Onward, Outward, Upward?
A Review of Contemporary Australian Metropolitan Growth Policies

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Abstract
All five of Australia's largest metropolitan areas are actively considering the best policy framework to
deal with anticipated growth. For SE Queensland and Perth the pressures are immediate and powerful
as burgeoning economies and significant inward migration put a premium on developable land. The
pressures in Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide are less intense but remain an issue in the longer term.
Cities which have opted for Urban Growth Boundaries are faced with a significant decision as to the
elasticity of those boundaries and the relationship between urban consolidation and expansion.  This
paper makes a comparative review of current growth strategies for the major Australian metropolitan
areas (Melbourne, Sydney, Perth, Adelaide and SE Queensland) and specifically seeks to address
two fundamental questions:
What is the chosen strategy to accommodate growth - urban consolidation, extensions to existing
urban growth boundaries, the expansion of townships beyond the existing urban boundary, the
designation of land for new settlements?
What are the proposed arrangements for implementing and assessing proposals for development in
new growth areas, including the roles and responsibilities of state and local governments, the
establishment of growth area authorities, commissions or assessment panels?

1.  Introduction
In the early years of the 21st century, metropolitan planners in Australian cities are faced with a
number of significant challenges. Most of these are not new – the desire to curb urban sprawl, the
imperative of providing affordable housing and the need to fund the timely provision of infrastructure
and services. But there is also now a new imperative to respond to climate change by making cities
less vulnerable and more resilient to the inevitable consequences of global warming. The nature of the
challenges varies somewhat from place to place and so, to some extent, do the responses. This paper
seeks to provide a snapshot of current metropolitan strategies, with particular reference to the ways in
which they are seeking to accommodate future growth and to the means by which the strategies are
intended to be implemented. The principal purpose of this paper is to review current metropolitan
plans for five Australian city regions – Perth, Adelaide, Sydney, Melbourne and South-East
Queensland. The review draws primarily upon published sources. It examines the leading strategies
set out in these plans and the methods proposed to implement them. Institutional arrangements and
processes vary from state to state but there are some common elements. The paper concludes with a
comparison of the five selected metropolitan areas, seeking to establish common approaches and
trends. The paper represents the first step in a more detailed comparative study of contemporary
metropolitan growth strategies.

2.  Earlier metropolitan plans and their implementation – a brief historical review
The history of attempts to anticipate and shape the future growth of Australian cities, together with the
evolution of the institutional arrangements for planning over the past 50 or so years, are now fairly
well-documented (see, for example, Logan, 1987; Hamnett and Freestone, 2000; Gleeson and Low,
2000 XXXXXXX). Much has changed over that period, but there have also been some enduring
themes. The early years after the Second World War saw the release of several ambitious plans for
Australia’s major cities. This was an era when high economic growth, rapid population increases and
the new availability of cheap motoring fuelled rapid urban expansion. These ‘first-round’ plans (Logan,
1987, p.50) were influenced by long-established British planning concepts – new towns, green belts,
‘slum’ clearance projects and, to a lesser extent, public housing – overlain by a growing enthusiasm
for freeways.

Hugh Stretton, writing in 1970 in Ideas for Australian Cities put forward a vision for a linear, corridor-
based city extending north from Adelaide and implemented by a government prepared to countenance
strongly interventionist land development policies.
The state is already an experienced converter of rural to urban land: let it now monopolize that business, so that the only way of converting rural to urban land is to pass it through the hands of the public developer. Most of the cumbersome effort to plan new development by statutory maps and complex ordinances and restrictive pressure on land prices can be dispensed with…'(1989, p.159).

Stretton’s ideas were fanciful in 1970 but the policies of the Whitlam Government in collaboration with the South Australian labor government meant that, by 1975, the South Australian Land Commission and the South Australian Housing Trust had most of the next generation’s supply of residential land in their ownership. Land banking was seen as important in overcoming the inequities in land prices caused at times of high growth and through land speculation and the propensity of private land owners to withhold land from development. But government support for this degree of intervention in land markets in Australian states fell away quickly after the demise of the Whitlam government (see Troy, 1978; Bramley, 1997; and Gleeson and Coiacetto, 2007). Interest in long-term spatial strategies for the cities also fell from favour in the latter part of the 1970s and a concern with future urban form was replaced by an emphasis on the better management of urban systems, the detailed forecasting and programming of urban land requirements and the better co-ordination of government agencies having major influences on urban development (Huxley, 2000).

