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Comment on discussion paper: Sydney Greater Metropolitan Region

Summary

The planning strategy adopted for the Metropolitan Region will have many long term and irreversible consequences. It is essential that the decision-making process adopted for the strategy formation be beyond reproach. The adoption of fact based planning in place of ideologically or trend driven planning is advocated. It is suggested that a disciplined methodology be adopted to ensure that a wide range of options are considered and objectively assessed by specialists who are free of conflicts of interest. To assist conceptualising the points made, some practical examples of difficulties associated with current approaches are discussed. Possible alternatives to current planning strategies are suggested.

Limitations

The production of this comment document has been constrained by two factors:

- Drafting was deferred pending attendance at one or more of the discussion meetings that were held. In spite of the widely publicised Government/DIPNR invitation to the public to have its say in the future planning of Sydney, in every instance where Save Our Suburbs applied to attend forums that it got to hear about, it was refused entry. Thus efforts to attend discussion meetings were unsuccessful and this submission is made without the benefit of input from such discussion (Appendix 10).
- The generalised nature of the Sydney Greater Metropolitan Region Discussion Paper (the Discussion Paper) limits opportunities to make specific comments. However the paper states that the “Centres Policy” is to be the corner stone of the Metropolitan Strategy and it is on this aspect that comments will be focussed.

The necessity of evidence based planning.

Due to the long-term effects of planning decisions made it is essential that the decision-making process adopted for the Metropolitan Strategy formation be beyond reproach. This implies that all decisions made must be soundly based and founded on fact and not on temporary fashionable trends or unsupported emotional ideology.

Only one approach under consideration to cater for an increasing population

Implicit in the declared Centres Policy referred to is a policy of increasing population density. This limitation in direction has been made clear by statements by State Government appointees placed in charge of the process. It is understood that no studies have been undertaken to justify this approach. No evidence has been put forward that such a policy is the optimum direction to take, or indeed that it will at all improve the quality of life of the inhabitants. Our researches indicate that the contrary is likely to be the case (see below). No effort appears to have been made to investigate other planning approaches.

Lack of evidence for benefits of Centres Policy

Save Our Suburbs has repeatedly requested the proponents of current policies to provide some credible evidence of claimed benefits. Such evidence would preferably be an example of successful implementation elsewhere or, at the very least, undisputable results of comprehensive objective modelling. In every instance the proponents have failed to provide such evidence. Public presentations at best have been limited to illustrations depicting examples of limited applicability and at worst unsupported assumptions (Appendix 9 provides examples). Appendix 2 expresses reservations concerning the Centres Policy.

Claimed benefits of urban densification

Our investigations reveal that the benefits claimed by State Government spokesmen for densification policies are spurious or minimal. These are briefly discussed in appendices under the following headings:

- Reduced traffic congestion (Appendix 3)
- Cost (Appendix 4)
- Saving of land (Appendix 5)
- Sustainability (Appendix 6)
- Housing choice (Appendix 7)
- Improved social networks (Appendix 8)

Compensation

The benefits and costs of development fall very unevenly onto different groups in the population. Possible methods of compensating groups who are significantly disadvantaged by particular developments should be examined ²¹.

Other possible solutions

Examples of other approaches that might be explored can be found in Appendix 1 as illustrative of how the viewpoint may be broadened.

Decision methodology

If the decision-making process adopted for the Metropolitan Strategy formation is to be credible, it is essential that an acceptable decision-making methodology is adopted. At the very least it is necessary that:

- Sustainability objectives be defined and performance indicators set
- Broad possibilities be stated
- Detailed analysis of these options be undertaken including a benefit/cost analysis. All suggestions should be backed up by supporting evidence. Full social cost accounting should be undertaken and external costs included.

The literature provides further information, examples ^{1, 2}.

It is suggested the study be undertaken by an autonomous institute with input from respected engineers, economists, planners and community representatives who are independent of government patronage. People with a vested interest in promoting particular solutions should be rigorously excluded, including those who currently advise the Government/DIPNR on residential strategy and yet participate in development stemming from resulting decisions for their own advantage.

