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Prospects and policies for new urban settlements in Australia

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Introduction

This chapter examines the state of play of decentralisation development in Australia, reappraising past visions and realised schemes, and exploring possibilities for these to shape Australia's urban and rural futures. We consider responses to the 2020–22 Covid-19 pandemic, which have resulted in a de-urbanisation that is novel for recent decades and has reversed some of the metropolitan primacy and growth rates that underscored established Australian planning discourse and practice. Reflecting the range of decentralisation discourse itself, we consider claims to recentre cities or to create 'new' cities, including schemes both speculative and realised, and reflect on the diverse fates of greenfield versus proximate satellite city schemes.

In the almost 50 years since the plans of the Department of Urban and Regional Development (DURD) for new Australian cities collapsed with (as it transpired) only Albury–Wodonga and Macarthur in south-western Sydney undeniably fruitful outcomes, it appears the concept of the purpose-built greenfield 'new city' has barely reared its head in Australian policy. While the Morrison Government was supportive in principle of shifting Australia's population away from a metropolitan primacy model,

only token programs were proposed. In fact, no federal government since Paul Keating's (1991–96) has committed specific funds to any paradigm-shifting enterprise.

As is so often the case, the cause of new-city development has been muddled by a confusion of terms—the question, for instance, of whether 'satellite cities' are necessarily purpose-built or merely economic dependents and, additionally, whether such cities are glorified dormitory suburbs or whether their 'satellite' nature is a mere geographical signifier of their relative position to a primate city while they nonetheless operate with a high degree of self-sufficiency. 'New cities' also pose definitional problems, particularly as so many thus designated are enhanced and expanded versions of towns. Questions of whether major infill or perimeter city expansion—adding effectively to metropolitan primacy, rather than decentralisation per se—qualifies as new-city building are also in the eye of the beholder.

Contemporary examples of real estate–driven new-city claims abound. Greater Springfield, a metropolitan fringe locality in Brisbane, serves as one illustrative example. With its (state government–provided) railway station promising a 30-minute trip to the Brisbane CBD, a (federally funded) university campus, and technology emphasis, the suburb is effectively a purposefully nominated new city developed by private enterprise and fully supported by multiple tiers of government (King and Fagan 2018). In New South Wales, and initiated at a state government level, the 'Western Sydney Aerotropolis', more recently rebranded Bradfield (itself possibly a temporary name), is in the urban fringe locality of Badgerys Creek. Bradfield is being promoted as the hub of a 'new third city' in the wider Sydney region and illustrates the magnetism of major infrastructure in promoting urban development. The new-city idea is also regularly evoked in the form of privately instigated proposals aligned with interstate high-speed railway development, indicating to the cynically minded the existence of a 'proposal industry'. All remain unrealised, however much they are widely publicised in their scoping stages as settlement schemes linked to very-fast-train routes, most recently in the Consolidated Land and Rail Australia (CLARA) scheme. At the same time, in Victoria, with Melbourne shortly to surpass Sydney in population, major development corporations continue to posit their own visions for 'new cities' perched on the edges of the metropolis's growth regions.

The prospects for a significant reset of urban settlement policies are perhaps constrained by experience: unrealised new-city schemes posited as having the potential to develop autonomously but later absorbed, with little acknowledgement of faded idealism, into contiguous capital cities. Familiar issues prevail with these progressive visions: how to persuade new residents to relocate, suffering not only the privations of pioneers in a growing region but also, potentially, the problems of decline and promises unfulfilled?

Such questions reverberate within current federal and state policy environments and the overarching expectation that inaction will lead to the degradation of urban quality of life. While urban policies in Australia's cities retain consolidation strategies for directing growth to specified corridors, paired with increasing infill densities, discontent brewing around the sustainability and liveability of major cities echoes the concerns that underscored DURD's growth centre announcements in the 1970s.

Decentralisation and new towns

One hundred years ago, it might have seemed that a major remaking of the still new nation of Australia was just around the corner. The Country Party, which remains (rebranded as the Nationals) the third major force in Australian politics, was formed in 1920 in part to engender the redistribution of Australia's population and to arrest the 'drift' of country-dwellers to the city. Decentralisation was soon declared a 'plank' of the new party (The Age 1922).

