

# WHO KILLED MELBOURNE 2030?

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*I went by, and lo! it was gone; I sought it, but its place could nowhere be found;  
and nothing can bring it back to me.*

J. H. Newman (1865) *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, p. 341.

Melbourne's metropolitan strategy *Melbourne 2030* was conceived in 1999, born in 2002, pronounced dead in 2009 and finally buried, unmourned and unloved, in 2011. When the newly-elected Baillieu government announced earlier this year that it intended to scrap *Melbourne 2030* and replace it with a new metropolitan planning strategy, the response was a deafening silence. This lack of protest, or even condolences, contrasts strangely with the fulsome praise *Melbourne 2030* attracted at its launch and for some time afterwards. The Melbourne strategy was hailed as a model for metropolitan planning, and an example for other cities.

This paper analyses the rise and fall of *Melbourne 2030*, with a view to explaining the strategy's demise. It explores two possible explanations:

- the strategy was basically sound, but failed due to a lack of political will and commitment; and
- the strategy was flawed in both process and content, and these flaws led it to fail.

## **DON'T THINK – JUST DO**

Most local planning academics praised *Melbourne 2030* on its release in October 2002, one declaring it 'a better plan than we have seen for at least thirty years' (Low, 2002, p. 6). The state president of the Planning Institute of Australia agreed: the strategy's 'values, principles and key directions are right on target' (Tesdaorf, 2002). In 2004, the Institute's national president stated that *Melbourne 2030* had 'achieved wide acclaim in planning circles', and was 'being emulated in a number of cities across the nation' (Spiller, 2004). The officials responsible for the Melbourne strategy gave interstate presentations with titles like 'success factors in preparing the Melbourne 2030 plan' (Collins, 2003), which directly influenced the spatial plans for Canberra and Sydney, released in 2004 and 2005 respectively. Interstate academics hailed *Melbourne 2030* as heralding a revival of traditional 'blueprint-style' metropolitan planning (Searle & Bunker, 2010), but also a move beyond this to 'explicit political oversight and coordination of urban policy' (Gleeson et al, 2004).

The praise was echoed internationally, especially by the key officials responsible for the strategy. Niven & Wilkinson (2005, p. 215) boasted:

If this is the substance of *Melbourne 2030*, how does it move from being a sophisticated, comprehensive statement of policy and intent into the more turbulent waters of implementation? What makes it not just a very good plan, but a concerted program of action? The answer is the right management, or governance.

The OECD also joined the chorus of praise after being commissioned to review the draft strategy. It concluded that 'the Victorian State Government, through its policies and the Melbourne Metropolitan Strategy is in the vanguard of metropolitan areas in [the] OECD in terms of governance', and that the strategy would 'create a framework for a very high level of economic, social and environmentally sustainable development' (OECD, 2003, p. 327). The OECD's endorsement of the commitment to sustainable development echoes one of the main virtues attributed to the Melbourne strategy. The other features attracting widespread praise were the integration of traditional spatial planning with other urban policies such as transport, and the consultation program that preceded the strategy. Gleeson et al (2004, pp. 364, 361) identified 'a rediscovery of the virtues of participation', noting that the *Melbourne 2030* consultation process had cost over \$1 million and generated 1400 public submissions. They reported that the Victorian Department of Infrastructure, which oversaw the process, held the view that 'the community support garnered could sustain the strategy through a change of government' (p. 361).

The strategy's former director even hailed *Melbourne 2030* as a prototype of a new approach to planning called 'strategic navigation', a term derived from management guru Richard Hames, who worked as a consultant to the *Melbourne 2030* Strategy Development Division (Wilkinson, 2009, p. 10). Hames, self-

described as 'the world's foremost corporate philosopher', lists strategic navigation it as the third of his 'five literacies of global leadership' ([www.richardhames.com](http://www.richardhames.com)).

