Contrasts in reform: how the Cain and Burke years shaped public transport in Melbourne and Perth

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Abstract

Melbourne's public transport system, despite its extensive train and tram lines, is facing major challenges. From a point of near-extinction in the late 1970s, Perth's historically smaller public transport system is arguably now better placed to deal with growing environmental and economic pressures. The election of reformist governments in Victoria and WA in the early 1980s provided critical opportunities for public transport in both cities. This paper documents the striking differences in the behaviour of the politicians, bureaucrats and civic action groups engaged in contention over transport policy in the two cities during this period. These differences had a significant influence on the performance of public transport in Melbourne and Perth today, and point to changes that will be required to improve transport policy outcomes in Melbourne.

Introduction

In 2009, public transport systems in Perth and Melbourne are on very different paths. In Perth, a centrally planned network has delivered consistent patronage growth for over a decade. More growth is expected from the new 72-km Mandurah line and its associated bus lines. In Melbourne, recent demographic shifts and petrol price rises have triggered transit demand that took the fractured management of the privatised system by surprise. Major new tracks, on or under the ground, are many years away.

Three decades ago, transport planners in both cities were smoothing the path for the demise of public transport. In Perth, the Fremantle line was closed; in Melbourne, the Lonie Inquiry floated the idea of closing down the whole tram system, but finally recommended scrapping eight lightly-patronised suburban rail lines and seven tram routes (VTS 1980). In both cities, strong civic protests against these plans helped to elect reformist ALP state governments with policies for improvement of public transport. But, since then, differences in the operations, management and performance of public transport in the two cities have multiplied, largely, it will be argued, as a consequence of the ways that transport policies were handled in the 1980s.

This paper reports on recent research into the style and content of transport reforms undertaken by the Cain and Burke ALP governments in the 1980s. It begins with a summary of the differences in performance of the two public transport systems and in the urban planning policies that are in place in each city. This is followed by a brief discussion of the centrality of political processes in theoretical approaches to understanding differences in the formulation of urban policy. This directs analytic attention to 'windows of opportunity' in which policy change is most likely to be possible. The main part of the paper consists of two case studies that explore the behaviour of the key actors in the contention over transport policy during such windows of opportunity in Melbourne and Perth.

The case studies show striking differences in the behaviour of key actors, both inside and outside the government. These differences had a significant effect on the outcomes of these reforms and, ultimately, on today's public transport performance.

Public transport and urban planning in Melbourne and Perth since the 1970s

Despite the benefits apparently offered by the city's extensive train and tram lines, per capita use of Melbourne's transit system declined rapidly after 1950 and stagnated for 25 years after 1980[1]. This decline is shown in Figure 1. Patronage has grown since 2006, but this was due to increased CBD employment and rising petrol prices: no significant changes in service patterns occurred at this time (DoT policy analyst, pers. comm.). For the journey to work, census data from 1976 to 2006 shows that Melbourne experienced the largest proportional decline of any Australian cities in public transport, car-pooling and walking, and the biggest increase in driving. Public transport's mode share for work trips fell from 24.1% in 1976 to 13.9% in 2006 (Mees et al. 2007).

