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A STRATEGY FOR THE CENTRES OF CAPITAL CITIES

(a) Ten sprawly cities of more than 100,000.

This article will deal with some aspects of central areas of the bigger Australian cities - say, those over 100,000 - of which there are 10. Melbourne is used as a case study.

All of these 10 cities are "sprawly" enough to be conceived as city-regions, rather than anything resembling the old concept of "town". It is acknowledged that city-region plans of a "strategic" character should be evolved for each of these city-regions. The principles that are proposed for the central city area of each of these cities obviously have to be consistent with an urban ecological approach for the whole region.

But it is also true that such a city-regional strategy needs to take into account properly its chief centre ---and this is the main intent of this article. However, the article will deal later with some recent Melbourne city-regional plans to show the connection between these and the Strategy Plan for the Melbourne central area.

The city centre of such an urban region, in traditional townplanning parlance, has been called the Central Business District (CBD). This could only better be conceived of as a Central Activities District (CAD), to lay the emphasis on what is always - for a capitalist city - the big weakness : lack of spaces, facilities and encouragement for non-commercial activities for its citizens. To free the concept of its connotation of "business" as the function for a centre, the area will be called here "central city"; and the central city plus its inner areas will be called "central area", except in any special context where the business aspect of the central city is meant, where the old term "CBD" will be used.

The problem is : (i) how to heighten the quality, range and participatory content of non-commercial activities and the diversity of small-man commercial enterprises in the central city which is the most accessible place to the maximum number of people from the whole city-region as distinct from designing a centre to suit mainly the elite and (ii) how to maintain and improve accessibility of all citizens in the face of "the sprawl". Item (i) is of crucial importance, but this article will deal mainly with the problem posed by item (ii).

(b) The central city sickness

Here are some of the features of the sickness overcoming central city and central areas :-

Anti-variety. The central city becomes more and more a "business"--- indeed more and more a big business centre (CBD), with proportionately more and more offices (because these are the most profitable investments) and less and less a variegated central "activities" district. This is so because neither "small-man" commercial enterprises nor participatory freetime activists can any longer stand a chance of obtaining cheap

accommodation in the bigger of the older buildings, many of which are demolished for the newer towers. The trend therefore is anti-variety, due to deteriorating conditions for survival for hundreds of small innovative efforts of all types which cannot survive in the less patronised suburban centres. With a contracted range of variety, the central city becomes less attractive except for the elite, catered for with high-priced high-fashion class of diversity.

Accessibility for cars instead of people. The decision-makers who build the new prestigious towers, and the decision-makers who rent them, consider it a natural condition for such buildings to cater for off-street parking within the building for their affluent customers and higher executives. This reduces the pressure for for more and improved public transport, and increases the pressure for freeways right into the central city. The belief that this provides more accessibility is a mistaken one. The only sense in which such measures increase accessibility is accessibility for those who can afford parking privileges and prestigious entertainment at fancy prices at the expense of those who cannot afford such privileges and prices, including those who are thus deterred altogether from coming to central city.

The C.B.D spillover and sprawl. Investment pressures within the central city, and carparking considerations are driving office-tower builders to spill out from the CBD, and demolish houses and smaller business premises, in the process of locating in the nearby older inner suburbs. The CBD, on a pedestrian scale, sprawls beyond its bounds, and loses the compactness which enabled pedestrian access from one city facility to many others, thus compounding the sickness by increasing the temptation to use the car to get from one part of the city to another, amplifying the need for parking, and spreading the sickness of anti-variety and carparking blight into the inner suburbs

Freeway anti-city contradiction. The above three maladies of anti-variety, inaccessibility and CBD spillover are associated with another feature: the progressive deterioration of public modes of travel, because it becomes impractical for many city workers to use public transport if they have to interchange between 2 or even 3 vehicles in the process. The resultant switch to private cars for commuting leads to congestion and sets up a demand for freeway solutions, or upgraded arterial road capacity. Either of these solutions are ultimately counter-productive because a maximum freeway access system for cars spells a minimum access for people. Freeways are anti-City, if one regards variety compactness and accessibility of people as providing the highest standard for any civilised central city. In any case, freeways are self-defeating in another way: tending to proliferate centres at their outer less-congested extremities, thus reducing all-over accessibility for many parts of the region.

(c) A prescription

To counter the current sickness, the following prescription would need to be included in any treatment or cure:

1. The central city of Australian capitals and other big cities should have :
 - * variety (including a variety of participatory activities)
 - * maximum accessibility for people (as distinct from cars)
2. This means it needs to be pedestrian-scale and therefore :
 - * compact (equivalent to high intensity of activity and no unused or wastefully used space, as in oversupplied office towers, bulk warehousing or car parks).
3. So that the highly-accessible and compact pedestrian-scale variety can be served by:
 - * upgraded public transport
(without which neither variety, accessibility nor compactness can be achieved to the fullest degree).
4. As a consequential refinement for the bigger capital cities, and combining items 1., 2., and 3. above (a) within the central city area the highest density developments should be in the immediate vicinity of the public transport interchanges, and (b) in the inner area

surrounding the bigger central city in the bigger capitals there should be no spillover of office towers, because they compel more people to use cars to get to them and make public transport more unacceptable and uneconomic.

