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CROW-BOX 26 - 25/39-0001

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An Environmental and Social View on

METROPOLITAN STRATEGY

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Entitled "Shaping Melbourne's Future", August 1987

- A policy statement by the Victorian Government

Effective planning requires two elements for its fulfilment:-

(A) Machinery for Integrated Planning

(B) A Policy Framework to Shape the Direction.

On the first score - machinery - "Shaping Melbourne's Future", which was launched in August 1987 by Hon. Jim Kennan, Minister for Planning and Environment holds some promise.

On the second score - policy direction - from an environmental and social viewpoint, the document does nothing to correct the undesirable features on the base on which it was built, and, to some extent, compounds the undesirable features, particularly in relation to conservation of energy resources and a reasonably humanised suburban life.

(A) MACHINERY FOR INTEGRATED PLANNING.

"Integration" Better Than "Co-Ordination"

It is good that the Victorian Government itself, as distinct from one of its agencies, has produced a comprehensive policy to guide the future development of the metropolis, even though, in its present early stage, the framework of such policy is understandably rather general.

Previously, when the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works (MMPW) was the responsible planning authority for the metropolis, although it was coming closer to planning in a more integrated way, its own basic powers to implement that planning were confined to carrying out land-use and development control changes, and its own water, sewerage and drainage functions. It had no direct powers to ensure that other government departments or agencies relating to transport, the economy, environment, housing, energy, employment, various social services, local government etc. would operate in line with its overall plan, such as its last metropolitan-wide effort known as Amendment 150 to the Metropolitan Planning Scheme (Am.150).

In theory, the State Co-ordination Council of the previous Government was supposed to "co-ordinate" all this; but it seems that, by and large, each department or instrumentality went its own

merry way, just as usual, and the enlarged top-heavy Co-ordination Council was expected to do the impossible: co-ordinate a series of fait accompli. This is the meaning given here to the word "co-ordinate" for the purpose of making a point.

In contrast to such a process, the word "integrate" is useful if given the meaning of all agencies working together from the outset to formulate a framework plan, and then each concentrating on carrying out its part of such a pre-co-ordinated objective.

Community Requests Integrated Approach.

In September 1983 the Conservation Council of Victoria (CCV) published "Briefing Notes for Ministers" on both machinery and policy. The document entitled "Steps Towards a Better Melbourne: A Community View" (called here "Steps" for short) was prepared jointly with two other peak community bodies - the Town and Country Planning Association and the Train Travellers Association.

In 1984 two Cabinet Ministers and heads of several other departments met with a Steps deputation which pointed out that if the Latrobe Valley was worthy of a special sub-committee of cabinet consisting of relevant Ministers, the metropolis of Melbourne equally deserved a co-ordinating sub-committee of relevant Ministers.

This part of the "Steps" argument - as to machinery - was adopted by the State Government later in 1984 when it set up an "Urban Infrastructure Committee" of Cabinet; but for some time this body did not seem to have enough support to operate vigourously, and, in any case, the Government had not considered the policy aspects of the "Steps" case in depth.

Now, according to "Shaping Melbourne's Future", this Cabinet Co-ordinating Committee of 8 Ministers is to be underpinned not only by an "Urban Infrastructure Technical Committee", but this group, in its turn is to be armed with a "Metropolitan Services Co-ordination System" (MSCS) (pp 56-57).

The task of MSCS is to set up a common information base and common forecasting and monitoring of socio-economic and environmental trends which will facilitate co-ordination of all government agencies, both physical and social, around a common policy with direct links to the budget process for allocation of resources.

There is also to be a standing consultative group called "Melbourne Forum" consisting of representatives of local government, business, unions and community groups.

Good machinery.

All this could be good. On the machinery aspect of planning, "Shaping Melbourne's Future" has planned all and more that the CCV, TCPA and TTA asked of the Government 4 years ago. Of course, implementation is another question, although in September 1987 Kennan laid heavy stress on implementation at the public seminar on the new metropolitan strategy. The government decision-makers for the future will hardly be in a good position to blame their tools!