Conclusion

The far-reaching and nonflexible effects of the implementation of planning decisions require the decision process to be soundly based and be seen as soundly based. It is essential that the process be publicly accepted as objective, transparent, uninfluenced by vested interests and motivated by overall long-term community benefit.

Tony Recsei
PRESIDENT
Save Our Suburbs (SOS) NSW Inc
6 December 2004

¹ J A Black, APaetz, PASuthanaya, *Sustainable Urban Transportation: Performance Indicators and some analytical approaches*, Journal of Urban Planning and Development, Dec 2002

² *Procedures for Recommending Optimal Sustainable Planning of European City Transport Systems*, Institute for Transport Planning and Traffic Engineering, Vienna University of Technology, Gusshausstrasse 30/2, A-1040 Vienna, Austria, <http://www-ivv.tuwien.ac.at/projects/prospects.html>

Appendix 1

Examples of alternatives

One possible alternative to accommodating an increasing population is balanced development across New South Wales, such as proposed by the Local Government and Shires Association of NSW³.

This can be accomplished by a combination of strategies. To cater for a portion of the additional population new satellite cities could be developed, perhaps along the road to Goulburn. These satellite cities should incorporate desirable features such as green belts, underground electrical cabling, energy-efficient buildings, drought-resistant plants and water reuse downstream. They should be of optimal size (with about 200,000 residents each). They should have street layouts designed to maximise access by walking, cycling and public transport. They should be linked to Sydney and each other by very fast transport and communication facilities. This approach is likely to have superior results to the current policy of retrofitting high density onto existing communities designed for lower population densities.

Central to all planning should be the goal of eliminating unnecessary travel by making the communities as self-sufficient as possible. This means that work, education, health, entertainment, shopping, sporting and recreational facilities must be located within easy reach of the residential precincts.

There should also be a policy of repopulating declining regions. In this regard, lessons should be learnt from the Whitlam Government's decentralisation attempt. The Commonwealth Government must take some responsibility. It cannot just assume, as it does now, that the States can forever shoehorn all new arrivals into existing communities. The Commonwealth should provide funds to cater for the necessary infrastructure and employment required to promote acceptable decentralised development across the nation. It should also provide workable incentives such as income tax concessions for those who set up a business or work in these areas.

As the proportion of the population of New South Wales housed within the Sydney area increases, so does vulnerability to catastrophic man-made or natural events. Decentralisation decreases this vulnerability. Such risks should be taken into account in any benefit-cost analysis of planning options that is performed.

Another alternative could be a bold strategy to channel future population growth into areas such as the Northern Territory where water resources are sufficient to allow large-scale development and the spare capacity of the new Alice to Darwin railway could be beneficially utilised.

Appendix 2

The Centres Policy

The Discussion Paper states that the Centres Policy is the cornerstone of the Metropolitan Strategy, concentrating homes, jobs and services into seven initial

³ Local Government and Shires Association of NSW, *A framework for whole of State development*, July 2000

centres, implying that this will reduce car dependence. A government spokesman has pointed out that Arlington, near Washington DC, is an example of how Sydney should be developed⁴. However Arlington has only 187,000 residents compared to Sydney's 4,000,000 residents. It is a satellite city of Washington DC, an alternative advocated above.

What might work as a satellite city, with built-in time and distance barriers to the mother city, cannot be assumed to be applicable to centres placed within the mother city itself. A large city has multiple attractors such as schools of choice, universities, special sports, entertainment, friends to visit, specialised work opportunities and specialist supplies. Only a tiny fraction of this variety can be located within a centre. In any event, with the current city layout a certain proportion of destinations such as local shops and child-care facilities are located close to residential precincts.

Before it can be assumed that a Centres Policy will significantly ease transport problems it is essential that it can be confidently predicted that a significantly increased proportion of car journeys will be limited to the centre with the result that car dependence will be reduced to a justifiable extent.