(d) Melbourne adopts the prescription !

The Melbourne City Council (M.C.C) Strategy Plan has adopted the prescription set out above !

The outcome, therefore, should be of universal interest, not only in Melbourne, but in Sydney, Brisbane, Hobart, Adelaide, Perth, Canberra, Newcastle, Wollongong and Geelong, the combined population of which is $8\frac{1}{2}$ million--70% of the total Australian population.

Although there are many attacks, and from different sources (as set out below) that have the effect of whiteanting the principles of the Strategy Plan, a critical test on one aspect is proceeding right now. We deal with this next, somewhat out of order, to give it emphasis, especially for Melbourne readers, to alert them to the dangers.

(e) Critical test on right now

Big property interests in the inner areas have had enough influence to have the M.C.C order a "study review" of the plot ratios of areas outside the central city, trying to lift them from the low profile recommended by the Strategy Plan to enable office towers and other redevelopments of higher density to occur.

This move, if successful, would undo the whole strategy of the Strategy Plan and leave it a useless husk.

The tragedy is that many people in Melbourne who should know, and would be concerned, seem to be unaware of this threat to the essence of the strategy. It is urgent that all those of goodwill band together to rescue the Plan from those who want indiscriminate redevelopment in parts of the inner areas. These redevelopment interests will find ready allies (if they have not already found them) in the freeway lobby, so that this particular attack on the principles of the strategy plan should on no account be taken lightly.

What follows will deal more fully with this and other attacks on the Strategy Plan. But first, the ecological significance of such principles as are contained in the "prescription" (as it is particularised in the Strategy Plan) need to be examined.

(f) Ecological significance of Strategy Plan

It is people vaguely know that Premier Hamer in 1971 (at that time Minister for Local Government) stirred the Melbourne City Council into preparing a plan for the City and those parts of the inner areas covered by the Melbourne municipality (Kensington, Flemington, North Melbourne, West Melbourne, Parkville, Carlton, East Melbourne and parts of South Yarra). They know that Interplan Consortium were given the planning job. They know that there was some sort of "public participation" exercise, relatively new to Melbourne. They know that four alternative choices were advanced and that one of them, a specialised city based on "compactness, accessibility and variety" was chosen (See Ecoso Exchange No.3), and they know that an Interim Development Order (IDO) was brought in late in November 1973 to protect the Strategy Plan, and that the Melbourne City Council carried the plan "in principle" in July 1974.

But, except for the people in the inner areas who became really involved in the participation exercise (mentioned above), few other people would remember what the Strategy Plan was all about, because it was only a one-day wonder in the daily press.

This article does not intend to give a synopsis of the whole plan, but merely to select a few of the main features to discuss their ecological significance (It should be understood that the Strategy Plan was not, openly anyway, based on ecological considerations. But some of its features appear to offer the potential for planning in a more ecological way).

(1) Public Transport

(i) The Plan provides that the future high office towers should be within certain areas inside the future rail underground loop now in course of construction (Flinders St., Spring St., Latrobe St., and Spencer St.) and should be within short walking distance of city rail stations.

(ii) The plan is thus based strongly on public transport (which helps the city to be "compact, accessible and of variety".) and in line with this policy the plan also advocates no increase in commuter parking, no further freeway or upgraded road capacity in the inner areas (except joining of Tullamarine Freeway to the Westgate Bridge - South Eastern Freeway By-Pass) and an increase of commuter parking at rail stations further out.

(iii) The same principle of relatively higher densities of activities near the rail stations in the inner areas ... (e.g. Kensington, Macaulay, Newmarket, Flemington Bridge) or centres based on tramlines e.g. Errol Street North Melbourne).

These points - (i) - (iii) - are ecologically superior to present trends because if these plans are implemented they are a necessary complement to the process of cutting down on energy-wasteful and pollution-causing private transport for workaday commuting.

(2) Redevelopment.

(iv) In line with item (i) above the Strategy Plan proposes certain "mixed use" areas suitable for functions "ancillary" to the City.

These areas are outside the loop areas (in particular along St. Kilda Road, Royal Parade, in Jolimont, North and West Melbourne and South Carlton). The plot ratio of $1\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 for these areas would keep a low profile, prevent high rise office towers and, in general, discourage massive redevelopment because it would not be very profitable. This provision would have the effect of encouraging the adapting of existing buildings to new uses rather than demolition and rebuilding.

(v) For the residential parts of the inner areas the Strategy Plan proposes encouragement of rehabilitation of buildings rather than redevelopment, and such redevelopment as there is to be in scale and character with existing housing, which means it would need to be very low profile so that, again, there would not be much profit in redevelopment.

(vi) The Strategy Plan proposes big housing redevelopment schemes on 3 or 4 sites close to the city, none of which would disrupt the community nor involve residential demolition ... on the Newmarket cattleyards; Harbor Trust and Gasworks Land, on railway air-rights, near Flagstaff Gardens. Such projects by providing high density new housing would also relieve the intense pressure for redevelopment in other inner suburban residential areas.

