

The Colloquium

**Growing a Greater Sydney
Connecting people and places**



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14

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GROWING A GREATER SYDNEY
CONNECTING PEOPLE AND PLACES

NOVEMBER 7 2014 — LENNOX THEATRE, RIVERSIDE
CHURCH STREET PARRAMATTA



The Colloquium panel discussion

Image @davidgholm

There's a general consensus that Australian infrastructure hasn't kept pace with population growth in the major cities — and no more so than in Sydney. Sydney's plan for growth fizzled as the last athletes packed their bags from Sydney's 'best ever' Olympic games more than a decade ago. But while the planning may have stopped, the growth didn't — proving once again the dictum that failing to plan is planning to fail.

In 2014, major infrastructure projects like West Connex, a second Sydney airport, the North West, and South West rail links have all been announced. Done well — they promise to transform the city; shifting how people might move; from where and why. Pooled together, NSW major projects currently on the drawing board total around \$20bn.

As recently as November 2014, the G20 leaders' meeting in Brisbane agreed to support a global infrastructure hub to be based in Sydney. The idea assumes we're close to best practice. If not already there. So are we?

Do we really know what's involved in making infrastructure 'transformational'? Is there a difference between infrastructure that transforms for good, and infrastructure that carves, divides and isolates? And what role, if any, does architecture play? For example, given our time again, would we build the Cahill Expressway as an elevated highway cutting the city from the sea? Undergrounding it would be a cost, sure. But what new value might it unlock in waterfront sites and new public

space where the city meets the Quay? Will West Connex be just another motorway through Sydney? Or will it really be a road for the 21st Century (and what is a road for the 21st century anyway)? Will a second airport for Sydney be a no-go zone marooned in Sydney's west with no planned transport linkages to the Sydney or Parramatta centres, or can it connect to its neighbours and act as an anchor integrated with its surrounds?

Alongside new flagship projects is the imminent release of a new metro strategy for Sydney — a planning document that promises to set the direction of investment and flick over those levers of the state. Probably the best read on the transformational potential of the metro strategy to date is Rob Stokes' speech to the Planning Institute in September.

Joe Agius, President of the NSW Chapter of the Australian Institute of Architects, puts the question very simply — asking, how can we ensure that Sydney's growth is not just a case of bigger and bigger, but 'bigger and better'?

Lucy Turnbull: design is the answer! Design brings together and integrates diverse needs and diverse interests. #saf14 @committee4syd David Tickle @davidthickle_



ONE SYDNEY. BIG CITY THINKING.

Part of the answer for Sydney is to see itself as one city, and finally resolve the east/west divide. Not surprisingly, this was a theme of The Colloquium. One Sydney. Big thinking. Big city thinking. Combined with some design thinking too. Connecting up the disparate and the fragmented so the right strategic moves can be made.

The new Lord Mayor of Parramatta, Councillor Scott Lloyd welcomed participants to the second largest employment centre in NSW — experiencing faster growth than the (Sydney Cove) CBD, and still yet to grow by 50,000 more in coming years.

Unlike Adelaide or Hobart or Geelong, Sydney's challenge is to plan well for good growth – not something Australian cities have done particularly well to date.



Lucy Turnbull

In 2009, the combined governments of Australia agreed on this, and adopted nine principles for strategic planning of our urban centres. Heading this, was recognition that we don't integrate transport and land use planning — meaning any connection between roads and rail (let alone cycling paths or light rail or new ferry stops), with housing (or universities or the other uses we deem appropriate for the land we make available to develop) are missing.

