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Special Issue

NEW M.M.B.W. REGIONAL PLAN

In November 1971 a comprehensive document of over 100 pages dealing with new areas of planning as well as traditional ones was rushed through the M.M.B.W. in one brief sitting

Before we start :

Have you read it. ?

You will have to if you haven't done so. After all, here are "framework" planning policies for the whole Melbourne region, and you are invited by the M.M.B.W. to participate. What? Do we hear you say "I am too busy"? Think that phrase ever. There are right times and wrong times to be "too busy" for different things. In the next few months you should be "too busy" with the M.M.B.W. plan so that other interests will temporarily take other priorities. Actually, however, because the plan does or should cover everything of vital concern to Melbourne, you may find that without too much painful new thinking you can contribute without much extra effort. To be blunt: you have a responsibility to advance such progressive ideas that lie within your own special interests in the public debate which should be proceeding, and if you don't, who is there to blame?

Where to get the documents :

"Planning Policies for Melbourne Metropolitan Region".

Obtainable M.M.B.W. Planning Department, 425 Collins Str.,
Price \$1.00 (if you are calling the entrance
is from Market Street)

Also obtainable

"Living City" No. 10. . . Spring . . . Summer 1971
which has some material from the main report. Free from the
above address. For those with a professional interest:

2 interim development orders & 2 amendm. to the Planning Scheme
Nos. 3 and 21 free from same address.

Where does one start. ?

Even granted (which we don't grant) that secrecy of any impending planning zones should be strictly maintained to eliminate speculation 9/10ths, of this report has nothing to do with planning boundaries, but with a multitude of general principles which should have been openly released years ago with a continual exchange of views organised.

The M.M.B.W. intends to "stimulate public dialogue with interested organisations and individuals by inviting their participation in seminars..." (Introduction by Chairman Croxford p. 1)

"Irregular" offers its pages for any comment at all
on the plan

What follows is intended in no way as a synopsis of all the features of "Planning Policies" which have indeed many sensible ideas, nor is it intended as a thoroughgoing analysis or alternative policy, but rather some random questions to "needle" you into "stimulation" to read the report (if you haven't) and think, talk and write more about it.

ON THE ECOLOGY

1. Solid Wastes. "This concept of complementary processes appears to have some application in the establishment of linked industries in which the waste of one activity may be used as the input for another, or the wastes of several industries blended so as to produce a nontoxic, and

bio-degradable waste, suitable for disposal in the sewerage system" (p38)

Fine ! But how is this to be organised ? As a starting point, who is to research it ? It's a new idea, fair enough, but we can't expect it in the plan right now. But what follow - through recommendations should be made ?

2. Performance Standards of Industry "Recommendation relating to industrial development place emphasis on performance standards designed to minimise all forms of pollution, and this emphasis is reflected in the zoning provisions contained in the proposed amending planning scheme" (p. 38)

Good! But if performance standards can be set high enough, does it not make obsolete the whole concept of "zoning" into tight and rigid separate industrial, residential and commercial zones with all the disadvantages (e.g. lack of mixed primary uses of land (Jane Jacobs) and unnecessary daily travel) to which this gives rise. ?

3. Petrol Pollution "Motor vehicle engines are by far the biggest source of "(air)" pollution" "The speedy development of new or modified power sources for motor vehicles with substantially reduced levels of air and noise pollution should be given the highest priority by the manufacturers".

How ?

4. Environmental Management is seen as the technique for solving ecological problems posed by the rapid development of technology since the industrial revolution (p 35) (Typical examples of this have already been given in points 1.2. and 3. above)

Whilst there is mention of the views of Dr. Paul Ehrlich and Sir MacFarlane Burnet that population growth should be limited in accordance with resource availability, in connection with possible future amendments to population estimates (p. 22) there is no concept of western industrial society consciously taking measures to restrict production of wasteful and unsatisfying commodities as well as population to levels that can re-establish a permanent viable relationship between human society and nature.

In a word, have "Planning Policies" set on a high enough level the ecological challenge ? Instead of taking all current production for granted and confining our concern to " environmental management " of the results, are we not reaching the stage where the ecological desirability of the production of this or that commodity or service has to be examined ? Cleaning up a mess is vital, but minimising the amount of mess produced and energy consumed is even more vital.

SOCIAL FACTORS

1. Recreation One policy objective is stated to be for "significant conservation areas to be preserved in a natural state with a minimum of public disturbance, containing native flora and fauna, geological features, forest stands, landscape and river features of high scenic attraction" (P. 35)

Why then in the table "Figure 10" (on p 55) is "agriculture" shown as "acceptable" to this policy objective ?

2. Restoration of Bushland. Is there anywhere expressed the concept of re-afforestation of suitable areas as Australian bushland for recreational and landscape purposes ? If not why not ?

