

9

OTHER COMMERCIAL AND COMMUNITY CENTRES



The activity centre strategic objectives provide for continued functioning of commercial and community services at various levels.

The Technical Advisory Committee on Retailing expressed the view that possible future constraints on personal mobility may result in increased use of shops within walking distance of houses. Smaller commercial and community centres will therefore continue to cater for the daily needs of their immediate neighbourhood.

Suburban centres which are not district centres are encouraged to reorganise and to improve their facilities and amenity. They are the preferred locations in the existing urban area for commercial or retail development which, for whatever reason, is not appropriate for district centres or Central Melbourne.

Proposals to locate new major community or commercial facilities outside designated district centres will continue to be considered on their merits, subject to the Minister's retailing guidelines. Developers, however, will need to show why they cannot or should not be in one of the district centres.

Developers of major office developments will have to show why they cannot or should not be located in Central Melbourne or in one of the district centres.

9.1 Strip Centres

The most likely centres to develop as commercial and community centres are the traditional strip shopping centres, which have developed along major roads. Some of them generate considerable retail sales and

other commercial activity. In others, many small businesses trade only marginally. Some centres consist mainly of small shops. Some have modern developments behind the main road frontage.

Shopping at such centres has its attractions. The variety of building styles can be stimulating. Small shops offer a variety of products. Some centres have food markets. Some have lower rent shops which offer specialised items and services such as books, second-hand goods and shoe repairs.

Many of the tradespeople and their customers speak a common ethnic language. People of all ages use the street as an informal meeting place and there is the general bustle of an urban and often multi-cultural environment. Community facilities are often well represented. Access by public transport is normally excellent, which makes the centres very useful to people without the use of a car.

Many small businesses (including offices, small manufacturing concerns and service firms) rely on low rent premises in centres whose retail function has declined. No actions should be taken which would restrict the availability of such low rent premises, because of the effect on employment.

Many of these centres do, however, have problems which threaten their continued commercial prosperity, even their existence. Parking is often inadequate. The length of the strip often prevents easy walking to its full range of activities. Through traffic creates noise and other pollution. Pedestrians and road traffic (including public transport) are often in conflict.

Many of these centres do not attract people from a wide enough area in sufficient numbers to support the range of businesses and facilities they offer. Nearby areas have in many cases had a decline or change in population that has resulted in lower spending.

Redevelopment is difficult because of fragmented land ownership and lack of unified centre management. Modern centres and stores in these areas, often on their fringe, have sometimes had a negative impact on the established centre, including effects on small firms and elongation of the shopping strip.

These centres nevertheless represent significant public and private investment. They also have the great advantage in most cases of ready access by public transport. A number of actions could be taken to improve the competitive positions of these centres and the service provided to local

communities. Some councils have already initiated such actions, which could include:

- re-organising the retailing strip into a retail node or nodes based on the most active parts of the strip and the location of public transport. Encourage remaining road front premises to change to office, light industrial, warehousing or mixed uses. Include such intentions in a local development scheme
- expanding nodes, where appropriate, behind the road frontage to create a more compact shopping precinct. Actions by the public sector to identify, buy and amalgamate sites for disposal for redevelopment may be necessary
- co-ordinating the assembly of sites for new development. Councils could acquire land (under the Local Government Act or the Town & Country Planning Act, if necessary) and offer them for sale at a price to cover site costs and handling
- improving streetscapes at the nodes by providing street furniture, landscaping and enhancing any special character
- increasing parking where appropriate in locations to increase the appeal of centres. Shared parking with nearby activities could be considered along with the use of paved parking areas as recreation outlets outside trading hours
- reducing pedestrian and vehicle conflict by marked pedestrian crossings, providing access to parking areas from the rear rather than the main street, and creating pedestrian malls where feasible
- creating management committees for centres. Members could represent traders, operators and the council. They should identify the problems and potentials of their centre and generally manage and promote it.

As with district centres, the Board will provide information, advice and general assistance.