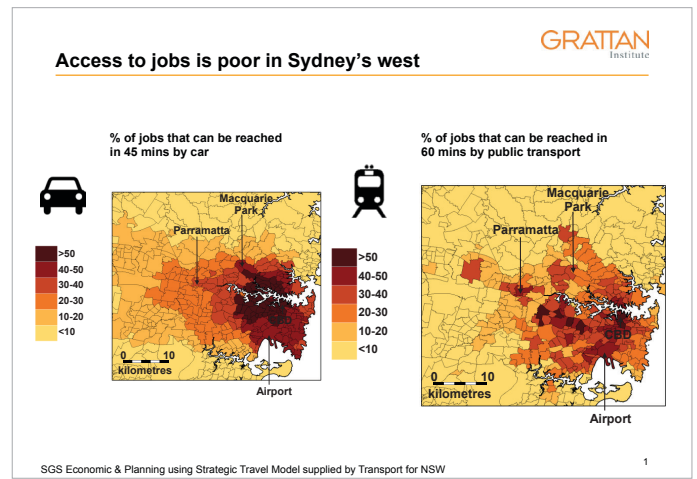
Efforts to build these connections are seen everywhere. Some state governments acknowledge this by combining departments of planning, transport and infrastructure (while admirable, few of these forced marriages have succeeded in bringing genuine collaboration).

Turnbull points out that Sydney is going through one of its fastest growth periods in its history. The questions is — will Sydney ever meet the challenge of integrating smart design, solid planning and quality development — particularly through an intelligent fusion of land use and transport planning? And what does this take?

Well it means plugging Sydney's "governance gap" for starters. A Greater Sydney Commission promises to play broker and bridge between levels of government using soft leadership — often more successful than operating by threat of statute anyway. Sydney needs to invest in the space between the strategic, regional responsibilities of state governments, and the hyper-local concerns of local governments on the other.

To Turnbull, it will take 20-50 yrs of consistent work for the city to become a truly polycentric city. In the east, the site of the Sydney Cove settlement is shorthanded by reference to a CBD. But in reality, central business districts are also found in places like Chatswood, or Macquarie Park. Viewed as the whole metropolitan footprint, Parramatta really can be seen as the geographic heart of greater Sydney. This is Turnbull's "polycentric puzzle" that can be realised by applying design thinking at city scale. Used like this, what is design thinking? Turnbull explains it's the curatorship of local knowledge and expert; gathered around a designed approach involving design professionals with the skill to translate local and global concerns and best practice in to a place. Like the Design Parramatta initiative which was a partnership between the NSW State Government Architect, and Parramatta City Council itself.

And so if this is the solution — just what is the problem in the first place? As the Grattan Institute's Paul Donegan puts it; the economy has a spatial dimension. Location matters. The problem is, the spatial dimension of most Australian cities doesn't match the shape of the new economy. We're still based around the old post war manufacturing economy. Where transport policy comes



Paul Donegan, Cities are the engines of growth

in, is that it can help mask the old world legacies — giving people access to housing, jobs (and all the other things we all do of a day; like school drop off, check on ageing parents, weekend sport, buy furniture. You know; life). Put best by Assoc Prof Rod Simpson when he asked, rhetorically “If you could work, walk about, meet, talk, and be urban without having to travel; wouldn’t you? It’s not transport we want. It’s access”. A city with access.

Numbers may not lie, but only a narrative compels. That may be why Donegan uses the example of a public health professional who, after having kids, moved out from the city centre only to find the daily commute impossible when combined with caring for family. As a result she now teaches sewing at her local school. It’s a valuable story in many ways, but Donegan uses this real world example as a measure of how the community at large loses out. The contribution she can make is not optimised because it’s not economic to provide services equally across a city with widely different density patterns. This idea of fairness and equality was recurring through the day. To many, the answer is not just more people in those few centres with it all. It’s about planning more people and more life in those centres that can only then experience what all communities should expect; opportunity to access services, support and infrastructure.

