

Cities Issues and Data Workshop, 14 October 2008, Canberra

Summary of Proceedings

Workshop Opening

Andrew Tongue, Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Context and challenges

- Cities are an important part of the Commonwealth government agenda.
- We need mutual engagement – Commonwealth and capital cities. We can improve spatial understanding of cities for evidence based public policy.
- We need a framework for policy dialogue through better data and data sharing arrangements which would facilitate public policy.

Presentations

Michael Lockwood, A/g Director, Council of Capital City Lord Mayors (CCCLM)

The key productivity, environmental and social issues facing the major cities

- Global cities are innovative, rapidly growing and competitive, but face infrastructure and house price issues.
- Adaptation issues arise as a result of changes in infrastructure, climate change, and international trade—with the associated adaptation costs.
- Socially inclusive cities—there is a geography of disadvantage with similar patterns in most Australian capital cities.
- City governance issues—working with a range of sectors, levels of governments and community groups.

David Gargett, BITRE Transport Research Branch

Issues with urban transport –people and freight

- Main city transport tasks are passenger and freight. Car transport dominates the passenger transport task in cities (90 per cent) with (10 per cent) urban public transport between 1977 and 2008.
- Trends point to slowing passenger growth, linear freight growth but more rapid traffic, emissions and congestion growth.
- The last few years has seen significant growth in urban public transport demand.
- Two levels of data—aggregate and detailed network—in four major areas: passenger and commercial tasks, the resulting traffic, fuel use/emissions, and congestion. The scarcity of data at both levels is not easily resolved without additional resourcing.

Leanne Johnson, BITRE Regional Research & Statistics Branch

National economic and social research and data

- A range of BITRE small area data sets for researching Australian cities and regions are available from the Bureau. The Bureau tracks and analyses the changing social and economic geography of Australia to improve the empirical base for city and regional policy and programs.
- A number of case studies of BITRE research show main sources of job growth and losses in capital cities, city industry characteristics, differential economic growth patterns between cities, persistent patterns of disadvantage and the distribution of wealth and income.

Mishka Foster, Brisbane City Council

Using forecasting for policy development

- Since 2004 Brisbane has used the forecast of employment and economic activity for policy development such as in regional land use, local area, transport and major infrastructure planning.
- They find that transport infrastructure activates economic drivers and travel time is a key to accessibility.
- Modelling enabled 'real' centres of growth to be identified and highlighted different but supporting roles of Brisbane and surrounding South-East Queensland regions.
- Future success depends on productivity and competitiveness rather than population. Interconnectedness of local regional economies increases economic efficiency.

Austin Ley, City of Melbourne

City Challenges for the future

- The importance of data on city land use, population and travel patterns and its relevance in planning and development of the city was emphasized. Increased understanding of economic relationships had improved policy.
- CLUE (Census of Land Use and Employment) unlocks existing data and captures the nature of the city in a powerful model. It is a tool for both councils and state governments to access information down to the street level. The aim is to roll out CLUE across all councils in a consistent and systematic way.
- Remaining issues include metadata, cost of data, changing geographic areas, updating mechanism, confidentiality and ethics.

A wide ranging discussion of issues faced by capital cities, with a focus on issues that would benefit from increased research effort or improved data, resulted in identification of the following key issues.

Growing economy and productivity

- Understanding cities' contribution to the national economy and employment
- Measuring productivity: an important factor underpinning cities' prosperity and global competitiveness
- Assessing comparative performance for policy formulation and evaluation
- Quantifying services provided by cities to wider regions.

Infrastructure

- Understanding the complex local/state/national patterns of impacts that result from infrastructure decisions
- Quantifying social and productivity costs and benefits of infrastructure: measuring productivity outcomes, accessibility implications etc
- Understanding drivers of residential patterns and industry agglomeration across cities
- Understanding implications of e-business on city functions and infrastructure needs.

Urban liveability, affordability, sustainability

- Learning from experience of how growing city economies best address issues of social cohesion, efficiency and environmental sustainability.
- Identifying spatial patterns of social exclusion and inequity: for migrants, indigenous and other disadvantaged groups
- Understanding implication of accessibility (travel times) across cities
- Affordable housing: patterns of residential differentiation and access to employment
- Understanding how energy consumption varies by place to provide the ability to measure impacts of policy and responses on the economy and environment.

Data issues

Evidence-based public policy relies on good data and research. The workshop considered national data relevant to cities and detailed local data for individual cities or council areas within cities. Discussion revealed opportunities for bringing together data held by councils to inform national policy. The discussion also identified specific data needs and issues including:

- Improved measures of regional (within a city and extending well beyond city boundaries) economic activity and productivity
- Unlocking existing data: including data held by councils (eg land valuations), governments (eg traffic counts) and industry (eg data from GPS, mobile phones etc)
- The need for a national business register (formerly provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics) – possibly drawing on GST administrative data

- Improved data on journey to work: spatial data on where people work and live
- Improved data on passenger traffic, including pedestrian traffic
- Improved data quality through (for example) consistent definitions and geography, better data linking, longitudinal studies, longer time series and improved meta data.
- Improved data sharing arrangements across all levels of government.

Moving Forward

The workshop concluded with agreement on the following way forward.

1. To publish a record of the workshop on the BITRE website.
2. To form a small working group representing (self nominated) workshop participants.
3. The working group to investigate the feasibility of data sharing to build a consistent, policy relevant, cities dataset. This dataset would allow analysis at city, state and national scales and should have a standard framework and use standardised data definitions (consistent with ABS standards). The dataset could include data on:
 - business details (a register)
 - economic activity
 - productivity
 - accessibility
 - transport/traffic.
4. The working group to consider best practice means of data management and sharing.
5. The working group to report back to all workshop participants.