MANAGING MELBOURNE:
Review of Melbourne Metropolitan
Strategic Planning
This paper has been prepared by Lester Townsend in his role as Strategic Planning Consultant to the Strategic Policy, Research and Forecasting Division of the Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD). The views expressed are his own and do not necessarily reflect those of DPCD or the Department of Transport (DoT). The identified lessons from this review are not intended to be a comprehensive or definitive assessment of previous plans, but are intended to assist in identifying the scope and approaches that may be suitable in the development of a new metropolitan planning strategy.
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1. INTRODUCTION

In preparing the new metropolitan planning strategy it is worth reviewing previous plans for Melbourne to see what lessons we can draw.

Melbourne is a city with a long history of strategic planning. Beginning with Robert Hoddle’s 1837 street layout for what became the CBD. This has come to be known as the ‘Hoddle grid’.

While there were no formal strategic plans for the city until 1929, town planning ideas, such as the Hoddle grid have influenced the layout of the Melbourne we know today.

By the early 1910s concerns about the dilapidated parts of the city prompted major public inquiries by the Joint Select Committee on the Housing of the People in the Metropolis (1913-14) and a Royal Commission in 1915. These events led to the development of Melbourne’s first strategic plan in 1929.

The 1929 plan of the Metropolitan Town Planning Commission proposed a planning scheme to prevent ‘misuse’ of land and protect property values, highlighting traffic congestion, the distribution of recreational open space and haphazard intermingling of land uses.

The plan was not implemented and it was only after the Second World War, in the early 1950s, that the planning system as we know it today commenced.

This paper examines planning policies for Melbourne since 1954 and presents a number of ‘lessons’ – these are summarised in this introduction.

The lessons in this paper are structured under a number of themes:

• Connecting to Victoria,
• Projecting growth,
• Shaping the city,
• Decentralisation: district centres, activity centres and central activity areas,
• Employment,
• Housing,
• Urban renewal,
• Height, heritage and character,
• Transport investments, and
• Open space.
1.1 Sixty years of planning Melbourne

Past plans for Melbourne have addressed a range of issues – though not all plans have addressed all the issues. Critical issues include:

• identifying how to strengthen links between Melbourne and regional Victoria,
• projecting population growth and proposing ways to manage that growth,
• identifying areas for suburban expansion to meet housing and employment needs,
• identifying areas of environmental or landscape value to be preserved,
• identifying activity centres and setting a vision for how they might be achieved,
• identifying areas for urban consolidation, or renewal,
• identifying the future transport network, and
• identifying open space improvements.

In 1954 Melbourne recognised the need for planning and prepared a comprehensive plan, coupled with a proposed planning scheme. Since the preparation of that plan, Melbourne has:

• accommodated over two million more people,
• built a freeway system,
• built the underground train loop,
• revitalised central Melbourne,
• increased public open space, created shared trails along waterways and created regional parks,
• built the arts centre, a new museum, sports and entertainment centre, stadium at Docklands and the exhibition centre,
• identified and protected heritage buildings,
• protected areas of natural value and landscape value,
• built a network of suburban shopping centres,
• built Monash and Latrobe Universities,
• built the Thomson, Cardinia and Sugarloaf dams.

Melbourne is recognised as one the worlds most liveable cities, and is relatively prosperous. Looking at how previous plans have maintained liveability can help guide future thinking.
1.2 What can we learn from previous plans?

Some planning approaches have been more successful than others. In trying to draw lessons from the past we might conclude:

• Melbourne must be understood in its wider State context and metropolitan strategies must recognise the interaction of Melbourne with regional Victoria.

• It is better to think about planning for a proposed number of people, or a proposed transport task, in the first instance and then deciding when this might be achieved as a means of programming infrastructure.

• Protecting environmentally sensitive areas and areas of landscape beauty has broad community support and where the green wedge boundary or Urban Growth Boundary follows on-the-ground constraints or landscape values the boundary has endured.

• Metropolitan planning has not been successful in identifying sufficient development potential for jobs and retail in activity centres. The district centre policy of the 1980s underestimated the amount of floor space required. As a result, development took place outside of centres.

• Past district centre/activity centre policies have had limited effect on shaping where retail floor space, and suburban jobs and services, have been located. Controls to force office development into centres did not work.

• State level services have been conceived of as ‘capital city functions’ and have remained firmly planted in inner Melbourne. They have not been proposed for other centres in Melbourne, or for that matter regional centres.

• Previous strategies have not developed a policy framework to tackle employment and economic development in a systematic way.

• All proposals to ‘free up’ the construction of medium density or higher density housing in suburban locations on a one size-fits-all approach have eventually been defeated by public outcry, whether it was the 1960s flat boom, as-of-right dual occupancies, or the Good Design Guide in the 1990s.

• Planning must now consider high rise suburban development. Building costs once constrained high rise development in Melbourne to a few select locations. Now this form of development is financially feasible across a far greater range of Melbourne suburbs.

• Higher density housing in and around activity centres in established and new areas has become accepted planning practice (though it does not always meet with community support).

• Urban renewal projects have been successful where they have been part of a broader strategy of urban regeneration, and created an attractive public realm.

• Managing issues of height and character is an ongoing challenge.

• A long term plan based around maintaining opportunities for future transport projects, that can be realised when needed, can have great success.
• Public transport plans have been weak in identifying areas that are well served by public transport, and at identifying a long term public transport vision.

• Proposals to covert Melbourne’s rail system into a Metro style system is a significant recent change in thinking.

• Interest in planning for bikes and walking is relatively recent, and physical improvements have lead to increases in the use of these modes.

• Open space planning has been part of metropolitan planning from the beginning and Melbourne’s open space network has been gradually expanded and improved, notably with open space along waterways.

**Overall lessons**

The overall lessons from a review of previous strategies might be:

• Move beyond the generic, and the ‘top down’.

• Put mapped frameworks in the planning scheme.

• Use government investment or action as a catalyst.
2. HISTORY OF METROPOLITAN PLANNING IN MELBOURNE

2.1 An expanding metropolis

Melbourne was founded in 1835 and was officially declared a city by Queen Victoria in 1847. During the Victorian gold rush of the 1850s, it was transformed into one of the world’s largest and wealthiest cities. By world standards, today, Melbourne is a relatively low-density city.

