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WHO CARES WHAT THE PLANNERS SAY? ITS POLITICS THAT COUNTS

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ABSTRACT

Transport and urban policy is shaped by powerful influences outside the immediate control of the planner. Ultimately, it is the politician as an elected member of government and directly accountable to the public who must make the final decision. It is the responsibility of the planner to provide the best possible advice to clarify the efficiency, distributional, social and environmental implications of policy options. Rather than slighting political implications, planners must also be capable of analysing political feasibility. However, the politician must determine the trade-offs and be held accountable for his decision. Until the planner is capable of providing this breadth and depth of advice, the planner's effectiveness in bridging the gap between the desirable and the possible will be limited.

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INTRODUCTION

Government ownership and responsibility for a significant proportion of transport infrastructure requires that government is held accountable for the decisions it makes. The decisions taken by the politicians in government are shaped by the resources, attitudes and motivations of actors involved in the decision making process. Traditionally, the planner has been concerned with the early stages of the process in providing information to government. Rarely is the planner involved along the whole continuum of planning and implementation. It is not sufficient to merely address the question of "planning for whom" without at the same time ascertaining whether the decision makers "care what the planners say".

The views expressed in this paper are a product of many years of research, evaluation and planning for government agencies throughout Australia. Specific examples are not detailed since it is felt this could be inflammatory and counterproductive. The paper begins with a brief review of recent shifts in urban and transport policy. It then identifies the broad spectrum of actors who shape these outcomes and considers the constraints under which each operates. The effectiveness of the planner is questioned and suggestions are made for increasing planner participation in the decision making process.

WHAT SHIFTS ARE APPARENT IN TRANSPORT AND URBAN ISSUES ?

The general societal shift expressed in conflict, militancy, pluralism and uncertainty is apparent in transport and urban policy areas. Transport and urban issues are but one small subset of a larger political, social and economic system where it is far more likely that other forces will shape urban and transport policy directions rather than the reverse (E.H.C.D. - Planning Workshop 1975).

From Rationalism to Contradiction

Following the post war boom, advances in computer technology, and what appeared to be rationalism, emerged in the early 1960s. Large scale plans and investment proposals such as the Main Road Development Plan emerged during this period. Local councils and planning agencies had little influence on the recommendations contained in these proposals. Numerous professionals have pronounced the requiem for large scale transport models of the 1960s. Professionals in transport questioned the assumptions, value judgements and political biases upon which these were based, e.g. peak hour journey to work and assumption of continuing trends. This resulted in debate amongst

professional groups advising government on policies in these areas.

From Apathy to Politicisation

Politics during the early 1960s did not appear relevant to transport and urban issues. Both the Liberal and Labor parties endorsed the freeway and post war development initiatives. Growth and development were seen to be motherhood values that no political party would dare dispute. The late sixties and early seventies saw the emergence of a distinct change in public attitudes. Some of the disbenefits of freeways, ports and associated developments and central area concentration, became apparent and the docile consumer public of the early sixties had grown into a diverse and educated public capable of articulating its views. Resident action groups formed and used their local members of government to voice their opinion in parliamentary proceedings. Union groups protested against government freeway programs on environmental grounds as well as becoming involved in employment based public transport issues.

From Large Scale Olympian Plans to Capacity Utilisation and Incrementalism

In 1975 URTAC advised the government on the benefits to be derived from utilising capacity in existing transport infrastructure (and questions were raised concerning the validity and practicability of the SATS recommendation). The Minister of Decentralisation and Development recognised the costs and problems associated with radical redistribution of population policies inherent in a new Bathurst Orange Growth Centre. It would be facile to assume that the change of government in N.S.W. did not hasten many (but not all) of these changes. The Labor party was elected into government on an anti-radical freeway platform and unlike the Liberal Country party coalition, had a power base in cities rather than country party strongholds such as Orange and Bathurst. Suffice to say that the shift in transport and urban policies occurred at a time when it was both economically and politically expedient for a new direction to be taken. It would be foolish to expect government policies not to respond to economic and community pressures. Rather than the olympian plans of the past the demands are for small scale, low cost, short term, flexible solutions. Clearly, given a new set of circumstances, policies could again take a new direction regardless of the party in power.