Perth remains a car-dominated city, with a higher level of driving for work trips than Melbourne, but there are some positive signs. Per capita transit use in Perth grew by 32% between 1992 and 2005, even though population grew at a faster rate than in Melbourne. The absolute level of transit use is lower than that of Melbourne mainly because of Perth's historically small rail system, but the growth correlates with changes in service quality and coverage. Recent falls in the journey to work by car have occurred at a greater rate than in Melbourne, and Perth now performs better than Adelaide on this measure (Mees et al.). The new 72km Mandurah line and its associated feeder buses provide grounds for optimism for future growth in transit use.
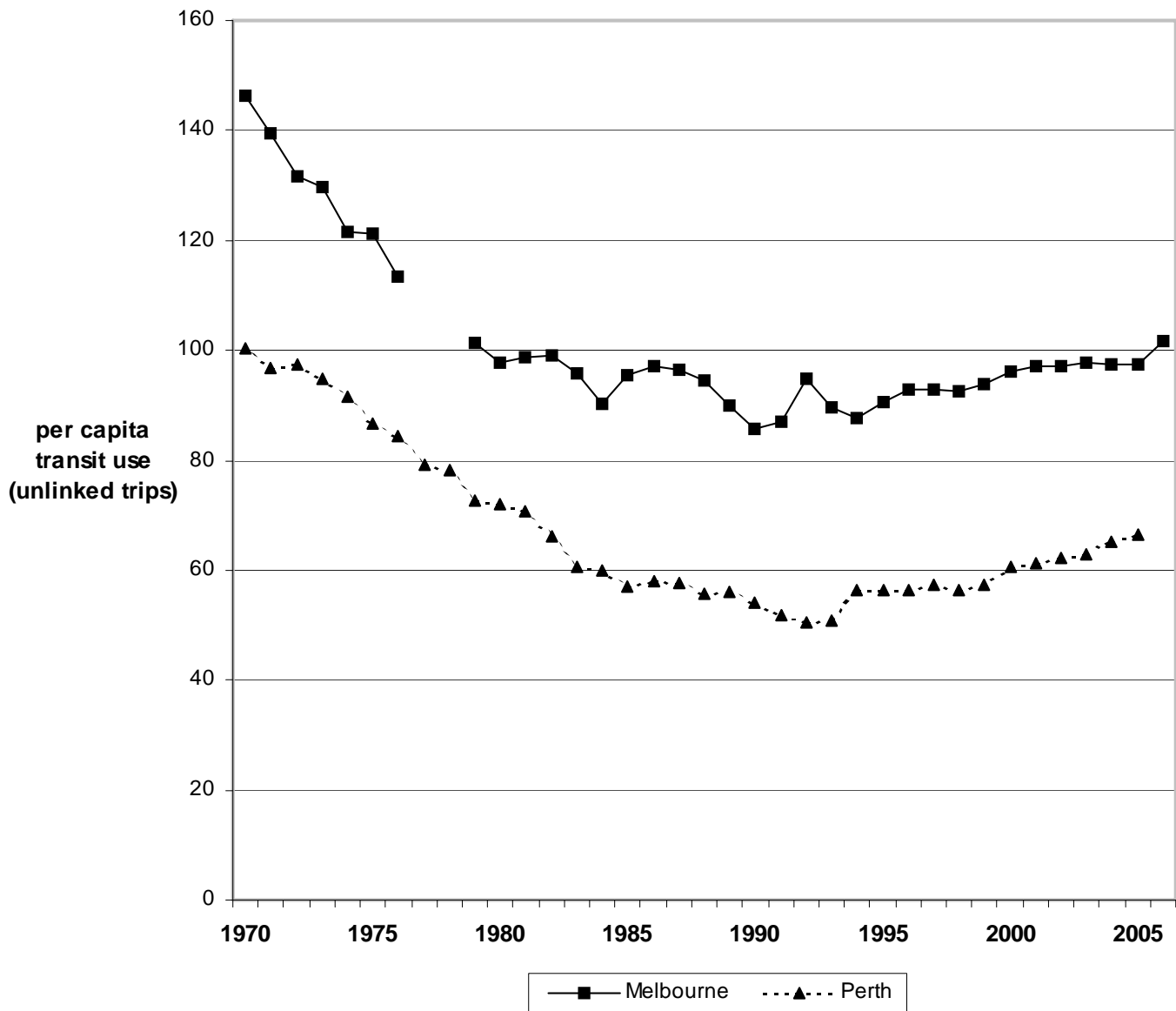
Figure 1: Comparison of transit performance in Melbourne and Perth since 1970

Sources: Melbourne – to 1999, state transit agency Annual Reports, from 1999, Department of Infrastructure, compiled from information from private operators; Perth – state transit agency Annual Reports

As Vuchic (1999) makes clear, transit performance is influenced by the combination of transport and land-use planning policies put in place across an urban region. Vuchic categorises possible urban transport policy approaches and argues that "the most rational and cost-effective policy for achieving … livable metropolitan areas" (p. 247) is to provide incentives for transit and disincentives for car travel.

Perth policy-makers were firmly on the 'car incentive' trajectory until the 1980s. Since then, there has been a slow implementation of 'transit incentive' policies; primarily through rail electrification and the construction of new rail lines and a

reconfiguration of bus services. While not wanting to overstate the degree of change, there have been some moves to slow the city's substantial road construction program, and the *Network City* planning process is tentatively engaging with the difficult task of building 'car disincentives' into a city that already has a virtually complete freeway network.

Melbourne, on the other hand, clearly demonstrates the reverse of Vuchic's ideal. Since 1976, Melbourne has built more lane-kilometres of urban freeways than any Australian city (Kenworthy and Laube 2001): a dramatic 'car incentive'. The basic problems of Melbourne's public transport system, unlike Perth, do not relate to the absence of rail infrastructure, although this is needed in the suburbs that have grown up since the last major rail line was opened in 1930. Rather, it is the fragmentation of transit service delivery, particularly between rail and bus, which creates significant 'transit disincentives'. More large freeways opened in 2008, others are proposed and the urban growth boundary established in the *Melbourne 2030* plan has been abandoned. So, car-dependent development continues apace.

