne will rise to 20 per cent from the current level of 9 per cent" (p. 146). Very little detail of how this is to be achieved is provided, except for a map (p. 147) which shows similar rail and tram extension proposals to *Transporting Melbourne*, and a network of cross-suburban "smart bus" routes, which again appear to have been drawn from the 1995/6 strategy.

The map in Chapter 4 of *Melbourne 2030* shows precisely the same freeways as recommended in *Living Suburbs*. Although the map title suggests the freeways are for freight, the most expensive project is the $1.8 billion Scoresby Freeway, which according to the Environment Effects Statement prepared in 1998 would principally cater for personal travel, rather than freight (NIEIR, 1998, p. 43). No costings appear anywhere in *Melbourne 2030*, but the currently estimated total cost of the proposed freeways shown on the map in Chapter 4 is approximately $3 billion, or some 15 times the cost of the proposed rail extensions shown in Chapter 8. Therefore, public transport receives only 6 per cent of the capital budget, a considerably lower figure than the 14 per cent it received in the 1969 plan.

Both *Transporting Melbourne* and *Melbourne 2030* make token references to the desirability of promoting walking and cycling. *Transporting Melbourne* "endorsed" the construction of a "Principal Bicycle Network" of off-road routes (p. 75), without committing to a budget or a timeline. Nevertheless, work did commence on the network under the Kennett government. Seven years later, *Melbourne 2030* promises to "continue to develop the Principal Bicycle Network—to be completed (*resources permitting*) by 2015" (p. 159, emphasis added). It should be noted that the cost of the entire network is equivalent to about a kilometre of new freeway.

So in substance, we have a re-statement of the earlier transport policy, albeit a considerably more evasive statement than the original. The evasion appears to have misled Low (2002) into believing that the Orbital Corridor centrepiece of *Living Suburbs* has been dropped. But not only are all the road elements of the Orbital part of *Melbourne 2030*, right down to the on-again, off-again link across the Yarra Valley, but so also is the proposal to integrate transport-intensive land uses with the ring road (*Living Suburbs*, p. 29). This is also hidden away in Chapter 4 of *Melbourne 2030*, which proposes to "[a]ssess the impact of the Scoresby [Freeway] on the demand for new industrial land and address any supply issues" (p. 79).

Given the disproportionate expenditure on freeways, and an activity centre policy favouring car-based shopping malls, one can confidently predict that the "20 per cent by 2020" target in *Melbourne 2030* is even less likely to be achieved than the more modest patronage target in *Living Suburbs*.

Implementation

Premier Kennett's introduction to *Living Suburbs* boasted that the policy "represents, for the first time, a whole-of-government and community approach" to planning (p. 1). This would involve the Department of Premier and Cabinet taking "responsibility for overall coordination" (p. 70) and "linking the strategy to Budget processes" (p. 71). In fact, nothing happened, except for continued construction of freeways by the powerful State road agency Vicroads, which has dominated transport planning in the state since the 1960s.

Melbourne 2030 states: "Just as the development of Melbourne 2030 has been informed by whole-of-government objectives and strategies, so its implementation will involve working across government" (p. 174). But in contrast with its predecessor, *Melbourne 2030* offers no indication of how integration will be achieved, or who will be responsible, and there is no reference to linking the plan to budget processes. It is, therefore, even less likely to produce the claimed integration than its predecessor.

The major implementation mechanism appears in the accompanying "Advisory note on Implementation in the Planning System" (DOI,

2002c). This document requires local municipalities to do little more than include in certain decisions a statement that, before making the decision, the municipality has "had regard to the Metropolitan Strategy".

Although six "draft implementation plans" appeared along with *Melbourne 2030*, these are (with the exception of green wedges—see below) laughable. For example, the major "actions" listed in the draft "Integrated Transport Implementation Plan" (No. 6) are:

- develop a metropolitan bus plan
- develop a metropolitan tram plan
- develop a metropolitan train plan
- develop and implement a travel demand management plan
- develop a walking action plan
- develop a cycling action plan
- develop a metropolitan road and traffic management plan.

After 3 years and millions of dollars, the promised "integrated transport strategy" turns out to be a suggestion that various agencies should prepare plans. The road plan is to be prepared by Vicroads (DOI, 2002d, p. 15), so one can at least be confident of it being implemented!