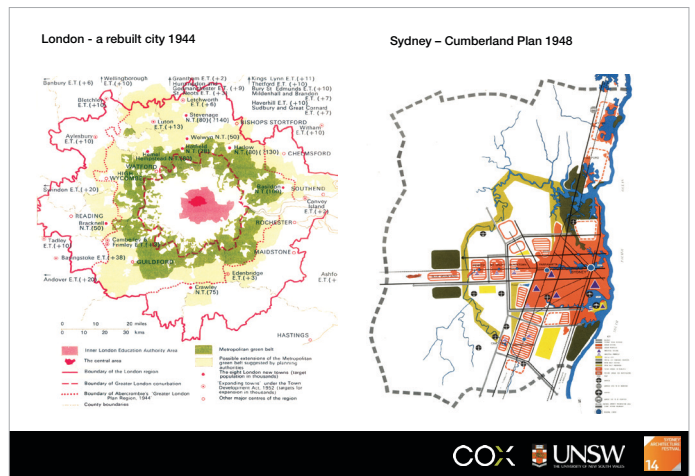
Access, again.

Transport is not a panacea (there’s only so many roads you can build). The challenge is to reduce the distance between where people live, and where they work. Which means more jobs locally. To Donegan, architects play a role in giving public confidence to accommodating more people, more business and more jobs in a way that is respectful of people living in an area.

So if the economy has a geography, what gave Sydney it’s (urban) geography?

Well, according to Bob Meyer, had the Parramatta river been a fraction deeper and wider, it would have been the capital which, like London, sits protected up the river from the open harbour. But the keels of the tall ships kissed the bed of the river (at what’s now called Kissing Point); limiting the ease with which goods could be delivered to a site known by local aboriginals as ‘Burra matta’ the place of eels.

In 1828 more people lived in the west near the fresh water and fertile soil of Parramatta than in the Sydney Cove development. So what changed? Well, only a few days after the Prime Minister delivered the Bradfield Oration – celebrating Bradfield’s engineering vision for Sydney, Meyer credits the advent of rail — in particular building the city circle line — that shifted growth from central station (where the department stores and rail combined to funnel in goods and customers), northwards to what we now know as the CBD.



Philip Graus, *Sydney in an international context and continual evolution — but how do we get it right?*

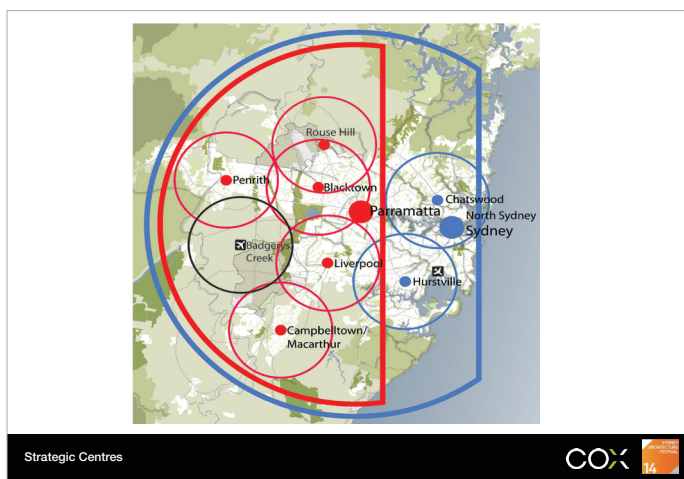
Shortly after, the County of Cumberland plan (1948) borrowed from the 1944 London plan that saw the future in new town development beyond a green belt. In the Cumberland Plan, Parramatta was the edge of the development (the green belt was located to its west). This 1948 plan projected a whopping 2.5m people in greater metropolitan Sydney by 1981. Only, we reached that by 1961. So a new plan was needed. But this time, the conceptual moves were not about concentric radial development, but connecting up the rings with a five fingered plan borrowed from Copenhagen. Development was planned like a ‘beads on a string’ (or finger) — new town development along rail lines that were essentially extensions of the original 19th C rail network.

Sydney’s history is characterised by ambitious growth projections — all of which are generally met a decade or two earlier than predicted. So, today’s projection of around 7m people by 2050 might just be a reality by 2030. Double the population in around 15 years time.

What conceptual model do we reach for to make this work? We’re talking 4m people in the west of the city alone. To Meyer, Parramatta is a pivot. Seven sub regions are clustered around their own town centres. Sub regions provide the magnet for 500,000 people and ensure a sustainable base for hospitals, universities and the things we all need.