3. Metro Towns "The growth corridors must not simply be new dormitory areas where residential settlement will occur, but dynamic growth areas where all forms of urban development must be positively encouraged. Each corridor will need to develop its centres of specialised activity around which new communities will be established. Having all modern amenities and facilities such as schools recreation, hospitals and shopping facilities, industrial and commercial employment and professional services" (P68)

Such sweeping and flawlessly correct generalisations! But where are the "dynamic growth areas" to be? If they are to be mini-C.B.Ds with mixed primary uses and intense activity based on high densities, they will in effect be "new towns or "metro towns" within the metropolitan area. But how can we start without starting? So where? where? where?

4. Updated Services Unwittingly the Housing Commission has demonstrated the extremely complex fabric of a city, because by block bull-doing based on the inspiration of only one of man's needs, namely housing, it has stirred up such revolt because man also needs jobs, shops, schools, and a net of official services and unofficial neighbourly connections which are bulldozed too.

The M.M.B.W. regional plan recognises this in a formal style, but there is no hint that the M.M.B.W. planners are grappling positively with forward-going new and restructured services which should have a direct bearing on any forward planning. For example, are the primary schools too big for areas where there are fifty foot frontages so that distance to school is too far for children to walk? Are small health clinics in which are centred preventive, domiciliary - type health and supportive services to the home an urgent necessary investment rather than the continued growth of big centralised hospitals? How can jobs for housewives be provided not too far from their homes?

GROWTH PATTERNS

1. Social Mix One would have thought, after Hugh Stretton's lucid argument about the formerly "taboo" planning problem of how to avoid development of one-type areas (e.g a rich area and a poor area, an old peoples' area etc.) that there would be something on such a vitally basic planning matter. There is only one sentence we can find. "In the central, north and west sectors the aim should be to encourage a greater diversity in the population in terms of occupation, income and ethnic structure and any incentive given.....and they would be needed....should be towards improved levels of amenity. In the North and West Sectors, the establishment of satellite cities would seem to offer one means of achieving this, but the feasibility studies currently being carried out will need to be completed...." (p. 70)

What sort of amenities are going to encourage this better "mix" in the north and the west? In any case, surely the white collar professional non-migrant growth to the east and south is as unbalanced as the industrial migrant growth to the west?

2. Compounding mistakes by forcing development west and north

Background : The 1954 M.M.B.W. report gives all the reasons why the west and north are less favourable residential territory than the south and east... For soil, flat windy plain, low rainfall, all underground services and foundations more expensive, more expensive reticulation of water and electricity (and now natural gas) from the east. So the west has seen the growth of obnoxious industry. It has become the "wrong side of the tracks" for Melbourne.

The Town and Country Planning Board, in 1967 (see map p. 16 of "Organisation for Strategic Planning") recommended an elongated south-eastern corridor and no corridor to the north or west. The Government, however, (see Ministerial statement by R.J. Hamer... "New Town Planning Organisation for Victoria" Hansard 24/2/1968 page 3244) opted for the M.M.B.W. concept, spear-headed by Sir Bernard Evans for a "balanced development" in every direction to centre on the C.B.D.; even if this required subsidy. The 1971 M.M.B.W. "Planning Policies" makes several things clear about recent trends since 1954 and 1967.

1. New population growth to the west is overwhelmingly migrant-industrial-worker growth (from 10% "non-Australian" rose of total in 1947 to 36.1% in 1966) (see appendix 2.1 page 104)

2. Despite this, percentage employment changes of "industrial metals, machines, conveyances" between 1961 and 1966 show + 8.5% growth for the southern sector (the biggest gain) against - 1.1% decline for western sector (the only bigger decline being the central sector) (see Appendix 2.7 page 110).

Question

If the most rapid recent actual growth even of the "heavier industries" has been to the south - east, and if in this direction lies more pleasant as well as more economic residential development, why try to force growth artificially in the other direction? Why not go for a "social mix" in an elongated south - eastern corridor rather than what would inevitably be even more intense and homogeneous concentration of migrant-industrial workers in the west and north if development is subsidised there?

3. Unexplained advocacy of north, north-east and east corridor

It appears that the more urban development in the valley of the Yarra and its tributaries (e.g. the Maribyrnong River, Moonee Ponds Creek, Merri Creek, Plenty River and Diamond Creek etc)

- (a) the more difficult it is to control pollution of the Yarra,
- (b) the more the Yarra is subjected to flooding and consequent flood mitigation works are needed.

"Whatever flood mitigation works are eventually found necessary, it is considered that costs of major magnitude will be involved. However it is considered that it would be unrealistic to put further constraint on development than proposed in this report, and that distribution proposed within the catchment of the Yarra River and its tributaries will result in the least increase in flood potential and will permit maximum deferment of the time when major flood mitigation works will be necessary. The provision of flood mitigation works of high cost must be recognised as essential if increases in population as predicted are to occur in the metropolitan area" (p.58)

Why? What is "unrealistic" in containing development in this direction? Speculative developers undeserved expectations of development? Why incur Melbourne ratepayers in the "costs of major magnitude" to mitigate bigger floods that would better not be invited in the first place? Instead of planning to "defer the time" when major costs for floods and pollution are encountered, why not post-pone it indefinitely by an elongated rapid-transit-based south-eastern corridor?

