

Remaking the Border: The Proposed Border Expansion of Canberra in the 1960-70s Revisited

Abstract

Borders are political and social constructs, and create unique settings for cross-border planning and development. Borders could be especially problematic for purposefully planned cities, like Canberra, the capital of Australia. In the 1960-70s, there was an attempt to expand the administrative border of Canberra, the Australian Capital Territory, into its neighbouring New South Wales state to accommodate long-term population growth and urban development. However, this attempt failed ultimately. This study investigates the considerations, actions and objections of remaking the border to unpack the drivers and actors of the proposal and the reasons for its failure. It uses a mix of primary and secondary sources of data and information from archives, media reportage, interviews with key informants, census, and literature. The study finds that the border expansion proposal was driven by political advocacy on the basis of a Modernist technocratic planning vision for a linear city and an over-optimistic and mechanic population projection. However, as a highly political initiative, its failure was doomed by political strains and changes, and local community's concerns. In recent years, the issue of Canberra's border expansion was resurrected with the city's rapid urban development encroaching near the border. Knowing this historical attempt and its failure contributes to revisiting the same issue in today's context of urban growth and planning paradigms, and calls for immediate inter-governmental attentions and actions to address the cross-border planning and development issues.

Keywords: border expansion, urban growth, Canberra

Introduction

As Australia's capital city, Canberra's urban area has been expanding continually since its birth in 1913. From a collection of sheep paddocks, the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), the administrative area of Canberra, has transformed into a city of more than 400,000 residents now (ABS, 2016). Population grows along with urban expansion. The ACT's recent population growth is largely attributed to the growth in its northern area Gungahlin, which was Australia's second fastest growing suburb in 2006-11 (ABS, 2016), and has experienced significant urban expansion since its initial development in the 1990s. This reminds people of the city's rapid growth in the 1960-70s, which triggered a proposed expansion of the ACT's north border into the neighbouring New South Wales (NSW) state. Then the Commonwealth government, through its agency National Capital Development Commission (NCDC), advocated expanding the ACT border to accommodate projected population and result urban growth under one administrative system. As it turned out later, this attempt was not successful.

This article investigates this part of Canberra's urban planning and development history to reveal how the border expansion was proposed, and why it was not successful. It draws on data and information collected from a mix of extant primary and secondary sources: archives, literature, newspaper clippings on the issue in *The Canberra Times* in 1965-76, interviews with four planners who worked for the NCDC and were involved in the proposal at the time, and census data. The article is organised as follows. After the Introduction, the second section briefs on Canberra's early development, and rapid growth in the 1960-70s and planning response to contextualise the border expansion proposal. The third section elaborates on actions and debates on the proposed border expansion, and its ultimate failure. The fourth section revisits the same border issue in the context of Canberra's planning and development from the end of the 20th century, especially recent urban growth into the border area. The article concludes that another border expansion proposal is less realistic, and calls for immediate inter-governmental attentions and actions to address the cross-border planning and development issues.

Planning for Urban Growth

The Federal Capital Territory – so named until 1938 – was officially declared by the Commonwealth government on 1 January 1911 for Australia's capital city Canberra. Its border was surveyed between 1910 and 1915 by a team of surveyors, led by Charles Scrivener. The first part of the border was drawn as a straight line across the northwest corner (top left in Figure 1) in 1910 (ACT Government, 2013a). This straight line cut a few watercourses between NSW and ACT and isolates parcels of land surrounded by the border and the watercourses, which presented cross-border planning and management challenges for the future. The remaining parts of the border were surveyed largely on the basis of ridges between water catchments, and the Sydney to Queanbeyan and Queanbeyan to Cooma railway lines (Higgins, 2013).

The early years after Canberra's appointment as the national capital and the subsequent well-known Burley Griffin Plan were subject to slow progress. Sentiments of Canberra as "a cemetery with lights", "the ruin of a good sheep station", and "six suburbs in search of a city" suggest the area was lacking many qualities required of a major city (National Capital Authority, 2011). World Wars I and II, and the Great Depression affected the fledgling capital's progress and population growth, as did scathing media coverage about Canberra that made many public servants in Melbourne reluctant to relocate to Canberra (Sparke, 1988). As of 1946, the ACT's population was less than 17,000 (ABS, 2014).

The growth and development of Canberra as a national capital after World War II can be largely attributable to the support of Prime Minister Sir Robert Menzies during his second term (1949-1966). Although Menzies was not fond of Canberra at first – considering it a place of "exile" – he realised over time the importance of Canberra as the national capital, and began to treat it as such (Sparke, 1988). Following this change in attitude, he took it upon himself to make Canberra a capital city that the people of Australia could take pride in. The formal creation of the NCDC in 1958 was an important

part of this process, as it gave a body with the legislative power and budget to make a difference to the city (National Capital Authority, 2011). The second integral part of Menzies' commitment to the Canberra cause was the restoration of funds to build Lake Burley Griffin that he inaugurated in 1964 (Sparke, 1988). The creation of ornamental waters was a central part of Walter Burley Griffin's original plan for Canberra. The transfer of the Defence Department from Melbourne to Canberra by 1963 also marked an important turning point for the city, as it signified the acceptance of Canberra over Melbourne as the seat of Commonwealth government, despite this officially being the case since 1927 with the move of the Parliament (Sparke, 1988). Such milestones contributed to a noticeable shift in the dynamic of the city:

“In the years between 1958 and 1965, Canberra changed from a semi-rustic town to an integrated, if still small and incomplete, national capital. It grew from a seemingly purposeless scatter of suburbs on either side of a willow-lined stream and its flood plain to a rapidly expanding city, sure of its future.” (Sparke, 1988, p.103)

During the period from 1958 to 1965, Canberra's population more than doubled from 43,000 to 93,000 (ABS, 2014). Such rapid growth of population led to the realisation by NCDC that strategic planning was necessary to accommodate urban development in the future. In 1965, after observing rapid growth in the ACT population, the NCDC felt a need for a new plan, and requested that Lord Holford, a British architect and town planner, produce a report to outline his observations and recommendations on the future of the city. Holford's (1965) report stated that the original Burley Griffin Plan had been outgrown: the Burley Griffin Plan was intended for a population of 70,000 people; at the time when the report was written, the population of the ACT was reported as 85,000 (93,000 according to census – author) with an annual growth rate of 10 per cent. Holford (1965) recommended that the future planning for Canberra focus upon policies promoting the following elements:

- A satellite system of towns;
- An open space system;
- Highways (free from development) to connect towns; and
- Framework for a coordinated transport system.

Following Holford's recommendations, in 1966 the NCDC commissioned American transport planner Alan Voorhees to work with one of their engineers, Ian Morison, to develop a long term plan for the ever-growing city. The resulting General Plan Concept, or “Y Plan” as generally known for the shape of its structure (see Figure1), was adopted in 1967, and was later presented in a book entitled *Tomorrow's Canberra* (1970). With a central idea of a linear city within a natural landscape, the Y Plan assumed a metropolitan population of one million and continuous growth (Freestone, 2010; 2012). The linear structure was implemented through a “towns-in-corridors” strategy, which was

intended to respect Canberra's surrounding hills and valleys, while incorporating a series of "new towns", instead of "districts", of about a population of 100,000 people and jobs for 10,000 per town linked by transport corridors (Overall, 1995; Morison, 2000). These towns spread far beyond the old central area of the initial Burley Griffin Plan, and it was there that the modern garden suburbs proliferated (Reid, 2002). As it turned out in the subsequent decades, the Y Plan has governed much of the urban growth within the ACT without intruding into the NSW: these new towns radiated from central Canberra to the north-west, north-east, and south, including the present-day areas of Belconnen, Woden, Tuggeranong and Gungahlin (Figure 1).