The pattern of growth in the 1950s clearly shows the city strung out along rail lines; cars were not generally available and people were more reliant on rail travel than they are today. In 1950 there were 160 cars for every 1,000 people in Victoria\(^1\), in 2006 there were 730.

Development from the 1960s continued the growth along rail corridors but also included car-based suburbs within the established pattern of railway lines.

*Figure 1: The growing footprint of Melbourne*

**Melbourne’s Urban Growth 1850 - 2010**

Source: DPCD

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\(^1\) 1954 figures from 1954 Surveys and Analysis page 169; 2006 figures from ABS
2.2  Metropolitan planning strategies

Over the sixty years since this planning effort began more than 21 policies or plans with a metropolitan impact have been produced. Figure 2 lists these. Details of the policies are provided on page 37.

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<td>1984</td>
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<td>1989</td>
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<td>1989</td>
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<td>1987</td>
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<td>Creating Prosperity: Victoria’s Capital City Policy</td>
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<td>1995</td>
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<td>1999</td>
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<td>2009</td>
<td>Delivering Melbourne’s Newest Sustainable Communities</td>
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Of the many strategic plans that have shaped Melbourne since 1954, eight stand out for their breadth or lasting impact. These are plans that were coupled with lasting changes to the planning scheme, or significant capital works programs. The critical plans were:

1954  **The Melbourne Metropolitan Planning Scheme 1954 Report, Surveys and Analysis** lead to the 1958 planning scheme with its system of zones for land use control and particular provisions.

1969  **The 1969 Melbourne Transportation Study** identified the future freeway network for Melbourne. In inner Melbourne which was, of course, already developed, opportunities were limited. However, in undeveloped areas the plan was able to identify optimum routes and reserve the land well in advance of development. Though the proposed network was refined in 1973 by removing some of the more controversial inner city alignments, it set the basis for the current freeway network.

1971  The Melbourne Metropolitan Board of Works plan, **Planning Policies for the Melbourne Metropolitan Region**, introduced long-term conservation and development policies through growth corridors and what we now call green wedge principles, and contained outward growth to a limited number of areas on the edge of the city. It looked at the physical constraints around Melbourne for the first time.

1970-1976  **Statements of Planning Policy** introduced the idea that specific areas had qualities that ought to be recognised and protected. This is particularly the case with the **Upper Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges Regional Strategy Plan**, which continues to be specifically recognised in Section 46F of the **Planning and Environment Act 1987**.

1980  The Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW)’s **Metropolitan Strategy** and subsequent **1981 Metropolitan Strategy Implementation** encouraged development in existing areas. The Metropolitan Strategy sought to concentrate housing, transport, employment and community facilities at highly accessible points. Following plans have repeated or reinforced these directions. In 1983, new district centre zones encouraged office development in 14 centres and restricted it elsewhere. Implementation included Amendment 150 which saw the introduction of new zones and controls to the Melbourne Metropolitan Planning Scheme.

1994  **Creating Prosperity: Victoria’s Capital City Policy** laid the path for central city revitalisation. Revitalisation of central Melbourne emphasised urban quality. The plan identified renewal projects and emphasised urban quality and place making.

2002  **Melbourne 2030** had a broadly similar strategic thrust to the preceding 20 years but for the first time quantified the task of urban consolidation. It also introduced an Urban Growth Boundary (UGB). The plan was expressed in the policy section of ‘new format’ planning schemes based on the Victoria Planning Provisions (VPP) and introduced progressively between 1997 and 2000.

2009  **Delivering Melbourne’s Newest Sustainable Communities** expanded the Urban Growth Boundary and reserved land for the Regional Rail Link, Outer Metropolitan Ring (a road and train corridor), and the land for grassland reserves in Melbourne’s west.
2.3 Underlying aims

Looking back at the previous plans for Melbourne it is clear that the basic aims have been constant, though expressed somewhat differently, as each plan adopted the language of its time. All plans set out to:

- improve the efficient operation of the city,
- improve what we would now call its liveability, and
- preserve valued environmental areas.

The 1954 plan, in keeping with the times, presented itself as a technical response to a series of problems:

> Behind this Planning Scheme lie three years of intensive research and work. The Board does not claim to have produced a panacea for all the defects and weaknesses of our city, but we do say that we have made an honest endeavour to give Melbourne a practical and worthwhile plan. It is a means to a more efficient and more orderly city and is designed to serve the public not become its master. It offers what the planning staff and the Board considers is the best solution of many pressing and costly problems, and the safest shield against recurrence of these problems in the future.²

A number of the identified problems were to be solved by reference to what was taking place in America, and the 1954 plan has a number of photos of developments in America.

By 1971 concerns had shifted slightly to include the need to preserve environmental values, as well as create an efficient city:

> The published plans are the first step towards making the most of efficient and compatible use of land available, channelling urban development into growth corridors within easy reach of open areas, making the best use of our existing systems, conserving our resources, preserving areas for the future and developing in a way that minimise future community costs.³

In 2002 concerns about the quality of life or ‘liveability’ were more fully expressed:

> In the next 30 years, Melbourne will grow by up to 1 million people and consolidate its reputation as one of the most liveable, attractive and prosperous areas in the world for residents, business and visitors.

The main thrust is to continue to protect the liveability of established areas and to increasingly concentrate major change in strategic redevelopment sites.

Implementing the plans

Part of the history of metropolitan planning is not simply identifying policy directions for Melbourne, but creating the statutory, machinery of government or capital works program tools to implement those plans.

² 1954 Plan, page vii of Report foreword by John C Jessop, Chairman of the Board

³ Alan H Croxford, Chairman of the Board
The 1954 and 1971 plans both lead to significant planning scheme changes. The 2002 plan (Melbourne 2030) introduced the Urban Growth Boundary, changed green wedge controls and introduced new state policy. By this time the new format planning schemes were much more policy driven and, so, Melbourne 2030 could be given effect without too many changes to zones and overlays in planning schemes.