From Inviolable Bureaucratic Hierarchies to Reorganisation and New Initiatives

In N.S.W. the government is in the process of investigating and implementing structural changes to major transport agencies such as the Department of Main Road and

the Public Transport Commission. Some restructuring has already taken place with the DMR, responsibilities being split between the Minister for Transport (policy), Minister for Roads and Local Government (construction and maintenance). The media have also reported proposals to split the Public Transport Commission in an attempt to maximise efficiency. Furthermore, consideration is being given to change the N.S.W. Planning & Environment Commission to a department. These and other restructuring initiatives have attempted to increase efficiency and to increase the accountability of bureaucracy to elected government ministers. As yet it is difficult to judge whether the restructuring is superficial involving only a change in external appearance or whether it is effective in improving efficiency and accountability.

From Efficiency to Recognition of Welfare
Function of Transport

Mounting transport deficits and at the same time a growing transport task has resulted in government taking a close review of existing operations. However, at a time of relatively high unemployment levels and uncertainty, attempts to rationalise services and achieve greater cost recovery and efficiency meets particularly with union opposition. While certain marginal changes can be made without creating violent union response, the benefits in terms of efficiency and cost savings are also marginal. This gives rise to a stalemate situation where efficiency and employment objectives of government are in direct conflict. In recent years there has been a growing recognition of the welfare function of transport. Services to country towns and regions and outlying metropolitan areas, coupled with the need to maintain a regular and relatively high level of service, result in inefficiencies and gross subsidisation within the industry. Yet without this geographic distribution and level of service, a wide range of communities would be economically and socially disadvantaged. Yet little work has been undertaken to quantify and better understand the magnitude of the problem. At the moment it is only possible to speculate as to which groups would bear the costs or stand to benefit from the rationalisation of existing services.

While some research has been undertaken, answers to questions such as:

- * how can this welfare function be stated explicitly in the accounting framework within government?
- * how much welfare subsidisation can the government afford compared with other forms of government assistance?

require further investigation and support from politicians.

There is No Panacea

If the government is to be in an informed position to negotiate with vested interest groups such as the unions and private transport operators, transport advisors must provide information that will be of relevance and assist in negotiations. There is no panacea for the problems experienced by public and private operators. Whichever policy the government chooses to better manage the urban passenger or freight task there will be both benefits and problems associated with it. However, with the growing politicisation of transport issues and the emergence of forceful actors ready to articulate their case and put pressure on government through formal and informal channels, new directions need to be taken in providing advice to government.

WHO ARE THE ACTORS?

Shifts evident in a number of urban and transport policy areas are a product of the wide spectrum of actors who influence various stages of the decision making process. The resources, attitudes, motivations and opportunities to influence decisions vary considerably amongst these actors.

Politicians

Politicians' influence within their particular parties varies depending upon the personal characteristics, position and connections of the individual. Each party has wide ranging views on urban and transport issues as it does on wider political issues. One can be fairly confident that divergent views on transport will be held within and among political parties. The resources available to politicians vary considerably depending on whether he is in or out of government and whether he is a minister. In government he has access to the extensive manpower resources of bureaucracy and some direct, if competitive, control of public expenditure. Outside government, access and influence are extremely limited.

Within government, the cabinet standing committee organisation is also indicative of the relative influence of members of government. In the N.S.W. Liberal Country party coalition, the planning portfolio was in the Natural Resources sub-committee with the Minister of Local Government and Tourism acting as the chairman; the Industrial Resources sub-committee contained the large capital investment groups such as transport, public works and was chaired by the Minister for Public Works and Ports. Neither transport nor planning were represented in the Policies and Priorities Commission chaired by the Premier.

The present NSW Government standing committee structure has outwardly remained much the same but some significant changes have occurred. The Natural Resources

Committee is now termed the Development Co-ordinating Committee and while the Minister for Planning and Environment is on the sub-committee, it is chaired by the Deputy Premier (Minister for Public Works). The Industrial Resources sub-committee is also chaired by the Deputy Premier and contains the heavy capital investment portfolios including transport and public works. It is interesting to note that the Decentralisation and Development Minister is represented in both the Industrial Resources and Development Co-ordination Standing Committee. However, both the Minister for Transport and the Minister for Planning & Environment are represented on the Policies and Priorities Committee due to their seniority. One could argue that the Transport and Planning portfolios are located in more strategic sub-committees than was the case under the previous Government. However, the Planning Minister does NOT chair the Development Co-ordinating Committee and the Minister for Public Works as Deputy Premier assumes a more significant role than either the Minister for Planning & Environment or the Minister for Transport. Hence, in the political arena "planning" is an area that has been traditionally associated with "environment" and "local government". It has not been perceived by politicians as being central to the functioning of Premier and Treasury Portfolios.