In 2007, the Victorian government commissioned four 'independent experts' to conduct an audit of the strategy's first five years. Their 2008 report argued that '*Melbourne 2030* has not failed, nor is there anything fundamentally wrong with its underlying principles.' By this time problems had emerged with the strategy, but the expert group concluded that the issue was simply one of implementation:

We have the Plan. We have the objectives. The task is to translate the words into action. One might well heed the words of the great Hawthorn football coach John Kennedy: "*Don't think – just do*". (Moodie et al, 2008, p. 7).

## **EXPLAINING WHY THE STRATEGY FAILED**

The audit group's reference is to a speech Kennedy made to his players at half time in the 1975 VFL (now AFL) Grand Final. It should be noted for completeness that in the second half of the match, Hawthorn kicked 4 goals to North Melbourne's 10, losing by the biggest margin since the 1957 final (122 points to 67).

*Melbourne 2030* fared little better than the 1975 Hawthorn team. Contrary to the expectations of its authors, the strategy did not survive the 2010 change of government; in fact, it did not even last until the election. Only 12 months after the 2008 review's optimistic assessment, an editorial in *The Age* declared the metropolitan strategy dead, and blamed the state government for 'the failure of *Melbourne 2030*' (The Age, 2009). When the new government announced in 2011 that it would prepare a replacement strategy, the Planning Institute of Australia called for a new approach to avoid repeating 'the lack of success that *Melbourne 2030* experienced' (Worn, 2011).

So by now it is agreed that the strategy that received such fulsome and widespread endorsement turned out to be a failure. The important question is: why?

The most popular explanation echoes the verdict from *The Age*: the problem is politics and politicians. The Planning Institute shares this view, and proposes as a solution to 'de-politicise' metropolitan planning. State and local government 'elected officers' (!) would be asked to sign a Memorandum of Understanding in which they promise to support the implementation of the new strategy over its period of currency (Worn, 2011). The unstated rationale echoes the 'don't think – just do' sentiments of the 2008 review: if a strategy is not implemented, this must be due to a lack of 'political will'.

By contrast, a minority of observers, which includes the present writer, point to flaws in the strategy itself and the process by which it was prepared. Birrell et al (2005) focus on content, rather than process. They argue that the strategy's aim of locating around 40 per cent of new households in 112 nominated 'activity centres' would fail, as high land and construction costs would make large-scale developments in centres too expensive. This would then lead to urban infill spreading randomly across existing suburbs, destroying their 'house and garden' character. They also point out that the strategy's urban growth boundary (UGB) 'is not a hard boundary', since the government 'has made it clear that it will extend it if land is in short supply' (Birrell et al, p. 06-3). Therefore, the actual outcome was likely to be continued outward growth, plus loss of neighbourhood character in existing areas.

Dodson (2009) focuses on *Melbourne 2030*'s 'weak treatment of urban infrastructure, especially transport networks', noting that the strategy document contained no specific discussion of infrastructure, and nor did any of its 12 supporting technical reports. He concludes that 'the intellectual shift towards land-use planning... had crowded out thinking on infrastructure to support it', while also pointing to the diminution of planning capacity resulting from the privatisation of public utilities, especially public transport (Dodson, 2009, p. 114). As public disquiet over 'weak infrastructure planning' (p. 114) increased, the government commissioned a series of transport plans from engineers, which have gradually seen large-scale infrastructure planning dominating spatial strategy at the expense of land use concerns.

Mees (2003, 2007) criticises both the content of *Melbourne 2030* and the process by which it was produced, arguing that both the consultation process and the commitment to sustainability praised by the strategy's admirers were shams. Although there was a very extensive process of consultation, this was not allowed to influence the strategy, which was written in private by members of the Strategy Development Division. And the strategic directions involved only a rhetorical, rather than a real, departure from the policies of the previous Kennett government, which focussed on market-led residential infill and road-based transport. Mees (2003, p. 298) predicted that the strategy would not survive a change of government, as it had no legitimacy in the eyes of the public, and did not deserve to survive, as it lacked substance and rigour. The

appropriate aphorism under this view comes not from John Kennedy, but Nietzsche, via the Danish planning theorist Bent Flyvbjerg: *'power makes you stupid'* (Mees, 2007; Flyvbjerg 1998, p. 37).