Green Wedges

The only area in which *Melbourne 2030* represents a significant departure from *Living Suburbs* is its treatment of green wedges. These were introduced by the MMBW in its 1971 revision of the Melbourne growth plan, which adopted an urban form comprising 'growth corridors' separated by 'green wedges' containing farm land and environmentally significant areas such as the Yarra Valley. The policy was influenced by the 'linear city' notion, influential in planning circles at the time, which aimed to preserve access to open countryside for the urban population, and to channel travel patterns into radial corridors that could be conveniently served by rail transport. The policy was reinforced in the 1980 plan revision.

While *Living Suburbs* expressed a commitment to preserving these areas (pp. 59–60), in practice the government permitted ad hoc rezonings of green wedge land, leading to piecemeal erosion of the green wedges. The magnitude of such rezonings actually increased during the period in which *Melbourne 2030* was being prepared (Buxton and Goodman, 2002), and so it is surprising to see that the Green Wedges Implementation Plan (No. 5) departs from other aspects of *Melbourne 2030* by introducing strong measures to protect the green wedges from further erosion. These take the form of new green wedge zones making housing developments a prohibited use, backed up by legislative protection.

The reason for this difference is that the Green Wedge Coalition, a community organisation (but one with very good links into the Victorian Labor Party), lobbied the Planning Minister directly to have the much weaker controls proposed in the draft of *Melbourne 2030* replaced. They were successful, despite fierce opposition from the Department of Infrastructure (interviews with coalition members, October–November 2002). However, even after this strengthening, the commitment to green wedges remains only partial. The transport proposals in the strategy directly undermine the green wedge policy, as each of the major freeways proposed runs through one or more of the green wedges, which are supposedly to be preserved from urban development. And the Scoresby Freeway/Metropolitan Orbital is actually intended to act as a catalyst for rezoning of additional land for industry (see discussion above).

Conclusion: Content

The content of *Melbourne 2030* bears out the more pessimistic assessment of Davidson. The rhetoric about sustainable development, public transport and diversity that Low, Tesdorpf and George praise is merely a smokescreen to cover the fact that the substantive proposals involve no significant change from the Kennett government's *Living Suburbs* policy. Little appears to have changed since Thomson pointed out the use of the same trick in the 1969 Transportation Plan. In my view, this actually makes the current plan worse than *Living Suburbs*, because at least the Kennett government was able to arrive at its pro-freeway, pro-market policies without wasting 3 years, millions of dollars and countless hours of the time of well-meaning members of the public.

The result validates Powell's claim that "Clayton's planning" is currently dominant in cities like Melbourne, but interestingly, also bears out the predictions made by the 'market' school:

> The alternative [to the market] is for governments to prepare strategies based on a poor understanding of urban process. At best such strategies will be meaningless; at worst they will be contradictory, confusing and downright damaging to the future prospects for a city. (Paterson, 2000, p. 377)[3]

So does this sad result validate Powell's call for a return to modernism, or Paterson's call for less planning, rather than more? Does it leave any hope for those (like me) who advocate more

participatory approaches? To answer this question, it is necessary to examine the process employed to produce *Melbourne 2030*.

Process Employed for *Melbourne 2030*

'Fancy Asking the Community!'

The negative conclusions about the strategy expressed above might seem surprising, given the fact that observers and those responsible have praised the consultation process employed in *Melbourne 2030*. Gleeson and Randolph (2003) praise the plan as an example of "multi-level planning" (i.e. subsidiarity), while Low (2002) says "[t]he report has been a long time coming, but what has emerged shows real signs of the long consultation process that preceded its birth …" (p. 6). George waxes even more lyrical:

> I have to say the DOI got off to a great start by being so committed to facilitating broader community input … Fancy asking the community! Fancy being serious … about hearing from the broader community … rather than just talking to planners and industry … This was such a refreshing alternative to many past approaches to macro-strategic planning, whereby most of the deep thinking was undertaken by "experts" and then sold to the planning and development community and sometimes, though far less energetically, to the broader community. (George, 2002, p. 6)

Penny Coombes, of the consultancy The People for Spaces and Places, which was contracted to carry out the public consultation, delivered a glowing report on the process at the 2001 RAPI conference. The presentation detailed of the way in which the public consultation workshops were carried out,[4] but also sought to answer the much trickier question of how to ensure that the public's views actually informed the contents of the strategy. As Sherry Arnstein, inventor of the famous 'ladder of citizen participation' pointed out: "There is a critical difference between going through the empty ritual of participation and having the real power needed to affect the outcome of the process" (Arnstein, 1969, p. 216).

