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Perth Access to the City Plan, the Graham Farmer Freeway and the status of freeway linked transport commitments

Prior to the opening of the Graham Farmer Freeway in 2000, commitments were made by the government that the Freeway would allow a dramatic improvement in access for pedestrians and cyclists in Perth. It was known as the 'Perth Access to the City'. We have revisited some of the commitments that were made in 1997 by the former Court Government as part of its promotion of the Freeway.

A major claim of the City Access Plan was it would improve the amenity, ease and safety of movement on foot and bicycle within central Perth. The opening of the Graham Farmer Freeway was to provide the opportunity to widen footpaths and create bus lanes in Perth CBD. According to the 'Access' brochure and the former Court Government the commitments were to be completed with the opening of the Farmer Freeway in 2000. The commitments are examined as of January 2004.

As will be seen, many of the commitments have not occurred, 6 years after they were made and nearly 4 years after the opening of the Graham Farmer Freeway. Has the \$600 million Freeway project led to significant improvements in the amenity of Perth CBD, or could that amount of money have been spent directly on CBD improvements and alternative sustainable transport projects to reduce the impacts of traffic? One thing that is clear from this example is highway proponent claims need to be treated with a good degree of scepticism.

The major commitments were,

The 'Access' plan included changes to the one-way traffic system in Murray Street and Hay Street. The traffic flow for both streets was to be reversed. It was claimed by the then Director of Metropolitan Strategy, Department of Transport, Emmerson Richardson* (Morning Magazine, RTR-FM, 1997) that it was a very important and necessary part of the plan.

(Traffic flow in Hay and Murray Streets between Pier and Barrack has been changed but the major sections of Hay and Murray Streets, between William Street and Elder Place, have not been changed.)

The Mitchell Freeway exit to Riverside Drive would be closed. *(Not done)*

The 5 lanes of William Street were to be reduced to 3 lanes. 2 lanes were to be for general traffic with one bus lane. The reduction in lanes was to allow for widening footpaths. Pedestrians currently have ~1/4 of the space and traffic 3/4. This was to be changed to 1/2 and 1/2. *(Not done)*

The Barrack Street Bridge would become a two-way bridge.
(One lane provided for southbound traffic. It can only be accessed by people travelling east along Roe Street not from both directions as was claimed).

Bus priority and bus lanes on St Georges Tce, William Street and Barrack-Beaufort Streets. Buses given priority at key intersections. *(Not done except for a bus lane on a section of Barrack Street.)*

Cycle paths in the city centre.

It was claimed the big benefit of the City Access Plan was that it would segregate cycling traffic from motoring traffic especially in terms of a major north south path. *(No major N/S cycleway in the CBD).*

An east west route was to come all the way along the railway. *(The railway path is dual use and creates conflict between pedestrians and cyclists).*

(Only minor, disjointed improvements in the CBD eg, cycle contra lane on small section of Murray Street).

'Access' was also to develop cycleway routes along Hay and Murray Streets as "shared use with traffic". *(Curious terminology given that a cycleway is for cyclists. Not done).*

Riverside Drive was to be reduced to half its current width by lane reductions. The primary focus was to be around Barrack Street where the 8 lanes were to be reduced to 4 lanes. *(Not done)*

Eliminating the rail level crossing at Lord Street. *(Completed)*

Modified intersection at Causeway. Allow bus only lanes. *(Completed)*

Creation of an 'urban boulevard' along Riverside Drive. *(Not done unless a row of palms constitutes 'boulevard' status)*

Creation of a 'pedestrian priority zone' bounded by Wellington Street, Victoria Ave, St Georges Tce and Elder Place. *(Isolated improvements but largely not done)*

A safer walking route along Barrack Street, linking the city to the Swan River and Barrack Street Jetty. *(Not done)*

Why the Lack of Action?

Perhaps one reason for this lack of action and lack of success in making Perth City a pedestrian friendly environment was revealed on Morning Magazine on RTR-FM in 1997. Statements were made by the then Director of Metropolitan Strategy of the Department of Transport, Emmerson Richardson, when he was interviewed by Mar Bucknell. The interaction was over the depth of analysis that the City Access Plan was put to, especially in relation to where traffic was going in the Perth CBD. The relevant part occurs half way through the interview when they are discussing traffic modelling.

MB - Have you actually done the analysis on the actual origin-destination of this traffic or are you just guessing how far up Hay Street it is going?

ER - We have not done detailed origin-destination analysis by asking people where their destinations are. What we have done is very very comprehensive matching of number plates and analysis of traffic using computer models. We have analysed the whole system using what is called a Saturn model and the whole system of traffic in central Perth for a whole number of scenarios that we looked at in this. The one we have chosen is the one that makes the traffic the simplest, the one that reduces the most traffic in the City centre and provides the most benefit for people.

MB- But again it sounds like to a large extent you are guessing what the origins and destinations of traffic actually are?

ER- I should explain, yes, yes you are right. That would appear to be the case. But what is built into a lot of these models we accept the models from the regional models and the regional models in turn has taken the information coming out of the census data and comprehensive studies done in the past and that has origin destination data in it.

MB - How is this origin destination data actually determined?

ER - Determined by household interviews coming out of things like the census and major transport studies we do every so many years.

MB - What I am getting at is more the question of in terms of City traffic. I would expect there would be quite a significant amount of the traffic that, again I am guessing as well, would be multiple destination traffic.

ER - Yeah, you are absolutely right. There is an absolute multitude of destinations in there. Let me give you a couple of examples of studies we did. We took number plate matching of vehicles that came across the Horseshoe Bridge and we were able to determine by matching the numbers on the ramps onto the Mitchell Freeway and Mounts Bay Road that 25 % of that traffic was through traffic all the way from the Horseshoe Bridge to the freeway ramps on Mounts Bay Road.

Comment on Traffic Modelling.

A regular problem with traffic modelling is that it relies heavily on computer modelling with input being exclusively quantitative information. While 'Saturn' modelling is used in many countries to predict traffic changes, many use qualitative information input as well as the regular quantitative information. For example, roadside interviews on trip purpose, alternative transport opportunities and origin destination questions are carried out for comprehensive traffic model inputs. It appears such important inputs were lacking in the City Access modelling.

For example, the number plate matching mentioned in the interview would not have included important information like whether the vehicle had stop destination in between the two monitoring points.

It is important to note that Saturn is most suitable for the analysis of relatively minor network changes such as the introduction of a one-way street, changes to junction controls and introducing a bus only lane. Saturn is usually used in conjunction with smaller localised models, which allow greater precision.

The issue of accuracy of the information is also crucial. If some information is incorrect or incomplete then the answers you get back will be flawed.

Census data and major transport surveys referred to in the interview usually do not include the specific detail, eg actual routes and time of travel etc, required to calculate traffic impacts and movement in a specific locality such as the Perth CBD. It helps to give a broad perspective, but should not be used as primary source material.

* (While working for the DoT, Emmerson Richardson also promoted other proposed highways such as the Fremantle-Cottesloe Highway and the Fremantle bypass highway. He left DoT in 2001.)

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