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SUBMISSION TO

~~THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE~~

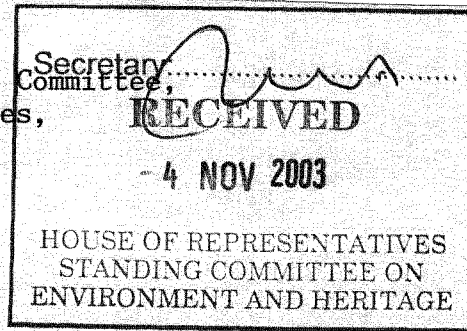
Discussion Paper

SUSTAINABLE CITIES 2025

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### **SUSTAINABLE CITIES 2025 - Discussion Paper**

The inquiry into sustainable cities seeks to identify how government policy might ensure that developed areas retain an Australian lifestyle without diminishing the future value of Australian eco-systems.

**What is an Australian lifestyle?**

**How does one define an Australian lifestyle in today's multicultural society?**

Older Australians may think of Australian lifestyle in terms of growing up in the country, riding a horse five miles to the nearest school, swimming and learning to swim in the irrigation channels during hot summer days.

Later, after possibly moving to the city to find work, the Australian lifestyle might become a modest home with a front garden, a backyard with a vegie patch, room for children to play and a shed to potter in. Backyard barbecues and trips to the beach in summer then become typical of the Australian lifestyle.

But what happens to the front and back yards, sheds and play space when pressure for urban consolidation occurs due to a dramatic population increase in cities?

**How has this impacted on the Australian lifestyle?**

How ironic that with Australia's vast open spaces, 80% of the population is crammed into cities around the coastline, and by so doing, foul our own nest. The outward spread of residential development means that private and public open space in the cities is diminished because of the need, it is claimed, to curb urban sprawl, with urban consolidation in older established suburbs using in-fill development.

**How then to retain the Australian lifestyle and importantly, Australia's eco-system?**

Significantly the issues paper fails to mention one of the most important means of addressing the questions raised, that is how to retain the biodiversity of Australia and equitable access to all services, while there is a population increase due to an immigration program which results in settlement in major coastal cities.

The initial move then is to limit the migrant intake to levels that won't increase the demand for housing, deplete further scarce water resources and intensify urban sprawl into productive farm land on the city fringes.

Tim Colebatch, quoted in the AGE 26-6-03 in a letter from the National Director of Sustainable Population Australia claims that:-

"All policy makers must realise the limitations on further development on this arid continent - one that will be 20% drier in the southern half if the CSIRO is right about climate change."

Furthermore any talk of settling large concentrations of people in inland Victoria is laughable according to Jenny Goldie National Director ASP.

Katherine Betts in **The Great Divide**, believes that there is "an active growth lobby in Australia, with a core drawn from the building and construction industries which has a clear economic interest in higher migration." (p3)

The author spells out the impact on residential amenity of continued population growth in cities when she says:-

"Population growth can reduce access to uncrowded parks and beaches and to low-density housing. (All a feature of the Australian lifestyle). It can reduce the space between neighbours that minimise friction over loud stereos, dogs and neighbour car repairs. It can increase traffic volumes and lengthen the frustration of getting to work or the shops. It eliminates safe places for children to play outdoors and increase the need to supervise them for a longer period of their lives...Because Australians value their detached houses, gardens, space for hobbies and family entertaining they see the loss of these amenities a real cost." (p.52)

"as more people are accommodated in existing cities, some property owners make windfall gains, land developers, speculators and builders enjoy easy profits, and people who are more affluent can continue to buy living space which used to be available to the majority." (Betts p.53)

It appears that the Federal Government's Discussion Paper is asking the people most affected by inflated immigration, which impacts on what is presumed to be the Australian lifestyle, to come up with solutions to the problem of urban sprawl, over-crowding and resource depletion.

Recommendations arising from forthcoming submissions will be "bandaids" only, and until future Liberal and Labor Governments realise the need for a reduction in migrant intake we can expect a "business as usual approach" by the powerful construction lobby and therefore further degradation of Australia's eco-systems and lifestyle."

## TRAFFIC

How to curb urban sprawl without reducing the liveability of the old established middle ring suburbs with their trade mark private open space and gardens?

