



Vantage

Women's Planning Network - June 2007 Update

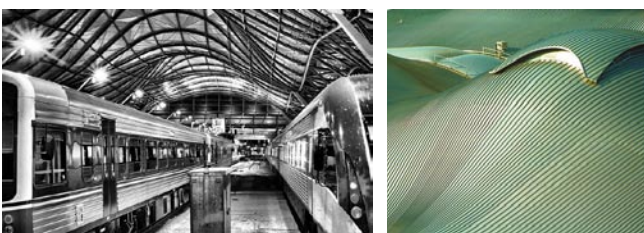
Southern Cross Station Urban Design Walk



The Women's Planning Network urban design walk this year was at Southern Cross Station – conducted by the architect who conceived the project, Keith Brewis from Grimshaw Architects.

Traditionally the urban design walks have been our most popular events, attracting large numbers and men and women. The urban design walks provide an on-site briefing from people who are involved in a place or a project's design and/or planning, with the added bonus of meeting people along the way. The Southern Cross Station walk was no exception, attracting over 30 people with as many women as men.

We started in the 'pods' with a presentation by Keith Brewis on the urban design and architectural features of the Station. The presentation highlighted the potential of the southern cross Station redevelopment to re-connect the western edge of the city to the Docklands and the Yarra River. There was a strong emphasis on the need for the Station concourse to seamlessly connect to the street, without the need for extensive signage. The previous Station acted as a barrier to movement and provided a 'wall' at this edge of the city. The redevelopment now 'draws' Collins Street up and over the extensive infrastructure of the rail-line, and connects the edge of the city with the Docklands.

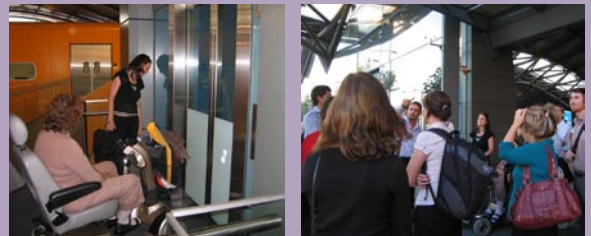


The architectural design features were also illustrated along the way. There was a strong emphasis on elegant solutions to the numerous technical challenges the station building presented. These included using the roof form to draw fumes and air out, creating an airy and expansive building, and planning for future water capture within the support structures. The station design also needed to enable the movement of large numbers of people as part of the ordinary daily operation of the Station, for ease of movement and clarity of connections to adjoining streets/precincts and this was a strong driver of the design.

The walk started and ended at 'Loco Bar' in the Station where we got elevated views across the platforms and an appreciation of the Station's similarity to the 'spirit' of great transport hubs internationally. The discussion at the end turned to the central role of public transport in Melbourne and how this building sent the right message to encourage increased usage of public transport.

The 'walk and talk' certainly captured the imagination of the participants and really engaged with the strategic city design issues as well as the detailed architectural details. We were especially grateful to Keith Brewis for contributing his time in what was an interesting and informative talk about the development.

We also note that the Royal Institute of British Architects has recently awarded the Station its prestigious Lubetkin Prize, which it bestows on the most outstanding new building located outside of the European Union.



Upcoming events

Fireside Chat - with guests Nicole Donnison and Catriona MacLean who will be sharing their various experiences of working in Samoa, and Melanie Hearne, who will talk about her recent experience in Abu Dhabi. Details Soon!

A second tour of Council House 2 - Already SOLD OUT!

Launch of our Affordable Housing Research - watch this space!

Public Toilets: A Gender Perspective

At WPN's International Women's Day breakfast in March, we awarded the inaugural WPN Rising Star scholarship award to Katharine Bailey, a second year planning student at Melbourne University. Sponsored by Hansen Partnership, we are pleased to be able to offer support to undergraduate students through this scholarship. Following is Katharine's paper - Public Toilets: A Gender Perspective.

Public toilets are an important design element in urban areas. Urban planning often emphasises cultural and aesthetically pleasing design, however, it is the more essentially banal elements of the streetscape that must deserve our attention to ensure a fair and equitable society for all. Urban planning often forgets the less attractive side of the built environment. Social amenities are important as they act as a base for the rest of the urban environment. The presence of basic facilities impacts directly upon those who use them most, their presence, or lack of, can have a discernible impact upon the way users interact with the built environment.

