Price Tags

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Melbourne
Like Vancouver, Melbourne is a region of three parts:

The walking core.
The tram and train corridors.
The car-dependent suburbs.

The Age: Melbourne tops nation in growth
THE WALKING CITY
- now the CBD -
was laid out in 1837
by Robert Hoddle.

The Hoddle Grid:
aligned with the Yarra,
one mile long,
a half mile wide,
all square blocks.
The trams feed the grid.
THE RAIL CITY
Rail made Melbourne …
Shaped by the trams and trains, scaled for local, metro and state service …
All overlapping.
Great transportation engineering has until recently been about airports and freeways.

Now, once again, great railway stations are being built. Old ones are being restored. Some have always maintained their greatness

Like Flinders Street Station.
RECENTLY
Southern Cross Station,
the terminus for the state’s regional rail network, replaced the dismal Spencer Street Station.

A transparent concourse spills on to the corner of Spencer and Collins Street, with immediate connections to the trams.

More here. And here.
A love/hate relationship …

There is a lively transport culture in Melbourne, and they're sometimes at each other's throats.

While the Labor government is devoting $10.5 billion to transportation alternatives, its supporters say: not enough. It never is.

More than that, Australian cities (Perth aside) often fail to skillfully integrate different modes of transport, particularly the dozens of private bus companies.

More here.
When I complimented Melbourne’s transit system in a media interview, the story didn’t run. When another headline suggested Melbourners should stop complaining so much, I received derisory emails.

Clearly, they said, I didn’t understand how deficient the system was. And that’s true. I was just impressed with how good it was.
Yarra Trams, the French-owned operator, is expanding the system in line with the regional plan – Melbourne 2030.

Box Hill, for instance, is a regional centre in the plan – but the transit improvements can be slow-going.
Melbourne 2030 is based on the hope that amorphous sprawl can be consolidated into ‘activity centres’ by reinforcing and re-energizing the rail and bus network.
Melbourne 2030 aims to reverse a half-century of urban history.

It’s the same ol’ story: after the war, everyone bought cars, they expanded the freeways – but not the transit system.

Growth went where the cars went.

Transit use declined: now down to 6 percent of all trips in the region.

There are some hopeful signs. Congestion has actually declined in Inner Melbourne.

But not so in Outer Melbourne.
THE CAR CITY

When everything is designed to serve the car, eventually the car-dependent system fails. The intersections fill up.

Still, people who left the inner city thought they had been promised that traffic would never get overly congested.

So they're frustrated.
With growth everywhere, you can feel the city stretching to capacity.
Even the foot paths that lead to Flinders Street Station.

The trams are jammed among the cars that flood the arterials.
In the 1990s, the Liberal government looked to the private sector for solutions, privatizing both the trams (with unfortunate results) and the roads (with tollways so successful that the subsequent Labour government continues to expand the network.)

Locking another generation into the illusions of the car-dependent system.
Much of the growth in Inner Melbourne has been helpful. Not too long ago, Melbourne’s core seemed to be dying.
1992
738 dwellings

Not many people lived downtown.
And now they do:
Ten times more people in a decade.
Many more people walking around.
And so many more places to walk.
Melbourne has a life of the lanes – a scale and density that just feels good, like Melbourne.

This is the multicultural city.
It’s where the young people concentrate and where the human parade has the right of way,
Pedestrian paths between the wide and the narrow streets link the mid-block passages, lanes and arcades.

More here.
And beautiful bridges extend this urban culture across the river.
Princes Bridge joins Swanston Street with St. Kilda Road. A walk of a hundred metres takes you across the Yarra and into Southbank.

There the relationships and scale feel very European - rather like Paris.

And no wonder.
The Sandridge Railway Bridge of 1888, disused since 1987, has just been reopened and re-designed for pedestrians and cyclists.

As another project in the Yarra Plan, it will connect with a new public space: Queensbridge Square.
Southbank is the urban renewal district that began in the early 1990s - naturally with a promenade. Partly business, partly residential, partly retail, with the attractions of food, art and entertainment.
Public investment created private value, evident in the soaring real estate.

For instance, the audacious Eureka Tower.
Along the river the city moves at five to fifteen kilometres per hour – walking to cycling speeds.

Most of the time it works. But since they did not separate wheels from feet in their design, conflicts increase with crush of the crowds.
DOCKLANDS

Given the success of the Hoddle Grid and Southbank, it’s odd that they got it so wrong with the urban renewal district to the west of the CBD, the Docklands.
Spread out and exposed, Docklands doesn’t yet feel walker friendly.

It looks impressive, but it’s scaled for speeds over 50 K.

Most of the time it feels vacant, Brasilia-like, waiting for something to happen.
And maybe eventually it will.

Docklands too has an amazing cycle and pedestrian bridge.

Meant to resemble an aboriginal eel trap, most call it the Snake.
Melbourne is not alone in building great new structures for self-propelled people.

Brisbane does it even better.
Here are five examples on the Brisbane River of beautiful structures that connect the city just for those on feet, buses and bikes.

1. **Jack Pesch Bridge**
   - upstream, is named in honour of a cycling champion during the 1930s

2. **Goodwill Bridge**

3. **Tank Street Bridge**

4. **Schonell Bridge**

5. **Riverwalk**
1 Riverwalk

This section of floating riverwalk connects the CBD with downriver neighbourhoods.

Custom designed, made of stainless steel, lit by solar lighting, with drawbridges for boat access to the properties along the shore, it’s another illustration of how Brisbane spends money on making alternatives attractive.
The Goodwill Bridge – named after the short-lived Goodwill Games – was opened in 2001 after much controversy, especially because of its growing cost, ultimately $23 million (Au), but also because to many it seemed an unnecessary extravagance.

It was, after all, only for pedestrians and cyclists.

Now it serves 40,000 people a week, and connects a busway station on South Bank with the Queensland University of Technology. More than its utility, though, it brings people to the river, provides a joyous experience and serves as a symbol of the city. Not a bad deal after all.
Or how about spending $63.3 million (Au) on a pedestrian and cycle bridge to link the city centre and South Brisbane, completing a loop via South Bank and the Goodwill Bridge? Yet another bridge is planned, for a total of $130 million.

More here.
Eleanor Schonell (Green) Bridge

This bridge, opened in 2006, is the first in Australia designed exclusively for buses, cyclists and pedestrians, serving the University of Queensland with new transit service.
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This is a constantly changing work of art across from Melbourne Town Hall. As the drought continues and the reservoirs drop, the artist repaints the wooden wall that covers a turned-off fountain, showing less water, more desert.