

# **Simpler, Faster, Cheaper - Australia's Urban Aspirations and the Planning Reform Agenda**

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# Introduction

- This paper is part of a developing program of research looking at both planning reform and strategic planning nationally, but in particular at NSW, Victoria and WA.
- It comes in part from an interest in planning reform - often fuelled by a change in government, or as rhetoric around elections.
- Planning is characterised as hampering development, increasing housing costs and restricting economic growth.
- A common theme of reform, is cutting 'red tape'.



# The Planning Agenda

- But there is a tension as the demands on planning continue to expand.
- Planning must:
  - promote economic prosperity,
  - manage growth,
  - protect environment,
  - promote social cohesion and liveability
  - and deliver globally competitive cities.
- But can Australian planning systems become simpler, faster, and cheaper and still deliver on these expanded goals?
- And what ought the connection be between strategy and regulation.

# Planning reform

- Planning reform has been fuelled by the work of the DAF, and encouraged by national interest through Productivity Commission and COAG.
- Goals for strategic plans have been set through the national urban policy, and then systems were assessed against criteria.

| <i>Agency</i>  | <i>Report(s)</i>  | <i>Year</i> |
|--|---|-------------|
| Productivity Commission  | <i>Performance Benchmarking of Australian Business Regulation: Planning, Zoning and Development Assessments</i> | 2011        |
| COAG Reform Council  | <i>Review of Capital City Strategic Planning Systems; Report to the Council of Australian Government</i>        | 2011        |
| Local Government and Planning Ministers' Council: COAG Business Regulation and Competition Working Group | <i>First National Report on Development Assessment Performance 2008/09</i>                                      | 2011        |

# COAG planning objectives

**Table 3 1: National Objective and Criteria for Future Planning of Capital Cities**

## OBJECTIVE

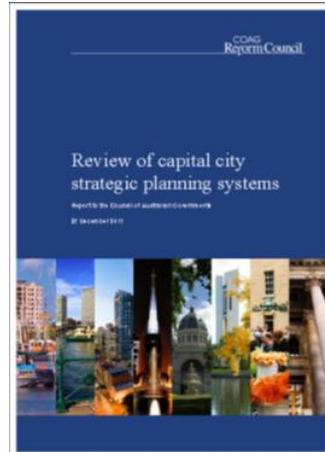
*To ensure Australian cities are globally competitive, productive, sustainable, liveable and socially inclusive and are well placed to meet future challenges and growth.*

## CRITERIA

Capital city strategic planning systems should:

1. be integrated: -
  - a. across functions
  - b. across government agencies;
2. provide for a consistent hierarchy of future oriented and publicly available plans;
3. provide for nationally-significant economic infrastructure (both new and upgrade of existing);
4. address nationally-significant policy issues;
5. consider and strengthen the networks between capital cities and major regional centres, and other important domestic and international connections;
6. provide for planned, sequenced and evidence-based land release and an appropriate balance of infill and greenfields development;
7. clearly identify priorities for investment and policy effort by governments, and provide an effective framework for private sector investment and innovation;
8. encourage world-class urban design and architecture; and
9. provide effective implementation arrangements and supporting mechanisms.

Source: adapted from COAG Reform Council (2012)



# State systems assessed – more reform required!

Table 4: National Review of Capital City Strategic Planning Systems

| Criteria   | Perth   | Score       | Melbourne | Score       | Sydney  | Score      |
|--|---------|-------------|-----------|-------------|---------|------------|
| <i>Integration</i>                                     | LC      | 2           | PC        | 1           | PC (rp) | 0.5        |
| <i>Hierarchy of Plan</i>                               | C       | 3           | PC        | 1           | PC      | 1          |
| <i>Nationally Significant Infrastructure</i>           | LC      | 2           | PC        | 1           | PC      | 1          |
| <i>Nationally Significant Policy Issue</i>             | LC      | 2           | PC        | 1           | LC      | 2          |
| <i>Capital City Networks</i>                           | LC      | 2           | LC        | 2           | LC      | 2          |
| <i>Planning for Future Growth</i>                      | C       | 3           | LC        | 2           | C       | 3          |
| <i>Framework for Investment/Innovation</i>             | PC      | 2           | PC        | 1           | PC      | 1          |
| <i>Urban Design &amp; Architecture</i>                 | PC      | 2           | LC        | 2           | LC      | 2          |
| <i>Accountabilities/timelines/Performance measures</i> | PC (rp) | 0.5         | NC        | 0           | C (rp)  | 2.5        |
| <i>Intergovernmental Co-operation</i>                  | PC      | 1           | LC        | 2           | PC      | 1          |
| <i>Evaluation &amp; review cycles</i>                  | PC (rp) | 0.5         | PC        | 1           | PC      | 1          |
| <i>Consultation &amp; Engagement</i>                   | PC      | 1           | PC        | 1           | PC      | 1          |
| <b>Average Score</b>                                   |         | <b>1.75</b> |           | <b>1.25</b> |         | <b>1.5</b> |