In addition, in spite of a policy of establishing high-density living near railway stations, there have been successive major reductions in Sydney's passenger rail services. This points to escalating future difficulties in travel throughout the city using public transport and adds further doubt to the possibility of any significant reduction in car travel.

Appendix 3

Traffic congestion

The Government/DIPNR has claimed that high-density reduces problems relating to traffic congestion. However the high-density advocates cannot point to one high-density world city that justifies this claim. High density cities such as New York, Hong Kong, Paris and Moscow have public transport services that are better than Sydney will ever match. Yet they experience severe traffic congestion and dangerous emission levels⁵.

It is apparent that the percentage of people who use public transport does go up in higher densities. But it can easily be seen that, as population density in a city increases, so does traffic congestion. The increased public transport use is more than outweighed by the increased number of people in the neighbourhood who still use their cars. The reality is that for most journeys undertaken (travelling to work outside the city centre, recreational activities, visiting friends) public transport is just too inconvenient.

⁴ C Johnson, *Sydney Morning Herald*, Letters 28 April 2004

⁵ United States Environment Protection Agency, EPA/600/P-99/002aC April 2002, Third External Review Draft, *Air Quality Criteria for Particulate Matter*

This is exemplified by an example of a city much admired by compact city proponents. The planning authorities in Portland, Oregon admit that, in spite of all efforts (including large sums spent on public transport and none on extending the road system), by 2040 the use of public transport there will only increase from the current 3% to 6% of people's journeys - still negligible. Car traffic will increase from 4 million to 7 million daily trips resulting in massive congestion and pollution.

Moscow may be taken as another case in point. This city has one of the best public transport services in the world, it is a high-density city where no single-residential buildings are allowed and has no arterial roads. Yet Moscow now experiences severe traffic congestion, with traffic frequently grid-locked. Before the freeing up of political systems in Russia, traffic congestion was minimal. It is likely that this previous traffic pattern can be restored with a return to a system of political coercion and a primitive economy. Some high-density proponents thinly disguise their advocacy of coercion to reduce travel choice coupled with restrictions placed on economic behaviour. The question must be asked whether any benefits resulting from such authoritarianism outweigh the costs and whether such advocacy points to dogmatism overcoming objectivity.

The writer maintains that a fundamental physical restriction exists with current public transport systems. Public transport travels linearly whereas cities are two dimensional.

Consider the points of origin and destination in a city as being depicted in a two dimensional matrix. It is apparent that a linear public transport system cannot reach all these points, whereas a car can. This limitation is even more noticeable when time is also taken into consideration. The inclusion of time requires a three-dimensional matrix, with two spatial dimensions and one of time. Public transport only runs at certain times, further limiting the proportion of points within its reach. Car travel is less time-constrained.

It is apparent that the number of the three-dimensional area-time points that can be connected by public transport is very much less than those that can be reached by car. The ratio of such points achievable by public transport compared to those attainable by car decreases exponentially as the size of the city increases.

Appendix 4 Cost

The Government/DIPNR has maintained that for an increasing population infrastructure costs will be saved if high-density living is retrofitted into areas designed for low density when compared to the development of greenfield sites.

There are three aspects relating to cost that need to be considered:

- After 10 years of application of urban consolidation to Sydney it is apparent that this policy overloads existing infrastructure and merely postpones expenditure. Failures are increasingly significant in sewerage systems, stormwater systems,

water supply, power supply and public transport. Traffic congestion has noticeably increased and other services such as health and policing are under stress.

The infrastructure of our suburbs was designed for the density of dwellings then built. Retrofitting higher density must overload infrastructure. It is more cost-efficient to provide new infrastructure on a clean slate than to upgrade existing installations, with all the obstructions, legal constraints and problems that replacing obsolescent engineering entails. Overloading infrastructure may postpone expenditure but the ultimate cost will be higher.