To deal with this challenge, Coombes devised an iterative, three-stage process in which public forums would be used to produce ideas, but also to evaluate the extent to which the departmental officials producing the strategy had listened to the public's ideas. Stage 1, called "All Ears Listening", was the public's chance to enunciate goals and visions. Stage 2, "Did we hear you right?" would ensure that the results of stage 1 had been correctly interpreted, and discuss possible "alternative futures". Stage 3, "Reviewing 'Our' Draft Strategy", would enable the public to assess a draft strategy prepared by officials and based on testing of the alternative futures. This would be followed by the production of a final strategy.

While the proposed process left a number of issues unresolved (e.g. what if the public don't all agree?, what if the public and the Department don't agree?), these could have been dealt with if the consultation strategy had been combined with a rigorous, transparent programme of testing and assessing development options—as, for example, occurred in the Vancouver Livable Region Plan (see discussion below). But this did not happen. No options or alternative futures were ever discussed or even identified; there was thus no need (or process) for evaluation. And, possibly as a consequence, Stage 3 of the consultation process was abandoned, and the final strategy was released without being preceded by a draft. (I should emphasise that these decisions were made by the Department, *not* by Coombes.)

What Didn't Happen

So how was the strategy developed? How can the reader be confident that the proposals in *Melbourne 2030* are viable and affordable, let alone superior to other possible courses of action? And why should citizens, developers, municipalities or future governments feel any "ownership" of the strategy, or cooperate in its implementation (cf. Yencken, 2000)?

The written report contains a short section entitled "How has *Melbourne 2030* been developed?" (p. 30) that purports to answer these questions. "An important body of research lies behind it," the reader is told,

> and experts within and outside government have contributed in-depth studies … Thousands of Victorians have expressed their views and concerns through public forums, small group workshops and direct submissions … A reference group has contributed to the development of important concepts and provided a sounding board for many ideas about content and the processes for community consultation.

This section of the report contains a diagram (p. 17, fig. 8) showing eight "urban growth options" that "have been investigated for Melbourne's growth", including "compact-contained" and others such as "dispersed" and "major regional centres".

The reality is quite different.

A series of reports from consultants was indeed commissioned, but the *Melbourne 2030* proposals on major issues are the opposite of those recommended by the consultants. For example Technical Report 1, covering environmental issues, recommended that the Strategy "[p]revent any expansion of regional retail centres [i.e. car-based malls]" (p. 162) and "prevent the expansion of the freeway network" (p. 163). These recommendations were supported by the study on activity centres (Technical Report 8), and a transport study by Dr Jeff Kenworthy of Murdoch University, which the Department refused to release (presumably because it was too controversial). None of the other reports advocated expansion of malls or freeways: even the report on economic competitiveness (No. 3) merely proposed more efficient use of road space through measures such as road pricing (pp. 56 and 59). But instead of preventing expansion of retail malls, *Melbourne 2030* designates them Principal or Major Activity Centres and *encourages* them to expand into fully fledged, US-style "edge cities". Instead of freezing freeway construction, *Melbourne 2030* commits to the same freeways as the Kennett government's *Living Suburbs*, and proposes that planning for future freeways be delegated to Vicroads.

The emphasis on freeways is also the opposite of what the public asked for during the consultative forums. Penny Coombes reported that "[t]he single most powerful issue to emerge from the public consultation was that of public transport" (Coombes, 2000, p. 1). The second-most-important issue was roads and traffic congestion, but participants were "fairly equally split about how to solve it" (p. 2), with half advocating expansion of roads along with public transport and the other half opposing road expansion. This is a classic instance of a disagreement that could have been resolved through a rigorous evaluation of alternative options,[5] but the *Melbourne 2030* programme, which involves expending 94 per cent of committed capital on freeway expansion, is consistent with neither approach. The motivation behind the strange arrangement of the strategy report—with the freeways that consume most of the budget hidden, and public transport 'talked up'—now becomes easier to understand, as does the reason why the consultation process designed by Coombes was not allowed to run its full course.

