

# PARTICIPATION PROCESS AND CHANGE: NEGOTIATING PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN METROPOLITAN PLANNING IN THE A.C.T.

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## **Abstract**

The National Capital Authority (NCA) has voluntarily implemented its own protocol for public participation. While many of the NCA's projects concern works approval for small developments, the NCA also develops sophisticated and extensive public consultation processes for projects that concern strategic metropolitan planning issues that impact on Canberra's future development. This paper reports on the NCA's consultation processes which have uncovered a literate, interested and engaged public whose participation has contributed to metropolitan planning policy.

Recent reviews into parking in the Parliamentary Zone and surrounding areas, and the provision of landscape spaces in the city produce very different objectives. Yet they share a common outcome, that is, the consultation process has generated meaningful public commentary on complex issues facing city planners concerned with transport, density and city form. These reviews also highlight the ongoing dilemma faced by cities. Forty-five years ago, Christopher Alexander argued that "cities are millions of people's attempts to reconcile their desire for access and their desire for land" (Alexander 1966).

This paper finds that planning with the community using web based formats is not only possible, but desirable when agencies seek to engage in higher order strategic and transdisciplinary thinking to gain a collective understanding of an issue. Such an approach also carries risks, but on balance, planning with the community produces a more enduring and acceptable outcome for producing policies to promote and develop a more resilient city. The challenge has been to find ways to make engagement meaningful to an otherwise dispersed public voice.

Public participation

Planning law

Metropolitan governance

Metropolitan strategic planning

## INTRODUCTION

Cities present some of the most critical and compelling challenges of our time. Critical, because humans are collectively grappling with the concept of accommodating more than half the world's population in urban settings, and compelling because the way problems are framed and issues resolved in each city is unique to its history, culture and *genius loci* or the local setting. Yet these challenges are strikingly similar across Australian cities. How do we house a growing and changing population? How should we transport ourselves, our goods, and the services we need to function? How do we maintain a decent standard of living and at the same time reduce our demand on resources so that future generations may enjoy the same standards that we aspire to? How do we adapt to global shifts in information, population, economic flows and climate change? In tackling these challenges, how do citizens make meaning of their city in a local, regional, national and international context? To conceptualise the challenges facing cities is to harness the knowledge deeply rooted in citizens' understanding of their city. This requires planners and policy makers to engage in a dialogue with the community about change. Yet consultation with community is often fraught. Vested interest groups may be able to deliver a focused message through well organised submissions, harnessing the goodwill of passionate advocates. Local media will often criticise agencies for their lack of community engagement and ferment public suspicion about political interests. Consultation has often been seen by the community as a regulatory requirement and nothing more than an exercise in informing the public of decisions already made.

Canberra, perhaps more than any other jurisdiction in Australia, faces a myriad of local organisations that are formed to try and influence the planning agenda in the face of change. These can start as single issue groups but often become proxy advocacy groups to challenge broader metropolitan scale strategic directions. It is often said that the Australian Capital Territory is populated by 330 000 planning experts.

## Background

The history of planning administration in Canberra has, for most of its existence, sat solely with the Federal Government. The evolution of planning, particularly in the post war years, is well documented (Troy 1981, Freestone 2000, Reid 2002). The recurring theme is the role of these statutory bodies in building the National Capital. This has been closely linked to the building of nationhood and national identity. The National Capital Development Commission (NCDC) was responsible for the development of Canberra between 1958 and 1989 and it exemplified the interdisciplinary focus of planning architecture and urban design (Troy 1981). At times, the NCDC was a well funded professional body internationally recognised for its achievements in planning and land administration. Yet the best intentions of those plans and ambitions, more often than not, have been subverted.