These points - (iv) - (v) - are ecologically superior to present trends because it is wasteful of energy to demolish buildings and rebuild on the same site when new buildings could be accommodated on or over what are now cattle pens and railway tracks, and the like.

(3) A Focus for Involvement.

(vii) The Strategy Plan in opting for a city of variety and laying the stress heavily on ready access to the diversified and unique attractions which ... the centre of a big metropolis should be able to supply, does so for all of Melbourne's people irrespective of age or income. The plan aims to enhance shopping, entertainment, cultural and historic uses in the City. For example, roofing of the rail lines east of Princes Bridge Station and the development there of a "Tivoli Gardens" as a cultural and fun park connecting with the gardens and parks beside and beyond the Yarra.

(viii) Regarding the inner areas around the City, the Plan is to encourage compact neighbourhood shopping and community centres to provide convenient services including health and education for the local people, and it calls for community resource centres and social interaction with the full spectrum of society.

(ix) Multi-purpose use of public spaces, mixed land use in place of homogeneous zonings, even mixed uses within buildings are features that pervade the Strategy Plan aimed to heighten the facility with which people can become involved with other people.

These points - (vii) - (ix) - are ecologically advantageous as well as socially advantageous to the extent that they can contribute to turning the attention of people towards involvement in activities with other people, rather than the more energy-wasting habits of consumerism and relatively aimless travel.

(4) "C.A.N." Stiffening of the Strategy Plan.

As part of the public participation, one of the inner area community groups, the North Melbourne Association, produced its own independent plan for its own area which it saw as complementary both to the other inner areas and to the City. Known as the "C.A.N." (Citizens Action Plan for North and West Melbourne) Report. It said its primary value was for a mixed and participatory city and its three secondary values to achieve this were (1) the retention of the building stock (2) careful selection of suitable areas for new high-density development of a mixed character and (3) provision of specialised "host" functions in the City and inner areas for the whole of Melbourne.

It is not the purpose here to summarise this conscientious voluntary effort by 50 or so members of the North Melbourne Association, but to select a few of its features which, if adopted, would stiffen the ecological effects of the Strategy Plan for self-evident reasons.

C.A.N. Report Proposed:- (a) Deliberate retention of the building stock ... i.e. any sound building (rather than discouraging redevelopment by low plot-ratios and keeping buildings in scale);

(b) Deliberate selection of all out-dated low-intensity use of land for new high density buildings to take off the pressure for redevelopment (e.g. wool stores, skin sheds, truck depots, car saleyards) as well as more extensive rail track decking if necessary.

(c) Accent on participatory aspects of social centres and provision of "people parking" indoor spaces in the neighbourhood focus (For some detail on this see "Learning Exchange" August 1975 No. 32 at p13.)

(d) Bike and pedestrian priority ways to serve such neighbourhood focus.

(e) Cease pulling down big old buildings (of eleven or so stories) in the city where cheap rents can encourage "small-man" and voluntary efforts, and confine office towers to the vicinity of the new loop stations.

(f) More deliberate design to prevent through traffic in every street by "environmental areas" protected by by-passing roads from a very local block scale to a district scale.

(g) All buildings originally intended as dwelling houses to revert to these uses rather than office storehouses etc.

(h) Specific recommendations on centres for young children, education centres and for an indoor sports complex in the district.

(g) Attacks on Strategy Plan
from Within and Without

Ecologists should support the Strategy Plan as stiffened by "C.A.N.", because the sum-total fossil fuel energy saved would be considerable, both directly by public transport usage (instead of car commuting) and rational adaption of building stock; and indirectly because the emphasis is on involvement in participatory activities. Moreover, it has metropolitan-wide implications on both scores and does not only affect the central area.

Plans, however fine, can of course be disposed of not only by counter planning, but also by quietly forgetting them or subtly modifying them. To continue on the entrenched way of doing things, as if the Plan did not exist, may or may not be deliberate (and here we are not concerned

with scandals so much as with principles) but whatever the degree of consciousness, the important thing is the objective effect and, in this sense we say the Strategy Plan has been "attacked" in the following ways:

From Within.

(1) The M.C.C., having spent \$700.000 on the Plan, has made no attempt to enact stage one of implementing it, namely to popularise it -

- * there have been no leaflets, posters, films or any other popular way of disseminating what the Strategy Plan means;

- * Community Resource Centres recommended by the Plan to act as continuing centres of public participation in implementing the Plan have not been established;

- * The Lord Mayor, in May 1975, sent out a brochure called "The Ratepayer" to every household with the theme about "lively Melbourne is going ahead" but with hardly a mention of any principles of the Strategy Plan.

(2) Individual Councillors, with their own pet schemes, go on as if there was no such thing as an integrated overall Strategy Plan for the M.C.C. and others belittle its importance.

- * Cr. Hanna Pan recommended that "a tunnel be built under the Yarra and Swanston Street. It would start near the Arts Centre in St. Kilda Road, run under the Yarra and Swanston Street, and emerge North of Victoria Street". By a close vote the M.C.C. asked its public works and traffic committee to examine the proposals ("Age" 11/2/75). The Strategy Plan clearly states that the goal should be to "encourage a C.B.D. vehicular by-pass system".