The introduction of the VPP in the late 1990s, followed by the 2002 plan (Melbourne 2030) paved the way for a more comprehensive approach to detailed planning. It is only in recent times that there have been explicit:

- Growth Area Framework Plans or Growth Corridor Plans,
- Precinct Structure Plans,
- Structure Plans for Activity Centres, and
- Green Wedge Management Plans.
3. LESSONS FROM METROPOLITAN PLANNING

A study of previous metropolitan policies can show where our current approaches have come from, and can show us what has worked (and what has failed to work) in the past.

All plans address a similar range of issues, though with different emphasis:

- Connecting to Victoria,
- Projecting growth,
- Shaping the city,
- Decentralisation: district centres, activity centres and central activity areas,
- Employment,
- Housing,
- Urban renewal,
- Height, heritage and character,
- Transport investments, and
- Open space.

The changes between the plans reflect different strategic choices for achieving the broad objectives of efficiency, liveability and environmental conservation, rather than changes in the objectives themselves. For example, in one era inner urban renewal is seen as best achieved by the demolition of substandard housing and building Housing Commission estates. In another, it is seen as best achieved by the preservation and restoration of the existing housing stock.
3.1 Connecting to Victoria

The 1987 plan was the first plan for Melbourne prepared by the State Government, as opposed to the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works, but it was only in the 1995 plan, Living Suburbs, that the connection of Melbourne to regional Victoria was explicitly addressed in metropolitan strategy.4

The 1995 plan provided a schematic showing Melbourne’s links to regional centres and set out a range of explicit policies.

Figure 3: Regional context was explicitly addressed from 1995 onwards

Melbourne must be understood in its wider State context and metropolitan strategies must recognise the interaction of Melbourne with regional Victoria.

4 It was addressed in the 1992 Shaping Victoria’s Future
3.2 Projecting growth

Most previous policies have been based on a future population, and a prediction of when that population will be achieved. All metropolitan strategies have projected population growth. Some projections have been more accurate than others, but all the projections have been realised: some a little later than anticipated, some a little earlier. Figure 4 shows the actual and projected population of a number of past plans. The 1954 plan underestimated growth; the 1971 plan overestimated.

Figure 4: Changing population projections

There are two main implications of population projections: how much land, infrastructure and services will be required when the city reaches the projected size; and how quickly the land, infrastructure and services will need to be provided. An inaccurate forecast means that infrastructure spending might need to be stepped up to keep pace with growth, or that there is a little more time to deliver projects if growth is less than anticipated.

Planning for a large population increase in the 1971 plan (even though this took longer to be realised, as the wide availability of the contraceptive pill slowed growth) delivered advantages in providing longer term certainty around infrastructure delivery and allowed planning in the 1980s and 90s to concentrate on other issues. It also allowed a longer-term view of transport issues to be taken, identifying a proposed freeway network and introducing reserves that are still relevant 40 years later.

Recognising the difficulty of identifying both the population and the year it will be achieved, recent thinking has emphasised the total population that needs to be housed, for example 'Melbourne @ 5 Million' rather than a specific year such as Melbourne in 2030 (as done in the earlier Melbourne 2030 plan).

It is better to think about planning for a proposed number of people, or a proposed transport task, in the first instance and then deciding when this might be achieved as a means of programming infrastructure.

Source: DPCD, relevant plans, ABS
3.3 **Shaping the city**

The corridor plan and protection of development in the Yarra Ranges and Mornington Peninsula were introduced in the 1970s. They have remained an enduring feature of planning for Melbourne. Planning for growth based on detailed consideration of a range of constraints continues to today.

In 1954 Melbourne did not extend much beyond what we would now call the inner and middle suburbs, with some development along the existing train lines. Maps 5 and 6 of the 1954 plan show the existing and planned density patterns. The selection of land for urban expansion considered:

- the provision of drainage,
- utility services,
- the greater cost of servicing and street construction in the basalt areas of the north-west, and
- that ‘people have a preference for the eastern and south-eastern and southern suburbs’.

The 1954 plan reinforced the established tendency of the city to grow to the south east.

The 1971 plan took the first comprehensive look at the constraints that surrounded Melbourne. The plan even takes the trouble to present the constraints on a series of overlapping transparent pages (Figure 5).

*Figure 5: Photo of transparent pages in 1971 plan*

The 1971 plan adopted a ‘corridor’ approach to urban growth. Land between the corridors was called ‘non-urban’, and we have come to call them green wedges (though these non urban areas are not wedged shaped). The areas identified for conservation significance in this plan have been enduring and from the basis of later restriction to growth.
Six functions for the non urban land were identified:

- conservation,
- landscape interest,
- extractive industry,
- intensive agriculture,
- general farming, and
- public use and utilities.

These plans did not include the Mornington Peninsula, and the Yarra Valley was initially a growth corridor. The protection of the Peninsula and Yarra Valley from suburban development was achieved in the Statements of Planning Policy released in the years immediately after the 1971 plan.

The south east green wedge has been narrowed over the years as the growth corridor has crept into the wedge and developments such as the golf course and housing at Skye have been approved. In the early 1990s substantial land was added to the west of the Cranbourne corridor, narrowing the south east green wedge.

The green wedges were implemented through land use zones, with land identified for preservation placed in zones such as the Landscape Interest Zone, and land for urban growth in the Corridor Zone.

The 2002 plan (Melbourne 2030) introduced the concept of limits to urban expansion, that was formalised through the Urban Growth Boundary, which excluded landscape and conservation areas from urban development. It also excluded areas that had in the past been identified as growth corridors, but included ‘possible future development’ fronts more or less where the 1971 plan had identified corridors.

Any jurisdiction that seeks to meet the demand for land by expanding its urban area must grow somewhere; the approach in more densely settled parts of the world is to ‘leap frog’ green belt areas and establish new settlements or encourage expansion of towns away from the main centre.

Because Melbourne established a corridor plan expansion was always envisaged along the corridor.

Support for the environmental values of the green wedges has been maintained in plans and is stronger today than when first introduced. Those areas with landscape or environmental values have been maintained as green wedges.

In 2009, Delivering Melbourne’s Newest Sustainable Communities expanded the urban growth boundary, and there is now 2787 square kilometres within the Urban Growth Boundary; enough land to cater for a city of about 4.5 million people if we maintained the same mix of densities that we had in 2006.

