

By Bruce Aulabaugh (member of the Sustainable Transport Coalition (STC))

Comments on the Draft Sustainability Strategy: Chapter 6 (Settlements)

Vision: Increased liveability with reduced resource consumption.

This two-part vision is consistent with the STC charter (as far as I understand it):

Objectives/ Goals:

- Reduction of resource consumption is identified as a primary objective. It should also be a measured performance indicator for the various strategy and action elements.
- Liveability is the other primary objective noted. The term 'revitalised' is used in the context of declining centres and suburbs. This implies activity and opportunity.

These are consistent with STC objectives and would appear to cover the 'triple bottom line: social-environmental-economic'.

Strategies:

- Managing Urban and Regional Growth
- Revitalising Declining Centres and Suburbs
- Integrating Land Use and Balanced Transport

These three strategy elements comprise an interesting combination of approaches. Comments on each are provided below.

Managing Urban and Regional Growth

'Managing Urban and Regional Growth' proposes to use traditional town planning type tools (e.g. structure plans, planning strategies, and planning policies) to establish the desired physical form for Perth. It also proposes to use the existing Metropolitan Development Program (MDP) and new Cooperative Agreements (between State and Local Government) to control and coordinate land development to fit the desired urban form and cost effective infrastructure provision.

The management of urban form and reduced urban sprawl are accepted by STC as part and parcel of reducing reliance on automobile travel, resource consumption and pollution.

The biggest challenge will be establishing some legitimate vision on a Perth Metro Area with 'reduced sprawl' and then 'redirecting growth' to the areas that are to cater for the desired or inevitable population and commercial/ industrial growth. The Future Perth project is identified as the vehicle for developing the required vision.

The 'Future Perth' project must provide a definitive conclusion on the issue of urban sprawl and the optimum metropolitan form. If it is ambiguous or ambivalent, the current plans/policies/ processes will ensure that sprawl prevails into the future.

Growth boundaries, minimum densities, land use mix, etc must be set out clearly and mechanisms must be identified to monitor and enforce these urban structuring elements.

The traditional town planning system and processes have been very effective at ensuring a good supply of zoned and serviced land – but resulted in urban sprawl because they had no guiding principles, political checks or economic drivers directing them otherwise.

The idea of using the MDP with the help of Cooperative Agreements to control and coordinate growth to suit a new vision is logical because:

- The MDP is the only tool currently available for planning land release and infrastructure provision; and
- The cooperation of local government is necessary for both funding of infrastructure and creating the common new vision for where growth is to occur and at what time.

However the use of these mechanisms to implement a vision which is at odds with many vested commercial and political interests is untested and at risk of serious compromise if not supported with new regulatory policies such as:

- SPP 5aa on urban growth limits; and
- SPP 5aa on land use transport integration

These policies will not be developed or used if significant political support is not available at local council level, the proposed regional council level and at the state government level. In turn, such political support will not be forthcoming unless the need to ‘redirect’, ‘control’ and ‘coordinate’ land development is understood and agreed to at all levels.

If new regulations are not in force, the likely outcome is that ‘sustainable’ projects will make progress - but only those that are not inconsistent with the current vested interests. The majority of projects that are undertaken will continue the existing pattern of sprawl unless very strong state government policies and plans are adopted that ‘force’ compliance. The idea of the current balance of incentives yielding a new outcome is naïve.

Indicators and Targets: these should include resource consumption, habitat preservation, pollution, congestion, accessibility, equity, and affordability measures.

Revitalising Declining Centres and Suburbs

The inclusion of a strategy element aimed specifically at improving the liveability of declining centres and suburbs represents an important shift in focus for state government planning agencies— towards the monitoring and maintenance of communities instead of just initial structure planning and subdivision (and the associated regional infrastructure provision).

Although ‘revitalisation’ is not specifically identified as an STC objective, in this context it is not in conflict with any STC principles and uses methods that are supportive of STC objectives/ outcomes.

Although Perth has had ‘revitalisation’ projects such as the East Perth Redevelopment, Subiaco Redevelopment, and various Homeswest housing upgrades, the inclusion of this element suggests that:

- Perth is maturing and the mass of existing development is significant and some of it demands urgent attention; and

- A role exists for the state planning agencies throughout the whole of the ‘development life cycle’ whereas currently, local government has been left with the task but not necessarily the resources or power to maintain and support viable centres and suburbs.