The 1980s saw a resurgence of interest in long-term, ‘visionary’ strategic metropolitan plans (Lennon, 2000; Bunker, 1995; Neutze, 1988) and, by the end of this decade, a style of metropolitan planning strategy was found in most major cities characterised by a continuing concern for urban consolidation; a desire to integrate social, economic and physical policies; the coordination of land development with transport, water supply, schools, hospitals and other community services; more explicit strategies for developing employment and attracting investment; policies designed to ameliorate the problems of areas of social disadvantage; and a new emphasis on environmental protection and natural resource management. Urban consolidation and the development of new denser housing forms on smaller blocks were encouraged by the Hawke Labor government as a means of providing more affordable housing. Many of the features of the metropolitan strategic plans which emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s can still be seen in contemporary plans, including a concern for ‘whole of government’ approaches - the coordination of all relevant government agency programs and the establishment of a close relationship between strategic infrastructure proposals and state government budgetary processes, underpinned by metropolitan development programs for matching land release and infrastructure requirements to population and household growth.

However, in the late 1980s and 1990s the role of government in the public provision of infrastructure and housing came under further challenge and there was increased interest in development charges, ‘user pays’ approaches and various forms of public-private partnership. The Commonwealth government returned briefly to the urban policy arena through the Howe-Keating ‘Better Cities Program’ but this had little of the radical intent of the Whitlam era, although Orchard saw, in its affirmation of support for urban containment and denser housing, a very significant shift in intellectual and policy approaches to Australia’s cities ‘towards a view which challenged Australian housing preferences and city structure as too expensive and inefficient, not environmentally sustainable and as reproducing social disadvantage’ (1995, p.85). The Better Cities program did not survive the election of the conservative Howard government in 1996 and the period since then has largely been one of continuing dominance of a neo-liberal orthodoxy which questions the importance of public planning and which prefers the adoption of market solutions to urban policy issues wherever possible. Changes to state legislative arrangements for implementing plans in the 1990s and thereafter have likewise been influenced by micro-economic reform arguments in support of facilitating economic development.

A major change to the language of metropolitan plans in the past few years has been in the explicit acknowledgment of the vulnerability of Australian cities to the consequences of climate change and all recent plans now stress how their particular mix of policies will lead to the attainment of more resilient and sustainable cities (see, for example, Searle, 2004; Gleeson, Darbas and Lawson, 2004). A central premise of these policies continues to be urban consolidation, now generally presented as part of a ‘compact city’ strategy to reduce the urban ‘footprint’ and the amount of motorised travel. This is subject to criticism by some on the grounds both of the impracticality of seeking to change Australia’s low density settlement pattern in the short-term and also because of the threat to egalitarian principles which is felt to exist in higher density cities. The argument that attempts to check the outward growth of cities leads to reductions in land supply, and to rising land and housing costs, is a politically important one in the early years of the twenty-first century when Australia is facing a serious crisis in housing affordability.
3. Contemporary metropolitan growth strategies

Following the brief historical context sketched in the first part of the paper, this section now provides a summary of the main elements of contemporary metropolitan growth strategies in the five city-regions which have been selected for study.

Melbourne

*Melbourne 2030* is the current metropolitan strategy for Melbourne and provides the strategic overview for the city's development in the first quarter of the twenty first century. Melbourne currently anticipates a growth of 347,000 dwellings by 2030. Of these the majority (approx 60%) will be accommodated within the existing built-up area and the remaining 40% on greenfield sites (DSE, 2006). A key to accommodating this growth is an extension of Melbourne’s urban growth boundary in five designated areas. These areas are the subject of strategic land use plans which seek to create sustainable communities with sufficient infrastructure and jobs to support a substantial population increase in each. The Victorian government is committed to maintaining a 15 year minimum supply of land for housing and industry, regarding sufficient supply as the key mechanism for assuring affordability of housing. The urban growth boundary was introduced in 2002 to help manage outward growth. It set an interim boundary to protect Melbourne's highly valued farming, conservation and recreation areas, but indicated that the boundary around the five growth areas would be subject to review in the light of growth area development needs in the longer term. Smart Growth Committees were appointed in 2003 to carry out the review during 2004-05. On advice from the committees about future development, and in light of the government's commitment to maintain a 15-year minimum land supply for housing and industrial development, the urban growth boundary has been amended and in some areas now accommodates a 25 year land supply. The urban growth boundary changes are detailed in the planning scheme amendments approved by the Minister for Planning in November 2005, and are indicated on the growth area framework plans in ‘A Plan for Melbourne’s Growth Areas’. Policy suggests that gross residential densities in growth areas will aim at achieving 15 dwellings per hectare rather than the city wide average of 10 dwellings per hectare. Twelve new major activity centres have been identified in the planning of the growth areas (Growth Areas Authority, 2006).

