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traralgon activity centre plan: background reports

urban design context report

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urban planning | urban design | landscape architecture

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1 introduction

hansen partnership pty ltd has been engaged by Latrobe City Council to prepare an Activity Centre Plan for the town centre of Traralgon, including the preparation of an urban design framework.

In support of the above project, the following urban design context report seeks to identify the key urban design influences on the Traralgon Activity Centre (identified at figure 2, overleaf). The report addresses this task through detailed analysis of the existing conditions within the study area; consideration of the state and local policy context within which all future development will take place; and explanation of existing best practice principles and case studies drawn from an international context. By drawing a series of parallels across these three fields of enquiry, the report aims to develop an understanding of the critical urban design issues faced by the Traralgon Activity Centre and to formulate a series of key directions which are to inform and underpin the development of the Traralgon Activity Centre urban design framework.

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traralgon activity centre plan

base map
1:2500

legend

study area boundary

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2 background: history of the settlement

The land upon which Traralgon exists is part of the traditional lands of the Gunai Kurnai people [1]. During European settlement of the La Trobe Valley, Traralgon evolved as a stopping place on the main cattle route to Melbourne[2] and remnants of that route appear in the wide treed avenue of Kay Street. The first built structures comprising the town were, in recognition of this function, the "Traveller's Rest" (1858) and associated cattle holding yards, and a modest post office. The township was surveyed at this time (in 1859), although formed streets were laid some twenty years later following the establishment of a rail line, and the resultant increase in Traralgon's labour force, which also allowed the construction of more substantial brick buildings in the town (such as the replacement Post Office and Court House building on Franklin Street (1886)). Images from the late 19th century depict wide streets with generous footpaths and newly-planted street trees, lined by predominantly single-storey weatherboard shopfronts and weatherboard cottages, interspersed with some more substantial double-storey brick institutional buildings and hotels. New housing areas (including the neighbourhood immediately south of the Traralgon train station) and many commercial buildings were constructed in a boom at the beginning of the 20th century, following the establishment of a rail service depot[3].

Figure 2 historical photograph, Franklin Street, 1888
Image source: Traralgon and District Historical Society (1985: 13)

[1] Context (2005)
[2] Traralgon and District Historical Society (1985)
[3] Context (2008)

Whilst much of the more substantial heritage stock has been replaced over time, notable examples remain from the late 19th and early 20th centuries in the Traralgon Post Office and Court House building and the Ryans Hotel building, located on the southwest and northwest corners of Kay and Franklin Streets respectively; the Layton Brothers General Store building on Franklin Street; and the Traralgon Engine Shed and Turntable, on Queen's Parade. Traralgon's wide streets and regular grid also persist as an important remnant of its historic development, as do a finer network of midblock laneways. The primacy of Franklin Street as the town's key axis appears to date from the settlement's inception.

The second key period of development for Traralgon which should be noted from the outset results from the growth of the energy sector in the Latrobe Valley in the 1970s, following the construction of the Yallourn W (1973) and Hazelwood (1971) power stations and, particularly, the massive Loy Yang complex south of Traralgon in the early 1980s. These developments brought an influx of labour to the town and, as noted in the Latrobe Heritage Study (2005), led to the formal development of the Latrobe Valley as an industrial region, a structure confirmed through present planning policies which emphasise the role of Traralgon with a regional "network city". In urban design terms, the position of the town within a wider network places greater stress upon the need for Traralgon to both maintain strong physical transport connections to other centres, and for the town to develop and strengthen its own distinctive urban image.

3 urban design context analysis

> *"Urban context concerns the broader setting of a development – including its existing physical surroundings, its social and economic environment, and a strategic view of the area in which it is located and its role over time[4]."*

The following analysis sets out a series of observations derived from our knowledge of the study area, building upon a number of site inspections, discussions with key stakeholders, and review of relevant topographic and cadastral mapping information and aerial photography. Broadly, the analysis attempts to identify the key elements which comprise the urban design context of Traralgon at present. A discussion of the implications of this chapter is presented at Chapter 5 of the report.

3.1 structure and activity

Urban structure describes the key skeletal *physical and ownership* patterns (such as streets, urban blocks and property boundaries) that define the layout and character of an urban area. Urban structure is often thought of in terms of grain: of how "tight" (or "fine") the subdivision pattern is in terms of the size of lots, the level of diversity in property ownership, the number and size of streets and the length of built "edges" to streets. In this way, the city can be thought of as forming a kind of *fabric*, which is experienced from a pedestrian viewpoint, and apparent in looking at a plan. A "fine grained" area in a city is characterised by small lots, narrow frontages, detailed and varied streetscapes and many/narrow streets. In contrast, a "coarse grain" might be created by larger lots, longer frontages, fewer and larger roads, sometimes larger holes or gaps in the streetscape, and more unified property ownership.

It is also important to add that given that cities are configurations which order social life[5], the *human activity* which occurs within cities also forms an integral component of urban structure. In considering the structure and activity of the Traralgon Activity Centre, we note the following:

[4] Department of Sustainability and Environment (2004:11)

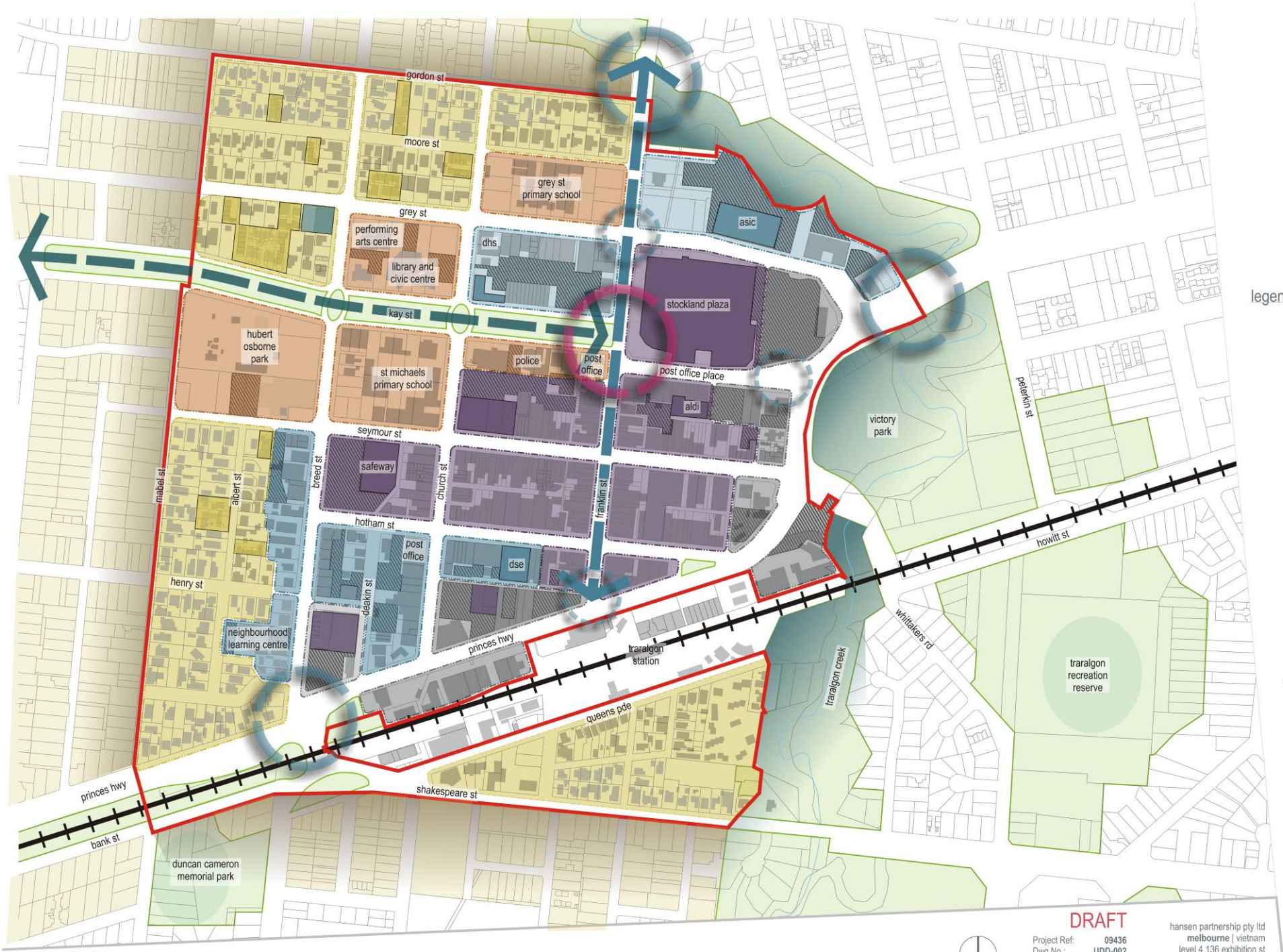
[5] Hillier (2007)

