

Integration of Central Business District Activity and Transport

MELBOURNE,
AUSTRALIA

In 1986, Melbourne was a city, roughly the size of Mexico City, with a population of 3 million people. Nevertheless, fewer than 700 people lived within the Central Business District's (CBD) 3 square kilometers. Today, over 36,000 residents live in Melbourne's three CBD neighborhoods. Often referred to as the world's most livable city, Melbourne provides valuable lessons for any city seeking to reinvigorate its downtown core.

Project overview

As decentralisation and flight to the suburbs reduced the CBD's daytime population, and large tracts of land lay vacant, Melbourne's urban core was hollowing out. A national recession, significant budget constraints, and a slump in the CBD office market led to a radical program to reinvent Melbourne's CBD. In recent decades, a number of projects and initiatives have focused on how best to use the 'spare' capacity of road space. With over 230 laneways in the CBD, almost all now have at least one café, restaurant, or entertainment venue, increasing the city's appeal as a tourist destination. The overall strategy has deliberately encouraged land owners to think creatively about how they can use space including the laneways at the rear of their properties. The city has also sought to make high quality pedestrian environments a priority in the last 20 years, converting over 35 hectares of road asphalt for pedestrian use. More than 20 shared traffic zones, a 1,100 meter pedestrian mall and an 8 hectare park have also been created in the CBD.

Results and impact

A number of projects over the last 30 years, including the landmark Postcode 3000, Federation Square, Swanston Walk and laneway activation programs have worked towards reversing the trend of

decentralisation and integration of business, cultural, and education assets in the most transport-rich environment. AI fresco dining has taken over footpaths, which have been widened into former traffic lanes. In 1983 there were two outdoor cafes and there are now more than 600. Melbourne has become renowned for its laneways, the CBD economy has grown as a result and the average visitor stays additional nights in order to explore more. Travel in the CBD is more efficient, safe, and convenient than ever and the higher density clustering of activity has enabled the greater agglomeration of economies to be achieved. Transport has been integral to much of the change as planners have sought to encourage and prioritise pedestrian activity. Programmes have focused on the most efficient modes – cycling, walking, public transport – coupled with ever increasing residential and employment densities. The density of land use means many trips can be significantly shorter while more economic activity can be sustained in the same geographic area. Coupled with improvements to public transport and cyclist infrastructure, transport efficiency in the CBD has increased significantly.

Enablers

The integration of projects provided consistent, incremental application of specific initiatives aimed at making the CBD more pleasant for people to live, work, and play in. The focus has been on achieving tangible outcomes that break down old stereotypes and reimagine the CBD as the 'place to be'. A number of key enablers can be attributed to the transformation of the CBD area. Firstly, recognition that pedestrians fuel the CBD economy allowed planners to focus on creating an attractive, stimulating environment to prolong interest and encourage spending. Secondly, personal leadership from individuals at the municipal council, specifically in the areas of urban design and transport, were crucial in making a number of interconnected projects happen. Lastly, rigorous data collection has proved vital in informing debates and shaping solutions to the CBD's urban development needs.