The designated growth areas are an extension of Melbourne’s well established corridor development policy. Increased development densities both within the existing city and in the growth corridors are a stated policy aim, though it is too early to make any judgements on the effectiveness of this approach. It is increasingly clear that the approach to growth taken here is incremental. More growth areas may be designated in due course and existing growth areas may expand in order to increase land supply and competition between developers in the interests of affordability.

Sydney

The Sydney Metropolitan Strategy, *City of Cities* (Department of Planning, NSW, 2005) is the key document in looking at long term growth of the Sydney Metropolitan area. It covers the Sydney region together with the Central Coast, the Lower Hunter and the Illawarra. Sydney is planning for around an extra 1-1.4 million residents over the next 25-30 years. This equates to about an extra 450,000 dwellings. Some of this growth (between 30-40%) or 181,000 dwellings will be in two designated growth areas. These are located in the North West and the South West of the city. In contrast to previous fringe area growth, a more comprehensive approach, which recognises best practice environmental management and sustainability criteria was recognised as necessary in 2004. The logic for establishing the growth areas rests on the argument that, if no further greenfield land were to be identified for urban development in Sydney, the proportion of dwelling growth in established areas would increase to 90% of total dwelling growth within 15 years. An approach to managing growth with limited greenfield development would require a significant shift from single houses towards villas, townhouses and apartments in established urban areas. A limited greenfield land supply could add to price pressures on existing housing in Sydney and regional areas. If this was to occur, it is likely that the greenfield land supplies in the Illawarra and Central Coast would be developed at a much faster rate than currently planned. Without significant economic development opportunities in these regions, people would commute from even further away. Additional land for greenfield development is therefore required. Sydney has not opted for a formal Urban Growth Boundary, though the two Growth Centres will be bounded by a cordon beyond which development is restricted.
Perth

Network City is Perth’s fourth and current metropolitan plan released in 2004. It claims to be distinctive in the high level of community involvement which went into its preparation. It is underpinned by a ‘whole-of-government’ approach and its overall vision is for Perth to develop as a sustainable city, accessible by public transport and multi-centred in character (WAPC, 2004).

Metropolitan Perth in 2001 had a population just under 1.4 million, with a further 63,000 people living just to the south of the city in the Peel region. The projected population to 2031 of Perth and Peel is 2.22 million, an increase of 52%, which translates into a need for an additional 375,000 new homes. In 2003 the density of dwellings in Perth was 12.7 per net hectare. Network City aspires to an overall target of providing 60% of new dwellings in existing urban areas and 40% in new growth areas in the next 30 years. Preliminary assessment indicates potential for approximately 192,500 homes within activity corridors and centres in existing urban areas, assuming that an average density of 20 dwellings per net hectare can be achieved. This leaves a shortfall of 29,500 dwellings, leading to the proposal that there be a further increase in residential densities within the existing urban area. Achieving housing targets for new growth areas is estimated to be feasible on zoned land or land earmarked for development, once again on the assumption that a density of 20 dwellings to the hectare can be achieved.

Network City divides Perth, and the areas of Mandurah and Murray to the south, into three types of area: high potential areas with good opportunities to increase the number of homes close to activity centres and corridors; middle and outer suburban areas with fewer immediate opportunities for redevelopment but some scope for consolidation; and land earmarked for housing development through zoning or structure planning but currently undeveloped. The notion of introducing an Urban Growth Boundary for Perth was considered during the preparation of Network City, but to date no UGB has been adopted with reliance placed instead on existing town planning controls. The intention is to use existing statutory controls and related techniques to work with established market forces and to guide these to where growth is most appropriate. These related techniques include changes to density controls to include ‘minimum density zoning’, based on measures such as ‘average density’, where small and large lots can be averaged across an area; ‘maximum allowable lot size’; or ‘minimum allowed density’.