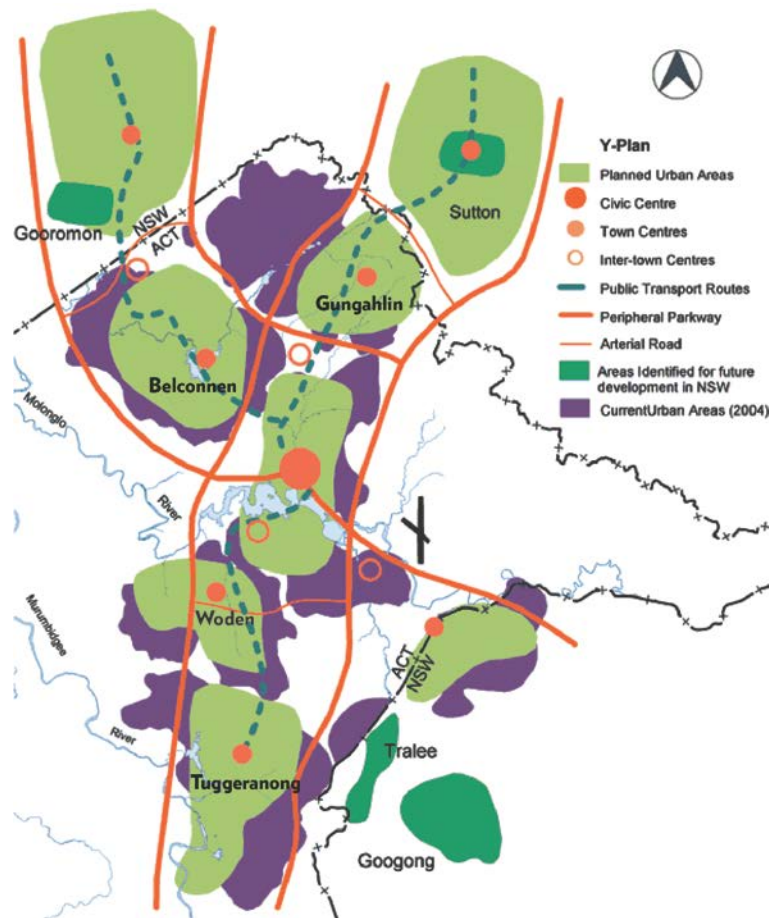


Figure 1. The Y Plan

Source: ACT Government, 2004

The idea of the ACT border's expansion into NSW was integral to the Y Plan by stating that "within the ACT it would accommodate up to 500,000 and if necessary one million by expansion across the borders into NSW" (cited in Sparke, 1988, p.154). This expansion was to be accommodated by extending the northwest arm of the Y Plan to develop a new town in the Gooramom area, and to the northeast by developing a new town around Sutton (Figure 1); over time the border was extended further north to incorporate areas around Jeir and Gundaroo. However, how the expansion and issues such as planning and governance would be handled, were glossed over in *Tomorrow's Canberra*:

“The questions whether further growth could take the form of new towns in NSW, their planning and administration, and how integration with the planning and development within the ACT could be achieved, are matters which will need to be examined but which are outside the Commission’s jurisdiction.” (NCDC, 1970, p.224)

The push to expand Canberra’s urban area into NSW was based on the assumption that Canberra’s population would outgrow available land space within the ACT border. An interdepartmental committee reported in 1970 that Canberra’s population could reach between 600,000 and 840,000 by the year 2000 (Ling, 2013). In August 1975, the NCDC (1975a) suggested that based on population projections, it was “a fact of life” that suitable land for detached homes within the ACT would be used up by 1984, and development of the Gooramoon area be commenced, if not completed, by 1990 (see Figure 2). Even after revisions of these estimates taking into account restrictions on the growth of the Australian public service, the NCDC (1975a) believed that this would not affect the long term need to expand the border to accommodate an estimated population of 800,000 by 2000.

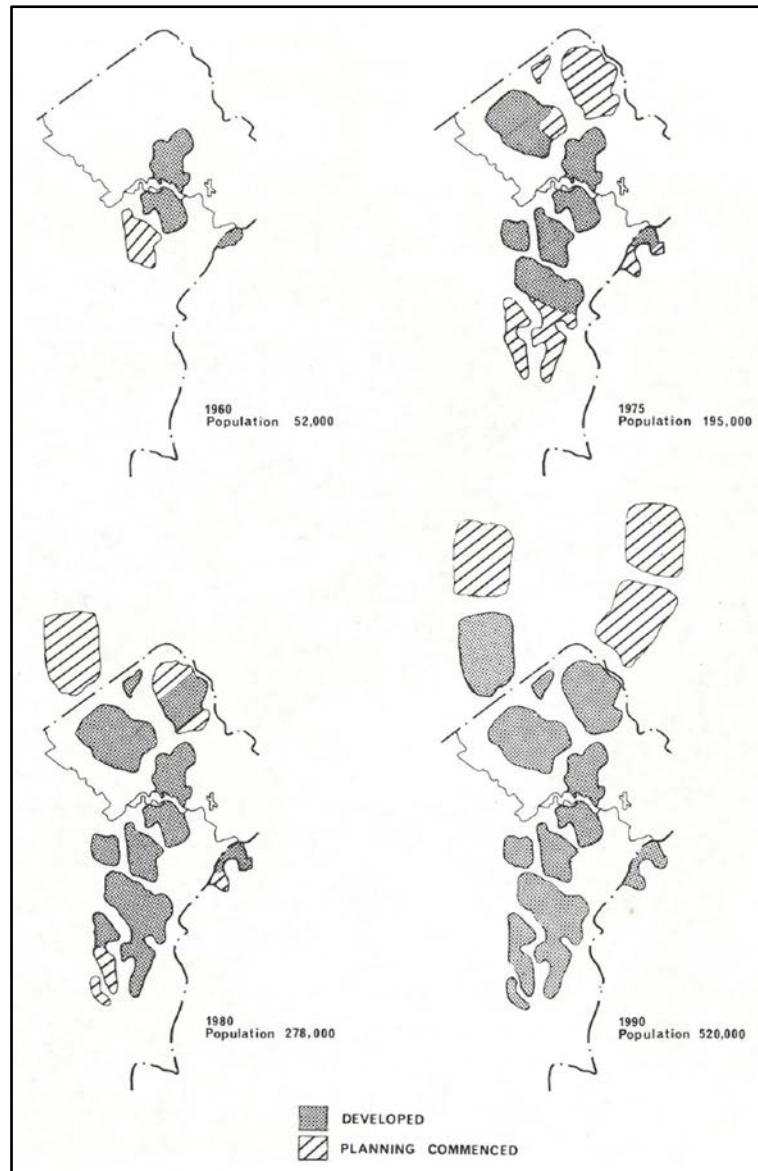


Figure 2. Planned Sequence of Development for Canberra and Its New Towns, 1960-1990

Source: NCDC, 1975a

Remaking the Border

Cross-border Considerations

Several considerations pushed for expanding the ACT border into NSW. As stated above, the root cause stemmed from concerns that the amount of developable land within the existing border would be exhausted based on population forecasts. Using uncommitted land or open space within the ACT border was raised by members of NSW shires surrounding the ACT who were not in favour of the expansion (Sparke, 1988). However, it was deemed that many uncommitted areas in the ACT were integral to the city's open space network, and many others too topographically steep and fiscally expensive for development (see Figure 3). Expanding into NSW rather than developing more

environmentally sensitive areas of the ACT would allow conservation of open space networks that were integral to the Y Plan (NCDC, 1975a, 1975b). It was also considered essential to retain Canberra's garden city flavour.