The use of Enquiry by Design workshops and the establishment of Redevelopment Authorities for key centres has been tried and tested and offer a viable implementation mechanism. Funding will remain a key factor to these projects. An Integrated Funding Framework could help redirect ‘road construction’ money to fund the public transport facilities that are often crucial to these ‘revitalisation projects’.

The draft strategy suggests that new or improved infrastructure and service provision could be linked to key sustainability features such as ‘higher density development and urban consolidation’. The acceptance of higher density development is a sensitive issue in the Perth context and local councils have taken considerable ‘heat’ over medium and high density zoning of in-fill areas or rezoning of existing low density areas to medium or high density.

The ability to significantly intensify development will require a new attitude toward higher density living and some assurance that property values and neighbourhood amenity are not going to be sacrificed. If a new attitude is not forthcoming from within the community then local councils will not be able to adopt the required local planning strategies, will not adopt the required land use zoning/rezoning and will not approve development applications of higher density projects.

Before the Perth population accepts urban consolidation, a strong case needs to be made on the grounds of sustainability. It is likely that a significant consultation/ education/ promotional campaign will be required to effectively engage the public in a ‘paradigm shift’. This applies equally to the ‘Managing Growth’ strategy element discussed above.

Indicators and Targets: These should include accessibility measures (and non-transport measures such as employment/ income, education/ social services coverage, etc).

Integrating Land Use and Balanced Transport

The premise here is that sustainability is strongly influenced by the priority given to non-auto transport modes and by the extent to which land use is suitably located relative to the transport system.

These concepts are at the core of the STC philosophy and this two-pronged strategy should be fully supported.

Balanced Transport

By providing better public transport, cycle and walking facilities and by educating the public about travel choices, a shift in travel behaviour is achievable. A key question is whether the state will adequately follow through on:

- Transport funding reform to allow non-auto modes the necessary funding priority to overcome the current imbalance in the transport system. Road projects must be funded in competition with ‘green mode project’ and justified using a ‘balanced’ assessment process that gives weight to the social and environmental impacts of increased automobile use.

The public multi-criteria assessment method used for the Fremantle Eastern Bypass and extension of Roe Highway is consistent with the STC objective of transparency and public involvement in the planning process. We hope for more of the same with some improvements in the scope of the evaluations and the range of strategies employed to satisfy transport needs while minimising impacts.

- Cost effective and ‘anti-sprawl’ public transport improvements – although there is little doubt about the long term need for the Mandurah Rail Line, there are legitimate questions about the short-medium term patronage forecasts and the final price we will pay for the facility. If Western Australia can afford it then great, otherwise bus service probably should have been used until development progressed further in the SW corridor.

Although controversial to suggest, it is possible that the rail line (and particularly the Kwinana Freeway) promotes early land development and unnecessary ‘sprawl’ in the SW corridor. It may be difficult to comprehend at first but there is a case to be made for limiting the extent of the corridors and limiting the transport system at their extremities.

- Travel Smart (individualised marketing/ education programs on mode choice). This program had up a good head of steam and was gaining ‘brand recognition’. The state government must prove that it is serious about Travel Smart by ensuring its funding and using its name in promotions/policies/strategies etc – this was not done in the Sustainability Strategy!;
- Perth Bicycle Network enhancements. The PBN is a great achievement but much more remains to be done. Funding is a critical element but so is finding opportunities outside of rail reserves and freeway reserves for high standard Principal Shared Path construction. Near Perth CBD, there are river foreshore paths and rail reserve and freeway reserve paths and at the coast there are ‘coastal paths’. These all have bridges or underpasses or natural features that eliminate delays/ conflicts with automobiles.

Most of the bicycle path network suffers from the plague of frequent signalised road intersections that delay commuter cyclists and reduce the enjoyment and safety of recreational trips. Yes cars suffer from them also – but hey, why can’t we give cyclists some preferential treatment.

Some cities, such as Anchorage Alaska have constructed a network of recreational/ commuter paths that extend across the city (complete with bridges or underpasses at road crossings). These facilities usually follow a stream, linear parks or the coast line in order to maximise vistas and natural beauty but also to reduce the number of road crossings. Perth has few of these features in the middle and outer suburbs and some consideration should be given to adding to the system of Principal Shared Paths, particularly for cross-suburb travel.