While the attractions of the city were, for many, indisputable, at the same time, the apparently arbitrary nature of Australia's urban growth was hard to justify. The small number of large inland towns, much less cities, was similarly problematic in the eyes of many, and the establishment of Canberra as the nation's inland capital city was in many respects symbolic of a national resolution to conquer the continent rather than merely huddle on its shores.

Had Canberra's success come sooner than it did the nation could have been faster to establish more new inland cities; instead, the merits or otherwise of a significant urban redistribution have gone on to carry outsized discursive weight. Of course, there have been numerous new centres established across Australia in relation to industrial ports and extraction industry enterprises. The 'new town' of Elizabeth was a South Australian Government enterprise

designed along British postwar lines. In Victoria, the unusual false start of Sunbury Satellite Town (1959) led to charges of fraud and misrepresentation on the part of the vendor, Payne's Properties. Yet, whatever mistakes Payne's made in execution, the state government came to the opinion that the project's core premise was correct: the small town of Sunbury was ideally located to serve as a growth centre (Kolankiewicz et al. 2022). Sunbury and nearby Melton were chosen for expansion as satellite cities while at a similar time, on the other side of Melbourne, local government was aspiring to take a lead role in urban development. Aware of an interest in funnelling growth into a region extending out from the south-eastern industrial centre of Dandenong, the council of the outer suburban area of Berwick endorsed the recommendations of the planning firm Loder and Bayly. Aspiring to physical and functional separation from Melbourne, the novel proposal would reject the dominant patterns of suburbanisation seen in the wake of postwar settlement, reinforcing the decentralised township as an opportunity for experimental urbanisation. Ultimately the local government–led Berwick 'Metrotown' plans were shelved and Berwick's subsequent growth followed a more conventional pathway.

South Australia, the state that has never lost its sense of (and pride in) its social experiment origins (Hutchings and Bunker 1986), was prospective home in the late 1980s and 1990s to the unrealised Multifunction Polis (MFP), which was slated as a Japanese-funded high-tech smart city. The project was a victim of not only racism and fear of international control but also scepticism regarding the Labor government's 'clever country' rhetoric, but it was a financial downturn in the sponsor country that saw the MFP take a definitive dive. The city—which, at least in cartoonists' minds, appeared to be a self-contained cross between Silicon Valley and a medieval monastery—became instead a suburb of Adelaide, renamed Mawson Lakes, and characterised as a knowledge and technology-oriented housing development.

Such proposals at both state and local government levels were joined by federal investment in expanded urban areas in five Australian locations, under the (in)famous DURD growth centre proposals, two of which, Albury–Wodonga and Macarthur, were substantially established. Another, Bathurst–Orange in New South Wales, was barely embarked on; Monarto and Salvado in Western Australia left even less evidence of their advocates' ambitions.

Since the 1980s, urban policy in Australia has been characterised by consolidation strategies for increasing the infill densities of major cities and directing urban growth to expanding designated corridors—sometimes absorbing previous new-city projects. The major exception to this rule is a frequently expressed interest in a form of decentralisation to regions effected primarily by obliging public servants to disperse from major cities. The 2018 *Building Up & Moving Out* report (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Infrastructure, Transport and Cities 2018: 49 passim), for instance, dedicated a section to debates about this process 'as a potential catalyst for growth', adding that it had 'to be done in a sustained and coordinated way' (p. xxxviii). Released a month later, the Planning Institute's *Through the Lens: The Tipping Point* report decried the lack of cohesive strategy at a national level, opining that without a coherent plan, 'all jurisdictions will be disadvantaged when making resource allocation decisions and planning for basic enabling infrastructure' (PIA 2018: 24).

In short, the experimental initiatives in 1970s and 1980s Australia entailing the creation of new cities by government agencies—in part because they are so often represented as 'ill-fated'—have given rise to a negative outlook on such strategies. The quick rise and demise of DURD, in particular, seems to have only consolidated an Australian urban policy resolve to adhere to metropolitan primacy and the 'path dependency' critiqued by Troy (1999: 165). Bolleter et al. (2021b: 1020) concluded that had DURD been able to operate in ways

> less centralist in its *modus operandi*, more nimble in its responses to counter urbanization trends, and with Federal Government funding sustained and private sector investment more skilfully leveraged—the gap between planned and achieved Growth Centre populations may have been closed even more … [R]edistribution of the national urban population could have been made more secure.

