



Town and Country Planning Association

Box 312, Collins Street West P.O., Melbourne 8007

26 July 2002

The Secretary
Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Mr Rowe,

INQUIRY INTO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND COST SHIFTING

Thank you for the invitation to contribute to the above inquiry. The Town and Country Planning Association has a particular interest in the capacity of all levels of government to develop and deliver sustainable planning policies, including land use and integrated transport.

Local Government in Public Transport Planning

Whilst the broad parameters of public transport planning should be set by State government, the detailed planning of services, particularly of local bus services, would be better handled by local government, which has closer knowledge of local conditions and needs.

Urban planners have described Melbourne as consisting of five separate cities: the inner city, the western suburbs, the northern suburbs, the eastern suburbs and the southern suburbs. Melbourne's public transport planning, and to some extent its operations, should be organised along regional lines to reflect this structure.

The suburban railway network and, to a lesser extent, the tram network provide the backbone of Melbourne's public transport. The bus network should provide complementary services, filling the gaps in the rail networks and providing circumferential, feeder and local services.

It is proposed that regional consortia of local governments would plan the bus services operating in their regions. Individual local governments would consult local businesses and residents to determine service needs, and these needs would be fed into regional public transport plans. Service performance and adequacy would be reviewed routinely on a periodical basis (say every 3 years), in which process public input would be sought.

Giving local government a key role in the planning of public transport services would enable them to more effectively manage demand for roads and parking space, link services to intensive land-use and achieve access equity objectives.

Local councils are taking initiatives to encourage more sustainable travel as part of a local commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The City of Melbourne, for instance, has had considerable success with its Travelling Green partnership with Environment Victoria's Smogbuster's program. Regrettably the Commonwealth Government has ceased funding this program, but the City will continue its program through the State government -funded Travelsmart program. These initiatives can be effectively pursued by individual councils, but should be recognised as 'act local' models which are essential components to the success of a national greenhouse strategy and need to be funded accordingly.

Green Wedge and Green Belt Land Use Planning

Urban growth at the expense of the green wedges and belt on the fringes of Melbourne is one of the key strategic planning issues in the current review of planning for Melbourne over the next 30 years.

The factors behind urban sprawl and the loss of green space are many and may be specific to the actual non-urban land involved. Technical Report 2: Green Wedges and Non-urban Issues, prepared as part of the Metropolitan Strategy review has identified the limitations of an approach to green wedges and belts, which under current municipal strategic planning guidelines places greater responsibilities on individual councils to develop policy and manage in isolation fringe non-urban land and the urban boundary.

At the moment there are a few regional based-strategies. To cite Technical Report 2 on green wedge issue 'local government has been pressed by the State Government to develop strategic policies for their individual municipalities leading to a range of differing responses around the metropolitan area.'

In the absence of a clear State or regional strategy covering the objectives of maintaining green areas, the uses and management of non-urban land, as well as State level policies on the 'boundary', individual councils will be subject to the continuous pressures for development of land or rezoning as existing land uses (eg agriculture) become less viable or development opportunities emerge.

The problem is more than one of political pressure from local and other interests. Local government is subject to both the seductions of increased revenue from land developed for urban residential and commercial uses and the financial pressures of the costs of maintaining and protecting environmentally valuable green areas. There are to our knowledge no specific programs to assist local councils to maintain conservation programs which contribute to the overall liveability of metropolitan Melbourne or programs to tackle the difficult issue of less productive agricultural land.

The report referred to above canvasses measures that may be need to maintain rural area land use such as rate relief, financial environmental incentives and direct grants. Local government cannot be expected to bear these financial costs of the various 'sophisticated programs and policies' needed to manage non-urban areas to achieve desirable outcomes.

Ray Walford
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