The Minister for Local Government, R.J.Hamer quoted from a 1966 MMBW Report that:-

"nobody could contemplate a future metropolis of seemingly endless suburbs spreading outwards indefinitely." (Quoted in Suburban Backlash p.103) and so an anti-sprawl movement became concerned with the supposed financial benefits of utilising what was claimed to be "under-used infrastructure" in existing suburbs.

The Brack's Labor Government also seized on the supposed financial benefit of utilising existing infrastructure for in-fill development in older established suburbs. The **Melbourne 2030 Strategy** advocates building around shopping strips and railway stations in what are termed activity centres to encourage living and working in the centres, or using public transport to access their workplace or destination elsewhere.

Unfortunately metropolitan Melbourne is now a dispersed city and the public transport system no longer meets the needs of the workforce as it once did when more people were employed in the city. Today:-

"Only 12% of the population travelled to the city to work, while 58% worked in the region and 20% in adjacent areas." (Suburban Backlash p103.)

The question then arises of the necessity, or desirability, of creating high density, high rise development around stations, a mandatory policy of M 2030, if public transport is unable to provide the services to justify high density development in what are low density, middle ring suburbs often in heritage areas.

In support of the contention that high density development around public transport nodes doesn't necessarily increase the use of public transport, Paul Mees, *A Very Public Solution* quotes Breheny who states that:- 3.

"high rise housing estates built around Paris in the period since WWII are as dense as any city anywhere, but notorious for poor public transport and high car usage. Clearly density by itself does not change travel patterns: the form and structure of urban areas remains important. So also does transport policy including the attractiveness of non-car modes of transport." (p.91)

This example is borne out by another report "**Planning for Public Transport in the Future**" Jenny Morris, Fei Wang and Mike Berry. 2002. The State Government's M 2030 Strategy's target is to lift public transport's share of motorised travel to 20% by 2020. The conclusion reached in the report was that this target was unrealistic without radical government intervention which could take the form of **charging motorists the real cost of car use and a massive injection of funds to up-grade public transport.**"

Local government planners who are prepared to restrict parking provisions for high density housing in activity centres 400 metres from a transport node, is also an option though this is not happening in all cities at present.

Morris also reports that **"Significantly, vehicle ownership by single person households residing in the central city increased by about 20% from 0.60 to 0.72 per household. This is particularly significant given the good levels of public transport that are available in these areas.** (p.11)

**John Whitelegg, Professor of Environmental Studies, Liverpool John Morris University** describes the impact of traffic noise and pollution on the health of the population in English towns and cities.

"Living in urban Europe is increasingly bad for health of the population... but the car brings freedom, mobility, status and opportunity. Redesigning a built environment to downgrade the importance of this particular piece of technology poses a threat to lifestyles, industries and professions in a way that is new, and it is this newness that of itself harbours the bigger problem." (p.3)

As a solution to this problem the report's author gives examples of European cities which have embarked on car free experiments in 26 cities in Germany, as well as Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Edinburgh and Vienna. This involves physical barriers and restrictions. Car free residential areas are frequently over-subscribed revealing a large latent demand for living opportunities of this kind. **Shared vehicle arrangements and easy means of vehicle hire reduce pressure to own a car and is known as Statt Auto.**

**How would this policy work in our dispersed city of Melbourne? Would the Statt Auto system help to create a sustainable city?**

This model could possibly operate reasonably well in inner city areas if the residents could be persuaded to forego ownership of a vehicle in favour of hiring a car for out of town journeys. Suburbs like Glen Eira, for example, have a choice of three tram and three train services to choose from. Residents in this and similar well serviced suburbs may respond positively to relinquishing car ownership if it meant helping to create a sustainable city.

For the middle ring and fringe suburbs, the Statt Auto option would be more difficult to sell since public transport services are inadequate being infrequent, costly and thought to be unsafe, particularly by women. Bus services in some areas run an hourly service especially after 7pm and many don't operate over the weekend.

**As a result the car has become one of the most potent symbols of the Australia lifestyle.**

Public transport costs for low income and disabled Victorians is highlighted by Gavin Duffy in a VCOSS report April 1998. The privatisation of the public transport system was of concern to VCOSS who wanted the following issues addressed:-

- \* safety of service
- \* access to services
- \* reliability of services

The study found that:-

" As a percentage of expenditure full time wage and salary earners spend 16.1% of their total expenditure on transport costs while part time wage and salary earners spend 17.5% of their income on transport costs."

