A Plenitude, Plethora or Plague of Plans: State Strategic Plans, Metropolitan Strategies and Infrastructure Plans?

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Abstract: In the last five years, planning strategies have been released for the five mainland capital cities in Australia. This paper examines them in conjunction with state strategic plans and infrastructure strategies in South Australia and New South Wales, with which they are linked in most states. These two states have probably the most complete and current suite of all three documents, although other states such as Queensland have recent proposals of this kind, sometimes closely linked. The question arises as to how appropriate each of these plans is in its own right, how effectively it supports or reflects the others, and how robust it may be in dealing with uncertainty and the transition towards sustainability. The paper examines the characteristics of each of these plans the ways they are linked, and how they affect each other. The paper concludes that each of these three plans is useful in charting a direction for change. But each is subject to changes of government, in community attitudes and environmental circumstances. Moderate modifications to them and their relationships might improve the longevity and effectiveness of such instruments.

Introduction

While most states have recently formulated state plans, metropolitan strategies and infrastructure plans, there has been little examination of the links between them. While this paper is primarily concerned with the effectiveness of metropolitan planning, commentators in South Australia have already noted that metropolitan strategies have to take account of and be associated with important initiatives in infrastructure planning and strategic planning for the state (Hamnett, 2005; Hutchings and Hamnett, 2006). That inevitably leads to a series of questions about this strengthened suite of planning proposals. Are they consistent one with another? Do they support each other? How dynamic, flexible and relevant are they? Do they have distinctive roles and relationships? Where are they coming from? Does the first of them have priority or influence over the others? Which seem the more influential in charting an uncertain future? In particular the question has been asked of state strategic plans as to how much of them is substance and how much of them is spin.

This paper reviews recent plans and strategies of these three types in South Australia and New South Wales. These two states have the most recent examples of them, and the commonalities and differences between them should be of interest and significance. Organising such a description, commentary and interpretation in the most insightful and constructive way is not easy. After a general introduction, this paper first considers each of the three documents as unrolled in South Australia in the order in which they were produced. It ends that section by commenting briefly on their perceived roles and relationships. The next part carries out the same process for New South Wales. A third part then draws some conclusions from the exercise by comparing the character of each plan in the two states, and the final part hazards some opinions about how the characteristics of each plan might be strengthened both in their own function and their support for each other. Because of space limitations, the documents can only be described in terms of their general characteristics with particular attention to their constructed or potential relationships. More detailed accounts and critiques of Sydney's metropolitan strategy have been published elsewhere (Searle, 2006; Bunker, 2007) and these act in part as a basis for this paper.

In this interpretation, discourse analysis is used to establish the presence of particular themes. This can be done in two ways: in identifying the dominant themes in socio-political space and using appropriate documents to illustrate the nature of these discourses, and in analysing documents themselves to ascertain their inherent discourses in the way Searle (2004) reviewed the 1994 and 1999 metropolitan strategies for Sydney. By using both these deductive and inductive approaches, it is hoped to combine textual analysis with an understanding of the political, economic and social context within which debates and arguments about the nature and
content of policy take place, in order to gain insights into the nature of the plans and their strengths and weaknesses.

In both South Australia and New South Wales the vision is to shape a more sustainable society and capital city. Within this framework, there are discourses about:

- a neo-liberal political economy (Gleeson and Low, 2000) within which the state has an important part to play (McGuirk, 2005);
- a competitive economy driven by globalisation;
- a sustainable community;
- ecologically sustainable development; and
- a compact city.

Some of these discourses are dominant and some are recessive with struggles at the boundaries and overlaps between them (Vigar et al., 2000 Chapter 8; Searle, 2004). There are important differences in emphasis and character between the cities in the dominant discourses in the three types of plan. Economic competitiveness dominates Sydney so that City of Cities (NSW Department of Planning, 2005), Sydney’s metropolitan strategy is called the “NSW Government’s long term plan to maintain Sydney’s role in the global economy and to plan for growth and change” (www.metrostrategy.nsw.gov.au). Structuring and articulation of the compact city is the spatial instrument used to accomplish this. The social consequences are assumed to be beneficial trickle down effects in terms of ‘fairness’ in better proximity to jobs and services. Similarly access to open space, improved attention to biodiversity, better management of water and waste, and more use of public transport will mark a transition towards environmental sustainability.