Yes, this is planning for ‘a big Sydney’ as Philip Graus goes on to call it. This is no longer the stuff of pop-ups and food trucks to cater for excess demand, but of long term planning with sweeping Acts of parliament — those things that have the tendency to move big chunks of capital around. Assumed in the model are the better parks, better public transport, better things to do. All the more critical as Sydney’s growth rate is three times that of China. So is this just the stuff of statutory planning and Acts of parliament? Well, no

actually. It's the stuff of big thinking. Like PlaNYC whose targets are about ensuring everyone will be within five minutes of green space. Or the big thinking behind Enrico Moretti's book 'The new Geography of jobs' which is mapping the disruptive landscape of work.



Philip Graus, *Sydney in an international context and continual evolution — but how do we get it right?*

Whatever the model of Sydney's growth, Meyer's historical narrative tells us that it's worth investing some time in the means and methods we use to devise and deliver the next phase of growth. Timely, then for Urban Growth's Head of Strategy, Julian Frecklington to 'reveal' what was billed as a 'new approach' to urban renewal.

UNDERSTANDING THE CITY LIFECYCLE

The graphic is titled 'City Transformation Lifecycle' — represented by a neat sequencing of phases defined as 'thinking', 'funding', 'building' and 'living' cities. The recurring message is that development doesn't start with a master plan. Well, maybe not. But it can't happen without one either. To be fair, Frecklington's point is that a single site — even as large as The Bays, or Central to Eveleigh — can't hope to be the answer to wicked problems that can only be addressed across a whole range of sites and precincts. So a process is needed to capture aspirations and intelligence that might help design financial instruments as much as the streets and parks and buildings that make building the precincts possible. And, importantly, preserving space for stewardship of the precinct as it slowly evolves.

Informing this lifecycle is a creditable take on design thinking applied at city scale. Frecklington rattles off the characteristics of design capability — convergent and divergent thinking, collaboration, the importance of the open question, and iteration.



Julian Frecklington, *Good design for good growth*

Frecklington's presentation coincided with a more general release of press on the City Transformation Lifecycle by Urban Growth NSW — the gist of which was about the aim of creating communities; which starts with the thinking, moves to the funding, then the building and ends with the living city before starting the transformation cycle all over again.

Urban Growth NSW's challenge is huge. Some estimates place The Bays alone as a \$30bn proposition over 30 years. The point is that if we view this as a civil engineering or real estate question alone we fail. The message from all speakers at the Colloquium was that infrastructure can have — must have — a civic dimension. An essential design quality rooted in the individual's experience of the city

Architect, landscape architect and principal of Hassell, Ross de la Motte, framed his own position on the opportunity for Sydney's infrastructure spend by recalling the author Charles Sheppard's view that the Victorian rail stations were the cathedrals of the new age. It's a reminder that infrastructure can transform an age, not just a place. More, that great civic infrastructure is essential to those collective daily experiences that rehearse habits and create culture and community. And because we're all human, we prefer these collective experiences to be intuitive to use; generous with natural daylight and a 'flex' to common user behaviour. Like the tramlines laid in to European streets that allow cyclists and pedestrians to move easily. Where infrastructure is integrated in to generous public space — not removed or separated from it.

90% of all arts funding is spent in one LGA. Western Sydney has 30% of the population yet receives 3% of arts funding. #saf14
Shaun Carter @ShaunCarter70



Jess Scully @jessaroo

Poulet's "green armature": using locally-distinctive green infrastructure as the catalyst for the coherent metropolis. #thecolloquium



MOMENTS OF TRANSCENDENCE

So is there a checklist for this? What's the difference between infrastructure that integrates, and infrastructure that divides? de la Motte credits what he calls the 'moment of transcendence' — a combination of good patrons and leadership (leadership that's able to ably contest the cabinet table and corral transport, treasury, planning, premier). Vision backed by political smarts.



