

Chapter 6

DISTRICT BUSINESS CENTRES

REFERENCE has already been made to the concentration of activities in and around the central business area of the city and to the need for some degree of decentralisation. The establishment of district business centres has been suggested as one means of encouraging this, and their possibilities in the solution of the problem are discussed in this chapter.

Much of the activity within the central business area is associated with retail shopping, and to many housewives a visit to the city for shopping and entertainment is a pleasant experience, but to an increasing number shopping in the central area is becoming wearisome and irksome. In America the stage has been reached where the larger department stores, originally located mainly in the central business area as in Melbourne, have been compelled to establish branch stores in outer suburban areas to meet the demands of their customers and to preserve their business.

The most potent factor in bringing about this new departure is the motor car. In Australia the use of motor vehicles has generally followed the American trend; although the ratio of cars to population lags about 20 to 25 years behind that in the United States. We must anticipate, therefore, that the decentralisation of retail shopping will be found just as necessary and desirable in Melbourne as in American cities.

From discussions with leading representatives of retail business and others, it is clear that the key to successful decentralisation of central area activities is the provision of facilities similar to those offered in the central area by the department store, with its wide range of clothing, and the opportunity for conveniently satisfying other needs. In practice, this would resolve itself into the establishment in suitable centres of branches of the leading department stores, around which would develop the other retail activities necessary to provide for all the normal shopping and personal needs of the housewife. Such branch stores would need to be within convenient reach, by public conveyance or private motor car, of a population of at least 200,000 people, which is sufficient to justify the management in providing a range of goods and services comparable with those offered by stores within the central area.

Although it may be accepted that the department store is the key to successful commercial decentralisation, shopping

is by no means the only central area activity which could be dispersed with advantage to the community and convenience to the individual. In both Britain and America, financial and business institutions and government departments have found it advantageous to move from the central sites formerly occupied. There are already signs of this happening in Melbourne, and it appears certain that the trend will continue. It is important at this early stage to ensure that any such movement should not occur haphazardly, but should be guided to locations which will best serve the intended purpose.

A policy of business decentralisation is essential if our future civic development is to be sound, and should be encouraged in Melbourne. For such a policy to be effective, the decentralised activities should be grouped in centres which are not only well located geographically, but in which the existing physical conditions make it feasible to provide the necessary amenities and facilities by a programme of progressive development.

Haphazard and unregulated decentralisation could result in disadvantages which would tend to defeat the purpose. If full success is to be attained, both from the viewpoint of the community and of the individual business organisation, the decentralised locations must be established in accordance with a properly planned and co-ordinated scheme of development. Unless this is done, the advantage which it is sought to gain will not be realised. There is already some evidence in America of this happening.

For this reason the planning scheme provides for five *District Business Centres* which have been selected because they are well located geographically, and because they have the potentialities for progressive development. Whatever activities may be attracted to those centres, the main activity will be shopping, but it is visualised that besides this nucleus these centres will provide facilities for retail marketing, for the medical, dental, and other professions,⁽¹⁾ for branch offices for businesses and public administration, and for entertainment and cultural activities. They will offer to residents of the locality many of the facilities of the central city area under more attractive conditions nearer to their homes.

(1) A medical block providing facilities for doctors, dentists, and chemists is a feature in some recent American developments.

The sites which have been selected are:
 Western suburbs: Footscray shopping centre.
 Northern suburbs: Shopping centre near Preston Railway Station.
 Eastern suburbs: Box Hill shopping centre.
 Southern suburbs: Moorabbin shopping centre and vicinity.
 South-eastern suburbs: The township of Dandenong.

The location of these centres in relation to the central business area and their potential spheres of influence are shown in map 10.

To arrive at an estimate of the number of people to whom such centres would be likely to offer attraction, a study was made of the degree of car ownership, the influence of city and other suburban shopping centres, and the proposed road communication and public transport systems. From this it has been assessed that the zones of influence of the respective centres would contain populations both present and ultimate as set out in Table 3. A large proportion of these people would find these centres more convenient than the central city area for the purchase of much of their requirements and the fulfilment of many of their personal needs.

