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CHAPTER 8

PLANNING FOR DISRUPTIVE TRANSPORT TECHNOLOGIES: HOW PREPARED ARE AUSTRALIAN TRANSPORT AGENCIES?

John Stone, David Ashmore, Jan Scheurer,
Crystal Legacy and Carey Curtis

ABSTRACT

In Australia, corporations are playing an increasing role in the shaping of urban regions through their ability to mobilize capital to support large infrastructure projects and to usurp institutional planning roles which have traditionally been the responsibility of public-sector agencies. The chapter outlines emerging evidence of changes in the roles of corporations in generating ideas and mobilizing political support for their favoured city-shaping projects, and shows that the private sector is embedded in the processes of government, such as planning, in increasingly complex ways. Through 'market-led' or 'unsolicited' proposal evaluation frameworks, corporations can now bring proposals to political leaders in ways

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1 embedded in many aspects of urban transport and land-use planning
 2 from the funding of major urban toll roads and the operation, through
 3 franchises, of complex suburban rail operations to the management of
 4 land-title records and the privatization of building inspections. As 'pri-
 5 vated urban monopolies ... control ever larger parts of Australia's
 6 metropolitan estates' (Gleeson, ~~forthcoming~~, p. 183) the capacity for
 7 state agencies to direct the shape of urban development is further hol-
 8 lowed out (Streeck, 2016, p. 72) and corporate ambition is increasingly
 9 fused with state power and resources in what we can call 'corporatized
 10 governance' (Paul, 2016, Ch. 2). This is the context in which planners
 11 in Australian transport and land-use agencies are positioning themselves
 12 to meet the challenges of a possible transformation of urban transport
 13 driven through technological innovation generated by the private
 14 sector.

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15 Even without such constraints, planning in the face of complex change
 16 is a difficult task. Guerra (2016), whose interviews with planners in US
 17 metropolitan planning agencies provided the catalyst for our own project,
 18 lays down a challenge to planners by reminding them of failures to
 19 respond effectively to past technological innovations from the automobile
 20 to the postal service:

23 *Planners may yet again fail to influence the relationship between*
 24 *cities and a new transportation technology by either misunder-*
 25 *standing driverless cars or seeing them as a solution for contem-*
 26 *porary planning problems, such as road congestion or climate*
 27 *change. (p. 211)*

29 Acknowledging this challenge, we support the collective project of
 30 urban planning, if for no better reason than that we believe its laissez-faire
 31 alternative offers little hope of achieving our environmental or social
 32 aspirations for the city survival (see also Chapter 2 in this volume). So, to
 33 shape ^{our} future research and engagement in the future of Australian cities, we
 34 interviewed a small sample of senior staff in Australian transport and
 35 land-use planning agencies to better understand their attitudes to the plan-
 36 ning and regulation of emerging AV technologies. This chapter reports on
 37 the lessons learned in these interviews. We begin by giving some back-
 ground to progress towards AV deployment in Australia and the

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1 environment in which urban planners currently operate as they contem-
2 plate the task of managing the driverless city of the future.

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5 AV DEPLOYMENT AND URBAN PLANNING IN AUSTRALIA:
6 THE CURRENT STATE OF PLAY
7

8 The closure of large General Motors and Toyota plants in late 2017
9 marked the end of local car manufacturing in Australia (ABC, 2017a). So,
10 more than ever, the design of the local car fleet will be decided offshore.
11 However, governments of most States within the Australian
12 Commonwealth are actively competing to attract businesses engaged in
13 the development of AV systems, and trials of various types of vehicles are
14 in progress in several cities (ABC, 2017b; Government of Western
15 Australia, 2016). Local and international telecommunications companies
16 are collaborating with universities in trials of out-of-vehicle communica-
17 tions and guidance systems (Premier of Victoria, 2017); and national agen-
18 cies are working to:

19
20 *... put end-to-end regulation in place by 2020 to support the*
21 *safe, commercial deployment and operation of automated vehi-*
22 *cles at all levels of automation. (National Transport*
23 *Commission, 2017)*

24 Australian drivers – the large majority of whom live in the suburbs of
25 the major cities where a car is a virtual necessity for access to urban life –
26 are becoming aware of AV technology through popular media. And, while
27 only a minority now think that they would purchase an AV, half the urban
28 population apparently see AVs as a viable alternative to public transport,
29 if the price was right (ITLS, 2017). These results suggest that international
30 companies wishing to sell AV technologies in Australian cities will eventu-
31 ally need to find ways to persuade initially reluctant drivers to give up con-
32 trol, but that the first fruitful market for these companies might be found
33 in competition with existing public transport services.

34 The sphere of influence for planners to respond to changes such as AVs
35 has shrunk dramatically in recent decades. We can see this in the example
36 of Victoria, where, as neo-liberalism took hold in the 1990s, the public
37 service was hollowed out and the operation of large metropolitan train

1 and tram systems was franchised. Thus, the capacity for strategic transport
 2 planning was restricted, and even the head of the state planning agency
 3 argued that planners were relatively powerless:

4 *... the importance and – even more, the possibility – of the*
 5 *application of conscious choice to city formation is exaggerated.*
 6 *(Paterson, 2000, pp. 377–386)*

7
 8 And, today, planners in Victoria work in an environment in which reg-
 9 ulation is viewed as ‘red tape’: an imposition on business rather than a
 10 protection for the public (DTF, 2017a). This mindset has permitted the
 11 emergence of new processes that undermine traditional approaches to stra-
 12 tegic urban planning. It is now possible to fast-track private-sector propo-
 13 sals that have political support (DTF, 2017b). These processes are being
 14 used at a city-shaping scale. For example, a current proposal, now in an
 15 advanced stage, will permit construction of a \$AUD 5.5 billion inner-
 16 urban toll-road in Melbourne that had not been foreshadowed in any
 17 metropolitan strategic plan. If it is completed under current terms, which
 18 include mobilization of over \$A 3 billion in private capital, this project
 19 would entrench the monopoly position of the highly profitable toll
 20 operator. This degree of influence over the use of key parts of the urban
 21 road network, combined with a long-term ambition to use its existing toll-
 22 ing technology to roll out electronic road-pricing across the urban road
 23 network (Millar & Schneiders, 2016), puts this company in a powerful
 24 position to form strategic partnerships with the international developers of
 25 AV technologies. These examples illustrate the restricted domain in which
 26 Australian planners operate with respect to the private sector and therefore
 27 the inherent difficulties that they may face in protecting the public good
 28 through the delivery of collective solutions to problems raised in the
 29 deployment of AV technologies.

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 35 PREPARED FOR WHAT? THE CONTEXT FOR INTERVIEWS WITH
 36 AUSTRALIAN PLANNERS

37 International consideration of the objectives for governance of the deploy-
 ment of AVs (ITF, 2017a) points to the need for planners and regulators

1 to evaluate any proposed commercial or public project not only on ques-
 2 tions of safety and liability, but also against objectives including:

- 3 ● reduction of traffic (to foster active travel and mass transit and to sup-
 4 port compact urban form);
- 5 ● reduction of global and local pollutants;
- 6 ● improvement in accessibility to tackle social inequality.

7
 8 To avoid the risk of ‘greenwash’, it is also necessary that any claims on
 9 these questions be supported by publicly verifiable data (see, for example,
 10 discussions within the International Transport Forum (2017b)).