Ross de la Motte, *Introducing design excellence to every part of transport infrastructure*

This builds on a self evident causal logic presented by Cox Architecture's David Holm — one that drew the link between the transport mode, and the infrastructure it birthed.

Prior to the 18th C, boats were the mode and harbours were the infrastructure. In the 19th C, the rise of trains gave us stations. In the 20th C, cars gave us freeways. Now in the 21st C, planes need airports. But can an airport be a good neighbour? Most airports we're familiar with are islands that require us to manoeuvre around them. Thanks to noise; risk of accident; dangerous gases, fumes and security; 3km long runways and hectares of turning circle, clearances and logistics layovers, airports have tended to require (and still do). Not to mention the proliferation of discount stores and fast food 'pad sites' (and Ikea stores in some cities) that generally ensure airport precincts are places to move through quickly. Built for speed, not comfort.

Holm's question was — will Sydney's second airport be an island or will it be 'stitched in'? How can airports be stitched in to the fabric of their city surroundings? Public transport helps. Links to taxis, heavy and light rail that in turn deliver users to centres of activity; work and meeting, cultural venues and learning.

SEEING THE CITY AS A SYSTEM

But all this assumes we view the city as a system — the opening line from NSW Government Architect Peter Poulet. He too repeated concerns from Donegan and Graus on equity and fairness in a city with growing disparity between east and west. The difference is, Poulet sees the potential for the city to be seen as one great city with green infrastructure as the connectivity tissue — with the potential to bring amenity to those parts of the city previously lost to arterial roads and low value uses that are no longer viable. This green infrastructure is defined broadly, and includes networks not normally on the table in Australia's city-scale planning, including; waterways, streets trees, parks, squares and pathways. One could extend this further to include green roofs and walls that can help to cool the west where, as Meyer reminded us, the fresh, cool water once ran over fertile soils more recently lost under car yards, big box retail, 'employment zones' and logistics yards.



Peter Poulet, *From the Government Architect's workbench*

Some, of course, see the large land uses in the middle ring as an opportunity to reshape the city. Where the challenge of delivering mid-rise, medium density is often about aggregating the many small, privately held homes in the locations that matter, big land uses like shopping centres and bulky goods sites represent where big wins can be found. Finding the right sites can avoid what Rod Simpson calls 'pressure cooking' the city. By this he means the over-intensification of fewer centres which Simpson fears comes from group think on the rise of the knowledge-intensive class which, he says, "sounds a bit like those who trade value but don't create it".

Simpson couldn't be called a de-centralist. Evidence of where jobs will be in Sydney's future shows that despite much of the population growth being in western Sydney, major western centres like Penrith will still only have 1% of the Sydney jobs. This means that without a major industry innovation plan as part of a metro

Jess Scully @jessaroo

Simpson: We have a suburban conception of the city. We've failed to imagine or support alternative modes of living. #thecolloquium

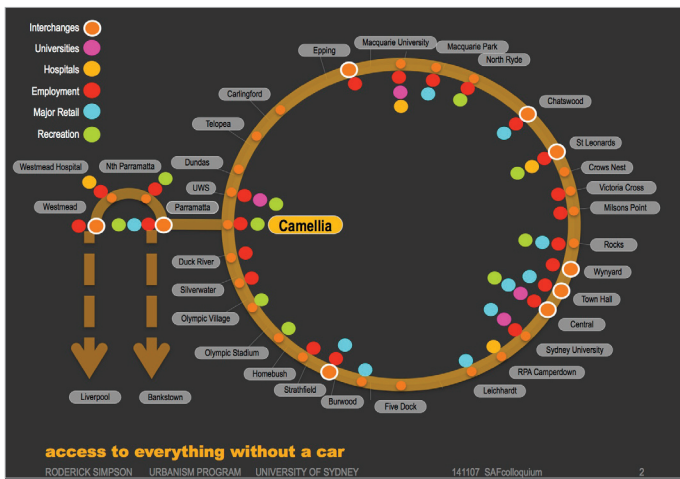


strategy, growth will see more people moving across the city — not quite the city of access we aspire to.