The transport policy package that has been implemented in Melbourne runs counter to the rhetoric of successive Victorian governments. Improvements in transit use have been a stated goal for more than 25 years, culminating in the specific objective for "public transport's share of motorised trips within Melbourne (to) rise to 20 per cent from the current level of 9 per cent" (DOI 2002, policy 8.1). If this is the intention, why have the policy settings in Melbourne remained diametrically opposed to those likely to achieve improvements in transit use? What happened in Perth to allow its transit system to improve to the extent that it has?

Theorising differences in transport policy formulation: the centrality of politics
The international literature points towards local institutional conditions and the behaviour of political actors as the keys to understanding variations in transit-use trends. In data collected by Kenworthy and Laube (2001) on a range of demographic, economic and transport indicators in large sample of cities over more than 20 years, growth in transit use was seen to vary significantly even among cities with many physical similarities. These authors argue that this variability relates to the consistency with which policies to support alternatives to car dependence are pursued by city governments (2002), rather than factors such as wealth or cultural attitudes to mobility that have been suggested by other commentators (Gomez-Ibañez 1991). In

Canada (Kennedy et al. 2005) and Europe (Bratzel 1999), research has also pointed to the political dimension as the key to explaining differences in transport policy.

Institutional variation does not appear to be the crucial factor in understanding differences in transport policy formulation in Melbourne and Perth. There are broad similarities in the local institutions of government and management of transport systems in Melbourne and Perth. In both cases, urban governance is the responsibility of state governments with little competition from weak local government. There has been little difference in the broad patterns of state parliamentary representation in Victoria and Western Australia since the 1950s.

One difference is the strength of statutory authorities in opposition to parliament. Historically, these authorities have had considerable power and autonomy in urban affairs in Melbourne; and the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW) provided a structure for metropolitan coordination that had some legitimacy in representing local interests. However, most of these authorities were dismantled in the 1980s, and reform processes were brought under centralised executive control.

If the institutions themselves are not significantly different in their basic structures, then explanations for differences in transport policy formulation in Melbourne and Perth are more likely to be found by investigating the behaviour of political actors. This does not mean ignoring the institutional frameworks. In fact, the outcomes of conflicts over policy formulation are influenced by the nature of the institutions in which the conflicts take place. There is no guarantee that "any arbitrary change can be made … or that changes will be consistent with prior intentions" (March and Olsen 1996, p. 256). Outcomes are also less predictable because policy conflicts can be fought in ways that reflect a "hidden or black polity" (Raab 1992, p. 74) which, by analogy with the black economy, implies some bending of the rules.

Across the spectrum of policy issues, a major obstacle to policy change is the existence of groups of interdependent professional actors, called 'policy networks', which exert strong and persistent control over their particular policy sectors. Policy networks are "very successful in resisting policy changes" (Rhodes and Marsh 1992, p. 197-8). Weakening this resistance appears to require a challenge by an external group of activists and experts who create a visible opposition to an existing policy network and seize a window of political opportunity to get action on their agenda.

This, in turn, may lead to a policy change and a new bureaucratic institution (Campbell et al. 1989).

Sabatier argues that "changes in the core elements of public policy require the replacement of the dominant group by another" (1991, p. 153), but it can sometimes be difficult to tell whether short-term change indicates that a dominant grouping has been replaced or if it is only responding to a challenge (Stewart 1991). In the transport arena, there are numerous examples of an existing policy network responding to political pressures by making rhetorical changes to its public position without changing its basic attitudes (Low et al. 2003; Vigar 2002).

Bratzel (1999; 2000) has investigated the political processes behind the achievements of six European cities that have been relatively successful in limiting the growth in car use and increasing the use of transit. In all six cities, he observed a three-stage pattern in the way that 'windows of opportunity' emerged and were exploited by skilful political entrepreneurs. These stages were:

1. Serious challenge to the government of the city or region due to popular opposition to elements of its transport and environmental policies.

2. Change in political leadership and in important transport policy positions.

3. Long-term institutionalisation of operational and technical changes through the creation of a new policy network. Significant political skill was required to maintain a mandate for new policies among a range of social actors.

Under this model, change in transport policy requires successful interactions between civic action groups that can give legitimacy to new ways of framing policy problems and solutions, and the 'public entrepreneurs' (Schneider and Teske 1995) who can use political and persuasive skills to reframe issues and build a coalition to support change within the institutions of government.

Taking Bratzel's model, the analysis of the case studies of Melbourne and Perth began with a search for 'windows of opportunity' during which existing transport policies were challenged by effective civic action.

In both Melbourne and Perth, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the dominant urban transport policy networks put forward radical plans to cut transit services, but were challenged by strong civic action groups. This political contention over these transport issues contributed to a change of state government (in Victoria in 1982 and

in WA in 1983) and the newly elected reformist ALP governments took up the agendas of the civic action groups.

