

Chapter 13

THE CENTRAL BUSINESS AREA

Because of its geographic situation, its port, and the opportunities for commercial and industrial development, Melbourne has attracted to itself many activities whose influences extend far beyond metropolitan boundaries. Here are located Government offices and the head offices of commercial, industrial and financial enterprises whose ramifications extend throughout Victoria and often into other States.

For these closely integrated activities a central situation has the advantage that it is the easiest point for the largest number of people to reach. Thus a centre of business activity has developed which we refer to as the *Central Business Area*. Because of its convenience, this area has also become the location of department stores and other retail businesses which must be located where they can attract crowds big enough to justify their wide assortment of goods. The main centres of amusement and entertainment, and the principal cultural amenities are also found here. Because of this, the central area provides a service to the whole State. Its function is regional rather than metropolitan, and its problems must be considered not merely from the viewpoint of the municipality of Melbourne, or even of the Melbourne metropolitan area, but from the wider viewpoint of the State of Victoria.

This Central Business Area is today mainly contained within the bounds of Flinders, Spencer, Franklin, Victoria and Lansdowne Streets, although some central area activities extend beyond these confines into North Melbourne and across the river into South Melbourne.

But despite the initial advantages of its rectangular layout and wide main streets, the central area of Melbourne still has not the facilities and amenities necessary for the needs of modern business. If today is not adequately provided for, what of tomorrow? Here above all places the long view must be taken, and not only must provision be made for the needs of today, but the foundations laid for what will be required in the future. Here is the need for vision. Its principal needs are facilities for the free circulation of people and vehicles, accommodation for stationary vehicles, and grouping of activities to facilitate the transaction of business while at the same time avoiding undue concentration and its resulting congestion.

This is the heart of the capital city of the State. Any wants or defects in its structure, any failure to provide all those amenities and facilities necessary for the efficient and expeditious conduct of business affairs, anything which will detract from its ability to fulfil its functions properly, adequately and efficiently will be felt over the whole State. Understanding and appreciation of its problems, its needs, its defects and deficiencies are essential in formulating proposals for guiding the future growth of this great centre of human endeavour.

ROAD TRAFFIC AND CITY OUTLETS

The most obvious and at the same time the most important problem within this central area is that of road traffic. Unless people and vehicles can circulate freely, efficiency must suffer. Melbourne has a wonderful asset in its broad streets, but they are not used to the best advantage. Too much of their capacity is taken up with stationary vehicles to the detriment of moving traffic. The time will come, and the sooner the better, when it will be realised that our principal streets and roads, both in the central city area and in the suburbs, will have to be reserved for their primary purposes — the movement of traffic and access to abutting properties. American and other overseas cities, with their great volume of traffic, have already learned this to their advantage. But even when this is done in Melbourne, there will still be a traffic problem which will be accentuated as the city grows.

Although the City Ring Road will improve conditions by diverting through traffic it will not completely solve the problem. With the growth of the city, the already large volume of commercial, worker and shopper traffic on which central area activities depend will greatly increase. It is imperative that this traffic shall be able to move freely into, around and out of the area.

For this three things are necessary:

- (1) The proper regulation of street use so that full advantage can be taken of the favourable street pattern to facilitate the circulation of traffic within the area.
- (2) The gradual removal from the area of those activities not essential for central area efficiency.

(3) Adequate means of access to and egress from the area.

The first of these is purely a matter of administration and does not enter further into the present considerations.

In regard to the second point it will be found that the amount of traffic depends largely on the type and volume of employment in the central area. This is seen from Table 9, which shows the relative importance of the principal sources of central area traffic.

Table 9

SOURCES OF CENTRAL AREA ROAD TRAFFIC

Class of employment	Vehicles per day		Percentage of total road traffic generated
	per employee	per 1,000 sq. feet of floor space	
Office, professional and miscellaneous	0.5	3.1	28
Retail trade	1.1	3.6	19
Wholesale trade, warehousing and storage	1.5	3.8	16
Industry	1.7	9.1	37

Office and professional employment, and the retail and wholesale trades, are essentially central area uses, but warehousing and storage, in which the economical handling of large volumes of goods is more important than easy access for large numbers of people, are more appropriately and advantageously located where vehicles can move freely. Although they are intimately associated with central area activities, their location within the central area is not essential and they can be accommodated to their own and the community's advantage in adjacent locations. Apart from the number of vehicles which they attract, warehousing and storage add to the traffic problem because of the large type of vehicle commonly used. While some of the industry now located in the central area, either because of its particular needs or because of its close relation to central area activities, requires a reasonably central location, most of it could take advantage of the greater mobility of modern transport and move further afield.

It can be seen from Table 9 that any removal of warehousing, storage and industrial activities from central locations would ease the traffic problem within the area. Therefore, in addition to the provisions of the planning scheme designed to encourage decentralisation of industry and the retail trade, the zoning provisions applicable to the central area have been designed to bring about the gradual and progressive removal of these non-essential uses. *Central Business Zone C* and the adjacent *Special Industrial Zone A* have been provided specifically for them.

Because of its special functions, the central area draws traffic from all parts of the metropolitan area in proportion to the number of motor vehicles garaged, the number of resident central area workers, the number of jobs outside the central area, and according to the location of transport terminals. Unlike inter-suburban traffic, it is little influenced by the length of the journey. The significance of this will be realised on examining the present means of entrance to and egress from the central area in relation to metropolitan development. Along the eastern, northern and western boundaries of the area there are 13 entry points to the central area. On the south side there are only four — the bridges at Punt Road, Swanston, Queen and Spencer Streets. These carry practically all the traffic from the southern suburbs⁽¹⁾ where are located the deep-water port and the southern river berths, and where in 1951 were garaged more than 42% of all the motor vehicles in the metropolitan area. In these suburbs live also 37% of the total metropolitan population and 41% of central area wage-earners, while one-third of all jobs outside the central area are to be found there. The cause of much of the present-day congestion at the river crossings is therefore apparent. As the city is developing so rapidly to the south, the problem will grow continuously. It is obvious, therefore, that one of the great needs of the city is more southern outlets from the central area to give better access to the arterial road system.

With increasing development in the southern suburbs, the problem of distributing worker traffic to its central area destinations also becomes accentuated. Already nearly half the central area wage-earners coming from southern suburbs work north of Little Collins Street. When the proposed City Underground Railway is built, development in this section of the central area will be stimulated, and the number of workers from the south employed there will correspondingly increase and with them the road traffic which, unless steps are taken to facilitate its distribution, will have to find its way through busy streets to its destination.

The City Ring Road will provide the means for distributing this traffic and will also provide two new outlets from the area across the river, but the following additional works will ultimately be necessary to provide adequate access to the city from the southern suburbs:

- Continuation of Batman Avenue under Swanston Street and along the north bank of the river to join with Queen's Wharf Road.
- Connection of Queen Street to this roadway by a subway under the railway yard. As headroom would be limited, commercial traffic could not be accommodated, but this outlet would serve the financial district, where worker traffic is high.
- A bridge across the river to connect King Street with Hanna Street.
- A bridge over the railway yards to connect Russell Street with Batman Avenue.

(1) Comprising for this comparison the suburbs included in the southern statistical district and Port and South Melbourne.