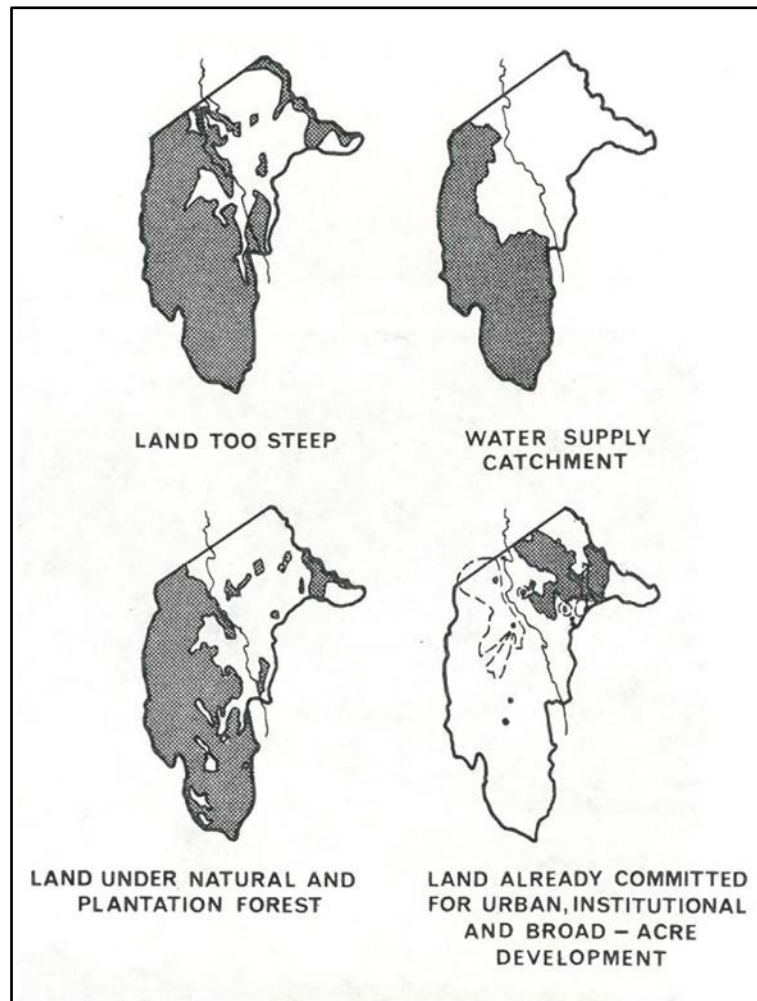


Figure 3. Constraints to Canberra's Urban Growth

Source: NCDC, 1975a

A perspective of regional planning and governance was also considered in the push for an enlarged ACT. The NCDC (1975a) argued that an expanded border (similar to that proposed in Figure 4) would allow development in newly annexed areas to Canberra's north to be administered more simply, and in a more efficient and coordinated manner. Development in areas such as Sutton would be planned and managed by only one level of administration – the NCDC – at the time, instead of two in NSW: state and local governments. And land in such areas would be converted to the ACT's leasehold system to be consistent with existing parts of the Canberra urban area. The NCDC (1975a) also argued that border expansion would not require resources to be re-directed from NSW, as was the case then that NSW residents sought public health and education services in the ACT. The same cross-border regional issue remains today, as was recently acknowledged by the ACT Government:

“...different jurisdictions do present challenges arising from the varying legislative and regulatory frameworks and the need to fund government services delivered in a cross-border context.” (ACT Government, 2013b)

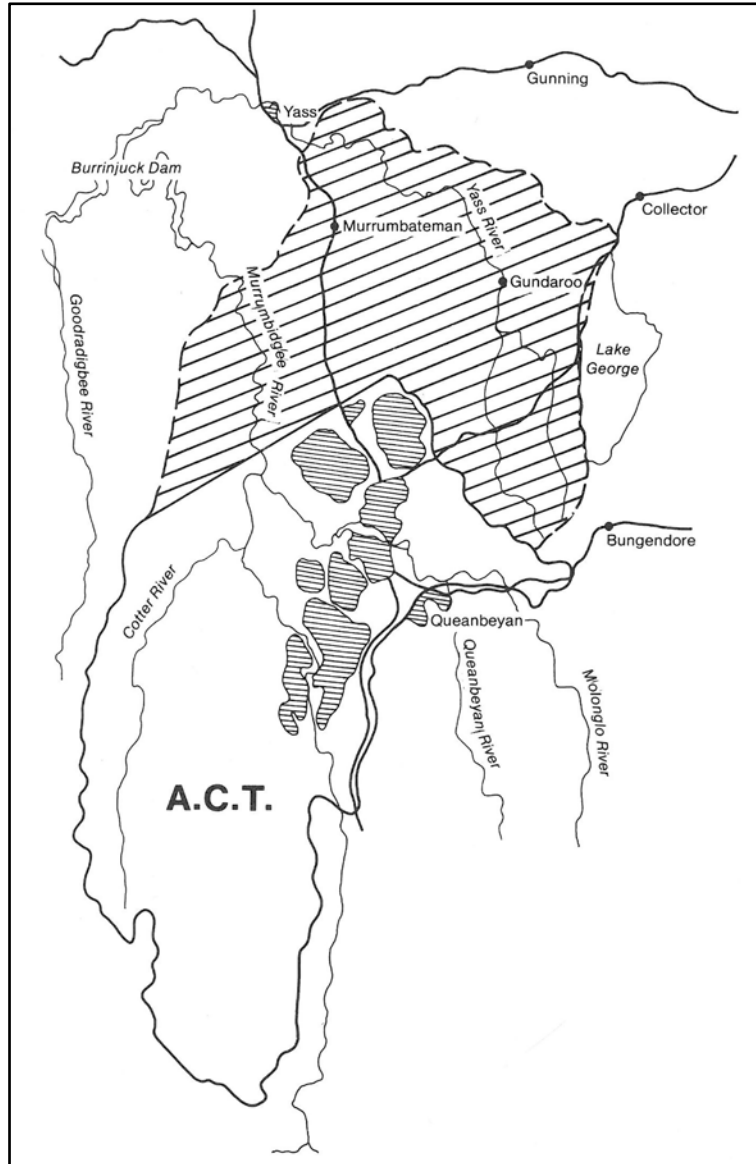


Figure 4. Proposed Expansion Area

Source: Sparke, 1988

Reducing the impact of land speculation was another consideration behind the push to extend the border. The late 1960s and early 1970s saw a substantial increase in the price and sale transactions of semi-rural land on the NSW side of the border (The Canberra Times, 1971), as well as the subdivision of some rural lots for speculation to cater for the spill over of well-to-do Canberrans (Overall, 1995). By 1971 the cost per acre of land bordering the Federal Highway near the ACT in the Yarrowlunla Shire was as high as \$500, compared to price of just \$50 per acre in 1965 (The Canberra Times, 1971). When the Goodradigbee Shire was valued in 1973, the value of some properties around Jeir and Murrumbateman had risen by 100 per cent from previous valuations

(Sparke, 1988). To study these problems and implications, the Gorton Government set up an Interdepartmental Committee in 1969. In August 1970, the Committee recommended consultations with the NSW state on two courses – a joint Commonwealth/state approach or an extension of the ACT border (Sparke, 1988).

Alternative strategies for coping with Canberra's population growth, such as higher density and population cap, were determined inappropriate at the time (NCDC, 1975a, 1975b). Increasing housing density was considered, however, this was likely to be unpopular as only 7 per cent of ACT residents lived in medium-density dwellings then (Sparke, 1988). Furthermore, it was considered that higher density development in future urban areas such as Gungahlin, and in older suburbs of Canberra built before 1940, would have only boosted the potential capacity of the ACT to 650,000 people (NCDC, 1975a). This was still well short of the long-term population projections of 800,000 to even one million, and would have led to costly relocation of many residents in the older suburbs. The notion of placing a cap on Canberra's population was also raised, as a way to prevent problems faced by larger cities. However, the NCDC (1975a) believed that limiting the physical growth of the ACT would also limit the capacity of the city to flourish as the national capital.