- * Cr. Alan Whalley is reported as saying that "the Council has approved the Strategy Plan only in principle and that changes would be made in the future". ("Age" 28/7/75). This sounds as if "the principle" is not going to count for much.

(3) More insidious, the Council has begun to undo its own plan.

- * A fresh so-called "community planning" scheme on a parochial block-by-block basis has been adopted and put into practice in Kensington, Carlton and East Melbourne. There has been no attempt to publicise the goals and objectives and policies of the Strategy Plan as an integral part of this planning scheme. The Strategy Plan emphasised that the first phase in implementation was to popularise the goals and objectives chosen for the Strategy.

- * A scheme of the traffic committee upgrades certain roads to take the future Eastern Freeway traffic through the inner areas. This is quite contrary to the Strategy Plan which showed the particular roads as "collector streets" not as arterial roads as the report emphasises, minimising commuter car travel.

- * A \$500.000 drainage project of the Newmarket cattle saleyards as proposed by Cr. Fox (Chairman of Abbatoirs and Market Committee). The Strategy Plan proposed that consideration be given to shifting the abbatoirs and cattleyards but the spending of large sums of money on updating will postpone the redevelopment of this valuable site, along the Strategy Plan lines.

- * There is a strong rumour that Council committees are working on the possibility of four large car parks on the edge of Central City. The Strategy Plan clearly states "discourage additional commuter parking" and advocates "maximising public transport and minimising commuter car travel".

- * The Melbourne City Council have ordered a "study review" of the plot ratios in the Mixed Use Areas (see above "Critical Test on Right Now"). The Town Clerk has sent a letter to a number of selected people stating that there has been a number of "objections to the Mixed Use Areas Policy, particularly the plot ratio limit of 1.5: 1" and that in a view of the plot ratios "a public participation programme based on the Mixed Use Areas as a whole is the best means of approach for the purpose of the Study".

There is no explanation in the letter of the goals and objectives of the Strategy Plan, merely a veiled (not too well veiled) denial of the Strategy Plan participation opportunities, inferring that this study will be more democratic as it is based on a "public participation programme" of those in the area affected by the proposed plot ratios and, furthermore, stating in its first paragraph, that there is considerable pressure for a review of the plot ratios policy!! Naturally, if the businessmen in the mixed-area itself are going to be the main voice they would prefer higher plot ratios!

From Without.

(4) The Melbourne Regional Planning Authority (The Melbourne Metropolitan Board of Works) has fathered two amendments to the Melbourne Planning Scheme, one of which runs counter to the Strategy Plan, and the other has the potential to operate with counter affect to it -

* Amendment 45 proposed high-rise buildings along High Street, St.Kilda (which would make a continuation of the existing St.Kilda Road tail of offices stretching several miles from the City). This would be directly counter to the Strategy Plan proposals to set a low plot ratio for the St.Kilda Road area. The purpose of the low plot ratio is to discourage the spilling over of high office towers from the City proper (see point (2) (iv) above).

* Amendment 35 proposes new "office zones" in the suburbs to enable stricter control of local amenity taking into account adjoining buildings etc. If the M.M.B.W. seriously respected the goals and objectives of the Strategy Plan then quite obviously it could not have brought down Amendment 35 without a regional strategy to cluster suburban office towers into some rational scheme based around public transport interchanges. As it is, the M.M.B.W. has now announced that the new zones are intended to apply to "Special Use 10 Zone" - and land in this zone is nearly all in the inner areas not very far from Central City. Note: objections from the Town and Country Planning Association, the Melbourne City Council, the South Melbourne City Council, and the North Melbourne Association to this amendment were rejected but drew from the M.M.B.W. begrudging and belated recognition of the point that big scale office development in the suburbs could have serious regional effects. The Board's planning committee have decided that any major development must be accompanied by a report which shows the "direct and indirect economic and environmental implications". (See M.M.B.W Newsletter 11/7/75, No.7).

High hopes indeed are placed on such a report! "An essential feature of the requirement is that in addition to consideration of the local social economic and environmental implications of a proposal, the metropolitan policy context relating to the proposal should be identified, and the strategic implications of the policy defined". How can this be done though, without a strategy as a framework to refer to? (For further comment on this see item (h) below.

(5) The Melbourne Regional Planners (M.M.B.W.) have retained a firm of consultants (Nicholas Clark and Associates) for parking studies throughout Melbourne. Object is a revision of the M.M.B.W's requirement for the provision of parking spaces under its Parking Scheme Ordinance. Terms of reference should have been something like this: "given and policy for, the maximum development of public transport, what parking requirements will optimise the use of public transport?". However, terms of reference appear to be very mixed. Whilst seeking consideration of where there should be a maximum number of parking spaces rather than a minimum, and asking how may a "revised parking ordinance assist in the achievement of wider Strategic Objectives" ... the typical old "demand parking" typing questionnaire that lead direct to freeway conclusions are also to be asked. For example, "do the existing provisions adequately reflect the traffic generating characteristics of particular land uses?". Are there situations where the minimum parking space requirements should be increased?".