Yet, of course, whilst it is good that Kennan acknowledges that "today's complex challenges require integrated physical, social and economic planning and resource allocation..." (Foreword), the question of even more importance is : integration around what policy aims ?

If Melbourne's future shape is in an undesirable direction, good machinery will only serve to push it quicker to an undesirable end-result. So the other element in "Shaping Melbourne's Future" - the policy framework - is all-important.

(B) A POLICY FRAMEWORK TO SHAPE THE DIRECTION.

- (1) Conservation of Energy and
Humanising the Suburbs
- (2) Environmental Aspects

(1) CONSERVATION OF ENERGY AND HUMANISING OF SUBURBS

In the "Steps" deputation of 1983 the CCV, TCPA and TTA did not confine themselves to asking for improved and integrated planning machinery, but asked that the Government produce a policy statement endorsing a "cluster and connect" plan for the metropolis. This policy direction, according to the "Steps" presenters constituted a systematic and workable plan of a sort which would be necessary if the new government was to carry out disconnected bits and pieces of policy promulgated during its election campaign.

Now, "Shaping Melbourne's Future" is such a statement, and, although somewhat belated is welcome in that at least the metropolis has become an avowed responsibility of Cabinet. At least that aspect has been established.

Flaws in the Base.

Unfortunately, however, the policy portion of the statement continues, instead of correcting, some major flaws in the planning base on which it builds. Some background is needed to explain this.

When the 1971 MMBW plan for the metropolitan region appeared it was a distinct advance for environmental conservation, and, potentially for energy conservation, because it adopted "urban corridors" as the shape for Melbourne's future growth. Urban growth outward from the established built-up areas was to be confined to some 7 or 8 corridors with "green wedges" for conservation, landscape or farming protected by new zones between the corridors. The corridors were along railway spines.

Neither green wedges nor rail-spine corridors were disturbed by the 1981 Am.150. This basic macro-scale design pattern has also been continued in the 1987 "Shaping Melbourne's Future" although detail has been elaborated as to which corridors are nearing capacity (Lilydale) or are too expensive (Merri, Melton East or west of Werribee); and which are currently favoured to take overflow (Plenty and Berwick-Pakenham).

But, erected on this basic structure of green-wedges/rail spine corridor design, Am.150, although elaborating on that structure, opened up a two-bob-each-way policy. It gave the appearance of aiming for a city designed to be less heavily dependent on cars, but this was appearance only and, in practice, the design guaranteed a continuation of a city becoming more and more dependent on private transport. Thus:-

- (1) Am.150 made no attempt to slow down outward sprawl which it could have done directly by its control of sewerage and water supply.
- (2) It provided for district centres, certainly based on the rail spines, but envisaged as being accessed mainly by cars.
- (3) It contemplated bus services, admittedly from where (some) people lived to the rail network, but only to district centres, not local centres. This meant bus catchments too large to enable a practical trip for most people, it meant many residential parts would be unserved, and it meant by-passing and ruining any prospective shuttle service to local centres.
- (4) Finally, although favouring higher residential densities along rail routes, it also projected dual occupancy as a generalised density-raising device without specifying zoning near rail stations.

In 1979-80 the MMBW was evolving new plans for the metropolis (which became Am.150) inviting public comment. The CCV made several submissions proposing amendments to Am.150 based on what it called a "cluster and connect" strategy. This strategy had been proposed in a book published by the CCV in 1978 called "Seeds for

Change" which coupled the physical measures needed for energy conservation with social measures to enable, potentially, more opportunities for enjoyable living in the suburbs.

So, "cluster and connect" was designed not just for two layers of "activity centres" (the Central Activities Centre and District Centres) connected by the rail system, but, underpinning this "macroplanning" it proposed "microplanning" for two layers of smaller activity centres which it called "Local Centres" around selected local shopping centres located on the rail network and "Neighbourhood Centres" consisting of a neighbourhood house and small convenience store within walking distance of homes, connected to a nearby local centre by shuttle mini-buses (or in some cases, by tram).

Neighbourhood centres were to provide a supportive function, and the commercial functions of local centres expanded to provide a wide range of people-involving activities whether around health, indoor sport, games, culture, education or entertainment, as well as an expanded range of retail business and welfare services of a "staple" kind.