Simpson's no enemy of density. But it's clear that density isolated to specific sites will only deliver limited results. But with a history of plans that are all increments of each other, what's a disruptive idea to kick thinking onto a genuinely new path?

THE REALLY BIG IDEA

Simpson says we should look to Tokyo's Yamanote line — an underground mass transit ring that connects Tokyo to super intense development along its path. Applied to Sydney, it would link the Sydney Cove CBD through Camellia, to Parramatta, and arcing back through Ryde to Sydney Cove. A vast metro not only to serve, but to drive the model of development in Sydney over the next 30 years.



Roderick Simpson, *Transport transformation*

A Sydney version of the Yamanote line would catalyse Camellia for 50,000 people in mid-rise communities by the river and with access to public transport. One in eight people in metropolitan Sydney would be linked to jobs without need for a car.

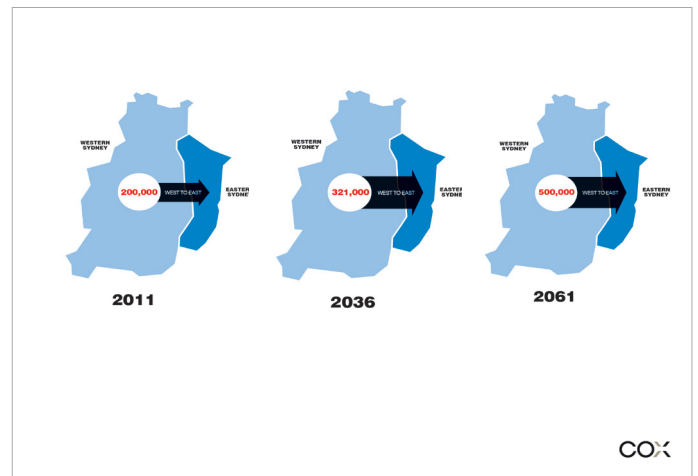
As Simpson puts it: If you could work, walk about, meet, talk, and be urban without having to travel; wouldn't you? It's not transport we want. It's access. And, as an aside, it's a rich and varied public domain with organic life that forgives the towers and the buildings. Part of that organic life is what Simpson terms 'urban flex' — the inevitable ebb and flow of commerce (shop closes, shop opens). It was this that prompted Simpson to exasperate "forget design excellence. Demand urban excellence!"

Challenged later on the costs of Simpson's Sydney Yamanote line model, Simpson rightly points out it's about long-term implementation, and costs are only part of the equation. The other is the potential value generated (and captured) by development made possible

by the certainty of long-term infrastructure delivery. Not just a road widening here or tram there (and the costs associated with gaps, shortfalls and duplication); but a 30-year underground mission to finally join north, east, south and west of the city via a shared mass transit line.

Sure this turns Sydney's city movement and urban infrastructure on its head. It's a strong, clear conceptual model off which the bus, car and taxi networks can hang. It's massively expensive but our disconnected transport planning is already measured in \$billions. But what this radical loop offers, is a rebalancing of the live/work equation across all points of the Sydney compass.

Why is this important for Sydney? Well, as David Borger points out, around 500,000 people move from west to east each day (300,000 move from east to west too, it has to be said). So while this means there's a nett figure of 200,000 people moving out of the west each day, the gross figure is important too.



David Borger, *Trains, planes, and smart jobs*

Movement of such numbers is part of the stress on streets, roads and motorways each day. It explains why transport planners see huge volumes of movement in their models (that, and the pragmatics of getting our kids to school — around 70% of which go by car). Borger sees the current plans for road and rail projects as 'widening the pipes'. But no matter how quickly we widen them, Borger thinks we'll continue to go backwards until Sydney sees itself as a single metropolitan city and places like Parramatta get a larger share of the cultural, social and other infrastructure that he sees currently being biased to only one or two local council areas. For him, it's not only business and jobs located outside the Sydney Cove CBD, but also flagship cultural buildings that provide an identity for the west in the way the Sydney Opera House has for Sydney Cove. Bilbao is mentioned too. As is East London's regeneration.