In South Australia, ‘Growing Prosperity’ is the first of the six objectives in South Australia’s Strategic Plan. 26 of the 98 targets set relate to that objective with many actions in other areas deployed to that end, so that the Premier has identified the guiding thread of the plan as ‘a knowledgable community’ (Government of South Australia 2007, p.4). While a more compact city is a theme in the metropolitan strategy for Adelaide, the role of the plan is a more modest one of land use and development to accommodate “more people living and working here” (Government of South Australia, 2006 p. iii) in the pleasant urban environment that Adelaide provides. There is much attention to the management of natural resources with “an impressive richness of analysis, particularly in relation to water, waste, energy, biodiversity and their links to urban development (Hamnett, 2005, p. 15-6) together with a separate plan for the rural-urban fringe.

With these reference points established it is appropriate to move on to examine each of the documents in turn in each of the states in sequence.

1. The South Australian Plans

The South Australian Strategic Plan, 2004 and 2007
When the Rann Government was first elected to power in South Australia it established an Economic Development Board to formulate an economic development plan for the state. The Board produced its report in May 2003 called A Framework for Economic Development in South Australia. Among its proposals was a recommendation to prepare a wide-ranging State Strategic Plan. The Strategic Plan was compiled and launched by the Premier in March 2004. It was very much an initiative by the state government and it does not appear government departments were extensively consulted in its preparation. The Plan articulated six key strategic interrelated objectives: growing prosperity; improving wellbeing; attaining sustainability; fostering creativity; building communities; and expanding opportunity.

Strong drive and purpose characterise the Plan. In April 2005 an Executive Committee of Cabinet was formed in order “to drive implementation of the plan through the public sector in an attempt to provide sharper political leadership to the process while retaining input from other
influential community leaders” (South Australia’s Strategic Plan Audit Committee Progress Report 2006, p.5). At about the same time a Strategic Plan Update Team was appointed to revise the Plan. This time it involved extensive consultation as the previous Plan “was sometimes perceived to be a plan for government and not necessarily for the state” (Government of South Australia 2007, p.8.)

The revised Plan was launched in January 2007. Some new areas of focus were added including early childhood, a sustainable water supply, multiculturalism, cultural engagement, employment participation, work-life balance and venture capital investment. It was also expanded to take much more account of Aboriginal people. The revised Plan also recognizes more the interrelated nature of objectives and targets and identifies key synergies and interactions in cognate targets. Understandably, given the relatively small and isolated economy of the state, most emphasis is given to suitable economic growth. The new Plan promises that this will be complemented by the development, over time of regional strategic plans that are aligned with the State Strategic Plan (p.40). However there is no spatial or locational analysis or differentiation built into the Strategic Plan, and the Metropolitan and other Planning Strategies not considered.

The Strategic Infrastructure Plan for South Australia
Among the recommendations of the Economic Development Board in its report of May 2003 was the establishment of an Office of Infrastructure “to set priorities, in line with South Australia’s Strategic Plan, across competing infrastructure needs and to coordinate planning and delivery of public and private sector infrastructure initiatives to support the development of the State” (Department for Transport, Energy and Infrastructure website accessed 10/05/07). Its first task was to produce the Strategic Infrastructure Plan for South Australia 2005/6 -2014/15.

It is an impressive piece of work and has a state volume (within which there are some important statements about regional and area-based challenges and opportunities) and a regional volume of comparable size. They were published in April and May of 2005 respectively. Like the Metropolitan Strategy, the Infrastructure Plan lists the State Strategic Plan targets and reviews 14 subject areas to show how they are deployed and addressed. It is comprehensive in scope and aims to cover all aspects of the state’s infrastructure – “physical built assets, delivery of infrastructure for social services and natural heritage” (p.4). Each subject area is discussed in terms of background, challenges and opportunities, strategic priorities and a number of projects listed in order of priority; who gives the lead; and whether they fall in the first or second half of the planning period to 2014/15.

Nevertheless economic development understandably takes priority so that “The effective and efficient provision of infrastructure is a key to sustaining high rates of economic growth and productivity improvement. It is critical to achieving the central economic target of the SASP, which is to treble exports by 2013.”(p.5).

