

Episode 5 - Sustainable Cities

This is Radio Australia. Hello, I am Barry Clarke and welcome to 'Sustainable Cities' our series focusing on challenges for cities in the Asia Pacific.

In this program, Melbourne, capital city of the southern mainland state of Victoria.

JIM GARDNER: The gold rush after gold was discovered in 1851 allowed the founding fathers of Melbourne to develop on a scale they could not have hoped for, or even imagined. It gave them the money to build in sandstone, in bluestone, in slate, they used the best materials and created edifices, which still remain and give the permanence and solidity to Melbourne today.

CLARKE: Like most Australian cities, Melbourne is less than 200 years old. Today it is regarded as one of the world's most liveable cities.

MARY DELAHUNTY: What we have in this city is a vibrancy around sport, around culture, around fashion, around food, around ideas. We are attracting the knowledge workers who could, for example, live almost anywhere and work almost anywhere in the world. They are coming here for that intangible, it is lifestyle, it is ease of moving around.

CLARKE: Mary Delahunty, former Minister for Planning in the State Government.

JIM GARDNER: Melbourne has developed very much as an American style city rather than an English style city.

CLARKE: Jim Gardner referring to the grid system of wide and narrow streets planned for central Melbourne by the surveyor Robert Hoddle in 1837.

I asked Jim Gardner how common the grid system was at the time.

JIM GARDNER: It was very much in line with current thinking and new ideas in city planning.

The grid system has had huge advantage for Melbourne, it has allowed the tram system to run effectively, the minor laneways, which were a particular innovation as they allowed servicing of the major buildings and the houses off the main streets.

CLARKE: Now it is interesting that you say it is more like an American city because of course many visitors consider it a very European style city?

JIM GARDNER: A lot of European cities though still have the planning system, the layout, the streets of their medieval origins, and this is a planned city in the way that a place like Pittsburgh or Manhattan is. And that has led to a different pattern of development, of wider streets, of taller buildings being possible, but yes it still retains a lot of the character of a European city. It is not by chance that this is called the Paris end of Collins Street.

CLARKE: As we heard, it was the discovery of gold in central Victoria in the 1850's that resulted in a tremendous growth in the size and importance of Melbourne. And the building boom that followed left a rich legacy for the city.

Jim Gardner is the Conservation Manager with the National Trust, an organisation that works towards conserving and protecting our heritage.

JIM GARDNER: Well at the moment we are at the Paris end of Collins Street, so named because of the Parisian atmosphere of cafes, of the grand buildings, of the boulevard of plane trees that makes this a very convivial part of the city. We have the Treasury building, built of impressive

sandstone with a bluestone base and it illustrates the power and wealth of Melbourne in the late 1850s. We have Parliament House, which is one of the grandest and most impressive parliaments in any of the Australian states or territories. There is also the extremely grand and prestigious Windsor Hotel, where royalty, presidents and other dignitaries have stayed throughout the years. This is also the heart of the establishment; many of the gentlemen's clubs were established in this area, in this part of Collins Street.

CLARKE: And as we look over here, No. 1 Collins Street in fact, an old building in the front but a brand new building behind it.

JIM GARDNER: Yes that is typical of this area. It has been substantially redeveloped. We have lost many historic buildings in this part of town, but somehow we have retained at least some of the heritage and some of the atmosphere of the Paris end of Collins Street.

CLARKE: The 1850s, the discovery of gold, by the 1880s this really was a significant world-class city.

JIM GARDNER: This was one of the largest cities in the British Empire and certainly one of the wealthiest cities in the world at the time. Not only did the gold rush create that wealth, but the 1880s land boom that followed it created many millionaires, paid for the great Toorak mansions, and the commercial and public buildings we see around us.

CLARKE: And is that where the term came from, "marvellous Melbourne"?

JIM GARDNER: Yes, it is. That term "marvellous Melbourne" was coined by a visiting English journalist who was so impressed with what he saw and the grandeur of the city.

CLARKE: Jim why are these old buildings important?

JIM GARDNER: Well these buildings I believe, and it is not just the buildings, it is the parks, it is the trees, it is the public art, these give us our sense of place. These ground us, these allow us to feel part of the city, and they create our collective memory, which we hand on from generation to generation. If everything changed dramatically all the time, we would not feel part of this wonderful city.

TRAM CONDUCTOR: Next stop is William Street, anyone for the Aquarium? And we're heading towards the Docklands, the new residential and business heart of Melbourne.

CLARKE: I am standing now on the waters edge and a decade or more ago I would not have been able to stand here. But like many cities around the world, Melbourne is finally embracing its old port area. What was a 'no go' area of the city, is now developing into a new residential business and commercial district. The area's called appropriately, 'Docklands'. And with me is Sally Gibson from Vic Urban, who is developing Docklands.