- The cost of building multi-unit housing to replace existing detached housing should be taken into consideration. In addition to the waste factor in demolishing viable existing housing, the new dwellings are much more expensive. Three-bedroom villa housing is 50% more expensive to build than cottage construction while two-storey town-house dwellings cost twice that of detached housing.⁶
- The land component of the price of a dwelling has increased from 32% in 1997 to 60% in 2002⁷. The cause is attributed to a shortage of land caused by the urban consolidation policy. From the late 1970s up until early 1990s, more than 40 per cent of the additions to dwelling stock each year in metropolitan Sydney were located in new greenfield areas. That share has dropped significantly since 1993-94 to an average of 28 per cent for the period 1996 to 2001. It is projected to fall further to 25 per cent over the next five years⁸. This trend has also been observed in Portland, Oregon mentioned above, where data from the United States Census Bureau and the National Association of Homebuilders shows that the proportion of average Portland families who can now afford a home is only half of what it was before the implementation of high density policies.

Appendix 5

Saving of land

The fact that the ecological footprint of a city extends far beyond its boundaries questions the assertion that urban densification, in the Australian context, saves any significant farmland and bushland.

A calculation of the land that would be saved by doubling the urban density of Sydney illustrates this. The residential area of a city such as Sydney comprises 40% of the total⁹. Looking at a map of Sydney, most of the city lies within a square of about 45 km. This amounts to 2025 sq km of which the residential areas (as defined including dwellings, access roads, local shops and offices and primary schools) will be 810 sq km.

⁶ Department of Health Housing and Community Service, *Economic aspects of urban consolidation*, Urban Futures Journal, Vol 3 no 1

⁷ Housing Institute of Australia *Submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry into First Home Ownership*, October 2003

⁸ Productivity Commission inquiry into housing affordability (Dec 2003), chap 6 page 98

⁹ Brian McLoughlin, *Urban Consolidation and Urban Sprawl: a Question of Density*, Urban Policy and Research IX, 3 (1992), pp 148 -153

If the residential density of Sydney with its current population were to be doubled (a horrific scenario to many), then the residential area will reduce to 405 sq km. The new area of the city then will be 1620 sq km, or a square some 40 km across.

So doubling the population density of Sydney with its current population would save only 5 km off its 45 km cross section. If one flies from Sydney to Brisbane and observes the huge expanse of land between the ranges and the sea one realises that this is negligible. It should be pointed out that there is no evidence of a shortage of productive farmland – refer, for example, to the low prices farmers receive for their produce.

While one would not wish to encourage the replacement of farmland and bushland this needs to be put in the context of an increasing population. Sydney at present has many pockets of remnant bushland which are attractive to residents and visitors. They counteract pollution, purify the air, mitigate rainwater run-off, cool the city and provide a critical sanctuary for wildlife. These areas are continually under siege by developers. If so little peripheral bush would be saved, surely it is better for city people to live among some trees, birds and animals and to preserve these as far as is practical so as to prevent their extinction in the city area. Surely it is better for people to be able, if they so wish, to look out upon nature and to grow some fruit and vegetables themselves than to save the equivalent of 5 km of mostly degraded fringe farmland and bush on the city periphery.

Appendix 6 Sustainability

Far from alleviating transport problems, experience in Sydney and high-density cities all over the world shows that traffic congestion and dangerous air pollution increases with densification. There is more noise and greenhouse gas emissions.

After 10 years of urban densification efforts in Sydney, sewers now frequently overflow into the Harbour and Botany Bay, much of it as a result of the increased sewage load in a sewerage system designed for lower density. The higher proportion of tiles and concrete resulting from densification forces rainwater that previously was absorbed in gardens to rush off into a stormwater system that will now overflow.

Water shortages are being experienced. The reuse of water can be economically engineered only in greenfield areas. Electricity failures are becoming frequent. Energy use has escalated due to power hungry high-rises, which depend on lifts and clothes driers. Increasingly units rely on air-conditioning as they are mostly unshaded by trees or eaves and windows are often kept closed to exclude the noise, odours and excessive neighbour intimacy associated with crowded conditions.