The Plan has frank discussion about often hidden parameters- such as the fact that the energy sector together with some transport and water services is largely privatised and under different imperatives to that where public authorities provide and distribute energy, so that investment and project initiatives are differently shaped and driven (p.125).

It provides a critical mediating role between the improvement, enhancement and connection of infrastructure systems of all kinds – including service networks and organization – and the physical assets needing to be built to reflect and shape them. So the projects it lists include not only substantial spending on major public works such as the Osborne maritime precinct (p.60), but also building information processing networks requiring hardware and software (p.114), investment in vocational educational training (p. 78), and “changes to the state’s planning system to increase housing densities in strategic locations and to increase the supply of affordable housing in locations that have access to infrastructure and services” (p.61). These initiatives obviously require the recruitment, support and continued employment of skilled personnel.
The Plan contains an important section on delivering the Plan, including major discussions on working with the private sector. Rather than seeking to coordinate project bids between competing departments and portfolios, the Plan outlines a new planning and delivery framework where a strategic case is first established to identify a particular service need and the services required. This produces a “short list of projects that have been adequately scoped, and are then approved by the government for further detailed analysis” (p.35). From this a project or projects is substantiated and assessed, the method of funding and appropriation (if any) determined and the project delivered.

The Plan pays considerable attention to matters traditionally associated with land use and spatial planning. It notes the importance of urban regeneration and renewal in the future growth of Adelaide leading to higher residential densities in some areas (p.19). It mentions the need for infrastructure audits in areas undergoing change (p.11). Under ‘Land’ it seeks to “increase housing densities in strategic locations and to increase the supply of affordable housing in locations that have access to infrastructure and services” (p.61). However the section on housing is largely concerned with placing public housing on a more sustainable basis through re-use, renewal and redevelopment noting the “presence of tenants with complex and high needs will contribute to lower levels of community sustainability and wellbeing (as is already evident in many areas)” (p.119).

There is no material on the characteristics of the renewal process which is expected to be dominated by the private sector, or on the likely outcomes of such a process and how it might best be handled by local councils. In conclusion the Plan does begin to play the connecting and mediating role between abstract objectives, how they might be pursued through investment in different kinds of infrastructure, the priorities in that, and who might carry the action and provide the funding.

The Metropolitan Strategy for Adelaide

This strategy was finally released in August 2006 after a draft for public consultation had been circulated in April 2005. There is a considerable difference between the draft and the final version. That reflects the growing importance of the State Strategic Plan and Infrastructure Strategy (Hutchings and Hamnett, 2006); dealing with the urban consequences of the State Plan’s target of a state population of 2 million by 2050; and some watering down of original proposals. The previous function of the metropolitan planning strategies appears to have been in part appropriated by these other plans, and Planning SA finds itself a part of the Department of Primary Industries and Resources SA, one of the strangest bedfellows in terms of the long history of planning’s different organizational partners.

The Strategy adopts the principles espoused in other metropolitan strategies - a more compact city whose envelope is shaped by a growth boundary; increases in residential density, particularly by medium- and even high-density housing around activity centres and along major public transport routes and major roads; relying on processes of urban renewal and redevelopment to provide an increasing proportion of housing relative to new greenfields development; improvement in public transport; and improvements to the arterial road system, particularly aimed at facilitating freight movement into, around and out of the city by road, air and sea.

The Strategy contains extensive reference to the State Strategic Plan and incorporates a detailed table showing where the Strategy’s policies meet the Plan’s targets as Appendix 3. The Strategy describes the purpose of a whole range of government initiatives, programs and policies which unfold and support the functioning of the city. This is reflected again in the extensive cross-referencing to associated policy and legislation, for example public health, broadband strategy, housing plan.

The State Strategic Plan places strong emphasis on population growth and targets a population for the state of two million by the year 2050. This places the excellent population and housing forecasting service in Planning SA in a dilemma as ABS projections and its own more expansive
‘medium-stable migration projection’ shows lesser rates of growth than this. The solution is ingenious. No targets are set for population and urban growth. Instead a series of output-based and outcome-based indicators are proposed for which baselines are to be established so that some identified targets may be set “where a causal relationship with the Strategy can be identified” (p.112). Output-based indicators will be derived to measure the performance and progress of the policies detailed in the Strategy, of which there are 24. Outcome-based indicators measure the performance in relation to - the managed growth of the urban area; greater integration between water and land use planning; greater integration between transport planning, energy provision and land use; and integrated waste management. While the Strategy suggests that such indicators could be similar to those in the State of the Environment Report released every five years, for them to have any long-term relevance then this also has to take place within an adaptive management framework.