So the choice is between two broad accounts of *Melbourne 2030's* demise: a good strategy laid low by the weakness of politicians, versus a flawed strategy that failed because it deserved to. In the first account, planners are heroes let down by villainous politicians; in the second, planners themselves must take the lion's share of the blame. Hardly surprisingly, academic and practising planners have largely preferred the first explanation; the remainder of this paper assesses whether that view is supported by the evidence.

## THE 2008 STRATEGY AUDIT

A good place to start is with the five-year 'audit' of the strategy by a government-appointed expert group. This first notable aspect of the audit is the way its terms of reference departed from the promise made in the strategy itself, which was that regular minor reviews would be supplemented by 'formal reviews – with full community involvement – [that] will be carried out at five year intervals to... assess whether major change is needed' (Victoria, 2002, p. 164). Instead, the terms of reference announced that 'it is not intended that the audit of *Melbourne 2030* include fundamental changes to the strategy's principles and directions'; nor would it 'consider proposals to amend the Urban Growth Boundary, designation of activity centres, the merits of specific development proposals or particular investments in infrastructure or services.' The public would be given four weeks to make submissions to the audit expert group, which 'is not required to undertake public hearings, but may initiate meetings [if] it deems necessary' (Moodie et al, pp. 73-75).

The composition of the expert group itself is also significant, because only one of its four members had any expertise in strategic planning. Two members were practitioners working in the statutory planning appeals system at the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (one a Queens Counsel, the other a planning consultant and former editor of the Victorian Planning Reports); the group's chair was a Professor of Public Health. The audit group was assigned four experts to assist it in areas such as housing, economics and transport (the transport advisor was an expert in car parking), but there is no evidence of the contribution made by any of these people.

The audit group appears to have relied almost entirely on its own resources and those of the departmental officials responsible for *Melbourne 2030*. The report is basically a series of assertions for which no pretense of substantiation is offered, something that would be regarded as unacceptable even in an undergraduate student essay. The most telling indication is the list of 21 references at the end of the report: these are all government documents, except for the 2006 census, the Garnaut Climate Change Review and a set of course notes for a subject called 'Affordable Housing Policy and Practice' taught by the University of Western Sydney. If the expert group relied on any sources other than itself and government agencies, it chose not to disclose them. In particular, there is no evidence that the group bothered to read any of the assessments of *Melbourne 2030* produced by planning scholars and referred to earlier in this paper, or to consider the experience of any other cities with metropolitan strategies. The group apparently followed its own advice to 'don't think – just do'.

Despite the analytical weaknesses, the audit review actually reveals more about the failings of *Melbourne 2030*, and the reasons behind them, than its authors apparently intended. The most revealing section is the one that rebuts a series of 'what we have come to see as "myths" about the plan' contained in the public submissions to the review (pp. 19-21).

The first 'myth' is that *Melbourne 2030* will lead to the destruction of neighbourhood character. The expert group responds that the developments complained about 'would also have been supported under previous planning policy regimes. The policy context... has remained largely unchanged from that which preceded *Melbourne 2030*' (p. 19). But this amounts to arguing that the strategy represents no change from the planning policies of the previous Kennett government, which means it was a sham, as Mees (2003) argued.

The second 'myth' was that *Melbourne 2030* would lead to high-rise development in activity centres. The expert group replies that the high cost of high-rise development, and low land values, means that 'development in and around activity centres will seldom be more than six storeys in height' (p. 20). But this, it will be recalled, is precisely what Birrell et al (2005) argued: the activity centres will not attract the projected high-density housing, leading to unplanned urban infill across existing neighbourhoods.

As if to confirm this diagnosis, a later section of the report observes that

'on the ground' implementation of the Plan has under-performed in several key areas. These are:

- Insufficient progress, to date, in redirecting residential growth from the fringe to established areas of the metropolis.
- The lack of significant residential or mixed-use developments in and around principal and major activity centres.
- Insufficient provision or commitments to crucial public transport investments (p. 22).