SE Queensland

The South East Queensland Regional Plan, 2005 covers an area extending from Noosa in the north to the New South Wales border in the south and as far west as Toowoomba, including the principal urban areas of Greater Brisbane, the Sunshine Coast and the Gold Coast (Queensland Government, 2005). This is the first statutory plan at the regional level.

The context is the continuing rapid growth of SE Queensland which has attracted an average of 55,000 new residents each year over the past two decades with the forecast population of 3.96 million for 2026. The western parts of the region have traditionally grown more slowly and an important element of the 2005 plan is to direct a greater share of growth to what is termed the ‘Western Corridor’ to reduce pressure on the coast.

The Regional Plan identifies sufficient land to accommodate a projected population of between 3.5 million and 4 million people by 2026. Urban growth areas have been identified across the region with the purpose of providing choice, assisting housing affordability and strengthening regional identity. Areas of land for employment and economic development have also been identified. Future growth is to be accommodated through a combination of infill and redevelopment in existing areas, greenfield development sites and rural living.

Overall the Regional Plan rests on contemporary planning notions of more compact and consolidated urban development around urban activity centres and public transport nodes. New residential areas are also to be developed at densities that support public transport services and the efficient delivery of infrastructure.

Part E of the Regional Plan identifies areas for future growth as part of a discussion of the desired ‘Regional Land Use Pattern’. It allocates all land within SEQ to one of the following land use categories: Regional Landscape and Rural Production Areas; Rural Living Areas; Urban Footprint Areas; and Investigation Areas.
Most future urban growth to 2026 is to be in the Urban Footprint areas. These are intended to be well located with respect to existing and planned urban infrastructure, activity centres and services. They encompass both sites within existing areas which provide opportunities for redevelopment and infill as well as orderly extensions to urban areas, including the expansion of some smaller townships. The intention is to promote ‘cohesive communities’ and to maximize access to existing or planned employment centres. Strategic ‘inter-urban breaks’ (green belts, green corridors or buffer zones) are identified to maintain the identity of the separate urban areas which comprise SEQ.

The Western Corridor, focused on Ipswich City, is expected to play a significant role in the future development of SEQ. This corridor has substantial areas of land available for new housing and industry, with economic development opportunities related to aerospace development in the vicinity of the Amberley airbase, ‘knowledge-based’ industries and the potential establishment one or more major inter-modal freight hubs. Most new residential development in the Western Corridor will be in new master-planned communities, to be designed on environmentally sustainable principles and located in proximity to employment.

Adelaide

A draft update of the Planning Strategy for Metropolitan Adelaide came into effect in 2003. An urban growth boundary was established for the metropolitan area and some separate townships, as were associated urban consolidation policies, with an increased emphasis on clearer residential design policies and neighbourhood character studies. A further version of the metropolitan planning strategy was adopted in August 2006 by the Rann government.

In comparison to its predecessors, this latest version of the metropolitan planning strategy is more coherent and explicit in expressing a commitment to sustainability. As with most other contemporary Australian metropolitan strategies, there is acceptance of the notion that a compact urban form is likely to be more sustainable and early challenges to the urban growth boundary, mounted by large land developers, were firmly resisted. However, modelling of urban land requirements over the next 25 years indicates a likely shortage of land within the boundary for new housing unless redevelopment of some established areas occurs at significantly higher densities. This is particularly significant in the light of the State government’s commitment to achieving a state population of two million by the year 2050. These higher densities are to be sought primarily from mixed use ‘transit-oriented developments’ around major nodes in the transport network and along public transport corridors. Strategies are also proposed to encourage the use of non-motorised forms of travel and reductions in car-parking requirements are canvassed in transit-focused areas in order to encourage the use of public transport services. Work is also proceeding on a metropolitan growth strategy which will look beyond the current metropolitan planning strategy to outline a longer-term settlement strategy for urban South Australia.

4. The Implementation of Metropolitan Strategies

Melbourne

The Victorian Government appointed five Smart Growth Committees with independent chairpersons to oversee the review of existing growth area plans and to provide advice on the long-term growth in each area. The committees comprised government departments and agencies; local council officers and councillors; representatives from the development industry peak bodies; and local community representatives. Each committee carried out technical investigations, conducted public workshops and submitted final reports to the government. The work of the Smart Growth Committees has directly informed the government’s decisions about the growth area plans and changes to the urban growth boundary. The government has adopted most of the recommendations of the Smart Growth Committees in relation to the growth area framework plans.