Cross-border Actions

Media reports from 1966 - nine years before the border issue came to a head – raised the need for the ACT to be considered as part of a greater region incorporating the towns and villages of Southeast NSW. A keen supporter of urban and regional development, Deputy Opposition Leader Gough Whitlam proposed in 1966 that a Canberra Regional Development Authority should be created and funded by the Commonwealth in a similar manner to the NCDC, to be responsible for directing and stimulating development in the area of Canberra's market influence – the Southeast corner of NSW that had a population of 140, 000 (The Canberra Times, 1966a, 1966b). One of the first people to raise the notion that border expansion may one day be needed was the former NCDC Assistant Commissioner and Australian National University's researcher Peter Harrison. He used journal and media articles, including the influential article "An Approach to Planning a City on the Increase" in *Architecture in Australia* in 1968, to promote the Y Plan as being capable of holding a metropolitan population of one million people, by expanding over the existing border into NSW. Harrison's article publicised the Y Plan before the NCDC was comfortable to disclose it given its political sensitivity and implications.

Proposals around regional symposiums, involving local, state and Commonwealth bodies, were raised, to discuss ways to accommodate the spread of Canberra and its population across the border (The Canberra Times, 1973a). The Gorton Government's Interdepartmental Committee's recommendation on consultations with the NSW state was not actioned by Prime Minister John Gorton, but his successor William McMahon did write to NSW Liberal premier Robert Askin suggesting that the two governments consider the ACT growth into NSW as an issue with some

priority. Despite no substantial follow-up actions, the border expansion issue progressively gained prominence into the 1970's, reaching a crescendo during the Prime Minister Gough Whitlam years (1972-75):

“Between 1973 and 1975, the issue took wings and before it plunged earthwards, the efforts to keep it flying took on an almost frenzied character. The main reasons for this were a feeling (which might have been right) of ‘now or never’ and a combination of factors which convinced the Canberra protagonists of an urgency approaching crisis.” (Sparke, 1988, p.234)

Whitlam's interest in the ACT's expansion was no coincidence. His broader interests in urban and regional development were stimulated by his memories of planned Canberra, where he had spent much of his youth, and of the unplanned environment of the new post-War suburbs of his outer-Sydney electorate (Lloyd and Troy, 1981). By the 1970s, there had been growing public frustration from weak planning mechanism and implementation, and a political sentiment for new ideas and methods to rehabilitate Australian cities (Hu, 2016). It was against this backdrop that Whitlam played a cities card in his election campaign of 1972, and created the Department of Urban and Regional Development (DURD), the first Commonwealth department dedicated to urban and regional growth in Australian history, after his landslide election victory.

As discussions progressed between the Commonwealth and NSW authorities, two main options were presented to manage the potential expansion of the ACT border into NSW (Fuller, 1974):

1. That the Commonwealth acquire part of the NSW territory adjoining the ACT, which would become legally part of the Capital Territory; or
2. That a growth centre be proclaimed for joint development by the two governments on the same principles as the development of Albury-Wodonga (twin cities geographically divided by the Murray River with Albury located on the north side in NSW and Wodonga on the south bank in Victoria – author).

The acquisition of NSW land was preferred by the Commonwealth, as there was a long-standing belief that it was less complicated:

“There would be no particular wish on the part of any Commonwealth agency to complicate the metropolitan problem by introducing a separate and sovereign government into the issues of city development and coordination. It seems unlikely, however, that the decisions will be left to Government agencies, for private enterprise may well see fit to seek to open up new urban areas in NSW close to the Canberra market and employment pool. If this happens then the problems of engineering services, transport, communications, power, employment

and finance, to mention only a few, will move to a new level of complexity.”
(NCDC, 1964, p.59)

Integral to the preference of this option was the assumption that NSW was not capable of dealing with the border situation. For the NCDC, the record of the NSW government was “not good” in allowing ribbon development in outer Sydney and permitting the degeneration of green belts (Sparke, 1988, p.235). The NCDC did not want sub-standard development occurring around the fringe of the national capital, such as that experienced in peri-urban areas of many other cities, and preferred to take control of the development themselves (Sparke, 1988). Such sentiment toward planning processes in the ACT and NSW is still supported by one former NCDC planner interviewed, “for all the criticisms of Canberra’s planning, and there’s been a lot over the years, we do it better than NSW do” (Interviewee 3).

In early 1973 a joint Commonwealth – NSW planning study of the development of the ACT was announced by then NSW Premier Sir Robert Askin. The study committee involved members from the State Planning Authority, Department of Main Roads, NCDC, and Department of the Capital Territory. It sought to determine whether the expansion of the ACT into the NSW was truly necessary (Sparke, 1988). During this period there was a positive relationship between the Commonwealth and the NSW governments regarding the proposed expansion. This included letters between Prime Minister Gough Whitlam, acting Prime Minister at the time Jim Cairns, and Sir Robert Askin, which outlined NSW’s conditional acceptance of the proposed border extension (The Canberra Times, 1974b). The NSW government would support it on conditions that adequate financial compensation make up for the loss of revenue from the areas taken over by the ACT, and that development of the expanded parts of the ACT not detract from people movement to other regional centres such as Albury-Wodonga and Bathurst-Orange (The Canberra Times, 1974b).

The relationship between the Shires surrounding the ACT, and the Commonwealth, was often strained during the period of discussions regarding the extension of the ACT border. This strain stemmed from a number of issues including insufficient consultation, potential loss of land (including prime agricultural land) and associated rates revenues, land release and subdivision, and use of and damage to council roads. However, one surprising exception came in 1967, when the Mayor of Yass was receptive to the idea of absorption into the ACT. This was despite Yass not sharing a border with the ACT at the time. Yass Mayor S. Dobbin stated that:

“Personally I see nothing against the idea of absorption into the ACT and the national capital has been having a beneficial influence on us for some time both in terms of employment and culture. We have long advocated a rail link with Canberra so we could become a dormitory suburb with works commuting to the ACT. The extension to absorption is not such a large step and personally I can’t see anything against being part of the ACT.” (The Canberra Times, 1967a)

Councils close to the ACT's northern border, particularly Goodradigbee, which surrounded the then Municipality of Yass, Yarrowlumla, and Gunning, had sought co-operation and clarification from the NCDC during the late 1960's and early 1970's, in relation to development along arteries to the ACT. Under an informal agreement, any proposals for development along the Federal and Barton Highways were referred to the NCDC by the Yarrowlumla Shire, and strict controls were placed on any developments that did not fall under the category of agriculture and forestry (The Canberra Times, 1967b). The Goodradigbee Shire strongly advocated for a consistent approach to planning in its lands close to the border, and even prepared a report calling for controlled development on ACT border land (The Canberra Times, 1969a, 1969b). This collaborative approach was supported by the Goodradigbee Shire through much of the border discussion period, with the suggestion of a regional planning conference between surrounding Shires, the State Planning Authority, and NCDC in 1971 (Brammall, 1971).

However, the NCDC did not seem to do enough to assist surrounding shires in the border discussion period, for example, by not attending meetings with shire officials to discuss cross-border planning issues (Davidson, 1969). It took several years for the NCDC to publicly announce its plans for lands close to the border. The NCDC claimed not attending such meetings was justified, as it was not its place to interfere in NSW affairs (Cook, 1987). However, such a stance was a paradox as long as the NCDC was advocating an urban form in the Y Plan, which included provisions to extend Canberra's urban area into the NSW (Cook, 1987). This stance made it difficult for shires close to the border to adequately plan for their lands, particularly with some of their lands potentially subject to future claims by the ACT (Brammall, 1971).