This damning indictment covers most of the core ingredients of *Melbourne 2030*. So what exactly was supposed to have been successful about the strategy? The widely-praised consultation program perhaps? The expert group's verdict on this question was negative as well, and in contrast with the rest of the report reveals a relatively sophisticated understanding of the issues involved.

## WHY THE MELBOURNE 2030 CONSULTATION PROGRAM FAILED

The report notes 'the extent of the consultation carried out during the preparation of the Plan', but adds: 'Nevertheless, the overwhelming impression is that the community does not believe that the State Government has listened to its views sufficiently or made enough changes in response to them' (Moodie et al, 2008, p. 17). The group diagnoses the problem as one of 'the difference between "public consultation" and "community engagement"' (p. 17), a distinction it expands upon in a set of 'community engagement guidelines' (p. 33). These guidelines provide the key to understanding why the consultation process for *Melbourne 2030* failed.

The first listed requirement for community engagement is 'an honest desire for input and willingness to incorporate advice... into the final plan or policy.' In particular, the guidelines advise: 'Don't ask for advice if the decision is already made'. This warning describes precisely what happened in the preparation of *Melbourne 2030*: indeed, the Secretary of the Department of Infrastructure expressly told the *Melbourne 2030* community reference group that he would not follow its advice, because 'the role of the Reference Group is advisory. The reference Group is to assist the department with its work' (Reference Group minutes, meeting of 31/10/2000; cited at Mees, 2003, p. 295). The reference group only met once over the 14 months prior to release of *Melbourne 2030*.<sup>1</sup>

The fourth listed requirement is to focus consultation on addressing 'difficult choices and consequences.' This is because '[p]rocesses which simply identify a variety of desirable goals (for example, increase housing choice and maintain existing neighbourhood character) provide little or no guidance for real life decisions when difficult funding and development choices must be made.' Again, the 'what not to do' statement provides a succinct account of exactly what happened with the Melbourne strategy. A series of 'strategic directions' ranging from the trite (Direction 8: Better transport links) to the completely content-free (Direction 5: A great place to be) was presented for public endorsement. When people agreed with these platitudes – as if there was an alternative: worse transport links, or a terrible place to be, perhaps? – the Department of Infrastructure then treated this as endorsement of its actual policies and proposals, which were never submitted for public discussion or approval. An additional round of consultation to review the draft strategy was proposed early in the process, but then cancelled without explanation (Mees, 2003).

The discussion of the difference between real community engagement and meaningless 'consultation' is the only section of the audit report to clearly show the influence of the expert group's only member with expertise in planning, the former head of strategic planning at the City of Vancouver. The process that led to Greater Vancouver's *Livable Region Strategic Plan* in the early 1990s provides a stark contrast with *Melbourne 2030*. It began with the relatively easy task of developing planning goals, such as 'an efficient region'. This took less than 12 months; the process of choosing how to bring the goals to fruition took three times as long. It involved the formulation, evaluation and debate of a series of alternative transport and land use policies, incorporating conferences and forums with titles like 'The Critical Choices' (GVRD, 1996).

The plan was finally approved in 1994, by unanimous vote of the 22 municipalities making up the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD). It was re-adopted in 1996 as a legally binding plan under the new Provincial *Growth Strategies Act* of 1995, which restored to the GVRD and other regional councils the land-use planning powers that had been removed by a previous government a decade earlier. The plan remained in force until July 2011, when it was replaced by a new growth management strategy called *Metro Vancouver 2040* (GVRD, 2011), which was adopted by unanimous vote of the region's municipalities and its transport agency Translink. The new strategy updates the *Livable Region Plan* from its target year of 2021 to 2040, but re-emphasises all the key policies of the earlier document. The community engagement process of the early 1990s was so successful that it has set planning directions which have persisted for two decades.

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<sup>1</sup> The writer was a member of the community reference group.