Twenty years on since the introduction of self-government, the city continues to navigate its way forward with two agencies responsible for planning and development. Up to a decade prior to self government, the NCDC was coming to terms with the division of responsibility and this brought into focus the question of what role should the Federal Government play, and how would they maintain the "national interest" on behalf of the Australian people. At that time the metropolitan Y-plan proposed a decentralised city to avoid urban congestion and take advantage of established transport corridors to encourage a polycentric city (NCDC 1972). Central to this plan was the recognition and incorporation of non-urban landscapes into the metropolitan plan. Known as the National Capital Open Space System (NCOSS), this landscape structure recognised the formal urban design elements that this type of natural or bush landscape had and continues to play in the form and function of Canberra. However recent studies have shown that the Canberra landscape, despite its advantages, is becoming increasingly unaffordable to maintain in its current form (SGS 2010).

Like many Australian cities, Canberra is also coming to terms with the stubbornly high levels of private automobile use. Urban design solutions have historically focused on increasing the density of the city to encourage a modal shift towards more sustainable transport. The ACT Government has committed to shifting the long held views of the local population to accept a more compact city in the pursuit of more sustainable and resilient urban form. The 2030 'Time to Talk' project, initiated by the ACT Chief Minister's Department, was an ambitious and well patronised community forum largely conducted online. While it professed to open dialogue about the future of the city, it had in its target, the low density nature of the city and the poor quality public transport system. Questions on the front page of the website asked the community- "Should Canberra be higher or wider?" and "What's your opinion on the Action Bus system?"

(ACTPLA 2010). These two themes were both persistent and interlinked, but perpetuated rather than interrogated the assumption that the city form and the transport habits of its citizens were inextricably linked. Today, the ACT Government's strategy for the future growth of public transport continues to rely on the assumption that consolidation would provide the densities required to make automobile use a choice rather than a necessity. Far from being a solution, the pursuit of consolidation has created problems for planners facing a significant community backlash to the erosion of their low density leafy lifestyle, a phenomenon persistent across many low density suburban areas in Australia (Dovey et al 2006). Politically this has made the pursuit of a more compact urban form and modal shift away from private vehicles ineffective policy. Most recently Mees (2010) argues that this coupling of public transport and urban form actually reinforces rather than solves the problems associated with low density and private car use. This presumption is a long held but fraught view in strategic planning circles. The silo thinking between urban design and transport planning creates barriers to addressing the achievable outcomes and this in part is due to the way knowledge is constructed in these fields (Mees 2010). Urban design is creative, holistic and complex, whereas transport planning is linear, mathematical and reductive. To assume that fixing one problem such as urban density to solve another such as public transport use has, for the most part, failed in Australia. To understand ways to approach these problems is to understand the nature of the problem itself (Brown 2009). One of these ways is to examine the nature of community engagement in the city.

Problems that are considered difficult to solve because of their inherent complexities, changes and contradictions, were termed 'wicked problems' in the 1960s by philosopher C. West Churchman and design theorist Horst Rittel. (Brown et al 2010). The central tenet of this paper is that many challenges facing Canberra, like all cities, are wicked problems.

As the transport example shows, there is no solution that can fix the problem, but rather, a need to engage in ongoing deliberations about what incentives and disincentives can be brought to the fore to initiate cultural change. The challenge remains; how does the community take ownership of the problems associated with change? To what extent are communities and individuals able or willing to provide ideas to resolve the problems rather than use their energies to mobilise and resist looking for a resolution?

The challenge facing the NCA was not merely to conduct reviews as a means to delineating land use boundaries or determining the correct mix of paid and free parking for employers working in the Parliamentary Zone and surrounding area. Undertaking these reviews also framed the role the NCA plays in meeting the challenges facing the city. Canberra is one of the lowest density cities for its size; its citizens enjoy some of the highest standards of living and exert the highest per capita demands on non-renewable energy in Australia. It also has one of the highest rates of civic engagement in the nation. Its citizens are more generous with their time and money, more engaged in local community groups, more likely to play sport, and more likely to participate in cultural activities (Leigh 2010). Part of the reason for this is that they have fewer family connections due to the transient nature of the workforce, but also they spend less time in the car than most other Australians – despite its reputation as a city designed for the automobile. The paradox of a healthy engaged community living unsustainable lives in an unsustainable city requires us to think creatively and ask different questions to address this as-yet unresolved dilemma. This paper explores the NCA's consultation processes undertaken in keeping with their Commitment to Community Engagement. It looks at how different approaches have engaged an interested public and stakeholders in debate about issues faced by the city.