Bureaucracy

The bureaucracy of state government commissions, departments, authorities, boards and other such entities plays a significant role in urban and transport decisions taken by government. The resources available to each agency vary considerably. In N.S.W., groups such as the Public Transport Commission, Department of Main Roads, Department of Public Works, have manpower resources and funds in excess of those available to traditional planning agencies such as the Planning & Environment Commission. In Victoria planning functions are split between the Melbourne Board of Works and the Town & Country Planning Board. However, the servicing role of the Board of Works increases the status and effectiveness of planning within Melbourne. Unfortunately, while researchers and professionals hold the need for landuse/transport interaction, state co-ordinating interdepartmental structures such as URTAC (NSW) do not exist in all other states to cater specifically for landuse transport policy interaction. Unlike instances in countries such as the U.S.A., senior government administrators are not elected but rather appointed by the Government and Public Service Board. These agencies are not directly accountable to the people and unless they are directly accountable to the government, attempts by government to take new policy initiatives or change policy directives can be frustrated. The role of these agencies and their senior administrators must be to act as instruments of government policy on urban, transport and other issues when where personally they are opposed to the new directions taken by Government.

Unions

In Australia, the trade union movement is also characterised by divergent attitudes and politics. While unions are often perceived by the community as being militant, there are numerous highly conservative sections. All in all, however, the union movement is playing an increasingly significant role in shaping government decisions and societal attitudes. Groups such as the Builders Labourers Union have been directly involved in traditionally non-union issues through "green bans" on major inner area and city developments. The associated transport unions exert a strong force in the transport industry both public and private. Governments must move particularly cautiously on issues such as rationalisation of existing public transport services, rail branch line closures and even on matters such as car pooling. Each of these policy initiatives, while being able to be ratified on efficiency criteria, would have a direct impact on employment and potentially could involve job losses either through capital substitution for labour or scaling back operations. Through its control over labour and thereby the provision of essential services the union movement has a powerful resource base and strong motivation to protect its members' interest. However, even within the union movement there are polarised views held by member groups.

Business

Business interest groups with their control over capital, labour inputs and production of goods and services directly and indirectly influence decisions on urban and transport matters. Directly they can place their capital and existence at risk by backing particular decisions. Indirectly they exert pressures on government decisions to protect their vested group or individual interests. This is particularly evident in trough periods in the economic cycle where the "employment" argument can be used by the private sector to counter any longer term "environmental" arguments.

Resident Action Groups

Recent years have seen the emergence of resident action groups. Many of these groups have formed in response to large scale government capital investment programs that are perceived by the community to impair their wellbeing - either causing them to relocate, suffer loss of property values or diminish the environmental quality of their area. In the main, groups have emerged in areas where the individuals are capable of organising themselves and articulating their views through the political process. Freeways, rapid transit routes, ports, airports, heavy traffic routes and high rise developments have in Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and other cities, resulted in the formation of these groups. In general, these groups are

small but because of their tight local area base and focus on particular issues, they can have a substantial lobby impact particularly through their local political representative.

Minority Groups

Minority groups such as migrants, handicapped, women and children, have been given some token recognition in the political arena. It is extremely difficult to gauge the level of influence exerted by these groups. These groups are not characterised by the large capital or labour resources in union and business groups; nor are they concentrated in particular geographic areas where they can form tight locally based action groups. Their resources are small and scattered but their emotional appeal to politicians and the media is high. Attention is now being given to these groups in a number of transport and associated urban policy areas. However, because their voting power is not concentrated their influence can only be seen as marginal.