When transport costs are assessed as a percentage of income, the lowest paid 20% of the population spends 21.4% on transport while the highest paid 20% spend 10% of income on transport. A VCOSS survey of emergency relief agencies has found that 11.5% indicated that they were seeking assistance for transport costs.

**Low income groups have been forced to re-locate to fringe areas to obtain cheaper housing and are therefore most disadvantaged by fare increases.**

## HOUSING

While higher density housing sited around transport hubs and activity centres is a major policy initiative of Melbourne 2030, the policy also states that there **must be affordable housing in these locations**. Should this ever occur, low income groups would benefit from access to public transport and community facilities, however planners have as yet been unable to devise a method of ensuring that high density housing will be "affordable" for low income earners in prime real estate areas around transport hubs. Rather duplexes and townhouses currently being built close to transport and activity centres in middle ring suburbs are expensive, thus defeating the purpose of attracting greater public transport use and affordable housing for those most in need.

**Are urban hubs and communities concentrated around public transport nodes an appropriate future model to suit Australian lifestyle needs?**

If we accept that the Australian lifestyle is one in which Australians place great importance on having their own plot of land - their own private open space to grow a garden or provide play space for children, then communities concentrated around public transport nodes in mixed use zones is not an appropriate model in which an Australian lifestyle can flourish.

Articles in the real estate sections of the nations papers constantly report that certain suburbs are eagerly sought by families because of closeness to public parks and the properties for sale have plenty of space for play and recreation.

The Age 5-10-03 reported:-

"They are going for a big back yard. When people are single they live in the inner suburbs like Elwood and St Kilda and then, as soon as they have kids, they leave to move out to larger housing." (Valuer Peter Hay of Hay Property Consultants)

Certainly provide high density, high rise in the inner city CBD for those who prefer that lifestyle, but there are other means of transforming existing suburbs into more sustainable forms of living rather than depriving middle ring suburbs of their space, gardens and back yards.

To begin, with although blocks of land on greenfield sites are much smaller than formerly, the size of houses built on the sites are larger, often built boundary to boundary, leaving no room for a tree(s) with a spreading crown or play space.

Australia is reported to have a declining birth rate and yet houses currently being built have three or four bedrooms, several bathrooms and often a pool despite the well publicised water shortage predictions. By contrast one of the reasons given for the need for urban consolidation is that there is an ageing population seeking smaller housing, but the diversified housing offered is invariably two-storey, unsuitable surely for an ageing population.

The bulk of housing or development sites, lack open space and permeable surfaces to absorb stormwater suggesting that this is an area where more sustainable forms of planning and building needs to be implemented before creating high density ghettos around transport hubs.

Ann R.M. Young writing in **Environmental Change in Australia since 1788** states:-

"Cities are importers of materials and energy. Sand and gravel come from beach dunes & river flood plains to be used in concrete for buildings, foundations, kerbing and driveways. Blue metal is quarried and brought in as road base and a component of some concrete. Timber is harvested from forests and plantations to provide building frameworks, fencing and furniture." (p.162)

Clearly then some attention could be given by the building industry to the extravagant use of finite materials for the construction of ostentatious housing. Alternatively, if housing was designed to include space on site for energy efficient landscaping using trees for summer shade and winter shelter, then there would be reduction in energy use for cooling and heating.

#### CONCLUSION

If the Commonwealth is genuinely interested in promoting ecological sustainable patterns of settlement then:-

1. Stabilising population growth by reducing the migrant intake is an essential first step.
2. Diverting money planned for freeway construction to an injection of funds to improve public transport - especially rail services to the regions and country towns. Use of rail instead of dangerous and damaging (to roads) use of road transport for freight carriage.
3. **Affordable housing** close to transport, schools, recreation and medical facilities for low income groups rather than allowing developers to profit from expensive in-fill in the transport hubs close to these facilities as is the case in Victoria at present.
4. Encourage sustainable use of finite building materials, use of energy efficient landscaping, creation of open space/ parks within 150-300 metres safe walking distance from all developments to encourage exercise for the physical and mental health of the community.

It is hoped that the Australian lifestyle encompasses "the idea of being wise citizens of the planet recognising that we share it with all other species and that we hold it in trust for all future generations. (Professor Ian Lowe in Sustainable Population Australia: September 2003 No.59 p.7.)

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