An analogous process in Portland, Oregon commenced in 1992 and led to the adoption in 1997 of a regional strategy called the *2040 Growth Concept*, whose name appears to have inspired both *Melbourne 2030* and *Metro Vancouver 2040*. Again, a series of possible regional futures was developed, analysed and debated, leading to a unanimous agreement among the 24 municipalities making up Metro Portland (Metro Portland, 2000, p. 12). Portland's regional strategy, which claims to be a 50-year growth plan, has been regularly updated, but remains in force in 2011. As in Vancouver, the regional policies adopted in the 1990s have persisted for more than a decade. By contrast, *Melbourne 2030* lasted seven years.

## THE 'INFRASTRUCTURE TURN' AND THE DEMISE OF *MELBOURNE 2030*

The *Melbourne 2030* audit expert group concluded that the strategy had 'underperformed' on its main objectives, and lacked legitimacy thanks to the flawed consultation process that preceded it. Given these findings, the final recommendations and the 'don't think – just do' rallying cry are surprising. What is less surprising is the fact that the Victorian government effectively abandoned the strategy the following year. The way in which this occurred deserves examination, because it reveals that the strategy's fundamental flaws could not be reversed simply through an application of political will.

The one area where the audit group praised the Victorian government's progress on plan implementation was transport: 'The Government's *Meeting Our Transport Challenges (2006)* has begun major improvements and adjustments to our transport system' (p. 26). The audit called for an acceleration of this work, including '[f]unding works to address capacity constraints and other deficiencies in the existing public transport network' (p. 53), and noted – apparently with approval – that '[a]n assessment of the need for an east-west link between the Eastern Freeway and the Tullamarine Freeway is currently underway and is addressing a number of transport-related issues that impact directly on *Melbourne 2030*'s implementation' (p. 49). Consistently with its overall approach, the expert group basically urged the government to continue with its transport policy directions, only faster and with more funding.

The study cited by the expert group was a review chaired by Sir Rod Eddington. The review was proposed in the 2006 *Meeting Our Transport Challenges* report, the second such document released by the Victorian government in response to public criticism of the lack of action on transport since the release of *Melbourne 2030*. What the expert group did not notice was that, as Dodson (2009, p. 116) notes, the Eddington study marked the point at which the government's transport planning became completely detached from the *Melbourne 2030* process. Eddington, an engineer and the former head of a number of airline companies, was advised by a team that included road engineers, but nobody with any expertise in public transport or other sustainable modes (Mees, 2010). Dodson predicted that this 'infrastructure turn' in metropolitan planning would limit 'questions of broader, comprehensive and strategic spatial and land-use planning in favour of a project-oriented engineering driven perspective' (Dodson, 2009, p. 120). This turned out to be an accurate prediction: in fact, the 'Eddington Report' provided the catalyst for the complete abandonment of *Melbourne 2030*.

The Victorian government released the audit report along with a response to the expert group's recommendations, in May 2008. The government said it would 'take up many of the Audit Expert Group's recommendations' (Victoria, 2008a, ii). Among the recommendations the government accepted were to produce a long-term transport plan building on the recommendations of the Eddington Report (p. 15), and to maintain the Urban Growth Boundary, while developing a clear and transparent process for future reviews of the boundary (p. 43).

The Eddington Report was also released in May 2008. Like the audit group's report, it endorsed the metropolitan strategy, stating: 'The Victorian Government should resist pressure to weaken *Melbourne 2030*' (Eddington, 2008, p. 37). Eddington recommended a series of multi-billion-dollar transport projects, including an east-west road tunnel, a north-south rail tunnel and the 'Regional Rail Link' (RRL). The RRL is a new line to provide an express route for commuter trains from Geelong and other provincial cities, avoiding the need to share tracks with suburban services on their way to the centre of Melbourne. The RRL route skirted the Urban Growth Boundary, running through the Green Wedge north of the Werribee growth corridor (the RRL was initially called the Tarneit line, after one of the rural areas through which it passed). Although the main purpose of the RRL was to carry long-distance services, a number of local stations would also be provided.