There was a 'community reference group' established to provide advice to the Department on process and content for the strategy, but the Department expressly rejected the group's advice on process, and stopped calling meetings of the group in July 2001 (the reference group only met once in the following 14 months). Specifically, at a workshop on 11 October 2000,

the reference group proposed a multi-stage approach that would integrate the Coombes consultative process with development and evaluation of options, and 'sign-off' by stakeholders, to ensure power-sharing between the Department of Infrastructure, local government and the community. The next step was to be: "Take the above process thoughts to the full reference group. Discuss and compare with DoI's proposed process" (minutes of workshop, 11 October 2000, p. 5). This discussion was not permitted however, because at the following meeting, the Secretary of the Department, who was also chair of the reference group, advised as follows: "The overall process will remain as at present proposed by the DoI. The Chair confirmed that the role of the Reference Group is advisory. The group is to assist the department with its work" (minutes of meeting, 31 October 2000, p. 2).

A consistent pattern emerges. There were indeed technical reports; there was consultation with the public; there was a community reference group. But each of these produced answers that the Departmental officials responsible for preparing the strategy disagreed with, and were therefore ignored or overruled. And so the resulting strategy proposals are those that would have emerged had there been no technical reports, consultation or reference group. But while these made no contribution to the substance of the strategy, they did give the Department an indication of the concerns it would need to *pretend* to have addressed in the published strategy.

Ironically, the only community group that was able to influence the content of *Melbourne 2030* was the Green Wedge Coalition (see above), which ignored the formal "consultation" processes and lobbied the Minister directly.

So what was the real process by which *Melbourne 2030* was developed?

What Did Happen

The origins of the metropolitan strategy pre-date the election of the Bracks government. In 1998, the Department of Infrastructure, under John Paterson, commenced work on a "metropolitan analysis" to build upon the report *From Doughnut City to Cafe Society* (DOI, 1998) released in April of that year. The word "analysis" was used rather than "strategy" because of the hostility to metropolitan strategies stemming from Paterson's preference for market approaches. The limited role for planners anticipated in Paterson's vision did include "reading and anticipation" of "megatrends" (Paterson, 2000, p. 385)—although what the purpose of this reading would be, other than strategic planning, was unclear. It may, like the *Doughnut City* report,

have been intended to provide an intellectual justification for the policy of market-led "urban consolidation", of which Paterson was a strong defender. Part of the agenda appeared to be the production of new "analytical tools" based around chaos and complexity theory (Paterson, 2000, pp. 383–384).

Little progress had been made on the metropolitan analysis by the time of the September 1999 election, but a team of staff had been assembled. Perhaps understandably, it was from this group that the Metropolitan Strategy Team was selected by Paterson's deputy (acting in his place following his resignation) in November 1999. Lyndsay Neilson, upon his arrival the following March, left the team in place. This proved a fatal strategic mistake, because it ensured that Paterson's values—in particular, his hostility to strong land-use planning, support for freeways and contempt for public participation—dominated the strategy from the outset.

Neilson, a former head of the NCDC, shared a number of these values, particularly a reluctance to share power with local government or the community reference group. Interestingly, this attitude was defended on the basis that a Metropolitan Strategy, being a political document, must be "owned" at all stages by the State government, a rationale precisely in accordance with the (unacknowledged) logic of Sandercock and Friedmann's definition of a metropolitan strategy (see above).

The public heard nothing about the strategy until May 2000, when the Minister announced that a community reference group had been established. At the reference group's first meeting on 16 June, the group was informed that work had been underway for 7 months: consultants' reports had been commissioned on a dozen key issues; interdepartmental liaison groups had been meeting; a broad outline of the contents of the strategy had been developed; and the draft strategy would be finished by April 2001.

The reference group members were concerned to hear this. How had the decisions about content (necessary to decide the topics of consultancies) and process been made? Who had been consulted? The answer was that everything had been decided in private by the Strategy Team, in consultation with other departmental officials. The reference group agreed that its next meeting would be a workshop, with an independent facilitator, to discuss "Directions and Process" (reference group minutes, 16 June 2000, p. 3). On arrival at the next meeting, the reference group members discovered that the original agenda, which reflected the decision of the previous meeting, had been replaced with a new one. The original read: "Workshop—facilitator Mary Crooks: issues facing Melbourne; preferred directions; process." The new agenda deleted "process" from the agenda for the workshop, and moved it to a new item, which read: "Metropolitan Strategy process, products and timing—Chair." In other words, rather than having a chance to discuss the strategy process, the reference group would be informed about it by the Secretary of the Department. This was the beginning of a power struggle between the reference group and the Department, which was eventually resolved by the Secretary of the Department refusing to accept the reference group's advice (see above).