11 A further issue for planning and regulation of AVs is the desired rela-
 12 tionship between the new technologies and existing transit networks.
 13 Some transport planners argue that AVs will be more valuable if they are
 14 integrated with traditional public transport services, and with cycling and
 15 walking, because this allows for a ‘seamless’ experience for users and
 16 greater efficiencies for the use of each mode (Lindsay, 2016; UITP, 2017).
 17 If AVs are to be deployed in ways that provide lower cost structures or
 18 greater operational flexibility to replace or rationalize low-patronage tradi-
 19 tional services, then it seems logical that transit planning agencies will
 20 need a significant degree of control of the information platforms and pay-
 21 ment channels needed to provide new multimodal mobility. This is a task
 22 that innovative agencies internationally are already well-placed to perform,
 23 building on decades of growth in patronage and increasing political and
 24 public support. Transit-planning agencies in German-speaking Europe, in
 25 particular, have practical experience of fare and service coordination
 26 between public and private transit operators and, more recently, with
 27 other mobility services such as car and bike sharing (Goodall et al., 2017;
 28 VDV, 2015), but this does not appear to be the case in Australia, where
 29 urban transit agencies are only recently emerging from decades of declin-
 30 ing patronage and fragile political support (Mees & Groenhart, 2012).

31 To explore these issues, a series of semi-structured interviews were con-
 32 ducted in March and April 2017 with transport and land-use planners and
 33 policymakers. The interviews were framed around the question: how pre-
 34 pared are Australian transport planning agencies for disruptive transport
 35 technologies? The question of preparedness in relation to AV technology is
 36 obviously made more complex by the uncertainty over the timing and
 37 capabilities of any mass market entrant in the field. Guerra (2016), after

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1 surveying US metropolitan planning organizations on their approaches to
 2 the introduction of AVs, found that:

3 *... none of the Metropolitan Planning Organizations most likely*
 4 *to be planning for self-driving cars have incorporated them into*
 5 *their most recent Regional Transport Plans. (p. 213)*

7 He concluded that even though planners were closely following the
 8 evolution of the new technologies, the absence of AVs in their plans was
 9 principally due to uncertainty about the impacts of AVs on road capacity,
 10 traffic safety, land use and travel behaviour. Our research aimed to
 11 explore the extent to which uncertainty was also influencing the responses
 12 of Australian planners to AVs.

13 Participants for the semi-structured interviews were recruited from state
 14 or national transport or planning agencies. Six interviews were conducted,
 15 with an agreement to anonymity of agency and city. Key themes, discussed
 16 in the next section, were identified through an inductive process by which
 17 the most important topics were identified by their frequency and the
 18 emphasis given to them by interviewees (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke,
 19 2006; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

23 FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

25 Uncertainty Hampering Planning

27 Guerra (2016) found that planning agencies in the United States appeared
 28 to be failing to prepare for the deployment of AVs because, as one respon-
 29 dent put it: ‘We don’t know what ... to do about it. It’s like pondering the
 imponderable’ (p. 214).

31 This sentiment was also reflected in our interviews:

33 *The planning cycle and the planning horizons have gone even*
 34 *more crystal ball than they ever were before. It’s very hard to*
 35 *plan in such an environment. If you try and foresee what’s going*
 36 *to happen and try and regulate ahead of the curve, then you are*
 37 *probably going to get something wrong. But then if you leave it*
too long, then you’ll have outdated regulation. [Interviewee 5]

1 Respondents felt that getting regulation wrong was a worse problem
 3 than having outdated regulation, which could, in theory, be improved
 5 upon. So, it was seen as preferable to ‘watch and wait’ and to maintain
 7 dialogue with all parties in the sector, expand and develop the relevant
 9 skill and knowledge base within government agencies, and keep the plan-
 11 ning process as open as possible.

12 While uncertainty in relation to the ultimate form of AV deployment
 14 and its impact is unavoidable, acknowledgement of uncertainty by plan-
 16 ners is not necessarily evidence of unpreparedness. Preparedness might be
 18 better gauged by the extent to which planners are working to devise and
 20 articulate goals for AVs and to formulate means by which to measure their
 22 impact. There was, however, little indication of any push to ~~drive~~^{support} an inte-
 24 grated and purposive agenda. X

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Government: Enabler or Prescriber?