Peter Salhani @pjsalhani

Community ownership of projects can be the enabler: it's our job to use our democratic right to engage. @helenlochhead #thecolloquium



To this short list, Helen Lochhead (Adjunct Professor University of Sydney and Assistant NSW Government Architect) adds the sustained leadership of New York mayor, Mike Bloomberg and the successful baton pass from Ken Livingstone to Boris Johnson. Vision, leadership and continuity are recurring themes to Lochhead. Presenting research from ten cities around the world, Lochhead cites lessons with examples — all of which resonate for Sydney. Including;

1. **The significance of vision** (like Bloomberg's greener, greater New York reflected in objectives, targets and measures found in PlaNYC)
2. **Aligning political will** — seen in London's ambition to derive a legacy from their 2012 Olympic Games evident in continuity beyond electoral cycles
3. **Lead by example** — Chicago's Millennium Park as the exemplar which, like the Highline is as much as testament to financial models as to design and place management. Delivering the park might have cost \$430m but 50% of that was sourced from private funds. Not a model Sydney is used to.
4. **Importance of incentives** — seen in the lesser known enabling mechanisms that brought New York's Highline to life- carrots and sticks that included increased development yield on adjacent sites in return for 30% affordable housing and design excellence
5. **Big ideas, small bites** — which the start-up sector would call 'launch to learn' — jumping into small or temporary prototypes in order to prime the implementation of the long term
6. **Harness opportunity of major events** — again like leveraging something like the Olympics as the spark for long-term city regeneration in East London. Here, public good and public value must be the drivers. Be aware that big projects can also silo the benefit, like the London superstores that benefited most from funnelling crowds from transport infrastructure through retail developments rather than public space.
7. **Work with what exists** — while planning the new, take the chance to improve on what is there, as part of delivering a broader strategy. Examples from London's regeneration — like Hackney Wick and Barking Town Centre — part of the Mayor's 100 public spaces program.
8. **Value nature in the city as an essential part of renewal and regeneration.** Sweden's Hammerby aims to be one of the world's highest profile examples of sustainable urban development and, as a result, is visited by 10,000 decision makers and specialists each year from around the world.
9. **Tap into community aspirations and needs** — and recognise that ongoing engagement is needed which takes time & investment in community.

How and where do these come together, and what would it mean for Sydney if they came together here? Well, for Lochhead the parallel is in the Lower Lea River Park — a 40km long linear green walk, cycleway and connected green space as part of urban regeneration, housing and commercial development that is realised through genuine collaborative ownership of multiple agencies, local councils and community groups.

Think of the possibilities from the Bays Precinct to Sydney Olympic Park through Silverwater and Camellia to Parramatta and beyond...imagine the complement to the natural assets of Sydney's privileged east — a Sydney 'green grid' linking Sydney's south-west open spaces and waterways such as the Georges, Cooks and Parramatta rivers.

Common throughout the presentations and panel discussions was agreement that infrastructure can be transformational and regenerative, but only if driven by big strategic thinking, supported by the mapping of evidence in scenarios intended to test the many alternative futures for Sydney. This is less about seeing architecture as the business of making buildings (although that's part of it), and more about applying design thinking to the question of a city's essential urban architecture. Just as a building comprises elements like walls, floors, doorways and stairs — a city has elements like roads, streets and open space, housing, schools and hospitals. And just as a building can be designed to work, so too can a city.

Sydney's infrastructure pipeline is beginning to shake with the sheer volume of investment coming at us. The potential for this pipeline to shape a greater global city is immense. This is not the challenge, but our opportunity. The challenge is that its potential to carve, divide and isolate is just as great. The choices we make now will determine whether Sydney really does grow bigger and bigger, or bigger and better.

More architects coming out as westies.

Refreshing. #thecolloquium

Jennifer Crawford @OurNewHomecoach

