

# Parting shot from axed top planner

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THE man hired by Bob Carr two years ago to oversee the state's development has been dumped.

Professor Peter Newman, whose appointment as the NSW Sustainability Commissioner was announced to great fanfare in April 2004, received a call from the Planning Minister, Frank Sartor, on Thursday to say his services were no longer required.

But Dr Newman, whose role involved reviewing all of the Government's plans for land releases and developments in Sydney, did not leave his post without firing a parting shot at "antiplanning" factions within the State Government, including the new Treasurer, Michael Costa.

Mr Costa made his job overseeing the metropolitan strategy, a 25-year plan for Sydney's growth, "enormously uphill", he said.

Dr Newman said he became concerned for the future of his position after the Department of Planning failed to return his calls after the completion of the metropolitan strategy in November.

"I was finally told it was being reviewed and I should just wait, so I waited and then Frank said they had reviewed it and now the metro strategy is out, it's not needed any more."

Dr Newman's tenure was due to expire in April, but he said he was quite happy with the decision to end it early. He plans to travel to the United States in June to speak to state governments about sustainability.

Dr Newman, who is director of the Institute for Sustainability and Technical Policy at Murdoch University in Perth, said he was pleased with the contributions he had made to the strategy, but said "anti-planning" factions within the Government made finalising the document "a real battle."

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"You have got ministers for other portfolios saying they don't want the strategy publicly, it's no secret. The present Treasurer is constantly saying 'I don't believe in planning' at public meetings."

Dr Newman said he left a city with two crucial transport projects still up in the air.

The Government was yet to announce how it planned to pay for the heavy rail line linking the north-west and south-west growth sectors via the city, and no commitment had been made to extend the light rail system in the city - a move that was "incredibly important for the future of the Australian economy".

Dr Newman's critical views have influenced several key decisions in the past two years. His advice contributed to the Government's move to shelve the M4 East extension in 2005.

But the relationship between Dr Newman and his government colleagues has not always been amicable. He has strongly criticised the Government's plans for Sydney, including the desalination plant that has now been dumped.

In September, Dr Newman condemned Mr Sartor's decision to water down limits to Sydney's sprawl. He said allowing development to continue unrestrained risked creating poverty traps.

His dumping comes three months after Mr Sartor said he was reviewing the role of Professor Ed Blakely, the metropolitan strategy's convener. Dr Blakely, a world planning expert, has criticised the Government for its lack of focus.