The research then turned to an investigation of the behaviour of key political and institutional actor groups during this time.

The sources of information included published and archival material, newspaper reports and semi-structured interviews with key figures in each city[2]. There were 18 individual informants in Melbourne: four former Cain government ministers, nine senior public servants and policy advisers, and five members of civic action groups. There was also a group interview with six retired road engineers. In Perth, there were nine informants: one former cabinet minister, five public servants and advisers, and three civic action group leaders. Full details can be found in Stone (2008).

Key actors in 1980s transport reforms in Melbourne and Perth

In Melbourne and Perth, there were striking differences in the behaviour of key actor groups during the political windows of opportunity created by the election of reformist governments in the early 1980s.

Five actor groups shaped transport policy: these groups were road planners and builders; transit operators; urban planners; political entrepreneurs; and civic action groups. The following case studies of Melbourne and Perth describe the significant political events surrounding the windows of opportunity for transport policy change in the 1980s and the behaviour of the key actor groups during this period.

Melbourne

In Melbourne, considerable effort was required in the post-war years to create the institutional capacity to construct new roads for the expanding car fleet (Davison 2004). While not a period of strong contention, this time was significant for later policy conflicts because it led road planners and their supporters to recognise the need to operate effectively in political arena. The rail and tram systems were operated by once-great statutory authorities which had engaged over many decades in a "fever of perverted competition" (Davison, p. 198) with each other. Their history tended to blind them to the emerging threat from the car.

The Melbourne Transportation Plan (MTC 1969) became the means by which road planners sought to gather the organisational and financial resources required to allow

large-scale road construction to commence. The Plan set out a grid of freeways across the metropolitan region. This has set the agenda for road projects right up to the present. The rail operators, by contrast, used the process of the Plan to pursue a city tunnel, something that had been on their planning agenda since 1929 (Winter 1990). This locked transit planning into an outdated city-commuter focus that ignored changing travel patterns in the growing suburbs: a problem that remains today.

From 1969 to 1977, there was strong civic reaction to the freeway proposals in the Transportation Plan. This opposition was strongest in the inner suburbs where gentrification was only just beginning, but it existed right across the city. For some years, the myriad of residents' groups maintained unity through a 'no freeway' platform because bargaining over one freeway would only shift the problem to a suburb where residents were already mobilised. However, in 1973, Liberal Premier Rupert Hamer split the opposition through his decision to cancel some of the inner-city freeways.

From 1973, civic action groups fought vigorous rearguard actions against the remaining inner suburban freeways, but they were isolated by their left-wing rhetoric (National Action for Public Transport 1976) and by their location in the political heartland of the then-weak ALP. Road proponents learned important lessons: subsequent plans for metropolitan freeways have been introduced piecemeal. Each section of new road is justified in terms of its local congestion relief, sidestepping larger questions of overall transport policy and avoiding the mass opposition that had been triggered by the over-arching 1969 Plan.

By the late 1970s, the deficit for public transport services was burgeoning. The rail authority wanted to cut services and sack staff, and invest the savings to keep the rest of the system afloat. Road proponents saw this money as a way to revive their freeway program that was stagnating in the face of global recession and tighter Commonwealth financing arrangements. The mechanism for this raid was the Victorian Transport Study (VTS 1980), called the Lonie report after its industrialist chairman, This report was written mostly by Robin Underwood, a savvy road engineer regarded as a savage critic of public spending on public transport, and it was actively supported by the Transport Minister, Rob Maclellan.

The Lonie report proposed to close eight urban rail lines, seven tram routes and several rural passenger services. Measured by press coverage, this was the biggest state political issue for most of 1980 and 1981. Civic opposition was built around the public transport unions and newly formed user groups. The unions adopted new tactics to strengthen public support. These included 'no fares' days on the suburban system and targeted bans on large container-freight trains (Alford 1982). The campaign damaged the Liberal government's credibility on transport issues and forced it to delay implementation of any of the cuts as the 1982 election approached. For this election, the ALP wrote into its platform much of the union reform agenda, which emphasised the need for new trains and trams, and extensions to existing suburban lines. Also on the party's election manifesto were policies of opposition to further freeway construction that had been adopted during the early 1970s.

Under the leadership of John Cain, the ALP's 1982 election victory was a watershed in Victorian politics. Coming after 27 years of conservative rule, the new government and its supporters were eager to implement a broad and well-articulated reform program. The principal administrative tool employed by the ALP was to reduce the power of the statutory authorities and bring control back to Cabinet (Considine 1992; Mant 1982)

In some portfolios, a handpicked team of senior officials and advisers who had been part of the pre-election policy development ran formal processes to implement new programs (Considine 1992; O'Grady 1985), but this was not the case in transport. Steve Crabb, an individualist, set out to establish a huge new Transport Ministry without any formal framework for negotiating policy detail.

