



THE metropolitan crisis will be Australia's greatest problem of the decade.

We are the most urbanised nation in the world, with 86 out of every 100 people living in cities and towns, and we have done less to get to grips with the problems of urban living on this scale than almost anyone else except the Americans.

The two major metropolitan areas are already bogged down in a chaos of central congestion, diminishing city amenities, a faltering and antiquated transport system, and suburban sprawl which, besides producing a shortage of domestic building land, accentuates all the other difficulties.

Adelaide and Perth are proceeding, rather more slowly, in the same direction as Sydney and Melbourne.

The suburbs of Brisbane present a distinctly unattractive example of extemporary planning improvisation, and the city centre is largely as cluttered and uncomfortable as the larger cities.

The city of Sydney — responsible for 7.4 square miles of the total Sydney metropolitan area of 1600 — adopted a comprehensive strategic plan in 1971, but its scope is handicapped by the fact that the decisions on some of the essential ingredients of city planning, like transport services, are not in the city council's hands.

A few farsighted local municipalities have adopted strategic plans — comprehensive and forward-looking schemes — and places like Artarmon, in Sydney, and the Gold Coast, in Queensland, now have a clear idea of the ways in which they will try to shape their future.

Some experts take the

gloomy view that it is already too late to save the situation.

The foremost expert on the subject of the Australian city, Hugh Stretton of Adelaide University, maintains that Sydney and Melbourne have decayed so far that there is no longer anything that can be done at economic cost to put them right.

He suggests that it would be better to use our resources developing new centres on the peripheries of the present big cities, leaving the existing centres to stumble on as best they may until the focus of urban life switches to the new, properly planned areas.

## Strategic plan

On the other hand, a planner like George Clarke, head of the firm which produced the Sydney strategic plan, believes that strategic planning can still save the metropolis.

Clarke, in fact, goes even further, with the suggestion that what we now need is a National Strategic Plan, which would chart out the whole picture of Australian development, and which would be put into effect by the co-operation of Federal, State, and local government, and private enterprise.

In the early 1950s Australian planning was considered at least abreast of anyone else's. This was the period in which planners were concentrating on broad regional schemes of land use — the green belt era — and Australian plan-

ning got into this field early.

Today the Australian problem is the last thing the planners of the 50s would have expected, but it is the product of their work: urban sprawl and lack of living space in the metropolis.

"The economic and social pressures of the time made suburban expansion inevitable," says George Clarke. "It was what Australians of the day wanted — if the planners had proposed any other kind of answer it would not have been accepted."

"It is only now, in the 1970s, that Australia is beginning to face up to the need for planning inside the existing metropolitan areas — for getting to grips with detailed neighborhood, and municipal planning in the existing built-up districts."

The oversight of the 1950s was caused because planners, like nearly everyone else in Australian life, failed to foresee the effect that would be caused by mass migration and an unprecedented population explosion.

Today the urgency of the situation is very clear, at least in planners' minds.

It appears likely that if immigration continues at present rates both Sydney and Melbourne, cities where facilities are already severely strained by populations around two and a half million, will have to cater for five million people.

It is beginning to be appreciated that the cherished Australian belief in the availability of endless space is a delusion.

Not only is the suburban sprawl too far extended for the population we already have: it is highly unlikely that the future population expansion can be accommodated in the empty inland wastes.

It is improbable that the unsettled parts of Australia can absorb more than a million, at the very outside, of the predicted population growth by the end of the century.

## Transport revolution

There is so far no sign that decentralisation schemes in the eastern States will work outside the Melbourne-Sydney axis.

We need to start planning now in order to be able to do the kind of things that will be needed in the 1980s.

Facing up to the kind of population pressure we are expecting for the last quarter of the century requires an immediate start on long-distance planning schemes in our existing cities.