The Cluster and Connect critique of Am.150 which was not accepted, whilst acknowledging that it had left open some key options, for example:-

- Location of most district centres on rail lines.
- Mixed-use pedestrian-scale character of all activity centres.
- Residential density increase in areas of high public transport accessibility,

nevertheless was flawed on other key aspects, namely:-

Sprawl and car dominance was to continue :

- (1) No significant switch to public transport
(Bus routes to district centres would make most trips too long, bypassing and stultifying growth of local centres closer to where people live)
- (2) No brake on outward sprawl
(Yet, without this, little investment can be expected to assist local centre growth or even district centre growth)
- (3) "No growth" for local or neighbourhood centres
(So limited uplift possible for the quality or range of suburban living whether supportive or activity aspects.)
- (4) Higher densities not directed to sites close to rail/tram
(Dual occupancy, despite principles above, contemplated for everywhere).

The question now is whether "Shaping Melbourne's Future" has set out to correct any of these flaws or whether it entrenches them.

"Cluster and Connect" Half Endorsed.

(Applicable to microplanning level)

It must be said that "Shaping Melbourne's Future" did, in so many words, endorse the cluster and connect concept. Under the heading "Community/neighbourhood and local centres", the measures are to be:-

"Develop an integrated pattern of activity centres by using the 'cluster and connect' concept which provides social, educational, work and leisure facilities appropriate to the level of each centre, and links to higher order centres"(p.39)

The text then goes on to promise manuals to assist small retail business and to effect townscape improvements, but not - be it noted - manuals for design of residential with non-residential uses in mixed use buildings, nor how to make manufacturing uses compatible with retail or residential uses.

Positive features

The positive features about this statement are:

- (a) It officially legitimatises the "concept of cluster and connect" at the microplanning level.
- (b) It recognises some features of that concept, namely:
 - (i) the mixed-use character of the activity centre i.e. "Social, educational, work and leisure facilities."
 - (ii) the need for transport "links to higher order centres"

Negative features

The negative features of the above statement derive from ambiguity and omission, thus:

- (c) By lumping the two types of centre together (i.e. neighbourhood centre and local centre), and by using the generalised term "develop" the statement avoids any promise to plan the different features of each type of centre. It does not promise
 - (i) the growth in size of local centres (the commitment is not to growth but to "creating a pleasanter environment for the people using them" (p.38))
 - (ii) the increase in numbers (but not the growth in size) of neighbourhood centres.
 - (iii) the supportive functions of neighbourhood centres, and the more specialised range of functions of local centres
 Also, in lumping the two types of centre together the statement omits a vital element of the mixed-use concept namely:
 - (iv) the inclusion of residential accommodation in the mixed-use range of local centre functions, and also for the area immediately around such centres. This does not apply to

neighbourhood centres in residential-only areas, because Cluster and Connect objective is to leave all surrounding existing homes undisturbed. Hence the neighbourhood centre should not consist of more than a neighbourhood house, plus a neighbourhood "convenience" kiosk, ideally accommodated in a converted existing house.

(On the question of housing generally note that "Shaping Melbourne's Future" omits any mention of increased housing stock as an important "mixed-use" under the heading of District Centres (except for public housing near District Centres -p.39) or under Central Melbourne (pp.37-38) despite the 1985 Strategy Plan of the City of Melbourne proposals to encourage housing in multi-use zones around the City)

- (d) By lumping two types of transport together (i.e. local shuttle bus and train/tram transport) by the generalised terms "links to higher order centres" the statement avoids any promise to plan for neighbourhood centres in walking distance of all homes or any scheme to connect neighbourhood centres by shuttle bus to the nearest selected local centre on the rail network. In fact "links to higher order centres" could mean road links.

As can be gathered from the above, when "Shaping Melbourne's Future" talks about "using the 'cluster and connect' concept" it is, remember, referring to the "microplanning" level only (i.e. at the level of planning below district centre level).