Crabb had some understanding of the changes required to build a modern transit system: multimodal ticketing, regular timetabling and simplified bus routes. But, these priorities were not shared by the union officials who Crabb brought into management positions, nor were they important to others in influential positions inside the new agencies: mostly resistant operators from the old transit authorities and road engineers who had little knowledge or interest in public transport operations.

After only 18 months, Crabb also took on the challenging industrial relations portfolio, and was shifted from transport after the 1985 election. His successors

became mired in managing the union and community backlash against measures designed to cut costs of public transport operations such as the move from trains to trams on the St Kilda and Port Melbourne lines. The escalating conflict with transport unions culminated in 1990 in a dramatic strike by tram drivers and conductors. Cain still argues that this conflict was rooted in the ideological and factional rifts that eventually crippled his government (Cain 1995; Considine and Costar 1992). However, from a transport-planning perspective, operational changes like the plan to close the Upfield line and the introduction of a new ticketing system were fundamentally flawed (Stone 2008, pp.197-198; Wilson 1999), and so the government could not maintain public confidence in their management of the transit system.

In the other main issue in the transport portfolio, Crabb, like most of the people from whom he took advice, supported the continuation of the freeway-building program (*research interview*), and so was at odds with the policy platform his party had taken to the 1982 election. John Cain, a freeway critic during his time as Shadow Planning Minister (1978), said in the research interview that: "we were tempered by pragmatism – a bit like Lady Macbeth – [sometimes you are] so far up the track that you can't turn back". Crabb was less restrained: only a few weeks after the election, he told an amazed group of road engineers to ignore the ALP policy and continue work on their current freeway project (*research interview with group of retired road engineers*).

Crabb was not the planning minister, but he was a powerful figure in Cabinet and he was able to block any proposals for formal urban planning process that might have put a spotlight on the differences between the clear statements of party policy and his own views on freeway construction. This is probably sufficient reason for the absence of any large-scale review of planning policies, but there was another factor at work. The ALP's administrative reforms weakened the institutional base of a group of planners in the MMBW who had, over the course of the 1970s, developed an analysis of the failings of existing urban plans. In the *Metropolitan Strategy Implementation* report (MMBW 1981), they had opposed the Lonie cuts and questioned the priority given to freeways. But, following the moves against the MMBW, few of these voices of doubt found a place in the new ministries. Road building was the centrepiece of the planning strategy that finally emerged five

years into the ALP's time in office (Victorian Government 1987), and it was David White, another party heavyweight, who laid the groundwork for the massive inner-city City Link tollway project built by the Liberals in the 1990s.

Apart from the unions, three main civic action groupings supported improvements to public transport during the contention over transport policy in Melbourne in this period. For different reasons, none was able to make an impact on the ALP reform process.

One group comprised transit users who had been part of the Lonie protests. They formed the Public Transport Users Association in 1984, and were primarily motivated by their frustration with the many immediate problems facing commuters. Some members of this group were brought onto the board of Crabb's new public transport agency. Faced with the apparent "defeatism" of rail managers, they saw few opportunities for progress on big issues like the coordination of intermodal services. For his part, Crabb was disappointed with what he saw as their inability to rise above tactical point scoring.

The second civic action grouping was based around opposition to the freeway program. They did not share the view held by some in the PTUA that the international ramifications of the recent oil crisis and the local political defensiveness created by the freeway conflicts of the early 1970s would combine to push future large-scale freeway construction off the agenda. Leftist residents groups and others continued to organise against the emerging ALP road agenda. But, with few influential allies, they were further weakened by internal dissension typical of groups on the margins.

The third civic grouping was based around the activists who had influenced the shift in the MMBW approach to urban planning during the 1970s. Their seminal publication, Seeds for Change (White et al. 1978), included, under the slogan 'cluster and connect', a local articulation of linear city planning theory that was a forerunner to today's policies of 'activity centres' linked by transit. After the 1982 election, this group continued to lobby for reforms to planning policy: an ultimately fruitless endeavour given the weakness of the planning portfolio, both in government and the bureaucracy.

The window of opportunity for policy change effectively closed after 1985 when the ALP transit reforms began to falter. The various civic action groups could not mount a new challenge to either the established transit managers, who offered little leadership on alternative visions for the city, or to the roads policy network that enjoyed clear, if covert, political support and had established direct influence over transport and planning policy. Over time, political leaders and the public lost confidence in the ability of managers to rebuild the transit system, leaving roads proponents to dominate policy debates.