The Victorian government commissioned a review of the Eddington rail proposals from Edward Dotson, a senior transport specialist with the World Bank for nearly 20 years. Dotson's report was devastating, pointing out that no serious analysis of alternatives had taken place before the decision to recommend billions of dollars worth of new investment. Dotson argued the existing rail system has significant spare capacity which, used efficiently, might avoid the need for the RRL and tunnel or delay them for many years (the issues are

discussed in detail in Mees, 2010). He also noted a problem with the RRL that no Victorian urban planner managed to spot: because the line and stations are outside the UGB, building them would 'lead to pressure for development north of the link' (i.e. outside the UGB), especially given that local councils are 'in favour of development outside the urban growth boundary' (Dotson, 2008, p. 18).

The Victorian government released its promised new transport plan in December 2008. The *Victorian Transport Plan* included the RRL as the top priority, but also committed to Eddington's north-south rail tunnel and part of the road tunnel. Dotson's report and the concerns raised in it were not mentioned at all. The RRL was awarded funding in the following year's Federal budget and is now under construction (Mees, 2010).

In the same month, the government released another document, *Melbourne @ 5 Million*. Although described as an 'update' of *Melbourne 2030*, the new document really marked its abandonment (see discussion above). The new document was said to be needed because of new population projections, which increased estimates of Melbourne's future growth, and also the release of the *Victorian Transport Plan*. In fact, 'Melbourne @ 5 Million has been prepared in consultation with the Department of Transport' (Victoria, 2008b, p. 2).

The first major change was a large expansion in the Urban Growth Boundary, despite the fact that only seven months previously the government had accepted the audit report's advice that no expansion was necessary. The new urban pattern would be based around:

- six 'Central Activities Districts' in the suburbs 'with employment as a key focus'
- three 'employment corridors' based around a freeway, a rail line and a suburban bus route
- 'targeted redevelopment', especially along the tram network; and
- 'new sustainable communities' in Melbourne's north and west, meaning development in former green wedges.

The activity centres that were the centrepiece of *Melbourne 2030* are downgraded to a single throwaway line: 'This settlement structure will continue to be supported by the network of activity centres designated in *Melbourne 2030*' (Victoria, 2008b, p. 9). The replacement for the old centrepiece strikingly demonstrates the influence of the 'infrastructure turn', particularly the three employment corridors based along transport routes and the targeted redevelopment along tram lines. The dominance of infrastructure also underpins the 'new communities', the largest of which is in the green wedge north of Werribee, and was decreed 'sustainable' on the basis that it would be served by the Regional Rail Link. In fact, the RRL is quite unsuited for this role, since it is not electrified and is served by regional express trains, very few of which will stop at the two stations provided to serve the new 'sustainable communities'.

Most planners and commentators condemned the expansion of the urban growth boundary, but without seriously addressing the question of the alternative to suburban expansion. Instead, critics contented themselves with claiming that Melbourne's density is very low by world standards, as if this observation were enough by itself to constitute a spatial planning policy. For example, the two non-lawyer members of the audit expert group pronounced Melbourne 'the world's eighth most spread out city' (Moodie & McAfee, 2009), even though census density figures place Melbourne ahead of 37 of the 50 largest urban areas across Australia, Canada and the United States (Mees, 2009). Few of the critics offered any analysis to demonstrate where the 600,000 additional households would actually end up if all were built within the previous urban growth boundary. Again, the message was 'don't think – just do'.

Most planning commentators seemed happy to go along with the demise of the *Melbourne 2030* activity centres policy. They redirected their enthusiasm to a new proposal, from the Melbourne City Council's urban design team, for high-density linear development along tram and bus routes, instead of in centres. Considering that only 4 per cent of Melburnians travelled to work by bus or tram at the 2006 census (down from 10 per cent in 1976), compared with 10 per cent who took trains (1976 figure 12 per cent: Mees et al, 2007), the MCC proposal appears even less likely to produce more sustainable transport outcomes than a focus on rail-based activity centres. The only justification offered for shifting to the linear model was an assertion that this has worked in the Brazilian city of Curitiba (MCC, 2009, pp. 12, 14). However, the MCC omitted to point out that Curitiba does not have a rail system, and so bus corridors were the only place to focus transit-oriented development.