Sally can you put this area into some context for us in relation to what we might call old Melbourne?

SALLY GIBSON: This area had been locked off from the city and from the people for 150 years. We could not even see we had a water body here unless you actually worked on the docks. It comprises of 164 hectares, which compares with the old city of Melbourne, which is 160 hectares. So we are essentially doubling the size of the city of Melbourne. We have basically extended the Melbourne city grid street system, we have brought trams with those streets, and we have also brought other transport options, such as bike paths, ferry systems and of course there is car access.

CLARKE: Given that we have embraced our port a little bit later than many other cities, what lessons were we able to learn?

SALLY GIBSON: We learnt some really critical lessons. For example, from a waterfront development in Baltimore in the States we learnt the value of having wide public waterfronts. Baltimore put a 99-foot perimeter around their development, and we have repeated that, we have a 30-metre wide on average public promenade around seven kilometres of this waterfront. And I think as years go by people will see that as really the key to the success of this new precinct.

CLARKE: Another thing that I know is important in this area is the large amount of public art?

SALLY GIBSON: That is a really innovative part of this development. Basically developers are required to contribute one per cent of their development investment into public art. Now when you are talking about \$9-billion worth of private sector investment, you are talking about \$90 million of public art. Now that is a lot of public art.

CLARKE: Well Sally, you have mentioned one of the new forms of transport and that is ferries. We are not so used to them here in Melbourne, but you are going to take us on a ferry now?

SALLY GIBSON: Yeah, the ferry system is a new transport option for Melburnians. But I think as the Docklands project grows, the people will see the opportunities in that, and the enjoyment that comes from travelling by boat.

I think the innovative element that distinguishes this development from many others of its kind around the world is the way it has been financially structured, in the sense that the private sector is fully funding the development under management of government, but all the money that builds the whole of Docklands is coming from the private sector or will be paid for eventually by the private sector.

Over here on our right we are looking at the new National Australia Bank office campus. National Australia Bank is Australia's largest bank and it has consolidated 23 different smaller sites in the main CBD of the city into this one large campus. It is not a skyscraper as you can see, it is an eight-storey building and it is called a ground-scraper, very much open plan, lots of light, lots of natural ventilation, it is a four-star energy rating, which means it is very energy efficient. It is a very wide building. It is not the sort of building you can build in an old city anywhere these days because you simply cannot consolidate enough titles to be able to do it. So these waterfront developments give cities the opportunity to actually spread out and to do some new things that can help change and modernise corporate culture. And that is what the National Australia Bank building is doing down here.

CLARKE: And as we drive past on the ferry, we can see obviously some employees. It is about lunchtime, they are sitting out at tables and chairs right by the waterside, so obviously a very pleasant environment for them. And I must say it is a rather funky, if that is the word, building, it is very colourful, it is reminiscent of a Rubik's cube.

SALLY GIBSON: It is very funky, that is the word. And the colours around it are really inspired by the containers, shipping containers. The other important aspect of the colour is that we try and make colour very much a part of the new Melbourne, the new Melbourne at Docklands is colourful compared to the more subdued colours of the old city. So we are trying to create a distinction in what we are doing down here with the old city, but complementing it as well.

FEMALE TOURIST: Docklands has very great potential of being a very good area for living and also for entertainment and for commercial. It's great.

MALE TOURIST: I visited Melbourne a few years ago and coming here today there is a lot of things happening. Certainly the skyline of Melbourne is changing, it is going to be a much more confident city, with the dockside development a new dimension I would say.

FEMALE TOURIST: I think it is a great city and I love it very much. I have been here three times this year.

CLARKE: What do you like about it?

FEMALE TOURIST: Well, I think mainly about the friendly people, the food, atmosphere and new architecture that is being evolved at the moment.

MALE TOURIST: Oh I like Melbourne so much, I think Melbourne is a very lively city, it is very safe, it is very clean. I like Federation Square as well. The architecture is very different from the rest of the world, like I think it is very unique. I think I want to come back one day.

CLARKE: This is 'Sustainable Cities' on Radio Australia and this program looking at the Australian city of Melbourne.

JOHN WESTLAND: I am about to take you for a ride through Melbourne's streets as I wend my way to work.

Prapat Chongsanguan is the Governor of the Mass Rapid Transit Authority of Thailand, the MRTA. In July 2004, the first ever underground rail line was opened in the Thai capital. Twenty kilometres long, the line runs north to south through the centre of the city and has 18 stations. I asked Khun Prapat what the opening of the line meant for Bangkok and its people.

CLARKE: Radio Australia colleague, John Westland, on his preferred method of transport around the city, bicycle.

JOHN WESTLAND: One of the great things about cycling in Melbourne is not only is it relatively flat and relatively well laid out, but cyclists are increasingly seen as an important part of the transport landscape. And more and more provision is being made for cyclists with segregated roadways and pathways on the main roads.