## **THE NCA COMMITMENT TO COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

The NCA is well placed to engage in community dialogue about broad objectives concerning Canberra's metropolitan plan because of the federal government's statutory role in the strategic planning of the city. In theory, the NCA maintains the National Capital Plan (NCP) on behalf of the Australian people. In practice, it develops the city's metropolitan plan in a continuous if not fraught dialogue with the ACT Government through the ACT planning authority. Under legislation, the NCA is not required to formally consult with the community on many matters to do with its activities, and for this reason the NCP theoretically has considerable flexibility to implement change in the city. However, community engagement is considered an essential part of strategic planning and so the NCA has, over the years, undertaken consultation with varying degrees of success. In February 2010, the board of the NCA reasserted its approach to community engagement. (NCA 2010) This was done in light of a history of criticism of the authority in the past for its autocratic approach, but perhaps more telling was the board's desire to improve its performance through harnessing the community's capacity to enter into meaningful dialogue about complex strategic issues to do with the future of the city.

In February 2010, the Board reaffirmed its commitment to engaging with the community as part of its decision-making and acknowledged that meaningful community engagement and opportunity for third party contribution was essential for prudent decision-making. Today the Commitment to Community Engagement is part of the operational fabric of the NCA and serves three purposes. Firstly it improves the NCA's capacity to connect with the people of Canberra and the nation. Secondly it provides an action plan for community engagement within its core business activities and finally it formalises consultation requirements for planning and development approvals, and incorporates feedback and complaint handling procedures into one document. The features of the NCA's approach include various means of online and face to face communication. These include:

### **Web Based Tools**

Web based tools are increasingly used by planning authorities as the main format for community engagement. All state planning bodies encourage communication through a range of online tools. These formats may provide large volumes of data, but it remains to be seen how they translate into affecting change in decision making. The NCA home page contains public consultation notices and progress updates on infrastructure work and other online communication tools designed to provide accessible input from the community. The agency maintains an accessible information subscription service to ensure that interested and subscribed parties are informed of new or changed information. It also has a more dynamic portal called 'Have Your Say'. This provides a communication channel between NCA staff and the public. The NCA's 'Have Your Say' site encourages users to debate the merits of the projects in question, using various formats, including spot surveys, chat pages and voting tags on user comments. This format has seen a marked increase in dialogue between community groups and individuals by creating an online discussion, possibly because many individuals are used to social network sites such as Face book and are more comfortable with this form of dialogue. This is also a reflection of how, increasingly, daily transactions are carried out online.

In the past, organised community groups made lengthy submissions to the NCA at the end of a consultation period. Some of the more organised and well funded groups adopted strategies such as media and publicity campaigns to try and enhance the legitimacy of their submissions in order to sway policy in their favour. The design of these consultations did not allow content of these submissions to be subject to a more public airing during the process. The NCA has responded by not only encouraging open debate, but allowed staff to join into the discussion to help keep the conversation going. Importantly, the new form of open dialogue allows organised groups to post a summary of their views to place their opinion into the debate to test the legitimacy of their own submissions. This has resulted in a levelling of the playing field and given a voice to other groups and individuals in the community who do not normally get involved in such activities. It remains to be seen whether the traditional community organisations will continue to engage this way.

### **The public role of the NCA board**

The NCA Board is appointed to manage the Commonwealth's interest in Canberra as Australia's national capital on behalf of all Australians. The Board currently consists of a Chairman, a Chief Executive and three other members, all of whom are appointed by the Governor-General. The current Board includes built environment professionals, academics and administrators from a broad field. The Board is required to discharge its responsibilities with transparency and accountability, and with this in mind, publishes a record of each meeting on the NCA website. The Board members also attend the annual public forum and field questions from the audience.