Through the 1990s, under the Kennett Liberal government, there was a strong move to re-organise transit services according to the dictates of neo-liberal ideology. However, this revolution disguises the fact that there has been little change in transit services. Privatisation, on the Melbourne model, has largely entrenched the existing fragmented approach to transit planning and operational practice (Mees 2005). Privatisation has consumed the attention of many of the key actors since it was first proposed in the 1990s and has made sensible reform of the system more difficult. However, this article is not the place for a full analysis of the problems of privatisation. Rather, the intention is to show that the crumbling credibility of the system during the 1980s helped to create the conditions under which the supporters of the privatised model were able to implement an extreme agenda.

The return of the ALP to government in 1999 did not mark a shift in transport and other urban policies. The *Melbourne 2030* strategic plan used the rhetoric of urban consolidation and transit-oriented development but expansion of the freeway network was the primary infrastructure focus of the plan; and there has been little change in the approach to management of the public transport system apart from a weakening of the obligations placed on the franchisees (Mees 2005). New proposals for expansion of the public transport system are very poorly developed. There is no process for the assumptions behind these proposals to be contested publicly.

So, Melbourne is in a weak position to respond to growing demands for improved public transport. It remains to be seen whether civic action groups will be able to use the growing urgency of the global and local impacts of climate change or other public policy imperatives to create a new window of opportunity for reform of transport policy and practice in Melbourne.

Perth

Unlike Melbourne, transport policy in Perth was the subject of only minimal political contention until the late 1970s. Although the early metropolitan plan (Stephenson and Hepburn 1955) was well regarded by the profession (Stokes and Hill 1992), its advocacy of a relatively compact urban form and a strong role for rail and bus fell on largely deaf ears in government and the policy community. By the time the Perth Corridor Plan emerged as a statutory planning scheme (MRPA 1970), proposals for rail lines in the northern suburbs were lost and plans for new arterial roads were set out as a network of urban freeways. Construction of the first of these freeways during the 1960s was done without the need to bulldoze inner-city communities: losses were chiefly in open space and walking links and at the time were not considered a big price. All this was achieved not as the result of victories achieved by a politically active road lobby, but through an almost unanimous consensus that the car was the future.

As a corollary to this 'roads consensus', "it seemed almost automatic that the railways would die" as the small diesel railcars aged (*Hicks, research interview*). But, even in this heyday of the car, transit operators established Australia's first multimodal fare system in 1974 (Manning 1991) and bus operators kept operating costs low. Such measures helped to slow the decline in transit patronage.

The loss of support for the rail system can be traced through a series of government studies after 1970. The first concrete move would be to close the line with the least patronage. In January 1979, the government announced that a 'trial' closure of the 15 km Fremantle line would commence eight months later. This announcement, coming as the first oil shocks were being felt internationally, triggered extensive civic protests that were seen by some at the time as a 'lightening rod' for dissatisfaction with the incumbent Court Liberal Government.

Within four months, the Friends of the Railway (FOTR) had collected over 99,000 signatures on a petition – Perth's population at the time was only 900,000. Although the rail unions played an active part in this campaign, they did not dominate, as was the case in Melbourne. The leaders of FOTR were business people and academics, including a young Peter Newman, who had recently been elected as a Fremantle councillor and who later became an internationally known transport researcher. They had strong links to rail management through the participation of retired engineers.

They recruited a full-time campaigner from the environment movement and had a strong cadre of 'grassroots' organisers, mostly women. From this base, they built up support among parent groups in local schools, in the football league and in other Perth institutions.[3]

FOTR built their campaign around a positive plan to electrify the entire suburban rail system. They gained valuable momentum from political intrigue around leaks from the rail operator that supported FOTR's costings for electrification, but, even with opinion polls running at 82% in favour of retaining the train, the Liberals closed the line as planned in September 1979.

Although the Liberals won an election in early 1980, there were some signs of hope for FOTR. Activist Rick Grounds stood in a safe Liberal seat on the Fremantle line and took the ALP vote from 35% to 44%. The lesson was not lost on ALP power brokers: transit could be a vote winner, especially when compared with the much smaller protest vote achieved by ALP candidates who were identified with concurrent campaigns to save native forests (*West Australian* 25 Feb 1980).

The 1983 election took Brian Burke and the ALP to power, but the Fremantle line was not a prominent issue. Even so, the new Premier visited Fremantle on the day after the election and assured campaigners that public transport reform was on the agenda. In these early days, he also told his ministers privately that he expected significant changes. Salvaged rolling stock was found to cobble together a service on the Fremantle line, but among transport managers there was a view that it would have been better if the line had been torn up (Stevenson 1987, p. 108).