Each one of them faces increasingly desperate problems of suburban sprawl, which is forcing

up the price of housing and condemning the less-well-off to live in fringe areas where they are doubly penalised by having to pay high fares to work on low wages; moribund urban transport systems which accentuate the switch to cars and further worsen road and city congestion; and crowded, uncomfortable, city centres.

It takes years of preparation to build a new railway, revive a dying city centre, or plan housing patterns. A community has to start now to be able to get things right in the next decade.

There are ways out of the difficulties approaching us in the next 25 years.

An alteration in traditional housing patterns, combined with a revolution in urban transport, can ameliorate the urban sprawl.

Transport problems can be overcome if we can present people with an acceptable alternative to the motor-car.

The city centres can be brought back to life if we can discover ways of easing the economic pressure which supplants theatres, restaurants and hotels with office blocks and drives the retail trade into the suburbs.

State authorities are the best placed to begin comprehensive metropolitan planning. The Federal Government is too distant to offer more than encouragement and

financial aid, although the Opposition Leader, Mr Whitlam, believes that a Federal office of urban affairs could do much to channel planning in the right directions by the distribution of Commonwealth funds.

But authorities of every size must be involved, modern urbanists believe.

## Intolerable chaos

The signs are that the State governments are now becoming slowly aware of the problem they ignored in the 1960s.

Australia is probably entering a decade of hectic planning activity to rival even the energetic era of the 40s and early 50s.

George Clarke remarks: "The problems of public health was the great civic question of the 19th century, and the problem of working conditions and wages was the question concerning the radical side of politics."

"The great civic and political problem of the last quarter of the 20th century is going to be the quality of life in the metropolises — not only here, but internationally."

"This is going to be the vital area where we will need action, money, and politically involvement. This is the area where there will be argument, conflicting pressures, and where the interests of every voter will be concentrated."

"The quality of life in our urban areas is becoming the great question of our time."

The further planning

gets from the people affected, the slower and the less efficient it becomes.

George Clarke believes that besides individual metropolitan planning, involving State and municipal government with Commonwealth co-operation, Australia needs a national strategic plan.

He says: "The Federal Government should have a very clear scheme for the future distribution of jobs and population."

"We can already see, I think, that this distribution will be largely along the seaboard — say, on the eastern coast between Cooktown and Bega; the south coast of Victoria between Sale and Portland; the northern coast of Tasmania; the southwest coast of WA between Geraldton and Bunbury; and along the Hume Highway between Sydney and Melbourne, which is the economic axis of this country."

## Hectic activity

"We need to be able to scheme the larger elements in this distribution on a reasonably coherent pattern — so that we can tell where we want ports; where areas of natural resources are; where future railways must run; the best places for towns, industrial development, 100,000 acre national parks; and so on."

"The existence of a long-distance national plan of this nature will enable us to organise future expansion properly. "Without it, we will find ourselves in intolerable chaos."

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## Town houses and villas offer the best of both worlds

By Mr M. B. Sewell, president NSW Real Estate Institute

BETTER use of land and streamlining of planning and sub-divisional procedures will become increasingly important in all of Australia's major cities as the 70s progress.

While decentralisation and the creation of new cities are undoubtedly the long-term answers to overcrowding, more economical use of our land resources and greater efficiency in processing them is needed to help halt rising prices and the suburban sprawl.

Fortunately, a number of organisations are ac-

tively researching both questions.

On the one hand, a special advisory committee set up by the State Planning Authority of New South Wales has just completed its report into medium density housing.

While the report deals with New South Wales, its findings will apply equally well to other States.

Many people see medium density housing

(town houses, villa homes, etc) as being a desirable alternative mid-way between individual detached cottages and home unit dwelling.

Medium density housing makes better use of land, is more economical than detached housing, and yet does not have the sociological disadvantages of high-rise home unit living.

A survey carried out by the Real Estate Institute of New South

Wales as part of the SPA committee's deliberations showed that a substantial unsatisfied demand exists for medium density housing in the Sydney metropolitan area.