The 'corridor' approach to urban consolidation did not supplant the former activity centre policy; rather, it diverted attention from the fact that there was now a policy vacuum on redevelopment of the existing urban area. So the outcome is the worst of both worlds predicted by Birrell et al (2005). Without a credible policy to guide higher-density housing, the result is amenity-damaging random redevelopment in existing areas, plus continued growth at the fringe. *Melbourne @ 5 million* even passed up the chance to plan the fringe growth in a transit-oriented way, since the extensions of the Urban Growth Boundary take development into green

wedges that are generally remote from the suburban rail system, even if some locations will receive a few trains a day courtesy of the Regional Rail Link. One location that might have permitted transit-oriented growth is the former Whittlesea corridor identified in the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works' original 1971 corridor plan. This follows the route of the abandoned Whittlesea rail line, which could be readily reinstated as an extension of the suburban service to Epping. The option appears not to have been considered at any stage in the process of reviewing *Melbourne 2030*.

### **SO WHO DID KILL MELBOURNE 2030?**

The answer is reminiscent of the ending of *Murder on the Orient Express*: all the participants had a hand in the strategy's demise – politicians, developers, residents, government planners, academics, the OECD and the audit expert group. But ultimately, *Melbourne 2030* died because it deserved to. The problem was not lack of political or bureaucratic will, as expressed in the 'don't think – just do' motto, but rather the problem identified by Flyvbjerg: 'power makes you stupid.'

Because the Department of Infrastructure officials who prepared *Melbourne 2030* did not have share power with the public, local government or even the community reference group, they were able to confine the public consultation process preceding release of the strategy to the production of woolly generalities and to make all the substantive decisions in private without any public input. As the audit expert group pointed out, the result guaranteed that the strategy would have no public legitimacy and would depend for its survival on the whims of planning ministers. In addition, the absence of any requirement for the strategy's authors to explain or justify their decisions meant that the resulting strategy was incoherent and unworkable, with an activity centre policy that had not been properly analysed or assessed, and no substantive content on transport issues at all.

Although the audit expert group correctly identified the flaws in the consultation process, the rest of its report repeated the 'evidence-free' approach that marked the original strategy. And its final recommendations were to press ahead with *Melbourne 2030*, despite the strategy's lack of legitimacy and rigour. The expert group failed to notice the 'infrastructure turn' that had seen real power pass to engineers focussed on individual mega-projects without the inclination or capacity to place those projects in a wider strategic context. It was the engineers' transport proposals that provided the catalyst for the Victorian government's abandonment of the main elements of *Melbourne 2030* in late 2008.

By contrast, in both Vancouver and Portland, the authors of metropolitan plans were required to obtain endorsement from local government, community groups and public agencies. The requirement to do so produced plans with widespread legitimacy, but also with a serious analytical basis: both factors have combined to ensure support for consistent metropolitan policies over two decades. And in Vancouver at least, where more recent data is available, clear evidence has emerged that the *Livable Region Strategic Plan* is beginning to achieve its key objectives. Vancouver was the only Canadian city in which the average time taken to commute to and from work declined over the 1992–2005 period (Statistics Canada, 2006, p. 15). The 2006 census revealed a decline in the average distance travelled to work over the previous decade, and a modest but significant fall in the share of work trips made by car drivers, from 70.6 to 67.3 per cent, due to increases in walking and public transport use (Statistics Canada, 2008, p. 27).

Perhaps the most surprising aspect of the *Melbourne 2030* saga was the largely uncritical attitude adopted towards the strategy by planning scholars, who – with important exceptions – seemed prepared to accept at face value the vainglorious claims made by the strategy's authors (although one should also note here the extraordinarily uncritical approach taken by the OECD). Once *Melbourne 2030* began to unravel, some scholars retreated into an embarrassed silence, while others – mainly locally-based – joined those advocating the 'don't think – just do' approach. If metropolitan planning in Melbourne is to rise from the ashes of *Melbourne 2030*, practising and academic planners will need to pay much more attention to thinking before doing – or as it is often called, planning.

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