Cross-border Objections

On 3 January 1975, the Premier of NSW Sir Robert Askin was replaced as by Tom Lewis – a man who was less accepting to an expanded ACT than his predecessor (Ling, 2013). Even as early as 1967 when the notion of an expanded Canberra was first proposed, Lewis was not receptive to the idea, stating that:

“If Canberra is growing at such a great rate it would seem to me that NSW can develop the necessary areas for home-making or satellite cities like Queanbeyan can be developed in NSW to meet Canberra's needs.” (The Canberra Times, 1967a)

Despite these views, he stated that “my mind is still open and I am willing to listen to the representations on the ACT's requirements” (The Canberra Times, 1967a). However during the climax of the border discussions, his views regarding the acquisition of NSW land for the ACT were

recounted as: “You’ve got all that land in Canberra. Why don’t you use it first and when you’ve done that, why don’t you just stop growing?” (Sparke, 1988, p.239)

Shortly after his appointment as Premier, it was announced that a committee of inquiry into the border expansion would be formed. Known as the Holmwood Committee of Inquiry, its task was to ask the Commonwealth government to justify the need for expansion. The inquiry would take into account the impact on NSW citizens, the effect on local government, the possible effects on the fulfilment of the Albury-Wodonga and Bathurst-Orange growth centres, and the general effects on the NSW state (The Canberra Times, 1975a). Prime Minister Whitlam wrote to Lewis and suggested that the Committee be formed as a joint Commonwealth – State body, but was refused (Ling, 2013). The Commonwealth was invited to make submissions to the Committee; however, Minister for Urban and Regional Development, Tom Uren, refused to allow any Commonwealth submissions to be made (Sparke, 1988).

In an attempt to counteract the Holmwood Committee of Inquiry, and to convince the public that their reasons for pursuing the border expansion were sound, the NCDC undertook a publicity campaign, including a series of informal talks with local stakeholder groups and other members of the public (Cook, 1987). Since a formal submission to the Inquiry was out of the question following Uren’s decision, the NCDC also presented their “evidence” supporting border expansion, in the form of a 4-page article in *The Canberra Times* with the purpose stated as:

“...to set out for public information and discussion the issues involved and the options available with respect to the future growth of Canberra as the national capital and seat of government.” (NCDC, 1975b)

With no formal submissions from the Commonwealth and no defence of the NCDC planning and population, the Holmwood Committee of Inquiry was unchallenged, and instead chose to rely on projections of the National Population Inquiry, which suggested the ACT would have up to 555,500 residents by the year 2000 (The Canberra Times, 1975b). Based on this, the Holmwood Committee of Inquiry found that “up to and beyond the year 2000, there is no need to expand the geographical area of the ACT in order to serve and make provision for the national capital and its population” (Sparke, 1988, p.240). Such comments brought the NCDC’s population projections into question – greatly undermining the basis for the pursuit of the ACT’s border expansion (Sparke, 1988).

By March 1976, the border expansion proposal was off the table. Just months after the Whitlam Labor Government was replaced by the conservative administration of Malcolm Fraser on 11 November 1975, the Minister for the Capital Territory Tony Staley announced an agreement with NSW to develop a regional plan for Canberra and its surrounds while leaving the borders unchanged (Department of Capital Territory, 1976). The Department of Capital Territory also took the step of

distancing itself from the previous population projections that were behind the border expansion proposal, stating:

“The latest population projections for the ACT show a slowing down in the growth of Canberra. This suggests that the supply of residential land in the ACT could last a little longer than had been expected.” (Department of Capital Territory, 1976, p. 10)

Thus, government changes in the NSW and Commonwealth formally concluded the long-debated border expansion proposal. Looking back on the period, one former NDCD planner cited border expansion as a highly political sensitive issue in that it was advocated by a political initiative, but it lacked a political will to make it happen: “everyone found the subject too hard and left it for the future to solve” (Interviewee 1). The lack of a political will involved the Commonwealth, the NSW state, as well as the local shires along the border, as commented by another former NDCD planner: “I think there was a lack of consensus about the future of Canberra, because there wasn’t any coincidence of interest” (Interviewee 3).

Opposition from local councils out of many concerns made it further difficult to pursue an expanded ACT. The NDCD had, at times, sought assistance from the various shires, and later the NSW government, in an effort to combat subdivision and speculation on rural lands subject to the border expansion proposal. Talks between the Commonwealth and the NSW included a request to “secure the land around the Australia Capital Territory from further development so that the future development options were protected” (The Canberra Times, 1974a). However, these talks angered the shires surrounding the border, as they had not been notified or asked for input on the issue. This culminated in a Council deputation to NSW officials in early 1975, strongly opposing the border expansion proposal, and asking for an explanation of border negotiations (Cook, 1987). Such sentiment dated back in the 1960s, as the idea of border expansion first emerged. As the border debate intensified, surrounding shires suggested the ACT fill its existing border first (The Canberra Times, 1974b).

The shires expressed several concerns over local impacts from the border expansion. The NDCD had stated that if the border extension go ahead development would not encroach upon prime agricultural land. However, land holders felt that “the in-roads of people, children, goods, noise and traffic would have a detrimental effect on the stud flocks [of fine wool studs] and their viable operation would be in question” (Hodgkinson, 1975, p. 3). Road maintenance was also an issue raised by local shires: the growth of Canberra was putting extra strain on their local and arterial roads, resulting in meetings with Commonwealth officials for assistance (The Canberra Times, 1973b). The cost of infrastructure was a potential concern. One former NDCD planner (Interviewee 1) felt the construction of large-scale communities in areas such as Jeir and Gundaroo would require considerable earthworks, including the construction of roads, electricity and communication lines, and water and sewer pipes. Such

communities would be much farther from existing infrastructure connections and employment centres in the ACT. In addition, the border expansion proposal received opposition from community groups in areas that stood to be annexed by the ACT. The NSW Border Landholder Association strongly advocated the idea of limiting the growth of Canberra, as it would minimise the negative impacts on the surrounding shires in terms of loss of income, people and area (ACT Border Land Holders' Association, 1975).

Border Revisited in New Planning and Development Contexts

In 1989, the ACT started its self-government status and became independent from the Commonwealth government. The planning and development contexts that nurtured the border expansion proposal in the 1960-70s have profoundly changed. In the 1980s, Canberra's population growth rates eased. The *Metropolitan Plan* (1984) assumed a more realistic population forecast of 400,000, which was reached as of late 2016. However, it was still well below the 500,000 to 650,000 people, which were believed to be the ACT's capacity based on its current borders (NCDC, 1975a). It did not reach 800,000 in 2000 as projected then, which was the primary base of the border expansion argument. Looking back on these projections, one former NCDC planner described them as "mechanical" and claimed that "they hadn't been thought through" (Interviewee 3). According to today's projection, the ACT will reach a population of 650,000, the ACT border's carrying capacity estimated in the early 1970s, in around 2060 (Figure 5). However, the assumptions of estimating the ACT border's carrying capacity have changed. The NCDC (1975b) considered a few areas within the ACT such as Molonglo, Jerrabomberra, and Majura, unsuitable for urban development. Now Molonglo is being developed for residential; Jerrabomberra is being developed on the NSW side of the border; and Majura is emerging as an airport city. The Molonglo development could be seen to stem from the need to cater for Canberra's growing population within the existing border.

