

Sydney's Martin Place as it might look as a pedestrian plaza.

# PLANNING A CITY FOR PEOPLE, NOT CARS...

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AMID ALL the building, rising skyscrapers and noise of jack-hammers, the one constant feature of Australian central city development has been the deterioration of the urban environment.

As skyscrapers rise into the sky and pack closer together on allotments that previously had two, three or four-storey buildings, transport and services facilities have fallen behind, turning lunch hours into a jammed chaos of people crowded around pocket handkerchief restaurant tables, and peak hours into a tangle of crawling traffic and jostling pedestrians.

Office buildings and insurance houses have pre-empted ground space, crowding out the variety of service shops needed by the people in the office buildings and leaving little open space for people to get out of the hurrying throng on narrow pavements.

## Most convenient

Of the traditional public transport modes, trams provide easily the most convenient way for a person on foot to get around a city.

Buses get snarled in traffic, so that journeys through the city centres become very slow, uneconomical and inconvenient, and the buses become overcrowded.

Nevertheless, Sydney and Brisbane have got rid of their trams, on the ground that they held up private motorists — as though the be-all and end-all of city planning is to encourage private motorists to bring their cars into the heart of the central business district.

The result is entirely predictable — more cars in the city, more pressure on parking space, and bigger traffic jams than ever (try driving through Kent St., Sydney, on a Friday morning these days).

It would be a salutary experience for some of the gentlemen who run Australian city transport systems to ride on a city bus in Sydney and hear the comments of the women with shopping baskets and children, or witness the displays of irritation by bus crews which contrast with the good humour of the average Melbourne tram crew.

(It's not for nothing that the protagonist in one television advertisement for a headache powder says: "I've been driving buses on and off for 30 years. . . No wonder I get splitting headaches.")

Considering the amount of rebuilding and renovation that's been going on, in Sydney and Melbourne particularly, and the economic strength that increased population is supposed to bring, the central city areas ought to have improved out of sight in recent years.

Instead, as places to work, shop and live in, they have deteriorated, with glossy new buildings, carpeting and (often oppressive) air conditioning unable to compensate for the crowding and lack of facilities at street level.

The reason is plain enough — there has been nobody with sufficient control or expertise to view a city as a whole, or to enforce the sort of solutions needed.

There has also been a lack of informed concern among the users of the city — only recently, for example, have some of them started to recover from the infatuation with the motor car.

You can still find people who are convinced that the answer to all city problems is more city car parking stations, despite the example of Los Angeles where half the city was torn down to

provide multi-storey car parks and the entire urban area was festooned with freeways, only to create worse traffic jams than ever and the worst photochemical smog problem in the world.

A recent decision by Sydney City Council may be the start of effective action to reverse the deterioration in Australian cities.

At the beginning of May, the council decided to engage a consortium of planners to develop planning doctrines for the City of Sydney and advise on basic planning strategies.

Some 23 consultants around the world, including the well-known Greek planner Doxiadis and the French Metra group, expressed interest, but the final nod went to an Australian group.

## Town planners

The group consists of the Urban Systems Corporation (the holding company for the interests of town planners George Clarke and Don Gazzard), McConnell, Smith and Johnson and management consultants W. D. Scott and Co.

The cost of the study will be just under \$100,000 (some quotes ranged up to \$750,000).

A study of the brief shows that at long last city aldermen are starting to realise that cities are dynamic institutions and planning must allow for continual change.

"The old static plan just won't do," says Don Gazzard, of Urban Systems Corporation.

"The old master plan is out of date the moment it's drawn. What you want are a flexible set of objectives and strategies.

"You also need to get as many citizens involved as possible.

"Perhaps one of our most successful jobs was one we did for Hobart City Council redesigning the historic Battery Point area.

"We didn't start with preconceptions; we fanned out and got people's opinions. It was a classic example of citizen co-operation."

The initiative for the study has come partly from two Civic Reform aldermen, architect Andrew Briger and engineer Leo Port, both from the Fitzroy Ward (which includes the King's Cross area).

"We're engaging these consultants to carry out a program," says Leo Port.

"The initial program will last about nine months. Within that program, there's a tightly worked out schedule by which the consultants come back to us every few weeks with positive recommendations and advice.

"The word plan means to people a zoning map with little coloured blobs. But what we want is a planning strategy."

The present Sydney City Council, elected in September last year, has already tipped its hand in a number of ways.

One is the proposal to close off Martin Place to traffic and convert it into a pedestrian plaza, creating a wide, traffic-free precinct a few blocks from Circular Quay.

Because Martin Place is often blocked off anyway for military marches and ceremonial, and also such events as a tableau of schoolchildren to represent the road toll, transport routes are planned to avoid it.

The main inconvenience of having it blocked off will be to