The turn of the century

The last decade of the twentieth century saw many of the disasters predicted by advocates of new regional centres come to pass, prompting a revisiting of past visions. While these were facilitated by government policy—notably, on taxation—they were the result not of state government visions, but of market-led activities. Sydney real estate prices, for instance, soared to levels inconceivable in the 1980s, and Melbourne followed suit in the early twenty-

first century. Pressures on existing population centres saw their peripheries, and beyond, developed to meet growing need—again, undertaken by market interests aided by governmental decisions such as growth boundary shifts and the use of first-homeowner grants. In 1999–2000, the Victorian City of Casey—covering, in part, the Berwick region—and the Shire of Melton were two of the biggest growth areas in the nation, with the expansion of both typified by the subdivision of agricultural land for housing. Queensland's Gold Coast saw far and away the greatest increase (Wade 2004), offering, as Andrew Leach (2018: 142) has pointed out, 'an infrastructure based on … the paradoxical stance of offering an urbanised experience of "getting away from" the city'. A reappraisal of DURD growth centres found several had come close to their anticipated populations but had been eclipsed by the sheer scale of growth in larger urban conglomerations (Bolleter et al. 2021b).

In this context, ideas for shifting, stemming, or competing with the forces of global cities had come to seem almost quaint by the turn of the twenty-first century. A cynic could be forgiven for imagining that the MFP was the last attempt to create an entirely new metropolis for Australia. Yet, some important success stories of new-city development hide in plain sight. The Northern Territory's Palmerston, initially conceived as 'Darwin East', has, over 40 years, become a self-governing settlement of 18 suburbs and a city centre, with a population of more than 34,000 people. The city of Joondalup, in Western Australia, was developed in the late 1980s by the state government on land close to the region intended as the DURD city of Salvado. Businessman Maha Sinnathamby's Greater Springfield, mentioned above, is, however, the outstanding example: in late 2013, railway access was extended to the area with a dedicated spur line (Josey and Burton 2014). It now has a population comparable with Palmerston's and local government is eager to capitalise on growth potential. In 2011, Ipswich City Council announced the development of the new satellite city of Ripley, 17 kilometres west of Springfield, to increase its population from 400 to 120,000 (Urban Land Development Authority 2011). It is expected Springfield's railway line will be extended to Ripley.

Looking at these examples, it seems reasonable to conclude that while autonomous new cities, by definition, do not 'just happen' at a high level of settlement policy, they are nonetheless promoted under the radar across the nation. Whereas twentieth-century government agencies, at state or federal level, could have been brought into existence through political braggadocio seeking to nation-build through city construction, we now see

a lower-key and uncoordinated process merged with private development and marketing. This is, perhaps, the legacy of a historical lesson learnt: that grand pronouncements should be resisted. Governments and private interests alike have come to eschew modernist cure-alls for urban ills, and instead hope to create or encourage new urban areas in a more subtle fashion—one validated by market forces better equipped to take on risk. A strong impulse in both the marketing of and the rationale for the new city in Australia is green living and sustainable urbanism, with the additional (related) appeal of a second 'quality of life' string to the new-city dream.

Schemes led by rail and air

The Australian nation-state grew and prospered in the second half of the nineteenth century under the modernising and clarifying influence of railways. New visions for urban and rural futures arose in the wake of this national skeleton. The notion that the next shot in the arm for population redistribution could come from railway technology is at the very least a nod to tradition. Australia's original railway networks were developed by colonial governments interested in ratifying their capitals and, by default or design, drew population away from regional sea and river ports. The twentieth century saw a shift to contracted rail networks and later to infrastructure supporting car ownership.

A change was first signalled in 1984 with the development of the Very Fast Train (VFT) project, initially proposed by Paul Wild of CSIRO, nurtured by the federal government, then picked up by private enterprise, which nonetheless abandoned it in the face of later governmental uninterest (indeed, disincentive). More recently, proposals for a Melbourne–Canberra–Sydney–Brisbane railway suggest the possibility of rail-based redistribution, with new-city options proximate to the rail route. The CLARA scheme proposes bullet trains through south-eastern Australia, with strings of 'new towns' near (but not in) Nagambie and Shepparton in Victoria, anticipating land value uplift. The CLARA consortium received federal government seed funding. Federal government fast-rail proposals, however, amount to little more than varying degrees of scoping reports over recent decades (Terril et al. 2020).

