

# Future Brisbane: City modelled on New York parks and Singapore mass transit

NOT long from now Brisbane's civic fathers will wake up to the possibility of converting Herston's Victoria Park golf club into an inner-city park similar to New York's Central Park.

As most cars will be forced out of the city, there will also be a debate on what to do with the empty carparks and tunnels. Perhaps the tunnels will be used by robots to transport goods too heavy to be ferried by drones. Defunct parking stations may be converted to landing pods for flying motorcycles, such as those trialed last week by BMW.

Cars will not be needed in the city because automated light rail and driverless buses will crisscross the city on a dozen new bridges.

Dotted around Victoria Park will be 30 or 40 buildings, many of them skyscrapers, making up Brisbane's second CBD. It will rub shoulders with the Royal Brisbane international medical research institute that implants mechanical hearts and restores sight to the blind.

Not far away, the Royal National Association will welcome a new mosque and Islamic art centre in a diversified "mini-city" that already has a set of striking residential, hotel and business towers set around the Ekka showgrounds.

By then, Brisbane's population will be measured in the millions.

Even in our lifetimes there will be at least two more CBDs, one at Mount Gravatt to the south and one at Chermside to the north.

**Futurist Michael Rayner has been looking over the horizon for 15 years.**

So says Michael Rayner, a habitual futurist, who has been looking over the horizon for more than 15 years.

Rayner is a gifted architect, who with his previous firm Cox Rayner, pencilled the curvaceous Kurilpa Bridge, the sculptured tower that is 111 Eagle St, the Australian Age of Dinosaurs Museum at Winton and the University of Queensland Oral Health Centre.

I especially like his ferry terminals – pieces of accessible art perhaps bringing joy to river travel.

Rayner also won international accolades for his Helix Bridge in Singapore, a town whose mass-transit model, he says, should be replicated here.

In Rayner's Future Brisbane vision, the living densities in Brisbane's "core" will be much higher.



Victoria Park golf club should be considered a true central park, similar to New York. The Vic Park golfers, alas, will have to find another sport.

“I’m sorry for the few golfers that have the luxury of playing on Victoria Park,” Rayner says.

“But we should be looking at it as a genuine central park, like Central Park in New York, that serves greater numbers.”

Victoria Park will become “very strategic” in the planning of new Brisbane.

Parks will become increasingly important because there will be few back yards left.

“I don’t want to take out a golf club because I’m feeling wilful,” Rayner says.

“It is because there is a large open space and we can put density around it,” he says.

Rayner speaks with authority. He was the force behind the Smart State Council set up by Premier Peter Beattie 11 years ago.

Beattie’s Smart Gang was charged with looking at opportunities and strategies for the city’s future. It was asked to identify what features unique to Brisbane differentiated us from other cities.

undefined

The Smart State ethos was ridiculed by some. But there is little doubt it provided a momentum for change, challenging us to respond to the peculiarities of our subtropical environment.

Today Rayner welcomes new initiatives, such as the State Opposition’s proposed science academy at South Bank and the imaginative \$2.5 billion performance and education precinct on a transport interchange at Roma Street Railyards, proposed by entertainment entrepreneur Harvey Lister.

But Rayner stresses the need for connectivity.

“What worries me these days is that you are finding announcements about individual ‘things’ being suggested.

“Someone says, ‘let’s build an academy of sciences at Kurilpa’, or ‘let’s build a fast train to the Gold Coast’, or something else.

“There are kind of individual proposals with words like architectural icon attached to them.”

Each project should not be considered in isolation and should demonstrate how they better connect the city as a whole. “To me, the things you might create that might be iconic are elements that come out of a much more cohesive set of strategies, rather than, say, let’s have this idea for this site and that idea for that site.”

Bridges are the key to “connectivity”. One day there will be 12 bridges between Hamilton and St Lucia, he says.

“Brisbane city centre has a serpentine river running through it that is very tightly woven. By creating bridges, we are able to connect places that were unconnected.

“The Kurilpa and Goodwill bridges have shown that.”



Bridges such as the Goodwill Bridge are the key to connectivity.

He’s right. Brisbane is better connected now than it was 20 years ago when those bridges were not there.

Rayner wants more bridges to the Botanic Gardens, and across to Kangaroo Point and connections through Dockside to New Farm and routes down Sydney St or Merthyr Rd with links to Bulimba.

In Smart State’s early days, his thinking was limited to pedestrian and cycle bridges. Now he sees bridges as crucial transport corridors for “light rail”, whatever that might be in the future.

Rayner talks about a series of bridges that would be a “conduit of movement”.

“That in itself would be iconic.” He adds: “Why not create a new subtropical city by putting your elements along that route so people can move from piece to piece?”

“Some of the pieces are already there, such as the Powerhouse, the Botanic Gardens, New Farm Park.

undefined

“Create the conduit and then start filling it with life.

“If you can put more things on those routes, all the better. Melbourne does that very well,” he says.

When big projects are announced, he starts thinking: “How does that link up, and what does it mean?”

“Connectivity is everything to the legibility of a city, so if you create corridors of movement you create legibility at the same time.”

The more “legible” a city, the more people will enjoy it.

