

STATE of SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Trends and Issues 2006 Update

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METROPOLITAN PLANNING

Alan Hutchings and Steve Hamnett

Introduction

The present system of spatial planning for South Australia was established in the early 1990s, following the Bannon Government's 'Planning Review'. With regard to the Adelaide metropolitan area, a planning strategy was to be prepared to establish long-term goals and objectives for the city's development. These required endorsement at the political level as a statement of government and community purpose. The strategy, once adopted, was to provide a framework for privately initiated major projects and a focus for initiating public-funded projects. Its purpose was to 'guide the provision of and staging of infrastructure and other services' (South Australian Planning Review 1992:17) and, to this end, it was to be linked directly to budgetary processes. It required high level bureaucratic and political status and hence it was recommended that the task of managing and revising the strategy should be given to the Department of Premier and Cabinet since it was difficult 'to conceive of a line agency in government being able to assume sufficient authority for the duties involved' (South Australian Planning Review 1992: 46).

The evolution of metropolitan planning in the 1990s was described by Hamnett and Lennon (see Spoehr 1999). This –the period of the Brown and Olsen governments – was a period of limited strategic thinking and ad hoc infrastructure investment. The defining characteristic of the period was an emphasis on providing a quick and certain planning approvals system for developers on the grounds, regularly contested by some, that delay and inefficiency in the system were scaring off investors. This formed part of Australia-wide 'neo-liberal' approaches which saw planning as a '...minimalist form of spatial regulation whose chief purpose is to facilitate development'(Gleeson and Low, 2000:190). This short update picks up the threads in the early years of the 21st century and focuses, in particular, on the changing role of metropolitan planning strategy under the Rann Labor government.

The Rann Government And The Re-emergence Of Strategic Planning

A draft update of the Planning Strategy for Metropolitan Adelaide was prepared and released for public consultation in early 2002, although it did not come into effect until 2003, by which time Labor had returned to office. It affirmed the importance of an urban growth boundary for the metropolitan area, together with urban consolidation policies, with an increased emphasis also on clearer residential design policies and neighbourhood character studies. Integrated transport and land use planning, a new industrial land review and strategic transport infrastructure for freight movement were other areas which were given higher priority. But, even while adopting the 2003 Planning Strategy, the Rann Government signalled its intention to prepare a new 'refreshed' strategy which was to have a stronger focus on ecologically sustainable development than its predecessors:

'In Australia, we need to start planning cities and surrounding areas with ESD principles as a foundation, not just another issue which needs ticking off on a checklist. The South Australian Planning Strategy aims to establish guiding principles and place emphasis on biophysical resources as a foundation of planning..'
(Bellette 2003: p.12).

After a protracted period of delay, redrafting and restructuring, accompanied by, and related in part to, cabinet changes, this latest version of the metropolitan planning strategy was released for public comment in April 2005. Its introductory section noted the Rann government's commitment to making Adelaide a 'leading creative and green city' and identified the planning strategy's task as being to guide physical development

and the growth of the city in ways which support this commitment. Four 'guiding principles' derived from the 1992 National Strategy on Ecologically Sustainable Development followed:

- 1. Optimise the net benefit from development, use and management of resources and ensure the integrity of natural, social and economic capital:**
- 2. Create integrated solutions with multiple benefits from sustainable development:**
- 3. Enhance accessibility to, and ensure a fair distribution of, resources throughout the urban area:**
- 4. Provide both certainty to investors and adaptability of policy to allow for innovation**

(Planning SA 2005: 9)

'These led in turn to three 'planning priorities' expressed as 'Urban containment', 'Integrated energy provision, transport planning and land use planning', and 'Integrated land and water use planning and development' (Planning SA 2005: 12)

In comparison to its predecessors, there was no doubt that this latest draft version of the metropolitan planning strategy was more coherent and convincing in expressing a commitment to sustainability. There was an impressive richness of analysis, particularly in relation to water, waste, energy, bio-diversity and their links to urban development, leading to strategies to plan with, rather than against, natural cycles. As with most other contemporary Australian metropolitan strategies, there was 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. Modelling of urban land requirements over the next 25 years indicates a likely shortage of land within the boundary for the new housing projected unless significant redevelopment of some established areas occurs at higher densities – particularly mixed use 'transit-oriented developments' around major nodes in the transport network and along public transport corridors (Planning SA 2005, p.10). Strategies were also proposed to encourage the use of non-motorised forms of travel and reductions in car-parking requirements were canvassed in transit-focused areas in order to encourage the use of public transport services.