Before CLARA, the High Speed Rail Study was initiated by the Rudd Labor Government in 2008 and the phase one report was tabled in parliament in 2011 by then transport minister Anthony Albanese. It takes seriously the

impact of a new rail line operating services at up to 350 kilometres per hour in hitherto remote environments, with justification from both ecological and economic standpoints. 'Development benefits' were considered for each potential route, but the defining principle of each was primarily the ease of construction, line length, and issues of terrain—that is, the favoured locations for new developments fell naturally as new beads on a string between the four cities in need of service—notwithstanding that 'capital city satellites, within 150 kilometres [of existing state capitals], such as Wollongong and the Gold Coast, are growing faster than coastal, inland or capital cities' (AECOM 2011: 23). 'Workaround' routes to take in remote areas, such as the NSW towns of Moree or Tamworth–Armidale, were considered, perhaps for reasons of political sensitivity. Their inclusion would, however, add hours to the rail journeys regardless of how 'high speed' they were, negating a core element of the project: competition with air travel. South to north, the primary regions in New South Wales identified for growth via a new high-speed rail line included Wagga Wagga, the Southern Highlands, the Central Coast, and Coffs Harbour (AECOM 2011: 78). The report notes that at its Queensland end, the high-speed railway (HSR) would pass near three places already designated as urban development areas by the state government: Flagstone, Yarrabilba, and Ripley (AECOM 2011). The considerable route planning notwithstanding, the HSR project was terminated by the Abbott Government in 2013. A dedicated advisory group was abolished in November of that year, among 21 non-statutory bodies considered redundant or out of alignment with federal policy (Thosmen 2013).

The HSR project has a descendant in the 2015 CLARA proposal, which would cover a much shorter distance, Melbourne–Canberra–Sydney, but harbours greater ambition for demographic change in Australia. The CLARA plan is, the journal *Foreground* notes, 'radically' different from previous proposals as 'the largest "value capture" initiative ever proposed by a commercial developer' (Gupta 2017). It proposes 'to build the world's most liveable, sustainable, and connected cities in Victoria and New South Wales and connect them by a world-class high-speed rail' (CLARA 2021). Stations—and, therefore, urban expansion—lie between the three large urban centres, the first and last being Melbourne and Sydney, respectively. The scheme is premised on private settlement schemes. New centres embrace Strathbogie (population 300) and Shepparton (population 51,000), both in Victoria, and unnamed, vaguely positioned, and designated 'new smart cities' between Canberra and Sydney. The CLARA plan, while supported

in scoping stages, relies on access to a protected rail corridor that remains elusive. Federal and state funding in Victoria for regional train infrastructure has meanwhile bolstered commuter-oriented train services in the interests of extant regional cities and towns such as Bendigo, Ballarat, and Geelong (the last long heralded as a growth centre and now serving unofficially as such, particularly in light of its affordability relative to Melbourne's), which at least until the Covid-19 pandemic were serving as dormitory suburbs of Melbourne—highlighting the ambiguity in what is meant by new, recentralised, or decentralised, and to whom (Denham 2017).

Fast-rail projects—interstate and intranational—are traditionally set up in opposition to air travel nodes. Bradfield presents, therefore, an additional 'strand' of urban growth. This development aligns with the concept of Sydney as a polycentric conurbation: the new Aerotropolis region, with a population at the time of writing of less than 300, is to become commensurate with the subcentres of Penrith and Parramatta. The positioning of 'three cities' enfolds the new within the old. The region is conceived of as 'a Parkland City in the true sense, with a dense urban neighbourhood focused on both the new metro station and Wianamatta–South Creek [waterway] system' (DPE 2021).

Congestion, consolidation, and beyond: Urban discontents revisited

While urban policies in Australia's cities retain consolidation strategies for directing urban growth to corridors and increasing infill densities, twenty-first-century discontent with the sustainability and liveability of major cities echoes the concerns that underscored DURD's growth centre announcements in the 1970s. Dredging up past visions has seen decentralisation narratives in Australia turn to new settlements in response to population pressures in major cities, and ideas of acting as a 'relief valve'. Moreover, new settlements have been put forward as responses to cities' growing pains. DURD cities were rooted in this analysis: travel times, liveability, and housing quality were all identified as urban ills to be designed out in new decentralised settlements.

