

City parking

IT HAS become increasingly clear to planners the world over that the main hope of relieving traffic congestion in the cities lies in improved public transport. Rapid transit systems using their own rights of way, which usually mean railways, are the most efficient and most economic way of transporting large masses of people to and from the city centres. Dependence on private motor vehicles and attempts to cater for this traffic by the construction of bigger and better expressways is self-defeating. More cars are encouraged to enter the inner city and congestion is worsened. Many major cities throughout the world are now revitalising their railway systems or building new ones.

In the United States, cities which have built vast expressway systems without solving the problems of traffic congestion are turning back to their railway networks. San Francisco and Washington, DC, are two cities which are building new systems. The City of Sydney's strategic plan gives full recognition to this trend. One of its main policy objectives is to seek the modernisation of public transport in stages to create an integrated system of greater capacity, convenience and comfort. However, the Sydney City Council would be making a grave mistake if it allowed the growing emphasis on the role of public transport to blind it to the need for providing increased off-street parking facilities for the City.

It is to be hoped therefore that the council is not daunted by the proposals in the latest action plan submitted by the Strategic Plan consultants. The plan recommends that the council build a series of public parking stations on the western perimeter of the City to accommodate an additional 3,000 cars by 1975 and a further 3,000 by 1980. There is no doubt about the need for the stations. The Minister for Transport, announcing

that 130,000 new cars a year are coming on to the roads in NSW, says that the State plans to help cope with city traffic congestion by building parking stations over suburban railway stations.

Even if there is a significant increase in rail commuting within the next 15 years, and that is most unlikely, the central business district will still face serious congestion problems. By 1980 it is estimated that the central business district will need at least 5,200 additional car parking spaces. To cope with the increase in motor vehicles and reduce kerbside parking to allow traffic and pedestrians to move freely in the City, adequate off-street parking must be provided. The alternative will be to ban private vehicles from the City, a solution which would not be welcomed by businessmen or the public. The problem for the City Council will be financing the proposed parking station program which could cost up to \$3 million a year for 10 years.

This is the area where the parking action plan's recommendations are likely to meet the most resistance. As well as suggesting that the council seek State and Commonwealth financial assistance (there is a strong case for regarding these parking stations as part of the total transportation system) and consider increasing its existing parking charges, the planners look to the city developers. They propose that developers be required to contribute to the cost of the stations in lieu of on-site parking and for floor space bonuses. It is legitimate for the public to expect developers to be responsible for the parking needs generated by their buildings. But it would create chaos to place these parking areas along narrow inner city streets. It is not unreasonable therefore to ask that they contribute towards the cost of off-street parking stations on the perimeter of the City.

Skylines and price drops

THE skyline starts high up at the forty-storey level, then drops sharply to the ten to fifteen storey level half a mile south, then drops again, with a few tall fingers pointing into the sky, and then flattens out completely around Sydney's Central Railway Station. Not far from the existing picture, this is the likely effect of the City of Sydney's new building code.

Even more sharply differentiated will be the prices paid for sites by developers and the rates collected by the Council. And although the impact is still to become evident on the market place the fact that some property values have been cut down to a half or a third, while others will gradually edge up from the present situation of oversupply can hardly be denied.

The weapon that has cut down site values (unwelcome to some) and rates (welcome to others) is the new "plot ratio" section in the City's code. The "plot ratio" determines the relation between the size of the area you own on the ground and the amount of gross floor space you may put up. A major innovation in the new code is that in the Sydney areas where work development has gone on, small sites will have low ratios. At the northern end of Sydney, a site of 5,000 square feet will have a basic "plot ratio" of four (gross floor space) to one (site area), but a site of 12,500 square feet or more has a plot ratio of five and a half. This doesn't seem a radical difference, on paper, but in practice, the reading is different. Builders can increase the ratio by putting into their developments a number of prescribed amenities, — assembly halls, plazas, financial contributions to the City's parking stations, and so on. For sites of 5,000 square feet, they can up their ratio to ten to one, and for sites above 17,500 square feet to 12.5 to one. The catch is that when you have a small site, you don't have the space to provide these amenities and make anything of them.