- Characterised by a grid of wide streets, rectangular urban blocks, long and narrow plots, and rear laneways, the structure of Traralgon's town centre is typical of many settlements laid out in the mid to late 19th century in Victoria. Despite the replacement of much of the building stock of the past, the underlying subdivision pattern has persisted, providing the town centre with "fine-grained" (narrow and diverse) street frontages and a high level of cross-block permeability. A sense of human scale is considered one of the key characteristics of the activity centre, which is strongly linked to this underlying structure.
- The north-south axis of Franklin Street acts as the town's "main street", a role which results from the direct alignment of the street with the Traralgon Station to the south, the concentrated commercial activity on the strip and the presence of the notable heritage Post Office and Court House building and large Stockland Plaza shopping centre to the north.
- The Kay Street Avenue of Honour forms a secondary east-west axis. The space of the avenue is also understood to exist as a remnant of the town's historic role as a stock route to Melbourne. The street is exceptionally wide, not only accommodating traffic but also acting as a landscaped green space and a monumental setting for the civic functions which abut it. An open space and cenotaph are located at the east end of the street, however beyond this space (on the opposite side of Franklin Street) the blank elevation of the Stockland Plaza shopping centre which ultimately terminates the axis does little to reflect the importance of the street.
- Whilst café uses are scattered throughout the town centre, generally specific acrtivity is concentrated within identifiable precincts, with a limited mix of functions within given precincts and an absence of vertical distribution of functions within buildings (for instance, shop-top housing or mixed-use developments). Precincts are identified as :
    - The central streets of the grid (Franklin Street, Post Office Place, Seymour Street and Hotham Street) form the retail core of the town, supporting a number of retail uses operating at a range of scales. This precinct also takes in Stockland Plaza, a big box internal shopping mall. In the south, retail uses are interspersed with office uses and a large multi-deck car park is located midblock between Seymour Street and Hotham Street.
    - To the north-west, a clear "civic" precinct has evolved which takes in the formal landscaped avenue of Kay Street, the library and civic centre, police station, church, Post Office and Court House building and two schools. This precinct is characterised by built

form set within landscaped “campus” settings.

- Land abutting the Princes Highway constitutes s a “highway precinct” which at present lacks a clear identity and structure, comprising larger commercial uses and a number of vacant sites. This loose “edge” condition also fails at present to provide visual cues at the key entries into the activity centre.
- Both the area abutting the western side of Breed Street and land to the north and east of Stockland Plaza concentrate office functions and medical suites, with some notable larger format offices on the north-eastern periphery.
- Residential housing, to the west of Breed Street and to the south of the railway line, predominantly comprises lower density single family dwellings.
- We also note evidence of an emerging area of medium density housing to the north-west (refer Figure 3, but generally north of Kay Street and west of Church Street).

- A significant number of voids exist within the town centre, comprising vacant paved areas presently being used for car parking. Such spaces generally take two forms, either occurring in the middle of street blocks, or forming the paved surrounds of larger big box retail outlets. These areas are considered a poor outcome for the town at present but are also recognised as key development opportunities.
- A network of primary and secondary gateways define the entrances into the town centre, with the key entries from the freeway and on major roads supporting a number of secondary entries as pedestrians and drivers move closer to the “core” of the town. The intersection of Franklin and Kay Streets and Post Office Place (between the Post Office and Court House Building, the Stockland Plaza shopping centre and associated public space, Franklin Street and the Kay Street avenue) forms an identifiable “core” to the town which could be built upon in future urban design work.



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traralgon activity centre plan

structure and activity

legend

- study area boundary
- "main street" axis
- green axis
- town core
- primary gateway
- secondary gateway
- railway line
- retail precinct
- large format retail
- office precinct
- large format office
- residential precinct
- medium density residential
- civic and community precinct
- highway precinct
- residential interface
- open space
- landscape interface
- void spaces

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3.2 urban form and streetscape

Building upon an understanding of the underlying physical and land use patterns, consideration of the three-dimensional "built" character (and the streetscapes which buildings enclose and define) reveals the following:

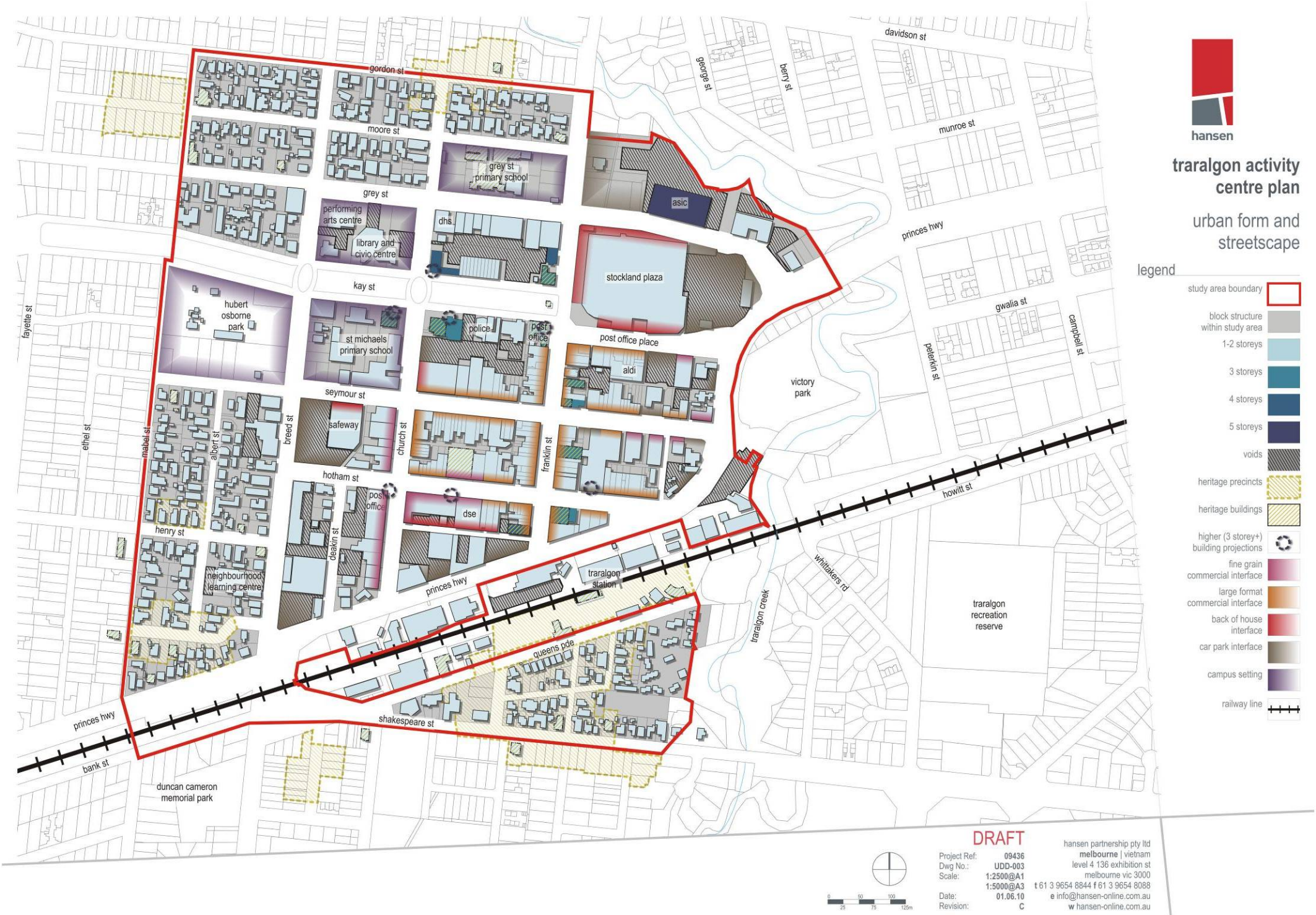
- Traralgon's town centre comprises low-rise buildings of between one and two storeys, with very few taller buildings in the area. Limited examples of taller forms can be found in the Post Office and Court House clocktower, some three storey development to the north of Kay Street, and the five storey office building currently accommodating the Australian Securities and Investments Commission on Grey Street.