Traffic congestion was one of the 'deteriorating conditions' (Pennay 2005: 273) cited in calls for decentralisation and new-town initiatives in Australia through the 1960s and 1970s (Neutze 1971; Logan and Wilmoth 1975;

Ravallion 1975; Stein 2012). Reviewing the impetus for the 1972 federal designation of Albury–Wodonga as a growth centre, Stein (2012: 22) summarised these, suggesting that 'most researchers state that at a certain point the advantage in an agglomeration changes and diseconomies of scale prevail', including travel time: '[A]s the size of the city increases traffic congestion [and] time lost traveling from home to work … become problems.' To Neutze (1971, 1988), traffic and travel time were part of the case for developing middle-sized cities and town centres in Australia. The minimisation of travel, while realised at the scale of Albury–Wodonga, did not substantively shift patterns for major cities. Travel, congestion, and transport in the twenty-first century reassert themselves as central planning and government concerns—apparent in, for example, the 20 (or 30)–minute neighbourhood aspiration. In Victoria, precinct structure plans continue to aspire to local employment as a solution to travel time costs. Yet, at least before Covid-19, surveys of residents reported it being 'a fantasy to get employment around the area' (Nicholls et al. 2018).

Australian urban consolidation and densification strategies since the 1980s have been mainly concerned with growth. Growth corridor suburbs in Melbourne by the early 2000s were adding tens of thousands of new residents each year, underscoring rapid recalibration of strategic plans. Ideas for supporting regions occupied incremental territory such as differential incentives for first-homebuyer grants outside metropolitan areas. Decentralisation schemes to 'ease the burden' and 'reinvigorate' regional areas by relocating public servants or other attractions—most recently seen in the bayside regional centre of Geelong in Victoria—have been eclipsed by larger patterns of urban growth.

How the Australian nation can negotiate the dispersal of growth is largely informed, and in turn constrained, by past efforts. The absence of an illustrative, powerful, and ultimately successful precedent—aside from Canberra—casts doubt on the capacity of the public and private sectors alike to provide new conduits for urban and population increase, let alone to craft appealing and valid new urban places and centralities. Perhaps the limitations and constraints that led to the failure of past policies are too often emphasised. These have been, at worst, wholly unfulfilled, such as in the case of Monarto, and at best, either partly complete, such as Albury–Wodonga, or fully absorbed into an existing metropolitan area, such as the Melton–Sunbury satellites in Melbourne. We ponder how contemporary attempts at decentralisation can negate public and political apprehension based on the historical outcomes of such policy. This is especially relevant in

an age in which the quality of urban life is seen to degrade against markers of housing affordability, congestion, pollution, and the intensification of infill development.

Despite falling off higher-level policy agendas, there is a continuity in public (and developer) narratives, with calls and claims for new cities persisting over decades and centuries in Australia, in varying forms, as a response to urban discontent; hence the discursive role of CLARA-like proposals as the 'best of both worlds'. Steve Bracks and Pat McNamara's *Victoria's future state: Why decentralisation should be our priority* (2018) discusses an assembly of political, private, and academic interests, proposing a self-described 'fourth option'. This entails a vision for the state in which 'via a planned and long-term (30-plus year) decentralisation program Victoria grows its existing regional cities and develops new ones in order to divert future growth out of Melbourne and across our state'. It indicates a demonstrable reliance on the private sector not only to fund and coordinate such efforts, but also to absorb risk.

As it stands, attempts to purposefully relocate or recentre populations are ad hoc and stumbling. In May 2015, then minister for agriculture and deputy prime minister Barnaby Joyce announced that the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA) would be relocated from Canberra to regional Australia—specifically, a city within his seat, Armidale. The move, Joyce claimed, would 'contribute about $16 million a year to the local economy, and would lead to an additional 200 jobs' (Thomas 2015). Costing the nation more than $25 million, the move, Joyce advised, would be the first of at least three relocations 'to boost regional economics and put researchers closer to rural industries' (Barbour 2016). Less than three years later, it was revealed that more than half of APVMA's close to 200 employees, including 33 regulatory scientists, had resigned. As of May 2018, only two staff members had relocated. An initial relocation offer of $30,000 was upgraded to $55,000 (Conifer and McKinnon 2018). Reliance on a monetary incentive fails to appreciate the relationship between lifestyles and urbanity, and how the 'critical mass' of existing cities is germane to the identities, lifestyles, and cultural practices of their residents (van Diepen and Musterd 2009). This perhaps indicates what townships presently receiving the decentralisation treatment lack.

