

A
50
YEAR PLAN
FOR

METROPOLITAN

ADELAIDE

Professor Norman Etherington AM



NATIONAL TRUST
South Australia

Acknowledgements

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A 50-YEAR PLAN FOR METROPOLITAN ADELAIDE
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PART 1: VISIONS

I

.....

Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men's blood and probably themselves will not be realized. Make big plans; aim high in hope and work, remembering that a noble, logical diagram once recorded will never die, but long after we are gone be a living thing, asserting itself with ever-growing insistency. Remember that our sons and our grandsons are going to do things that would stagger us.

Daniel Burnham (1846-1912) American Architect¹

¹ Though the time and place of Burnham's statement have not been precisely pinned down, there is no doubt of the authenticity of his sentiment. See Patrick T. Reardon, 'Burnham Quote: Well it May Be', Chicago Tribune, 1 Jan 1992.

Introduction

.....

‘Make no little plans’ is probably the most quotable quote in the history of city planning. Adelaide began with a very big plan by William Light, which Ebenezer Howard made famous in his influential book, *Garden Cities of Tomorrow* (1902). The idea of the city in a park still has the power to stir our blood, as witnessed by the inclusion of Light’s plan on Australia’s National Heritage Register. But few in the succeeding centuries has matched his vision. For four brief years from 1916-1920 Charles Reade enthralled South Australians with his bold proposals for a second ring of parklands and a Torrens River linear park until the property industry rose up and gutted the town planning and development bill which would have put his vision into practice.² Reade departed and with him, his big ideas. In 1970 a professor of history, Hugh Stretton, pointed out that fortuitously Adelaide had grown along transport routes in a way that made it suitable for the development of a linear city along the lines developed by Europeans at the end of the 19th century. Since his time, however, plans for metropolitan Adelaide have become steadily smaller. The current *30-Year Plan for Greater Adelaide* (2010 with subsequent updates) is full of little plans, is notably lacking in ‘magic to stir men’s blood’ and appears to have had zero impact outside our state.

The National Trust of South Australia believes it is time once again to lift our eyes and reach for the stars. Five years, ten years, even 30 years is too narrow a horizon. Big plans take time to come to fruition, so we invite you to imagine what could be accomplished in 50 years by an energised citizenry capable of holding its nerve – resistant to the shifting currents of party politics, finance and capricious fashion. A 50-year plan must be above politics, lest a change of government sink it midstream. It will be both conservative and radical. It will not seek to transcend the limitations of earth, air, fire and water. It will aim to preserve the features of our metropolis that have stood the test of time, especially historic townscapes, beaches, parks and gardens. It will attempt no utopian makeover, because experience shows that only small transformations of the built environment are possible in established cities due to the limitation of public and private capital investment.

It will have the capacity to absorb a greatly increased population but will work just as well with low or negative growth. With each passing decade Adelaide will further differentiate itself from other great cities so that by 2070 it will be a place like no other, the pride of its residents, the envy of the nation and a coveted destination for international travellers.

Subsequent sections outline clear, simple steps that will take us there in the next 50 years. Very little if any of what follows is original. Some of the ideas were present at the inception of the South Australian colony. Others sprang from the fertile imaginations and common sense of people who watched the city grow. Many of them were put forward long ago but were never implemented and thus had to be rediscovered by subsequent generations. None are borrowed from other cities in Australia or overseas because imitation has never worked very well for us.

2 John M. Tregenza, ‘Reade, Charles Compton (1880–1933)’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/rea-de-charles-compton-8166/text14275>, published first in hardcopy 1988, accessed online 4 October 2019.

II

Geography is destiny

Earth, air, fire and water constrain our metropolis – limiting and directing what human intellect and resources can do. Textbook diagrams of city development are generally circular. From the city centre transportation networks radiate like the spokes of a wagon wheel delivering people and services to ever more distant suburbs. Our 50-year plan begins by acknowledging that Adelaide is nothing like a wagon wheel. Hemmed in by the Mount Lofty ranges and the sea the city looks much more like a parsnip, with plains steadily expanding outward from a narrow point at Sellicks Beach to the broad acres that lie between St. Kilda and Gawler.

That geography determines where rain falls, where streams run, and where periodic floods cause trouble. For the original inhabitants the land lay as it did because of the Dreamtime creatures who shaped its slopes and rills. Their work created innumerable sites of remembrance, ceremony and celebration. During the last decades of the 20th century we began to recognise these places with signs and markers. That project should continue in cooperation with Aboriginal elders.

Differently understood by European settlers, the natural landscape determined where they put houses, industries, roads, parks and gardens. They sought out the seaside and higher ground for views and clear air. They avoided wetlands and creek beds, fearing flash floods, bad smells and disease. The steep terrain and fire risk inhibited settlement on the nearby hills.



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Further constraining factors identified in the last quarter of the 20th century are the threats of rising seas, extreme weather events and bushfires. While people differ on the reasons, practically everyone accepts the need to prepare for the effects of a warming climate. Hydrological projections indicate quite a lot of the existing city is likely to be under water as former swamps reassert themselves and the sea sends fingers of saltwater inland. Unless its defences are shored up, half the Adelaide Airport runway will be awash. Stormwater drains and outlets will need a general rethink, upgrading and in some places rebuilding.

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*BELOW: In the year 2100
Predicted Shoreline, Port Adelaide to Brighton.
Source: <http://www.ozcoasts.gov.au/climate/Map>*



Especially worrisome is the possibility that rising seas shrink the Lefevre Peninsula to an unsustainable thin finger of land.



.....
*ABOVE: Very similar projection for 2100
Source: <http://www.coastalrisk.com.au>*

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ABOVE: Light's Plan showed the South Australia Company where, and where not to build.
Source: State Library of South Australia BRG-42-120-17.

