Fringe Failings of Australian Cities

Growth areas on the fringe of Australian capital cities are significantly disadvantaged with residents and workers suffering socially and economically.

The conclusion is made in a paper by Andrew McDougall and Vigneshwar Maharaj, and published in the September edition of Australia Planner Volume 48 Number 3.

The article titled ‘Closing gaps on the urban fringe of Australian capital cities: an investment worth making’ claims fully integrated plans to provide jobs and services to these growth areas, and linking them to other areas of the metropolis are rare.

Co-author and consultant at SGS Economics and Planning Melbourne, Andrew McDougall, said the study found the inequities between inner urban areas and outer growth areas are replicated throughout Australian capital cities.

"We show that Australian capital cities follow a similar development pattern with a large proportion of jobs concentrated in inner urban areas," Andrew said.

"The outer urban areas on the other hand have poor accessibility to jobs and services."

McDougall and Maharaj undertook speculative modelling to establish a cost benefit analysis of partially closing the gaps between fringe growth areas and their host metropolises.

"We looked at what would be needed to improve the distribution and accessibility of jobs and services including improved government service delivery on the urban fringe.

"The aim would be to promote vibrant town centres and improving transport links across the metropolis.

"What we found through our speculative modelling was that while the cost of better equipping outer growth areas would be significant, it is likely to be outweighed by the benefits.

"Benefits associated with workforce and transport productivity enhancements were of particular significance."

The authors conclude that government service delivery on the urban fringe to create vibrant town centres with better transport links across the metropolis should be a priority for investment.

While the study links potential dividends to the scale of future growth earmarked for the fringes of Australian capital cities, the paper highlights that the degree of government intervention in the initial establishment of growth areas may need to be reviewed.

"Getting the foundations right at the start may well be difficult but may mitigate some of the significant retrofitting efforts now being entertained in the inner and middle rings of Australian capital cities."

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