

10 things: Urban Commute

The Grattan Institute earlier this month released another great report on Australia's urban landscape.

To read the 87-page report go [here](#).

But for those of you that are time short, I have pulled together 10 things you need to know about this work. Many of them are quite surprising.

10 things

1. Most residents don't live far from where they work, and this isn't changing much.
2. Commuting distances have changed little in most of our cities in recent years.
3. Commuting times have also been largely stable over the last decade. See the table below.

Three-quarters for work trips are no longer than this

Capital city	2008	2016
Sydney	60 minutes	62 minutes
Melbourne	45 minutes	48 minutes
Brisbane	42 minutes	46 minutes
Perth	34 minutes	39 minutes
Adelaide	30 minutes	30 minutes
Canberra	30 minutes	30 minutes

4. The CBD's are growing (in terms of jobs) in Sydney and Melbourne but are actually shrinking in most other Australian cities.

5. Most new jobs are in other suburban areas, with three out of four jobs widely dispersed. See the diagrams

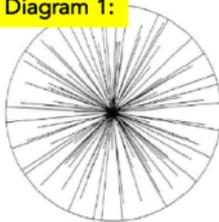
below. Diagrams one and two are what is in most town planners' heads, but the third diagram is what really goes on.

Remarkably adaptive: Australian cities in a time of growth

Figure 2.1: Employment in Australia's biggest cities is mostly randomly dispersed

The mono-centric city

Diagram 1:



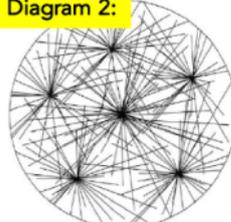
Jobs are concentrated in the Central Business District and workers – living in concentric rings at greater and greater distances from the CBD – commute on radial routes to their jobs in the CBD.



This model describes the reality for about 15% of workers

The poly-centric city

Diagram 2:



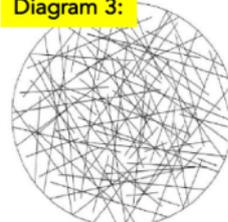
Workers commute to a discrete set of identifiable employment sub-centres located throughout the metropolitan area.



This model describes the reality for about 10% of workers

The randomly-dispersed city

Diagram 3:



Jobs are not drawn into CBDs or significant sub-centres; instead they are dispersed in a random pattern.



This model describes the reality for about 75% of workers

Note: These percentages are approximate.

Sources: Angel and Blei (2016a) and Grattan analysis of ABS (2016a).

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6. Living in a large Australian capital city doesn't mean travelling much further than living in a smaller capital or major regional town.

7. The common urban myth "double the population means double the commute" doesn't apply.

8. Population growth has a bigger impact on commuting distances and times in smaller cities than large ones.

9. People accept a longer commute to live in a lifestyle area and in particular close to the beach.

10. In recent years very few workers have actually changed the way they get to work. See the table below.

Transport method used to travel to work

Capital city	Mode of transport	2011	2016
Sydney	Car	68%	67%
	Public transport	23%	24%
	Bike/walk/run	5%	4%
	Worked at home	4%	5%
Melbourne	Car	75%	75%
	Public transport	15%	14%
	Bike/walk/run	6%	6%
	Worked at home	4%	5%
Brisbane	Car	77%	78%
	Public transport	15%	13%
	Bike/walk/run	4%	4%
	Worked at home	4%	5%
Perth	Car	80%	80%
	Public transport	13%	13%
	Bike/walk/run	4%	3%
	Worked at home	3%	4%

Some caveats

But some caveats do apply.

1. Some cities have grown a lot in recent years – especially Sydney and Melbourne – and much of this increase in population is due to a lift in net overseas migration.
2. Most overseas migrants settle in Sydney and Melbourne.
3. Many recent migrants settle in the more urban parts of our capitals, whereas longer term residents live (mostly) in the middle and outer suburbs.

So, some of the ten points listed above have been influenced

by recent demographic trends.

Suggestions

Yet here are some things worth considering that might actually improve the current state of play. Some of these suggestions are Grattan's and some of them are mine. These include:

1. Get more people to work from home via tax breaks and favoured appointments.
2. Question the mega projects. Incremental improvements are likely to have more impact. In Brisbane for example there is a need for many more bridges crossing the Brisbane River. These are cheap as chips when compared to such white elephants as Cross River Rail.
3. Encourage people to move closer to work or encourage work to relocate closer to the workforce. Property stamp duties stop local moves. Restrictive town planning and zoning stop new builds. Cheaper and different building methods are need too. Visit [here](#).
4. Change the way people get to work. A congestion tax and/or free public transport during peak periods.
5. Get kids to catch the bus or train to school. Given the increasing demand to live in the 'right' school zone, many of the kids can probably walk to school. And I am a parent of two daughters who were made to catch the bus.
6. Stagger school start times; school holidays and change the 9 to 5 work day. These schedules are a legacy of the industrial age and/or unionised labour.
7. Provide clear and separated modes of transport. Get push bikes off the road but have well connected bike lanes. Better connectivity for walking too.

Until next time,

Michael

Michael Matusik

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