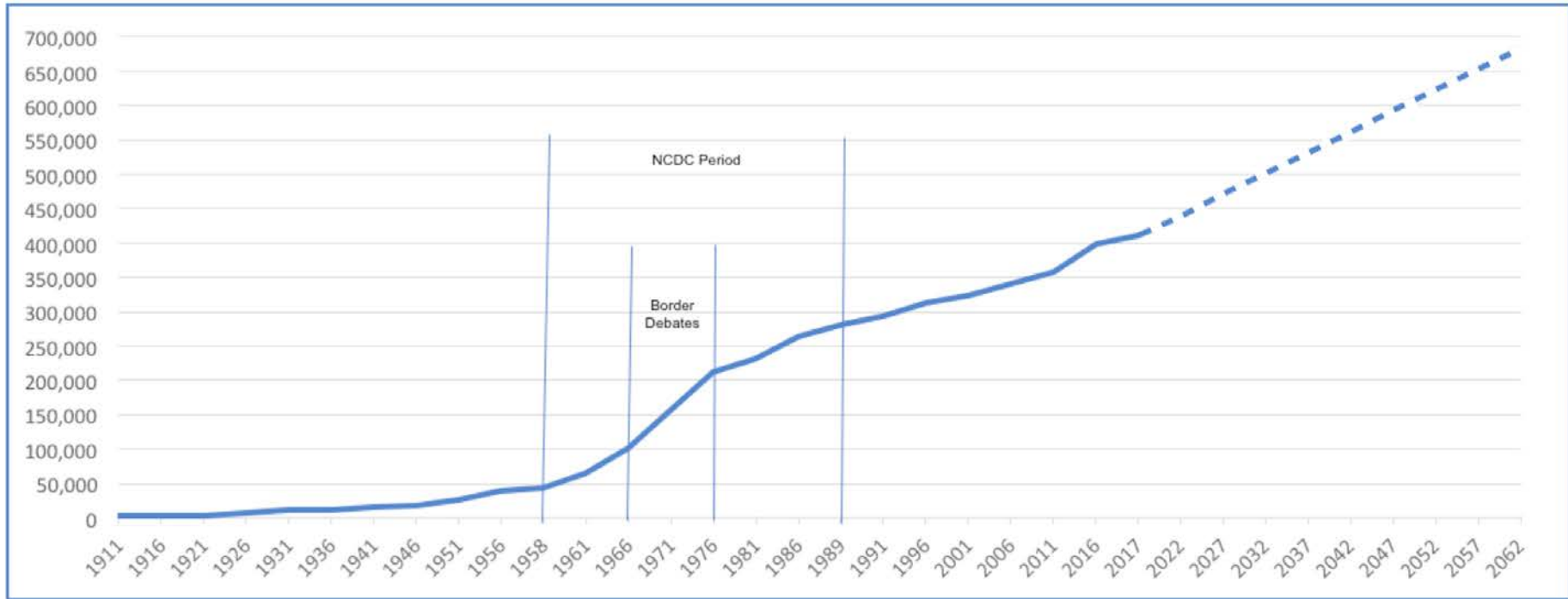


Figure 5. Canberra's Population 1911-2062

Source: ABS, 2014; ACT Government, 2013, chart created by the author.

Notes: The dotted segment of the line represents projections of Canberra's future population. The years are mostly organised with intervals of five years to reflect the trend except for a few benchmark years: 1958 – establishment of NCDC; 1989 – ACT's self-government; 2017 – dividing line of actual population and projected population.

At the turn of the century, the planning direction in Canberra swerved from the Modernist technocratic planning approach in the 1960-70s, which was characterised by the NDC's concentration on physical planning aims and models with measurable results that had already proven their value elsewhere, mainly in American suburban situations (Fischer, 1984). After the millennium, Canberra was obviously an exemplar of a city in search of a new paradigm of planning, including sustainability, professionalism, memory, participation, and social and ethical values (Fischer, 2013). As illustrated in Figure 6, the ACT government set "a more compact city" as Canberra's strategic direction in the *Canberra Spatial Plan* (2004) through "containment" of growth, "intensification" of residential, and "centralisation" of employment to guide its development in the beginning of the 21st century (ACT Government, 2004). In a similar planning ethos, the current *ACT Planning Strategy* (2012) outlined targets including a 50/50 split of infill and green field development for new homes into the future, as well as increased urban intensification in existing town and group centres and along transit corridors (ACT Government, 2012). These strategic directions aim to create a more compact and sustainable Canberra, whose residents are closer to employment nodes and public transport. They also mean to reduce Canberrans' reliance on private petrol-powered vehicles, which has been largely attributed to the city's development structure shaped by the corridor planning approach in the 1960-70s (Morrison, 2000).

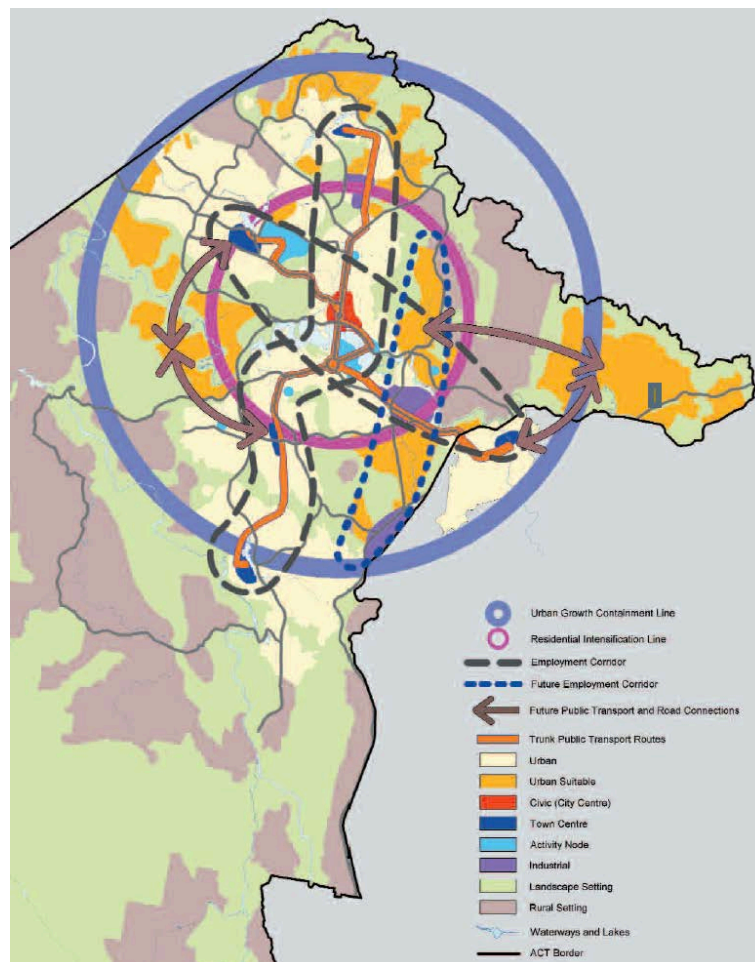


Figure 6. Canberra's Urban Containment Strategy

Source: ACT Government, 2004

Increasing densities in existing urban areas have been pursued since the early years of the ACT's self-government in 1989. Morison (1995) suggests a reluctance to expand over the border may have played a part in such plans. Higher density development is in contrast to the lower-density development patterns of the 1960s and 1970s that projected the need to expand beyond the current ACT border. In retrospect, one former NCDC planner felt that "there was a view that Canberra was too suburban, and that urban consolidation was inevitable" (Interviewee 3). The same planner also lamented that not extending into NSW has seen the ACT employ the Y Plan "with a bit of imagination" (Interviewee 3).

Recognising Canberra as part of, and not separate to, the surrounding region contributed to the consideration of border expansion in the 1960-70s. A regional planning perspective has only grown in recent years (National Capital Authority, 2010; Norman & Steffen, 2014). This has seen closer communication and collaboration between the ACT, and local councils surrounding it, on urban and regional planning issues. It is beginning to shift perceptions away from the ACT border marking a hole in a donut, as critiqued in by Norman and Steffen (2014), to visions of the border as a "notional concept, marked only by road signs" (ACT Government, 2013b). For example, several recent studies on Canberra's performances in competitiveness, sustainability, and knowledge economy include Canberra and Queanbeyan town in the NSW as one significant urban area across the border (Hu, 2015a, 2015b; Pratchett, 2017).