The outcome was the formation of a Growth Areas Authority designed to oversee planning and development in Melbourne’s five growth areas which came into effect in September 2006. The Growth Areas Authority is intended to work with councils, developers and government agencies to plan new suburbs in a way that enhances quality of life for residents, creates local jobs and is environmentally sustainable; create affordable housing with a greater range and choice of homes; plan for infrastructure and services as new development occurs.
The Growth Areas Authority is an independent statutory body. Key tasks will include advising on the release and servicing of new land when required, to ensure there continues to be competition and a downward pressure on prices; developing infrastructure and service plans, supported by development contributions, for infrastructure and services for consideration by government; supporting the implementation of government policy in relation to housing affordability, choice and yields; providing advice to local councils and the Minister for Planning on the sequencing of land release, and land rezoning proposals; and working with local government to ensure that appropriate detailed structure/precinct plans are prepared.

The GAA reports directly to the Minister for Planning. It has no specific powers but has been introduced to co-ordinate existing departments with the intention of facilitating action. To that end it has, for example, taken on plan preparation at the request of the Casey local council in order to fast track the planning process. The GAA has already produced Precinct Planning Guidelines to facilitate more rapid plan making in the Growth Areas. These are also intended to lay down sustainable principles for future development, including increased development densities.

The situation in respect of development levies for infrastructure in Victoria is fluid at present. In 2003 a review of development contributions was published. This was intended to cover the whole of the state, not just the growth areas. Under the reformed system, development infrastructure was defined and mechanisms were produced to apply a development taxation system. However this was later withdrawn under pressure from the development industry, which promised increased development densities in the growth areas in return. So far the performance on density increase can be at best judged as patchy, though it remains too early to make definitive judgements.

**Sydney**

In 2004 the NSW State government established the Growth Centres Commission. The Commission has the planning, development and financial management capabilities of a development corporation. The Commission is similar to the Melbourne GAA in that it has a co-ordinating role, but it is significantly different in that it has powers to intervene in local authority plan making and development decision making if it so decides. A streamlined planning and development approval process operates in the Growth Centres, along with measures to ensure the timely provision of infrastructure (GCC, 2007).

The Growth Centres Commission's functions are: preparing plans for the funding and development of regional infrastructure; controlling Precinct Plans for each precinct (or part of a precinct where anomalies exist in the boundaries) within the North West and South West Growth Centres; recommending to the Minister for Planning new precincts for staged land release; administration - including collection, holding and management - of the new Special Infrastructure Contributions to pay for regional infrastructure; implementing regional infrastructure in consultation with state agencies to support new development; and negotiating with government, landowners and developers to ensure development is facilitated in a sustainable and timely way.

The State Environmental Planning Policy (Part 1 (4)) notes that the normal consent authority is the local authority in whose land the site is situated but leaves open the possibility of the consent authority for managing development within the growth areas being the local council, the Minister or another relevant authority (e.g. the Growth Centres Commission). Canvassing local experts suggests that the GCC will seek co-operation but if this approach fails then it is empowered and prepared to intervene directly in plan making and development decisions.

A Special Infrastructure Contribution applicable in the designated Growth Areas has been legislated to cover the costs of new and upgraded regional roads and heavy rail infrastructure and services; bus services; education, health and emergency services; conservation lands; and precinct planning (GCC, 2006). The GCC will be funded by the infrastructure levies drawn from the Growth Areas. Not all of the cost of infrastructure will be derived from developer contributions, with the relative proportions varying between different components. The GCC is clearly the central mechanism in the co-ordination of infrastructure provision in the Growth Centres.

**Perth**

Implementation of Network City rests on existing statements of planning policy which will remain in force until amended or superseded but are to be ‘understood and interpreted in the context of Network
City’. Network City is to be taken into account in preparing regional and local planning strategies and planning schemes and amendments, and given weight in statutory decision making in relation to urban growth, governance, community, environment, heritage, employment, transport and infrastructure.

Implementation will also occur through the day-to-day processes of decision-making on statutory plans, structure plans, subdivisions and development applications and the actions of other State agencies and local governments in carrying out their responsibilities.

