



Perth Area Consultative Committee

Submission to:

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage

Inquiry Into Sustainable Cities 2025

The Perth Area Consultative Committee is part of the national network of Area Consultative Committees funded under Regional Services from the Department of Transport and Regional Services. The area of operation of the Perth ACC covers 27 local government authorities across the Perth metropolitan area and extends from the outer areas of Yanchep Two Rocks in the north to Mundaring, Kalamunda in the east, south to Armadale and west to Cockburn.

This submission is an overview of some of the issues faced by the urban sprawl and a summary of the practical initiatives and approaches undertaken to address the social and economic impacts of urban development in the northern metropolitan areas of Perth. These projects have all been undertaken with a whole government and community approach and reflect the importance of a multi layered and long term commitment to sustainable urban development.

The following terms of reference are addressed;

- The environmental and social impacts of sprawling urban development
- Measures to reduce the environmental, social and economic costs of continuing urban expansion

Core- Periphery Urban Development

The development of the Perth Metropolitan area has spread outwardly from the city centre at a pace of around one kilometre per year for the last thirty years. Current projections of urban development show that this trend is set to be continued with planning for major developments already reaching the outer metropolitan planning limits.

Urban growth at this rate and the resultant environmental, economic and social impacts are unsustainable and as such comprehensive strategies need to be developed to address these issues. Wealth and opportunity are pulled towards city centres and the outer urban fringes are becoming increasingly disconnected from economic growth and consequently are beginning to show social costs of this growth pattern.

The marginalisation of these communities is measured by higher rates of unemployment, high rates of welfare dependency, low school retention rates and lack of infrastructure such as public transport, public and community and social services and recreational opportunities.

Employment concentration and in particular, the high skill-high wage jobs are concentrated in the central and western suburbs of Perth reflecting the global - parochial city divide. These suburbs attract high flyers and knowledge based workers who want to live close to their work. The inner areas are rich in public and private infrastructure for quality employment, training and self-development and as a consequence, Perth's outer suburbs are being abandoned by young, wealthy professionals.

A trend analysis of the demographic profile of several outer metropolitan areas supports this scenario as it shows that people leave the area in their late teens and early twenties. There is an increasing trend for "reverse commuting" by highly qualified professionals choosing to live close to the central city with its stimulating environments, high amenity and life style factors and working in the relatively fewer highly skilled positions in outer urban areas. This is reflected in labour mobility which exhibits a direct relationship between skills and mobility. In the outer metropolitan area, several Local Government Authorities have a high proportion of professional people working in the area who do not live in the area.

The outer areas have the potential to become marginalised as these areas are characterised by dormitory suburbs, lower skilled and more casual jobs, workers who lack the requisite skills to compete for jobs in the new economy and lower incomes. For people living in these areas, a greater percentage of their income is spent in travel costs and this situation is likely to increase with the declining production of petroleum further forcing up fuel costs over the next decade. People living in outer suburban areas with long distances to travel to work will be further disadvantaged as travel to work costs put a heavy strain on household budgets and quality of life.

The level of schooling and qualifications of the outer metropolitan suburbs is generally lower than that of inner metropolitan areas. This will be a negative factor in the attraction of highly skilled new economy industries to the outer urban areas and may limit the ability of local people to compete in the new economy. The issue in the short term will be to provide sustainable employment to complement the existing skills base of residents while facilitating the development of new industries that will build and feed on the strengths of the locality.

Accessible employment in local areas, mixed use development opportunities and home based business relocate economic activity to the community and leads to sustainable growth from the power generated within the system. These measures maintain a strong economic base, better utilise the available workforce and capture the spending capacity of the local population.

The provision of a social infrastructure, which caters for all ages and cultural groups has the potential to reduce marginalisation and social exclusion by better access to facilities, education and community services.

A sustainable community results from a long term integrated systems approach to developing and achieving a healthy community by jointly addressing economic, environmental and social issues.

The following section provides some practical initiatives and approaches undertaken to address the social and economic impacts of urban development in the northern metropolitan areas of Perth.

Ellenbrook

This development in the north east sector of Perth has been designed to reflect the West Australian Liveable Neighbourhoods Sustainable Cities Initiative. It has several neighbourhoods clustered around a town centre containing schools, community and commercial centres. The development has an interconnected network of streets with perimeter block development and frontage to streets and open spaces, a wide choice of housing types (including public housing), mixed land use planning and walkable neighbourhoods in a radius around neighbourhood centres.

Although the development is nodal in nature and reduces automobile dependence internally, it is not fully serviced by a public transit network to link with areas of high employment density and as such vehicle ownership and dependency is still high.

As a development on the urban fringe, Ellenbrook has the potential to intensify problems of social isolation, low employment self-sufficiency and limited economic sustainability. Proactive strategies have been implemented to address these factors. Perth ACC has been part of a working group consisting of the property developers, local government, community organisations and business which has undertaken the following approaches to address both economic and social issues:

- Community Development Fund with property developers and local government to fund initiatives such as playgrounds, sporting equipment, community centres.
- Business incubator housed in mixed use development areas to support business start-ups and provide premises for the progression of these businesses.
- Proactive Home Based Business strategies such as seminars, and the liaison with project homebuilders to develop elevations or project homes with specific areas designed for home business use.
- Support for youth projects
- Active liaison with job search and assistance agencies
- Development of the Ellenbrook Employment Strategy

City of Joondalup

Perth ACC took part in the City of Joondalup Enquiry by Design process to review the performance of some of its older outer suburbs. The review focussed on developing measures to enhance the economic, social and environmental sustainability of predominately dormitory suburbs with very low levels of employment self sufficiency and high economic leakage. These suburbs were all planned in the early 1970's and were designed to separate home, work and community facilities. They are all highly vehicle dependent, have a single housing style and have reduced connectivity of streets and roads.