Modelling of flood risk maps show, just how aware Colonel Light and the first European settlers were of the need to avoid risks posed by geography. On this 1838 map swamps

and watercourses of all kinds are prominently displayed. No town acres are suggested for surveying or sale on the hills face of the Mt. Lofty Ranges.

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LEFT: Maximum flood projections, 1st Creek to 5th Creek.

RIGHT: The same projections apply for the Southern and Southwestern Park Lands.

It has been fancifully suggested that Light drew the irregular jagged form of Adelaide's East Terrace in anticipation of Aboriginal attacks or an insurrection of angry settlers. The true explanation is revealed in the map of peak flooding of eastern creeks which neatly coincides with the line of East Terrace (see above).

The same goes for the Southern and Southwestern Park Lands.

As a result of these early precautions, very little of Adelaide's 19th-century built heritage is threatened by the warming climate. In contrast a succession of catastrophic bushfires illustrated the unwisdom of building on the hills face as historic mansions were destroyed.

For better or worse, the constraints of topography and climate rule out many possible futures. In a warming world, there must be no new development in sites threatened by rising seas, fire or flood. The National Trust's 50-year plan aims to work with rather than against these constraints.

III

Light's Vision of City in a Park



William Light, self-portrait, c 1839.

The park lands that ring the central city are routinely celebrated as a priceless asset, 'the crown jewels' of our city. On the other hand, from the time they were first laid out by Colonel Light, they have been pillaged and despoiled for profit.

The early Adelaide City Council sold the right to cut wood there, as well as to pasture and slaughter animals.

The formal squares of the city centre and North Adelaide, which in their original layout compare favourably with the Georgian squares of London and Dublin, have been carved up with roadways, which have a miniscule beneficial impact on traffic flows. In recent years they have been routinely defaced with temporary fencing to control paid access to events. They deserve better.

Preservation of the Park Lands as a public asset is the first item on this metropolitan plan for the next five decades.

A Landscape Master Plan prepared for the Adelaide City Council in 2011 sets out much of what a 50-year Plan ought to be.³ It sensibly recommends the designation of places important to the original Aboriginal owners, as well as the retention of key natural and cultural heritage elements. It remarks correctly that 'This exemplar of Nineteenth Century town planning may well also satisfy the criteria for World Heritage Listing.' That would do a lot to curb the eternal inclination of city and state governments to subordinate Park Land preservation to short-term political needs.

The state government elected at the dawn of the 21st century introduced legislation with the announced purpose of safeguarding the Park Land forever from development – and then proceeded to transfer large tracts to private and commercial interests on what amounts to permanent tenure. Expressions of outrage from community groups such as the Park Land Preservation Association fall on deaf ears. From time to time the State threatens to seize control from the City Council to serve short-term political objectives. Adelaide aspires to be a world city while abusing its Park Land in ways that would never be allowed in New York's Central Park, London's Hyde Park, Sydney's Domain or Perth's Kings Park.

³ *Adelaide Parklands Landscape Master Plan*, Taylor Cullity Lethlean, 7 November 2011.

The National Trust Park Lands Policy does not descend to the detail of the Landscape Master Plan but goes further in some essential respects.⁴ It asks for unnecessary roadways to be closed and for others to be either sunk or diverted on overpasses so that pedestrians, joggers, cyclists and casual visitors may enjoy

unimpeded thoroughfares right round the parkland ring, as is done in New York's Central Park and other great urban parks. A visionary Master Plan prepared by one of the world's best landscape designers is what Adelaide has never had but desperately needs.

Outside government and commercial circles there is virtual unanimity on the main points of the 50-year Plan's requirements for the future of the Parklands:

- 1. World Heritage listing following National Heritage Listing of the Park Lands.**
The present National listing of Light's diagram needs to be followed by listing of the actual landscape.

- 2. Formal adoption by the state government and adjacent local governments of a visionary Master Plan, with progress to be audited annually in a parliamentary report to the people.**

- 3. Absolute prohibition against permanent alienation of Park Land for commercial purposes, including leases exceeding ten years. Any exemption must require the consent of both houses of parliament.**

- 4. Development of a roadway and public transport layout that minimises impact on the Park Land.**

- 5. Return of all the formal squares of the central city and North Adelaide to their original configuration.**

⁴ National Trust of South Australia, 'Park Lands Policy', June 2016. The policy originated in the last century and is subject to periodic review.

IV

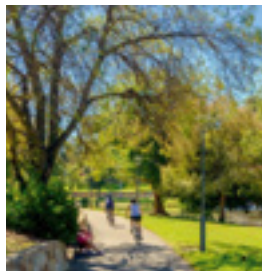
Charles Reade's Vision for Outer Park Lands

Light's plan inspired Ebenezer Howard, British founder of the Garden City movement, who in turn inspired Charles Reade, Adelaide's first professional town planner. During his five years in Adelaide (1915-20) Reade put forward two great ideas. One was a second ring of park land and the other was a linear park running the length of the Torrens River from the sea to the hills.

Reade's proposed outer ring of parkland was a concept, rather than a plan, drawn as circle roughly 12 km. in diameter. Very soon new suburbs grew up which made it impossible, but the idea was too good to die.

In the 1980s the Torrens Linear Park plan was revived and opened to the public in 1997 (at right).

In one big leap of imagination, the Department of Environment and Planning released a Mass Open Space Scheme Study (MOSS, 1987) which resuscitated and expanded Reade's concept of an outer Parkland belt on a grand scale. It proposed a Coast Park stretching from Outer Harbour to Sellicks Beach offering an uninterrupted path for walking and cycling. At various points the path is projected to intersect another park running along the Adelaide Hills face and Mount Lofty Ranges all the way to Gawler. It proposes green fingers of park stretching along waterways that would offer continuous pedestrian and bicycle access to the Adelaide Plains comparable to that afforded by the River Torrens Linear Park. Both Labor and Liberal governments have at various times endorsed the concept under different names. It continues to be mentioned in plans for Metropolitan Adelaide into the 21st century.