Media

The influence of the media on decisions taken by government politicians cannot be underestimated. Indeed, the media provide much of the public interface between many of the actors on transport and urban issues. Increased politicisation of these issues creates fertile grounds for media to promote particular views and directly and indirectly place pressures on politicians. However, while the media often purport to reflect popular opinion, reports are motivated by a multiplicity of objectives and it would be shortsighted to exclude financial and political interests of the management. Clearly, many of those groups influencing political decisions on transport and urban development are protecting sectional interests. Media can act to promote conflict situations and as a result it is difficult to see how the politician can weigh the attitudes of a representative cross-section of the community against sectional interests promoted in the media.

Planners

The planner operates both within government as a bureaucrat or in the private sector as a consultant. Traditionally, planners have been drawn from local government, architecture and engineering and only recently have social sciences made any substantive contributions to the planning workforce. Within government, planners have gravitated to traditional landuse planning agencies although, a number of the large transport and servicing agencies have incorporated planning units in their administrations. In N.S.W. and South Australia planners have also been placed in strategic

positions in Premiers Departments. Over time, planners with legal and social science backgrounds are assuming more senior and significant positions. Consultant planners, as with their counterparts in bureaucracy, have primarily served traditional planning agencies and provided advice for planning units in other non landuse agencies. Until recently, the planner in government and consultancy has perceived himself as the protector of the "public interest" and political implications have been slighted. The number of planners are few compared with other professions. They are either located in landuse planning agencies that do not have substantive mechanisms (financial, political, technical) for achieving their objectives or, scattered throughout a number of agencies where they assume backroom research roles or in consultancy offshoots of larger architectural or engineering practices.

The professional planner, whether in the private or public sector, whether in transport or landuse policy areas, is but one of many actors. Amongst such an impressive range of contenders for the attention of our political masters it is little wonder the planner is often relatively ineffectual in the decision making process.

Many of the actors have recognised the political system within which decisions are effected and act accordingly. Planners are only just beginning to wake up.

WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS TO MORE INFORMED AND DESIRABLE POLITICAL DECISIONS?

The politician is the nucleus of the system with direct control over vast public expenditure funds for transport and urban servicing infrastructure and direct responsibility and accountability to his voters. At the same time numerous other groups mould the decision taken by the politician - many of these are vested interest groups supporting particular positions. This creates a highly charged and confusing environment for the politician. On the one hand, it may be smoother and tactically expedient to respond to sectional demands yet, on the other hand, the decision may be technically not feasible and not in the interest of the voters the politician is claiming to support. In these circumstances, it would be reasonable to postulate that the probability of the politician taking the option that is technically feasible would be highly dependent upon whether the backup research and evaluation is available to opposition government and non government factions, and whether the politician can be held accountable for the decision by the public and in the public media.

Political Constraints

Politicians both inside and outside of government are constrained by historical and present day circumstances. Historically, the party line held by long standing members

can mitigate against individual politicians holding and promulgating their own view. The geographic basis on which politicians are elected also poses constraints as well as advantages. The local member for a federal or state electorate is implicitly required to serve the interests of the area. As such, politicians are particularly concerned with the effects of government actions on their electorates, place of residence or marginal seats. The politician seeks information and is concerned with any effects on his electorate or party. However, the politician finds himself on a double edged sword - on the one hand he seeks information, but on the other hand it may not be politic that other vested interests know that the politician has the information.

Bureaucratic Constraints

Bureaucracy, with its hierarchial seniority system, can also impose constraints on government decision making. An adage amongst those involved in transport and urban policy areas is that "while politicians come and go, bureaucracy is here to stay"! There is considerable inertia within large bureaucracies resulting in difficulties in changing policy directions. Territorial boundaries are carefully protected - especially at co-ordinating committees such as the State Co-ordination Council (Victoria) and Urban Transport Advisory Committee (NSW). Access to information in bureaucracy by elected representatives both in government and in opposition can also be difficult. In such instances these agencies form mini-governments in their own right but since they are not headed up by elected officials over time they can become independent of accountable control.

Interest Group Constraints

Unions, business interest groups, resident action groups and others act in an advocate role to protect their interests. Consequently, the information they present to the politicians and their representative agencies is geared to putting forward a particular philosophy rather than presenting information that could in any way threaten their cause. This does not provide the politician with cross sectional opinion nor a thorough basis for policy and political feasibility analysis.