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Protecting environmentally sensitive areas and areas of landscape beauty has broad community support and where the green wedge boundary or Urban Growth Boundary follows on-the-ground constraints or landscape values the boundary has endured.
3.4 Decentralisation: district centres, activity centres and central activity areas

The notion of district centres or activity centres has been a feature of successive metropolitan strategies.

While most strategies have identified centres, the identified centres have changed from plan to plan with only a few being a consistently identified. Major ‘freestanding centres’, Chadstone in particular, have often been ignored in the plans.

The concept that the centres might reach a level of intensity, such that Melbourne becomes a ‘polycentric’ city, is relatively recent.

Choosing centres

The 1954 plan nominated six ‘District Business Centres’: Central (Melbourne CBD), Footscray, Preston, Box Hill, Moorabbin and Dandenong. The plan presented detailed plans of how these centres might develop. These centres were the first recognition that central Melbourne could no longer continue to serve the needs of the growing city and that some ‘decentralisation’ was required:

Some people might fear that urban decentralisation would react to the detriment of the central business area and lead to a reduction in property values... Unless positive steps are taken, the growing discomfort and inconvenience within the central area must inevitably force businesses enterprises to decentralise in their own interests. The only question is, “Will they decentralise according to a plan or without a plan?”

Looking at the details for the district centres in the 1954 plan shows they were very modest proposals, not really much more than a few additional shops and some car parking in local centres. It is interesting to note that one of the reasons for decentralisation put forward in the 1954 plan was to better protect Melbourne from aerial bombing raids.

The 1971 plan introduced the ‘corridors’ and identified the need for centres in the corridors. These are not explicitly named, but appear to be: Melbourne CBD, Craigieburn, Dandenong, Frankston, Ringwood, Sunshine, Werribee, Mernda, and Lilydale. These centres were only identified in broad terms and district centre policy wasn’t really introduced until the 1980s. In 1981 the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works had determined that:

The Board will encourage and facilitate the development of designated major activity centres spread strategically throughout the metropolitan area.
By the time district centre policy was introduced a number of free standing centres had been established:

- Chadstone opened in 1960 as an open mall and in 1967 the mall was roofed over with translucent fibreglass. It was built on the paddocks of the Convent of the Good Shepherd which grazed cattle until the mid 1950s.
- Northland opened in 1966. A new bridge over the Darebin Creek at Murray Road was built to provide access to the centre.
- Highpoint was opened in 1975 and was built on an old quarry.

The 2002 plan (Melbourne 2030) expanded the notion of activity centres to give them a role in catering for residential development.

**Which centres?**

Some centres, unsurprisingly, have a long history of recognition: Box Hill, Dandenong, Footscray, Frankston and Ringwood. Other centres are included from time to time to try to shift development and employment to new areas.

A feature of activity centres in Melbourne is the creation of new centres away from identified activity centres. Planning policy has always been slightly ambivalent to these centres – on the one hand, recognising their size and role in the retail hierarchy and, on the other, recognising that these are essentially car-based retail centres, with their location driven more by land availability than by public transport access, even though bus services have been provided to these centres.

The various plans have also struggled with how to deal with Melbourne’s shopping strips (some kilometres long) in a theoretical framework that emphasises ‘centres’. From time to time, zoning patterns or strategies have sought to develop nodes along the longer strips. Figure 6 identifies the activity centres that have been identified in different plans.
**Figure 6: Activity Centres over time**

| Source: Relevant plans | Note: The Central Activities Districts are in addition to Principal and Major Activity Centres |

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Figure 7: Network of Activity Centres from 2002 plan (Melbourne 2030)

Source: DPCD
Out of centre and new centres

In the 1980s planning controls were introduced to limit the size of offices that could be developed outside of district centres. These controls were ultimately removed because there were simply not enough development opportunities in the nominated activity centres.

There has always been a tension in planning for commercial and retail growth between a ‘sectorial approach’ (how much office/retail space do we need and where is that demand) and a ‘spatial approach’ (here are the proposed district centres/activity centres and supply will be provided in those centres). Metropolitan planning has not been successful in balancing these tensions and the district centre policy of the 1980s simply underestimated the amount of floor space required.

Hard or loose boundaries

At different times a lot of effort has gone into trying to define the boundaries of centres. It is clear that some centres have grown over time while others have remained static.

Polycentric city

*Melbourne @ 5 Million* adopted the concept of a ‘polycentric city’ with the nomination of six Central Activities Districts in addition to Principal and Major Activity Centres. It is fair to say, that no district centre policy, however framed, has seriously proposed moving ‘capital city functions’ to one of the centres, for example, constructing a campus of the National Gallery of Victoria in Frankston as opposed to the central city.

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**Metropolitan planning has not been successful in identifying sufficient development potential for jobs and retail in activity centres. The district centre policy of the 1980s underestimated the amount of floor space required. As a result, development took place outside of centres.**

Past district centre/activity centre policies have had limited effect on shaping where retail floor space, and suburban jobs and services, have been located. Controls to force office development into centres did not work.

**State level services have been conceived of as ‘capital city functions’ and have remained firmly planted in inner Melbourne. They have not been proposed for other centres in Melbourne, or for that matter regional centres.**
3.5 Employment

Employment has been discussed in general terms in various plans but has seldom moved beyond a commentary on existing trends. Large areas have been identified for industrial uses, with potential off site effects in Werribee and Dandenong.

The identification of employment corridors in the 2008 *Melbourne @ 5 Million* is probably the first significant spatial policy for employment that moves beyond land supply for industrial uses.

Previous strategies have not developed a policy framework to tackle employment and economic development in a systematic way.

3.6 Housing

3.6.1 Flats, units and townhouses

The 1954 plan did not see a need to increase densities in established areas. If anything, it envisaged a slight decrease in urban density. It did, however, introduce a residential zoning regime that provided four levels of density – Residential A, Residential B, Residential C and Residential D – catering for residential development from inner urban terrace houses to low density fringe development.