Another key question is whether enough travel behaviour change is achieved through these ‘carrots’. ‘Sticks’ are probably needed to finish the job and could include some or all of the following:

- Road pricing (congestion pricing);
- Allocating existing and new road space to public transport;
- Limiting the supply of car parking;
- Increasing parking charges,
- Increasing taxes on petrol,

- Restricting company car schemes etc

If these ‘sticks’ are not used to limit automobile use, automobile travel will always increase to the limits allowed by the capacity of the road system – and pollution and congestion will get worse and worse.

The problem is that the state government (regardless of controlling political party) has consistently shown limited willingness or ability to consider any of the ‘sticks’. This is because Perth has not been congested or polluted enough and these ‘sticks’ are politically risky and they rely on cooperation from local government and the development industry (e.g supply of parking and parking charges). In some cases the state government is even the guilty party (e.g company car schemes motivating excessive use of auto travel and providing no alternative ‘green transport’ scheme).

Land Use Transport Integration

The draft sustainability strategy focuses on maximising development opportunities around rail stations and on the Liveable Neighbourhoods Policy for greenfields developments. These are the key landuse-transport integration themes in the document.

Liveable Neighbourhoods is an award winning development code that clearly establishes that ‘movement networks’ have their primary purpose and justification dedicated to supporting walkable neighbourhoods, public transport accessibility and local mixed use centres.

Liveable Neighbourhoods deserves full STC support.

The draft sustainability strategy suggests extending or adding a separate code to cover ‘District-level models’. The Urban Design Unit has been developing the key elements of a ‘District-level model’ at various charettes and workshops. It has not however documented the key structuring elements in the same detail as has been done for the smaller scale Liveable Neighbourhoods model which includes the following elements:

- Community design;
- Movement network;
- Lot layout;
- Parkland;
- Urban water management; and
- Utilities.

The creation of a ‘district level design code’ would be another step toward defining the elements of sustainable urban form. Obviously the issue of regional/ metropolitan urban form is as important if not more important but is probably outside the scope of the Urban Design Unit of DPI.

Future Perth is the only identified mechanism in the draft sustainability strategy for establishing the desired vision for the optimum metropolitan urban form. STC must therefore focus adequate resources on tracking and participating in Future Perth project and ensuring that it provides clear definition on sustainable urban form at the metropolitan level.

The sustainability strategy also refers to better land use transport integration to reduce freight transport impacts. Although the Freight Network Review is well underway and there is a list of recommended actions, there are no well publicised strategies or other 'background' papers that clearly document the key landuse/transport integration features to be included in future planning. Further investigation is needed to determine if the state is doing the homework to be able to define what such 'integration' will entail.

Indicators and Targets: these should include density/ intensity of development at rail stations, freight tonne-kilometres, accessibility measures for inner, middle and outer residential areas, mode split targets, and total kilometres traveled by automobile.

Summary of the WA State Sustainability Strategy:

Sustainability and Settlements Section (chapter 6)

Principles

- The challenge for a sustainable future is in managing growth. Settlements need new priorities, new policies and new technologies that can redirect growth more sustainably. **Resource consumption** must be reduced while simultaneously improving liveability.
- Regional Councils will be the main driver to ensure that general strategies are given a regional perspective through detailed planning. *Refer to **Implementation Model** in Governance and Sustainability chapter.*

The results (designs?, development requirements?, specific policies?) could be reflected in statutory Statements of Planning Policy and local Town Planning Schemes where appropriate.

- **Future Perth** is vehicle for achieving a strategic plan for the future of the metropolitan region and will reflect sustainability principles. Future Perth will be finalised after the Sustainability Strategy is done. The Future Perth process in figure 6. Identifies 'railway precincts', 'activity centres and networks' and 'urban villages'. It also identifies a number of working papers of interest:
 - Population
 - Urban costs
 - Transport
 - Environment
 - Activity centres
 - Urban capacity

Key Strategy Elements (see details on following pages)

- Managing Urban & Regional Growth
- Revitalising Declining Centres and Suburbs
- Integrating Land Use and Balanced Transport

Managing Urban and Regional Growth

Introduction

- **Future Perth** must focus on shaping growth (*urban growth limits?*) and also redirecting some of it to 'brownfields' sites/ middle suburbs to overcome decline (*read urban consolidation?*) – see next section.
- Perth's sprawling form has reached the stage where clearer guidelines for land release need to be developed. Land release programs such as **Metropolitan Development Program (MDP)** can be used to manage growth.
- **Liveable Neighbourhoods** provides 'redefinition' of urban growth at Greenfields Sites.