Media Constraints

The media, while being able to thoroughly research issues, often acts as a convenient medium for interest groups voicing their opinion. Conflict situations are newsworthy and as such pervade the media reports. Indeed, the media has a vested interest in highlighting conflicts, keeping them alive and in creating new conflicts. The level of research and investigation of the media of many transport and urban policy reports is questionable and the

motivations of the media management are sometimes obscure to the casual observer. Accountability of the press is low, and legal proceedings are difficult and expensive, yet the effect of conflict reporting on the popular image of a politician and his government is of immense significance.

Planning Constraints

Those involved in research, planning and providing advice to government and private sector decision makers impose constraints on arriving at desirable and politically feasible solutions. Too often reports and documents provided to government by planners either in bureaucracy, private consultancy or research institutes presents information in a way that excludes politicians and other individuals from being able to understand, synthesize and comment on the findings. A cynical interpretation could be that the voluminous and technical nature of reports serves to reduce the potential number of readers and the amount of scrutiny any one reader can devote. Matters that can be stated in simple terms and concepts are augmented in their complexity, obeying the rule "there is nothing so simple that cannot be made difficult" (Martin 1975). This type of exclusionary practice by planners, while having the benefit of limiting the number of challengers, also has the rarely considered disbenefit of excluding the decision makers who can act on the recommendations.

Transport and urban planners have lacked a convenient methodology for addressing the distributional, equity and political feasibility aspects of policies and programmes. On the one hand, the planner provides lengthy analysis and description of particular aspects of a problem but does not attempt to develop a methodology that will identify groups and geographic areas that will bear the burden of costs or stand to benefit. This type of analysis was recently undertaken by Planning Workshop Pty Ltd for the MANS Study Incidence Analysis. Yet this analysis could be taken further by amalgamating geographic areas that bear particular costs to federal and state electoral boundaries and finally ascertaining the relative distribution of costs among Labor, Liberal and marginal seats.

Far more developmental planning work needs to be undertaken in the study of political feasibility to bridge the gap between what is desirable (either on efficiency/equity or environmental criteria) and what is possible (political reality) (Meltsner 1972). Political scientists are recognising the need to develop a procedure which maps policy alternatives in terms of the actors, their resources, beliefs, voting strength, motivations and sites where they interact (committees, lunches, meetings and so on). Yet it is difficult to see where, in a structured manner, planners have evaluated projects in terms of both desirability and political possibility.

One of the dangers in current transport and urban planning research is that assumptions made in the evaluations are highly value laden and related to the current politico-economic philosophy. For example, questions such as value of time and whether each group in the community should be assumed to place the same value on time is directly related to political philosophy. Numerous other examples exist in literature of ways in which the assumptions can have implicit politico-economic biases. Yet how many of the politicians and possibly senior bureaucrats are aware of this influence?

The planner often exists within an ivory tower, isolated from the muddy territory of party politics and unaware of the political implications of his findings and recommendations. Generally he has taken the view that politics would soil or dent the "gallant knight in shining armour". This has created further constraints with a breakdown in communication between the advisor and the politician, lack of accountability of the planner and failure of the planner to become involved in actually implementing policies and programs. This is particularly the case of consultants operating outside bureaucracy where access to the decision maker and ongoing involvement is particularly limited. As such the solutions and policy directives enunciated by planners are often incapable of being realised because they have been formed with little regard for the financial and political constraints within which they operate. The slighting of political implications is one of the most formidable barriers to changing current transport and urban planning methodologies.

HOW HAS THE PLANNER STOOD THE TEST OF TIME?

It is exceptionally difficult to measure how many of the planners' recommendations have been adopted and implemented by the politicians. Since we cannot estimate the number of proposals that never reach the light of day, it is more difficult than attempting to measure hidden unemployment or latent demand. As has been discussed in earlier parts of this paper the planner is but one of many actors involved in the changing stage of urban and transport policy. While planning can have a role in initiating social change, it needs to be responsive to shifts that occur as a result of wider political economic and social pressures. It is the role of the planner to thoroughly research and analyse a problem and identify the implications of alternative courses of action but, it is rightfully the role of the politician to take the final decision and to be held accountable for that decision.