Charles Reade's plan for the Adelaide metropolitan area, c 1917.

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ABOVE: The MOSS plan for an outer ring of Park Land (Source: <http://location.sa.gov.au/viewer/?map=hybrid&x=138.7731&y=-35.00912&z=10&uids=119>)

Realisation of the plan has from the beginning relied on the state's Planning and Development Fund, a pot of money raised by allowing developers who cannot achieve the statutory minimum 12.5% of open space in new developments to satisfy the requirement through a proportional cash contribution to the Fund. The original idea was to make grants to local councils who would use it to acquire and propose management plans for sections of the Coast and Hills Parks. Gradually these would fit together like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle aligned with the city's parsnip-shaped perimeter.

It is, in Daniel Burnham's sense, a big plan. Great progress has been made in the Coast track, but the Mt. Lofty Ranges park remains largely conceptual. The aim should be to consolidate the entire area in a single National

Park. Legislation should require an annual report to Parliament outlining what has been done in the previous year to advance the cause. Realisation of the outer belt of park land should always be the number one priority for distributions from the Planning and Development Fund. When accomplished and declared a National Park, it will be one of the urban wonders of the world.

The second priority should be the conversion of all the metropolitan watercourses to linear parks, excepting only those that have been irrevocably transformed into closed underground sewers. Gaps in the existing linear parks at Dry Creek and Salisbury should be brought to completion and the Sturt River restored from its present incarnation as a concrete ditch to a natural creek with associated wetlands at appropriate intervals.

This makes environmental as well as social sense. In times of flood the established watercourses are our best defence against damaging floods. The Adelaide Botanic Gardens show what can be accomplished by working with rather than against them.



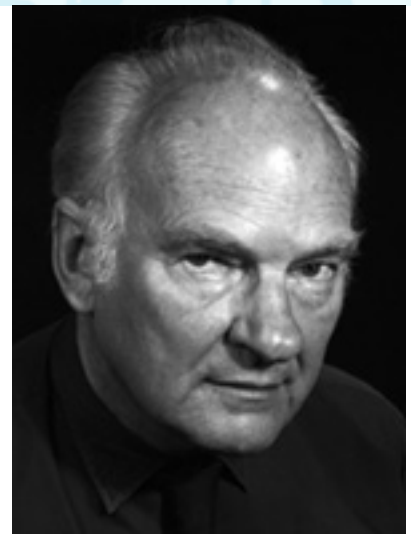
ABOVE: Potential linear parks

V

Coping with Growth: High, Low, and Negative

Hugh Stretton and the Linear City

A professor of history at the University of Adelaide, Hugh Stretton thought planners had gone too far in copying the American radial city model which made practically everyone rely on cars for daily transport. The further out from the centre they lived, the worse people were served by essential services. He watched with rising alarm as the population boom was directed to the outer ring, which was both socially and economically inequitable. He was deeply impressed by the alternative model of the linear city espoused by Europeans at the turn of the 20th century. A city with significant centres dispersed along a high capacity transportation line would allow every citizen to live within easy reach of employment, recreation, community services and open space.



In Ideas for Australian Cities (1970) Stretton set out his vision of Adelaide as a linear city. He pointed out that in pursuit of industrialisation South Australian politicians and public servants had created a railway corridor stretching from Willunga to the Barossa that would deliver workers to their places of employment. The new city of Elizabeth showed how industrial workers could enjoy a quality of housing and access to essential services equal to that enjoyed by wealthier people near the Adelaide central business district. Although the reasons were hard-headed and pragmatic, they could serve a grander purpose.

Viewed from above, the distance from Willunga to the northernmost industrial reservation beyond Elizabeth is forty-six miles [74 kms] as the crow flies, and not much further by rail or road. Most of Adelaide's industrial revolution is strung along that line and around the port triangle which is the only major digression from it – a short, self-reliant digression with its own centre, work and housing.

... the three ports, the industrial zones, the city and several district centres are spaced to allow the expansion of uncongested concentrations of activity around each, but are linked directly to each other by rail, road and services. The jet airport is centrally placed, three miles off the line, the charter and amateur airport, and the defence and experimental airport, are both on the line. On it or near it are most of the metropolis' jobs and most of its good low-cost houses. [pp. 167-8]

Imagine, Stretton asked, what could have been done with these assets.

Suppose the Adelaide planners had somehow brought the rest of the metropolis into close relation with the industrial line, then the city in 1990 might have been forty miles by two or three, with five-mile bulges around its port, its old city, and one or two city centres developing on the southern reaches of the line. All the land along that line is workable and plenty of it is attractive. ... Consider the social and economic gains open to that long city. ... A linear Adelaide

would already be enjoying some of them. It could be building its freeways cheaply, mostly on open land, disturbing nobody. A high proportion of the population could live in walking distance of a single efficient passenger line, which would soon justify [p. 169] reconstructions to allow rapid expresses and central city underground. There would be custom for two or three more Elizabeth-style town centres, each affording some relief to the roads and the city centre... Dense housing could still be in reach of the things which make density tolerable: centres and countryside close by, and quick, open-country routes to the beaches and the hills. [pp. 168-9]

To Stretton's deep disappointment the planning system ignored the possibilities for the linear city, opting instead for radial suburban development of areas lying to the north-east and south that were poorly served by public transport and community services. New housing swallowed up land that ought to have been reserved for recreation. The railway reserve intended for new suburbs to the northeast was sold off for housing, leaving residents with long commutes to work along dismal roadways lined with fast food outlets, used car lots and the other retail detritus characteristic of American exurbia. The Elizabeth-style new town that might have been built on the rail line to Willunga was instead located at Monarto near Murray Bridge before being abandoned altogether when the Commonwealth government pulled the plug on finance.