Assurance should be given by the M.M.B.W., and its consultants, that the study commissioned is to respect the Strategy Plan proposals for limiting both road capacity and commuter parking spaces in the central areas, and that similar principles be applied to other busy commercial nodes in the suburbs. (Readers interested in Nicholas Clark's transport ideas should refer to Irregular No.45, March 1972 - "Free Public Transport ... How Dinkum is Clark?", and Irregular No.39, January 1971, "Two Slants on the Transport Plan" (a) Wot! No Transport Lobby ... and Irregular No.35, August 1970, "Towksbury Symposium" p2).

(6) Ineffectiveness of the I.D.O. and the Appeals System.

Ideally, the Interim Development Order (I.D.O.) of October 1973, has the purpose of protecting the Strategy Plan principles in a transitional period until they can be enshrined as part of the planning scheme by way of amendment. Ideally, the Planning Appeals Tribunal legislation should provide for appeals procedures capable of upholding these principles.

In practise however - and here our criticism is aimed at the system and not at the judgements - this does not happen. Those who have rights under zones of the metropolitan planning scheme or under the Council by-laws, continue to get permits just as if the I.D.O. and the Strategy Plan were non-existent.

The North Melbourne Association have tried to prevent three permits and lost each case.

In the Dingwell case, a permit was issued for a new warehouse right alongside the Macaulay railway station making desolate and dangerous an area that should be uplifted for the sake of the several thousand people in the Kotham Housing Commission Estate nearby and the Primary School, Secondary School and Community Centre in the vicinity.

In the Royal Children's Hospital case a permit was issued for a residential tower block in Flemington Road in an area where the Strategy Plan said that housing should be in scale and character and despite lower-rise alternative plans submitted by the Association for a similar number of units on the same site.

In the Stoker Motors case a permit for a car showroom was issued for an area directly opposite homes which will have the effect of increasing traffic in residential areas, and in the very area prized by the Association for its potential for a walkway and bicycle track connecting the three neighbourhood focal points of the district.

(7) The M.M.B.W. released a report on "Social Dysfunction and Relative Poverty in Metropolitan Melbourne" in August 1974, which draws the major conclusion that the "older core areas have a high incidence of various social problems or aberrant situations which impair the City's capacity to function smoothly". Dr. Renate Howe points out that this report recalls with uncanny similarity the Report of the 1936-1937 Slum Abolition Board on Melbourne's inner suburbs, where the high rate of juvenile delinquency were co-related to overcrowding in the inner suburbs. (Ekotasis No.11, March 1975). Both reports seem to assume that it is the inner suburban residential conditions that cause delinquency and other social problems. Those hankering after massive redevelopment of the inner areas and the related massive increase in off-street parking and inner freeways, will find great solace in the Dysfunction Report.

Such swing back to the attitudes of earlier decades will run directly counter to the findings and policies of the Strategy Plan.

(8) A Strategy Needed for Whole Region to Extend the M.C.C. Strategy Plan.

Thus, the M.M.B.W. has no strategy of its own, and deliberately or not, appears to be producing amendments, policies and practices that undermine the M.C.C. Strategy.

At the public hearing of objections to Amendment 35, the Town and Country Planning Association (T.C.P.A.) spelt out the sort of strategic principles that it considered should be urgently adopted because the erection of high-rise office buildings in Melbourne suburbs was something new in history.

Regarding the City as the centre for the whole Melbourne region, they proposed there should be a limited number of "sub-regional" centres each to provide a "colourful living pedestrian orientated urban centre with a reasonable range of diversified activities. Then, all high density office developments should only be located either in the City or in one or another of these sub-regional centres all of which would be located within short walking distance of public transport interchanges". While such a strategy was being prepared the T.C.P.A. proposed an I.D.O. to prevent indiscriminate growth of office towers.

The T.C.P.A. case also advocated that there should not be "office zones" at all, because in the sub-regional centres that are envisaged it is better to have mixed uses, not only in the same area, but even within the same building. As an example of this they advocate that "at ground floor level within and around newly constructed or redeveloped buildings of higher intensity, pleasant amenities for people should be provided to accommodate such a range of spaces for community activities and services, and these should be connected through adjoining buildings or rights of way by pedestrian links, walkways, arcades or courts requiring high standard design both to take advantage of, and give advantage to, the activities of people in surrounding developments, as well as on the particular site in question". They list health centres, branch library, child care, legal aid, community resource centre, meeting rooms, reception areas as examples of such community activities and services. (For full text see "SPACE" May/June 1975 at pp8,11 & 17).

The M.M.B.W. amendment 35 dealt only with local physical amenity (height, bulk, set-back, landscaping, effect on neighbouring buildings etc.) and not with what might be called community amenity" as just described. The connection between "community amenity" of this type and deliberate creation of selected sub-regional nodes of high density urban centres connected with public transport is obvious. Combined they could constitute a regional strategy, provided that strategy included transport strategy ... i.e. by designing such centres to exclude the commuter car and by providing them with up-graded train, tram, bus, taxi and bicycle track services.