The new transport minister, Julian Grill, was an ambitious Kalgoorlie lawyer well connected in the mining industry. Despite his later notoriety (O'Brien 2007), Grill is still seen positively in transport circles:

> He is a dealmaker … a person who can accumulate the forces needed to make things happen, and a very good listener to his backbench and his bureaucrats. (*Fred Affleck, Curtin University, research interview*)

His main interest in his new portfolio was to find cost-savings for mining and agriculture: that meant job cuts in rail freight. The rail unions resisted and there was a period of tense negotiations, but eventually Grill found some union leaders who could see that the writing was on the wall. The final deal involved an inventive

translocation and redundancy package for workers, and, an agreement from the minister to support transit improvements in Perth:

> The formal driving forces for … electrification came from [the bureaucracy] but without that trade-off with the unions, I don't think it would have happened. (*Grill, research interview*)

Inside the bureaucracy, changes were being made in senior positions, although these did not entail wholesale sackings. The head of transport policy, a hardheaded road advocate, retired and was replaced by the more open-minded John Taplin. FOTR was allowed a place in policy making through Peter Newman, who sat on the committee that managed a study into electrification. In 1985, this study concluded that electrification was a cheaper option than continued operation of the old diesel system. On the strength of this finding, FOTR mounted an intense lobbying effort to ensure the ALP took expansion of the rail system seriously.

When the ALP went to the 1986 election promising to implement the electrification plan, media reports mentioned only the ALP's commitment to further suburban freeways (*West Australian*, 7 Feb 1986, p. 46). There was a long fight to get the electrification promise translated into a firm Cabinet commitment. Burke's views and Grill's deal with the unions were important in overriding those who thought the election promise had no firm intention behind it, and the FOTR lobbying was a crucial counter to some sections of the bureaucracy who favoured a 'busway' option (*Newman & Grill, research interviews*).

The next stage of the FOTR agenda, namely extension of the rail system into the northern suburbs, also required long and consistent political effort. While public opinion and the politicians favoured rail (Hannaby 1987), in the bureaucracy the issue was fought through the claims of competing consultants about the comparative costs and benefits of rail versus busways (Newman et al. 1988; Travers Morgan Pty Ltd 1988). In the end, the rail advocates prevailed and support for this decision from the media and voters in the northern suburbs 'mortgage belt' helped the ALP to scramble over the line in early 1989 in the first election after Burke's resignation in the wake of the WA Inc scandals.

Peter Newman is rightly given much of the public credit for this series of political successes, but the decisions to fund new rail projects would not have been made

without an increased acceptance among senior transport policy professionals of the importance of transit to the future of the city. The key figure in this move was Stuart Hicks.

As a senior transport planner during the 1970s, Hicks had been an active member of the 'roads consensus'. But, in what he calls the "heady atmosphere" of the early years of Burke's reform government, his intellectual sparring with both Newman and his sceptical but argumentative Minister led Hicks to re-assess his position on the place of transit in the future of the city. In late 1984, Grill offered Hicks the job of running the transit operations in Perth. From this point, Hicks saw that his main task was to get "enough people to suspend disbelief and back you to make something happen".

Without altering statutory arrangements, Hicks established Transperth as the marketing name for unified management of buses and trains. The public face was a common livery for all buses and trains and one set of timetables for all services. Even before rail electrification in 1991, these new services slowed the decline in per capita transit use.

By 1988, he had assembled a board that could "help run the strategic discussions" so that the transit agency could "stand up and be counted in the community debate" over the future of the city if it continued to rely on the car. Hicks argues that if Transperth had not become:

> A policy influencer … a marketer, a [successful] manager of big infrastructure ventures … there would have been no driver to bring the desired system to reality and make it operate. (*Research interview*)

Hicks was given the task of managing construction of the northern suburbs railway. Not the least of his achievements in this role was to bring high-profile critics into the planning process, deal with their objections constructively and so build a stronger consensus for the project. Completed on time and on budget, and with rapid success in meeting patronage targets after its opening in 1993, the new rail project helped create a climate of support for transit among the Liberals who came to power in the same year.

The Liberals were keen to pursue their neo-liberal economic agenda, but Hicks was able to offer a model of privatisation that, unlike that pursued in Melbourne, he felt "did not sacrifice the single, seamless system for public transport". Planning

continued for the southern rail line to Mandurah. In 2001, with the ALP again in government, Hicks and the new Planning Minister, Alannah McTiernan were central to resolving conflict over the route by which the new line would enter central Perth. The final decision to take the most direct route is a symbolic and practical indication of the change that has been achieved in transport policy in Perth in less than 25 years.