The energy embodied in new construction to replace viable single-residential housing is also a significant consideration. Traditional detached houses have a greater capacity to use materials with lower embodied energy. Weatherboard houses embody 1/6 the energy of brick-veneer houses and timber-framed houses store carbon. Energy embodied in high-density residential developments constructed of concrete and steel greatly increase the amount of carbon released to the atmosphere and are a significant source of environmental stress.

With buildings over 2 storeys embodied energy starts to increase significantly¹⁰. Tucker, Salomonsson and Macsporrán (in 1994) estimated that the embodied energy of the Australian national building stock at 22,500 petajoules was equivalent to about nine years of total energy consumption. About 40 percent of this embodied energy was estimated to be in the residential building stock¹¹. Energy embodied in tall buildings constitute a significant proportion of the release of CO₂ which amortised equals annual energy consumption¹². Additionally they rely on air conditioning – a significant source of greenhouse gas release. Heating and cooling energy, a quarter of energy consumption, is thought to be equivalent to the embodied energy of a typical dwelling with a life of 50 years¹³. According to the United States Department of Energy's Centre for Sustainable Development, buildings consume 40% of the world's total energy, 25% of its wood harvest and 16% of its water.¹⁴

There is no evidence that urban densification policies in Sydney improve sustainability.

Appendix 7 Housing choice

The State Government maintains that urban densification will increase housing choice, saying that local government areas should be transformed until all housing styles are available in all municipalities and that people should be able to move to a different housing style in the same locality. But there is no evidence that there currently is an insufficient range of housing choice for local residents. A study by the Planning Institute of Sydney University showed no evidence of shortages of any particular accommodation type¹⁵. There is now a surplus of apartments in the city. Vacancy rates have reached their highest in 7 years (4% of rental apartments within 10km of the city are vacant, middle ring 2.5%, outer ring 2.7%¹⁶). The sales of single residential homes are booming and there is a looming land shortage for first home buyers¹⁷.

A study of social trends during the past two decades show that 83% of Australians would rather live in a free standing home¹⁸. This has been a major goal of most families, notably those of low income, and is viewed as an important part of the Australian way of life. Detached housing gives families the room to live and play together without having to leave the house. Backyards allow children to play off the

¹⁰ Personal conversation, 28/8/01

¹¹ Patrick Troy, Paper: *Sustainable Cities*, Canberra, 10 August 04

¹² Personal conversation, 28/8/01

¹³ Patrick Troy, *Rethinking our Cities*, in *Australian Financial Review*, Review 1, 23 March 2001

¹⁴ *Sustainable Cities 2025*, Discussion Paper, Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage, House of Representatives, 2003

¹⁵ *The Demand for Urban Consolidation* Planning Research Centre, University of Sydney, 1999. This document also shows that new multi-unit development is occupied mainly by immigrants who have not previously experienced anything else. Australians in general do not move from single-unit to multi-unit accommodation.

¹⁶ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 Feb 2001 quoting Real Estate Institute of NSW Jan Property survey.

¹⁷ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27/8/01 and 18/08/01

¹⁸ *Sunday Telegraph*, 20 June 2004 quoting *Australian Bureau of Statistics Report 4102.0 Australian Social Trends* issued 2004.

street, allow swimming pools, cater for pets, allow outdoor social functions and space for growing fruit and vegetables, composting, for open air clothes drying, for boats and caravans¹⁹.

Gardening is ranked second, after walking, as the most important physical activity for a population and is placed above fishing, swimming and exercising at home or at a gym²⁰. Garden greenery acts as a carbon sink.

Families with children are already finding housing choice increasing limited. Data from the ABS Census 1996 shows that in the inner suburban ring in Sydney the proportion of homes with children is only 30% compared to the outer ring where the proportion is about 55%. This mirrors the housing choices presented in these rings. Separate dwellings represent only 28% of homes in the inner ring and 82% in the outer ring. Densification thus is already restricting housing choice for families with children. They are increasingly limited to selecting either an inner city unit or an outer area house.²¹ In time, forcing more and more of these families to live in confined group housing will be bitterly resented.