Until the 1970s, flat development was covered by the Uniform Building Regulations. Many of the flats built in the 1960s did not require a planning permit. The 1971 plan envisaged ‘only limited increases in population and employment within built up areas’. However it did note:

*Flats and villa-units constitute some 40 percent of all dwellings now being erected.*

This figure is a result of the flat boom of the 1960s. The boom was short lived, and with the introduction of new residential design guidelines and public outcry over the perceived ugliness of the flats, flat development lost its investment edge and new building activity virtually ceased.

*Figure 8: 1960s flats were unpopular*

Source: Photos by author
The 1981 plan expressed concern about the mismatch between housing stock and household types and proposed dual occupancies, the redevelopment of old industrial sites in the inner suburbs, and greater density and diversity in housing development in outer areas. By 1991-92 medium density developments had decreased to only 12 percent of all new dwellings.

*Figure 9: The 1960s flat boom*

![Graph showing the percentage of housing starts that are not separate dwellings from 1956/57 to 1990/91.](source: DPCD)

The 1981 plan identified areas where there was a greater opportunity for housing diversity:

> ... these factors show that the greatest housing emphasis would need to be given generally to the older established middle suburbs, notably in the east and south east and the least emphasis in the inner suburbs.

At times the desire for urban consolidation, or housing provision, has lead to a freeing up of the planning controls over medium density housing in existing areas. This freeing up has taken the form of as-of-right permission for dual occupancies and standardised controls and policy approaches to medium density housing in 'VicCode' (1993) and later the 'Good Design Guide' (1995). These approaches met with public outcry. The introduction of ResCode (Clause 55 in the Victoria Planning Provisions) which looks to policy to determine location and neighbourhood character to shape design has reduced some of these concerns.

All proposals to ‘free up’ the construction of medium density or higher density housing in suburban locations on a one size–fits–all approach have eventually been defeated by public outcry, whether it was the 1960s flat boom, as-of-right dual occupancies, or the Good Design Guide in the 1990s.
### 3.6.2 Inner urban housing

The 1967 plan, The Future Growth of Melbourne, identified much of inner Melbourne as a ‘Redevelopment Area’. From 1954 to 1991, inner Melbourne lost dwellings and population and there was a fear that Melbourne could become a ‘doughnut city’ – a place with no one living in the inner suburbs.

In fact, the inner suburbs of Melbourne had experienced their peak populations in the years immediately after the First World War. They declined over the next 70 years, losing as much as 66 per cent of their peak populations.\(^7\)

The 1970s saw a renewed interest in inner Melbourne as heritage housing was protected, and areas ‘gentrified’. Owners, architects and builders developed a better understanding of heritage values and many properties have since been restored.

In 1992 the City of Melbourne introduced its ‘Postcode 3000’ policy aimed at increasing residential development in the Melbourne city centre, including the central business district and St Kilda Road to 3000 people. The policy reviewed certain building regulations and provided incentives for people living in the central area. Development saw the conversion of unoccupied lower grade office buildings which because of a glut of office space had no real prospect of being used as offices; total office vacancy rates were at their highest rates in decades.

In the early to mid 1990s higher density and high rise development began to feature more prominently in Melbourne development. While there has always been a limited amount of high rise buildings in Melbourne, most notably along the St Kilda foreshore, along St Kilda Road and at Doncaster Hill, the mid 1990s saw high rise development spread to other areas of inner Melbourne and then into middle-ring locations. While planning policies broadly supported this spread, actual construction was made possible due to rises in the price of housing and decreases in the cost of construction as a result of changes in construction methodology.

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**Planning must now consider high rise suburban development. Building costs once constrained high rise development in Melbourne to a few select locations. Now this form of development is financially feasible across a far greater range of Melbourne suburbs.**

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\(^7\) Department of Infrastructure, 1998, From Doughnut City to Café Society, page 3
3.6.3 Housing in activity centres

The 2002 plan, Melbourne 2030, introduced the notion that activity centres were a location for higher density housing – up until this point activity centres had a commercial focus. Certainly there was discussion in the 1980s about ‘shop top housing’ but this form of development did not attract much developer interest. This changed with the release of the 2002 plan.

In some ways the residential interest in activity centres was an extension of the interest in residential development in central Melbourne.

The aim of increasing residential development in activity centres was twofold:

• it was seen as a way of helping make car based activity centres ‘work better’, and
• it was a good location for housing to meet the need for infill for infill housing in established suburbs.

Higher density housing in and around activity centres in established and new areas has become accepted planning practice (though it does not always meet with community support).

*Figure 10: Schematic for revitalising Activity Centres from Melbourne 2030*

Source: Melbourne 2030, Department of Infrastructure, 2002.
3.7 Urban renewal

Part of planning for Melbourne has included identifying areas that need to be ‘renewed’. The approach to renewal has shifted significantly from 1954 to today. Metropolitan strategies have generally not always identified urban renewal projects, but plans for Central Melbourne have.

Urban renewal began (badly) with the development of high rise housing commission estates in inner Melbourne. The housing commission high rise had its genesis in the 1954 plan:

Proper redevelopment of a really decadent area rarely, if ever, comes about, except in accordance with a comprehensive plan.8

This renewal activity was typical of the large scale projects proposed. Figure 11 shows the 1954 plan’s vision for the land around Parliament House, together with a later proposal for the Queen Victoria Market.

Figure 11: Pre 1980 ideas about renewal ignored local context and heritage

Parliament precinct redevelopment from 1954 plan 1978 plan for Victoria Market ignored local context

Source: 1954 plan, Melbourne Metropolitan Planning Scheme Report, MMBW.

Since the 1980s the need for concentrated efforts at urban renewal has been recognised and a number of significant renewal projects undertaken, primarily related to surplus government land in inner Melbourne. There was a critical shift occurred in the way these projects were planned with a much greater emphasis on the creating attractive liveable places.

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8 1954 plan, page 38
The 1984 Central Melbourne: Framework for the Future identified a number of opportunities that have since been realised:

- ‘La Trobe Central’ which lead to the development of Melbourne Central and the QV Centre,
- Station Pier,
- Southbank, and
- Jolimont: Federation Square, the Melbourne Park Tennis Centre and housing on relocated rail yards.

Other renewal projects have included:

- Docklands,
- Lynch’s bridge, and
- Arundel.