Further, instead of the kind of crisply articulated metropolitan framework provided in the Sydney strategy, there is an “Adelaide Metropolitan Spatial Framework” described as “a conceptual framework that has been designed to reflect the existing urban structure and identify the common land-use patterns that will accommodate a range of population projections, and the possible resultant housing, employment and service needs” (p.25).

Finally the well-established Residential Development Program becomes Appendix 4 of the Strategy. It uses two different population projections for the period 2001-2016 prepared in 2002 and based on 1996 data. The lower one was the one considered most likely at the time of preparation and the higher one included to take account of the government’s policy to increase population contained in the Strategic Plan. These forecasts are broken down into likely dwelling construction divided into that to be expected by new construction on broadacre subdivision, suburban redevelopment, retirement villages and apartment buildings. (p.7 Appendix 4). This then provides the basis for estimates of dwelling construction by six sub-regions constituting the Adelaide Metropolitan Region and some of the Outer Metropolitan Planning Region. This is divided into the proportion of detached as opposed to attached dwellings for the years 2003/4-2007/8. It provides a reasonably robust estimate of likely future demand and supply of housing in the short term.

The result is that the Metropolitan Strategy looks like an intelligent holding operation. It has also been expanded to encompass, appropriate or support a whole range of social, economic and community needs such as “Match locational and delivery of health and community services and facilities with the needs of the community” (p. 59). Similar exhortations address other actions - ‘Encourage…’, ‘Improve…’, ‘Reinforce…’ But it does not provide any analysis or direction as to where areas of multiple stress and disadvantage may be and how locational or land use policies might seek to address them along with other measures.

**Comment on the relationships between the planning documents**

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Planning SA and the Metropolitan Strategy has not come out well in these Rann initiatives. They are squeezed between the State Strategic Plan and the Infrastructure Plan. The Infrastructure Plan contains much of the material one would expect in a metropolitan strategy, but strongly linked to methods of implementation. Not only do the projects in the plan accordingly promise much more in terms of *actual happening* in the next few years than the somewhat vague statements in the Metropolitan Strategy, but as has been noted the Infrastructure Plan even includes some of the more exhortational measures and administrative proposals that traditionally populate metropolitan strategies.

On the other hand, the Metropolitan Strategy has to reflect the more abstract ambitions of the State Strategic Plan, so that its major section on policies reflects how the Strategic Plan’s objectives are met in 24 policy areas in a metropolitan setting. Another consequence is that the Metropolitan Strategy has a ‘Spatial Framework’ with annotated initiatives in particular areas, without much indication of intensity, priority or likelihood. Further its admirable Metropolitan Development Program is shaped to show that its short-term projections of population and
dwelling growth in Adelaide are not inconsistent with the longer term ambitions of the State Strategic Plan for a population of two million by 2050.

2. The New South Wales plans

The New South Wales Metropolitan Strategy, ‘City of Cities’

This document was produced in December 2005, after a long period of public agitation for a metropolitan plan. While this was a general public concern, it was particularly advocated by the Property Council of New South Wales which sought certainty for investors particularly for businesses and the property development sector. There were serious shortages of land for residential development and for employment lands for factory and business estates and wholesaling/distribution activities. In addition there was growing disquiet about transport, with failures in the public transport system and increasing congestion and disruption on major roads.

The overall strategy is a crisp definitive one. Regarding the economy and employment, it provided land, locations and incentives for the addition of half a million jobs by the year 2031. The spatial expression of this economic development is the main source of growth for centres and corridors with employment being concentrated in 27 strategic centres served and connected by improved public transport corridors, and employment lands located close to the orbital motorway network. The targets for these centres reflect a number of Property Council publications of previous years setting a target of 25% of employment in such centres.