Modest public transport improvements were referred to – an extension of the Glenelg tram line from its current terminus in Victoria Square to the railway station on North Terrace (subsequently extended to the City West campus of the University of South Australia), new trams to replace the venerable existing fleet, two new suburban bus-rail interchanges and a possible extension of the southern Noarlunga rail line to Seaford. The transport sections of the

strategy also mentioned improvements to the freight transport network, including 'efficient transport links for the north-south corridor through Adelaide' (Planning SA 2005: 25).

Overall, the draft metropolitan planning strategy provided a clear and generally coherent set of proposals in support of a more sustainable city, interpreted as being a more compact city, characterised by selective increases in residential density, achieved in particular through transit-oriented development along existing transport corridors. Modest improvements in public transport infrastructure were indicated, along with road improvements to facilitate freight movement, particularly in the north-south corridor. The whole was underpinned by an explicit commitment to ecologically sustainable development as '...development that improves the total quality of life, both now and in the future, in a way that maintains the ecological processes on which life depends' (National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development 1992, cited in Planning SA 2005: 8).

After a further protracted period of delay, the draft Metropolitan Planning Strategy was finally adopted, with relatively little fanfare or media attention, in August 2006.

However, under the Rann government, there have been some significant changes to state strategic planning arrangements and to the processes of infrastructure planning as a part of these. The metropolitan planning strategy needs to be read in relation to these broader changes to governance arrangements in order to better understand how 'integrated' planning now works in South Australia. The next section explores the current arrangements for infrastructure planning.

Strategic Infrastructure Planning for South Australia

Soon after coming to office the Rann Government established a new Economic Development Board (EDB) to advise on ways of revitalising the state economy. Early recommendations of the EDB's work in 2003 were to establish a 'whole of government' State Strategic Plan and to support this by stronger co-ordination arrangements between government agency chief executives through a senior management council. The arguments advanced for a State Strategic Plan are familiar:

'By implementing an effective State Strategic Plan, this government will be visionary rather than risk being short-term and political in its outlook. A State Strategic Plan would provide guidance to the public sector and the

community about the government's long-term objectives and enable people to plan for their future with more certainty and confidence and respond more dynamically to the challenges they face. It would also allow the private sector to confidently take account of the government's overall strategic objectives in developing its own long-term business plans...It is the State Strategic Plan that must drive the budget. Successive governments have failed to adhere to this principle: they have chosen to focus on short-term problems rather than adopt a longer-term view and commitment. An effective State Strategic Plan would also facilitate more complex multilateral, cross-agency objectives' (Economic Development Board 2003, p.26).

Streamlined processes to support economic development were also advocated and, in relation to the land use planning system, these included the introduction of development assessment panels at local government level, including independent experts and a minority of elected local councillors. Local authorities and other agencies involved in the planning process are to be made more accountable for timelines in decision-making through performance monitoring, benchmarking and other tools first introduced in the 1990s. Community consultation remains important, although '...while government should listen to minority views, these opinions should not drive decision-making or replace proper consideration of what is in the overall best interests of the State. Specifically, the EDB is concerned that there exists within some sections of the community an apparent anti-development sentiment that is hindering our economic opportunities, and which has a disproportionate voice' (Economic Development Board 2003: 26).