It may be thought that after fifty years Hugh Stretton's concept would be remembered – if at all – as an intellectual curiosity. So much has changed. Population growth has slowed to a snail's pace. Families are different; so are education, industry and life expectancy. However, an unanticipated turn of events makes the linear city once more an attractive option. A lot of the manufacturing industry formerly served by the rail network has closed down. Vacated factory and warehousing sites have suddenly emerged as prime sites for new residential development.

Adelaide's urban rail network is an extraordinary legacy from a previous era of economic growth. It is also a grossly under-appreciated asset.

An example is the western side of Churchill Road between Torrens and Regency Roads. Apartment building of the 21st century ignores the forbiddingly fenced-off rail line, when it would have been easy to link it to strategically located stations, affording access to central Adelaide in under 5 minutes. In Hugh Stretton's day trains carried passengers from Willunga to Angaston. Short-sighted rail closures now restrict travel to points between Seaford and Gawler. There have been threats to transfer the transport system to private owners, which would foreclose possibilities for the linear city.

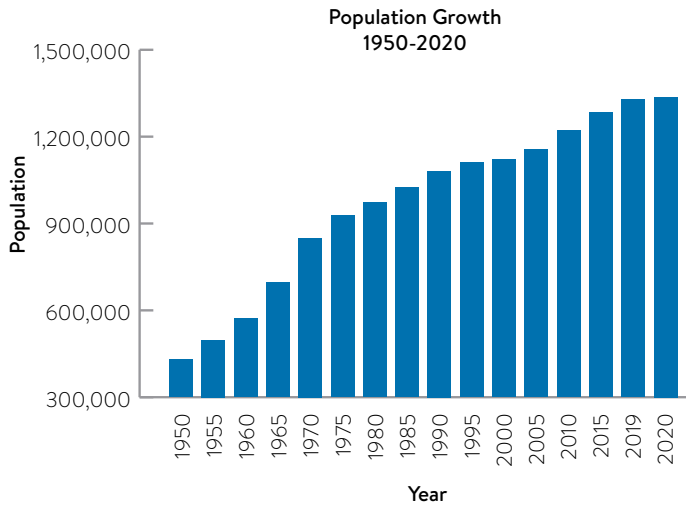
How we make use of that asset depends a lot on the size of the population it serves. That has been a subject of fierce debate.

Population growth scenarios

All government planning for Metropolitan Adelaide has been predicated on substantial increases in population – either by natural growth or design – for which new homes must be found. For the last 40 years planners, lobby groups, architects and developers have argued that urban expansion must stop somewhere and therefore 'infill development' will be the solution to population growth. They unfailingly advocate relaxation of planning regulations over height, density, building occupancy and heritage as the means by which the private sector can be incentivised to do the job.

The 30-year plan of 2011 considered growth to be both a necessity and a good. Even when growth failed to live up to expectations, the 2017 update continued to use a high-growth scenario on the ground that it was desirable. A Deloitte study ('Make it Big, Adelaide', 2016) commissioned by Business SA, the Committee for Adelaide, the Property Council and others displays the same fundamental contradiction: steps must be taken to accommodate the growth that hasn't happened.

The chart below shows how dramatically the rate of growth has slowed since the boom



Year	Population	Growth Rate (%)	Growth
1950	429,277	0.00%	
1955	497,246	2.98%	67,969
1960	571,822	2.83%	74,576
1965	696,809	4.03%	124,987
1970	850,095	4.06%	153,286
1975	928,600	1.78%	78,505
1980	971,834	0.91%	43,234
1985	1,023,736	1.05%	51,902
1990	1,081,585	1.11%	57,849
1995	1,111,665	0.55%	30,080
2000	1,121,573	0.18%	9,908
2005	1,154,863	0.59%	33,290
2010	1,221,639	1.13%	66,776
2015	1,283,805	1.00%	62,166
2019	1,328,119	0.85%	44,314
2020	1,336,403	0.62%	8,284

Source: <http://worldpopulationreview.com/world-cities/adelaide-population/>

What if the growth doesn't happen and the metropolitan population remains static or gradually declines? It is remarkable that no one asks what the implications might be for planning. A 50-year plan needs to be more than wishful thinking. It has to deal with all three possibilities: high growth, no growth, and shrinkage. Each of these scenarios can be effectively dealt with by a modified version of Stretton's concept of Adelaide as a linear city.

The high-growth model poses the biggest challenges to liveability, planning and infrastructure. So let us begin by asking the current question: how can significant population growth be accommodated?