While 30-40% of new housing to house population increase to 2031 is to be in greenfield sites mainly in the north-west and south-west growth centres, the rest of this dwelling increase is to take place in the existing urban area by renewal, redevelopment and infill largely in the form of medium- and high-density housing around centres and along major transport corridors joining them. Transport is understandably concerned with improving the movement of freight into, around and out of Sydney and has important proposals such as dedicated freight rail links to accomplish this. But it also complements the pattern of centres and corridors by connecting them either through existing rail inks or new strategic bus services. The net result is that much more of the residential population should be well located to access jobs and urban services.

The final section on implementation and governance, and is concerned with - the planning, programming and provision of the infrastructure needed to implement the strategy; identification and building of major projects and public works; public-private partnerships; pricing of public goods and services; subregional planning to allocate the targets for population, dwellings and jobs; standard Local Environment Plan template; monitoring and adaptation of the strategy.

The Metropolitan Strategy shapes the spatial form and structure of Sydney in 2031 to enhance economic performance and innovation. However, the Strategy is basically an arrangement of land uses and communications and in the absence of an economic development strategy depends on a number of new initiatives and augmentation of existing activities to fulfill its intention, some of which have happened. It promises an Innovation Strategy, a State Infrastructure Strategy and many new institutional arrangements to develop supportive measures, critical strategic detail and monitor trends and progress, some which have eventuated. It is essentially a top-down strategy with local councils as instruments of implementation rather than partners in local place management.

The New South Wales State Infrastructure Strategy 2006/7 to 2015/16

Soon after Morris Iemma succeeded Bob Carr as Premier of New South Wales new mechanisms were put in place to “provide for identification of infrastructure needs, establish clear administration and coordination across government, and provide for monitoring and management of risks” (Ministerial Memorandum M2005-09 dated 11 October 2005). These new arrangements
were firmly seated in the Premier’s Department and Treasury. An Office of Infrastructure Management was set up within Treasury and made responsible for a State Infrastructure Strategy - foreshadowed in City of Cities - to replace the arrangements for infrastructure planning and construction existing previously. It assumes new roles and relationships including “linking the four year Budget cycles and our 25 year regional plans, the first of which – the Sydney Metropolitan Strategy – was launched last December” (p. 3).

The Strategy was released in the first half of 2006 and is a much improved exercise compared with its predecessor, providing a ten-year perspective chartering the infrastructure provision the state government will need to make in the six broad regions comprising the state. It contains extracts from the NSW Budget Paper 4 for 2006-07 showing how various programs such as asset maintenance for the following four years fit in with the Strategy (p.9).

The Strategy links “agency asset acquisition strategies with whole-of-Government activities such as the Sydney Metropolitan Strategy and the State Budget” (p. 14) and the Sydney part of the Regional Infrastructure section is introduced by reference to City of Cities as “a detailed planning framework to deliver strong and sustainable growth and secure Sydney’s status as Australia’s gateway to the world” (p. 53). So the State Infrastructure Strategy will help transform Sydney into a city with - a strong global economic corridor; more jobs in Western Sydney; connected major centres; a contained urban footprint; stronger centres; access to housing, jobs, services and open space; and stronger connections to the Central Coast, Illawarra and the Lower Hunter.

This section uses the Metropolitan Strategy map with its various kinds of centres, and major lines of communication as a base map on which to locate and annotate the major projects and programs comprising the Infrastructure Strategy. There are separate maps to show the development of the north west and south west growth centres.

**The State Strategic Plan – A New Direction for New South Wales**

A draft State Plan was released for consultation and comment in August 2006. In the foreword, the Director General of the Premier’s Department commented that “the Premier challenged us to be creative and innovative in policy making”. It was drafted by chief executives working together over a three day period. It defined four themes - respect and responsibility; improving services; growing prosperity across NSW; and environment for living. Within these it identified 13 topics and developed 29 priorities to address them.

A period of feedback and consultation then took place and a much fuller and expanded plan issued on 14th November 2006. The report on public response to the draft Plan identified key concerns with the environment and the provision of infrastructure, and the areas where improvements were most clearly needed were public transport and water. Of the priorities listed in the draft Plan, five were identified as the most important - health services; public transport; reduction in crime; more harmonious communities through increased participation; and cleaner air. There was also concern as to whether and how the Plan might be implemented.