Why should people have to give up their outdoor home activities and be forced to indulge in the “vibrant” lifestyle advocated by high density advocates of drinking coffee on the footpath instead? The writer’s observations indicate that people who live in units are away from home more often than those in free-standing houses, having to get away from the surrounding four walls, usually travelling in their cars to do so. It also appears that many sufficiently wealthy such people own weekend residences outside Sydney, apparently for the same reason.

Recent widespread claims of obesity being associated with suburban living are an indicator of the desperate attempts used by high-density advocates to justify their standpoint²². Defects of these studies include that the body mass differences found (typically a few hundred grams) are not significant, no mention being made that the timing of the onset of the obesity problem does not correlate with when suburbanisation occurred and ignoring the influence of diet and socio-economic status.

Appendix 8

Improved social networks

Proponents of high density maintain that this style of living enhances the involvement of people in community activities. However people's community involvement in the more spacious small towns is found to be twice that in dense large cities. Also, such

¹⁹ G Searle, *To go up - or go out? Sydney’s urban development dilemma*, Faculty of Design, Architecture and Building, University of Technology Sydney, Public lecture given in the UTSpeaks series, 16 November 2004

²⁰ For New Zealanders. *Otago Daily Times*, 17 March 2001

²¹ Personal correspondence, A Little, *How State Government Housing Policy Has Segregated Sydney’s Households*.

²² *Measuring the Health Effects of Sprawl*, August 28, 2004

community involvement is greater in low density suburbs than in denser central city areas. This is especially true for the larger centres. The available data therefore shows that as density increases, peoples' involvement in community activities declines.²³

Appendix 9

Concerns over validity of statements made at public forums.

At public forums, such as “Sydney’s Public Transport Future” held in the Sydney Town Hall on 20 April 2004, overheads have been projected accompanied by various statements.

- The statement was made that preference for private transport is not influenced by wealth. This was “proved” by a bar chart showing that comparatively wealthy Europe uses public transport to a greater extent than some less well-off societies. However one cannot just look at two variables in a complex situation involving many factors and there are many variables affecting travel patterns. Furthermore, multivariate analysis shows that wealth **is** the most significant factor in the choice of travel mode and that it is the high price of petrol in Europe that is the main factor in limiting car use, which overrides the increased wealth there²⁴.
- A bar chart showing a correlation between higher densities and increased use of public transport when viewing the inner, middle and outer ring of Sydney was used as “proof” that higher densities result in increased use of public transport. In fact the major reason for this apparent relationship is that people who live in the inner ring tend to work in the city, a destination to which it is often too inconvenient and expensive to use one’s car.
- Zurich and Copenhagen were illustrated as examples of high density cities to follow, without an indication of how car dependence is reduced in these cities. This is misleading for a number of reasons. Firstly these are old cities built before the advent of the car and in which the number of car journeys is increasing rapidly at the expense of public transport journeys. Secondly, when considering the whole city instead of only the central business district, the degree of car dependence is only minimally less in such cities. The majority of transport in these cities is by car and increasingly so. The percentage of transport energy used by cars is a high 92% of the total in Copenhagen and 94% in Zurich²⁵. To look at another statistic, the traffic intensity in Copenhagen is 73,308 vehicle km per sq km, in Zurich the figure is 75,085 compared to Sydney’s 32,491. It is highly misleading to consider only a limited precinct from which it is relatively easy to exclude or limit cars and not the city as a whole.

²³ Deduced from Putnam R D, *Bowling Alone*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 2000

²⁴ R Kirwan *Urban form, energy and transport: a note on the Newman-Kenworthy thesis*, Urban Policy and Research, Vol 10 no 1 1992.

²⁵ P Newman and J Kenworthy, *Sustainability and Cities; Overcoming automobile dependence*, Island Press, Washington DC, 1999, p 70.