Despite these significant changes in Perth's transit system, the city is still very car dependent. Freeway construction continued throughout the period in which the new directions in transit planning were established. The staged roll-out of the freeway network continued with few constraints after 1983. Today, only a second crossing of the Swan River near Fremantle remains as a major gap in the plans drawn up in the years of the roads consensus. The simplicity of construction on Perth's flat sand plain helped to put successive transport ministers in the fortunate position of having sufficient money from Canberra and from local revenues to back both modes. However, growing popular and professional recognition of the need to limit growth in car-use has seen a gradual slowing of the roads program. The reservation for the Eastern Bypass of Fremantle was removed from the planning scheme in 2003 (WAPC) and construction of the Swan River crossing looks increasingly unlikely.

So, road-planning decisions are not shaping Perth as they did in the past. There is anecdotal evidence that residents of Perth have some pride and confidence in their transit system. Further extensions to transit are being seriously discussed for parts of the city not served by the rail network. Until the ALP's 2008 election defeat, McTiernan and planning professionals were taking advantage of the political capital built up over the previous 20 years to establish limits to urban expansion and create new patterns for the location of commercial and industrial activity. Their planning process, called *Network City*, was intended to produce a new statutory planning framework and it employed a greater level of community consultation and debate than in the past, although there is some debate about the extent and validity of this consultation (Albrechts 2006; Curtis 2006). It is not yet clear how the change of government will affect the continuation of this process.

Conclusions

Skilled political action over a long period was the key to rebuilding public confidence in Perth's transit system. This action was initiated by a deal-making political entrepreneur, an effective reform bureaucrat, and by a civic group whose leaders

mobilised extensive community support in the early years and then re-focussed their efforts on tenacious lobbying inside the political parties and through a range of government processes. As in Bratzel's European case studies, a new policy network emerged to institutionalise new operational practices in transit management, and the city is now taking some steps towards the creation of an environmentally oriented policy network in urban planning.

Perth's transit reform task may have been easier than Melbourne's. The policy prescriptions of electrification and suburban rail construction were easy to grasp; the existing culture of transit operations was less fragmented and more easily aligned to modern thinking; and road proponents were less threatened and less politicised. Even so, there is an obvious contrast between the catalogue of missed opportunities in Melbourne and the actions taken in Perth by Grill, Hicks and Newman to take advantage of the 'window of opportunity' forced open by the skilful civic action of Friends of the Railways.

In Melbourne, external advocates for policy change failed to establish a presence in the right circles when new directions for transport policy were set in 1982. This would have been a difficult task, given Minister Crabb's idiosyncratic style and brief period in the job, but there is little evidence of organised attempts that failed; rather it seems that the need was simply not met. More broadly, the Perth experience suggests that direct challenges against freeway construction in Melbourne in the 1980s represented a quixotic strategy that was unlikely to succeed without first giving serious attention to reform of transit management and the creation of a credible institutional voice to publicly argue the case for a shift away from car-dependence.

Crabb's attention to reform of transit management fell far short of the careful long-term leadership that would have been required to re-focus the design and delivery of transit operations to reflect the needs of users in a modern dispersed city, and so patronage did not grow. Because there was no political settlement with the unions on the need to reduce the transit workforce, this issue consumed and defeated successive ALP transport ministers and ultimately the government itself.

The way that Crabb handled the contradiction between the ALP's public policy and his own personal position on freeway construction may have set a precedent for behaviour that has unfortunately become widespread in subsequent transport and planning policy processes in Melbourne. Since the 1980s, a highly politicised

bureaucracy dominated by road proponents has produced public statements of government policy that include general expressions of intent to reduce the impacts of car-dependence while taking actions that produce quite the opposite results. The manipulation of policy rhetoric to disguise the continuation of control by an existing policy network is consistent with the Vigar's observations (2002) of the conduct of transport policy debates in the UK

In contrast to Melbourne's intellectually bereft culture of transport policy-making, transport policy officials in Perth have worked in an environment in which rigour and independent thought are expected. In the research interviews, both Hicks and Fred Affleck, from Curtin University, remarked on these expectations. Hicks says that Perth transport managers "built up a tradition of thinking outside the box"; and Affleck noted that:

> Thorough analyses of policy options and the adoption of [their] outcomes … [are] an important part of government … Government has been prepared to employ the people to do this work and to pay for it. They are still doing it.

For analysts of transport policy, this research points strongly to the need to take more notice of the political dimension in policy formulation. The research has shown the importance of strong civic action groups in creating the opportunities for change and of effective political entrepreneurs and public servants in taking advantage of these opportunities. So, rather than continuing to enunciate the detail of 'good' policy practice from 'outside', public policy researchers must engage in the political process.

Endnotes

[1] Transit use data for Melbourne and Perth obtained from operators' Annual Reports.

[2] Interviews in Perth were conducted between August 2005 and October 2006, and in Melbourne between July 2005 and September 2007.

[3] Apart from the research interviews, valuable information on Friends of the Railways is contained in scrapbooks kept by Jan Newman.

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