



Reinforcing and enhancing the valued qualities and structure of the inner Melbourne region

The many, wide-ranging and authentic features that typify 'inner Melbourne-ness' are worth consolidating and building upon. The region depends on conscious enhancements of the public realm for its physical amenity and charm. This includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Systematic improvement of the walking and cycling environment. This requires not only the generous provision of pedestrian space in streets essential to support local activity, but also more connected pedestrian networks and cycle lanes. It also requires accommodation of complementary uses, such as employment, retail and service facilities, within walking distance of residential areas and public transport services. This reinforces the settings of inner Melbourne as a richly walked city.
- Encouragement of diverse, site-specific and well-designed architecture, art and landscape design in all pieces of urban infrastructure to continue to raise the quality of the urban environment.
- Reinforcement of the public spaces that tie the inner Melbourne region together.

Provision and enhancement of public spaces and other assets can also change the context and stimulate uses for private redevelopment, by encouraging new private redevelopment that responds to and complements these special places.

- Building on the strategic advantages of the inner regional waterways for water-based recreational uses and public transport, supported by shore-based infrastructure and onshore amenities.
- Strengthening the role of smaller streets and laneways within the traditional subdivision patterns to support inner city development, by allowing retention of heritage streetscapes to coincide with increased residential density and better use of city amenities.
- Protection and enhancement of the significant presence of nature throughout the inner Melbourne region. The natural environment is a distinct and primary component of the city's structure and character. It is vital for providing a habitat for people, wildlife and biological diversity.

Each of the above processes will play a vital role in developing strategies to encourage creative and regionally integrated actions to strengthen inner Melbourne's structure, character and significance.

If a sustainable, walking-based urban lifestyle encouraging social participation and community belonging is possible anywhere, it can genuinely be achieved in inner Melbourne. The greater the number of routes, nodes, corridors and spaces that are designed and managed as good public places supporting a balanced mixture of transport modes, natural environments and cultural diversity, the better that area will be able to support a dense, vital mix of uses with high standards of amenity, safety and universal appeal.

Liveable, Walkable Melbourne

The Structure, Character and Significance of Inner Melbourne

An initiative of the **Inner Melbourne Action Plan (IMAP)**



The IMAP area covers the municipalities of Melbourne, Port Phillip, Stonnington (west of Kooyong Road) and Yarra and Docklands. It is generally aligned with the Inner Melbourne Statistical Division.



'Grids & Greenery' – the waterways, parks, boulevards and built form of inner Melbourne.

Melbourne is constantly changing. New projects, changing activities, technologies and styles, and incremental renewal result in gradual and definitive changes that reshape areas large and small, public and private, throughout the city.

The definition of the inner Melbourne region is based on the region's closely related topography, cultural development, underlying structure and physical characteristics rather than on political boundaries. Fundamentally, inner Melbourne is a geographically and historically distinct area. It has established residential neighbourhoods, valued heritage places, a finely interwoven framework of streets, laneways and varied buildings, and a sequence of public spaces that tie it all together.

Change can lead to loss of the qualities we value most in the city, particularly those that enrich Melbourne and give it a special character, authenticity and significance. This Statement defines a shared understanding between Melbourne, Port Phillip, Stonnington and Yarra municipalities and Docklands of the important physical elements of inner Melbourne that should be preserved and enhanced. This includes the patterns and relationships of these elements as they interact with people, the landscape and built form. In describing Melbourne's enduring structure and assets and its desired future qualities, this Statement forms a basis for developing a collaborative vision and joint initiatives between the Councils, and for future decisions by the public and private sectors to create a sustainable inner city region.

Urban structure in cities is fundamental to character. Structure determines how and where details contribute to character and is enduring. Concepts of space are more durable and versatile in a strategic view than details such as architectural character, landscape assets, site-specific land uses and local activities. In inner Melbourne, the enduring urban structure and its assets are remarkably stable elements that interact to create the region's familiar yet distinctive features.





Inner Melbourne of the past

Melbourne’s early urbanisation and rapid growth in the 19th century established its basic structure of street grids, parklands, rail and tramways, and left a legacy of precincts, institutions and buildings that remain vital parts of the city. The fine grain of its subdivision pattern provided a highly walkable intricate structure that contrasted with larger scale elements – such as the major park systems. It also set up the valuable proximities – between the city centre, Yarra River, Hobson’s Bay, and public parks reserves – which are essential components of Melbourne’s liveability today.

Four initial structuring patterns provided the city’s underlying physical imprint. The skewed grid of the central city aligned to a particular section of the Yarra lay at its heart. Radiating from this were the formal boulevards – grand in scale, generous in proportion and pedestrian space, and continuous in design – which reinforced their impact as major structuring elements of the urban landscape. Between these lay the surrounding north-south street grids, with occasional topographic variation.

Finally, extensive parkland reserves were established surrounding the city. Some became transformed into formal parks and gardens that flank the city virtually continuously from north to southeast. Other areas were partially resumed to form ‘parkland precincts’ comprising public park reserves, tree-lined streets and other uses

such as public institutions and sporting facilities in landscaped grounds. All vary in character but are predominantly pastoral or picturesque landscapes rather than ‘hard’ urban spaces.