**Figure 12: 1984 plan identifies elements of inner Melbourne**

The 1994 *Creating Prosperity: Victoria’s Capital City Policy* built on the Central Melbourne Framework and introduced a number of the projects and ideas that have transformed Central Melbourne in the last 20 years or so, including:

- demolishing the Gas and Fuel buildings and building Federation Square,
- building the Melbourne Exhibition Centre at Southbank,
- completing the Melbourne Casino,
- extending the National Tennis Centre,
- commencing redevelopment of Docklands,
- building a new museum in Carlton,
- expanding the Postcode 3000 project to encourage central city residential development,
- providing new housing in the Docklands and at Lynch’s Bridge,
- restoring the Old Customs House (now the Immigration Museum),
- restoring the Regent Theatre and opening it to the public, and
- creating new open space in the redevelopment of the Jolimont Rail yards (Birrarung Marr).

Perhaps the most surprising lesson from a review of previous planning strategies is how effective government investment was at transforming inner Melbourne, leaving a lasting legacy and helping Melbourne maintain its reputation for liveability, even if the larger scale projects such as Docklands are yet to win public praise.

Urban renewal projects have been successful where they have been part of a broader strategy of urban regeneration, and created an attractive public realm.

*Figure 13: From 1984 plan to reality, Southbank*

*Source: 1994 Central Melbourne: Framework for the Future and Photo by author*
3.8 Height, heritage and character

Height and character probably account for most of the dispute in planning matters.

Historically part of the community concern with high rise development related not just to its height, but to the demolition of heritage buildings, particularly in the CBD, and the design of buildings that ignored their context.

Today heritage is protected, and though there is the occasional controversy, there is nothing like the wholesale destruction of heritage fabric Melbourne witnessed in the 1960s and 1970s.

The 1980 development guidelines for the City of Melbourne provide an insight into the concerns over the form of development proposed at the time. Concerns included setbacks of buildings from the street without active frontages and design that did not recognise its context.

Before the mid 1950 height controls were introduced as part of building safety concerns; fire ladders only reached so far and this set a 40 metre limit for the city. With changes in technology, building could be taller and the 1958 ACI House on the corner of Albert and Nicholson Street, at 20 storeys, broke through the previous limits.

In the suburbs land was cheap and the additional costs of building a second storey were relatively expensive. A housing stock of single storey development developed and some councils, even into the mid 1990s had ‘policies’ against two-storey development.

None of the previous strategies established a systematic approach to height limits across Melbourne.

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Managing issues of height and character is an ongoing challenge.
3.9 Transport investments

3.9.1 Roads and freeways

Metropolitan strategies since 1954 have identified the need for a freeway network and proposed routes. The network identified in 1969 has endured (with some of the more controversial inner urban freeways removed) and has been gradually implemented. There has been no similar enduring plan for public transport.

Figure 14: 1969 plan for freeways (green) and rail (red)

The construction of freeways was not without controversy and the opening of the Eastern Freeway (the F19) was met with public protest and during November 1977 protesters blockaded the opening of the freeway into Alexandra Parade in Collingwood.

Despite the controversy, where reservations have been included in the planning scheme they have made subsequent construction possible. The lesson from this may be that a long term plan (rather than a list of capital projects) has the ability to endure and shape urban form over many decades.

Source: 1969 Melbourne Transportation Study
Figure 15: From reservation to reality: 1968 reservation to constructed freeway

A long term plan based around maintaining opportunities for future transport projects, that can be realised when needed, can have great success.

3.9.2 Rail, Trams and Buses

Melbourne rail network was established early in the settlement of Victoria and Melbourne. The 1969 Melbourne Transportation Study recommended a number of rail improvements including the City Loop.

Funding of the project was through debentures, with the State Government paying 60 per cent of the cost, while a special city levy from 1963 was to fund the remainder. The levy was to last for 53 years, but was ended in 1995. Tunneling works under the city streets commenced in June 1972, and the Loop was opened gradually between 1981 and 1985.

The 1980 Victorian Transport Study (the Lonie Report), studied freight and passenger transport within Victoria. This plan recommended the closing of a number of train and tram lines. The effort in public transport planning and community interest in the 1980s was about keeping services open; there was no sense that patronage might increase to the degree that new services would be needed.

Melbourne 2030 proposed a number of network improvements, and a number of transport plans flowed from Melbourne 2030:

- **Managing Our Transport Choices,**
- **Linking Melbourne Metropolitan Transport Plan:**
  - Smart buses (similar in concept to the 1988 Met Plan),
  - Third track between Dandenong and Caulfield,
  - Redevelopment of North Melbourne Station,
- Signalling and track improvements to overcome capacity constraints,
- Construction of Eastlink.

The 2008 Victorian Transport Plan proposed an ambitious program of works. It is fair to say that none of these plans sets out an ultimate vision for the public transport network in the same way that the 1969 plan set out a vision for the freeway network. The 2008 plan introduced the significant proposal to change Melbourne’s rail system into a Metro-style system.

The current State Planning Policy Framework (SPPF) identifies the ‘Principal Public Transport Network’, a concept articulated in Melbourne 2030. The policies in the SPPF do not distinguish between actual services and proposed services and so do not distinguish between the levels of service or connectivity of the routes it identifies (or for that matter whether there is a current service). The policies treat an outer suburban road with a 20 minute bus service that stops at 7 pm as the same as St Kilda Road, one of the busiest tram routes in the world.

Public transport plans have been weak in identifying areas that are well served by public transport, and at identifying a long term public transport vision.

Proposals to covert Melbourne’s rail system into a Metro style system is a significant recent change in thinking.

### 3.9.3 Bikes and walking

While bikes and walking have featured as part of open space planning their role as an everyday transport mode has been more recent with the gradual improvement of bicycle facilities, particularly in the inner suburbs. In the late 1980s a bicycle commuter trip down Canning Street could be made without seeing another cyclist; this is hardly the case today.

**Figure 16: Cycling has grown in popularity**

![Cycling has grown in popularity](source: Photo by author)

Until 2002, plans did not address bicycles or walking as a transport mode.

Interest in planning for bikes and walking is relatively recent, and physical improvements have lead to increases in the use of these modes.
3.10 Open space

Planning for open space has been a feature of all plans since 1954. There is an enduring legacy of identifying, protecting and acquiring regional open space as part of metropolitan strategies.