Since 1990 a small number of planning documents have raised the possibility of Canberra's urban area one day spilling over into NSW. The draft *National Capital Plan* (1990) came under criticism from local Councils to the ACT's north for suggesting cross-border expansion as an option for further growth that could have been needed in less than 15 years from 1990 (Hobbs, 1990). A draft *ACT and Sub-region Planning Strategy* (1995) also found new urban areas would be needed outside the ACT in future years, to house an estimated 690,000 people in the Canberra-Queanbeyan region by 2035 (Henderson, 1995). However, any tension that may have existed at the time of the latter strategy was downplayed by then Federal Minister for Housing and Regional Development, Brian Howe, who stated "we shouldn't be in the business of moving borders, but of removing them – at least for the purpose of planning and development" (Henderson, 1995, p. 3).

However, the recent developments are taking Canberra's urban area closer to the NSW border – especially those in north Gungahlin (Forde and Bonner), west Belconnen (Dunlop and west Macgregor), and the industrial estate of Beard. The rapid urban growth along the border area was captured in the current *ACT Planning Strategy* (2012) (Figure 7), but leaving the sensitive border issue and associated cross-border planning and development untouched. As highlighted in Figure 7, this strategy designated one block as "future urban investigation area" along the straight line of the border, which was first surveyed and drawn in 1910. As stated earlier, this straight line cut several

watercourses and created isolated parcels of land. Today, a 30-year Ginninderry property development project of 1,600 hectares exactly sits on the straight line of the border: the ACT part is within the “future urban investigation area” designated by the *ACT Planning Strategy (2012)*; the NSW part is an isolated parcel surrounded by watercourses and the border (Figure 8). The Ginninderry project has been moved forward by a very entrepreneurial developer Riverview Group, which owned parcels of land across the border, despite the split of administrative jurisdictions. For the development to occur, the land on both sides of the border needs to be rezoned. The ACT Territory Plan Variation (DV351) was approved in 2015 with an amendment to the National Capital Plan announced in July 2016. For the NSW component of the project site, the rezoning process is underway. The development in the ACT side and market sale already commenced in 2017 through a joint venture between the ACT Government and the Riverview Group, and development in the NSW side within the Yass Valley Council was advertised to commence in 2033 and complete in 2055. So far, discussions and processes of this mega cross-border development have been led by the developer, who first raised the project concept with the ACT Government and the Yass Valley Council in 2006. In due course of the project’s long duration, there must be a time when the entrepreneurial capacity reaches its limits, and the governments at both sides need to coordinate and sort out the cross-border planning and development issues. This, however, might leave much uncertainty of timing or progress in fulfilling the project’s future vision.

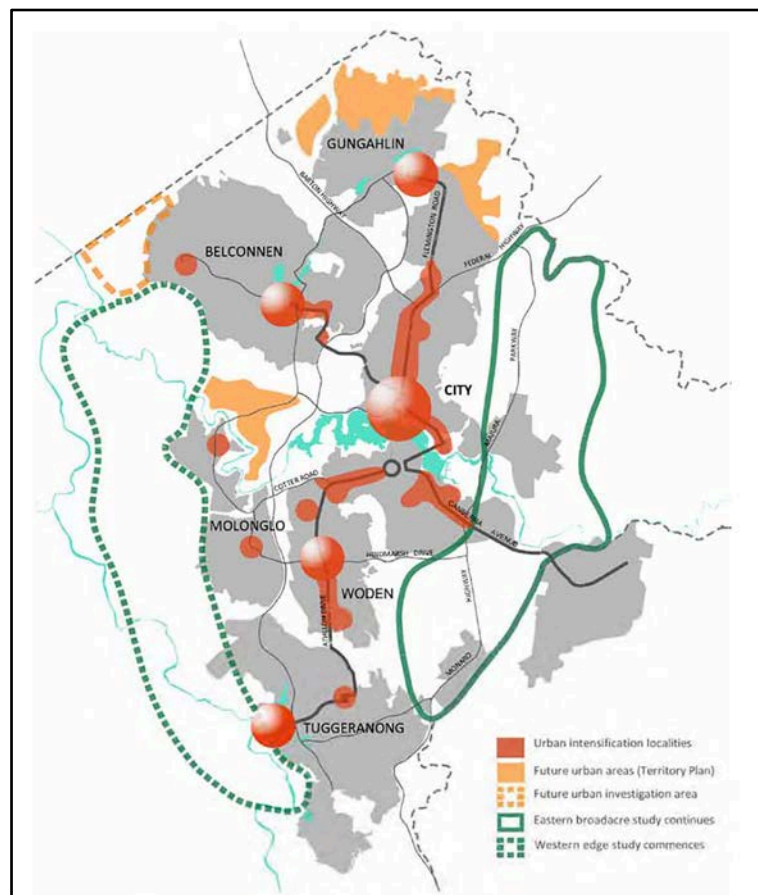


Figure 7. Canberra's New Urban Growth

Source: ACT Government, 2012

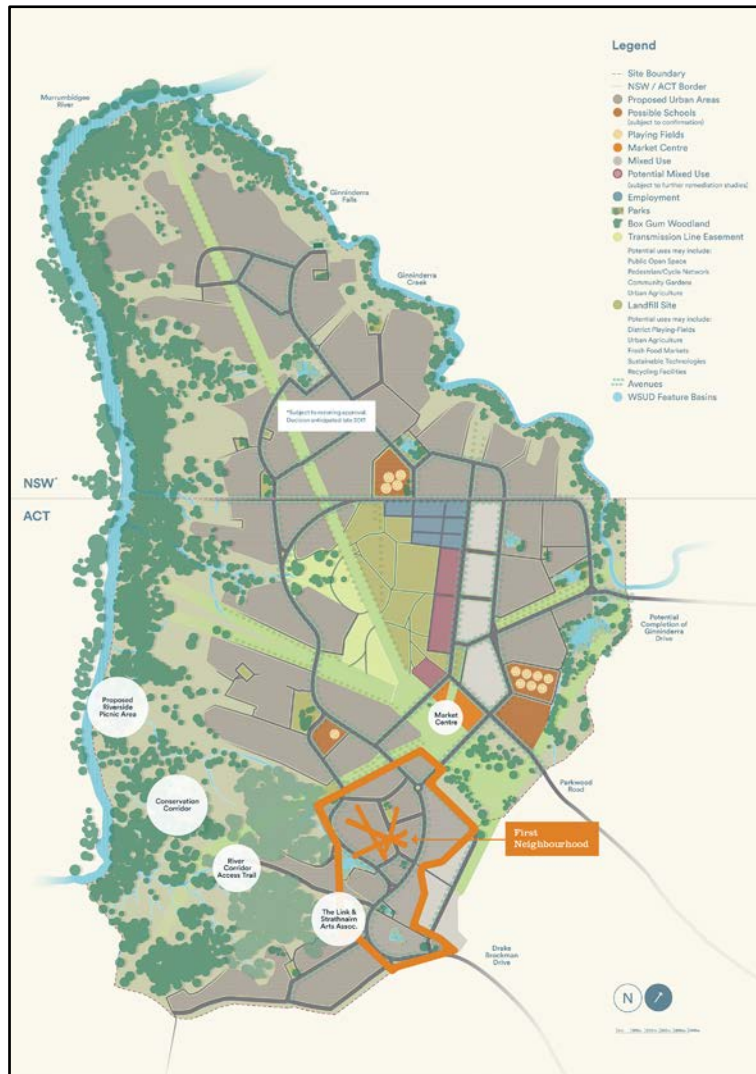


Figure 8. Illustrative Master Plan of Ginninderry Cross-border Property Development

Source: Riverview Group, 2017

Meanwhile, the population of Sutton and Murrumbateman, the two largest present-day communities in the area to be earmarked for the ACT expansion up to 1975, increased by almost 50 per cent from 3,300 in 2006 to 4,900 in 2016 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016). The urban growth along the border, the ACT side in particular, resurrects attention and action towards the border issue in new planning and development contexts. Anticipating the urban growth more than 20 years ago, former NDC planner Ian Morison (1995) saw collaborative cross-border development as inevitable, predicting that the ACT government would soon have to take an initiative with NSW on how the first urban land release was to be organised for Canberra's spill-over to the north. This did not happen yet. One former NDC planner (Interviewee 2) felt an expansion into NSW was more of a long-term opportunity, with low-density development to continue in areas close to the existing border. Another former NDC planner expressed fears for the future urban form of Canberra, particularly if it were to expand into the NSW without being under the ACT's control:

“If you don’t own the land across the border we have no planning jurisdiction, then all we’re going to get is costs. We’re going to have to provide the services to it. The people that make the profits will be the people that own the land across the way.” (Interviewee 3)

The same planner also pointed to the possibility of neighbouring homes in cross-border developments having the difficult task of conforming to different planning codes in ACT and NSW if they were to proceed without the ACT’s control.