In the revised Plan there was some minor rewording of the themes and a fifth was added – fairness and opportunity. Within these themes, 14 goals were described, and some 50 targets identified. Those which relate to the Sydney were an increase in the share of trips made to and from the Sydney CBD by public transport to 75% by 2016; an increase in the journeys to work in the Sydney metropolitan region by public transport to 25% by 2016; to consistently meet public transport reliability targets for all forms of public transport; an increase in the number of people who live within 30 minutes travel of a major centre by public transport in metropolitan Sydney; ensuring a supply of land and mix of housing that meets demand (as a target to achieve the goal of ‘affordable housing’); and to maintain current travel speeds on Sydney’s major road corridors despite increase in traffic volumes.
Like South Australia, the new Plan allocated responsibilities to a Lead Minister and Lead CEO of nominated departments for each priority. Annual Performance Reviews are to be conducted, verified as to their accuracy by the NSW Auditor-General. There is to be an annual report on the State Plan and a review of it in 2009 with full community participation.

The Plan incorporates parts of the Metropolitan Strategy, particularly under the theme ‘Environment for Living’. Chapter 8 – ‘Delivering locally’ – has 22 pages outlining “specific regional delivery plans” for each of nine regions of NSW. That for Western and South Western Sydney repeats and adds to the statements of City of Cities. But, strangely there is no section on the rest of Sydney.

**Comment on the relationships between the planning documents**

Like South Australia, there does seem to be a “first in, best dressed” character about the three documents under examination. *City of Cities* was the first of the strategic initiatives put in place and is the responsibility of a forceful if controversial minister. It also foreshadowed and indicated some of the elements which were later initiated under the auspices of the Iemma government. It was by default part of an economic strategy which did not exist, picked up later by the Innovation Strategy, foreshadowed in *City of Cities*. The Metropolitan Strategy also presaged and pressed for the State Infrastructure Strategy which later emerged with strong links with it. The State Strategic Plan has few connections, however and its effectiveness is still on trial.

While *City of Cities* may have made the running, it is a physical land use and communications plan possessing wide ambitions in addressing social, economic and environmental sustainability. It may find difficulty in holding good in times of increasing uncertainty and rapidly changing circumstances attending metropolitan growth and change.

The crucial issues attending Sydney’s future are those regarding the diminishing supply and increasing cost of energy to run homes, businesses and transport. Similar problems attend the management and use of water. It is likely that there will be changes in economic circumstances as part of this shifting urban environment, and it remains to be seen whether the long run of economic good fortune can continue indefinitely. In this context, there is likely to be much uncertainty, changing challenges and increasing importance in sharing burdens equitably. Infrastructure provision, planning and funding could change remarkably with much more local attention to energy and water supply, use and management. Demand management will become much more important and the large centralised infrastructure systems of previous times become less dominant. Much of the burden will pass on to households who are increasingly bearing the risks of servicing and serving urban areas in the way that governments used to do. The plan set up in *City of Cities* has little capability of satisfying these issues or of adapting to become an important part of the measures devised to address them.

3. **Comment on each type of plan**

*State strategic planning* faces the challenge of how well it is formulated and whether it is likely to be followed. On the first point, the two state strategic plans still largely follow the methodology used by establishments and institutions, whether business- or community-based where objectives, aims, responsibilities and actions are reasonably defined, focused and linked. Yet the government role of reconciling conflicting community interests and the practice of collegiate governance is different (Hutchings, 2004). The formulation, sequence and association of Vision-Objectives-Targets in governmental planning is vital and the structure of the plan and its recognition of associations and interrelations is crucial. Once set in a particular mould it can become difficult to recognise and respond to strong but fluid interconnections between issues and policies and the relative importance of each of the elements involved. The plan needs constant revision and monitoring of the kind set up in South Australia demanding a large commitment of resources. There are always questions about the choice, appropriateness and suitability of some of the indicators and benchmarks and how far they cover the necessary ground.
In New South Wales the motives of the state government in formulating the State Plan has been questioned. It was finalised and published in November 2006 under the title ‘A New Direction for New South Wales’. The Labor Party theme for the election held in the following March was ‘We’re heading in the right direction … (but we need more time)’. The State Plan was heavily featured in the advertising campaign leading up to the election. The *Sydney Morning Herald* is not enamoured with the Iemma Government and is still trying to get over its re-election, and its leading editorial of May 26-27th 2007 complained of “The notorious government-funded campaign by the Premier, Morris Iemma to sell his vacuous state plan …because the plan was egregious nonsense masquerading as serious policy-making”. Anne Davies, the Herald’s state political editor commented after the election that the Premier’s pragmatic approach meant that projects such as the State Plan were bound to founder “by quietly junking the plan or changing the benchmarks” (*Sydney Morning Herald* 2nd April 2007). More obviously, it is also subject to the danger of discard on changes of government, as political differences are more about using different ends to achieve similar aims.