figure 4 Franklin Street streetscape

- The streets of the town centre comprise buildings dating from a range of eras, and present inconsistent parapet heights which are generally characterised by business identification signage. Shops fronting Franklin Street and the key east-west streets all maintain awnings to the street, although few examples of the verandahs depicted in historical photographs remain.
- The central streets (Franklin Street, Seymour Street, Hotham Street and Post Office Place) are generally characterised by rows of narrow shopfronts, most glazed, some with a second storey above. This character can be linked to the "fine grain" subdivision pattern discussed previously, and can be described as a "tight" urban fabric – with many different shops in different ownership, which are set hard to the front and side boundaries and which are characterised by diverse architectural styles. Most facades fronting the central streets can also be considered "active", given that the main uses are visible and even accessible directly from the street. The general tendency towards fine grained active street frontages is a key asset of the town.
- Despite this general trend, a number of premises do extend across broader frontages, and examples exist of larger format retail tenancies such as the Harris Scarfe department store. A

number of larger “big box” retail buildings also exist within the town which present long “back of house” elevations to the street and are set within large areas of car parking. These larger format retail premises are at present generally confined to the edges of the centre, with poor interfaces most prevalent in the vicinity of the Princes Highway. Stockland Plaza presents the most severe example of this problem, given its important location

- Examples of “campus”-style development – that is, buildings set within landscaped grounds – are also present within the activity centre, particularly in the urban block which accommodates the performing arts centre and library and civic centre.
- Whilst the streetscapes which define the town are all relatively consistent, Franklin Street maintains a sense of primacy in its role as the town’s “main street”.
- In the surrounding residential hinterland, parts of which falls within the study area, housing stock tends to present consistently as single storey detached dwellings with some examples of double storey houses. To the north-west of the subject site, emerging examples of medium density villa units are available. It is further noted that the housing area to the south maintains a strong heritage character, and a good example of intact heritage streetscapes dating from the turn of the century.



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traralgon activity centre plan

urban form and streetscape

legend

- study area boundary
- block structure within study area
- 1-2 storeys
- 3 storeys
- 4 storeys
- 5 storeys
- voids
- heritage precincts
- heritage buildings
- higher (3 storey+) building projections
- fine grain commercial interface
- large format commercial interface
- back of house interface
- car park interface
- campus setting
- railway line

0 25 50 75 100 125m

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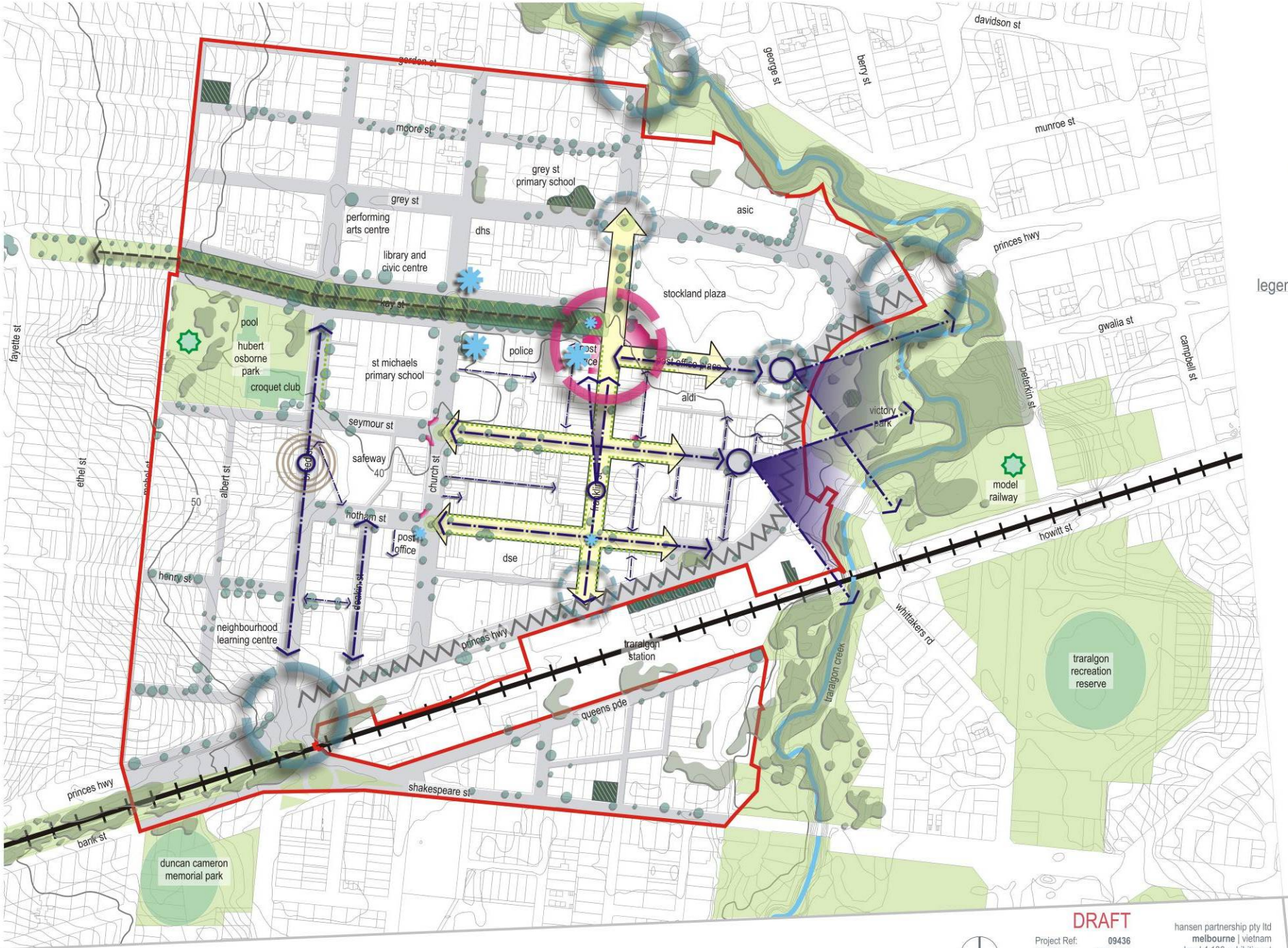
3.3 landscape and topography

The natural and man-made landscapes beneath and within the built environment provide an important structuring element which shapes the form and character of an area. Passive and active green spaces also provide an important community resource. With respect to landscape and topography, the following is noted:

- The land of the study area is higher to the west, with a notable crest on Breed Street adjacent to the Safeway supermarket. This higher point provides an opportunity for views, but also acts as a visual barrier to motorists and pedestrians traversing the street.
- Through the remainder of the study area, the land is relatively flat, with a gentle slope down to the east which provides the key east-west streets with corridor and panoramic views of the canopy trees of Victory Park. The way in which easterly views terminate in green space is highlighted as a valuable character element within the town centre.
- Victory Park provides the main source of high quality green open space to the town, taking in the meandering line of the Traralgon Creek. This swathe of green space accommodates a number of recreational facilities and is a major asset of the town.
- The Princes Highway acts as a strong barrier which breaks the visual and physical relation between the park, the riverine environment of the creek, and the town centre. The highway, which maintains a dual carriageway in each direction and a central median, also divides the key Franklin Street axis from the Traralgon Station.
- Several landmarks provide points of orientation within the town centre, the most important being the façade and central clocktower of the Post Office and Court House building on Franklin Street, which contributes strongly to the image of the town centre. Oblique views of the tower are possible from much of the length of Franklin Street and the building also terminates the Post Office Place corridor, lending this otherwise peripheral street a sense of significance. Secondary landmarks within the town include the Rotary clock, located in a roundabout at the intersection of Hotham Street and Franklin Street; the twin churches which mark the intersection of Church Street and Kay Street; the tower structure attached to the new post office building (on Hotham Street); and, finally, the memorial monument located at the beginning of Kay Street which marks the Avenue of Honour.

