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A Tale of Two Melbournes? The Disparities of Place and How to Bridge The Divide

Sambell Oration to the Brotherhood of St Laurence

Delivered by Professor Roz Hansen

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Thank you Bishop Huggins for that generous introduction.

And thank you to executive director Tony Nicholson for paying me the honour of asking me to deliver the Sambell Oration. As chair of the Ministerial Advisory Committee helping the State Government map out a new Metropolitan Planning Strategy – a blueprint to guide Melbourne's expansion and growth over the next 40 years – I have got to know Tony as a member of the committee. I can testify he is passionate about bringing to the table the Brotherhood's concern about weaving together economic and social policies to deliver a more inclusive growth for our city.

When the committee was framing key principles to guide the new planning strategy, Tony was the first to make the case that opportunities for full social and economic participation must be extended to all residents of Greater Melbourne, especially those setting up homes and families in the city's expanding urban fringe. I agreed without hesitation. I commend the Brotherhood's own moves to target need in the city's urban growth corridors. These new programs are in the best tradition of Brotherhood founder Father Gerard Tucker and Geoffrey Sambell, both pioneers of social service work in this city.

As an urban planner of more than 30 years' experience, can I say to you that I am deeply troubled by growing disparities in the choices available to Melburnians by the fact of where they live. The amenity enjoyed by a resident of an established suburb like Hawthorn, six kilometres east of the CBD, or Clayton, some 19 kilometres southeast of the CBD, is quite different from that of a Melburnian putting up stumps in areas like Craigieburn, 26 kilometres north of the CBD, or Melton, 35 kilometres west of the CBD, or Cranbourne, 43 kilometres to the south-east.

If you can forgive a little nostalgia, let me wind back to my own childhood in a comfortable home in East Ivanhoe in the 1950s. I lived in a part of Melbourne that was green, suburban and safe. From the age of seven, I was encouraged by my parents to walk to the local state primary school with my brother and sister. The walk was over a kilometre; we passed churches, a kindergarten and a shopping centre. We had to negotiate a couple of crossings along the way. I developed a real sense of place and independence from an early age due to these trips, mirrored by other children in the neighbourhood. Later, when I went to secondary school in North Balwyn, it was a much longer journey involving a walk, a bus and tram – but again I was lucky; good public transport connections were available where I lived.

So, what might travelling to school be like for a child growing up today in a new suburb like Craigieburn – situated at the end of a train line, where public buses venture on the half hour of a weekday morning and where there is no prospect of a tram on the horizon? Unless she lived close to school, she's more likely to be dropped off and picked up by car. If she walked, she would negotiate unfinished footpaths, greenfield sites and barbed wire situated near finished housing. There would be boards promising yet-to-be-built shops and signage boasting housing with 'Unbelievable Prices'.

In contrast, a child living in East Ivanhoe, even accounting for 21st century parental anxiety about walking to school, is still likely to have my freer experience of walking or catching public transport in a suburb full of amenities.

An increasing geographical divide in the mode of travel to school, to work, to local shops and community facilities between suburbs also extends to educational options, ranging from child care and pre-school to primary, secondary and tertiary education. You can even see a gulf in the different flavour of lifestyles offered by real estate advertisements – be it so-called 'downtown' city living or suburban living.

Disparities of place are also reflected in availability of jobs within a reasonable travel distance from homes located between suburbs and even the type of dwellings offered to match different needs and budgets. Long travel times from home to work are hurting productivity levels, the city's environmental health and disrupting work and life balance. There is less time to spend with children, family and friends and long commutes – overwhelmingly by car in the urban growth-corridor suburbs – are contributing to problems of mortgage stress. There is disconnection in our city between where jobs are located and where many people on the lower economic rungs can (sometimes barely) afford to live. The inevitability of rising petrol prices and the rising cost of living in comparison to salaries for paid work are all factors that have a 'knock-on effect' on our social connectedness and economic future.