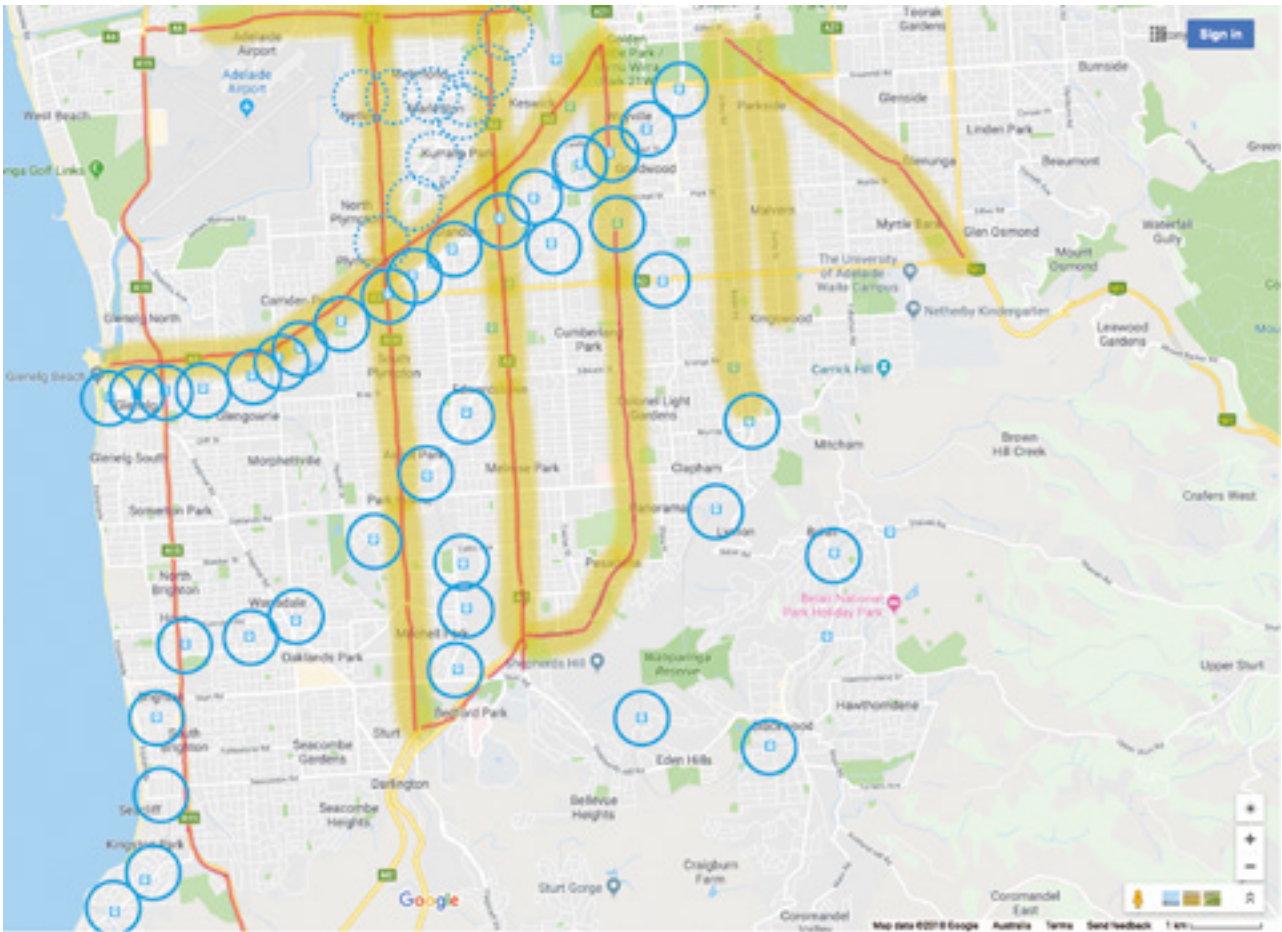
High Growth


Twenty-first century versions of a plan for high population growth identified 'transport corridors' as the preferred conduits for high and medium-density development.


Government planners have been trying to put this theory into practice by pushing through development approvals for higher and denser housing along corridors specified by ministerial instructions and the State Planning Commission.


The assumptions behind these drastic changes to the planning regime do not stand scrutiny. Suppose population growth returns to the 4% figure achieved in 1960-70: the only decade of the 20th century in which it surpassed 3%. Given the low rate at which unregulated infill development proceeds when driven by market forces, it is inconceivable that more than a tiny fraction of the required growth can be accommodated along transport corridors served by buses alone, even if they moved at 10-minute intervals. [See map opposite] Even corridors served by all three public transport networks – train, tram and bus – cannot keep up with population growth if development is left to the private sector. Anyone who rides the rails can see that very, very little medium or high-density development has occurred along lines since the explosion of Housing Trust accommodation in the 1950s and '60s.

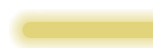
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 Blue circles show train and tram stations within 400m radius of each other.

 Dashed blue circles show a potential new tram line with an airport spur.

 Red lines show roads of 4 or more lanes.

 Yellow shows corridors within 300 metres of bus stops on frequently serviced routes.

ABOVE: Transport corridors are useful when there is a choice of more than one means of transport. This map of Adelaide south of the Central Business District illustrates the limitations of corridors served by only one or two means of transport. The Belair rail line is ineffective. So are the yellow bus routes lines along Unley Road and Duthy Street.

Curiously, the cry for infill development has been most intense near the city centre where densities are already high and opportunities for increasing population are limited. For this reason many suspicious citizens conclude that the transport corridor scheme is a subterfuge for altering zoning in high value neighbourhoods to the advantage of developers. Most new development in those neighbourhoods has been 'one-for-one' replacement of single houses which does nothing to raise the population. Tellingly, the South Australian advocates of the transport corridors cannot point to any designated corridors anywhere in the world that do what they promise.

Apart from some impressive redevelopment of the old gas works and Clipsal factories at Bowden, astonishingly little has been done to realise the potential of the rail and tramway network – which is enormous. Sydney anticipates that within a few years the residential density at Green Park on the rail line to Mascot Airport will exceed that of Manhattan and Hong Kong. Adelaide could achieve similar results at several points along the existing rail system, provided that development is managed with that aim in mind. That means concentrating all high-density new residential building within easy walking distance of train and tram stations.

Market forces alone cannot do the job, even if planning permission is fast-tracked in the desired locations. Private developers will always seek to plant their towers in established neighbourhoods with high property values, tree-lined streets and handsome old buildings (Norwood, Unley, North Adelaide, etc). Those possibilities must be closed off. A government authority must guide the development of the linear city, not by mindlessly auctioning land to the highest bidder, but by acquiring derelict industrial sites and holding them expressly for the purpose of high-density housing set amidst attractive parks and gardens.



.....
ABOVE: Red shaded areas are industrial sites adjacent to rail lines.

