



**Delivering Sustainable Central Activities Districts
Implementation Priorities – A Policy Paper**

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Context

The Government has recently released the Victorian Transport Plan, Melbourne@5Million and Freight Futures. These plans reinforce the government's commitment to continue the integration of transport and land use so that the quality of life and economic vibrancy of Melbourne is enhanced.

One of the key planks of this integration is the focus on six new Central Activities Districts (CADs) with CBD-like functions. Previous attempts to develop activity centres have met with varying levels of success. It has been argued that some of the key barriers to successful implementation are a lack of integrated planning and delivery of land use and transport services, and the spreading of financial and organisational resources too thinly.

Now that the policy frameworks have been updated the challenge for state government, councils, the private sector and the community is to ensure that the new CADs are implemented in ways that ensure they meet their potential while enhancing the liveability and economic vibrancy of Melbourne.

The Victorian Transport Branch of Engineers Australia has prepared this paper on its views on implementation priorities as a contribution to the successful delivery of CADs. We see real integrated transport/land use as central to successful implementation and the comments reflect this commitment.

The Paper has been prepared by the Branch following a seminar held in March 2009. While contributions have been sought from a number of transport and planning professionals, the views in the Paper are those of the Branch.

Challenges and Opportunities

CADs provide focal points for community and employment activities, and should be vibrant and sustainable places that will attract diverse activities and people 24 hours a day. The Victorian Transport Branch has undertaken consultation to identify a number of factors that will be important to help CADs achieve their full potential and be embraced by Melbournians. These are discussed below.

Design Leadership

CADs provide an opportunity to demonstrate sustainable and innovative design in land development and transport services. With their density of development and level of transport demand they offer the best potential outside the Melbourne CBD for significant investments in new ideas. These innovations then have the potential to flow through to other areas of the city.

However, innovation is less likely to flourish without ongoing government financial support, particularly in uncertain economic periods.

Planning for Integrated Networks

The planning and delivery of CAD-focussed transport services will occur within a wider regional context. Linkages to surrounding areas and other activity centres should promote access by more sustainable modes eg. walking, cycling and public transport.

CADs provide a location where transport services will be concentrated and the quality of these services will determine the role more sustainable travel modes play in providing access. Priority should be given to high amenity modes that have minimal impact on urban spaces, such as walking, cycling and public transport.

At the other end of the scale, efficient access for service vehicles will be necessary for the centres to fulfil their commercial roles. Building design and access routes should be designed so that they can accommodate freight and service vehicles without compromising the life and vitality of the centre.

From an urban development perspective the relationship between CADs and other activity centres should be recognised and articulated. These other sub-regional and local centres should not be neglected as a consequence of financial and technical resources being focussed on the CADs.

Governance

CADs require the involvement and action by many different government and private sector groups and so effective governance is essential to ensure the vision for each CAD is delivered. Clarity in roles and for decision-making and co-ordinated actions across state and local government and the private sector are essential.

Land purchase and consolidation power is one example of the need for co-ordinated action. Consolidation is necessary to overcome fragmented land ownership and match land parcels to strategic objectives.

VicUrban plays a central role in the delivery of the CADs and so it is critical that its actions are supportive of the vision for each CAD. In particular, it is essential for government to ensure that VicUrban's role as a commercial land developer does not compromise its other role as a contributor to the achievement of the government's integrated objectives for CADs.

If VicUrban's charter becomes increasingly focussed on obtaining a commercial return on sites it may be appropriate for government or other organisations to contribute to the cost of key developments so that they meet outcomes that may be 'non commercial'. In addition, the adoption of triple bottom line evaluation methods that include social and environmental factors will help to maintain a balance between objectives.

If innovative design is to be encouraged, models of government/private sector risk sharing will be required to overcome private sector reticence at innovative or market-leading investments.

Recognising CAD Differences

Each CAD has its own character. A single model and feel for all centres is not appropriate and development plans should build on the distinctive characteristics and

strengths of each centre. There is a strong role for community consultation to establish the unique strengths and character of each area.

This need to recognise the different characteristics of centres extends to the interface with surrounding areas. Transitional areas between CADs and surrounding areas should reflect the character of these areas and respect the expectations of existing communities, but not to the extent that this compromises potential outcomes in the CADs.

Deliver a Mix of Activities

A primary objective of a Central Activities District is to provide a hub for employment. While provision of employment opportunities is essential, particularly in a time of economic downturn, it is also important to simultaneously develop those aspects of CADs that promote community development and recreation. By giving housing, cultural and recreational activities equal attention to the commercial and retail elements, the risk of creating a centre that is lifeless outside of nine to five working hours is minimised.

Co-ordinated Budgeting

In the past, attempts to deliver co-ordinated programs across government where complementary elements are delivered at appropriate times have been frustrated by differences in funding streams and timing. For CADs there should be either a single budget stream or mechanism to ensure that budget timing across agencies and local government is co-ordinated.