Even where there are regional volumes there is a lack of appreciation of the spatial dimension of the issues covered in the state strategic plans. Such spatial characteristics are often both determinants and consequences of the problems, issues and opportunities addressed in the Plan. This is particularly the case with concentrations of social difficulty and disadvantage.

The metropolitan strategies deployed in Adelaide and Sydney are quite different in their methodologies, despite the similarity of their aims. Sydney has a crystalline plan, appealing in its simplicity and patterning of land uses and communications in response to the imperatives of propelling economic development and providing certainty for the property development industry. It assumes one population and housing projection for the city to the year 2031, distributes the jobs and residents by sub-region accordingly and constructs a sub-regional planning process to make sure those totals can be accommodated. There is little flexibility in it despite the intentions of monitoring and revision. Physical arrangements are assumed to have decisive authority and effectiveness in bringing about particular outcomes, and where supporting programs and pricing measures are needed to supplement these they are indicated in principle and processes outlined to shape them.

In Adelaide, the contrast could not be more marked. The city is seen as a repository for improved policies in social, economic and environmental terms largely sketched out in the preceding State Strategic Plan and Infrastructure Strategy. The general areas where urban renewal might take place to facilitate this are indicated in principle, and the greenfields areas likely to be developed in the short term are shown. Programming of residential development in the short-term is included.

The infrastructure strategies developed for both states and cities of the past two or three years show marked improvements. They perform an important mediating function between metropolitan strategies and annual budget spending, and both shape new processes for dealing with project development, funding and prioritization. They begin to acknowledge the uncertainties brought about by ‘splintering urbanism’ (Graham and Marvin, 2001) where infrastructure provision and operation is subject to part-privatisation; regulation by competition and consumer commissions and pricing tribunals; the need to explore sources of funding for public-private partnerships where appropriate and opportune; and new dimensions in the technology of infrastructure and its spatial organisation. To this complex and dynamic scenario, the challenges of climate change have added new dimensions.

Whether these infrastructure planning and project management systems are sufficient to cope with up-and-coming issues is not clear. Both cities face emerging problems in water management and use, energy use and transport. Sydney has replaced its 2004 Water Plan with a more flexible and comprehensive one moving towards recycling and promising ‘adaptive management’ as circumstances become clearer and the importance of supply-side solutions diminishes. Much the same is likely to happen with transport, as congestion rises in Sydney and the cost of travel increases. This could lead to changing emphases in infrastructure funding.
4. How the plans might evolve

The ambition to chart a transition towards sustainability for Adelaide and Sydney is set in an uncertain future. Cities are now more at risk of energy and water shortages, particularly in the availability of liquid fuels and gas, and sharp increases in price. These in part reproduce the challenge of climate change but also reflect the fact that we are beginning to press on the boundaries of important natural resources. There will be significant and reciprocal relationships with the technological and economic changes that are needed to address these issues.

In these circumstances, the search for certainty as a foundation for long-term planning is problematic, as is the danger of emphasizing state initiatives when many of the necessary responses will be national and international. It is within this context that we conclude with some observations about how the three kinds of planning responses we have reviewed might evolve. The comments also appreciate or assume that they mix abstract policies with funded programs, with shaping of the built environment, and increasing and more intricate communication systems. On a continuum from the abstract to the physical, state strategic plans sit at one end and infrastructure programs and public works projects at the other.