The finished product would be breathtaking. Imagine gliding at high speed from McLaren Vale to the Barossa, passing *en route* along a thin but densely populated ribbon of high-density residential blocks. At Goodwood, some passengers would board the train from the spur lines to Belair and Flinders University. At Adelaide central station others would transfer to other lines running to Grange, West Lakes, Port Adelaide, Semaphore and Largs. It would not be overly costly to run a connection to Adelaide airport via the old Holdfast Bay rail line and Richmond Road (provided that the runway is shored up to withstand rising seas). Trams already carry alighting passengers to key CBD attractions (North Terrace, Rundle Mall, Town Hall and Central Market). High-rise apartments built along the rail lines and the north-south expressway would be highly desirable because of their ready access to all the urban pleasures of Adelaide, not to mention their sweeping views to the Hills and the sea. In other Australian cities proximity to good public transport raises property values

This is not a utopian project. The rail network is already in place, thanks to visionary governments of the 19th and 20th centuries. Stations lie within easy walking distance of all our existing public hospitals, university campuses, major sporting complexes, cultural institutions and government offices. Rail allows easy access to beaches at Hallett Cove, Marino Rocks, Grange, Semaphore and Largs. It links the city to the Hills National Park system at Belair. Tracks still run to Angaston. Although the old Willunga line has been torn up, plans exist for extending tracks

from Seaford to the fringes of McLaren Vale. What is more, the rail network aligns itself neatly with the major motor ways of South Road, Anzac Highway and Port Road. That means that residents of future high-density developments will have an à la carte menu of transport options, including buses and cars.

This is not the linear city of Stretton's dreams, with open space on both sides of a dynamic transport corridor. It takes the modified form of a spine of highly desirable high-density living traversing suburbs built after World Wars I and II. No one would now wish to revive Stretton's plan for a new town at Willunga. McLaren Vale and the Barossa Valley are rightly destined for protection against suburban development. On the other hand, there would be huge public interest in daily express rail services to and from the wine districts.

'Save Our Suburbs'

Vested interests often argue that the only way to deal with increased population without intruding into surrounding agricultural land is by scattering higher-density development through existing suburbs. This alleged alternative often goes by the name of urban consolidation. As originally envisaged in the late 1970s, urban consolidation proposed to increase densities in 'middle ring' suburbs by encouraging additional building through subdivision or rezoning of large blocks. The pitfalls of the policy were comprehensively detailed by Patrick Troy's 1996 book, *The Perils of Urban Consolidation*.

By the early 21st century the policy had been perverted into an argument for medium and high-density 'infill' development in the most attractive inner suburbs. State governments overrode the resistance of local councils by declaring projects costing more than \$10m to be 'of state significance'. Watching with consternation as historic precincts were invaded by grossly overblown development, community groups such as 'Save our Suburbs' attempted to turn back the tide. They in turn were denounced as NIMBYs (Not in My Back Yard) by the property industry

for thwarting worthy objectives such as architectural diversity, 'affordable housing' and a lively urban café culture. In fact, relaxation of planning controls in the city centre and adjacent suburbs delivered none of the promised benefits. Developers, it turned out, did not want to increase population density or affordable housing through medium and high-rise building. They showed no interest in rundown neighbourhoods in unappealing locations. They wanted to build very expensive large apartments and units for cashed-up buyers who coveted the life-style of the wealthier suburbs. The paradoxical outcome was that they threatened to destroy the scale, historic integrity and amenity that had attracted their attention in the first place. In Adelaide as in other old Australian cities, the specious arguments of the urban consolidators threatened to bulldoze irreplaceable heritage of colonial and federation domestic architecture for no good reason.

The reimagined linear city – intensive development on former industrial sites served by road and rail – is the means by which a greatly increased population can be achieved without needlessly destroying established neighbourhoods of historic charm. It will also be welcomed by people in middle and outer suburbs who like their way of life and resent having it rubbished by the elitist advocates of urban consolidation who speak approvingly about the death of the quarter-acre block. Without rapid transport, most of these suburbs will remain car dependent (even if the cars are not personally owned or driven). Relieved of development pressure, the major roadways could be gradually redeveloped as green motor parkways.

No Growth

From a practical standpoint, no growth implies little new housing. Experience tells us, however, that politicians and lobby groups will go on insisting that a growth spurt is just around the corner or that desperate measures are needed to attract growth. When economic growth falters the same special interests invariably argue that relaxation of

planning controls will generate jobs through new building – even though there has never been a planning permission-led recovery, and the bureaucratic obstacles to building reached a historic low in the early 21st century.

To prevent irreparable damage to the most liveable neighbourhoods, it is necessary to anticipate these arguments and propose alternatives. The modified model of the linear city based on existing rapid transit networks provides the best counter argument. Building a land bank of state-owned former industrial sites buys insurance against any unexpected developments. If growth stands still the land can be gradually released for medium-density housing around stations interspersed with attractive parks and recreational facilities.

With that insurance in place it should be much easier to protect the Adelaide Park Lands, the Hills Face, beaches and historic conservation zones.

Shrinkage

South Australian planners have always taken the view that population growth is both essential and inevitable. However, examples from around the globe demonstrate that shrinkage happens.⁵ At the national level Italy, Japan and other developed countries will lose people over the next fifty years. The populations of many well-known cities in the United States collapsed in the closing decades of the 20th century, some by as much as 50%, even as the national population grew. Shrinkage is particularly associated with the kind of deindustrialisation experienced by Adelaide as automotive and other manufacturing enterprises shut down.

Due to high levels of immigration Australia experienced a growth spurt in the early 21st century, but most of the new arrivals went to Melbourne, Sydney and southeast Queensland. Efforts to force immigrants to settle in regional centres bore little fruit. Much of the industry that powered Adelaide's mid-20th century boom closed down. Head

offices moved interstate. Employment in agriculture and mining declined as machines did more of the grunt work. There's no point just hoping that 'something will turn up' to restart the growth engine. What do we do if the population declines?

Don't panic or despair. Thoughtful people argue that humankind must sooner or later face up to the limits of growth on this planet. Under the right conditions population decline can set the stage for regeneration. Rome, Venice, Bath, Vienna, and many other famous cities profited from decline by turning their unique cultural assets into drawcards.