South Australia's Strategic Plan, as proposed in 2003 by the EDB, was developed and released in early 2004. In April 2005 a 'Strategic Infrastructure Plan for South Australia' was also released. This was the work of a new Office for Infrastructure Development, set up following the recommendation of the EDB in order to plan and implement infrastructure in a co-ordinated 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'(Office for Infrastructure Development 2005: 6).

This Strategic Infrastructure Plan was not subject to community consultation. Its proposals for improvements to transport infrastructure within the metropolitan area gave the highest

priority to the construction of road tunnels to improve freight movement in the north-south transport corridor. While increased use of public transport was also identified as an infrastructure priority, in line with a State Strategic Plan target to double public transport usage (to 10 per cent of weekday travel by 2018), the principal short-term measures identified were the extension of the existing Glenelg tram-line for a few city blocks to North Terrace, the purchase of nine new trams and a commitment to 'investigate' an extension of the Noarlunga rail line to the fast-growing southern suburb of Seaford. Electrification of the metropolitan passenger rail system, seen by some as an essential step in shifting the balance towards a higher public transport share of daily travel, was ranked as a lower priority.

The introduction of an over-arching South Australia's Strategic Plan with measurable performance targets by the Rann Government has much to commend it, as does the publication of an infrastructure strategy which includes a clear set of priorities and projects designed to give effect to the South Australia's Strategic Plan. However, these changes to overall state planning arrangements have some implications for the role of the metropolitan planning strategy. It appears, for example, that, rather than the metropolitan planning strategy 'guiding the provision and staging of infrastructure' as was intended in the early 1990s, it now becomes a vehicle for incorporating and expressing the spatial consequences of infrastructure decisions which have already been taken elsewhere. The rationale put forward by the Planning Review in 1992 for locating the metropolitan strategy in the Premier's Department, moreover, appears to lose any force which it may once have had, since the metropolitan planning strategy now becomes unequivocally a plan which is mainly concerned with the physical or spatial expression of the policies of other government agencies. The reasons for engaging in extensive consultation on the metropolitan planning strategy are also open to question when there is no comparable requirement for consultation in determining major underpinning infrastructure priorities - and indeed, consultation on the 2005 draft metropolitan planning strategy was more limited than on earlier occasions, in part by budget constraints, to workshops with state agencies, local government and identified stakeholders (O'Leary, 2005).

The strong commitment to ecologically sustainable development in the current draft metropolitan planning strategy appears to sit uneasily with what appears to be a dominant economic growth discourse in the South Australia's Strategic Plan and the accompanying infrastructure strategy. That conclusion needs to await a more detailed analysis than has been undertaken to this point, although it is instructive to note Premier Rann's foreword to the Plan which expresses his desire to prove that

'...South Australia can be fervently pro-growth and pro-business, while also being environmentally sustainable and socially inclusive' (Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2004).

For economic development interests integrated planning may involve some adaptation to recognise sustainability concerns and also a marketing opportunity 'for businesses to gain a competitive advantage by supplying "clean and green" products' (EDB 2003: 11). It certainly acknowledges the importance of place and environmental quality in attracting new firms and investment (EDB 2003:18). It is likely to stop short, however, of integrating environmental concerns to the extent that they challenge the very nature of economic activity and its underlying imperatives for growth. Environmental advocates, however, are likely to support stronger notions of sustainability and to regard some environmental constraints to development as non-negotiable. Integrated planning in this context means modifying economic behaviour to take account of absolute environmental constraints (Blowers, 2000).

A decade or so on, the South Australian Planning Review's commitment to a 'community shared vision' seems rather old-fashioned (South Australian Planning Review 1992b, p.22). Individuals and groups have diverse aspirations and their abilities to fulfil these are not equal. Some have more resources and power to allow them to pursue their aspirations and express their preferences than others. Fundamental conflicts over values and inequalities of power are not likely to be resolved simply through improved arrangements for administrative co-ordination across government agencies and it seems important not to be naïve about the ease with which strongly opposed views can be 'integrated'. But, accepting that, there is some lack of clarity in quite how spatial planning strategy is now intended to fit into overall government planning arrangements. This has perhaps not been helped by some rather recent changes to government ministry and agency structures which have relocated Planning SA from forming part of a transport and planning agency to becoming a part of the large Primary Industries and Resources portfolio.