As we get on to one of the main thoroughfares through the city, Swanston Street, that very distinctive clatter that you can hear is one of the things that does set Melbourne apart, it is the trams. The inner part of Melbourne is very well served with public transport radiating out from the central business district. We have suburban rail network and we also have the tram network, which remains a very distinctive part of Melbourne's character.

On my right is Flinders Street Railway Station, the main suburban centre, and on the left is Federation Square, a new community hub of Melbourne.

Well at this point we turn at this corner past the Arts precinct of Melbourne, turn off here to the ABC office, the workplace.

CLARKE: Since the middle of the 1990's there has been a growing trend of people moving back to live in the inner suburbs, or even the city itself. High-rise apartment blocks in Docklands and other inner city areas have dramatically altered the skyline. In spite of this, like other Australian cities, Melbourne is characterised by its urban sprawl.

Throughout the 1900's with no shortage of land, and as its citizens aspired to the great Australian

dream of home ownership, more and more new suburbs were created by pushing the boundaries of the city. The result is that Melbourne, with a population around 3.5 million and growing, is among the least densely populated cities in the world, but this model of development is not sustainable.

MARY DELAHUNTY: If we continue to sprawl out right down the Mornington Peninsula for example, we are moving residential sub-divisions into an area that is prized for its environmental, tourism and agricultural significance.

CLARKE: Former State Planning Minister Mary Delahunty, oversaw the implementation of Melbourne 2030 - a 30 year development plan to manage the future growth of the city.

MARY DELAHUNTY: This is seen as a garden city, it is the garden state, it is a very strong identification as one of the world's most liveable cities. That is not our tag, that is the Economist and International Jurors assessment of Melbourne, the most liveable city. So this is a plan to manage that population growth. What are the projections? An extra million people over the next 30 years. You put that into context, that is another Adelaide, that is several Canberras. It is not just the raw figures though that are projected to be managed by a city of this size, it is the changing demographic. So this is a plan not just to manage the raw numbers, but to respond to the diversity of housing choices that increasingly Melbournians are seeking.

CLARKE: One of the key principles of the plan was to establish an urban boundary for the city, but it also identifies what is called 'activity centres' - areas in suburban Melbourne that can be further developed.

MARY DELAHUNTY: We have a changing society, we have an ageing society, we have shrinking families, what that means is that there are more and more people who are living in households of one or two people. As people age they do not necessarily want to go out to a nursing home out in the far reaches of Melbourne, they want to be close to their family. So, this is about protecting the existing suburbs by providing more housing choice in appropriate locations, which are already in existence, and which we would encourage around transport nodes in particular and around services that are close to where you live.

ROBYN LEESON: I think the greatest challenge for us in Melbourne is to change the way we view water. We have access to three times as much water as your average Dutch resident and access to about 170 times the amount of water as the average Jordanian resident, so we have always treated water as something that is a given.

CLARKE: Robyn Leeson is Manager of Environmentally Sustainable Development with the Melbourne City Council.

ROBYN LEESON: Australian cities generally we have really great access to high quality drinking water that is treated through our protected catchments, so we are used to using drinking quality water for just about everything, including drinking. Whereas there are other cities around the world and particularly through Asia where they are much more accustomed to drinking recycled water, and adopting this notion of water being fit for purpose, so if it is fit to drink then you drink it. If it is not fit to drink you use it for other things.

CLARKE: Australia is the driest continent on the planet but you would never know it by our usage of water, especially in the cities.

ROBYN LEESON: We definitely in the past had a very European view of how we manage our water; that water was plentiful, cheap and we would use it for all sorts of purposes. And now we have moved into more an era of scarcity, with coming off seven, nearly eight years of prolonged

drought. We are starting to see water more as a fit for purpose kind of notion, and by that I mean you use the type and quality of water for a purpose that suits it. So you do not use drinking water to wash your car, you do not use drinking water to water your garden.

We also pursue the management of our water resources in a really fragmented way. So we have departments or agencies or ministers with responsibility for water, rivers, fisheries, land, agriculture, and all of those things are in a particular water catchment. And the fish do not necessarily understand that their environment is being managed by half a dozen different agencies, and neither do the grasslands understand that. We fragment the world to make sense to us, but then it makes it difficult for us to manage that. So in managing water resources, we have multiple agencies that need to be able to coordinate their activities, and that is a real challenge for most cities.

CLARKE: Melbourne City Council has been proactive in curbing the use of water. One is a target to reduce water consumption by 40 per cent by the year 2020. I suggested to Robyn Leeson that the target seems a bit ambitious.

