We are always reading about booming urban populations: by 2020, Sydney to grow to 5 million inhabitants, Tokyo to 27 million; Mumbai to 28 million, and so on. Journalists and policy-makers pore over demographic trends, working out what to do with these raw numbers that scarily appear in statistical tables. But these people are also living, breathing publics, having to negotiate all sorts of encounters with each other, seething in traffic jams, talking into mobile phones, relaxing in cafes, and sitting in office blocks.

Understanding how people get around cities—working, socialising, relaxing—and monitoring the quality, ease and affordability of such mobility are important tasks for urbanists. There was a time when mass movements of workers through cities was thought to be on the way out. Telecommuting and flexi-time were hailed as ways of reducing rush-hour flows and traffic congestion. But modern work practices tend to require as much face-to-face human contact as ever before, and there are strong efficiencies to be gained in locating firms in densely clustered central business districts.

From those who call for a return to walking—a good way of tackling the obesity epidemic—to those who are seeking an expansion in airports, it could be said that the modern metropolis is all about the management of mobility, and balancing out the individual search for comfort and safety with equitable mass transport systems.

The widespread privatisation of airport management makes these spaces off-limits to democratically elected governments, despite their strategic importance to cities and nations.

For example, one of the major challenges facing cities—especially in terms of global warming—is what to do about their airports. Environmental protest movements are gradually turning their attention to the huge impact that unrestrained air travel makes on the environment, both locally in terms of noise and traffic congestion, but also with its huge fuel demands.

Certainly, experience from the United States suggests that a mix of careful taxation and enlightened developers can actually make a difference to how cities work.

But this doesn’t mean that airports will shrivel up and die. The opposite. Global air passenger numbers are booming, and while this upsurge may not survive an oil shock, the growing world population and its search for livelihoods will see air travel remain a fundamental part of future growth scenarios. Airport management becomes an entrepreneurial business, which explains why so many terminals now look like shopping malls, and why the simple act of hailing a taxi or grabbing a luggage trolley can now come with an unwelcome surcharge. The widespread privatisation of airport management makes these spaces off-limits to democratically elected governments, despite their strategic importance to cities and nations.

Just as understanding airports—their look, shape, size, and impact—is a fundamental question for urbanists, so at the other end of the scale, the quality of public space—or walking, relaxing, drinking, and eating—has always been an important issue for city dwellers. Yet whether we are talking about...
people moving in fuel-efficient ways are urgent task. Getting place management right and getting

end of town, there are other big issues facing public spaces. Few of these policy issues are clear-cut. The devil will always be in the detail. But getting place management right and getting people moving in fuel-efficient ways are urgent task for urbanists.

Donald McNeill is an Associate Professor at the Urban Research Centre and leads the Centre’s research on public space, development and mobility. His current projects include an Australian Research Council Discovery Project examining airports, cities and global learning: a partnership with Sydney Olympic Park Authority exploring its multiple publics; and an examination of public space management in London and Sydney.

PUBLIC FORUM: INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS TO THE URBAN INFRASTRUCTURE CRISIS

As part of the 2008 Australian Innovation Festival, the Urban Research Centre and the Whitlam Institute at the University of Western Sydney are convening a public forum on the urban infrastructure crisis. The forum will feature prominent researchers and commentators discussing cutting edge ideas about the provision of sustainable infrastructure to Australian cities.

Speakers will include Patrick Forth, Senior Partner and Managing Director, Boston Consulting Group; Pru Sanderson, CEO, Vo, Urban and Philip O’Neill, Director, Urban Research Centre. The forum will be held on Wednesday 21 May 2008 at the Sebel Hotel in Parramatta. Bookings are essential and can be made through Kelly Larranaga, 02 8833 5912, k.larranaga@uws.edu.au.

CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Urban Research Centre’s short courses provide a mix of theory and practice that extends professional knowledge, skills and judgment for a variety of urban professionals. Courses are designed for those who would like to learn more about a range of urban issues including planning, sustainability, governance, urban design, planning law and affordable housing.

Completion of short courses offered by Urban Research Centre can be counted as credit in the Graduate Certificate, Graduate Diploma or Master of Urban Management at UWS subject to the completion of appropriate assessment tasks. Most of the courses are held at Parramatta. The Urban Research Centre also offers in-house customised training around the topics listed above. Please contact the Centre for more information. Below is a listing of short courses that will be offered in the next few months.

- Social Impact Analysis 1 - 2 May
- Planning Law for the Real World 9 - 11 May
- Making Sustainable Places 15 - 16, 22 - 23 May
- Planning for Non-Planners: An Introduction 30 May

Further information:
Peter Phibbs, Academic Program Coordinator, p.phibbs@uws.edu.au, 0240 303 867.
Susan Lundy, Business Development Officer, s.lundy@uws.edu.au, 0244 156 572.

For a full description of short courses and registration, please visit our website: http://www.uws.edu.au/urban/research/courses
SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION

This is the first issue of Urban Concerns, the free monthly newsletter of the Urban Research Centre. Each issue will feature commentary from our researchers and highlight the Centre’s courses, research activities and events. Urban Concerns is relevant to urban academics, practitioners, policy makers, decision makers and community groups. To obtain a free subscription to this newsletter or to change your mailing details, please email urcadmin@uws.edu.au with the subject heading “Subscribe Urban Concerns” and include postal details in the email text. If you do not wish to continue to receive this newsletter, please email urcadmin@uws.edu.au with the subject heading “Unsubscribe Urban Concerns”.

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