At this microplanning level - to summarise - it has chosen words that are so generalised that they cannot be relied upon to convey the full essence of the Cluster and Connect scheme at all, either as to the different functions and character of neighbourhood centres and local centres; or in relation to the transport planned to connect homes to neighbourhood centre (walking), neighbourhood centre to local centre (shuttle bus), or local centres to "higher order" centres (train/tram).

Turning now to the problem of how "Shaping Melbourne's Future" deals with the macroplanning level of Cluster and Connect, we will cover, briefly, outward sprawl and how Central Melbourne and District Centres as well as "lower" level centres are likely to be affected by policies on sprawl.

"Consolidation" versus "Containment"

To many people "consolidation" and "containment" may convey much the same concept. Recent history, however, has given them significantly different shades of meaning in Melbourne planning terminology.

When the present Premier, John Cain, was shadow Minister of Planning in 1979, he circulated a discussion paper on the Melbourne metropolis in which he stated that Melbourne could not be literally "contained". But a policy of "consolidating" the presently established areas of Melbourne by more fully utilising the existing infrastructure would, according to this view, be desirable by slowing down outward sprawl, though never intending to stop it.

This thinking of John Cain has been incorporated into "Shaping Melbourne's Future". The official term used is "urban consolidation" (pp.1,34). The first two of nine "major themes" for a "strategy for managing future metropolitan development" (p.1) are :-

"Urban consolidation - Achieving a greater proportion of future urban growth within established areas."

Future outward growth - Managing development within the main urban growth corridors and protecting rural areas outside the corridors."

As if to ensure that estate development corporations, which seek to invest heavily and speculatively in large greenacre tracts of land on the fringe, are not unduly frightened by the word "consolidation", the document specifically promises (at p.36) that:

"The Government does not intend, however, to place artificial restraints on outward growth to achieve its objective of urban consolidation. Such a policy would distort the operation of the market and could lead to inflated land prices and disadvantages to house buyers at the urban fringe"

This seems a masterpiece of ambiguity. All planning worthy of the name "distorts the market" - that indeed is why it is needed! And how is the phrase "artificial restraints" to outward growth" to be understood when all outward is conditional on decisions of authorities that lie outside "the market" - not only planning regulations, but on water, sewerage and road works. If that does not constitute "artificial" intervention in market forces, what does?

To straighten out the confusion of similar-sounding concepts and ambiguous phrases, it is suggested a distinction needs to be made between, say, the following four possible positions:-

- (a) No restraints on outward growth whatever and no encouragement for growth in established areas, so that market forces determine entirely where development goes (No one openly advocates this?).
- (b) Slowing down outward growth with modest encouragement for redevelopment in established areas, but with no intention of ever

putting a stop to outward growth. (This seems to be the meaning that "Shaping Melbourne's Future" gives to the word "consolidation" e.g. it "aims to arrest the population losses from established urban areas, and to reduce outward growth rates that would be too rapid to service" p.34. Note: no ambition to achieve any population gains!).

(c) Winding down outward growth as fast as subsidised redevelopment in and around 100 or so local centres - as well as 20 or so district centres and Central Melbourne - can permit, with the ultimate intention of bringing outward growth to a standstill (This could be a meaning for "consolidation", but is nowhere suggested in any wording of "Shaping Melbourne's Future". Maybe it is this sort of approach that is condemned as "artificial"? In any case, the practical measures suggested in "Shaping Melbourne's Future" are not strong enough to effect this result. But, if this meaning were to be given to "containment", Cluster and Connect could possibly support such a position.)

(d) Stopping outward growth beyond fixed boundaries which would enclose no greenacre land at all except that for which estate development applications are already "in the pipeline" (This is a meaning clearly rejected by the "consolidation" position, but one which Cluster and Connect could, possibly, accept.)

Whatever may be said for the superiority of a solution that seeks to immediately stop outward growth, it might prove too abrupt to be politically feasible. But there should be serious argument as between (b) slowing down and (c) winding down.

To assist in the process of weighing judgment as between (b) and (c), and to save too many words, we will use the word "push" to signify the pressures for further outward sprawl, and "pull" for pressures that assist urban consolidation.

Circumferential versus radial investment.