The 1971 plan, for example, records the proposal for the Dandenong Valley Parklands, a series of regionally significant reserves extending 10km along the Dandenong Creek from Vermont South to Wheelers Hill. The Parklands cover an area of 1,306 hectares, and have been progressively developed as regional open space since the initial reservation of land in 1973. Not all the parkland has been publicly acquired to date.

A significant change has been the creation of the metropolitan trail network and the development of waterways as important open space corridors.

In March 1980 The Age newspaper started a campaign for the Lower Yarra River: “Give the Yarra a go”. The campaign meant two things: give the river its chance by restoring it, and go and try it for yourself. The campaign was adopted by the government of the day and began the process of improving the quality of the Yarra River.

The shared path network along waterways and railway reserves dates from the mid 1980s. Important links were developed in the 1990s with the Inner Circle Railway developed in the early 1990s as parkland, and the Anniversary Trail along the old outer circle railway line opened in 1991.

Figure 17: 1954 and 1995 plans for open space.

Source: 1954 plan, 1995 plan
The 1995 plan set out the policy of ‘developing an open space network of parks, trails, bicycle paths, waterways and habitat corridors throughout the metropolitan region’. This included proposed open space along the Yarra River upstream from Heidelberg. Much, but not all of this open space has now been acquired.

The 2002 plan, Melbourne 2030, reinforced past plans and identified new parks:

- Werribee River Regional Park,
- Werribee Township Regional Park,
- Kororoit Creek Regional Park,
- Merri Creek Regional Park,
- Melton Township Regional Park, and
- Cranbourne Regional Park.

There has been an enduring legacy of metropolitan strategies identifying and acquiring new parkland over time. This is not to play down the fact that concern is raised from time to time about the perceived erosion of existing areas of open space. In inner and middle Melbourne a number of landfills have been converted to open space, for example at All Nations Park in Northcote.

Linking People + Spaces, a plan for Melbourne’s open space (2002) identified a ‘Metropolitan Trails Network’ of 1200 km of shared trails creating a link between Melbourne’s recreational precincts, open space, public transport and local trails. Currently about 700 km of off-road trails are complete. This plan informed the regional open space network in Melbourne 2030.

Open space planning has been part of metropolitan planning from the beginning and Melbourne’s open space network has been gradually expanded and improved, notably with open space along waterways.
PREVIOUS STRATEGIES

1929 Metropolitan Town Planning Commission

*Plan of General Development*

Proposes a planning scheme to prevent ‘misuse’ of land and protect property values, highlighting traffic congestion, the distribution of recreational open space and haphazard intermingling of land uses.

1954 Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works

*Melbourne Metropolitan Planning Scheme Report, Surveys and Analysis*

First comprehensive planning scheme for the metropolitan area, prepared by the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW). Introduces the concept of district business centres and focuses major retail activity on designated centres on the public transport system that also provide central locations for housing, transport, employment and community activity.

Addresses: The size of the future city, decentralisation and civil defence, housing redevelopment and land subdivision, industry and its needs, Central Business Centres, suburban shopping, education and culture, open space and recreation, other community services, road communication system, public transport, central business area

It planned for a population of 2.5 million in the 1990s. It designated higher density zones for the inner suburbs, lower density zones for middle and outer suburbs (such as Footscray, Preston and Box Hill) and rural zones for many areas that have now become suburbs. The plan shows the beginnings of the development of the corridors that we know today.

It also proposed a major open space network along rivers and creeks. It proposed five district centres – Footscray, Preston, Box Hill, Moorabbin and Dandenong. The policy at the time said ‘They will offer to residents of the locality many of the facilities of the central city area under more attractive conditions nearer to their homes’.

1967 Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW)

*The Future Growth of Melbourne*


Projects trends for urban growth for Melbourne looking at scenarios, desired growth of Melbourne and how far the metropolitan area will extend. The scenarios include combinations of growth corridors, with provision for green wedges, along with possibilities of satellite cities and patterns for projected sprawl and consolidation.
1968  
**Town and Country Planning Board**

*Future Shape of Melbourne*

Independent of the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW) the Town and Country Planning Board reinforced the corridor approach and recommended the establishment of satellite towns at Melton and Sunbury. This approach was endorsed by the then Government.

1969  
**Metropolitan Transportation Committee**

*Melbourne Transportation Study*

The plan recommended 510 kilometres of freeway for metropolitan Melbourne, as well as extensive rail works, including the city underground loop and two new lines to Doncaster and Monash University.

Despite the majority of the printed material being devoted to non-car transport, 86 per cent of the projected budget was devoted to roads and parking, with only 14 per cent to other forms of transport.

1970  
**Town and Country Planning Board**

*Statement of Planning Policy No 1 – Westernport*

Westernport be planned primarily as a specialised port and heavy industrial complex.

1970  
**Town and Country Planning Board**

*Statement of Planning Policy No 2 – Mornington Peninsula*

Introduced policies to protect areas of natural beauty and conservation of importance to the east and south of the metropolitan area beyond the areas administered by the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works. Instrumental in setting the future planning directions for this area and establishing a special regional planning authority.

1971  
**Town and Country Planning Board**

*Statement of Planning Policy No 3 – Dandenong Ranges*

Introduced policies to protect areas of natural beauty and conservation importance in the Dandenong Ranges. Instrumental in setting future planning directions for this area and the establishment of a special regional planning authority.

1971  
**Town and Country Planning Board**

*Statement of Planning Policy No 4 – River Yarra*

Introduced policies to protect this significant physical feature of Melbourne as a major social and conservation attribute for the city as a whole. The area east of Warrandyte is identified was a potential water catchment.
1971  Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works

_Planing Policies for the Melbourne Metropolitan Region_

Introduced long-term conservation and development policies through growth corridor and green wedge principles, and contains outward growth to a limited number of areas on the edge of the city.

1973  Town and Country Planning Board

_Statement of Planning Policy No 7 – Geelong_

Geelong region to be planned to accommodate a greatly increased share of the expected growth.

1975  Town and Country Planning Board

_Statement of Planning Policy No 8 – Macedon Ranges and surrounds_

Seeks to protect the values of the ranges.