### **Annual public forum**

Public consultation for development projects normally includes at least one public meeting with agency staff. Often, these have been poorly attended unless the project has been controversial. In these cases, disaffected citizens present persuasive arguments but don't tend to add anything new to that described in their written submissions. This has made community engagement concerning broader strategic discussion about the future development of the city difficult. The NCA has addressed this dilemma by hosting an annual public forum to provide opportunity for open engagement between itself, its stakeholders and the wider community. The Forum and pre-Forum publicity is designed to provide a framework to initiate discussion on matters relevant to the role of the NCA. The agenda focuses on strategic topics of interest to stakeholders and relevant to the future of the national capital.

In November 2009 the NCA held its inaugural annual public forum to begin an open dialogue about strategic planning in Canberra. The NCA invited members of the public to submit comments and questions to be

discussed at the forum and the topics were determined by the nature of the questions submitted. These ranged from specific projects planned for commencement, to broader questions framed around notions of sustainability, liveability and national significance. During the forum, the proceedings were streamed live on the internet and this, along with subsequent annual forums, remains on the NCA website today. The first public forum provided a strong platform, but the NCA Board recognised that more needed to be done to enable greater inclusion and engagement.

#### Key-issue dialogues

The NCA proposes 'key-issue dialogues' to provide opportunities to analyse and debate emerging and challenging issues for the ACT. Key stakeholders, including residents, community and special interest groups, industry, professional bodies and the ACT Government – as well as the wider public – provide input to the key-issues dialogue through various means during the year. The aim of the key-issue dialogues is to increase collective knowledge and promote community debate to achieve the best possible outcomes for the National Capital.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This paper examines the community engagement of two reviews and looks at the overlap between the topics of conversation more so than the reviews themselves. It identifies how community members, through a dialogue with the authority and with each other, contribute specific 'local' knowledge. The NCA is required to continuously update and maintain the National Capital Plan (NCP) under the guidance of its community engagement policy. In doing so it has undertaken a number of reviews of both projects proposals and strategic planning amendments using the suite of tools outlined in this paper. In doing so, the feedback from formal submissions, public meetings, individual consultations and online web forums have provided a wide ranging opinions discussions and data that not only address the review in question but also tap into broader interrelated topics to do with how the city functions.

The intergovernmental committee review into the parking on national land and the review into the National Capital Open Space System (NCOSS) adopted different methods to collect information. The outcomes of the review presented a challenge to the NCA in determining how it may respond to the complex and nuanced understanding of the issues at hand. More importantly it also required that the NCA planners looked beyond urban design rhetoric to provide solutions to the wicked problems facing the city. In order to meaningfully incorporate this knowledge, the NCA had to understand how this more democratic and socially constructed community of interest could be considered in framing a response to initiating change at a strategic and metropolitan scale.

This study used a transdisciplinary approach to investigate the different contributions of knowledge and the capacity of the community to own the problem in order to explore resolutions rather than solutions to these wicked problems (Brown et al 2010). Transdisciplinary approaches differ from the multidisciplinary perspectives for addressing complex issues. Transdisciplinary thinking is the *"collective understanding of an issue...created by including the personal, the local, and the strategic, as well as specialised contributions to knowledge"* (Brown 2009).

When we think of city planning as a series of challenges without a final solution, then planning can be seen as a series of unfolding wicked problems. The object therefore is not to try to "solve" the wicked problem, but rather to adopt an iterative process in which there is recognition that no final or "right" solution exists. Urban design and strategic planning can propose interventions and resolutions that shift or nudge behavioural change. Thinking back to the density and public transport dualism, increasing urban density may or may not be effective in changing transport patterns in the long term, but in the current political environment it is not providing any effective shifts in behaviour. Therefore, it is necessary to discover other policy, design and behaviour changing interventions that will be more responsive to the issues at hand and this requires knowledge from all groups and types of users.