The state of public toilets can be seen as a reflection of the surrounding areas and thus they have the power to increase the social and economic viability of an area. Clara Greed (Date unknown) argues that good public toilet facilities can save money, make areas more attractive, increase urban renewal, increase tourism, and raise property values of adjacent blocks, increase sustainability and most importantly increase equality in society.

A major issue confronting society is that of gender inequality. The urban environment discriminates on a gender basis, and it is women who usually suffer as a result of this. Construction and control of the built environment, including public toilets, is most often in the hands of men. Thus, decisions are made that are often in the best interests of men. However women are the main users of such amenities. In general, women are more likely to be running errands without a car during the day (Bounds, 2004). This ensures that they have limited access to their home base thus are more likely to use public toilets (Greed, d.u.). Moreover, women are most likely to be the main caregivers of young children and the elderly. These groups are likely to need restroom facilities and the limited number acts as a deterrent for women to go to certain places limiting their interaction with the built environment.

There is limited incentive to use public transport if there are no bathroom facilities near tram, train and bus stops and stations as it becomes impractical for women with small children to use this infrastructure (Greed, d.u.). This in turn limits the sustainability of a city and increases other problems associated with high numbers of car usage. In general, women outnumber men in many shopping centres and activity centres during the day. However bathroom provisions are not divided evenly between the genders with men receiving more facilities (generally because of the availability of cubicles and urinals) at a ratio of 70:30. This impinges of the time of women who often have time restraints. Once more this excludes women from using such facilities. Sport facilities also have a higher proportion of bathroom facilities for men. This can reduce the participation of women in physical activity by sending a message of the apparent reflection of the importance of women in sport once more limiting interaction with the surrounding environment (Greed, 1996).

There are many issues associated with safety and accessibility and public toilets. Safety in public toilets is an issue and acts as a deterrent for many women. In many areas, including the CBD and Carlton, public toilets are located underground. The facilities are not inviting and the visibility whilst descending the stairs becomes a safety concern for many. Many of these toilets have limited surveillance which directly impinges upon women's safety.

Numerous issues arise from the toilets in these areas being located underground. The stairs leading into the toilets are a problem for accessibility. Those with a disability have limited access to these areas as do the elderly, limiting their use of the facilities and excluding them from the options that mainstream society have at their disposal. Moreover, access is limited for prams by the stairs that descend into these public toilets and many women then cannot use them not only for themselves but as areas for changing areas for babies. Melbourne City Council is beginning to make some changes by undertaking safety audits and constructing stand alone toilets with an emphasis on location, design, proximity and management. However, there is still more to be done to ensure that all facilities are appropriate for everyone in society (Roebuck and Dwyer, 2002).

These issues of safety and accessibility are not just limited to underground toilets in inner city areas. The majority of public toilets have limited security, visibility and lighting. Toilets in shopping centres often contain baby changing cubicles but few other public toilets contain such facilities which acts a deterrent for women to utilise other areas resulting in these areas becoming less economically sustainable due to reduced usage.

Public toilets have long been seen as something that should be hidden away which has resulted in the construction of public toilets being out of view. Reducing the centrality of facilities reduces the level of safety as visibility is reduced (Greed, 1996). By ensuring aesthetically pleasing designs, public toilets can become constructions that don't need to be hidden away; instead they can become a feature of the urban streetscape. In Japan each year they have a toilet design competition, encouraging the idea that good quality design can start from the social amenities upwards to larger scale constructions (Greed, d.u.).

The increasing presence of women in the workforce has also led to a differing pattern of public toilet usage. Many women enter the workforce doing part time work with flexible hours (Greed, d.u.). This means that many women will utilise public toilets at times outside that of a "normal" working day. Many public toilets in Melbourne are open from 7am until 6pm (Australian Government, 2006). This excludes many women from using the facilities making their operation useless.