1976  Town and Country Planning Board

_Statement of Planning Policy No 1 – Westernport (As varied)_

SPP1 was varied to preserve the opportunities for selected port and industrial purposes and also protect the area for conservation and recreation purposes. A more balanced approach following a major environmental study.

1980  Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works

_Metropolitan Strategy_

1981  Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works

_Metropolitan Strategy Implementation_

Intended to develop Melbourne and increase diversity, dynamics and to create more interest amongst the community as Melbourne experienced change, drawing on participation from municipalities to create their local development schemes.

Building on previous strategies, it outlines and examines existing policy and levels to which change has to be made to deal with changing economic conditions, population trends, employment opportunities, energy costs (not consumption), public investment, trends in commerce and industry, recreation and community lifestyles.

It encourages development in existing areas, and concentrates housing, transport, employment and community facilities at highly accessible points.

1983  Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works

_New District Centres policy and zones_

Encourages office development in 14 centres and restricts it elsewhere.
1984  State Government Victoria

Central Melbourne: Framework for the Future


This document sets out strategies and policies for a decade. Focusing primarily on the Central Business District of Melbourne and the direction of commercial and economic growth and how land use planning can help create a more prosperous city while looking into issues of public transport, environment and necessary infrastructure that will mould the city into areas of activity and various groupings of uses.

1987  State Government Victoria

Shaping Melbourne’s Future

Intended as a guide to development for the following decade, the State Government at the time created this policy to determine the form and direction of growth, facilities and infrastructure outlay, economic and employment opportunities - with a strong emphasis on private sector involvement in co-ordinating urban change in the future.

Reinforced the thrust of the 1980 plan.

1989  State Government Victoria

Metropolitan Activity Centres

A policy statement setting out the government’s revised policies for activity centres, retailing and office development and describes new policies for technology precincts.

1989  State Government Victoria

Plenty Valley Strategic Plan

Preparation of strategic planning directions and policies for the Plenty Valley.

1991  State Government Victoria

South East and Werribee Growth Area Plans

Preparation of strategic planning directions and policies for these growth areas.
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**1992 State Government Victoria - Cities in the Suburbs**

A policy statement that confirms the role of central Melbourne and revises the designation of three types of centres to two – strategic district centres and community district centres. Recognises role of free standing centres. Housing densities encouraged.

**1995 Victorian State Government - Living Suburbs**

Addresses: Business environment conducive to sustainable long-term economic growth, building Melbourne’s strengths as an international transport, production and communications hub, strengthening regional links, enhancing Melbourne’s environment and liveability, and managing infrastructure and urban development.

This policy document focused on relationships between central city, suburban Melbourne and adjacent regional areas, providing a framework for integrated metropolitan development. The main points were economic foundations, encouraging growth in serviced corridors and satellite cities, while building up services provided at major activity centres and encouraging the private sector to provide much needed infrastructure.

Relaxed metropolitan-wide planning direction and controls, for example, on green wedge boundaries and the hierarchy of activity centres, and devolves much decision-making to local level or on a case-by-case basis.

**1998 Department of Infrastructure - From Doughnut City to Café Society**

Addresses: Trends in residential development, current population levels, population trends, household population trends, projected growth, demographic trends and household expenditure.

Using statistical information from ABS census data and population studies, From Doughnut City to Café Society looked into Melbourne’s future trends in population growth and settlement trends in outer ring developing suburbs. It identified economic and environmental challenges and opportunities for Melbourne as sprawl increases and looks. It also looked at housing solutions and population demographics.
1999  Department of Infrastructure  
*Implementation, Integration and Innovation: a better future for Victorians*

Addresses: Vision becomes reality, striking a healthy balance, land use, the shape of Victoria, local government for the next millennium, accessibility and the Planning Advisory Council.

A program particularly based on planning system reform. Looking at the full implementation of major development projects, placing a strong emphasis on integrating partnership approaches through innovation. This is done through the new format planning scheme and lists details of grants, community consultation, monitoring and review mechanisms as well as planning panels and appeal processes.

2002  Department of Infrastructure  
*Melbourne 2030*

Scope: A more compact city, better management of metropolitan growth, networks with regional cities, a more prosperous city, a great place to be, a fairer city, a greener city, better transport links, better planning decisions, careful management.

The core concept was to transform the metropolis from a single centre structure dominated by the CBD, into a ‘network of cities’. The suburbs would have major centres of their own, featuring all of the activities that are normally associated with ‘downtown’.

It reinforced the need for urban consolidation, better use of infrastructure and manages outward urban growth and the protection of green wedges by introduction of an urban growth boundary.

2005  Department of Sustainability and Environment  
*A plan for Melbourne’s growth areas*

Outlined plans to manage outward growth in each growth area following the release of *Melbourne 2030* and the advice from separate Committees for Smart Growth. It is a more strategic approach to development in Melbourne’s growth areas. The plan covers residential, commercial and industrial land use, parks and open spaces, the good design of new communities and the staging of land release so services and infrastructure can be provided in a more timely way to new communities.

It aims to ensure an adequate supply of land to protect housing affordability and ensure Melbourne retains its competitive edge over Brisbane and Sydney.
2008 Department of Sustainability and Environment

*Melbourne 2030: a planning update – Melbourne @ 5 million*


Plans for revised population and settlement projections on which *Melbourne 2030* was based and considers the implications of these new projections for the future shape of Melbourne. The update has a strong focus on building jobs and services in six key suburban Central Activities Districts and employment corridors. The update also outlines the need to direct future growth to the north and west of Melbourne and to investigate how to extend Melbourne’s growth areas.

2008 Victorian State Government

*The Victoria Transport Plan*

A capital works based plan for all modes of transport that identifies a number of major road and rail projects. Introduces the concept of transforming Melbourne’s rail system into a Metro style system.

2009 Department of Planning and Community Development

*Delivering Melbourne’s Newest Sustainable Communities*

Outlines a plan for managing Melbourne’s outward growth to accommodate around 284,000 of 600,000 new dwellings over 20 years. Includes a change to the Urban Growth Boundary, a Growth Areas Infrastructure Charge, an alignment for the Regional Rail Link and the future Outer Metropolitan Ring/E6 transport corridor and new grasslands reserves.