- The main streets of the town – including the key axis of Franklin Street, and the secondary thoroughfares of Hotham Street, Seymour Street and Post Office Place – have clearly been subject to a number of tree planting regimes over time. Low-scale *robinia pseduoacacia* occur at regular intervals along these streets, alongside taller canopy trees (generally *platanus* orientalis) evidenced more occasionally. The lack of consistent large canopy street trees in combination with the wide street reserves and low scale of buildings leads to a highly exposed pedestrian realm, with shade generally only provided by shop awnings.
- The heritage-listed tree-lined Avenue of Honour (Kay Street) provides an exception to this otherwise open character. As a remnant of Traralgon's historical role as a stock route, this landscaped green space acts as a key structural element within the town and a valuable public space.
- The town is limited in the amount of formal/defined public spaces available within the town centre, with the spaces adjacent to the Post Office and in front of the Stockland shopping centre appearing to act as the primary public spaces within the town.
- In addition to the corridor views afforded by the town centre's wide streets, shorter cross-block views are also possible via the network of laneways which transect the grid structure. These laneway views are often partially interrupted by "vehicle drive-through" structures, vehicles, signage and other obstacles, however serve an important role in providing a sense of permeability.



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traralgon activity centre plan

landscape and topography

legend

- study area boundary
- passive green open space
- active open spaces
- street trees (large)
- street trees (robinia pseudoacacia)
- heritage overlay (landscape)
- canopy trees
- play equipment
- public space
- topographic highpoint
- Kay Street green spine
- key streets
- barrier
- town core
- primary gateway
- secondary gateway
- landmark structure
- panoramic view
- corridor view
- cross-block view
- railway line

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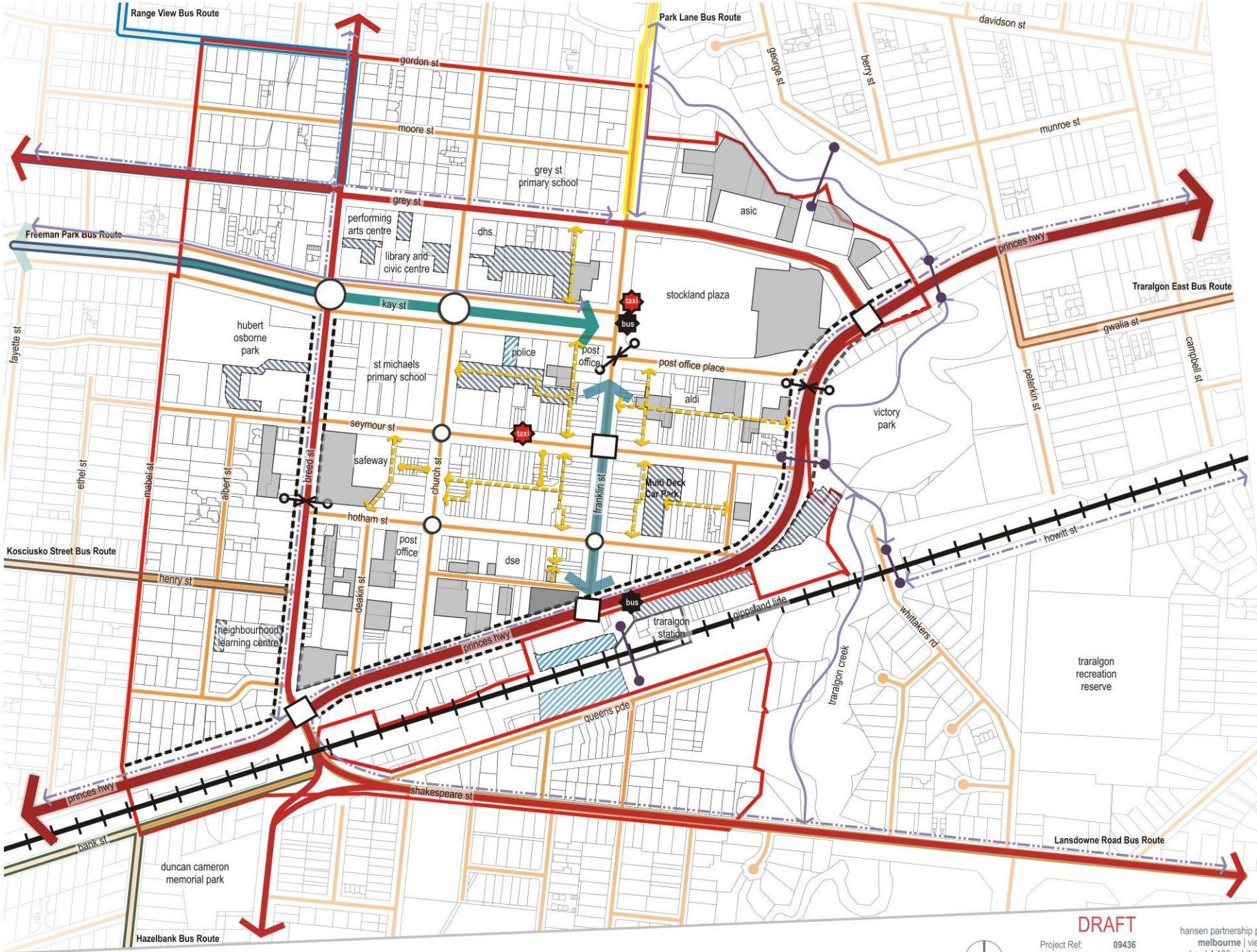
3.4 movement and access

- Traralgon is situated within a regional network of cities, and maintains excellent connectivity with both the towns of the Latrobe Valley and with Melbourne via a number of highways and arterial roads (the Princes Highway being the most prominent) and the Regional Fast Rail Link (the Traralgon Station is enclosed by the study area but is subject to a separate planning process through the Station Precinct Masterplan).
- The street network of the activity centre itself is laid out in a regular grid, with a hierarchy which privileges the Princes Highway (which runs parallel to the train line to the south and which forms the southern and eastern boundaries of the northern part of the study area) and Grey Street, an east-west Category 1 Road located to the north of the study area. Breed Street, to the west of the area, also forms a major north-south vehicular connection, linking the Princes Highway to the residential suburbs to the north.
- Within the grid, the main commercial streets of Franklin Street, Hotham Street, Seymour Street and Post Office Place maintain wide road reserves with angled on-street parking. Intersections within the grid generally feature roundabouts, with the exception of a signalised intersection at the corner of Franklin Street and Seymour Street.
- A network of laneways transect the urban blocks of the activity centre. These laneways are critical in providing access to rear carparking which is concentrated within blocks.
- There is a significant amount of car parking within the activity centre, although it is highly dispersed, taking in on-street parking; parking at the rear of properties within urban blocks; customer car parking next to larger format commercial uses; council car parks; and a double-storey multi-deck car park located between Seymour and Hotham Streets, to the east of the study area.
- A number of pedestrian paths transect Victory Park and the street grid within the town centre supports wide footpaths and a pleasant pedestrian environment with active street interfaces and a sense of human scale. At present however, several key pedestrian linkages are missing, or overly difficult, within the centre. The link between the Post Office and Court House building and Stocklands is circuitous (unclear and indirect), with the crossing on the southern side of Post Office Place. The pedestrian links from the activity centre to Victory Park are also difficult to negotiate, with long waits at signals, too few crossing points, and a lack of wayfinding infrastructure. The same

critique can be made of the crossing between Franklin Street and the train station to the south. Finally, there is a lack of pedestrian connectivity between the town centre and the western side of Breed Street, with no pedestrian crossings. This deficiency is particularly striking given the location of several medical suites on the western side of Breed Street and the topography of the street which makes visibility difficult. Beyond the lack of physical connectivity, there are also areas where the pedestrian experience of walking along streets is unpleasant – this is particularly an issue for Breed Street and the Princes Highway, where a lack of shade and traffic noise, as well as a lack of active frontages and other pedestrians, make walking uncomfortable.