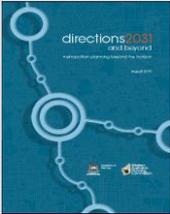
C = consistent; LC = largely consistent; PC = partially consistent; NC = not consistent; rp = reform pending

Source: COAG (2011)

# Contemporary plans

- So plans must produce cities that are “globally competitive, productive, sustainable, liveable and socially inclusive”
- Metro plans are ‘visioning instruments’ of an idealised urban future - and they are starting to look the same.
- Key ideas often repeated are:
  - Accessibility or connectedness
  - More compact urban form, along with good design
  - Liveability or lifestyle
  - Prosperity and economic growth and competitiveness
  - Global aspirations
  - Environmental sustainability.

**Table 1: Capital City Metropolitan Plans: Visions and Key Objectives**

| Strategy  | Vision   | Key Principles/Directions/Objectives  |
|---|--|---|
| <p><b>PERTH</b></p>      | <p><i>'By 2031, Perth and Peel people will have created a world class liveable city: green, vibrant, more compact and accessible with a unique sense of place'.</i></p>                                      | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Liveable city</li> <li>2. Prosperous city</li> <li>3. Accessible city</li> <li>4. Sustainable city</li> <li>5. Responsible city</li> </ol>  |
| <p><b>MELBOURNE</b></p>  | <p><i>"Already known as one of the world's most liveable cities, Melbourne will become a global city of opportunity and choice."</i></p>   | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A distinctive city</li> <li>2. A globally connected/competitive city</li> <li>3. Social &amp; economic participation</li> <li>4. Strong communities</li> <li>5. Environmental resilience</li> <li>6. Polycentric city linked to regional cities</li> <li>7. living locally – a '20 minute' city</li> <li>8. Infrastructure investment</li> <li>9. Leadership &amp; partnership</li> </ol> |
| <p><b>SYDNEY</b></p>   | <p><i>'Sydney in 2031 will be one of the world's most dynamic and successful cities. Its strong economy and healthy environment will make it one of the most desirable places to live in the world'.</i></p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Balanced growth</li> <li>2. A liveable city</li> <li>3. Productive &amp; Prosperous city</li> <li>4. Healthy &amp; resilient environment</li> <li>5. Accessible &amp; Connected city</li> </ol>   |

# Most recent – Plan Melbourne

- *Plan Melbourne* was released in October.
- According to the Premier “*It is a blueprint for Melbourne’s future prosperity, liveability and sustainability*”.
- Its vision for Melbourne is that: *Melbourne will be a global city of opportunity and choice.*
- The outcomes and objectives sought are:
  - Delivering jobs and investment
  - Housing choice and affordability
  - A more connected Melbourne
  - Liveable communities and neighbourhoods
  - Environment and water
  - A state of cities
  - Implementation – delivering better governance



# “A clearer and simpler planning system with improved decision making”

- So implementing the vision depends on planning reform.
- Primarily to be achieved through the new Metropolitan Planning Authority which will be a coordinating body.
- The MPA will “*focus on facilitating appropriate development, help to coordinate government investment, **speeding up development processes and advising when red tape can be reduced***”.
- One of the MPA’s immediate tasks will be to investigate new development opportunities and “***recommend new streamlined approvals processes***” .
- Implementation = cutting ‘red tape’, de-legitimising language.

# Planning reform and strategic planning

- Reform of statutory systems comes from a view that it is just about procedures rather than the achieving strategic goals.
- Stat planning is not the only means of achieving goals but is centrally important.
- Efficiency is seen as the ability to say **yes** quickly.
- This downplays other goals of metropolitan plans such as sustainability, connectedness, etc.
- Despite Plan Melbourne's discussion of both, recent statutory reforms in Victoria preceded the new strategy, limiting effective action in some areas before the strategy was released.

# Recent Victorian Statutory reform

- Statutory planning changes in Victoria recently have included:
- New zones
  - Which increase the number of uses and developments not requiring approval,
  - reduce the number of prohibited uses,
  - reduce third party rights of notification, objection and appeal.
- VicSmart
  - a system to “enable a streamlined assessment process for straightforward planning permit applications to be set up in planning schemes”.
  - Decisions must occur within 10 days and rules on notification are waived.
  - But once set up, this fast tracking could be extended to many other situations.

# Convergence across the states divergence of planning tasks

- Strategic planning and planning reforms across the states show evidence of policy transfer and convergence.
- Strategic metropolitan plans are manifestations of political rhetoric, with multiple audiences and purposes, they are boosterist marketing documents for both local and external consumption.
- Planning Reform is now simply deregulation, or a way to get decisions which facilitate development more quickly and with more certainty.
- Planning reforms appear to serve developer interests over other interests – cutting ‘red tape’ is developer language.
- But continual change and reform can be inefficient in itself – reform as ‘busy work’, loss of institutional knowledge and experience. An enormous amount of money and time can be spent for no obvious gain.