Meanwhile, projections over the next 40 years for metropolitan Melbourne inform us that we will be living and working in a geographically larger metropolis – with approximately 6.4 million people forecast by the year 2050, compared to nearly 4.2 million today. The future is already on our doorstep: Greater Melbourne grew by 60,000 between June 2010 to June 2011 – that's the equivalent of twice the population of Preston in one year.

The challenges faced by governments responsible for managing the growth and development in our capital cities are multi-dimensional. An ageing population means we will have less people in the workforce. There is also a more competitive and innovative global marketplace in which to do business. They signal that we cannot afford to plan cities on 'business as usual' terms.

For too long, governments of all political colours have relied on a legacy of past planning policies, programs and city shaping investment to 'cope' with growth rather than 'manage' growth. We continue to rely on ageing transport infrastructure to move people and goods around our metropolis rather than redirecting our energies to providing public transport that enhances accessibility to a wide range of jobs and services. We have failed to address

issues such as affordable housing by expanding the sea of suburbia on Melbourne's outskirts and cementing the car culture even more into the city's psyche.

To date, we have also promised so much for the people living in the growth areas and delivered so little in terms of public transport, jobs, child care and maternal health, schools and medical facilities.

I believe the future of metropolitan Melbourne is at a watershed in its 177-year history. The complexity and seriousness of problems associated with urban growth are becoming matters of state, national and possibly international consequence. The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Reform Council acknowledged as much in 2011, stating:

'The way we undertake our strategic planning for cities needs to change. Population growth, demographic changes, increasing energy costs and the shift to a knowledge-based economy have changed the assumptions that underpinned planning.'

The Discussion Paper – *Melbourne, let's talk about our future* – released last month by the Ministerial Advisory Committee (MAC) introduces nine principles and 16 ideas as a conversation starter to help shape the planning strategy for this city. Tonight, I focus on two of the principles – 'Social and Economic Participation' and the need for 'Strong Communities'. My emphasis is not simply because I am here speaking to a well-informed audience with a commitment to equity, but because I believe the two principles are at the heart of building a good life for all Melburnians.

I am not saying we don't need to focus our attention on building a smarter, more innovative and globally competitive economy because that is also a key principle in our discussion paper. But *as a city*, I say we can no longer view social issues as separate to economic issues. Having a job when you want one – including a choice of jobs – and not feeling disenfranchised or isolated are the foundations of quality of life and community success. Employment brings the ability to meet material needs, social contact and dignity. Connection to family, friends and neighbours across generations is also important to building strong, healthy and inclusive local communities.

To secure our future workforce and ensure job opportunities, strong foundations must also be built on education, skills retraining and life learning. Presently, we have pockets in our city where the non-completion rate at secondary schools is as high as 27 per cent. Within OECD countries, Australia is 20th for school completion rates. To place this ranking in context, research by the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research¹ states that 'about six in 10 children from low socio-economic households in Australia currently complete high school while 90 per cent of students from more affluent homes finish secondary studies'.

If we are to realise an ambitious national target of 90 per cent Year-12 completion by 2015, then metropolitan Melbourne has a significant challenge ahead to increase the number of youth completing Year 12 as an entry 'certificate' to a job. If we are building suburbs

¹ 'Explaining the SES School Completion Gap', Cain Polidano, Barbara Hanel and Hielke Buddelmeyer, Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research, Working Paper Series, Working Paper No 16/12

without a secondary school within walking or cycling distance or a reasonable public transport trip then how can we expect our children to want to attend and progress in education?

Clearly, the proposition that releasing more greenfields land on the fringe of Melbourne to assist in addressing housing affordability is also not ringing true. The aptly named VAMPIRE or Vulnerability Assessment for Mortgage, Petroleum, and Inflation Risks and Expenditure index ² shows a growing number of Melburnians facing mortgage stress – many of whom live in the outer suburbs and growth areas. Dwellings being built on the city's fringe are also too often energy guzzling housing in suburbs lacking essential services and facilities, despite the efforts to build master planned communities under the mantra of 'sustainable communities'.

