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for Local People

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COMMUNITY

LA AND WA

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It has been said that Perth now is like Los Angeles in the 1950's. I've lived in both places, and there's a lot of truth in that statement.

Like Perth, LA is built on a coastal plain with the beach at its feet and mountains at its back. Fifty years ago land in California was plentiful, housing was cheap, sunshine was abundant and it produced a laid-back, easy-going lifestyle. Sound familiar?

And then the people came, and the city expanded. The movie and aerospace businesses were the cornerstones in LA, just as mining and agriculture are king here. The weather and the natural beauty were a catalyst, and LA

grew from two million in 1950 to become today's megalopolis of twenty million, expanding up and down the coast from Santa Barbara to the Mexican border and out into the desert.

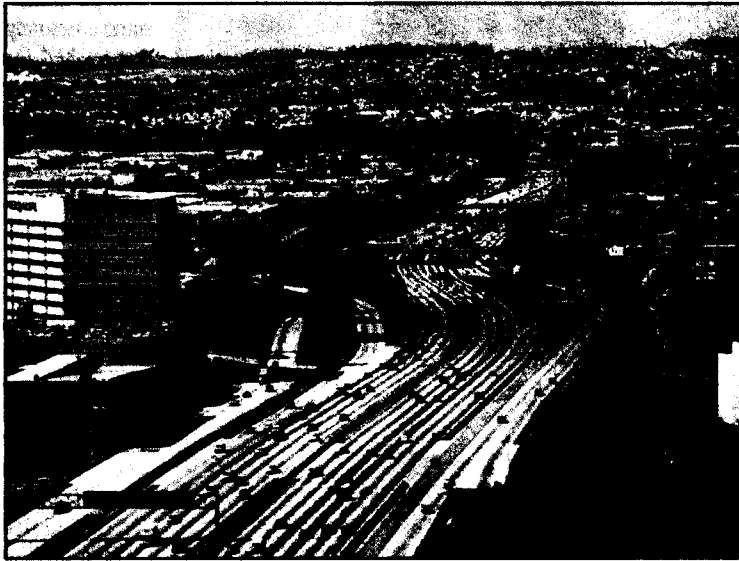
Today Los Angeles is a 300 by 200 km checkerboard of suburbs, each with a separate Central Business District, interconnected by a labyrinth of eight and ten-lane freeways. Twenty Perth's can fit side-by-side in the LA sprawl and with almost no public transportation, the only way to get around is the automobile. The freeways are either racing insanely at 130 kph, or crawling in bumper-to-bumper traffic in a tedious automotive hell.

The result is people are reluctant to drive any distance because they know they can be stuck in a traffic jam at any hour of the day or night.

They only go places when they absolutely have to: to work, to school, to visit relatives. Despite their fancy cars and freeways, they are trapped in their own suburbs. It's a fight to get to the good places, and when they get there, they find a huge crowd there already. Urban sprawl with little public transport: in LA the term "urban planning" has little meaning.

What does this mean to us in Perth? Australia's advantage is she can look to America and see the mistakes they've made, and hopefully not repeat them. One of the biggest mistakes LA made was continually building out, not in and up.

At some point, LA will look inward at her older, single-family suburban neighbourhoods and start to rebuild them as higher density: not skyscrapers, but two and three-story planned communities with open space and recreation areas. There would be urban hubs: network cities close to public transportation, schools, shopping, entertainment and social areas. Natural parks will



take on added importance as weekend outlets where city-dwellers can reconnect with nature, feel the freedom and breathe the fresh air. More importantly, these forested buffers will be the lungs and kidneys of the city, cleaning the air and providing water. The pity is in Southern California

the Swan River, create LA style air pollution and turn the area into a desert. Alarmingly, such developments are close to being built.

There is an old American Indian saying: we don't pass our lands on to our children, we borrow it from them.

very few natural areas have been saved, only the land that was too vertical to build upon.

Perth can learn from the urban planning disaster that is Southern California, but she must do it quickly, before it is too late.

Perth needs to start building in and up, not out. We need to preserve natural areas, such as bush blocks in the city, along the coast, and in the forested hills to the east. These wooded buffers are the lungs of the city, and attract and collect the rain to provide the city with fresh air and inexpensive water.

Building a series of large, high density developments sprawled across the wooded hills could poison Perth's water supply, pollute

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