- The hill which is located on Breed Street has been highlighted as a traffic hazard for motorists, limiting visual connections for motorists and making the right-hand turn from Hotham Street particularly dangerous.
- It is noted that a number of bicycle paths have been constructed which lead into the town centre from Kay Street to the west and Franklin Street to the north. Within the activity centre itself, designated bicycle paths and other bicycle-related infrastructure is not evident and bike parking is extremely limited.
- A bus terminal is at present located adjacent to Stockland Plaza, on Franklin Street. Six bus routes pass through the activity centre, servicing local traffic. The train station is well-situated with respect to other key destinations, being within walking distance of the civic functions to the north, key shopping destinations such as Stockland Plaza and Safeway, and the two schools to the west and north of the area.



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traralgon activity centre plan

access and movement

legend

- study area boundary
- highway
- main roads
- local streets
- laneway
- internal arcade
- railway line
- bus routes
- key pedestrian link
- tree lined avenue
- limited pedestrian connection
- low pedestrian amenity
- pedestrian link
- council owned car park
- public car park
- private car park
- bus stops
- proposed bike path
- existing bike path
- taxi rank
- signalised intersection
- roundabout

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4 policy and strategic background documents

This chapter considers the policy context within which the Traralgon Activity Centre exists. The review specifically focuses on urban design matters and design guidance within the relevant planning policies, with a view to identifying key policy issues affecting urban design within the study area.

4.1 state planning policies

4.1.1 clause 12.03 networks with the regional cities

This policy encourages planning for regional areas/cities, including the towns of the Latrobe Valley, that:

- *Develops and reinforces the distinctive roles and character of each city.*

This policy therefore introduces the notion of developing and reinforcing a clear urban image for Traralgon, a directive with strong urban design implications.

4.1.2 clause 19.03 design and built form

The objective of this clause is to achieve high quality urban design and architecture that:

- *Reflects the particular characteristics, aspirations and cultural identity of the community.*
- *Enhances liveability, diversity, amenity and safety of the public realm.*
- *Promotes attractiveness of towns and cities within broader strategic contexts.*

The policy advocates site responsive design; recognition of the importance of the public realm; acknowledgement of the role of landmarks, views, vistas; heritage sensitive design; design for pedestrians and for safety; the maintenance of complexity in the built environment and the staging of development; consideration of the issues of light/shade and energy/resource efficiency; and the need for high quality architecture and landscape architecture.

4.1.3 activity centre guidelines

Planning and responsible authorities should have regard to the Activity Centre Design Guidelines in the preparation of structure plans and in making decisions about new built form in activity centres. The

Guidelines form a reference document to Clause 19.03 of the Scheme. The Guideline set out the following aims for the design of activity centres:

- Develop a good-quality public environment;
- Promote street-based patterns of connection;
- Improve community safety;
- Encourage a mix of uses;
- Improve pedestrian and cycling amenity;
- Promote a public transport focus;
- Increase accessibility and integration;
- Encourage environmental sustainability;

In addressing the above aims, the Guidelines introduce a broad suite of objectives and design suggestions which are grouped under 8 key "elements": urban structure (comprising street layout and land use mix); train stations and interchange environs, passenger facilities, and railway corridors; street design (streets for people, street edges); public spaces (high quality public spaces, sense of place); building design (heritage, environmental sustainability); integrating malls/large stores into activity centres; higher density housing (opportunities, building design, surrounding residential neighbourhoods); and car parking.

In many ways, Clause 19.03 and the Activity Centre Guidelines define the remit of urban design matters which form the basis of the present analysis. As such, State policy provides an excellent overview of the scope of fields of intervention through future urban design work in Traralgon.

4.2 latrobe planning policies

4.2.1 municipal strategic statement

A key direction underpinning the Latrobe Planning Scheme MSS is the desire to achieve sustainable and healthy city principles. A strong focus on urban design is inherent in this policy which seeks to achieve integrated land use and transport planning. The MSS was introduced into the Latrobe Planning Scheme in January 2010. Key urban design policies which will drive the preparation of the plan are identified below.

clause 21.04-5: urban design overview

The broad policy aim is:

- *To provide a visually attractive urban environment which displays a high level of civic pride and community satisfaction, and creates a positive image.*

Strategies to achieve this objective constitute: a broad "support" for high quality urban design; a commitment to "improvements" and "upgrades" to existing urban design elements and improving visual amenity on transport routes; and to implementing Urban Design Guidelines adopted by Council.

Latrobe's broad commitment to high quality urban design outcomes for both built form and open spaces, and its recognition of the role of main road approaches, landscaping treatments and the siting of buildings, provides strong strategic support at a local level for the urban design components of the current task and future urban design framework.

clause 21.05: main towns

With specific reference to Traralgon, the Clause sets out the following strategies which are relevant to urban design:

- *Encourage higher density housing in the Transit City Precinct and existing and future neighbourhood clusters in Traralgon.*
- *Encourage the development of new retail, office and residential mixed use developments within Traralgon Primary Activity Centre (Area 4) and Argyle Street.*
- *Encourage increased densities and vertical growth of Traralgon's town centre to support the growth of the office sector.*
- *Inter-connect Traralgon's network of on and off road cycling paths.*

Clause 21.05 importantly stresses the need for a greater mix of uses in the town centre, comprising continuing growth of the office and commercial sector and the introduction of higher density housing, accommodated in some higher forms. These objectives pick up on the observed lack of functional mix outlined at Section 2.1 of this report, lending support to the prioritisation of this issue within the future urban design framework.

clause 21.08: liveability

The broad policy aim is to:

- *Enhance the quality of residents' lives by encouraging positive interrelated elements including safety, health, education, quality of life, mobility and accessibility, and sense of place.*

With regard to the principles of Healthy Urban Design, the policy states the following objectives and supporting strategies:

- *To provide for walkable neighbourhoods, ensuring public transport, shops, public open space and mixed-use community centres are close to all dwellings*, by:
    - Promoting active lifestyles and avoiding social isolation by designing new dwellings to be close to user-friendly pedestrian and cycle paths that incorporate shade, toilet facilities, seating and directional signage where possible.
    - Promote walkability within new developments, community centres or buildings (appropriate to scale of development) of approximately 400-800 metres from all dwellings.
- *To increase and maximise public transport opportunities between towns and within corridors to support the networked city*, by:
    - Improving existing linear open spaces and public parks by applying Healthy Urban Design Good Practice Guideline principles and through minor adjustments to infrastructure. This could include planting new trees, maintaining clear sightlines and bridging missing linkages to create a network of well-lit, walking and bicycle paths.
- *To encourage articulation of building facades and street integration to provide for safe and active neighbourhoods*.
- *To encourage all retail to provide active street frontages to foster a community spirit and promote community involvement,* by*:*
    - Encouraging retail areas that are commonly accessed community centres to be walkable spaces that promote physical activity and provide infrastructure such as bicycle racks.
    - Encouraging high quality community art in public spaces to foster community spirit, as well as provide attractive, high quality neighbourhood design.
    - Encouraging community centres to be designed to ensure active street frontages and promote 'eyes on the street' for natural surveillance. Provision of a mix of uses and

programs that allow users to socialise. These spaces are encouraged to be located near schools, public transport, civic areas and parks which will also assist in ensuring a viable community heart.

- *To co-locate nieghbouhood centres with complementary uses, such as public open space or schools.*
- *To promote physical activity and walkability in all towns by ensuring all dwellings are within a close walking distance of a community centre*.

The implications of the policy directives outlined above are considered below, within a discussion of the reference document "Healthy Urban Design Good Practice Guideline".