To date, the performance of the planner has had a chequered career. A number of policy initiatives and programs have been:

- * put forward to politicians but rejected due to union or sectional pressure;
- * adopted by politicians and implementation completed;
- * adopted by politicians, implemented, reviewed and circumscribed or abandoned;
- * implemented without political endorsement;
- * continue to be studied to avoid making a politically unpalatable decision.

Nipped in the Bud

A number of internal departmental investigations and consultant reports have been put forward to government yet have not seen the light of day due to pressure exerted on the politician from section interests. Research into car pooling, closure of branch lines and services have each met with opposition from the union movement for fear that it may result in retrenchments or wastage. A number of schemes that could be argued would have increased efficiency were not fully developed and implemented due to pressure group influences.

Effective on Small & Low Cost Options

Other small scale lower capital intensive solutions - transit lanes, bus lanes, by pass routes and upgradings have been successfully implemented without any significant public opposition. These can be budgeted and executed before situations change. However, the large scale investment decision has to ride the bumpy and twisting road of time. Freeways, ports, airports, growth centres, railways fall into this category.

Technical Underpinning Insecure

The technical competence of advice given on a number of these issues must be seriously questioned. The Australian Institute of Urban Studies in its First Report of the Task for a "New Cities for Australia" recommended 15 new cities for Australia. Considerable investment of time, manpower and public funds were involved in attempting to implement this objective in Albury-Wodonga, Bathurst Orange, Geelong and Monato. Attempts to achieve this radical redistribution of population growth has been questioned by professionals and the media. Finally, in an announcement this year the NSW Minister for Decentralisation and Development has made the decision to terminate the program and to consider alternatives for

the land acquired by the government for the new city. Similarly, the rationale for the Eastern Suburbs Railway to Mascot was questioned in the 1978 Public Enquiry with new recommendations that the system terminate at Bondi Junction.

Political Role Strengthens with Time

The DMR major road plan, freeway proposals and the SATS fall into a grey area. Large scale models were used to develop and evaluate these plans yet numerous authors bring into question the technical basis on which the models and recommendations were based. Rattray and Sinclair (1975) suggest that the DMR "has projected the image that it is a body with strong public support, however its policies have catered particularly for car owners and potential users of freeways". Black 1974 and other authors have been critical of many of the underlying assumptions and methodologies. More importantly, however, the Labor Party came into government on an anti radical freeway policy platform. A review of NSW State Parliament Hansard (New Series) Volumes 57 to 116 has highlighted a number of important points related to the Warringah Freeway.

- * During the 1950s and early sixties there was general agreement amongst all state politicians that an extensive freeway system was needed to alleviate serious traffic congestion. An analysis of government debates until 1965 reveals the main issues raised were not whether there should be freeways but when they should be built and why the government was incompetent in not providing them.
- * On 14 August 1968, Mr. Waddy claimed the Warringah Expressway had "virtually eliminated peak hour holdups" Vol. 74 p.220. On 18 March 1969, Mr. Ferguson asked the Premier whether increased Commonwealth grants for NSW roads would enable further work on the expressway, which would benefit the Premiers' electorate. Hence, the expressway was seen to benefit government held electorates.
- * By 1974 several conflicting viewpoints over the freeway had become apparent. Mr. Landa presented petitions from the Castlecrag Progress Association and other residents. Mr. Hallam asked whether the Minister for Highways was trying to influence the Neilson Report and destroy its impartiality. He added that experts were convinced that the expressway would not solve Warringah's transport problem.

- * After the publication of the Neilson Report opinion quickly polarised and there appear to have been many perceptions of what Dr. Neilson recommended. Mr. Bannon, the member for Rockdale suggested on 13 March 1973 that Dr. Neilson was leaning away from the concept of expensive freeways and had reservations about the use of the private car.
- * The most recent debates on freeways have centred around different perceptions of their necessity, changing public and professional opinion, and the need to revise present policies. On 13 November 1974, Mr. Cox asked the government to appoint a select committee of parliament to review all freeway proposals and named five Labor members who would serve on it (Vol 114, p.2719).

A similar series of instances can be recounted for the port and airport proposals. Essentially it would appear that politicians, other than the responsible ministers, are not well informed but are concerned with distributional affects on electorates.