The city of Leipzig in Germany provides an example of how good planning can manage decline. From a peak population of 713,000 in 1933, the city shrank to about 437,000 in 1998. World War II bombing, forty years of communist rule and the strains of German reunification delivered a series of shocks unlike any experienced in Australian cities. In 2000 Leipzig set out to plan a road to recovery. The council recognised that the prevailing planning regime was not up to the task:

Classic land use planning plays only a subordinate role in the process of urban redevelopment. Far more important are an extensive cooperation between public authorities and private initiatives, the development of flexible concepts and means and the controlled use of public resources.⁶

Government assumed a leading role in land use planning. The highest priority was preservation of 'buildings and neighbourhoods from the Gründerzeit, or Foundation Era in the late 19th century' when German unification set off an era of rapid industrialisation. Homes and buildings from this era constituted a large percentage of the city's housing stock and possessed an attractive architectural unity. Other districts where buildings constructed under the East German communist regime had been

5 Cristina Martinez-Fernandez, Ivonne Audirac, Sylvie Fol And Emmanuèle Cunningham-Sabot, 'Shrinking Cities: Urban Challenges of Globalization' *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* (2012) 36: 213-25.

6 City of Leipzig, Residential Space and Urban Renewal, [www. https://english.leipzig.de/construction-and-residence/urban-development/residential-space-and-urban-renewal/](https://english.leipzig.de/construction-and-residence/urban-development/residential-space-and-urban-renewal/). Accessed 13 Dec. 2019.

neglected or abandoned, were destined for comprehensive demolition and renewal. Large strategically positioned tracts of land were earmarked for redevelopment as parks and gardens.

Adelaide escaped the disasters that afflicted Leipzig, but can take lessons from the Germans on how to manage a stable or shrinking population. There is much to gain from deciding what to keep, what to throw out and what to renew.

Like Leipzig, Adelaide retains a treasure trove of nineteenth-century building – thanks to the wool, wheat and mining booms that led up to Australian Federation. The loadbearing stone and double brick buildings of that era constitute an irreplaceable heritage quite as important to world history as Leipzig's Gründerzeit. They deserve comprehensive protection. The historic conservation zones established at the turn of the 21st century cover a fraction of the areas requiring demolition control. In an era of declining population there can be no compelling case for their displacement by new building. In any event Adelaide must avoid the madness that gripped Hobart in the 1970s and 80's when fear of stagnation saw Georgian villas give way to car parks. The greater the likelihood of population decline, the greater is the necessity for historic preservation.

Fortunately, Adelaide has very few neighbourhoods blighted by overblown housing projects. Where buildings stand empty it is generally because owners hope to make a killing through redevelopment when the time is ripe. Such urban blight as does exist is often the result of poorly thought-out changes in planning regulations governing height and bulk, which make displacement of low-rise buildings a profitable business. It can take decades for the cycle of decay, demolition and new building to restore life to those streets.

A shrinking city must at all costs avoid the destructive speculator who demolishes serviceable buildings and then puts nothing in its place. It is not enough to make demolition

approval contingent on planning approval for a replacement building. The speculator must post a substantial bond that will be forfeited if no construction has commenced within three years.

What of the former industrial areas along the railway lines? In a high growth scenario they are best used for high and medium housing. That would still be good policy even if the population plummets because of the increased quality of life residents could enjoy. But there would be no urgency. An alternative would be to use a state-funded landbank to create parks adjacent to residential communities. This would be especially desirable for historic districts such as Alberton, presently sandwiched between ex-industrial sites on Port Road and the Port rail line.

In the absence of population pressure, priority could be given to restoring all the original watercourses shown on Light's plan through acquisition of adjoining properties that prevent continuous access along linear parks. Restored wetlands at the Botanic Gardens and along the Torrens and Sturt rivers show what amazing results can be achieved.

When population shrinks planning rules can provide more certainty for citizens, owners and developers. Great cities such as Paris and Amsterdam have shown how setting rules *and sticking to them* can create urban beauty that grows with every passing generation.

This need not rule out radical experimentation and innovation. There are plenty of areas where no particular amenity or historic character merits preservation that could be exempted from normal planning regulations, subject only to the requirements of public health and safety.

There are, in addition, a great many suburbs where planning can be devolved almost entirely to local government. Let these citizens decide, as they used to, what they want for their neighbourhoods. Experience shows there are many worse devices than democracy for building attractive and liveable communities.

VI

Imagination and Innovation

A widespread misconception holds that city plans inhibit innovation by imposing a straitjacket of regulation. In respect to some essentials regulation must be clear and firm. Everyone recognises the need for fire-resistant buildings, adequate sewerage, storm water management, coast protection, hazard reduction, traffic management, etc. Most South Australians also support clear rules for protection of parklands, heritage buildings and historic precincts. Beyond these basic requirements Adelaide, like any other great city must have room to adapt to unforeseeable events, new technologies and opportunities. Nothing in this plan constrains our ability to respond to the challenges of the future.

There may be some point in going further by designating certain regions and neighbourhoods as explicitly friendly to experimentation and innovation. There are places where building dense and tall will offend no one. South Australia could certainly use a lot more imagination in building and house design. In the designated areas shoddy, unimaginative and dull design could be penalised; excellence and radicalism, rewarded.

Because we cannot know precisely how the city will develop over the next fifty years we must hang onto all our irreplaceable assets. Australians now realize the mistake they made by ripping up tram and train lines in the 1950s, thinking that cars and buses would crush all competitors. It is now too late and far too expensive to bring the old lines back. Many cities have found that bringing back street cars actually increases congestion. This would surely be the case if Adelaide ran tracks up Prospect Road and Norwood Parade, as a previous government proposed to do. The public transport system we cannot do without is the one we did not tear up: heavy rail. No technology on the horizon, real or imagined, threatens to outperform it in Adelaide.