Community consultation is often interpreted as government informing an affected community of its decisions, not the other way round. The role of the individual is perceived as a consumer whose task it is to consume, not to make an informed choice that will benefit society. While specialised and organisational interests vie for dominance, the knowledge generated by individuals is bypassed. By allowing equal consideration to all contributors to knowledge, planning agencies need to consider that this is a cultural and social change in itself. That change will include shifts in the way information is analysed and how knowledge is constructed (Brown 2009).

The challenge for planners is to synthesise rather than analyse information, and in doing so, understand the nested knowledges concerned with individual, local, agency and national interests (Brown 2009). These knowledges contain their own features related to how they are constructed and how to overcome scientific, enlightened understandings that segment, rather than incorporate, all forms of knowledge to approach change in a way that is politically acceptable and effective within the tenets of the organisations' regulatory reach. This research looks at two aspects of community engagement in framing a response. Firstly it explores how to provide a mix of incentives and disincentives to initiate change. Secondly how through the engagement process the community comes to own the problem and in doing so accept the need for a considered solution that will not satisfy all their immediate needs.

## **Review into Parking in the Parliamentary Zone**

Parking in the Parliamentary Zone and surrounding areas has long been a contentious issue. The review into parking arrangements has been approached in the same manner as any other public policy issue. The IGC endeavoured to comprehensively analyse the nature of the problem with the current arrangements prior to considering whether change was needed, and what form this change should take and who should manage it. The review into parking arrangements set out to discover the best strategy for providing parking for commuters and visitors to the national triangle. In doing so it wanted to understand the role the NCA would play in the broader civic challenge to move away from automobile to alternative transit oriented behaviour. From an agency perspective the NCA wanted to identify how it could contribute to a shifting in the mindset.

While the NCA has jurisdiction over a small but economically and symbolically important part of the city, its contribution to the transport mix in the city along with other planning decisions can not be discounted. It is one part of the jigsaw but it can not be left out. The NCA and its predecessors have supported paid parking for a long time but have not found a way to implement this impost on Canberra's public servants for a variety of reasons. However by focussing on developing a suite of design interventions policy instruments and market incentives it can shift its focus to provide the right mix of incentives and disincentives to initiate change. In order to do this it requires detailed local knowledge of the issues at hand.

A total of 117 written submissions were received from individuals, organisations and government agencies. The use of discussion boards on the "Have Your Say" website provided a platform for people to provide their thoughts in an online public forum. The nature of discussion boards allowed users to post messages or ideas to an online board, and also to respond directly to posts from other users, thereby creating an online "discussion". The use of this platform received over 950 individual posts from around 780 users. In addition to posting text, users could give a "thumbs up" or "thumbs down" indicating support or otherwise for a comment on the board.

A number of other discussions occurred throughout the public consultation period that were not initiated by the IGC, nor directly involved the IGC. Examples include a discussion via an 'online forum for news and views in the Canberra and ACT Region called the Riot Act' and an online forum initiated by the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) and advertised through CPSU member updates. From the substantial amount of data collected and the associated research, the consultation process identified the following themes, which from an urban design perspective forms part of the brief for implementing change. The statistical data was not surprising; it clearly identified what the problem was in terms of car dependency. The last Australian Census (2006) revealed that 455 out of 9100 people working in Barton reported taking a bus to work. This equates to approximately five per cent mode share (ABS 2006).

High levels of car use within the ACT can be attributable to a range of factors, including high levels of car ownership (itself in part due to an affluent Canberra community), low land use densities, generous parking supply, and in the case of the Parliamentary Zone, Barton, and Russell, predominantly free parking. This has resulted in most commuter travel in the ACT being by car, and most frequently as single occupant vehicle travel.

The web based forum was able to provide more detailed information about why this dependency was so persistent. Based on survey responses, the key factors in encouraging people to reduce reliance on private motor vehicle included:

1. Better design of bus transit services including increased frequency and more direct routes, and lower bus fares, particularly for shorter trips. Despite this, almost seventy percent of people indicated they would not reduce their reliance on private vehicle if bus services were increased. This could indicate that increased bus services in isolation will not encourage a reduced reliance on the private motor vehicle.