The following headings analyse some of the proposed changes in relation to economic, social, environmental and human liveability measures. While all the proposed changes were based on world best practise sustainable urban principles, they were overturned by pressure from local residents who saw the changes as threatening to their existing lifestyle.

Economic Efficiency

The redevelopment of brown field sites is cheaper than the infrastructure costs of greenfield sites in outer metropolitan areas both economically and socially. The necessary infrastructure is already in place, public and community services already established and the surrounding population provides the critical mass necessary for businesses and recreational venues to be viable.

Zoning changes to allow medium to high density residential developments and mixed use development within walking distance of shops and public transport will improve the economic viability of suburbs by encouraging local employment, increasing demand for services created by more residents and reducing the need for work related travel.

Improvements in urban amenity, accessibility and the opportunity to work close to home or from home based businesses are all factors in reducing economic leakage and improving employment self sufficiency. Reduced vehicle dependence would occur as a result of increasing street connectivity, building footpaths, improving street amenity and lighting and encouraging public transport and services within walking or cycling distances.

Social Equity

Social equity is enhanced by the project as services and improved public transport become more accessible to those without cars, the elderly, single parents and children. An increase in the types of housing available and its location near transit areas and services will also assist social equity as poorer people are no longer marginalized in fringe developments.

Access to employment opportunities will increase as a result of direct measures such as encouraging mixed use development and home based employment and also as a result of the flow-on effect of increased demand and consumption of a healthy economy generated within the area.

Better access to the rail public transport makes it easier to access educational facilities, cultural events and social activities thereby increasing equity and opportunity for the residents of the neighbourhoods.

Environmental Responsibility

Inner suburban redevelopment, better access to public transit systems and the reduction in work related travel all reduce vulnerability to oil crises. The reduction of arable land through increased sprawl is also reduced by encouraging retro fitting and increasing housing densities in existing suburbs. Traffic impacts are also reduced by plans to increase connectivity and improve pedestrian and non motorized transport options through the suburbs.

Human Livability

Increasing the opportunities for community interaction through people based planning such as quality pedestrian facilities, increased street amenity with lighting, public spaces, walk trails and recreational and community activities, all increase the livability of the region. Community cohesion and the perception of public safety is enhanced by passive surveillance and access to quality public spaces.

The ease of access to the regional services and recreational facilities in Joondalup City is increased by a more efficient and extended public transport system allowing the opportunity for unplanned interaction and a more equitable lifestyle for the community. Diverse forms of housing developments within easy walking distance of local facilities such as shops and schools also increase the liveability of the city.

The four factors of economic efficiency, social equity, environmental responsibility and human liveability were seen as having an equal consideration in the development of plans and strategies to address issues faced by the Joondalup area.

City of Wanneroo

As the fastest growing outer metropolitan council, the City of Wanneroo is taking active steps to ensure that its growth is undertaken in a sustainable manner. One of the initiatives being formulated as part of the City's Economic Development Strategy is a Local Employment Policy focusing on employment generation in greenfield sites. Perth ACC has been involved in the development of this policy along with all levels of government, planning agencies, community and economic development practitioners and land developers. Planning approval from the City is contingent on land developers of lots in excess of 200 undertaking to implement land use options and strategies which increases the capacity for local employment generation as well as providing for community development initiatives. New developments also have the provision for dwelling diversity with housing options for singles, non-traditional families and elderly people seeking smaller homes with less upkeep. This not only increases residential density, but provides a more diverse community and is in line with the changing household composition of increasing numbers in these categories.

Another initiative the City has undertaken is the Eco-Detour project (Automotive Skills Centre for Youth) which seeks to incorporate environmental solutions to social and economic issues faced by the area. The project has received support from business and community as well as Federal Government funding from the Regional Assistance Programme. Eco-Detour will use car bodies and parts abandoned in an environmentally sensitive area as resources for training disadvantaged youth in automotive skills. The economic benefits of this project will be an increase in the skilled workforce for the area and the income generated from the sale of the restored cars and parts will provide part of the cash flow for a viable automotive skills centre.

Suburban fringe developments in this area are encroaching on arable soil which affects the existing economic base of the area as well as having the potential to place huge environmental strains on ground water and waterways. Legislation to protect existing agriculture areas has been implemented at State level with legislation enacted protecting the rural areas of Wanneroo and Swan from urban encroachment.

Conclusion

Only integrated strategies and plans for urban restructuring can be ecologically effective, economically viable and socially acceptable. Sustainable development strategies that favour local approaches and are small scale with bottom up involvement and commitment have the most chance of success as they provide the level of amenity required by the people living in those areas.

Sustainable economic, social and environmental development calls for a holistic approach to planning, incorporating all levels of government and the community working together to achieve long term gains. As the process is long term, multi layered and interlocking, it is very difficult to isolate indicators that will attribute changes to any one action.

I look forward to the findings and recommendations of this committee and following how these will be translated into government policy and direction.

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