Meanwhile, State government agencies were acting as if the status-quo outcome of the strategy was a foregone conclusion. In August 2000, Vicroads and the Transport Minister announced that the $1 billion (later revised to $1.8 billion) Scoresby Freeway, which had been shelved by the incoming Bracks government in November 1999, was to go ahead. A similar announcement had been made in respect of the Craigieburn Bypass freeway the previous month. In September 2000, an advisory panel appointed by the Department recommended approval of the Eynesbury Station development, a housing estate for 3000–4000 residents located right in the middle of a green wedge.[6] The panel did not regard the fact that a metropolitan strategy was in preparation at the time as a reason to delay or withhold approval (Buxton and Goodman, 2002, p. 29). In April 2001, the Planning Minister announced the largest incursion into a green wedge for decades, with the approval of a "sustainable" housing estate for 40 000 residents at Epping North (Buxton and Goodman, 2002, pp. 32–36).

So when the first round of consultation forums were held, from October to December 2000, the die had already been cast. And so the consultation programme, like the consultants' reports and the reference group, had no influence at all on the substantive outcome.

Writing, Not Planning

The "process" by which the strategy report was produced was simply one for the writing of a document setting out the views of a committee. Members of the Strategy Team wrote sections of the report and circulated them to each other, and some other officials, for comment, before revising and combining the results. The "final draft" of the strategy was sent to a team of 'reviewers' and shown to the reference group, and heavily criticised by both. The Department's response was to call in additional writers and public relations advisers to improve the presentation.

The substantive recommendations were not changed at all.

So, naturally, the strategy reflected the collective views of the officials who comprised the Strategy Team, and through them the influence of John Paterson. The bizarre and confused nature of the recommendations becomes much easier to understand when viewed as a metropolitan strategy written by people who have been taught that metropolitan strategies are pointless or even counter-productive.

The clearest example is the activity centres policy. The Strategy Team refused to seriously consider a District Centres policy along the lines of the erstwhile MMBW (or current practice in Sydney), despite this being the recommendation of the consultants engaged to report on this issue. The MMBW's centres policies were an object of particular derision for Paterson and the team pejoratively named such policies the "heirarchy approach". The preferred "network approach" simply nominated every existing concentration of retailing above a certain size as an "activity centre", continuing the emphasis of the "metropolitan analysis" that preceded the strategy on *describing*, rather than attempting to alter, what already exists. At last, the mystery behind the designation of the East Burwood K-Mart is solved! Interestingly, this policy was so incoherent that even the Property Council's representative on the reference group rejected it, arguing that "the hierarchy approach … is the only feasible approach" (memo from Property Council, 20 July 2001, p. 1).

Conclusion: Process

What most definitely did not happen was anything remotely resembling the participatory, community-partnership approach described by the *Melbourne 2030* report and some of its glowing reviewers, despite the fact that both the Department's own consultants and the community reference group recommended such a process. Nor, despite claims to the contrary in the report, was there any development, evaluation or comparison of possible transport and land-use options. There was no process for deciding the content of the strategy, merely a drawn-out exercise in writing down predetermined decisions in a way that put the best possible 'spin' on them.

The result is a set of proposals that reflects the opinions of perhaps a dozen unnamed officials of the Department of Infrastructure. There is no possible basis for the public, local government or developers to conclude that the proposals are practical, affordable or sustainable, let alone superior to other possible courses of action, as is the case with modernist plans, when done well.[7]

And, since there was no meaningful consultation, there is no basis in notions of participatory democracy for acceptance of the plan either.