At the time of writing there is a good deal of legislative and policy activity occurring of relevance to planning arrangements and metropolitan development. Legislation to require the establishment of local development panels and the mandatory delegation of planning applications to these panels or to professional officers has been passed. The Development Act, the principal act which governs land use planning, is to be further amended to tighten up requirements for strategic plans to be reviewed at both state and local levels. There is a program under way to achieve greater consistency between local council development plans which, in recent years, have become something of a patchwork quilt across the metropolitan area. It is also intended to introduce a range of measures intended to reduce the time required to review development plans and

also to speed the time taken by relevant authorities to deal with planning applications, including a streamlined process of referring applications to other government agencies for advice. Much of this activity is driven by a desire to counter criticisms that the assembly and release of land for development is proceeding too slowly at the urban fringe, while redevelopment within the existing urban area, required as part of the urban containment and consolidation policy, is being delayed by protracted planning processes, manipulated by recalcitrant local elected members.

The relationship between planning processes and housing affordability has taken on a higher political salience in 2006. After a decade of silence on urban affairs, the Howard Commonwealth government has rediscovered that most Australians live in cities and, at a time when the long period of low interest rates appears to be coming to an end, is blaming state planning agencies for an alleged shortage of land for development which is contributing to affordability problems for first home-buyers. A more balanced perspective might also consider, in addition to land supply issues, some of the factors which have influenced demand for housing and driven up prices recently - the First Home Owners Scheme, generous tax cuts to the wealthy and negative gearing for investors, amongst others. The ability of younger people to enter the housing market can also be argued to have been influenced by increased job insecurity under current industrial relations laws and by the fact that a generation of university graduates burdened by HECS debts may be reluctant or unable to take on the extra costs of a home loan. These debates will certainly intensify in the run up to the next federal election.

Overall, there is at present a fast-moving legislative and policy agenda which is impacting on metropolitan planning. The metropolitan strategy provides a clear statement of contemporary wisdom on how to make Adelaide a more sustainable city - an urban growth boundary, a more compact city and higher urban densities around public transport and regional centres - but the role of the strategy as a means of guiding government infrastructure decisions seems less clear than it was originally intended to be. There are also relationships to be established with other important policy initiatives aimed at reducing Adelaide's vulnerability to environmental and climate change - the government's draft Climate Change legislation, for example, and its draft Greenhouse Strategy. Another policy regime dealing with ecological sustainability and environmental matters has also grown up almost without reference to matters under the Development Act. The Natural Resource Management Act has led to a series of statutory boards that stand as parallel policy makers. Legislation urges cross referencing but ways and means are still to be settled. This is a critical challenge- particularly at the metropolitan urban/ rural interface.

In short, there is a great deal of strategic planning, infrastructure prioritising and legislative change under way. How well it all fits together is a little hard to discern from a perspective outside of government, but the thrust towards a more sustainable city is to be encouraged. The current energy and activity are also to be welcomed and stand in sharp contrast to the neglect of strategic metropolitan planning by state government for much of the 1990s. Challenges for the immediate future will be to ensure the coherence and co-ordination of the present burst of well-intentioned activity and also to look beyond the current emphasis on metropolitan containment to a new focus on the long-term evolution of South Australia's settlement system. We are likely to require a blend of urban infilling, well-sequenced fringe development, plus some planned expansion of regional towns, particularly if population growth picks up under the twin influences of the Premier's population target of 2 million people by 2050 and a predicted resource boom. South Australia's tradition and experience of strategic thinking about planned urban expansion through public-private joint ventures in which the government uses a substantial presence in the land market to ensure the timely and co-ordinated provision of services and infrastructure will be as relevant to these challenges as it has been in the past.

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