A central purpose for any policy aiming to pull in the metropolis must be to re-assert the radiality of metropolitan desire lines for travel. This is so because Melbourne's expansion into middle and outer suburbs was around the radial suburban rail (and to a lesser extent, tram) network. Such infrastructure, as is now underutilised, including the rail network itself, is therefore, by and large, radial, and investment for growth around activity nodes on this network can provide a positive stimulus which can spur growth capable of strengthening public transport.

Conversely, any strengthening of cross-radial main road connections or investment for re-development between the radial

rail spokes favours random private transport trips, and reduces the prospects for public transport.

As "Shaping Melbourne's Future" acknowledges: "Urban Consolidation is needed to improve access for people and goods, reduce total travel costs, and increase public transport patronage" (p.10).

In the light of all this, it is peculiar to find "Shaping Melbourne's Future" deliberately reviving plans for a circumferential outer-ring freeway! Not only that, it plans for a class of super-size outer "strategic district centres" served by, and to serve, such outer ring! (Frankston, Dandenong, Ringwood, Greensborough, Broadmeadows and Sunshine, as against the lesser 9 district centres lying further in (See Fig.13 p.35)

Admittedly the first phase of this heavy emphasis on outer-circumferential investment in roads and large road-connected district centres is to be "developed in the north-west, and, as a longer-term option, the south-east" (p.34).

Maybe there can be a reasonable case argued for better road links in the west of the metropolis, which although containing ports, country and interstate rail terminals and airport and heavy industry zoning has a "road system between the various parts of the region" (which) "is disjointed, however, because of the lack of road connections across river and creek valleys" (p.54).

Maybe this factor does contribute to forcing heavy road freight across the metropolis, but it would not be the only one. Lack of an efficient system of rail transport across the metropolis to outer-suburban rail-road freight depots in west, north, east and south, for example, (as proposed by the Urban Freight Group in 1979, but which has, apparently, never been studied by the Ministry of Transport nor by "Shaping Melbourne's Future" authors) provides another solution to this problem.

In the meantime, to relieve the pressure of heavy freight on the roads, an interim and much more cost-effective measure could well be to give priority to the quite short proposed "Western By-Pass" that could more directly connect the water and rail freight terminals with the airport, and a way around the established areas of the metropolis.

For reasons explained above, improvement of access to activity centres (another reason adduced for the western part of the outer ring route) should be strengthened along radial and not circumferential lines, and this applies as much to the west or north as to the east or south.

However, whether the north/west segment of an outer ring road

is treated as an exception or not, "Shaping Melbourne's Future" comes to a surprising rationale for this overall "ring" policy, which is so obviously at variance with a consolidation policy. For it argues that "linked and highly accessible concentrations of activities" (along the outer ring routes)"will be a means of integrating the outer metropolitan area with the established middle regions and of countering the outward spread of the metropolis" (p.34).

History, one would think, draws the very opposite conclusion ! A circumferential freeway entices development outward from the ring, since all roads outwards are less congested than roads inwards. (See Schaffer and Sclar in "Access for All" at pp.90-92 on the first circumferential freeway around any metropolitan area - Boston's Route 128 -built at about the same distance from Boston's downtown as the outer ring would be from Melbourne's central area, with comparable populations).

The revival of the outer ring route is not only complete capitulation to the road lobby, but it is the most damaging outward "push" measure it is possible to choose, effectively nullifying any consolidation "pull" measures !

Outward "Push" too strong for inward "Pull"

"Shaping Melbourne's Future" reports that:

"A recent study showed a net economic benefit of about \$29,000 for each household added to the established area, rather than to the fringe. This includes a direct net financial saving to government agencies of \$3,500 resulting from a reduced need for new infrastructure" (p.8)

The consultant's study compared costs in established Moorabbin with developing Cranbourne. In addition to the \$3,500 saving to government agencies, there would be a \$12,000 and more saving both for developers and prospective occupiers..

However, "Shaping Melbourne's Future" is silent on how the sum of \$29,000 benefit might be converted to a benefit to subsidise urban redevelopment in the established areas; and does not mention that the consultants state that figures for benefits could be higher if electricity, telephone and other unexamined infrastructure were to be taken into account.