- Arlington, Virginia was used as an example of the successful application of high density and public transport. However Arlington is a small city, the limited dimensions of which make travel relatively easy. It has only 187,000 residents and cannot be compared to a city the size of Sydney with 4,000,000 residents. What will work in a small city cannot be assumed to work in a large one.
- Melbourne was compared with Toronto in the context of the better public transport usage in the latter city. While much mention was made of the desirability of having higher densities around railway stations it was not revealed that in fact it is Melbourne that has high densities around railway stations while Toronto does not. The higher patronage of public transport in Toronto is attributed to superior coordination of public transport in Toronto, not high density

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Appendix 10

Correspondence relating to unsuccessful attempts to present Save Our Suburbs point of view

Attempt to arrange a meeting with Minister Craig Knowles

Save Our Suburbs made an application on 3 April 2003 to arrange a meeting with Minister Craig Knowles. The Minister's office requested information on the subject matter to be discussed. This was supplied in a fax of 23 April. Nothing further was heard from the Minister's office in spite of telephonic and faxed reminders.

Community Participation Meetings 18/19 May

Email to : metrostrategy@dipnr.nsw.gov.au
 From "Tony Recsei" 05/17/04 11:24am
 ATTENTION TRACEY PRESCOTT

Dear Ms Prescott

I refer to our telephone conversation this morning regarding the necessity of some community participation in the Metrostrategy process and in particular the sessions to be held on 18 and 19 May at the Australian Technology Park.

I requested that consideration be given to the desirability of the community being genuinely involved in this planning process if their confidence is to be gained in this undertaking and the final result. It will not be good enough to adopt some tokenist approach that will consult with them once the plans have coalesced into a predetermined outcome. It is suggested that there should be no repetition of the community consultation type of processes conducted in the past by the Department of Infrastructure and Planning which the public has learned to mistrust. If future community cooperation is desired with the outcome of the planning process, then community participation should be encouraged at an early stage so that the community can feel some ownership with the result.

The presence of Council participants does not meet this criterion. Most councils have not become interested in the broader planning issues (with the exception of WSROC who appear to have an interest limited to the effect on Western Sydney).

²⁶ P Mees, *A very public solution: Transport in the Dispersed City*, Melbourne University Press, 2001.

Our organisation has a deep interest in a constructive outcome and I request that I be allowed to attend.

Please respond urgently.

Yours sincerely

Tony Recsei
President
Save Our Suburbs NSW Inc

From: [Metrostrategy Metrostrategy](#) **To:** trecsei@bigpond.net.au **Sent:** Monday, May 17, 2004 12:01 PM **Subject:** Re: Community representation at Forum - URGENT
Dear Mr Recsei

Thank you for your interest in the Sydney Futures Forum to be held on may 18-19, 2004. The response has been overwhelming and the Forum has been fully subscribed. We will have transcripts of the speeches available on the website www.metrostrategy.nsw.gov.au for your information. Details of future Forums will be notified on the website in due course.

Judith Peters
Manager Stakeholders and Communication
Sydney Metropolitan Strategy

From: [Tony Recsei](#) **To:** [Metrostrategy Metrostrategy](#) **Sent:** Monday, May 17, 2004 12:43 PM
Subject: Re: Community representation at Forum - URGENT
Dear Ms Peters

Thank you for your reply. However I request you to reconsider your decision as I suggest that the community is the most important stakeholder, and I am sure that logistics would allow you to accommodate an extra person without any noticeable difficulty. Please look at the position once more.

Yours sincerely
Tony Recsei

NO RESPONSE RECEIVED

Community Participation Meeting 17 June 2004

From: [Tony Recsei](#)
To: [Metrostrategy Metrostrategy](#) **Sent:** Monday, June 17, 2004
Dear Ms Peters

Today I discovered (Sydney Morning Herald 17 June 2004) that the second of the Sydney Futures forums is being held at this moment. This prompted me to search your website when I found (with some difficulty) a new addition to your website stating "THE SYDNEY FUTURES FORUM IS A SERIES OF EVENTS WHERE THE PEOPLE OF SYDNEY WILL HAVE THE CHANCE TO HAVE THEIR SAY ABOUT THE FUTURE OF THEIR CITY
..... Telstra Stadium, Sydney Olympic Park 17 June, 2004".