I remember him saying as much 10 years ago, and it is probably more relevant now. “It’s all about creating movement spines. It’s not dissimilar to creating a shopping centre.

“You create spines and then you create tributaries off the spines that take you back to the town centre.”



Mass transit systems, such as that used in Singapore, will diminish our reliability on cars. Mass transit systems will diminish our reliability on cars.

Cars will choke Brisbane by 2020, he says, so commuters will demand alternatives.

“People sitting in traffic unable to get to work, and then paying 80 bucks to park will demand change sooner or later. So we need to look beyond current transport modes.

“Speed and mobility will be the key.”

As the city becomes more dense, there will not be space for cars.

“Cars are actually quite cumbersome for an individual. We will be looking for much more mass transit.

“Cities like Singapore are already moving in that direction. Their mass transit system is so good people are choosing to use it instead.”

It is not just about moving people. In Future Brisbane, stations will become social hubs with retail centres.

He sees a greater use of the river with ferry terminals at each bridge so people can get off one mode of transport and get on another.



“As our population ages, not everyone is going to be a cyclist.

“So we need to give people a multiple choice of movement.” Difficult questions arise.

If we have less reliance on the car in the inner-city, what will we do with all the carparks we have created?

“And if we are not driving cars to parks anymore, what happens to the Riverside Expressway?”



The Riverside Expressway may no longer be needed.

It might not be needed. Riverside Expressway might become a series of great public spaces.

“This may not be in the next five or 10 years, but at some point we are going to think about our road infrastructure and our tunnels and what we do with them all.

“There is no universal answer. All cities will be different,” Rayner says.

The way we live will change radically.

“The back yard is becoming doomed because people are continuing to subdivide blocks,” he says.

“The back yard will become a luxury you can’t afford to have.”

So we go to Victoria Park instead. Another park the size of Sydney’s Hyde Park could fit on the railway yards at Bowen Hills.

Also beyond the heavily populated core, Brisbane has “really beautiful edges”, Rayner says.

The Moreton Bay islands will be increasingly important “escapes” from the city.

#### YOUNG TALENT TIME AT CON

THE Queensland Conservatorium of Music has a shiny new Steinway grand piano that arrived from Hamburg in time for next weekend’s final performances in the prestigious Lev Vlassenko piano competition.

It is an arduous contest in which 20 young competitors from Australia and New Zealand must each play for three hours, from memory, in front of a jury that includes Natasha Vlassenko, head of piano studies at the Con.



Natasha Vlassenko is head of piano studies at the Con.

The contest honours her Russian father Lev Vlassenko, an international pianist who died in Brisbane in 1996. The contest is exclusively for pianists under 30. They spent the week filling the hall with the music of Beethoven, Brahms, Liszt, Mozart, Rachmaninoff and Yitzhak Yedid, an Israeli-Australian composer.

The contest reaches its crescendo next Friday night. Four finalists competing for a \$60,000 purse will perform with the Queensland Symphony Orchestra at the Conservatorium Theatre at South Bank. (Tickets: <http://www.lev-vlassenko.com/>). Governor Paul de Jersey, himself a pianist, will present the main prize. Several of the young competitors are from Chinese families. To think that just two decades ago Beethoven music was banned for being too “bourgeois”. I’m told there are now 30 million students learning the piano in China.

#### MUIR’S QUEST FOR SIR THOMAS

SOME petty ideologues think we should tear down our historic statues.

I think we should build more.

If Wally Lewis and Leroy Loggins have statues to honour their sporting achievements, why don’t we have a statue for Sir Thomas Brisbane? He was an astronomer, wood duck shooter, dancer, teacher, Latin and French scholar.

He was also a war hero who survived 14 battles and six sieges in a meritorious military career before becoming Governor of NSW in 1821. Sir Thomas sent John Oxley north to find a place for a suitable penal colony that would become Brisbane city. Our capital bears his name, but we don’t know a lot about the Scot who fought with the Duke of Wellington in the Napoleonic Wars.

Solicitor David Muir wants to change that.

He is heading to Brisbane's birthplace at Largs, in Scotland, to meet the civic fathers and descendants of Sir Thomas.

Muir said former Lord Mayor Clem Jones was fascinated with Sir Thomas and asked him to promote links between Brisbane and Largs. He is chairman of the Clem Jones Endowment Fund.



Amateur astronomer Clem Jones used a telescope belonging to Sir Thomas Brisbane.

Jones was a stargazer who used Sir Thomas's telescope to peer into the heavens.

Muir, a partner at HWL Ebsworth Lawyers, will carry a letter of introduction from Lord Mayor Graham Quirk and a copy of Denver Beanland's *History of Brisbane City Council* (Boolarong Press).

In Scotland, Muir will visit Brisbane's grave and meet Lord Seymour Monro, a retired general and a descendant of Brisbane's.

Muir agrees a statue would be a fitting tribute to Sir Thomas.

#### PERFECTION?

It seems the nation's two emblematic reds, Penfolds Grange and Henschke Hill of Grace have a genuine challenger. Both received 99 points in the latest Australian wine rankings. However, Torbreck's 2012 The Laird (\$750) was this week awarded 100 points by Lisa Perrotti-Brown in the influential *Wine Advocate*. She said it was "seductive" and "stunning".