17

18 The degree to which the purpose of government is to prescribe outcomes
 20 or enable the market was a recurrent theme, with the prevailing sentiment
 22 being that bureaucrats were neither technological nor procurement specia-
 24 lists. Again, the tactic appeared to be ‘watch and wait’. Participants consis-
 26 tently pondered the existential choice between laissez faire and directing
 28 the market towards some holistic solution.

25

*... there would need to be a certain level of regulation put in
 26 place by government pertaining to safety, but otherwise it would
 28 be possible for government to step away and allow self-regula-
 30 tion to take place. [Interviewee 6]*

29

30 Given the prevailing climate of political and institutional support for
 32 the private sector over the public, it is not surprising that interviewees gen-
 34 erally accepted that the market be allowed to take things forward with the
 36 state taking a light regulatory approach. The exception being safety: there
 38 are high hopes that AVs will not only reduce traffic accident rates and
 40 severity, but their enormous generation of data will also offer new oppor-
 42 tunities to address remaining road safety challenges through regulatory
 44 intervention. However, the ‘light touch’ on questions other than safety is
 46 likely to have a significant impact on the evolution of the state planning
 48 function. Interviewees, in general, recognized the difference between

1 waiting to see how a sector evolves before enacting an appropriate regula-
 2 tory framework and allowing matters to be taken forward by the market
 3 in a ‘hands-off’ manner. Most tended to support the dominant ideological
 4 view that the government’s role should be as an enabler. The implications
 5 of this standpoint are discussed in Chapter 1 of this volume and explored
 6 through scenarios in Chapter 9.

9 Government as a Facilitator of Integrated Supply

11 Despite the general acceptance of market dominance described in the pre-
 12 vious section, some interviewees felt that there was a need to ensure that
 13 new modes were integrated into a holistic offering. These respondents sug-
 14 gested that this could be done through a ticketing portal or ‘Mobility as
 15 Service’ application, with coordinated (and possibly subsidized) supply for
 16 disadvantaged communities or regional and remote areas (see Chapter 3
 17 for further discussion on the hopes and realities of MaaS). These interview-
 18 ees felt there was an imperative for the state to prevent supply-side frag-
 19 mentation, and to manage social dis-benefits:

21 *If (AVs) become part of an overarching public transport net-*
 22 *work, then what is the regulation guiding that? The policy cer-*
 23 *tainly needs to consider how much is left to an organic market-*
 24 *driven response compared to how much is tied in to a centrally*
 25 *driven public transport service. And what obligations are on the*
 26 *transit authority to have a level of control, to say contract some-*
 27 *one to provide a ... subsidised service, what level of regulation is*
 28 *needed for that? [Interviewee 5]*

31 *There is a growing focus on engagement ... but ... where the*
 32 *commercial motivators of industry don’t always sit well ... I*
 33 *think that government has a role to even the balance ... to ensure*
 34 *that the right outcomes are provided for those less profit-driven*
 35 *areas. [Interviewee 6]*

37 Given current practices, operationalization of this need to provide a
 social safety net would most likely be achieved through complex contrac-
 tual relationships with AV suppliers. As the interviewees themselves

1 agreed, the public sector faces a shortfall in the skills required to do this
 2 effectively.

3 The complexity of this question was illustrated by one respondent
 4 who said:

5 *... an on-demand model for buses rather than regular services ...*
 6 *would give government an opportunity to re-examine the rela-*
 7 *tionship they have with public transport. [Interviewee 4]*

9 This was not meant to imply that governments should retreat from pro-
 10 viding ‘marginal’ bus services, but rather that the new economies of AVs
 11 will require new responses from governments. This was the closest respon-
 12 dents came to acknowledging the need for AVs to operate in ways that
 13 strengthen transit systems as an alternative to the private car, as described
 14 earlier.