Table 3
 ESTIMATED POPULATION IN ZONES OF
 INFLUENCE OF DISTRICT CENTRES

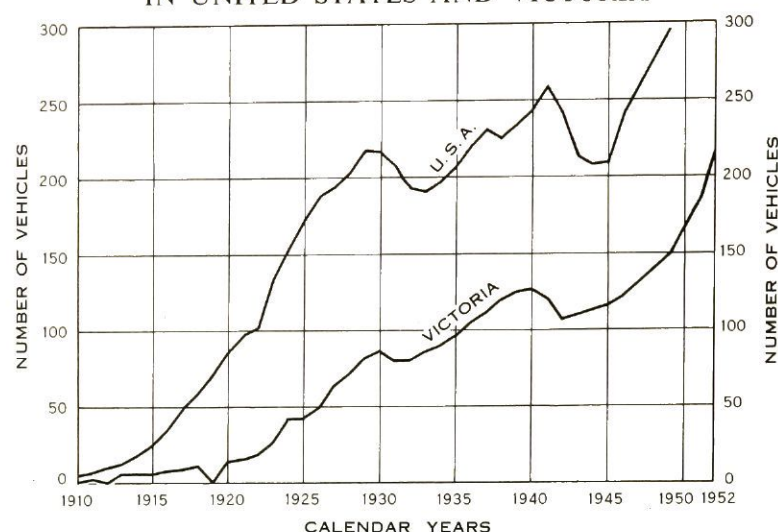
District centre		Estimated population zone of influence	
District	Municipality	Present	Ultimate
Western	Footscray	125,000	250,000
Northern	Preston	150,000	300,000
Eastern ⁽¹⁾	Box Hill	150,000	400,000
Southern	Moorabbin	180,000	300,000
South-eastern ⁽¹⁾	Dandenong	60,000	150,000

Each of the five sites selected have been carefully studied, and provided that future development is properly controlled, they could be developed into centres which would not only do much to assist in the solution of future problems of civic development, but which would prove to be a notable feature of Melbourne.

It cannot be expected that such district business centres could ever be developed to provide all the facilities available within the central business area, and this is not visualised, but it should be possible gradually and progressively to provide such improved facilities for the conduct of business that they will attract from the city proper a portion of the business which would otherwise be conducted there. By so doing, they would fulfill their functions. But if they are to provide the amenities necessary to ensure the efficient, convenient

(1) The Ferntree Gully, Bayswater and Croydon districts have been included in the zone of influence of the eastern centre, and Gippsland in that of the south-eastern.

9 USE OF MOTOR VEHICLES IN UNITED STATES AND VICTORIA



Number of registered vehicles per 1,000 persons
 excluding motor cycles

and pleasant conduct of business, it is essential firstly that adequate space is reserved for future development, and secondly that their growth should be controlled and guided in accordance with a well-conceived and comprehensive scheme of development.

If such centres are to serve their purpose, the prime requisite is the provision of proper facilities and amenities for the convenience of users. These would include:

- Conveniently located car parking facilities readily accessible from stores, shops and offices.
- Terminal facilities for bus passengers with convenient access to the railway station.
- Routing of traffic to minimise interference with shoppers.
- Convenient and adequate locations for department stores.
- Space for professional chambers, offices, and similar accommodation.
- Facilities for entertainment, cultural pursuits, and so on.

A centre such as is visualised, with department stores and other shopping facilities, a medical centre, private and public offices, and other facilities would attract a considerable amount of traffic. From traffic studies it is estimated that a centre having a zone of influence containing 250,000 people could result in a movement into the centre of 15,000 or more vehicles each business day. Road communications with such centres and parking facilities in them are consequently most important.

During investigations into the shopping structure of the metropolitan area it became apparent that there is a trend to larger individual shops and a growing disinclination of shopkeepers to live on the business premises. These