The Western Australian Planning Commission has commenced a comprehensive policy review program to give effect to Network City. Infrastructure funding is to be directed by a new focused public investment plan (FPIP) to outline the location and timing of planned public infrastructure. This is intended to concentrate new public infrastructure investment into those areas where growth is to be encouraged. The FPIP will be a component of a revised Metropolitan Development Program which will guide government and service providers on issues of land supply, staging requirements and infrastructure capacity in both brownfield and greenfield areas. The MDP is intended to reinforce more effectively actions to demonstrate the full cost of servicing as a guide to preparation of the state capital works budget; assess the current status of vacant land to determine its development potential; monitor the uptake of land for particular purposes and provide an early warning of when further action may be needed to ensure land supply is maintained; and monitor the way development is actually occurring and provide an early warning of when further action is needed to safeguard land supply.

Regular surveys of industry and developer intentions under the MDP are to be supplemented by regular forums with industry, local government, infrastructure providers and other government agencies to maintain an up-to-date picture of land stocks, redevelopment sites, development intentions, infrastructure capacity, forward planning, environmental and other development constraints and time frames for implementation.

More generally, Network City affirms the importance of a ‘Whole of Government’ approach to the implementation of the metropolitan growth strategy and the need for a commitment to the plan by all government agencies as well as local government. Annual monitoring of progress with Network City by a cabinet committee is proposed.

**SE Queensland**

The Office of Urban Management plays a central role in planning for future urban growth in South East Queensland and is responsible for the Regional Plan. The OUM reports to the Deputy Premier, who is also currently the Treasurer and Minister for Infrastructure.

The Urban Footprint takes account of existing urban development, urban and contiguous rural residential land zonings, and forward planning allocations in existing and proposed local government planning schemes as at 31 May 2005.

Local government is required to prepare Local Growth Management Strategies, amend planning schemes and adopt other policies to align with the Regional Plan. Detailed Guidelines for strategy preparation have been published. Where the Queensland Government is providing major new infrastructure to lead development in the region and it is ahead of full anticipated demand, land owners and developers of new areas who stand to benefit significantly will be required to contribute to infrastructure provision through a State Infrastructure Agreement. Structure plans for new greenfield areas will only be approved subject to a satisfactory State Infrastructure Agreement, which details private contributions towards priority state infrastructure.

State or local government can initiate studies within Investigation Areas. Once initiated, studies must be carried out on a partnership basis between State and local governments and in consultation with landowners, key stakeholders and the community. There are regulatory provisions to prevent premature or inappropriate development, these areas and in Regional Landscape and Rural Production areas. A regional land monitoring program has been established jointly between State and local government and the development industry to monitor land availability for future development.

The Regional Co-coordinating Committee advises the Queensland Government, through the regional Planning Minister, on the development and implementation of the Regional Plan. A Regional Plan Implementation Group, consisting of representatives of State and local government, assists in monitoring policies and actions to implement the Regional Plan. This group reports to the RCC and the Minister through the Office of Urban Management. There is also a ‘Transit-Oriented Development
Taskforce’ in acknowledgment of the importance attached to TOD as a key element of the SEQ Regional Plan. Members are once again drawn from State and local government and the private sector.

Adelaide

The South Australian State Strategic Plan was developed and released in early 2004. In April 2005 a ‘Strategic Infrastructure Plan for South Australia’ was also released by the new Office for Infrastructure Development, set up to plan and implement infrastructure in a coordinated manner to meet the priorities of the State Strategic Plan. Its prime task was the adoption of an integrated and more rigorous whole-of-government and whole-of-state approach to identifying and prioritising infrastructure requirements. This involves moving the State Government’s approach to capital planning away from the annual bidding process by individual agencies. A culture of managing across rather than within portfolio structures will be fostered to support better outcomes for the state in a more strategic way’ (Government of South Australia, 2005)

The introduction of an over-arching State Strategic Plan with measurable performance targets implied that the metropolitan planning strategy had become unequivocally a plan which is mainly concerned with the physical or spatial expression of the policies of other government agencies. The strong commitment to ecologically sustainable development in the 2006 metropolitan planning strategy may sit uneasily with what appears to be a dominant economic growth discourse in the State Strategic Plan and the accompanying infrastructure strategy.