17 Public Sector Knowledge Gaps

19 Interviewees stressed that in such a specialized area – far more complex
 20 than traditional transit – the skills needed to critically appraise the bene-
 21 fits of the new technologies, and how to procure them as part of an inte-
 22 grated solution, are underdeveloped:

23 *The capacity of the public sector to understand the drivers that*
 24 *motivate private sector behaviour is going to be really important*
 25 *... A lot of the expertise is going to be held by the private sector,*
 26 *we actually need to build our capacity to be a really informed*
 27 *consumer of services and advice (and) when the private sector*
 28 *holds expertise that the public sector doesn't, it can be very chal-*
 29 *lenging to drive good ... outcomes. [Interviewee 1]*

31 Given the ideological climate in which Australian planners operate, it is
 32 not surprising that some interviewees felt that the public sector generally
 33 does not recognize its own power:

34 *I think that the (private sector is) very aware that they need the*
 35 *active cooperation of governments ... probably more than we ...*
 36 *realise that they need this.... [Interviewee 2]*

1 This comment acknowledges the reality that, despite the rhetoric, busi-
 3 nesses do not want the removal of all government regulation, but rather
 want a predictable environment in which their service can be operated ~~at~~ x
 with consistent returns. It also speaks to the impacts of ‘corporatized
 5 governance’ through which once-clear demarcations of public and private x
 sector roles in policy development, planning and system operations
 7 and maintenance are being re-organized in response to technological
 disruptions.

11 Fragmentation of Effort

13 Interviewees recognized several lines of fragmentation: between politicians
 and planners; between state and national governments; and within the
 15 emerging AV industry itself:

17 *... all policy development requires an authorising environment*
 18 *... As a bureaucracy, we’re limited by the ambitions of our politi-*
 19 *cal masters and their willingness to (explore) innovative areas.*
 [Interviewee 1]

21 *Clearly, there can be competition for investment and jobs and*
 22 *the like, that’s what governments do. But when it comes to the*
 23 *actual technology, the way it’s being deployed, there’s got to be*
 24 *national consistency. [Interviewee 3]*

25 *There are multiple portals in place and perhaps there could be*
 26 *better governance to establish the links between those portals ~~and~~ ...*
 27 *channels, and a public description of what each of them is*
 28 *focussed on, but there’s a bit of competitive tension at the*
 29 *moment which isn’t a bad thing. [Interviewee 6]*

31 Respondents’ views on the issues requiring a regulatory framework
 32 covered a broad range, including an imperative to adhere to emerging
 33 global vehicle and technology standards, given the absence of locally man-
 34 ufactured vehicles and the relative isolation from global supply chains.
 35 The integration agenda, identified as critical in the literature briefly sur-
 36 veyed in our earlier discussion of the international context for the inter-
 37 views, was not explicitly recognized as such by most of the respondents.

1 CONCLUSIONS

3 The uncertainty about the form of the new technologies that Guerra (2016)
5 found to be causing paralysis of action among metropolitan regional plan-
7 ners in the United States was also found in Australia, but the uncertainty
9 goes further to encompass the almost existential crisis of legitimacy and
11 purpose that Australian planners face after decades of neo-liberal doctrines
13 in planning and governance more generally. So, planning institutions as a
15 whole are more likely to be avoiding some of the more difficult challenges.
17 This is unfortunate as there is only a short time available in which planners
19 will be able to formulate possible policy and regulatory responses before
21 the emergence of commercial proposals for permission to deploy new vehi-
23 cle technologies and requests for such things as state provision of communi-
25 cations support or preferential access to road space.

15 The evidence from our interviews suggests that some Australian plan-
17 ners are grappling with these questions, but, outside the questions of safety
19 being pursued by the National Transport Commission, these individuals
21 are only just beginning to articulate the formal and informal processes by
23 which policy and regulation to achieve these outcomes can be created.
25 Further research and engagement is needed to deepen understandings of
27 planners' attitudes and to participate in the development of mechanisms for
29 management of the deployment of AVs. This can be used to open a wider
31 public debate, with all sectors of the AV industry and with civil society, to
33 build consensus around new requirements for planning and regulation.

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