4.2.2 zones/overlays

The study area is affected by a number of zoning and overlay controls, which can introduce relevant urban design concerns through their purpose or decision guidelines. As such, the following is highlighted:

- Land within the study area is located within the Business 1 Zone (B1Z), Business 2 Zone (B2Z) and Business 5 Zone (B5Z). These zoning controls require that the responsible authority consider a number of relevant urban design related issues when assessing an application, namely: pedestrian and cyclist movement; the appropriateness of development interfaces; streetscape matters; and the design of buildings for solar access.
- Land within the study area is located within the Public Use Zone, Schedule 2 and Schedule 6 (PUZ2 and PUZ6). This zoning control requires that the responsible authority consider whether a proposed development is appropriately located and designed.
- Land within the study area is located within the Mixed Use Zone (MUZ) and Residential 1 Zone (R1Z), which are intended to encourage residential development that respects the neighbourhood character, and contributes to diversity in housing type.
- Sites within the study area are affected by both individual and precinct-based controls under the Heritage Overlay, which aims to conserve and enhance heritage places of natural or cultural significance or places which contribute to such significance.

The above directives are exceedingly broad in their nature and bring little *detailed* guidance to the task of

formulating an urban design framework, however contribute to the broader understanding of *general* issues affecting the study area.

4.2.3 healthy urban design good practice guideline

"Healthy by Design" describes a set of principles developed by the National Heart Foundation of Australia, expressed through a guide published by the foundation in 2004. Essentially, "Healthy by Design" links the discourse of *community health planning* to that of *environmental design*, advocating that a key method in developing healthy lifestyles for the community lies in providing (through design and development regulation) "supportive environments for physical activity". This focus on physical fitness is married with a number of other environmental design concerns (safety and crime prevention; road safety; and cancer protection through sun shading) to result in a single health-based design-focused "guide".

Latrobe City has, in response to the above initiative, in turn developed their own "Healthy Urban Design Good Practice Guideline" which is intended to guide the design and assessment of development proposals. The Guideline pairs a discussion of key health issues within the City with a number of general principles, arranged under the categories of residential development; community centres; and open space and path networks. The principles set out in the document have been incorporated into the MSS as "strategies" at Clause 21.08-3 and the Guideline forms a reference document to the Scheme as listed at Clause 21.08-5.

The implication of this guideline in terms of future work on the Traralgon Activity Centre Plan urban design framework is to introduce a clear focus on human health objectives. Specifically, this might play out in the detailed consideration of the specific references which the policy makes to 400-800 metre walking radii, the provision of bicycle infrastructure, the importance of seating, lighting and public art strategies, as well as designing for natural/passive surveillance and shade within the public realm.

5 best practice urban design principles & examples

> *"Urban Design is the practice of shaping the physical features of settlements to create places for people and to make high-quality connections between places and buildings for safe movement of people [6]."*

Contemporary urban design practice places a heavy emphasis on the value of "place" and practices of "place making", effectively linking the design of the physical structure of urban areas to affective notions of (collective) identity. This approach emphasises relations, networks, configurations and patterns in urban form and use; the divisions between "private" and "public" spaces, with a focus on the public realm; and the character, or urban image, produced and maintained by the built environment.

Rather than, as in the past, relying on understandings of what constitutes a "good place" as imposed or extrapolated from a universal set of rules, contemporary urban design tends to focus on site-specific characteristics and the particular values of the subject community. However, despite the stress placed on local conditions and values, a review of the way in which "principles of good urban design" are described internationally (a full analysis of key British, American, European and Australian policy examples is presented as Appendix 1) reveals striking consistencies across international policy contexts.

A number of key themes and approaches emerge which can together can be described as contributing to a set of loosely identifiable "world's best practice" principles within the current (Western) place-making paradigm. These are set in the table below.

Table 1: Summary of themes and approaches extracted from an international policy review

Theme	Approaches extracted from policy review
Theme 1: Place and character.	▪ Identity: work with and towards locally distinctive patterns of development & culture. ▪ Design for "beauty" in the built environment.
Theme 2: Accessibility	▪ Integrate places with each other so as to provide freedom of movement for pedestrians, cyclists, public transport users and cars (in that order). ▪ Reduce car dependence.

[6] Department of Planning and Community Development (2010)

	▪ Design inclusive environments that do not limit access through physical or social barriers. ▪ Locate development so as to maximise accessibility and support infrastructure.
Theme 3: Environmental responsiveness	▪ Respect and utilise existing topographic, climatic and ecological features of the site.
Theme 4: Public realm	▪ Design prominent and integrated public buildings. ▪ Ensure safety in public spaces and streets through passive surveillance. ▪ Design spaces which encourage civic participation and engagement. ▪ Stimulate vitality and activity in public life through the design of the built environment.
Theme 5: Green structure	▪ Provide a strong green structure (i) in order that inhabitants of settlements have access to biodiversity and natural beauty; (ii) to strengthen the ecology of a region; (iii) to order and orient the arrangement of urban areas.
Theme 6: Heritage	▪ Continuity: preserve heritage to encourage a sense of continuity with the past. ▪ Enrichment: build upon and improve the existing.
Theme 7: Diversity	▪ Design for housing diversity as this is fundamental to social diversity. ▪ Variety in built form is aesthetically important (balanced with need for consistency). ▪ Mixed (complementary) uses stimulate the public realm and support infrastructure.
Theme 8: Density	▪ Compactness of a city at the human scale supports better/more efficient infrastructure and increases vitality/activity of public realm. ▪ Concentrated decentralisation (networked cities) at a regional scale supports better/more efficient infrastructure and increased vitality economically.
Theme 9: Flexibility & Resource Efficiency	▪ Work towards adaptability in terms of function/use. ▪ Work towards reuse of buildings and materials, both in redevelopment now and for the future. ▪ Work with recycling systems. ▪ Work with resource-saving technology including low-energy housing and buildings. ▪ Work with the supply of renewable energy. ▪ Consider land a resource and be efficient with its use through development.
Theme 10: Governance	▪ Encourage community and user involvement in the design process and outcome. ▪ Develop legible urban design codes. ▪ Define and work with metropolitan regions.
Theme 11: Economic viability	▪ Consider economic management and maintainance as part of the design process. ▪ Design for economic as well as physical regeneration.

In addition to the above themes, the following theme has been extracted as a key policy initiative within the local policies of the Latrobe Planning Scheme:

- Theme 12: Healthy City Design
    - Design for crime prevention, sun shading, road safety and supportive environments for physical activity.

5.1 case study 1: public realm improvements – urban design for public spaces

Project Name: New York City Street Renaissance

Project Leaders: Project for Public Space (PPS)

Project Type: Urban design advocacy and built form improvement

Date: 2005 – ongoing

Figure 7: New York City Department of Transport NYC Plaza Program.
Source: http://www.ci.nyc.ny.us/html/dot/html/sidewalks/publicplaza.shtml

The Project for Public Space (PPS) is a not-for-profit organisation in the United States which describes itself as "the central hub of the global Placemaking movement, connecting people to ideas, expertise, and partners who share a passion for creating vital places"[7]. In their advocacy for "placemaking" approaches to urban design, PPS align themselves closely with the American New Urbanism paradigm, supporting urban design principles which emphasise the notion of "vibrancy" and "human-scale", with a focus on traditional (European) city spaces and the links between belonging, identity, community and the built environment.

PPS provide an interesting example of world's best practice in the way that they use images, test projects, citizen initiatives and advocacy to demonstrate the shifts that physical rearrangements and upgrades to the public realm can bring to stimulating the social "life" of a city.

The New York City Street Renaissance was a project began in 2005 which expressed one key idea: carving out space from car streets and intersections in New York to create a series of public plazas and bicycle-friendly spaces and streets. The project evolved from a visual exercise in re-imagining the city (through an exhibition

[7] Project for Public Space (2010)

entitled *Livable Streets: A New Vision for New York*) to a series of pilot projects, publications and websites, and eventually a larger-scale physical implementation project taken on by New York City's Department of Transport (DOT) through the "NYC Plaza Program". Pursuant to PPC's figures, in 2008, the NYC Plaza program reclaimed 49 acres of traffic lanes and parking spots from cars, in order to instead create bike lanes and plazas; has initiated plans for public plazas in each of the city's 59 community districts; and in 2009 undertook the production of the NYC *Street Design Manual*.