Quite frankly, there is little that is truly sustainable about these new housing developments. Beyond the odd solar panel on the roof of a house, the water tank in the backyard and the water-sensitive urban-design features which have become a marketing trademark of these projects, the lack of job opportunities, reliable and frequent public transport and basic social infrastructure in these areas sends warning signals that such developments are unsustainable in the short and long term. We are building houses that are too large for small lots; where any potential for trees in the backyard has been replaced by the alfresco dining deck. It is the new version of 'suburbia', but this time round it is just 'more building' on less land.

Of course, shelter alone does not sustain a good life assuming that you can afford to own or rent the housing that matches your needs. The building blocks of successful cities are strong and cohesive local communities. Local councils are well attuned to gauging community needs – they are at the coalface of community dissent and dissatisfaction.

The councils of Cardinia, Casey, Hume, Melton, Mitchell, Mornington Peninsula, Nillumbik, Whittlesea, Wyndham and Yarra Ranges prepared a submission³ to a state parliamentary committee *Inquiry on Growing the Suburbs: Infrastructure and Business Development in Outer Suburban Melbourne* in February this year. There are some compelling statements in this submission that I want to share so that we understand the magnitude of the issues we face and ask the question: why haven't these growth areas got a fairer share of the infrastructure pie over the last decade or more?:

- From 2001-2010 these municipalities accommodated some 332,660 new residents or 55 per cent of Melbourne's growth during this period.
- However, during this period, investment in infrastructure services and provision of jobs has not kept pace with this growth.
- These municipalities have relatively high levels of social economic disadvantage, low educational outcomes, poorer health outcomes, relatively high unemployment levels,

² 'Unsettling Suburbia: The New Landscape of Oil and Mortgage Vulnerability in Australian Cities', August 2008, Dr Jago Dodson and Dr Neil Snipe, Griffith University

³ *Interface Councils Submission to the Inquiry on Growing the Suburbs: Infrastructure and Business Development in Outer Suburban Melbourne, February 2012*, prepared by the local councils of Cardinia, Casey, Hume, Melton, Mitchell, Mornington, Nillumbik, Whittlesea, Wyndham and Yarra Ranges.

significant deficits in local employment opportunities, low provision of higher order services including arts and culture services, and a heavy reliance on private vehicle-based travel.

Average wages in these council areas, situated on the outer edge, are 12 per cent lower than in other metropolitan areas with only 11 per cent of residents holding a bachelor degree or higher education qualification compared to 24 per cent in inner Melbourne. There are 11 hospital beds per 10,000 residents in these council areas compared with 30 per 10,000 in inner Melbourne. Only 1.5 per cent of residents use public transport for their daily commute as opposed to 12.1 per cent in metropolitan areas.

I could go on citing statistics which highlight an inner Melbourne rich in job choices, well endowed with infrastructure and clearly more affluent overall than are residents living in the urban growth areas of our city who lack basic infrastructure and job opportunities upon which to build a good life.

According to the submission, for example, approximately 20 per cent of the bus routes that do operate in the 10 municipalities do not achieve Minimum Service Levels (MSL), defined as a 'minimum of one-hourly service interval between 6am-9pm Monday-Friday, 8am-9pm Saturday and 9am-9pm Sunday and a stop every 400 metres along the route'.

Indeed, too many of our suburban bus routes are configured on the basis of connecting with major suburban rail stations 'down the line'. They are usually linear journeys, often along main roads and, whilst they may connect to the nearest major activity centre, they are not facilitating public transport access to some of the more significant job clusters or employment agglomerations.

A large study conducted by the Centre for Work + Life⁴ across 10 Australian outer and growth suburbs from 2006-2009 – including some in Victoria – found that the separation of residential areas from areas of employment meant some residents took lower skilled jobs closer to home in order to meet the family's caring responsibilities. This had a specific impact on highly educated and skilled women. The study also found that in newer suburbs there is less support available for formal services, extended family and community relationships.

Characterise this divide as 'Two Melbournes' or 'the haves and have nots' – the tag doesn't matter. What matters is that unless government, the private sector and wider community join up to start to address these problems it will have profound and deleterious effects on our city.