The M.M.B.W. device, mentioned above, of making a developer produce an environmental impact study that shows the connection between his proposed project with a regional strategy, is just utter nonsense! It is a complete abnegation of the M.M.B.W.'s planning responsibility because there is no regional strategy comparable with the strategy of the Melbourne City Council.

- (i) Latest Region Decisions
- (1) Freeze Car Life-Styles and
- (2) Increase Pressures on the City

The results of the recommendation by the Town and Country Planning Board of the parts of the eleven Investigation Areas to be set aside for urban development, adopted by the Government and released on 22/7/75, are nothing new ... and could be nothing new. These are in the outer parts of the already adopted 8-spoke radial corridors/satellite design for future Melbourne growth. The new aspects deal with the greater precision which the Government has defined, the priority of the release of urban land and the effect this has on land prices, but it is not our purpose to deal with these aspects here. (Incidentally, the map published in the daily press 23/7/75 was lifted straight out of the report and was misleading to anyone but a close student of the report because it did not show Melton and Sunbury satellites which had already been recommended in September 1974 and adopted by the Government.

Nor did this map show the already adopted nearer parts of the various corridors already adopted arising from the M.M.B.W. 1974 "Report on General Concept Objections". By-the-by ... if public participation is to mean anything clear, maps are essential).

Taken by-and-large the design for Melbourne future growth remains a multi-radial one with "green wedges" between, with subsidised and forced growth to West and North. We will not labor the point here, but re-assert that this pattern "freezes" life styles in the car-way-of-life because of the increasing difficulty of servicing trips from one corridor to another by public transport. With a metropolitan growth design forcing an increasing dependence on car and truck for all purposes, pressure for increased road capacity and car parking in the inner areas and the City will be inescapable. (For a full discussion on this see Ecoso Exchange No.6, May 1974, "Rescrambled Plans for Melbourne ... 15 years of Ecological Disaster Adopted".)

In a sense the M.C.C. Strategy Plan is "at risk" therefore, not only by current attacks from within and without, but by the macro-design of the Melbourne region as a whole which will militate continually against efforts to strengthen public transport.

(i) Hamer and Hunt
The Hard Reality Versus the Fine Phrase.

Premier Hamer and Planning Minister Hunt, are masters of the fine ecological phrase

"The very real consideration for the future," said Hamer "is how far the community is prepared to go, given a lead by the Government" (our emphasis) "and how much material advance it is prepared to forego, to preserve and conserve the world we live in. The quality of living, and the endeavour to preserve the very ability of man to live, must become the increasing concern of all people and all Governments....." (This excellent pronouncement was made in Parliament 12/9/72 and was one of Hamer's first statements as Premier - Budget Speech, Hansard p174).

"Increasingly" said Hunt "those who care are becoming aware that we live in a world of finite resources, and it is without the slightest doubt the responsibility of Government to husband those resources" (our emphasis) "and to direct them into activities which will ultimately create the greatest advantage for the people of the State". That equally excellent pronouncement was made by Hunt in the Statement of Government Policy on Investigation Areas Report on 22/7/75, nearly three years after that of the Premier.

In all of that three years there have been many machinery moves ... the State Planning Council charged with making Statements of Planning Policy, new Melbourne, Western Port and Geelong Region plans, expansion of the Planning Appeals Tribunal, establishment of the Environment Protection Authority .. and the M.C.C. Strategy Plan which Hamer himself, earlier still, had asked the M.C.C. to have prepared.

And now there is still a further machinery move: a strengthening and up-dating of the State Planning Council, giving it the sinews of proper staffing and bringing it under the control of the Premier himself.

But what is the use of all this streamlining and "control" if it affects relatively minor aspects? What's the use of saying that the "Government should give a lead ... to preserve and conserve ..." in 1972, and reiterate that it is the "responsibility of the Government to husband resources" in 1975, unless a determined assault is made on the car-way-of-life which is one of the biggest and most intransigent problems facing ecologists?

And what's the use of the M.C.C. Statement that at least tries to reverse the trend, basing the future of the metropolis on public transport, if the Governments are not committed in the shape of the C.R.B. the M.M.B.W. and even the M.C.C. to back the attempt?

The crux of the matter is that Hamer cannot make the M.C.C. Strategy Plan "happen" unless he can make a Melbourne regional strategy on similar principles "happen". Meantime, the fate of the M.C.C. Strategy Plan hangs on a razor's edge! Time is running out, Mr. Premier!

(k) Misdirected Militancy

The central city has always been dominated by the biggest commercial/financial/industrial business interests ... by the capitalist "establishment". It is still so dominated. It will continue to be dominated by them until the capitalist system comes to its inevitable end.

Some of the very same interests dominate the sub-regional centres of any significance (e.g. the banks, finance companies, insurance offices, city emporiums, food chain stores). They have "decentralised" within the Melbourne region to drive-in centres and other suburban centres. Some of these same interests (e.g. insurance and finance) own much of the land still to be "developed" as urban land all around Melbourne as well as in the central business district. But the biggest of these capitalists are undoubtedly the world's biggest multi-nationals with investments in the automobile, steel, oil and allied industries whose wealth depends on augmenting private transport. The more cars and trucks there are, and the further they have to travel, the higher are the sales and profits of these multi-nationals. Suburban sprawl based on the ubiquity of the car is just fine for such interests. Dispersed random location zoning that tends to set up commuting in all directions is fine and a C.B.D. based on the car and deprived of public transport is fine. The M.C.C. Strategy Plan (as set out above) sets the course in the opposite direction.