Traralgon Activity Centre is an area that at present is characterised by a large number of urban "void" spaces and areas which are "lost" to car parking and traffic-related uses. The Street Renaissance project provides a number of valuable lessons in the potential to reassign the future of such spaces and in so doing improve the quality of Traralgon's public realm. Specifically, the project demonstrates:

- The generation of images and aspirational designs can be an effective tool in stimulating public debate and interest in urban design, and in demonstrating alternatives to existing urban design conditions, particularly with respect to public realm improvements.
- The amount of space dedicated to traffic and parking can be reduced or reconfigured to favour a net gain in the amount of social space in a city.
- New social spaces can foster a renewal or renaissance in the way that citizens perceive their area and can improve the safety, useability, liveability and aesthetic qualities of a town or city.

5.2 case study 2: active streets – urban design for cycling

Project Name: 'Choosing for Cyclist'
Project Type: Local government policy, cycle transportation
Project Leaders: The City of Amsterdam
Year: 2007-2010

A key aspect of active streets – and of healthy cities – is the stimulation and facilitation of cycling. Amsterdam has one of the highest shares of bike usage in the world, with 37% of trips made by bike in 2005[8], for a range of purposes: 35% of work trips, 33% of shopping trips, and 27% of leisure trips. The 'Choosing for Cyclist'

[8] Pucher and Buehler, (2007)

program, an initiative of the City of Amsterdam, has been used as an example across Europe, and provides evidence that commitments to non car-based travel require ongoing improvements rather than simple threshold targets. The program takes in the following policy dimensions:

- Street and path network: constructing bike paths, clarifying missing links, and – importantly – addressing traffic calming measures to concurrently reduce vehicle use.
- Bike parking: On work days, up to 10,000 bikes are parked at Amsterdam's Central Station. Introducing adequate bike parking and reducing theft (from 10% to 6% by 2010) is a key plank of the policy, with supervised bike parking near stations an important component.
- Traffic safety: Despite a 40% decrease in severe cycling injuries since the 1980s, between 6 and 7 cyclists are killed each year in Amsterdam. Rather than rely on bicycle helmets, the Dutch government places the responsibility directly on motorists, who are legally responsible in most accidents with cyclists. Safety therefore becomes an integral part of the design of streets, restrictions on cars and driver education.
- Promotion: even in cities with extremely high levels of cycling, the on-going promotion of cycling as an alternative method of transport is required. In Amsterdam, like many cities, children receive education in traffic rules and bicycle training from an early age, and socio-economic groups who display low percentages of bike usage are targeted for specific incentive/education/advertising programs.

Figure 8: Amsterdam's cycle program
Source: City of Amsterdam

The City of Amsterdam's initiative demonstrates that non car-based travel behaviour does not just evolve as the result of innate "cultural preferences" but rather can be actively stimulated, through a range of physical urban design solutions[9]. This policy serves as an example for Latrobe City and for the urban design framework for Traralgon Activity Centre in the way that it addresses healthy city design through a series of pragmatic and staged interventions, including bike parking, detailed bike path design, traffic calming and promotional measures.

[9] Reijnen (2009)

5.3 case study 3: the ecocycle model – urban design for sustainable precinct-scale regeneration

Project Name: Hammarby Sjöstad, Stockholm, Sweden

Project Type: Sustainable development project

Project Leaders: Private-public partnership led by the City of Stockholm

Year: 1996-2012

As part of an Olympic bid, in 1996 a 'world's best practice' suburb was both designed and constructed in Stockholm's inner south on land previously used for light industry. The development of the former industrial area 'Hammarby Sjöstad' provides an important example of the integration of urban design with concrete issues of waste management, recycling, water purification, energy-efficient design and higher density development.

Figure 9: Hammarby Sjöstad, lakeside mixed use street
Source: English Partnerships (2010)

The area extends across 200 hectares of former brownfields land, and at present comprises approximately 9,000 dwellings, 400,000 square metres of business floor area, new canals and quays, a water-lock, several bridges and a tramway. The project is expected to be completed in 2012, after an 11 stage design process and will accommodate about 30,000 residents and employees. The project has matured over the past years into a fully-inhabited suburb which - rather than maintaining a "green washed" exterior - pursues a functional sustainable systems approach on the inside, beneath an attractive human-scale waterfront area.

The Hammarby Sjöstad example demonstrates several potential directions in future urban design work in the Traralgon Activity Centre:

- The value of a systems-based approach to the integration of infrastructure: energy, water and waste and treated as both inputs and outputs in a broader system which delivers heating, cooling, built form and spaces.

- The value of precinct-scale planning, a spatial scale already implied by the study area, which might be further developed in terms of the identification of precinct-based opportunities.
- The proactive pursuit of sustainability by local government and the value of leading by example.

6 issues and key opportunities

Traralgon Activity Centre evolved as the centre of a town founded on a historic stock route and developed as a grazing, railway and later industrial centre, embedded within a regional network of towns within the Latrobe Valley. This heritage has left the town centre with an urban structure characterised by wide and open streets, fine-grained and active commercial streetscapes and a strong green network, and yet compromised by its low densities, urban void spaces, lack of functional mix and a number of "back-of-house" commercial interfaces. This existing condition provides a rich basis for future urban design improvements, particularly in the fields emphasised by current state and local planning policies, namely: high quality architectural design, energy efficiency, a mix of uses, higher density housing opportunities and a public realm which supports physical activity and safety. International best practice examples show that wide-reaching improvements and innovation in the design of public spaces, active streets and sustainable precinct-based regeneration are possible with strong support and initiative from local governments.

Upon the basis of the preceding analysis, the following key approaches are therefore offered as critical to the urban design framework which is to be prepared as a component of the Traralgon Activity Centre Plan:

1. Retain the sense of human scale which results from the existing fine-grained subdivision pattern. Whilst the future consolidation of lots may be desirable in order to support office and retail development and, in particular, higher density residential and mixed use development, Traralgon's streetscapes can continue to be experienced as "fine-grained" (intimate, human-scale, diverse), even with the insertion of newer, taller and larger buildings. New development should be able to maintain and contribute to Traralgon's streetscape character through the articulation of facades (that is, by using the exterior of new buildings to reflect rows of narrower shopfronts or by breaking up bigger forms into multiple, less expansive sections), through maintaining existing zero setback lines (that is, setting buildings hard to front and side boundaries to provide enclosure, shade and activity to streetscapes), and through the protection and activation of the network of laneways which transect the urban blocks.

2. Work with the current "left-over" spaces of the laneways and intra-block void spaces currently used for car parking. These spaces represent a huge potential for Traralgon and a supply of land which, in the future, can be exploited in order to both (i) accommodate new development and (ii) provide for a meaningful expansion of the public realm through their redesign as public spaces. The laneway spaces at present

simply channel cars into carparks, however such spaces – if properly defined and activated – can provide human-scale intimate spaces suited for small-scale retail, café and dining uses. As part of this strategy, alternate car parking options must be considered, with a clear opportunity for further multi-deck parking explored.

3. Strengthen the role and definition of the inner "core" and two key axes (Franklin and Kay Streets). These streets, and their intersection, provide opportunities to develop the urban image of Traralgon. At present, the blank presentation of western and southern elevations of Stocklands Plaza; the lack of pedestrian connectivity between the Plaza and the Post Office; and the lack of street enclosure and shade on Franklin Street all compromise the urban design quality of this critical junction. These issues need to be addressed, and opportunities for better interfaces, a larger or improved public open space, better connectivity and street enclosure via street plantings and higher forms should be explored. There are real opportunities in this area through management of the Post Office Couthouse and surrounds.

4. Create improved linkages to Victory Park. Victory Park is a key asset to the activity centre yet is difficult to access as a result of the barrier of the Princes Highway and the lack of visual connections to the town core. Wayfinding and access should be addressed in order to provide a clear and legible connection.

5. Introduce greater mix of uses and more mixed-use development, and explore opportunities for higher density residential. At present, functions are relatively separated with little mixed-use evidenced, with a clear lack of residential land use within the main streets of the town centre. Opportunities for higher density residential and mixed-use development exist in the form of infill development (within voids and through gradual replacement of building stock) and precinct-based redevelopment (for instance through consolidation of the emerging area of medium-density housing to the north-west). These opportunities could be explored in tandem with a focus upon energy efficiency and quality architectural design, objectives which can be achieved through the introduction of well-considered design guidelines and controls.

