

Rethinking Melbourne's Carpark for Future Use

As Melbourne heads toward its next phase of development, we encourage the debate on how the city will evolve. In the CBD, much of this argument should examine how our city's functional systems, such as transport, intersect with its experiential systems, such as its public spaces and streetscapes. Central to this debate is how Melbourne has been designed to preference the car and a car-based experience of the city.

In the City of Melbourne car parking accounts for 460 hectares of land – the equivalent of one and a half times the area of Central Park in New York. Car parking is the third largest land use. Space for community use ranks last and represents less than one fifth of one per cent of total land use by area in the City of Melbourne.

One way to reduce the number of privately-owned multi-level off-street car parks is to incentivise the sale of these sites to developers. Planning provisions stipulate that for the majority of sites for every 1 sqm of site area, a maximum of 18 sqm of floor area can be developed. There is an allowance for an increase in this plot ratio where it can be proven that a public benefit is being provided. Typically, public benefit takes the form of public open space. Our proposition, however, is that these multi-level car park sites, when sold onto developers would be regarded as constituting a public benefit and therefore would allow these developers to exceed the allowable 1:18 plot ratio on another of their sites.

This approach would incentivise car park owners to sell their sites to realise a much higher return. These sites could then be handed back to the city, and a portion of the sale proceeds transferred to the city to refurbish the car parks in a number of different ways, including social infrastructure that improves daily life. Recreational facilities, open space, public bike parking and end of trip facilities, affordable housing and affordable small work studios all come to mind as uses that would work in refit car park structures.

We have identified a number of off-street, multi-level car parks in central Melbourne that could be repurposed in this way. Importantly, the intent is to repurpose the buildings rather than demolish them. It is a more sustainable approach that allows for the creation of vertical public space to improve how people use and feel in the city.

We have incorporated a series of simple architectural moves, such as stairs, ramps, balconies, and platforms, into the bones of exemplar car park structures within the Hoddle Grid.

This approach utilises a kit-of-parts, and seeks to spark conversations about how we can reclaim space from cars so that Melbourne can be a greener, happier and more people focused city.