Recently there has developed a spate of misdirected militant shadow boxing against the "dominance of the big C.B.D. interests".

Mr. Uren, Minister of Department of Urban and Regional Development (D.U.R.D.) says he wants to "break down the dominance of the central business district" in favour of assisting the inner areas "retain their vitality as places where people want to live" (See Polis Vol I .1 p2 ... the publication of the Urban Interim Regional Council for Social Development). But he fails to realise that one objective tends to cancel out the other.

If Uren wants to protect the inner areas he should support the M.C.C. Strategy Plan to the hilt because its whole dynamics is precisely this ... no high rise office towers outside the rail loop areas (and therefore protection for the inner areas by a low plot ratio that deters wholesale redevelopment) plus support for very strong emphasis on Central City public transport (and therefore protection for the inner area from pressure for freeways and parking).

Instead Uren, has so far, refused Australian Government finance to the Loop and has proposed to put money into Government offices in Ringwood. In both instances, under the impression he is attacking big city interests. He is, in reality, advancing policies that would be applauded by the very biggest businesses ... the car and oil multi-nationals. There would be far less opportunity for employees or customers to travel by public transport to Ringwood, than to the Central City unless they happen to live on the Ringwood railway line, because of the inevitable impracticality of efficient public bus transport for cross-suburban commuting.

Ironically, to the extent that the Australian Government allows itself to be committed to funds for accelerated outward urban growth in the Western and Northern corridors and satellites (Werribee, Melton, Sunbury and Plenty), Uren is implementing the Bernard Evans scheme adopted by Hamer for so-called "balanced growth" around the C.B.D. This was deliberately adopted by Evans on the grounds that by so centering the C.B.D. within the metropolitan region (instead of

permitting further "lopsided" growth to south and east) maximum growth of the C.B.D. would be assured. Funds for corrective qualitative uplift of the "deprived" Western and Northern suburbs are overdue and full credit must go to Uren for making a reality of such priorities. But the outward extension at or towards Werribee, Melton, Sunbury, Plenty, will line the pockets of sub-dividers, developers and the big industrial and commercial interests associated with the development rather than uplift the quality of life in the already built up parts of the West and North.

Furthermore, Uren is apparently unaware or unconvinced by the proposition of Voorhees, Interplan's transport expert, that the corollary of a no-growth C.B.D. is a freeway network which offers the solution of accessibility to new growth areas in the suburbs accompanied by continuation of a policy of neglect for railed public transport. And no-growth policies in the inner areas including failure of residential growth on land anachronistically used for bulk storage or wholesale depots, cattleyards, etc. would drive up home prices in inner areas still further until only the child-less rich could afford to live there and the competition for exclusive Toorak Road high-fashion type of shops and business enterprises, could put an end to the Carlton-type diversity (for more on the whole problem see "Federal Labor at the Cross Roads" ... Ecoso Exchange No.1, February 1973, and "Dialogue on Strategic Goals for M.C.C.", Ecoso Exchange No.3, July 1973).

It seems that Uren really has quite good intentions and determined intentions to - (1) uplift the "deprived" western suburbs (2) prevent over development of the C.B.D. (3) support public as against private transport (4) give adequate finance generally to suburban municipal councils (5) to preserve the existing life and character of the inner suburbs.

All of these objectives are thoroughly creditable.

The trouble seems to be that in some areas he is receiving poor advice based on outworn planning "wisdom" which in practice charts a pattern of urban development based on exponential use of the car for commuting and every other purpose. The planning techniques he has adopted therefore are, sadly, inconsistent with his objectives.

Here are two examples of how such good intentions have resulted in attempts to apply apparent solutions to immediate pressing problems; but in such a way, unfortunately, as to aggravate the long term problem and jeopardise the possibility of any lasting solution.

The current acute over-supply of city office space is an obvious example of wickedly mis-timed allocation of resources which the private enterprise system is constantly exhibiting. The solution is not to duplicate multi-storey towers in the suburbs. Even though such a proposal gives the immediate impression of preventing current over supply of offices, it does not in any way reduce the total amount of office floor space in the whole metropolis; and the main effect of such well intentioned efforts is to make it more difficult to revive public transport because the new office sites are less accessible by public transport than the C.B.D.

Where and when office towers are to be built should clearly be a matter of Melbourne regional strategy and the evil of speculation and its resultant over-supply should be directly controlled as part of that strategy.

Another example is the underground loop railway. There are plenty of legitimate complaints. First, the financing is all wrong, placing a ridiculous burden on inner area residents, few of whom will directly derive benefit. Second, there will be inevitable escalation of central city property values especially near the new loop stations and this is at the expense of public funds.