<http://www.metrostrategy.nsw.gov.au/dev/ViewPage.action?siteNodeId=31&languageId=1&contentId=-1>)

I immediately telephoned your Department to inquire about the time of day of the forum and whether I could attend. I spoke to Mary Kennedy, who after asking about the identity of the organisation I represent, said she would find out. She phoned back a short time later to say attendance was by invitation only and that I would not be able to participate.

The assurances in your above email, "Details of future forums will be notified on the website in due course" and that on your website "the people of Sydney will have the chance to have their say about the future of their city" imply that members of the community will be able to participate. It is most disappointing to find out that, once again, this has proved not to be the case.

I would like to register a strong protest at this misleading and undemocratic attitude by your Department. I request you to please advise the reason for the exclusion of the community from the process of planning Sydney's future as well as details of what your future intentions are regarding their participation in this planning process.

Your urgent reply would be appreciated.

Yours sincerely

Tony Recsei

From: Judith Peters

To: trecsei@bigpond.net.au

Sent: Monday, June 21, 2004 10:37 AM

Subject: Sydney Futures Forum

Dear Mr Recsei

The first Sydney Futures Forum on 18-19 May and the Local Government Forum on 17 June were not open to the general public. These events were targeted at business, industry, non-government and government organisations. Community Forums will commence in July. Dates have not yet been fixed but will be notified in the press and on the website at www.metrostrategy.nsw.gov.au once determined. I hope you will be able to attend one of these forums.

Regards

Judith Peters

Judith Peters

Manager, Stakeholders and Communication

Sydney Metropolitan Strategy

From: Tony Recsei 7 July 2004 12.28 pm

Dear Ms Peters

Thank you for this email in which you now say that the Sydney Futures Forums held to date were not open to the general public. I point out that this is contradictory to the statement on your Sydney Metropolitan website

(<http://www.metrostrategy.nsw.gov.au/dev/ViewPage.action?siteNodeId=28&languageId=1&contentId=-1>) which states quite clearly:

"YOUR CITY YOUR SAY. Tell us what you think about the Metropolitan Strategy. Over the next few months there will be a number of opportunities for you to have your say. The first of these opportunities will be the [Sydney Futures Forum](#) in May 2004."

Please advise me why you now state that these Forums were not open to the public who, if that was the case, would not have had the opportunity offered on your website. Furthermore I also point out that when you refused permission for me to attend the 18/19 May Forum you stated "The response has been overwhelming and the Forum has been fully subscribed".

Although you advise below that notification will be on the website of Community Forums that will commence in July, as at 7 July 2004 I still cannot find notification of these forums. Also, there is no indication regarding the format this forum will take. One important desirable characteristic is for the community to be able to directly question and make their views known to the Metrostrategy decision makers. I suggest that the community forum should not be in the format of the highly manipulated "Plan making in NSW (PlanFirst)" forums that were widely conducted by your Department in 1999. Instead the community should be genuinely involved in the Metrostrategy planning process if their confidence in this undertaking and the final result is to be gained. It will not be good enough to adopt some tokenist approach that will consult with them once the plans have coalesced into a predetermined outcome.

Please advise the format for the forums in which the community can participate and when they will take place.

Yours sincerely

Tony Recsei

NO RESPONSE RECEIVED

Metrostrategy Public Meeting at Strathfield on 18 November 2004

After fortuitously hearing about a Metrostrategy Public Meeting at Strathfield to be held on 18 November, the writer made a telephone request to “Nick” on Monday 15 November to attend, giving name and telephone number. Nick said he would know by midday and get back. He did not do so and the writer phoned again on 16 November. Nick said they are running short of places but after checking he would call back that afternoon. He checked with the writer how his name was spelt.

HE DID NOT CALL BACK.

Meeting including environmental groups held in week commencing 15 November.

An article in the Sydney Morning Herald (“Green groups call for city plan detail”, 23 November 2004), reported that clusters of email invitations were sent out to developers, environmental groups and social justice campaigners.

SAVE OUR SUBURBS WAS NOT INVITED.