When combined, the above causes and consequences of not expanding the ACT border in the 1960-70s, and planning trends that have emerged in recent decades, make a large-scale expansion of the ACT border much less likely than was 50 years ago. However, urban development in Canberra is getting closer to the border to accommodate rapid population growth; some areas close to the border in surrounding NSW are also developing very fast. It is more realistic to pursue inter-governmental collaboration on cross-border planning and development than a radical border change. Despite acknowledgement of the importance of a regional planning approach, the cross-border issue remains untouched in Canberra’s future strategy for political sensitivity. However, it is now an issue of increasing imperative given the fact that urban development is happening very close to and on the border. The cross-border planning and development issues might be initiated by developers, but the process should not be developer-led; the governments should take the lead to coordinate inter-governmental actions and responses.

Conclusion

The proposed expansion of the ACT border into NSW in the 1960-70s was underpinned by a Modernist corridor planning thinking and based primarily upon mechanical population projections, which have still not been met yet. As a politically sensitive issue, its ultimate failure was doomed by political differences and obstacles. The new planning contexts and development trends towards a more compact urban form that have emerged in recent decades make a large-scale expansion of the ACT border much less likely than was 50 years ago. However, the rapidly growing populations in the ACT and surrounding region are pushing development closer to and on the border. These developments resurrect the cross-border planning and development issues, and call for immediate inter-governmental attentions and actions to address them since another border expansion proposal is less realistic.

Appendix

Canberra's Border Expansion Proposal in the 1960-70s: A Timeline

1965	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• NCDC observed rapid population growth and felt the need for a new plan, and requested Lord Holford to produce a report.• Lord Holford recommended a satellite system of towns and highway transport for Canberra.• NCDC commissioned Alan Voorhees to undertake transport study following Holford's recommendations.• First regional conference held at NCDC offices with representatives from surrounding Councils.
1966	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• NCDC Commissioner John Overall stated that Canberra's spill-over into NSW to the Parliamentary Committee on public accounts.• Gough Whitlam, Deputy Opposition Leader then, suggested a Canberra Regional Development Authority should be established, mostly funded by Commonwealth, similar to NCDC.• ALP candidate for Hume, John Menadue, talked at a meeting that Yass-Canberra could not be isolated, and proposed regional planning body and Yass-Canberra railway.
1967	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The General Plan (Y-Plan) was presented to and adopted by NCDC, including four towns in NSW.• NCDC hoped to acquire NSW land, and Planning Director Peter Harrison suggested ACT should take control of the use and subdivision of 93,000 acres of freehold land to the North. But NSW Minister for Land, Tom Lewis, felt that NSW could develop areas to accommodate a growing population without the acquisition of land.• NSW Government and NCDC cooperated to make sure development along Barton and Federal Highways was not unplanned.• Members for Goulburn and Monaro rejected any move that threatened the independence and integrity of border areas of NSW: they were in favour of Commonwealth rather than a complete takeover.• NCDC Annual Report concluded that Canberra's principal role was a magnet for surrounding areas.
1968	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Peter Harrison published "An Approach to Planning a City on the Increase" in <i>Architecture in Australia</i> to promote Canberra's growth and expansion.• An informal agreement between Councils of bordering areas that they would consult with NDCD before undertaking development except for agriculture of forestry.
1969	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Gorton Government established an Interdepartmental Committee to study complementary growth in NSW along the border of the ACT.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Surrounding Shires had meeting to discuss overflow from ACT, but no representative from NCDC attended. The Shires decided they will go about planning their own way, except when a proposed subdivision was on a boundary. The State Planning Authority gave recommendations for Shires regarding planning for subdivisions close to the border.
1970	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Tomorrow's Canberra!</i> released which outlined the Y plan. The Gorton Government's Interdepartmental Committee recommended consultations with the NSW state on courses of a joint Commonwealth/state approach or an extension of the ACT border.
1971	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Freehold land along Federal Highway in NSW close to ACT had high prices. NCDC warned that action be taken to control rural subdivisions outside the ACT. A regional planning conference between State Planning Authority, NCDC and Shires was recommended. NSW Department of Decentralisation and Development offered to help formulate plans for orderly development surrounding the ACT.
1972	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gunning Shire put pressure on Commonwealth to deal with planning for encroaching of Canberra and demand for smaller subdivisions. NCDC publishes the 15th Annual Report that conceded that Canberra must spill over the border: NCDC envisaged Canberra conurbation with population of 1 million whereas joint parliamentary committee suggested a cap growth at 500,000. Whitlam, Opposition Leader, stated that it was clear there would be some acquisition of public land in NSW. Election of the Whitlam Commonwealth Government, and the establishment of the Department of Urban and Regional Development.
1973	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Member for Eden Monaro, Bob Whan, said the Commonwealth should take some responsibility for planning in areas near the border of Canberra. The Canberra branch of the ALP proposed the extension of the ACT, suggested a development corporation to plan and develop land in NSW required for urban purposes. Minister for Urban and Regional Development, Tom Uren, stated there was an urgent need for NSW government to stabilise land prices in areas adjacent to ACT, and a meeting was held with members from Shires to discuss ACT expansion. A joint Commonwealth-State reconnaissance study of development of ACT was announced by NSW Premier Sir Robert Askin. A report commissioned by former Department of the Interior called for end to

	<p>issues regarding ACT expansion, and suggested that Canberra should limit population growth unless agreement could be made.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An urgent study of planning and regional development discussed development of Southeast NSW and the role of Canberra in its development. • ACT Borders Landholder Association called for a meeting with NSW Premier Sir Robert Askin regarding secrecy over a Canberra sub-region study report.
1974	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tom Uren attacked the NSW government for lack of interest, and Shires had different land use policies in relation to subdivision size. • Letters between the Commonwealth and NSW Government regarding proposals of border expansion approaches and decisions. • Discussions between the Commonwealth and NSW Government took place in Sydney about the proposal for the ACT border with no final decision.
1975	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NSW Premier Tom Lewis announced an independent State inquiry into the expansion of the ACT. • A Land Use Plan for the ACT was published, and placed emphasis on the non-urban land, confined to boundaries of the ACT but assumed development over the border. • Holmwood Report rejected expansion of ACT and recommended joint planning arrangements in areas where Canberra's growth was close to the border – responsibility for implementation was to remain with the State and local government. • NSW rejected a plan for a federal growth centre near ACT to ease population growth pressure. • The Commonwealth Whitlam Government was dismissed.
1976	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NCDC issued a revised set of population projections which were substantially lower than previously. • A Joint Steering Committee of a regional plan drew attention to a review of the Y-Plan, and came up with the 'containment plan' as a more efficient alternative. • A Labor Government was elected in NSW and established a team responsible for South East Region planning, but Federal Fraser government withdrew its involvement.

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