State strategic plans in South Australia and in New South Wales represent a considerable investment. Perhaps the necessary revision and review processes to retain their credibility would benefit from:

- insertion of the policies and programs already in place, by all levels of government that have some influence on the issue addressed – this would fill the gap between objectives and indicators and give some indication of the types and effectiveness of appropriate action;
- include spatial and locational circumstances relevant to the issue or target addressed;
- employ a problem-solving approach to critical questions such as: ‘what limits housing affordability and how can it be improved?’; ‘how do we encourage the development and growth of advanced businesses?’; ‘how do we reduce car-dependence?’; ‘how do we provide an education system that can support innovation in business, enrichment in person; and advance community welfare?’; ‘how do we respond to and link the challenges of climate change with better management of natural resources and equity in their distribution?’ This would encourage action in a number of different ways.

Metropolitan strategies might take a mid-course between the ‘envelope’ approach of Adelaide and the design emphasis apparent in Sydney. Policies could be shorter-term than the Sydney proposals but have more substance than in Adelaide. It would be important to identify and concentrate on crucial short-term strategic problems and opportunities. One common to both cities is the movement of freight into, around and within the city and the nodes and corridors involved. Another is the identification, monitoring and support of important centres, business estates and areas of renewal and redevelopment, with all kinds of programs and support.

One notable aspect of both metropolitan strategies is the importance placed on infill, renewal and redevelopment in the existing urban areas but with little attention or consideration of the processes involved, and their environmental, social and employment prospects and outcomes. Given the importance of this physical change, it is strange that both strategies pay so little attention to this and the demonstrated need to develop programs, policies and institutions that can manage and participate in it (Randolph, 2002). The Sydney Region Outline Plan of 1968 developed a spatial and infrastructure plan to manage suburban expansion, and a similar exercise seems needed to plan change in the existing urban fabric. Powell, in general terms (2006) and in commenting on metropolitan planning in Canberra (2003) has argued that a
metropolitan strategy “must be instrumental in giving rise to coordinated land development and infrastructure provision … (and) … must provide an administrative or governance basis for dealing with the fiscal implications that follow from such as close-knit arrangement” (Powell, 2003; p. 119). Indeed, such an approach would link urban growth and change with infrastructure programming and projects even more closely, and transfer some of the economic and social ambitions of urban planning to the spatial attentions of an improved state strategic plan. Any whiff of physical determinism would also be avoided.

The infrastructure strategies produced recently in both states are a big improvement on previous exercises and begin to canvas many of the issues arising from ‘splintering urbanism’ (Graham and Marvin, 2001). However that process needs to continue. There are clear indications that infrastructure provision may have to move from the extension of monolithic systems to more flexible and sometimes locally-based structures.

There are two challenges here. One is to develop the right blend of responses to service needs, where infrastructure reflects and supports demand management, stormwater harvesting, recycling of water and waste, local - even domestic - systems of power generation, and sub-regional activity and movement systems. The other is, as Wilmoth points out (2005) to shape new systems of financing these new configurations. While City of Cities does sketch out some ideas about the need and funding of infrastructure, these are more clearly articulated in the new infrastructure needed in greenfields growth areas. There is a clear danger, as Wilmoth argues, in not understanding or providing for the infrastructure needed in redeveloping areas. It is too easy to assume existing infrastructure has spare capacity, and while Melbourne has begun to estimate at least the crude costs of expanding activity centres where much intensification and compaction is to take place, (McDougall, 2007) there is still an assumption that existing infrastructure will cope with urban consolidation, densification and the new technologies and processes that are beginning to be deployed to face the challenges of environmental sustainability.

5. Conclusions

Two other issues arise from the above analysis. One is that in both New South Wales and South Australia, the first of these planning documents has had considerable influence on the others and in each case has been the responsibility of a strong and senior minister. In South Australia it is the Premier that has driven a strong and continuing initiative to link state planning with infrastructure provision. In New South Wales the Planning Minister has overseen a metropolitan strategy that again has been linked with an infrastructure strategy. These differences in emphasis and connection rely on the ministers involved and the timing of each of the three documents. This raises the intriguing issue within state planning, budgeting and development circles of which planning paradigm might lead the state, and which elements of their bureaucracies might undertake and lead it. Given the ephemeral nature of some of these circumstances, it is even more important to establish the most appropriate roles, responsibilities and relationships of each plan.

References