Only trains have the demonstrated capacity to move more people faster because they travel on single-purpose corridors unimpeded by traffic lights or other obstacles. Due to expense the time has passed for an underground system like those built when London, Paris and New York were about the size of present-day Adelaide. Sydney and Melbourne struggle to pay for the expansion of their metros. It is therefore imperative that the South Australian government continue to own and operate the urban rail system, not just for transport, but also because it needs to control development on either side of the tracks. Western Australia and New South Wales turned former railway workshops into very successful public arts precincts. Adelaide, which transferred the old Islington works to private owners, got a sprawling 'big box' shopping centre.

As we have seen, in both high-growth and low-growth scenarios, the rail lines remain what Hugh Stretton perceived them to be in 1970 – the best hope for housing large numbers of people in close reach of essential services, entertainment and open space.

A 50-YEAR PLAN FOR METROPOLITAN ADELAIDE
NATIONAL TRUST OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA



Rotunda on the Torrens, 1909 postcard.

Real innovation depends on original thinking. In the 1880s businessman and philanthropist Thomas Elder saw that a weir on the Torrens would create an unparalleled site for public recreation as well as an instrument for flood control. A century later South Australians grew envious of the waterside developments in Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney, where the container revolution in shipping technology left swaths of dockside property surplus to industry requirements. Misconceiving cause and effect, Adelaide embarked on a drive to make Elder's park into a 'Riverbank Precinct'. The result is a less lively, less used, less attractive stretch of parkland lined with convention and hotel facilities that contribute nothing to city living.

Colonel Light had a more original idea for waterway development. Noting that the stretch of land between central Adelaide and Port Adelaide was as flat as any urban terrain he'd ever seen, he proposed digging a canal to connect the two. It could still be done. Think of the development potential and the public benefits.

The possibilities for innovation in a 50-year plan are limited only by the human imagination.



A 50-YEAR PLAN FOR METROPOLITAN ADELAIDE
NATIONAL TRUST OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

PART 2: PLANNING TO MAKE THE VISION REALITY

The National Trust claims no particular planning expertise beyond our decades of work on heritage places. For that reason this section simply outlines the steps required to translate a 50-year vision into reality.

2021-25

- 1. Secure bipartisan support for the plan** from community organisations, local government and major political parties.
- 2. Commit government** – state and local – to the 50-year plan through binding resolutions.
- 3. Draft appropriate enabling legislation** for adoption by state Parliament.
- 4. Commission a survey of existing urban waterways** to establish the extent to which any or all may be returned to something like their pre-colonial condition. The survey should also identify the properties that would need to be acquired to accomplish the task along with an estimate of costs. Publish the survey and seek public comment.
- 5. Commission an urban rail transport consultant** to recommend improvements and extensions required to bring the rail system up to the highest standards of performance. This should include the costs of a spur serving the Adelaide airport and conversion of metropolitan sections of the Adelaide-Port Augusta rail line.
- 6. Commission new master plan by internationally renowned experts** on Adelaide City Park Lands and Squares. Conduct a community consultation on the completed plan, and make any necessary adjustments. Submit plan for ratification by Parliament, the City of Adelaide and adjacent councils.
- 7. Publish details of properties to be acquired** in order to complete second belt of Park Land (Metropolitan Open Space System), along with projected time frame.
- 8. Commence acquisition of strategic properties** along urban rail and tram lines.
- 9. Complete coastal pedestrian** and bike path.
- 10. Gather submissions** from local councils on new heritage conservation zones that deserve to be declared and protected by the State Planning Commission.
- 11. Test public opinion** on building Colonel Light's proposed canal from Port Adelaide to Mile End. If favourable, commission a feasibility study.
- 12. Identify areas where medium and high density development should be encouraged** and where it should be prohibited for the duration of the 50-Year Plan.

2026-30

1. **Commence required work** on urban waterways and associated linear parks, including completion of those begun in previous decades but which remain unfinished.
2. **Commence remedial and new work on urban rail lines** in accordance with priorities recommended by consultants. Establish budget for annual appropriations and land acquisition.
3. **Restore Adelaide park squares** to the configuration shown on Light's plan.
4. **Commence implementation of Adelaide Park Land master plan** in accordance with the timeline set down for 2020-2070.
5. **Continue to acquire properties in the Adelaide Hills** for the outer belt of Park Land. (Metropolitan Open Space System).
6. **Complete designation of urban heritage and conservation zones** with special attention to surviving buildings of 1836-1918.
7. **Commence development of former industrial sites** acquired in accordance with the plan.

2031-36

1. **Publicise progress on the 50-year Plan** as part of bicentennial commemoration of the founding of South Australia.
2. **Continue work on urban waterways and linear parks**, combined with a reassessment of projected effects of climate change.
3. **Commence extension of urban rail network** to more distant stations.
4. **Designate completed adjacent parts of the outer Park Land belt as a single National Park.** Continue acquisition of properties required for its completion as far north as Gawler and as far south as Sellicks Beach.
5. **Continue implementation of the Adelaide Park Land Master plan** as per schedule of works.
6. **Continue development of former industrial sites** acquired along the rail and light rail lines.
7. **Assess progress of the heritage preservation programme** and make any required amendments.

2037-50

1. **In 2045, the midpoint of the 50-Year Plan, comprehensively review the plan** in light of unforeseen events, challenges and opportunities. Revise the plan accordingly.
2. **Continue work on urban waterways and linear parks**, combined with a reassessment of projected effects of climate change.
3. **Commence extension of urban rail network** to more distant stations.
4. **Designate completed adjacent parts of the outer Park Land belt as a single National Park.** Continue acquisition of properties required for its completion as far north as Gawler and as far south as Sellicks Beach.
5. **Continue implementation of the Adelaide Park Land Master plan** as per schedule of works.
6. **Continue development of former industrial sites** acquired along the rail and light rail lines.
7. **Assess progress of the heritage preservation programme** and make any required amendments.

2050-70

1. **Complete all unfinished parts of the plan.**
2. **Prepare a new 50-Year plan for 2070-2120.**



www.nationaltrust.org.au/adelaide-2070/