

2.1 MAJOR CHALLENGES

Melbourne over the next ten years will continue to enjoy all the benefits of its population growth, economic stability and high levels of environmental amenity. Rather than any fundamental changes in direction, it is expected that a consolidation, expansion and refinement of the past decade's achievements will take place.

The desire to encourage the street as a place to sit, eat and drink, and watch the passing flow of people has manifested in a range of fixed infrastructure with permanent physical claims on the edges of many retail streets. In terms of balance, it may be that the proliferation of kerbside cafes has had a mixed result: while they create a vibrant, active street edge where previously none existed, they provide most of the stationary activity and reduce the freely available public zone alongside. A socially active and economically viable streetscape support a natural ebb and flow between public and private activity, but it must not privilege private use at the expense of public rights. Similarly, while the city's laneways provide greater animation and social participation via new active edges, it is important to offer places available to sit without consuming, that are well lit and accessible to all.

A city-wide program is well underway to expand and upgrade the cycle network, including both on- and off-road paths. A key obstacle to increasing cyclist safety is a lack of motorist awareness, and improving communication through driver education programs, public appeal and building partnerships will be just as critical as introducing new features such as different on-road alignments, better integration with public transport, and providing additional facilities, routes and services.

Expansion of commercial activities and construction of high-rise apartments has reinforced Southbank's riverfront as one of Melbourne's most vibrant public places, however substantial remnants of the low-rise, low-intensity land uses that once characterised the area still exist behind the waterfront zone. This highlights the differences between the role of the river's edge as a regional entertainment destination, and the qualities of a centre needed to support Southbank as a local city district. The joint aim of the State Government and City of Melbourne for Southbank is for it to become a 'mixed use, inner city district featuring a strong presence of the arts ... entertainment and recreational facilities concentrated along the Yarra and St Kilda Road, some commercial activity and a significant residential populations ... an everyday experience of visual and social variety resulting from co-existing and interacting uses.'⁵ However, recent development falls short of these aspirations, and numerous issues need to be addressed including open space provision and links, clarifying the street hierarchy, and improving the street environment for the local residential and working populations.

Because of the former industrial nature of Docklands and the remaining active port facilities and railways surrounding it, its connections to surrounding areas are poorly developed and opportunities for new routes are constrained. With Victoria Harbour as its focus, this offers a highly valued recreational resource. The development of small-scale links are just as important to the overall network as major ones, and linear spaces will act as recreational assets in their own right (ie. as journeys not just connectors of destinations). More detailed directions and action plans are required to link open space in Docklands with open spaces, facilities and services elsewhere within the Melbourne municipality that are convenient and safe, 24 hours a day, and accessible by foot, bicycle and public transport.

⁵Draft Southbank Structure Plan: 14