2. Reduce the isolation of workers during the daytime by improving access to commercial centres during work hours, including by allowing commercial uses to establish themselves within the study area. including park and ride facilities and a shuttle from park and ride locations to the study area.
3. More encouragement for cyclists by constructing direct cycle routes separated from roads, implementing a cycle hire service, and introducing practical initiatives such as better signage and increasing the number of bus stops with shelters; and
4. There were also a number of respondents who considered pay parking may alleviate some of the parking problems, and initiatives to encourage the use of public transport or cycling would be beneficial beyond just reducing the demand for car parks.

When these issues were examined in relation to the key themes of the review, then more nuanced information proved to identify both the intractable problems but present opportunities to identify incentives to change behaviour.

### **Public Transport**

Buses are unreliable and there is not enough flexibility, particularly if a multi-stop journey is required. While parking remains free, it is often cheaper to drive than to catch a bus. Not only did the imbalance in transport costs create a barrier to modal shift, it also produced a perverse outcome. The workers living in the inner northern and southern suburbs, closer to the Parliamentary Zone, indicated that there was no incentive to pay current prices to travel only a short distance. These suburbs, under the current Territory Plan, are earmarked for densification and one of the main arguments to those communities remains that such density patterns will create a modal shift. This finding in itself presented the most compelling case for introducing paid parking but also highlights the need to create incentives to shift behaviour. In addition a moderate shift to buses may not be beneficial from an environmental view if there is a low load factor. The total environmental cost of operating the bus fleet will only offset the environmental cost of car use if the patronage reaches a certain capacity (Mees, 2010).

### **Cycling**

A number of people recognised the benefits of cycling, including reduced peak hour road congestion, reduced greenhouse gas emissions and reliance on non-renewable fossil fuels and improved general health and well-being. These people were generally avid cyclists themselves, and already used cycling as a form of commuter transport. Any policy intervention needs to avoid the risk of preaching to the converted, but rather examine ways to make cycling more attractive to commuters who don't ride for reasons of personal preference, perception of danger and cultural associations of cycling as a sport rather than a mode of transport. A good example is the City Bike project, introduced by the City of Copenhagen in 1989 (McIntock 2002).

### **Pay Parking**

Two key factors were cited as reasons not to introduce pay parking – a lack of alternative transport options, and a lack of services and amenities. In regard to the former, many people indicated that public transport in Canberra is inadequate and does not offer a viable alternative for many people. In terms of the latter, most people noted the lack of services that are readily available in other areas where pay parking is in force. There was some suggestion that current planning requirements have deliberately restricted supply, and therefore all predicted demand should be met. Parking studies have indicated that the parking capacity in the study area is at 84 percent; however there is an imbalance of capacity across the different areas. Others backed propositions to decrease supply, by converting existing surface car parks to landscape, or permitting development on the land. Advocates of decreasing or restricting car parking supply asserted that Canberra must be the only city in the world to be considering increasing its supply of car parking. The supply of car parking and the impost of paid parking need to address the desire for the certainty that commuters will find a park within reasonable access to their workplace. This should be reflected in the price for that certainty.

There were a reasonable proportion of people who would support pay parking, particularly if adequate travel alternatives were provided for commuters (such as improved and cheaper bus services). The introduction of pay parking in the Parliamentary Zone and surrounds would make a more equitable situation for workers across Canberra. The perception in the community revolved around the concepts of equity and justice. This requires planners to consider how a more equitable situation could be achieved, through either improving accessibility to existing services or allowing service providers to set up within the Parliamentary Zone.