That is certainly how property men now see the situation. They argue that a site of say, 25,000

square feet or larger in uptown Sydney would still go for \$300 to \$400 per square foot, but that a site under 5,000 square feet should be valued at around \$150. Six months ago, the prices were very similar.

The immediate effect, of course, is that very few owners are willing to sell. What they are looking to is amalgamation with neighbouring small-property owners, to create larger, jointly-held properties. But for some, this option does not exist. They are on islands within sites already amalgamated or existing in large lumps. The typical case is the pub on the corner.

It may have been the deliberate strategy of some owners of such sites to stay put. Under the old code, they could have benefited in two ways: their larger neighbours might have ended up by buying them, to give their own new buildings the benefits of a clean sweep in all directions! Or they might have stayed put and charged higher rentals because of the surroundings. Or they could have gone into a development of their own.

SO far, Sydney knows of only one property that has been sold under the new code. This is the Percy Marks building, one of the remaining islands in the Martin Place - Castlereagh Street - King Street block, most of which is now owned by a Lend-Lease-M.L.C. joint venture.

Slightly down in the southern direction, starting from King Street, where the "Midtown Hub" zone starts, a different aspect of the code is knocking land values drastically. Though the same ratios apply as to the North, there are complex qualifications, the biggest of which is that only half of the floor space may be used for offices. This means that high rise buildings will have to give over much of their space either to retailing or to motel-hotel accommodation. But ask a retailer if his customers want to go from floor to narrow floor in lift after lift; and ask a hotel man what he thinks of land prices in this part of the city — they are still too high.

The result is easily foreseeable,

and it is exactly what the "Strategic Plan", drawn up by the City's town planners, Clarke, Gazzard and Co., had intended to do. It was to preserve this central part of Sydney for retailing. Those who hold a combination of small site and "mid-town hub" positions will have to write their values down. But if they are retail freeholders, they need not now reckon on increased rates, which are calculated as a percentage of land values.

A third weapon in the new code is the limitation on parking space. The code takes the correct view that inner Sydney is already over-congested, and while it allows builders to provide some parking space on their own sites, it edges them into paying a contribution to City Council stations, which will probably work out at \$4000 per car and is based on about one car per 400 square feet of office space. This again favours larger developments over smaller ones, for the provision of parking at the place of work is attractive, and is reckoned by developers to be worth between 25 and 50 cents per square foot in extra annual rental.

While the code has easily perceptible effects on the centre of the city, its impact on the fringe areas under the control of the Council is much less certain. Neither the code, nor the "Strategic Plan" on which it was based, looked into the future development of the Woolloomoolloo area. This old, port-side residential part of Sydney, now semi-industrial, is the most strongly contested piece of urban geography in New South Wales. It is thought that the State Premier and his Minister for Local Government, Mr. P. H. Morton, would like to see the port develop into office space, in line with the thinking of big investors who have acquired large tracts there. Other interests don't believe that offices will ever materialise there in sufficient quantity. The City of Sydney decided to sit on the fence.

Likewise, Sydney has left the area immediately to the west of the centre largely uncodified. This is the old port part around Pyrmont, where woolbrokers and other exporters have had their stores. Will they all move out to the new wool village which the industry is backing — and who'll take their place? What impact will the

the printing had to be done secretly because printers feared prosecution, but that somewhere between forty and fifty people were involved with the writing and production of the paper and about thirty with its distribution. She also insisted that she be allowed to admit that a total of seventeen charges had been laid against her, but she later clarified this by saying that one was on appeal and eleven were before the Equity Court.