One important target in the State Strategic Plan is to achieve a population of 2 million people for South Australia by the year 2050. This will require an increase in current rates of population growth and is already leading to a renewed bout of activity and interest in the future outward growth of metropolitan Adelaide. It is also focusing interest once again on the potential role of the state government as a land banking agency through its Land Management Corporation. The current context is one of heavy development industry lobbying for the release of more urban fringe land and criticisms of the LMC as a source of delay in the land supply process.

5. Discussion

Many of the approaches taken to growth planning in Australian cities in the first decade of the twenty-first century clearly build upon the experience of previous decades. But there are also new elements and tensions apparent, not least in the reconciliation of notions of maintaining and consolidating compact cities whilst at the same time seeking their physical expansion.

Table 1: The current policy position for managing urban growth in the five metropolitan areas.

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<tr>
<th>Established strategies</th>
<th>SE Q’land</th>
<th>Perth</th>
<th>Sydney</th>
<th>Melbourne</th>
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<td>Urban consolidation</td>
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<td>Public land agency role</td>
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<td>Activity centres</td>
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Recent innovations

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<th>Sydney</th>
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<tr>
<td>New co-ordinating authorities</td>
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<td>Overarching strategic plan</td>
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<td>Development Corporation with plan making powers</td>
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<td>Fast track planning systems</td>
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O = No Policy in place        X = Weak policy      XX = Moderate Policy     XXX = Strong Policy

The Table above summarises the approaches being taken to strategic growth planning in the five metropolitan areas. It is clear that certain well established approaches are commonly employed across all five areas. Corridor planning, where urban growth extends along transport and activity corridors, is
a conventional approach. Australian metropolitan regions are all pursuing compact city strategies and are seeking to accommodate a majority of new households within the existing urban area. The levels of consolidation which are aspired to are much higher than they were in earlier decades. However, all acknowledge also the need for substantial development in expansion areas – Melbourne and Perth estimate that some 60% of projected development can be provided within the existing urban areas with the balance needing to be at or beyond the urban fringe, while Sydney is aiming for a 70:30 ratio. Not all metropolitan growth strategies are underpinned by a formal urban growth boundary, although the boundaries of the Urban Footprint Areas and inter-urban breaks in SE Queensland are de facto boundaries. Similarly Sydney and Perth have declined to adopt urban growth boundaries on the grounds that they already have the powers to achieve the same effect through statutory controls and planning schemes. All current metropolitan plans emphasise the important of reducing car use and promoting transit-oriented development but Perth’s Network City appears the best developed strategy in terms of setting out what this might mean in detail.

Concerns about affordability and the aggressive lobbying activities of house-builders are creating an uneasy tension between the desire to maintain urban growth boundaries, where these have been established, and the political pressure to release more land for housing at the urban fringe at a time when a crisis of housing affordability is acknowledged.

Progress towards ‘whole of government’ integration between state government agencies appears better developed in some states than others and growth planning appears to have a higher political salience in some jurisdictions. There are also indications of a shifting balance between state and local governments in planning and assessment processes, with state governments taking a stronger stance in order to remove perceived bottlenecks in the planning approval system. The absence of Commonwealth interest or involvement in metropolitan growth strategies remains a constant.

The concept of government development corporations with powers to manage the development of new settlements or the redevelopment or expansion of existing settlements at first sight appears to have lost favour, but the Growth Centres Commission in Sydney has this potential, if not actual, role. It remains nevertheless a nascent institution, dependant on the success of the Infrastructure levy for its future growth. Large-scale land developers, including State land agencies in some instances, appear to be playing an increasing role in the development of new ‘master planned’ settlements and in the urban development process more generally.

The reorganization of planning responsibilities within government agencies also reflects the growing political salience of growth management and land release. As indicated above, Queensland’s Office of Urban Management now reports to the Deputy Premier whose portfolio responsibilities also include Treasury and Infrastructure. In Western Australia the Department of Premier and Cabinet now takes a more prominent role in co-coordinating the assessment of significant development proposals and has recently appointed a senior officer with specific responsibility to assist in facilitating land release approvals. In Melbourne and Sydney the respective growth agencies report directly to the relevant minister. In Adelaide the State Infrastructure Plan plays the key role in determining infrastructure spending priorities, with the metropolitan planning strategy in a subsidiary role.