4. Unexplained "2 bob-each-way" alternatives.

A peculiar departure from the style and policy of presenting one-positive-plan which constitutes the rest of the document occurs on pp 69, 70.

Having planned balanced growth-round-Melbourne corridors to north, south, east and west (which involves very much further and faster growth to west and north, because east and south are already well grown) see "plan 5" (on p. 53) in line with 1968 Government policy pronouncements (see above); the report on p. 69 suddenly presents "alternative 1" and "alternative 2" within the ample room of these corridors.

Now if alternatives based on different value judgements with the value judgements clearly stated were advanced, early in the planning process, one could only applaud

But the alternatives are not of this character! They are rather 2-bob-each-way alternatives. (based on the likely continuation of a parsimonious Federal anti-city financial policy?). They are an opportunists wait-and-see which proves financially more feasible, in the style of "hard-headed", narrow, pragmatic politicians.

"A different course might have to be followed if, at a later stage, it is found that Alternative I ("active encouragement of growth in each of the proposed-corridors simultaneously") is not having the required results. This could arise through the provision of public funds for growth encouragement being spread over too wide a range of corridors, with the result that insufficient impetus is given any one of them. It could also become necessary if accessibility to the Central business District does not keep pace with its expected development" (This is M.M.B.W. jargonise for saying insufficient funds for public transport and free-ways) "resulting in some of the commercial and other uses at present locating in the C.B.D seeking other growth centres where better accessibility can be provided. It could arise if the growing resistance to change and intensification of use in the built up areas, particularly the inner area, continues and the pressures for change and intensification

are not relieved by action in the growth corridors.

"Alternative 2 is a much more radical approach and involves the encouragement of selective growth aimed towards creating a new pattern (our emphasis) "This alternative would involve selecting one or two corridors which have the best potential for growth and concentrating public resources in that direction. The south-eastern corridor would be an obvious choice for this. Action would need to be taken at the public level to channel specialised land use and associated activities into a selected location" (our emphasis) "that would be readily accessible to the future workforce and communities settled in nearby residential areas." "Such location might be based on an existing centre, such as Dandenong, but alternative locations could offer advantages...." (p.p. 68, 69)

Ye Gods ! But this is a somersault and right-about-turn in one! This was the position of the Town and Country Planning Board's "Strategic Planning" in 1968 and the very opposite to the Bernard Evans and the M.M.B.W. "The Future Growth of Melbourne"! The author supports this right-about turn and only hopes that Sir Bernard Evans and the Government can make as neat a mid-air flip as the M.M.B.W. has done. But such decisions should surely rest not on the availability or unavailability of finance from Governments that are conceptualized as taking no notice of their own plans, but as grounds of value judgement (see two preceding sections in which the author's value judgements are apparent) If there is to be a "new pattern" (as indeed it would be because there would be a new strong mini-C.B.D.) Then there is much, much more involved than selecting one corridor at a time and giving selective treatment of one spoke of the wheel, then another. If Dandenong becomes a mini C.B.D. the advantages of development in a corridor way beyond Dandenong immediately becomes apparent.

The M.M.B.W say that "the basic differences between the two alternatives is one of emphasis" and states that Alternative I should be followed at this stage. We say: "let the significance of the difference between the alternatives be phrased as you will provided it means no new corridor spokes to the west, north, north-east or east, and selective development of the south-east spoke, and the Board, incidentally, just about contradicts itself any way when its says....." "It is to be expected that a major part of Melbourne growth will occur in these directions" (east and south-east) "despite any action taken to stimulate growth elsewhere" (p 72) So there! Why not cut out subsidies and give away "growth elsewhere" altogether?

5. Satellites That Aren't. Sunbury is a planned satellite. Within the very wide and long Melton corridor. There is an alternative suggested of a satellite around Melton at the end of the corridor instead of steady development outward.

Do we not confuse ourselves by the very use of the word "satellite" ? If either of these projects ever developed they would be suburbs of Melbourne like any other settlement at such a distance because no small settlements can hope to provide the differentiation of employment and culture to complete with the main metropolitan diversity. They would not be satellites but dormitories with a few work places or educational institutions for a proportion only of the residents.

Further more, would not Sunbury, for example, be a suburb with the ridiculous disadvantage of a stretch of some ten miles of non-urban growth (around Melbourne airport) to traverse for the increasing number of commuters and suppliers, the bigger it grew.

Hugh Stretton suggested a new major city at the gateway to Gippsland connected by a long urban corridor to Melbourne to absorb Melbourne's outward growth (Ideas for Australian Cities). The M.M.B.W.'s area ceases just beyond Cranbourne. Can one expect the M.M.B.W. to adopt a degree of altruism oblivious of its own power position, sufficient to advance a concept of Melbourne's growth such as that of Stretton's which overflowed even its own recent extended area of regional jurisdiction ?

Maybe. We doubt it. Is not bold "strategic" planning by a greatly strengthened Town & Country Planning Board now in order? Otherwise Melbourne may find itself landed with a regional plan which would have been a big step forward in the 1940s, but which, in the context of 1970's is extremely conservative so that ecological and sociological mistakes will agglomerate to the point of impossible crisis.