Skills

Victoria has high skill levels in the design and delivery of integrated land use and transport systems but the size of the skill base is limited. For local government the attraction and retention of skills relevant to the development of these complex areas can be a particular challenge.

The complementary skills of the different professions and organisations should be recognised and integrated. One area identified by several contributors was the need to build up project management and project delivery skills within DPCD.

CADs are being developed at different speeds and there is potential to share and build on the knowledge gained in one centre in subsequent projects. This requires an overall project management model or process where experiences from one CAD are shared between government agencies and local government across all CADs. The views of non government groups such as the development industry and not-for-profit sector should also be shared with implementation teams.

Achieving Consistency between the Vision and Delivery

The effort put into developing a vision for each CAD can be compromised if implementation actions are not consistent with that vision.

Because many of the planning and implementation processes for CADs differ from typical development approaches, some agencies and groups may need to challenge some of their traditional practices. There is a risk that if organisations are inflexible, preferring to maintain their organisation's 'policy stance', then the final outcomes of

the CAD may be compromised. It is important that all the participants commit to the vision and design principles for each CAD and adapt their practices where needed to support these principles.

Adaptation of procedures, however, should not be at the expense of good design and engineering practice. Concept designs should be carefully assessed by engineers and planners to ensure that infrastructure can be delivered practically and safely.

Communication

CADs are a new form of urban development for Melbourne and their function is not likely to be fully understood by many in the community. This uncertainty may lead to concerns, misunderstandings and opposition to implementation.

Government and key stakeholders should build support for CADs across local government, the development industry and the wider community. A strong communication process will help the CAD delivery process and encourage support of the policy over the coming decades. This was done over many years with cross-party support for Melbourne's Green Wedges.

Some of the ways in which this understanding and support can be generated include:

- supporting advocates of the centres with high-quality analysis;
- communicating why CADs in their proposed form are so important to Melbourne;
- keeping communities involved in the process and informed;
- articulating a clear and distinctive vision for each CAD and showing that each will reflect local conditions and issues;
- developing high-quality demonstration projects to show how centres can develop successfully;
- celebrating successes;
- establishing targets for each CAD to demonstrate the significance and role of each centre; and
- providing an annual Ministerial report on implementation over the year and plans for the coming year, covering both land use and transport outcomes.

Future Developments

Melbourne @ 5million and the government's recent announcement on *Delivering Melbourne's Newest Sustainable Communities* have reinforced the dynamic nature of Melbourne's development. Consideration should be given to long term needs and, if necessary, steps taken to protect potential future CADs in metropolitan and regional areas.

Recommendations

Three recommendations are set out below that are viewed as the most important in implementing CADs. However, the discussion in this Paper, and the recommendations themselves, can be viewed and applied in the broader context of activity centre planning and transit-oriented development principles.

Recommendation 1: Implement a government-led community education program to explain why CADs are important to Melbourne's future liveability and prosperity.

CADs represent a significant change in the form of the city and the scale of development outside the City Centre. Government should work with key advocates to explain the consequences for the city of not developing CADs and the contribution they will make to the achievement of a more sustainable and liveable city.

Recommendation 2: Develop an ongoing and significant whole-of-government funding stream for implementing the CADs, reflecting their importance, the scale of land use and infrastructure change required and the need to demonstrate leadership in design and delivery.

Timely implementation of CADs will require co-ordinated funding from the public sector and associated inputs from the private sector. Government funding should be adequate and co-ordinated across agencies so that meaningful action can be taken in a timely fashion and the objectives for CADs achieved. Government commitment will also give the private sector confidence to invest. This funding stream would extend to a review of government organisational roles, project management arrangements and the government skills and resources available to ensure that the objectives for the CADs are translated into action.

Recommendation 3: Adopt a single government group to coordinate and maintain a record of CAD planning progress and associated issues and their resolution to assist in clearing roadblocks.

The planning and design of CADs is a complex process typically involving many different government bodies. Each has a range of expectations and priorities, some of which overlap and conflict. It is important that planning elements that affect more than one organisation are not compromised through lack of agreement or difficult decision-making processes. Good communication and record-keeping will also allow new CADs to benefit from the learnings of other CADs.

Where to from Here?

The Victorian Transport Branch of Engineers Australia provides this Paper as a contribution to assist government in the delivery of sustainable and liveable CADs. The Paper will be circulated to all levels of government and the wider industry as part of our advocacy program.

About the Engineers Australia Victorian Transport Branch

The Transport Branch acts for professionals engaged in activities promoting the integration of transport and land use planning. Our members are typically employed in the consulting, government, industry, academic and research sectors.

We exist to help transport engineers contribute to our community and other professions through:

- *Providing networking and career development opportunities*
- *Advocating on transport issues*
- *Encouraging entry of new transport engineers into the profession*
- *Developing connections with transport-related organisations and professions*

The Transport Branch will continue to advocate on issues affecting the community, and maintain an active role in contributing to the debate on our transport future.

For further information, contact us by email at chair@transportbranch.org or visit our web site at <http://www.transportbranch.org>.