The majority of her witnesses proceeded to give evidence on their own parts in the paper, in spite of warnings from the bench that this might not be useful to them. The message of this line of defence was not entirely clear. Was it that the collaborators were challenging the police to charge them too? Was it to show detail that there was in fact a "sub-culture" involved in the paper? Or was it, more centrally, to convey the idea that just as there was nothing to hide about "Thorunka", there should be nothing to hide about sex?

Perhaps it was the last message that Wendy Bacon was trying to get over to the jury sitting behind the judge. During the examination of Elizabeth Fell, whom Wendy Bacon had called, His Honour sent the jury outside and told Wendy Bacon that she was prejudicing her case, because she was bringing evidence of the extent and width of the publication.

Accused Bacon: I am not afraid of that.

His Honour: And I am just telling you this in your own interests.

Accused Bacon: I consider it to be in my own interests. I am not afraid to tell the jury that this paper has been shown to any number of people.

His Honour: If I were you I would not adopt this rather daring attitude as I told you the other day.

Accused Bacon: I am not daring. I am trying to be honest.

This was the innovation in the "Thorunka" case, and it has been for this reason that it has aroused some of the intense sympathies that "literary merit" cases, now passé, used to arouse in past years. But is also clear that if a defendant does not adopt in full the sub-culture of the legal professionals

for the time being, then she will be uphill triumphing within its confines. She has only one way out — to address herself to the jury on the substantive issues — the jury being her peers. But in doing so, she must reckon that the set

procedures which the legal profession can bring to bear means to get the necessary unanimity for a verdict which are not in a defendant's possession. The accompanying box gives an account of how the jury reached its decision.

Inside the jury room

THE following contains the main points of a fairly brief telephone conversation last Saturday (12th February, 1972) with a juror at John Cox's and Wendy Bacon's trial.

1. At the beginning of the trial when they were each given a copy of "Thorunka", they did discuss and exchange their views on it contrary to what the court directs. Their views as to the "obscurity" or "indecentcy" of the paper were divided, roughly half of them in favour and half against the paper. There was a faint suggestion of the division being along age lines.

2. At the conclusion of the examination of the witnesses and the summing up by Staples and Wendy there seemed to be an overwhelming switch in favour of Cox and Wendy. Roughly nine or ten for and two or three against.

3. The situation was somewhat reversed after the prosecution summed up and the judge gave his direction. The matter was presented to them as a decision of fact on whether the paper contained an undue emphasis on sex. When the jury retired the first time they were roughly eight against Wendy and Cox and four in favour.

4. It would seem that those sticking out for the accused did so on grounds that the main purpose of the paper was satirical and political and that, perhaps, the emphasis on sex was not undue. It was further argued that the history of literature and art was full of examples of artists coming up against attempts by the respectable to suppress them. Deadlocked on this point, those against Bacon and Cox, led by the foreman and some others, suggested they seek the judge's advice on the definition of obscenity and indecency and also the crucial

question whether upon their finding part of the paper obscene or indecent they should judge the whole to be such. The reason for this was that the majority of the jurors thought that the comics on page 10 were of dubious taste.

5. Following the judge's direction they once again found themselves not unanimous; this time two of them sticking out in favour of Wendy and Cox. The discussion came to a standstill and the foreman declared the verdict to be "we are agreed to disagree". On being told by the judge that they must bring back a clear decision one way or another, there was only one juror left against finding the accused guilty.

6. During these last stages in their deliberation the considerations brought to bear on the dissenting jurors included such things as xenophobia ("A foreigner like you could not know what the standards of this community were. And if you're so keen on countries that are far more permissive why don't you go back there?"), the fact that the judge was determined to get a decision and he would get it in some other way anyway if they didn't agree, the concern that he may very well keep them here the whole weekend till they reached a decision; something pointless seeing there was just one dissident who could not convince the rest and they could not convince him.

7. This last consideration, and not an agreement that the paper was obscene, was what swayed the dissenting juror. He agreed with them to finish the endless debate. They all agreed to bring back a verdict of "guilty" on all charges, the dissenting juror being very upset by the whole thing which he described as a farce.