Third, there is starvation of other railway funds for such essentials as signalling, duplication of the Flinders Street Viaduct, tracks and new carriages, updating feeder-bus services and other general improvements that would bring relief to railway travellers far more quickly than the loop undertaking,

The superficial solution to all this is to attack the loop and fail to give it financial support; but the unintended effect of doing so is to add strength to the freeway lobby which wants to kill the whole loop idea. Surely here the correct solution is to tackle all those things that are wrong. These problems are aggravated by the way the loop construction is being implemented but not by the loop.

Australian Government finance plus greater taxes on those who will benefit from the loop, should replace any increase of rates from residents and, should, at the same time, provide plentiful funds for all the other urgently needed railway funds, as well as for the loop itself.

To fail to develop the loop railway would strike a blow at the M.C.C. Strategy Plan and at the idea of containing high rise within the central city, because what cannot be served by public transport, has to be served by the car, and this leads directly to freeway solutions and, because of parking requirements, it also leads to a spilling over of high rise from the Central City to the surrounding areas.

2. AFTER R.E.C. WHATFOR ECOSO ?

Urbanise the ecologists !
Ecologise the urbanists !

A heartening new development within the various ecological organisations is the turn towards the ecology of urban areas. That is not to say that campaigns like national parks, woodchipping, agricultural practices, uranium mining, the Little Desert, Lake Pedder, Frazer Island etc. will cease to be important or merit less attention.

It means that the conservation movement is maturing to the point of directing the attention of its following to the massive ecological damage done by secondary industry, by cities, by urban transport. Without turning its back on the bush, the conservation movement has begun to turn its face to the cities.

The Australian Conservation Foundation (A.C.F.), for example, has set up a national sub-committee to deal with urban matters and there are conveners for all the big cities, and attempts to establish urban sub-committees in each.

In Victoria, attempts to turn attention to urban issues have been made with varying degrees of success within other ecology organisations such as the Conservation Council of Victoria, Environment Alert, Inspect, Friends of the Earth and the Environment Section of the Social Action Department of the Australian Union of Students.

The Radical Ecology Conference held in Melbourne over Easter 1975 did not start this re-orientation, but it doubtless helped spur it on, helped consolidate these trends, and introduced new cross-referencing of ecological with urban problems in many different forms and between different people.

To put it in a nutshell.....

The ecologists are trying to urbanise their activities.

What should Ecoso activists and readers do to reciprocate ?

Most Ecoso supporters were not people whose social consciousness was aroused primarily around ecological problems. They are predominately "urbanists". By this is meant people interested in one aspect or another

of the many facets of life in the big cities, and how to improve them

The dimension that these "urbanists" need to add to their urban perspective is the ecological objectives. We have been trying, but all of us need to go a long way further. We tried when we changed the name of our organisation from the "Townplanning Research Group" (TRG) to "Ecoso Exchange", and adopted the 4 ecoso guidelines. We tried when we changed the name of our journal from "Irregular" to "Ecoso Exchange", and we tried to improve its ecological content. We tried again when we played an active role in helping initiate and organise the Radical Ecology Conference. But the preponderance of thinking and institutional structure all around us are geared to a drive for quantitative growth, and efforts to tackle the ecological needs in any thoroughgoing way are so far not very conspicuous.

To nutshell our own problems :

Us urbanists need to more thoroughly ecologise our perspectives

How ? Every possible way ! For example, why not join one or other of the (primary) ecological groups... to get to know more about ecology and to help the ecologists get to know more about what you know about cities ?

Another example : why not write something, however brief, on how you think the Australian Conservation Foundation should formulate its urban ecological policies ?

This journal "Ecoso Exchange" hereby throws itself open for any radical who may care to do so, to contribute an in-put towards the formulation of an ecological urban strategy and policy.

Whatever is published will be sent simultaneously to the A.C.F. Urban Committee for consideration, and to all our readers for comment, in the spirit of public participation. The article "A strategy for the centres of capital cities" in this issue can be regarded as the first of such efforts, and open to comment.

It should be added that contributors from any Australian state are welcome but it may be inevitable, for some time at least, that more of the contributions will relate to the Melbourne scene, because most readers are in Melbourne. This is not parish-pumpism as Melbourne has about 20% of Australia's population. But we want the other 80% too !

Electric Bus Invention

An Ecoso Exchange reader happened to phone through a piece of news, just as we went to press. You may have missed it.

On 25th. August ABV 2's program "The Inventors" interviewed Mr Roy Leembruggen, the designer of the NSW Railways double-decker rail carriages. Mr Leembruggen has been working for 5 years to design and build a working model of an electric bus, which he can now demonstrate.

It is powered by a bank of electric batteries which will keep it running for 3 to 4 hours. Batteries would be changed when bus crews changed for mealbreaks or shifts. Seating 130 or so --- about half as many again as in a conventional bus --- the electric variety would cost about 1½ times that of a conventional bus to construct. With quantity production, however, costs should be about the same. Running costs would be very much cheaper, and maintenance repairs extremely simple.

This would seem to offer an immediate alternative to a petrol or oil internal combustion engine for urban use, and have some advantages ecologically.

Incidentally, does any reader know enough about the potentiality of the "flywheel" principle of conserving energy as applied to cars or buses ?

Material in this issue prepared by Ruth and Mairie Crow.