FUTURE METROPOLIS: PLANNING FOR 2050

Changes in the Australian population over the next 35 years will create demands that underpin the way our future cities are conceived and re-imagined.
The future of Australia is predicated on a burgeoning natural resource—people, and lots of them. The populations of Sydney and Melbourne are forecast to swell by 60 to 80 per cent to reach about 8 million by 2050, while Perth’s population is poised to more than double to 4.6 million. In addition, the profile of the Australian population is altering and ageing.

This change is guiding and redefining our notions of what a future Australian city will be and how it needs to function to support its inhabitants. The biggest challenges of urbanisation will be finding ways to support the expanding population with viable economic models that sustain growth. Here, we look at the top five trends that will define the Australian city in 2050.

**DEMOGRAPHY IS DESTINY**

Australian politician Malcolm Turnbull once said, “Demography is destiny.” At the time, in 2004, he was foreshadowing an ageing Australian population that was also experiencing low birthrates. Since then some things have changed.

The Baby Bonus years have had a prodigious effect on swelling birth population numbers, as has immigration. Since 2006, annual immigration numbers have reached 224,000, which is 1.3 times the contribution of fertility and longevity to population growth. The forecast population surge is anticipated by ABS data to expand by 60 per cent, from 23.3 million today to 37.6 million by 2050.

“Australia has one of the fastest population growth rates in the OECD. Our cities will roughly double in size by 2061. Births will outweigh deaths, immigration will be strong and we will be one of the most urbanised countries in the world,” says Property Council CEO Ken Morrison.

While the sheer weight of these numbers is already exerting pressure on urban planning, it’s the sudden rise in revised forecasts that is much more perplexing. The ABS shifted its forecasts upwards in 2008, which means the race is on—not only to meet the latent demand, but also to ensure that urban planning is future-proofed for longevity rather than expediency.

“Australia is witnessing an incredible altering of demographics,” Morrison says. “The big implication is there will be a lot more old people, as baby boomers leave the workforce, raising the demand for retirement villages in desired areas. It’s also an ageing population that will be dominated by women. We are facing implications for the tax system and the generation of wealth. Will Australia be able to cope with that in the future?”

**HOUSING THE SWELL: BUILDING FOR BABY BOOMERS**

Politicians, policymakers and the private sector are accelerating plans for this radically different future. In addressing the issue of housing and sustaining an ageing population, there is no one-size-fits-all solution, cautions Tony Arnel, global director of sustainability at Norman Disney & Young.

“The ageing baby boomers want security and amenities and proximity to where things are. There is a lot of investment in the development of independent ageing facilities and establishing communities around that demand,” Arnel says. He warns that affordability and standardisation need to be closely monitored to allow for diversity and market flexibility.

As Sydney and Melbourne will host the bulk of the surging population, the notion of a standard apartment size needs to be reconsidered. “The rise of the micro-apartment in Melbourne is opening the market to far more affordable inner-city dwellings that allow occupiers to take advantage of the city,” Arnel says. He forecasts the micro-apartment will have a role in the marketplace, serving an ageing
population that needs to be in a central location rather than a suburban outpost.

With increased population density in cities, high-rise buildings with more diverse options for housing will emerge, adds UrbanGrowth NSW CEO David Pitchford. He says that’s why planning now is so crucial to getting the future cityscape right. In NSW, new projects that will span the existing CBD southern rail corridor will not only accommodate the growing population but also assist in unlocking growth corridors with urban renewal along infrastructure paths, such as new rail lines.

**COLLABORATION IS KING: INFRASTRUCTURE DILEMMA**

City governments will have an important role in defining the future. With significant infrastructure deficits already, and national productivity a priority, the question of who pays for the infrastructure that needs to support development has long been a vexed issue. Arnel cites Fremantle as an example of local government promoting sustainable living and development.

Morrison says: “The biggest risk to our infrastructure is investing in the wrong projects. You also cannot push local infrastructure costs onto the developer, because that does nothing for housing affordability. The Property Council is a big supporter of larger councils that spend money and resources on infrastructure in ways that communities benefit, as we’ve seen with Brisbane City Council.”

To produce the right infrastructure outcomes, Morrison calls for an alignment of layers of government as positioned by the City Deals framework (see ‘City Deals’, this page). “It’s vital that policies for each level of government are aligned. This will deliver a growth dividend that will produce a tax dividend. It’s a deal that has a practical dimension and an economic dimension. It will allow the economy to grow faster and accelerate urban change.”

Underpinning our successful cities of the future will be powerful collaborations “that go beyond commitment from the public sector and private sector,” suggests Pitchford.

**SUSTAINABILITY: GREEN IS JUST THE START** Sustainability has become such a politicised concept, but we need to take a deep breath as it’s the underlying

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**Projected city populations in 2050 (millions)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2050</th>
<th>Increase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>+64.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melbourne</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>+80.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brisbane</td>
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<td>4.2</td>
<td>+91.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perth</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>+143.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adelaide</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>+40.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ABS Population Projections, Australia 2012 to 2101

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*FUTURE CITIES*
principle for the future of cities, says Arnel. “We readily jump to the green idea, but it’s far more than that. The future of cities will be low carbon and looking for solutions in infrastructure, building and power supply.”

For Maria Atkinson AM, director of Atkinson Consultancy, the heart of sustainability is in a ‘city activation’ model, which at the granular levels can change journeys and activate new spaces. “Government will have a role in designing, from a precinct and planning level, to ensure every part of the urban streetscape and open space is utilised,” she says. This will mean the greenification of urban public spaces and the renewal of existing facilities with parkland-type spaces, which will allow the ageing population to use and participate in their management, she predicts.

Atkinson adds that sustainability will emerge in the trend of multifunctional use of buildings. “The notion of a single use for dwellings will collapse. Shopping malls will feature accommodation and childcare and healthcare facilities. High density will produce high levels of creativity with usage of space,” she forecasts, noting it will also alter many of the business models surrounding property management.

As energy costs continue to increase and political pressure for action remains strong in the coming decades, Property Council CEO Ken Morrison warns that sustainability is not just an issue but part of the matrix of how we future-proof all city development. “Most of our sustainable solutions will be embedded in our cities as pressure intensifies to efficiently utilise energy,” he says. Eco-efficient solutions will also be articulated in building design, materials and implementation, and these will have an impact on investment choices as the industry adapts to doing more with less.

For example, Casuarina Square, a student housing development in Darwin, features a purpose-built modular design with flat pack materials for interiors and finishes from China. “It has halved construction times and addresses the sustainability and efficiency issues,” Morrison says.

“Innovations in technology, such as 3D printing, will also accelerate processes and produce significant cost benefits and eco-friendly outcomes,” he adds.