ROBYN LEESON: By setting an ambitious target you actually create more opportunities and you can leapfrog into greater savings. By saying well, we are going to save five per cent or 10 per cent, that is really just shaving off business as usual, and so people will not necessarily change their business-as-usual type practices, they will just conserve a little bit. By saying you want a 40 or 50 per cent reduction, that means you actually leap into new technologies, and that drives much greater savings than you would otherwise have. And we have been comfortable with setting such targets for things like energy conservation as well, and it drives a different way of thinking about your environment when you do that.

CLARKE: Innovative ideas include mining the water of sewers to water our parks and gardens. This is achieved by drilling down to the sewers and installing a small treatment facility on top. But the council is piloting another program for residents called, 'Green Saver'.

ROBYN LEESON: We have a relationship with the Master Plumbers Association, and they have a program called 'Green Plumbers', where they have actually trained plumbers to be more skilled in terms of advice on saving water and energy. So, as part of that program, you could have a plumber come to your house and do a quick audit of your water and your energy consumption in your home. So they would get a long list of things they could do around their home to save energy and water. And they could actually employ the plumber to do some retro-fitting of different appliances in the home if that is what they wanted to do, or go all the way to having, say, a water tank or a grey water recycling system installed.

CLARKE: Robyn Leeson. Water and energy conservation are increasingly on planning agendas. Melbourne 2030 includes the development of a new model suburb. Mary Delahunty again.

MARY DELAHUNTY: It is being built entirely on sustainability principles, so there is a five-star energy rating and that is around electricity and siting, saving electricity and power and third pipe plumbing. Third pipe is plumbing to recycle used water. There is technology that can be built into new homes or can be retrofitted which allows your waste water from the kitchen to go out onto the garden, if you have a garden, sometimes to be returned for use in the toilet. So the third pipe concept is being used now quite extensively in some of our newer buildings. We are driving that through the planning portfolio, and what is marvellous is the response of the community.

SFX: Football crowd.

STEVE MONAGHETTI: I think everyone who's come to Melbourne and Victoria will know that the crowds here have an exceptional knowledge of sport, and when you are one of their own, it is even more exceptional and obviously to run in front of a home crowd, the support here has always been fantastic.

CLARKE: Distance runner and four-time Olympian, Steve Monaghetti, now chairman of the Victorian Institute of Sport. This elite training academy is in the heart of Melbourne's sports precinct.

STEVE MONAGHETTI: We are standing right on the redeveloped surface that was the swimming pool of the 1956 Olympic Games would you believe.

CLARKE: We are just a short stroll from the city centre here, the commercial heart of Melbourne.

STEVE MONAGHETTI: You can walk from the commercial district to this sporting precinct that is just growing almost by the day. Obviously we have the MCG, but surrounding that we have the Tennis Centre, home of the Australian Open, we have Olympic Park, main venue of athletics track and field. Around that we have got football grounds, we have got the Tan [running track] just across the road. If people would jog from the city, they would go down to the Tan and run around there maybe in their lunch hour, and that gets used 24 hours a day. So we certainly have a plethora of sporting facilities and ovals.

CLARKE: The roar of the crowd on Grand Final day at the city's best-known stadium, the Melbourne Cricket Ground, better known as the MCG - the jewel in the city's sporting crown.

STEVE MONAGHETTI: Yes, the MCG is one of the world's great stadiums, absolutely no doubt about that and to have it in such a central location in a city like Melbourne is a true asset. And there is no doubt that that is one of the reasons why the other sporting venues have popped up around it. As well as being the venue where most of our major sporting events happen, it also has a museum there and a hall of fame, and a lot of statues around it signifying some of our great sporting people. So if anything happens in sport in Melbourne, it is normally at the MCG.

CLARKE: Well this city prides itself on being one of the great sporting cities of the world. Is that a legitimate claim do you think?

STEVE MONAGHETTI: We have really only spoken about the facilities, but the one great thing about those facilities and why they are so famous is because they get utilised so well. I mean you can have the greatest facilities in the world but if people are not using them and going to them, then they do not get that, what I like to term, I normally call it 'X factor', maybe we should be calling it 'S factor', sport factor. And it really does just highlight how fanatical Melburnians are about their sport. They will go and watch anything, if you had fly racing at the MCG they would go there. And now sport is just... it is not something we see as exceptional, we just see it as part of our culture.

As you go out into the suburbs, they are linked by river trails, football fields and a number of indoor swimming pools and indoor basketball multi-purpose stadiums. So the spread always includes infrastructure that will allow people in the community to use sporting facilities, because as I say, it is very much a social part of the fabric of Melbourne.

CLARKE: And there is lots more in sports mad Melbourne, from the Formula One Grand Prix, to the nation's richest horse race, the race that stops a nation, the Melbourne Cup.

This series is produced by Sue Slamen and Barry Clarke, from Radio Australia.