Actions

- **Future Perth** to develop vision for the long-term future of South West Urban systems. Use Future Perth processes to generate region-wide debate on urban growth and test options to yield optimum land use location and reduce urban sprawl.
- **Liveable Neighbourhoods** to be the mandatory policy for structure planning and subdivision – affects urban fringe developments and regional centres
- Develop **District level transit supported development** models.
- **MDP** used to coordinate land supply release with cost efficient provision of infrastructure.
- **Cooperative agreements** with local government on land release.
- **Local Planning Strategies** used to give strategic development framework for local areas
- Implement **Bush Forever**

Indicators and Targets – proportion of urban development considered revitalised. Must be a mistake here?

Revitalising Declining Centres and Suburbs

Introduction

Sustainable Community Regeneration: Issues and Opportunities paper discusses Perth examples of past twenty years. Issues include: urban design, employment, housing, infrastructure, environmental issues and community development. Need to create context and mechanisms for improvement in older middle and outer suburbs.

Actions

- **Reviving the Suburbs** trial and new government processes/ incentives and ‘code’/ ‘model’ to be developed for middle suburbs.
- **Enquiry by Design** workshops for some centres and some suburbs.
- **Redevelopment Authorities** to be established for key centres.
- **Funding** to be provided for select town centre renewal (ie Gosnells)
- Link infrastructure and services provision to commitments to **higher density development and urban consolidation.**

Indicators and Targets – proportion of declining areas revitalised.

Integrating Land Use and Balanced Transport

Introduction

Sustainability in settlements is strongly influenced by the priority given to transport modes and by how land use is integrated with these modes.

- Excessive freight movement related to lack of integrated freight terminals and land use location
- Car dependence related to scattered suburbs
- Better urban planning provides accessibility without requiring mobility

Liveable Neighbourhoods Principles– solar orientation, centre location and neighbourhood clustering related to transport system.

Perth rail system is a success and offers opportunities for integration with rail station centres.

Integrated bus service expansion and extended rail services need to be planned. Potential for light rail to be explored.

Pedestrian and cycling activity requires more design and infrastructure support. Plus revamped PBN needed.

Individualised Marketing and household travel management programs to help mode shift.

Integrated Funding Framework to control/ guide infrastructure funds to the correct modes and correct land use/ transport integration projects.

Objectives

- Maximise development density and mix around key transport nodes and in major centres
- Reduce car dependence through promotion and provision of public transport and cycle/ walking alternatives.

Actions

- Restructure planning agencies to integrate land use and transport planning
- Double metro railway system
- Building Better Stations Program to improve and implement integration at stations
- Establish WA Pedestrian Advisory Council
- Create sub-regional Integrated Transport Plans to prioritise improvements
- Individualised marketing
- Concession fare prices frozen and time validity extended for public transport tickets
- Explore Smart card ticketing
- Alternative Fuels in public transport system

Actions proposed (*but not committed to yet?*)

- Whole of Portfolio Integrated Funding Framework to enable proper investment to occur to yield the desired integration and balance between modes.
- Review and update the MTS to reflect the doubling of the rail system, integrated bus, pedestrian and cycle networks, individualised marketing programs

- Liveable Neighbourhoods to be mandatory
- Establish Pedestrian Facility Review program
- Update the PBN
- Work with local BUGS on infrastructure issues
- Feed rail system via other transport systems and services
- Prioritise station upgrades according to land use integration potential
- Trip generation and parking demand research for planning implications
- Encourage lower parking requirements in TPS for public transport zones
- Encourage zoning flexibility to allow small business and corner shops to locate in existing suburban communities.
- Develop programs to promote mixed-use development in centres with good public transport provision.

Indicators and Targets –

- **number of new dwellings within one kilometre of a rail station.**
- **Modal split**