If he had been one to engage with the history of similar initiatives, Joyce could have validly pointed to a tradition of requiring public servants to move—most notably, the populating of Canberra itself, the city *from* which

Joyce was now insisting the APVMA employees move. Other initiatives such as the Victorian Government's relocation of the Traffic Accidents Commission (TAC) to Geelong, announced in 2005 and effected in 2009, was less prescriptive (the TAC's headquarters was moved from Melbourne, but employees were not required to do so) but nonetheless followed a decentralisation principle (TAC 2009). Approximately 650 TAC employees worked in the commission's new headquarters and 190 staff chose to live locally.

Like other shelved or demoted visions, the CLARA plan so far exists in the realm of VFT corridors, Monarto or Berwick new towns, and the MFP as initially conceived: visions assembled, sometimes by private developers, in turn either unrealised or absorbed without ceremony into the prevailing urban fabric. Decades of settlement planning have in practice focused on a duality of intense growth (largely from migration, both overseas and interstate) and attempts at strategic management of this growth. Whether the effects of Covid-19—which in the short term appear to be haphazardly realising long-held aspirations for regional population redistribution—will fundamentally shift the prevailing state of settlement policy and discourse in the longer term remains to be seen.

Conclusion

The influence of the pandemic and government responses to it in Australian cities is unfolding at the time of writing. Almost immediately, Covid-19 reignited a rift between proponents and critics of density as a planning instrument, calling into question its continued relevance in an era characterised by social distancing and remote working. This in turn has prompted contemplation of new visions of how we could one day live and work. Many of the features promoted as desirable urban qualities have been recast as problematic: high-rise living, major (crowded) events, global connections, lively urban spaces, and public transport. Initial evidence of altered migration patterns runs counter to recent decades of growth. To some, the bullet train has been rebadged as an 'economic game changer' for the post-Covid-19 world (Terrill et al. 2020). Schemes like CLARA, which promote diffused and scaled-down new towns, could fit a mooted new appetite for smaller cities, yet these still fundamentally rely on a model of primacy and growth (and office work) that seems unfeasible in post-Covid settings. Even the pandemic-based demise of air travel could yet undermine,

or at least delay, Sydney's 'third city' in the same ways commentators have deemed VFTs and bullet trains as unfeasible technology on which to base settlements (Terrill et al. 2020).

Planning professionals, in the main, have supported (or acquiesced to the reality of) controlled growth in major urban areas. Bolleter et al. (2021a) found Australian planning professionals were reconsidering plausible or desirable schemes for 'smaller, self-contained cities'. Such issues bring to light the carrot-and-stick approach of the construction and population of new cities and major urban areas. Housing prices are notoriously high in state capitals, leaving new homeowners in peripheral greenfield suburbs as isolated from the city centre as regional residents, while simultaneously subjected to the growing pains of new suburban development (Buxton et al. 2020). Yet, both state and federal governments in the early twenty-first century seem to regard passivity as the best practice in a nation that maintains a high percentage of homeownership and, therefore, little impetus to challenge the status quo when it comes to desirable 'destinations'. It has until recently appeared that if a change is to come, it will only be incremental and subtle. Reflecting on past Australian projects with new-city aspirations that have sought from varying distances to unsettle the centres that so quickly after colonisation gained primate-city status, any new schemes—from the distant to the satellite-proximate—will enter the uncertain discursive territory of what new, separate, and even 'city' mean and look like beyond a marketing vision.

In 2020–21, Covid-19 and associated policies reignited debates about suburban versus infill housing, and there is some evidence that planning professionals are reappraising the desirability if not the plausibility of new self-contained cities. Planning in the 1970s was informed by a view that post-industrial technology would shorten or remove the need for travel, that society 'would be less reliant on personal interaction for work, education and leisure', and thus there would be 'freedom from some of the constraints of transportation' (Maunsell & Partners 1975: 19). If the DURD's new cities have shown us anything, it is that we cannot consider new cities in terms of the years they were established or proposed. Only with the Covid-19 pandemic was the mid-1970s dream of working from home realised—via public health order: one central premise of the resistance to new cities, the chiaroscuro of distance from the established 'big smoke', finally laid bare.

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