My committee's discussion paper is not just about identifying problems; it also canvases solutions. There is a strong emphasis on bringing more jobs near to where people live and more people to where higher job densities prevail now and in the future. This will require

⁴ *Work, Home and Community Project, 2006-2009* – A three year study by the Centre for Work + Life at the University of South Australia, researched how Australians are 'putting together' their jobs, homes and communities, and was jointly funded by the Australia Research Council, Lend Lease Communities and the Innovation and Economic Opportunities Group.

some of those jobs being located closer to the outer areas so that they are readily accessible by public transport – of looking at ways of more bums on seats on the almost empty trains, trams and buses that are going in the reverse direction during the peak travel periods. It will require encouraging medium and higher density housing within and close to these job clusters, noting that these jobs are not primarily retail as is the emphasis in current planning policy. It will also mean that the public transport network, and walking and bicycling networks, will need to be upgraded, even reconfigured to ease connections between home and work.

If we are truly serious about encouraging more people to use alternative transport modes other than the car to link home with education, with jobs, shops and services, then we need to turn to buses, walking and cycling.

Few of us here would deny the public health benefits of walking and cycling – many are part of the ‘grey headed’ walking brigade with some so bold as to don the lycra and cycle to work or for recreation. Now, the benefits have been quantified in a draft discussion paper by the federal Department of Infrastructure and Transport, *Walking Riding and Access to Public Transport*.⁵

It unequivocally states the economic benefits of typical walking and cycling infrastructure include traffic decongestion, improved health, reduced vehicle operating costs and other infrastructure and environmental savings. Yet, there are many parts of Melbourne still lacking good quality pedestrian and bicycle networks. We will need to retrofit and re-engineer our land use pattern and transport system as a means of encouraging healthy, sustainable modes of travel to work, home and play.

Among the ideas the committee has also pitched is the notion of the ‘20 minute’ city. What range of jobs, services and facilities would you expect to access within a 20 minute walk, a 20 minute bicycle ride or a 20 minute public transport journey from home? Many people have been excited by this idea, but there have also been naysayers ranked among the usual suspects in the ivory towers and media. But note there are already areas within our metropolis that offer the 20 minute city – inner areas such as Carlton, Brunswick, St Kilda and Prahran. The challenge ahead for us is to determine how to deliver a more widespread 20 minute city land-use pattern at the neighbourhood and suburban levels. It will require different spatial models of delivering jobs and services, as well as different models of delivering housing which is affordable and meets changing needs as we grow old.

Instead of 50 per cent of all new housing being on the urban fringe, for example, why don’t we set ourselves a target of at least 70 per cent of new housing in more established suburbs?

The 20 minute city is also aimed at unlocking the capacity of our established suburbs and, in particular, our middle suburbs. These areas enjoy good quality infrastructure, much of it funded by previous generations. Perhaps it is time that all Melburnians also assisted in the

⁵ *Walking, Riding and Access to Public Transport: Draft Report for Discussion, October 2012*, Australian Government Department of Infrastructure and Transport

funding of essential urban infrastructure in the urban growth areas by way of a Melbourne metropolitan levy tied to specific projects.

In the past Melburnians paid a levy to fund the Melbourne Underground Loop and we continue to pay an annual Parks Charge to enhance, manage and maintain our world class network of major parks, trails, gardens and waterways. A new payment would need to be charged annually to all property owners and the basis of the amount to be paid would need to be carefully determined to ensure fairness and equity. Such a levy would be tied to agreed projects and timelines for delivery of those projects in collaboration with local government and other relevant agencies. It might be a hard sell politically, but again it is about sharing the benefits and the responsibilities of implementing the strategy.

I remain optimistic about the fate of our great city. But if the next metropolitan planning strategy is not underpinned by aspirations and challenging ideas to shape a vision for future planning and development, then it will be 'business as usual'. If we don't take action and initiative to support inclusive city growth, if we fail to address not only the current under-investment in city shaping and community making infrastructure, but the infrastructure to make us a global city in the 21st century which is liveable, sustainable, productive and equitable, then the real costs of addressing social, economic and environmental problems will escalate.

The legacy then will be even more daunting for our children and our children's children to take on.

Thank you for listening; I invite you all to participate in this important conversation.