Enough material has now been presented, above, to make some attempt at overall assessment.

The question is whether the slowing down position (described in (b) above), with an even-handed measure of support for the "push" of outward sprawl as well as the "pull" of consolidation

can, in fact, be achieved by the recipes presented by "Shaping Melbourne's Future" ?

We say: "No it cannot !"

Consolidation, still less containment, cannot be significantly implemented, despite the fact that there are elements on either side of the balance sheet, which could be represented as follows:-

Favouring "pull"

Microplanning

- * "Cluster & Connect" concept endorsed only in general.
- * Manuals for small retail business and better townscapes.

Macroplanning

- * "Consolidation" endorsed in principle.
- * Central Melbourne as a metropolitan focus to be strengthened.
- * Radially designed public transport and other under-utilised infrastructure to be more fully utilised.
- * \$29,000 benefit for each new dwelling in established areas (\$3,500 to gov't agencies, \$12,000+ to developers, \$12,000+ to householders.)

Favouring "push"

Microplanning

- * No provision for growth in size of local centres, or in numbers of neighbourhood centres.
- * Delivery of welfare-type services not connected with local centres, nor mention of people-involving activities.
- * For local centres no mention:
 - workable public transport (foot/mini-bus/rail)
 - residential uses in/around activity centre.

Macroplanning

- * Strategic district centres to be along route of outer ring road and super-size.
- * No "artificial restraints" on outward push.
- * No mention of how to strengthen railed public transport, nor how to switch \$29,000 dwelling cost saving as a subsidy for established area housing

All other things being equal one would have to say that the factors favouring outward push would be outright winners.

Any scheme calculated to make either "containment" or "consolidation" work would have to be a Cluster and Connect type system, integrating all elements (such land-use planning, transport

planning, social planning, economic planning) and integrating microplanning with macroplanning. "Shaping Melbourne's Future" does not attempt, in any serious way, either type of integration. By failing to provide all but a few elements to strengthen the "pull" position (and, at that, mainly in words rather than with "measures"), or by providing equal or even superior conditions for the "push" position, the recipe does not offer winnable conditions to effect consolidation.

But other things are not equal. Any competition between "pull" and "push" takes place within status quo conditions which are also a system familiarised by habit, but this system is one in which the outward push pressures are the dominant pressures. This is so because they are based on the private car which has become overwhelmingly the dominant mode of transport, not only for outer suburban access but metropolis-wide.

It is therefore very difficult to start reversing such a dominant trend. In fact, "affirmative action" to strongly support the "pull" trends, whilst simultaneously sternly discouraging the "push" trends are necessary.

To promise an equality on paper in generalised terms between push and pull is not enough for real equality. Specifically, "Shaping Melbourne's Future" acknowledges that:-

"Australia will have to import more than 70% of its fuel by the mid 1990's. Changes in the cost or availability of transport fuel in Australia will affect the quantity and quality of employment, recreation, education, commerce and other opportunities enjoyed by the community. There are therefore compelling reasons for improving energy management through more efficient transport." (p.10).

All this sounds very fine, but bicycles, minibuses and shared cars are the only solutions mentioned. The formidable though necessary task of taking our oil-dependent city decisively out of the future dangers mentioned depends on decisive energy conservation measures which can be accomplished only by an urban system permitting the bulk of everyday regular trips to work, shopping, education or recreation to be conveniently done by public transport accompanied by a higher quality of suburban life.

Incidentally, on another aspect of energy conservation "Shaping Melbourne's Future" mentions "energy efficient building designs" as applying to offices, not houses (p.18) which is all we can find on solar heating or insulation.

Regretfully we record, therefore, that "Shaping Melbourne's Future" will not implement the Cluster and Connect principle even

at the microplanning level, and will not implement any "winding down" or even "slowing down" on any significant scale.

The government's apparent intention for merely "slowing down" outward growth thus conserving transport fuel, improving pollution levels and saving costs is hardly adequate for the times which needs a firm "winding down" resolve. But, at least, give us a consolidation policy that can work !

(2) ENVIRONMENTAL ASPECTS