### **Landscape Amenity**

The community-held values to do with the landscape quality of an area would not normally form part of a study into commuter transport and parking, however it does demonstrate that the material impact of parking infrastructure is important. Perhaps more telling, it identifies how the users' experience of the landscape plays a role in influencing behaviour. There was genuine concern expressed about the impacts of current parking arrangements on the landscape quality and heritage of the area. The Parliamentary Zone in particular was considered an important landscape setting and that parking should no way impinge on the aesthetic beauty of the area. When landscape was considered as an urban design element it enhanced the user experience but changed focus from scenic values concerned with formal arrangements to issues concerned with legibility and accessibility. This doesn't ignore the aesthetic qualities of the space, but rather changes the focus of planning to understand how users make sense of the space. The findings from the NCOSS review supported some of these observations and provided more detail about how the landscape setting should be managed from a user experience rather than an urban design setting.

The NCA explored a number of issues that had direct and material impact on public servants in the Parliamentary Zone. In many cases the review could propose outcomes that were measurable and tangible including the cost of parking and the number of spaces. However the consultation process revealed that the resistance to adopting such an approach prevailed. While a number of respondents focussed on the direct financial cost of paid parking, many respondents were more concerned with notions of equity, access and certainty. In tackling these problems the NCA would need to provide solutions that address these tacit understandings in providing incentives for behaviour change.

## **CONCLUSION**

Contemporary urban design solutions to transport problems point to density targets that will not only take decades to implement, they are politically unpalatable and unlikely to be achieved in the ACT. Historically, urban strategies with density as the central policy objective have provided little evidence of reduction in auto use. Such a density approach has reinforced rather than confronted auto dependency. (Mees 2010). Rather than identifying the suburban layout as the problem, we need to engage in a new model of suburban transport policy that will have bigger impact on transport patterns in much shorter time frames. This approach combines transit incentives with auto disincentives and requires a creative tension between the experts and the public to achieve a modal shift (Mees, 2010). The National capital Plan requires a facelift to reflect these opportunities for change. In undertaking this challenge, it is up to the NCA to engage in community discussion about what needs to occur. Changes in metropolitan planning cannot occur successfully without an engaged community partaking in the discussion and owning both the problem and the investing in the resolutions.

Perhaps the most effective instrument for change is to understand how to make strategic decisions more politically acceptable and this requires an understanding of the nature of the community itself. The NCA has learned the following from the reviews currently underway in the nation's capital.

The NCA need understand the mix of community engagement it wants to implement. It has to decide upfront whether the consultation is about empowering people to provide input into the policy decision, or involving the community to allow them to put forward their views, and where possible incorporate their views in the final decision. From a decision making perspective deciding what point the agency favours a narrower set of options for the greater good requires a good understanding of the issues. The online discussion forums have been beneficial in testing the mood of the community for this reason, but in the end it requires leadership.

People recognise the difficulty in finding a solution but nevertheless tend to think of the impact on themselves; not necessarily what is best for the community as a whole. For example, the citizens most concerned about sustainable transport are often the fiercest defenders of leafy low rise neighbourhoods and it is easier to shift people out of large cars than off their large blocks of land (Gleeson and Low 2000). Therefore, goal of the consultation is often about asking the public to accept change and this invokes questions of justice, fairness, equity and reciprocity. To this end it is important to be able to identify who will benefit from the perceived loss. Designing consultation methods should allow the community to engage in debate online that acknowledges all voices including those materially affected.

Finally, planning agencies should clearly articulate the goals that respond to the intractable challenges to do with city planning rather than seeking a solution to an ill defined problem. In the case of the parliamentary zone, numeric performance goals such as percentage of public transport trips taken need to be accompanied by other less measurable objectives. Qualitative indicators include the demonstrable shift in user experience whereby more commuters choose transport options that suit their daily needs rather than

having to opt for private vehicles as a matter of necessity. This requires investigating urban design interventions at a range of scales and how each of these is nested into another.

On balance, the NCA has benefitted from encouraging motivated individuals and organised groups to post their comments early in the discussion to test their views in the public debate. However designing the online consultation to match the complexity of the project is critical. To do this the designers of the consultation should consider the immediacy of impact on the community and to what extent are they asking for the community to act as agents on behalf of the nation through invoking notions of stewardship and moral responsibility of citizens of the national capital.

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