New mechanisms such as Growth Committees and Commissions raise questions in respect of the role, power and influence of local councils. Whilst these generally appear to retain both land use plan making and development control powers, the existence of overarching growth committees and commissions may be a step towards an approach to growth planning which takes a regional rather than local perspective on development issues. The existence of a statutory regional plan for SE Queensland for which the Deputy Premier is currently the responsible minister is a further example of a regional approach to growth planning and of a substantial shift in Queensland towards a stronger role for state government in managing urban growth.

The issue of infrastructure provision features prominently in the documentation. There is evidence in several states of recent or proposed changes to levies or charging regimes to increase the contributions to infrastructure costs made by developers and landowners who are likely to benefit significantly from the provision of major new infrastructure by state government. Sydney represents the extreme case with legislation in place to levy significant contributions towards the infrastructure required to facilitate development in its two Growth Centres. The development industry is predictably critical of development charges in most cases, although anecdotal evidence from Queensland and Victoria suggests that developers may welcome the opportunity to bring the release of land forward in their preferred locations by additional contributions to infrastructure costs.
All states have some existing arrangements for monitoring land supply and for co-ordinating the timing of land release and the provision of major infrastructure investments. These arrangements are under review in several states with the intention of providing stronger links between metropolitan development and infrastructure programs and the processes of establishing budgetary priorities within government.

A key question concerns the forward planning horizon for land supply which is reasonable in order to maintain the effectiveness of the planning process, assist with housing affordability and allow developers sufficient lead time to bring projects on stream. Amongst urban analysts 15 years is widely regarded as sufficient to achieve these aims, but the mechanisms by which a 15 year supply can be maintained vary. For example government policy to increase densities within the existing urban area can extend the land supply by several years depending on the gross density figure chosen and the consistent enforcement of this standard. The imposition of an Urban Growth Boundary is only effective if it is rigidly enforced. Constant expansion of the UGB is not consistent with its fundamental aim of containment leading to increased development pressure inside the boundary to recycle urban brownfields and increase urban densities. Clearly, careful analysis of current brownfield land supply and desirable development densities in different parts of the existing urban area is required before explicit consideration of urban expansion is undertaken. As noted above, it is a moot point whether an UGB is a necessary mechanism in addition to existing planning controls, especially when extension of the boundary by designation of growth areas is ongoing.

Employment planning is referred to regularly in all of the strategies studied but ways of accomplishing this are not generally explicit and, notwithstanding planners’ traditional desire to see a balance between work and living, the impression remains of a set of growth strategies driven primarily by the residential development proposals of large land developers. This begs the question of whether future growth should be led by housing development opportunities or by positive planning to stimulate employment in specific locations.

Gleeson and Coaicetto (2007) have mounted a persuasive argument recently for restoring active government intervention in the land development process land markets for the traditional reason of creating fairer and more efficient land markets as well as providing a lever to encourage higher quality design outcomes. They also see benefits in the pursuit of long-term sustainability aims from the ability of governments to engage in strategic land banking. Overall, however, there is little evidence anywhere now of support for a strong government presence in the land market in order to manage supply or divert development gains back to the community. Rather, the existing government land agencies are seen to play a variety of roles, behaving sometimes as market driven developers, sometimes as a catalyst for the development of problem sites and occasionally as leaders and exemplars of best practice. The preference generally seems to be to manage land supply by using planning controls and zoning to maintain a sufficient land bank to keep housing affordable. The acquisition of new stocks of residential land to maintain a land bank in government ownership does not seem to have much support anywhere,

The implementation of metropolitan plans in Australia is inevitably constrained by the nature of the land market, the structure of the development industry and the power of property ownership. As in most capitalist societies, metropolitan planning takes placed against a backdrop of tensions between state intervention in pursuit of collective goals and the operation of markets based on private property rights. There are also the inevitable power plays involved in changing organisational structures within state governments which make the well-intentioned aspiration to ‘whole of government’ approaches extraordinarily difficult to achieve. At root the very nature and purposes of planning itself are contested. To some, planning is a justifiable infringement of private property rights only to the extent that this is absolutely necessary to correct for the effects of externalities. To others, planning is an institution for promoting particular collective ends, such as a sustainable settlement system or a socially-inclusive city. The preliminary review of current metropolitan planning strategies on which this paper is based suggests that it is premature to judge their likely outcomes but the trend appears increasingly to favour supply based policies, enthusiastically backed up by the development industry, which in its turn is expected to fund the infrastructure required for metropolitan growth.
References


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