6. Create a cycle and pedestrian friendly activity centre. Active streets and a healthy city go hand in hand. At present there is little evidence of bicycle-related infrastructure within the activity centre. Bike parking, pumps, lanes and safety should be considered in order to make all main streets "supportive environments for physical activity". Pedestrian crossings, footpaths and cross-block linkages should also be explored and improved through detailed urban design interventions. Particular attention is required to clarify connections between the town centre and the train station.

7. Define and consolidate edges to Princes Highway and identify entry points into the activity centre. At present the edges of the activity centre – on the Princes Highway, Breed Street and Grey Street, are characterised by a number of vacant sites, big box forms and expanses of car parking. These edges should be treated as opportunities for infill and the creation of a street wall, whilst entrances to the activity centre should reinforce a sense of arrival and pick up upon the desired urban image of the town.

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appendix 1

review of international best practice urban design principles

Table 2: Comparative analysis of urban design principles in an international policy context and ordered in terms of key themes.

Policy Context:	United Kingdom		European Union	New Urbanism (US)	Victoria	
Source:	The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE)(2001) *The Value of Urban Design*	English Partnerships / Housing Corporation (2000) *Urban Design Compendium*	European Union Expert Working Group on the Urban Environment (2004) *Urban design for sustainability*	Congress for the New Urbanism (2001) *Charter for the New Urbanism*	Department of Planning and Community Development (2009) *Urban Design Charter for Victoria*	Office for the Government Architect (2009) *Good Design*
Theme 1: Place and character.	Character Respond to and reinforce locally distinctive patterns of development and culture.	Places for People Safe, comfortable, varied, attractive, distinctive places that offer variety, choice, fun, vibrancy and opportunities to meet, play and watch others.	Place-making Create beautiful, distinctive, secure, healthy and high quality places for people to live and work in that foster a strong sense of community pride, social equity, cohesion, integration and identity at the local and wider scale.	Architecture should be seamlessly linked to its surroundings.	Sense of place Recognise and enhance the qualities that give places a valued identity.	Authenticity, sensitivity and intelligence in design of form, space, proportion, craft, detail Delight, beauty, involvement and engagement with our built environment - great places to be.
						Cultural values and diversity Strong sense of community and place, contribution to contemporary culture.
Theme 2: Accessibility	Ease of Movement Put people before traffic and integrate land uses and transport.	Make connections Integrate places physically (by foot, bicycle, public transport and car in that order) and visually.	Accessibility Public transport, pedestrian and cycle networks, and streets and public spaces to promote accessibility particularly for disadvantaged communities.	Reduce car dependence and provide transit, pedestrian and bike systems. Street networks should encourage walking.	Accessibility Provide ease, safety and choice of access for all people.	Accessibility to comfortable public transport facilities Ease and safety using public transport, reduced vehicle use, sustainability.
			Strategic location of development Locate new developments in relation to the natural environment and public transportation systems, and ensure maximum efficiency in car use.	Development must adequately accommodate automobiles.	Structure and Connections Organise places so their parts relate well to each other.	Strong pedestrian and cycling linkages Walking and cycling for commuting and recreation, freedom of movement, active public spaces, public safety, reduced vehicle use, sustainability.
				Establish transit (rather than highway) corridors.		Accessibility Inclusiveness.
Theme 3: Environmental responsive-ness		Work with the Landscape Utilise climate, landform, landscape and ecology to maximise energy conservation and		All buildings should provide inhabitants with a sense of location, weather and time and natural heating/cooling.		Appropriate orientation, responsive siting, natural light and ventilation A healthy living and working environment,

		amenity.		Design should be sensitive to local environmental features.		delight and comfort, reduced energy use for heating and cooling.
Theme 4: Public realm	Continuity and Enclosure Development clearly defines private and public areas.		Public realm & built space Make best use of proximity, ensure maximum efficiency in the use of public infrastructure and services, balanced population structure, vitality and security in the use of public space and long-term adaptability in the long-term development of built space.	Streets and squares should be safe, comfortable and interesting.	Inclusiveness and interaction Create places where all people are free to encounter each other as civic equals.	Excellent design of public places Safe, positive places, community pride and ownership, nurturing civic life.
				Concentrations of public buildings should be embedded in neighbourhoods and districts, not isolated.	Sensory pleasure Create spaces that engage the senses and delight the mind.	Excellent strategic urban design Vibrant civic life, encouraging engagement and investment.
	Quality of the Public Realm Public spaces and routes that are attractive, safe, uncluttered and work effectively for all in society, including disabled and elderly people.			Safety and security need to be defined, but not at the expense of accessibility and openness.	Animation Stimulate activity and a sense of vitality in public places.	Community needs and identity Pride in our places, safe places, reduced vandalism.
				Civic buildings deserve distinctive forms.	Safety Design spaces that minimise the risks of personal harm and support safe behaviour.	
Theme 5: Green structure			Green structure Green structure to both optimize the ecological quality of urban areas and give access to biodiversity for inhabitants.	Green structure (should be distributed to define and connect areas).		Sustainable Green Belts, courtyards, gardens and parks Good air quality, ecological continuity, enhanced local biodiversity, global sustainability, diverse outdoor places. Beauty.
Theme 6: Heritage		Enrich the Existing Encourage a distinctive response that arises from and complements its setting, at every scale.	Heritage Respects and builds upon the existing cultural heritage and social capital and networks of existing communities whilst avoiding conservation for its own sake.	Preservation and renewal of historic buildings, districts and landscapes.	Continuity and change Maintain a sense of place and time by embracing change yet respecting heritage values.	Retain and integrate cultural heritage History, memory, understanding of and continuity with the past.
				Respect historical patterns, precedents, and boundaries.		
Theme 7: Diversity	Diversity A mix of compatible developments and uses that work together to create viable places that respond to local needs.			Income mix in cities	Complementary mixed uses Integrate complementary activities to promote synergies between them.	Diverse housing types and costs More choices to suit changing and diverse household demographics, improved fit between housing and other elements of the built environment.
				Dwelling diversity and social mix.	Consistency and variety Balance order and	

					diversity in the interests of appreciating both.	
Theme 8: Density			Density (spatial planning scale) Compactness of the city at the human scale as a local development requirement; concentrated decentralisation as a regional development pattern.	Compact cities ('integrated neighbourhoods')		Clustering activity, shared use of facilities Accessibility to services, reduced travel distances, reduce spread of city, protecting our natural environment.
				Neighbourhoods should be compact, pedestrian-friendly and mixed use. Corridors connect neighbourhoods.		
			Density (urban planning scale) Sufficient density and intensity of activity/use to make public transport viable, whilst retaining a high quality living environment.	Decentralised concentration ('non-contiguous development').		
				Density to support infrastructure.		
Theme 9: Flexibility & Resource Efficiency	Adaptability Development that can respond to changing social, technological and economic conditions.	Design for Change Design for energy and resource efficiency; flexibility in the use of property, public spaces and service infrastructure, transportation, traffic management and parking.	Resource saving technology Including low energy housing/buildings, fuel efficient non-polluting transport, recycling, district heating and bio-mass/alternative power production.		Fit and function Support the intended use of spaces whilst also allowing for their adaptability.	Flexibility in structure and plan 'Long life - loose fit', adaptability for future needs and changing uses, longevity in the primary structure.
						Design for re-use Efficient, maximise sustainable use of resources.
						Efficiency in structure and plan Reduced building area, reduced use of resources, lower costs.
						Ecological sustainability Environmental, social and economic sustainability, recurrent cost savings.
Theme 10: Governance				Graphic urban design codes provide predictable guides for change.		Community and user involvement A fit for purpose, responsive outcome.
				Metropolitan regions are important economic unit and a bounded entity. Physical boundaries should		

				not be 'blurred' by peripheral development.		
Theme 11: Economic viability		Manage the Investment Economically viable, well managed and maintained projects delivered via appropriate mechanisms conceived as part of the design process.	Economic regeneration Supports a vibrant, balanced, inclusive and equitable economy and promotes effective urban regeneration.			