To use an expression beloved of political scientists, then, *Melbourne 2030* has no legitimacy. Instead, it provides a classic instance of "tokenism" as defined by Arnstein:

> Inviting citizens' opinions, like informing them, is a legitimate step toward their full participation. But if consulting them is not combined with other modes of participation, [it] is still a sham, since it offers no assurance that citizen concerns and ideas will be taken into account … participation remains just a window-dressing ritual … measured by how many come to meetings, take brochures home, or answer a questionnaire. (Arnstein, 1969, p. 219)

Arnstein, of course, was used to token consultation being followed by "real" (to use Powell's expression) modernist planning. *Melbourne 2030*, however, combines tokenism with "Clayton's planning".

Conclusions: What can be Done?

A common account of the woes of planners posits professional planners as guardians of the public good, whose noble intentions are overturned by political interference, development lobbies or ignorant 'NIMBY' members of the public. The *Melbourne 2030* story, however, is almost the reverse. It was intervention by the Planning Minister, resisted by the Department, that strengthened controls over green wedges, just as the (ultimately unsuccessful) initiatives for the community reference group and the consultation process came from the Minister. It was the general public in consultation forums that strongly supported priority for public transport over freeways; and even the development lobby wanted a stronger policy on district centres than the Department was willing to provide.

The sad conclusion is that the most influential lobby against effective, participatory metropolitan planning in Melbourne is actually the Department of Infrastructure (recently restructured into the Department of Sustainability and Environment). Part of the explanation for this lies in the ongoing intellectual legacy of Paterson's period at the helm, but this does not explain why the Department has managed to win the support of those who might normally have been expected to act as whistle-blowers in defence of planning, notably some academics and leading members of Planning Institute of Australia.

My own view is that some responsibility must be sheeted home to three decades of supposedly

radical academic critiques of modernist planning. Despite the intentions of the critics, the result has been (in Melbourne, at least) to undermine the positive legacy of the systems approach—the insistence on *process*, on decisions being seen to have been made on the basis of clearly stated objectives and rigorous evaluation of alternatives, and accompanied by serious implementation programmes tied to budgets—without offering anything workable to replace it.

So, the insistence that planning is political (originally used to oppose spurious claims of objectivity) becomes an excuse for senior bureaucrats to refuse to share power; crypto-Marxist truisms about the power of the market become an excuse for capitulating to shopping mall owners; post-modernist notions of diversity are used to justify "performance based" controls that control nothing; "discourse analysis" leads to an obsession with words and an inability to distinguish between a platitude and a plan; and real issues of multiculturalism and sustainability are reduced to forms of "political correctness" that can be satisfied by the inclusion of appropriate slogans and pretty pictures. Meanwhile, real planning is done by road engineers untroubled by post-modern angst about the nature of their task.

This may be why those responsible for Vancouver's Livable Region planning process a decade ago told me in 1994 that they received little assistance from books written by academics when designing their ground-breaking, and ultimately successful, attempt to combine meaningful public participation with rigorous evaluation of alternatives. Like *Melbourne 2030*, the Vancouver process took a number of years, involved thousands of people and cost some millions of dollars. Unlike *Melbourne 2030*, the Vancouver process produced an outcome that was "owned" by local government and community groups, and took sustainability seriously. Significantly, the *Livable Region Strategic Plan* remains in force today despite a change of government at Provincial elections last year. *Melbourne 2030* would not survive an (admittedly unlikely!) change of government, nor does it deserve to.

Notes

1. I was not a disinterested spectator of *Melbourne 2030*. I was a member of the community reference group, a sub-consultant for the activity centres report, and brought the Federal Court case that resulted in the proposal to complete the Metropolitan Orbital being uncovered.

2. From clause 17.02–2 of the State Planning Policy Framework, which was inexplicably deleted in 2000.

3. The cited passage appears above Paterson's article, and was written by the former *Practice Review* editor in an attempt to crystallise the 'market' view.

4. This issue, while important, is not my subject here. As far as this non-expert can tell, the forums themselves were well run.

5. A rigorous evaluation would have found that simultaneous expansion of both roads and public transport was unaffordable. Since all participants had supported public transport as the top priority, the result may well have been agreement with the recommendations of the consultants.

6. The subdivision was formally approved by the Department, acting under delegated powers, in May 2002.

7. In a plan like the NCDC's 1984 policy, this is the case even for those who, like me, disagree with the outcome (see Mees, 2001). Because the basis on which the plan has been prepared and evaluated, and the alternatives considered, are coherently explained, it becomes possible to engage in reasoned criticism and debate.

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