Lack of Communication between Politician & Planner

Planning proposals such as the County of Cumberland Greenbelt were introduced as measure for containing suburban sprawl. Yet the Minister released 50 square miles for subdivision without prior consultation with the County Council. On the other hand plans, such as the Sydney Region Outline Plan, have been implemented by the Planning Environment Commission, the Metropolitan Water Sewerage & Drainage Board and other agencies without having been submitted, debated and adopted by Cabinet.

In other instances, reports upon reports are compiled - at best, to arrive at an informed decision and, at worst, to delay having to make a politically unpalatable "no win" decision.

WHAT DIRECTIONS EMERGE FOR BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN THE DESIRABLE AND THE POSSIBLE?

Powerful actors have shaped current approaches to transport and urban policy. Sectional interests represented by unions, business and resident action groups are characterised increasingly by well argued cases, research and good use is made of access to media and the political system. Politicians, bureaucrats and government and non-government planners are faced with having to analyse and weigh overall costs and benefits and identify the distributional effects on various groups and geographic areas. However, the final responsibility for determining the trade offs between efficiency,

political feasibility and redistributive objectives must lie with the responsible Minister and government. Yet, as has been raised in earlier sections of this paper, the decision eventually made by the politician will be influenced by whether the research and backup information to the decision was made available to members in opposition, other interest groups and individuals.

Reorganisation

Various paradigms have been suggested for improving government organisation at Cabinet levels. In some instances such as the Department of Environment (U.K.), the Planning Minister and his bureaucracy have become "super-powers" with wide ranging roles and responsibilities. However, problems of scale have emerged and areas of responsibility such as transport are being carved off to separate ministries. Other paradigms have avoided the territorial empire problems associated with scale by placing the Minister for Planning in a role to assist the Premier and Treasurer without a large planning department.

The NSW government in its report "Directions for Change" prepared by Prof. P. Wilenski has taken up the challenge to improve existing government organisation. Further investigations are being undertaken and changes are being introduced. As yet it is not possible to conclude how far these changes will extend, nor how effective the final improvement will be in improving the efficiency and accountability of the various agencies.

How can the planner act to free up the system, so that informed exchange and debate can occur? There is no one simple solution that can achieve radical improvements to the existing structure of decision making. Furthermore, there is little that can be done by the planner unless there is a conducive political climate within which to operate.

Research & Evaluation

Further research needs to be undertaken to develop acceptable and tested procedures for evaluating the efficiency and redistributive implications associated with various transport and urban policies. This will assist the politician in weighing the magnitude and distribution of cost and benefits (expressed in economic and non-economic terms) to various groups and areas against cases presented by sectional interests.

To date very little work related to assessing policy analyses and political feasibility has been completed in Australia. The difficulty with this type of research and analysis stems partly from the fact that it requires experienced individuals with access to information to develop serious methodologies for analysing policy and

political feasibility. Historical work in the area could provide a building block for research in the area. The continuing slighting of political implications has mitigated against the successful implementation of policies and programs. If planners are to be effective it is essential that they provide well researched information that will clarify the implications and suggest means of bridging the gap between the desirable and the possible. In this way the politicians can better judge which options meet their objectives and which are counterproductive.

In accordance with basic principles of research assumptions should be stated explicitly and where possible, sensitivity tests run, or other such procedures need to be introduced, to clarify the implications of altering the assumptions. Similar procedures should be introduced when dealing with areas where there is a substantive difference amongst professional opinion, e.g. the valuation of time and other "soft" costs/benefits. Overall, it is essential that research is technically sound and clarifies the efficiency, redistributational and political feasibility implications and trade offs associated with transport and urban policy options.

Practical Action

Direct steps need to be taken by planners to put into practice a basic communication law "there is nothing so difficult that cannot be made simple". Material presented to senior government officials and members is voluminous and incomprehensible and consequently is either misinterpreted, manipulated or discarded. Simple procedures such as executive summaries can be used to condense the material. Indeed one of the great challenges of the future will be to have the time to consume mounting volumes of information.

Integration

Furthermore, professional groups such as Institutes tend to reinforce barriers among various actors. If some of these barriers were to be lifted then the planners within these Institutes could substantially benefit from interface and exchange with various groups. Until there is a greater interface and exchange amongst these groups, only slow and marginal changes are likely to occur. The group that stands to lose most is the planner and very few of the actors in the political arena will care what the planners have to say!

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