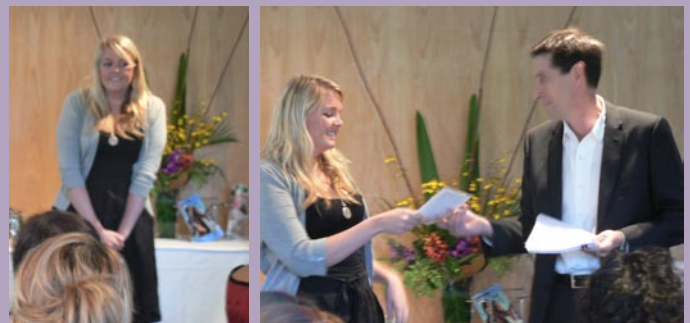
Increasing funding cuts have resulted in the number of public toilets being reduced. This is combined with facilities becoming an increasing target for vandalism often rendering them unusable. This limits the use of public toilets and directly affects women in the process. Vandalised public toilets often act as a deterrent even if the facilities are still in use. However, there is a solution to this problem. With urban renewal becoming an important element in urban planning, it is important that basic elements such as public toilets are not overlooked. This new agenda of

urban renewal is a perfect opportunity to make changes to social amenities from the bottom up. Improving social amenities, such as public toilets, often takes a back seat to more popular agendas such as the construction of public space and public art (Greed, d.u.). However, these spaces will not be used if the areas are not suitable for all members of society. Improving public toilet facilities can have profound and lasting effects on equality between the genders and ensures that women won't become disenfranchised and can utilise the urban space to its full capacity.

Planners must take care to ensure that basic aspects of society are met to ensure social equity for all. Although planning facilities such as public toilets are the less glamorous side of planning they are nevertheless an important one. By addressing simple design issues such as public toilets, planners can have a marked effect on societal structure. Fewer people will utilise the built environment if the basic social amenities are not present. The main group that will suffer because of inappropriate urban design will be women.

References

- Australian Government., 2006, *National Public Toilet Map*, accessed 13 December 2006, from <<http://www.toiletmap.gov.au/default.aspx>>.
- Bounds, M 2004, *Urban Social Theory*, Oxford University Press., Australia
- Greed, C 1996, 'Planning and Toilet Provisions: a Cistern's View of Planning, *Planning Practice & Research*, vol. II, no. 1, p99-'06
- Greed, C., date unknown, *Public Toilets in the 24 Hour City*, accessed 13 December 2006, from <http://www.toilettalk.co.uk>.
- Roebuck, R., Dwyer, P., 2002, *City of Melbourne 's Approaches to Addressing Safety Issues in Public Toilets*, accessed 13 December 2006, from <http://www.aic.gov.au/conferences/crimpre/roebuck.pdf>>.



Katharine accepting her award from David Barnes from Hansen Partnership

Invitation to join the management committee of the Women's Planning Network

The Women's Planning Network was formed in 1993 as the result of the National Women and Planning Conference held in Melbourne. The subsequent years have seen WPN become instrumental in raising the profile and participation of women working in planning and related fields which form our built environment.

WPN is now inviting any existing or new member of the Network to join the Management Committee. Committee members have great fun as a social group and, on a professional level, enjoy different perspectives outside their work environments.

The network goes from strength to strength each year and committee members will help lead the group through a very exciting phase:

- the launch and next stage of our research project on "Affordable Housing for Women";
- the continuing mentor program for young planners;
- organization of a variety of local functions through each year, e.g. urban walks, breakfast with guest speakers, building tours;
- production of Vantage, the network's newsletter;
- participation in selection of a student to receive an undergraduate planning award;
- occasional participation in overseas conferences dealing with planning issues common to women worldwide.

The committee meets on the first Wednesday of each month at The Green Building – 60 Leicester Street, Carlton from 6pm to 8pm. You are most welcome to send any Expression of Interest to Jode Cowie at the office.



Our Council House 2 tour in May

Calendar of Events

What you have to look forward to over the coming months!

July 18	CH2 Tour
August	Fireside Chat
August/September	Launch of the Research
September	Annual General Meeting
October	Planning Week Breakfast
December	Christmas drinks

Articles and contributions

At WPN we are always interested in receiving contributions to Vantage from our members, and feedback on our events.

If you would like to:

- contribute an article for Vantage;
- let us know about a great event idea; or
- advise us of any news from our members,

please either give Jode a call at the office on 9347 4622 or email her at admin@wpn.org.au.

We'd love to hear from you!