In more recent times, nearly continuous corridors of open space have been created along rivers, creeks and foreshores, forming a set of public spaces of equal significance to the early reserves.

Inner Melbourne today

Twenty-first-century inner Melbourne retains the ‘subtle layering’ of many of its formative 19th century characteristics. It has consistent patterns that make all parts of the city recognisable and continue to influence activities, development and people’s perception and enjoyment of the city.

Melbourne’s boulevards and streets of the central city are highly significant. Streets throughout the region are much more than functional traffic routes – they are valuable places in their own right, providing attractive and comfortable settings for a rich variety of activities and key institutions. The street and built form character of inner Melbourne’s early development prevails. ‘High streets’ along local transport spines support mixed strip development with retail, commercial and service activities, providing a framework for economic and social activity and access throughout the region. Local streets are significant for their varying orientation, scale and complexity on a local basis.

Activity centres are usually supported by tram routes and railway stations that form important links to the metropolitan transport system. These frequently form the focus for more intense activity and greater development density spreading into nearby side streets.

Lanes, both within the central city and other areas of inner Melbourne, further subdivide the street blocks, providing more frontages to smaller properties and a finer grain of access routes. And within the relatively simple structure of street grids and other spaces, inner Melbourne accommodates extremely varied architecture. Part of its essential character derives from this simple structure and diverse infill.

Collectively these corridors and centres offer a high level of connectivity and permeability for ease of getting from one place to another. In many cases this also manifests in highly walkable neighbourhoods which are poorly connected to each other.

Freeways are one of the most pronounced man-made structural elements introduced into the region. They provide important transport corridors that assist in removing freight and fast-moving traffic from city streets. They also provide important viewpoints over the region for travellers across a wider context that can reveal the underlying topography and patterns of parks and waterways. The elevated viaducts have, however, generally created semi-derelict spaces at ground level with unrealised opportunities for public access and use.

The streets and centres of urban activity in inner Melbourne are matched by areas for genuine peace and respite. In recent times, Melbourne’s rivers and waterfronts have become treasured for their civic-oriented frontage development, recreation and water-based transport. Together with the regional parks and gardens, these public open spaces are supported by local parks and plazas. Therefore, nature still maintains an important presence even in the most urban spaces. Many parks and gardens provide rich sensory environments, and human activity is a vital element everywhere.

Inner Melbourne in the future

The need to adopt more sustainable models for new development is commonly recognised, and inner Melbourne benefits from an urban structure that provides an almost ideal basis for a more sustainable city.

Preserving urban fabric

Inner Melbourne’s distinguished legacy of features means that there is much to be preserved. Amongst these are the many and varied links between activities and the public and private realms that are fundamental to its urban amenity and sense of place. These include:

- the waterfronts of Port Phillip and Hobson’s Bay and the Yarra River corridor;
- the skewed grid of the central city aligned with the Yarra River;

- the formal boulevards radiating out from the city centre, providing grand tree-lined entrances to the city centre, regularly lined with generous setbacks and ‘grand scale’ architecture and built form;
- the fine-grained subdivision and street patterns at neighbourhood level;
- the strip activity centres focused on tram routes, with development fronting directly onto the road reserve, resulting in a ‘street wall’ of building facades;
- the extensive parks and gardens which are significant as local open space and for their heritage and regional values;
- the variety of spaces that range from highly urbanised places such as the waterfronts at Docklands and Beacon Cove to the remarkably rural settings of Royal Park and the Lower Yarra River corridor; and
- in a wider sense, the regional parklands, including their environmental integrity, scale and diverse landscape character/s, and continuity of recreational access.

Reinstating neighbourhood areas

One of inner Melbourne’s primary assets is its highly accessible neighbourhoods that have become, through various works, poorly connected to each other. Parks and gardens, boulevards and avenues contribute greatly to Melbourne’s character and structure, but are also amongst the most vulnerable elements to change.

Remedial actions to help reinstate or perpetuate the integrity of these links and entities would include:

- repairing and/or redeveloping areas that, through public or private works focused on single uses (such as public housing, institutions and superstores) lack the robust diversity of uses that gives vitality to good urban places, or work well for their primary use but fit poorly with its surrounding environment;
- protecting and sustainably managing the tree-lined boulevards and repairing the urban fabric along main roads and key intersections;
- reducing the physical and psychological barriers of railways and freeways where they cross other spaces, for example, by remediating neglected undercroft spaces to support more intensive, active uses, addressing ‘raw interfaces’ with adjoining spaces and properties, and ‘bridging’ (e.g. through air rights) development to connect routes and activities on either side;
- halting (and wherever possible redressing) the alienation of parkland areas as ‘freely available’ sites for facilities or other uses; and
- reinstating components of the region’s subtle topography that has been modified through urban developments (such as levelling of hills and undulations and construction of artificial ground planes) by expressing it through new features – constructed or natural.



Urban structure at the macro scale.



Urban character of streets and neighbourhoods.

Future changes in inner Melbourne must be based on socially, economically, environmentally and culturally sustainable choices about the city’s future. By drawing from and building on the established patterns and physical elements of the past and today, this will be achieved. The features and characteristics that should be preserved, repaired, reinforced and enhanced are described above. While in some cases this may involve substantial improvements, in many others subtle modifications may be all that is required.