It is a fair assumption that the same is true for our other larger capitals at least.

Yet many local councils have retarded town house and villa home development by permitting it only in areas

zoned for high-rise unit development.

The cost of land in these areas, of course, does not permit medium density use.

Additionally, minimum lot sizes even in areas zoned for medium density development are often unnecessarily large, making the land content unnecessarily expensive.

The bodies represented on the State Planning Authority's advisory

committee (which include the Real Estate Institute, as well as architects, developers, planners, and the Department of Local Government) are well aware of these and other problems and their report when it is published will no doubt suggest ways of overcoming them.

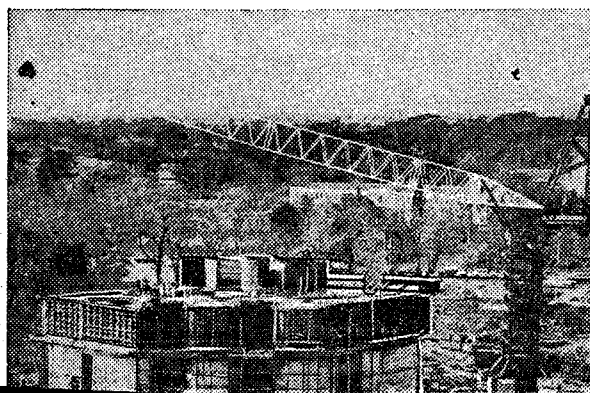
Our institute is also represented on a body which is conducting a far-reaching study into the price of land in

Australia's capital cities. It is clear from the areas of enquiry that the cause of high land prices is not the simple one so often put forward — speculation.

It is also clear that the solutions are likewise not as simple as those occasionally put forward, such as price control and public acquisition.

There are some 12 additional areas where further research is to be undertaken by the various State bodies of AIUS, and other bodies, including the CSIRO Division of Building Research, and universities.

# The project: Festival Theatre ADELAIDE Contract value: \$10.9 million The builder: A.V. Jennings



Adelaide's 2000-seat Festival Theatre, the separate Drama Theatre, and environs, will be the centre of the City's cultural activity. Construction is of pre-cast concrete and steel. Architects: Hassell & Partners.

Today most of our work is won at open tender. A growing proportion, however, is obtained on a negotiated basis.

For many companies, factors other than price are a major consideration. The builder's reputation, his

## Defending the role of the developer

By Mr Paul Strasser, a managing director of Parkes Development

SOME people generally regard developers as money-hungry businessmen, with no concern for proper planning and the environment.

They are usually made the scapegoats for all urban problems, particularly the high cost of land and accommodation and haphazard planning.

Few people realise the positive things that developers do and have done for the community. Over the past 20 years it has been the developer who has taken the initiative and the risk.

We have assisted in providing this country with the highest home ownership rate in the world — now standing at 80 per cent.

### Lack of guidance

In few other places is it possible for young couples to choose and purchase land or a home of their choice on a minimal deposit, as it is in Australia.



Until the strategic plan was issued last year, the City of Sydney Planning Scheme had been wending its way for 15 years through a morass of bureaucratic procedures.

A proper transport study is being carried out by the Sydney Area Transportation Study System Group, led by Dr Nielson.

A transportation study is critical to any planning scheme, and let us hope that it is not too late to implement the proposals, which should be known in 1973.

The study should have been commissioned at the

escalating at an alarming rate — much to the developers' concern.

We are certainly not withholding land from the market, despite criticism from certain sectors.

We cannot afford to. We are not in a position to gain by holding land. To operate profitably we must turn land over as rapidly as possible.

Our holding charges are 15 per cent per annum to acquire and develop a project.

In this free enterprise system competition generally prevents us from cornering the market or from extracting monopoly profits.

Professional developers do not speculate. We believe there is an acute shortage of land at present. The Minister for Local Government has asked for our help in this regard and we are co-operating.

Without

