

A retrospective on the Metropolitan Adelaide Transportation Study

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Abstract

This paper discusses the history of the Metropolitan Adelaide Transportation Study (MATS) which published its report in August 1968 and the subsequent community involvement and political activities that led to the eventual demise of its freeway components. The almost complete rejection of the planned freeways is probably unique in Australian transportation history and the process of community involvement and political effort preceding its demise is distinctive in many respects.

There can be no doubt that the State Government of the day and the South Australian Highways Department did everything they possibly could to win support for the MATS plan in Parliament and with the public. The plan was robust and clearly presented. The study was conducted with a high morale, with innovative achievements and precious, scarce learning opportunities for those who took part. It ended with a harsh lesson in deflated optimism, political disillusionment and lessons in social planning.

Few of the plan's many recommendations received adverse criticism but the intense objections to the plan centered on the social impact of the freeways. The public opposition grew to a stage where it attracted strong political interest and, despite the fact that land acquisition had commenced, with subsequent changes of State Government, the plan for freeways was effectively rejected

1 Introduction

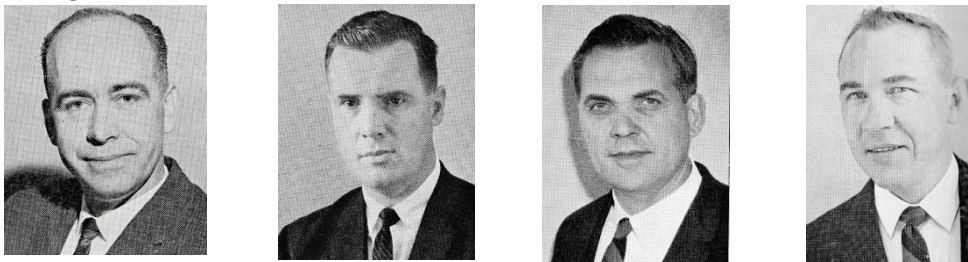
Following the 1950s post-war boom, Australian cities were growing rapidly and becoming increasingly congested. By 1966 Adelaide's population of 728,000 had increased by 90% on post war levels. During the early 1950s Adelaide had removed most of its hitherto extensive system of trams due to the high cost of electric power and, in consequence, street congestion had reached a stage where a plan, called the Metropolitan Road Widening Scheme (MRWS), had been implemented to provide for the future widening of selected main routes. Also experts had been warning of the consequences of unplanned urban sprawl leading to a vigorous interest in town planning. In 1955 the Town Planning Act was amended to make a requirement for a coordinated plan to guide the future development of Adelaide. As early as 1959 the need for transport improvements, including freeways, in Adelaide was being recognized and, in 1960, the then Minister of Roads, Minister Jude, introduced a bill enabling road access control.

39 The Metropolitan Development Plan¹ (MDP) of 1962, prepared by the Town Planning
40 Committee, showed a system of freeways sufficient to “serve road needs up to 1981”. The
41 MDP plan was generally well received following a generous time allowed for objections and
42 Parliamentary debate. It was adopted in 1967. Some freeways passing through Liberal
43 electorates in eastern and southeastern Adelaide had been deleted.

44 The Metropolitan Adelaide Transportation Study (MATS) was designed to follow and
45 elaborate the transport elements of the MDP. It was commissioned in 1964 by the South
46 Australian Government to be undertaken by a consulting team led by De Leuw Cather &
47 Company of Chicago, USA, under the guidance of a Joint Steering Committee (JSC) chaired
48 by The Commissioner of Highways and including the Director of Planning, the Railways
49 Commissioner, the Manager of the Municipal Tramways Trust and the Town Clerk of the
50 City of Adelaide. A Technical Advisory Committee, composed of members from the same
51 authorities, assisted the committee.

52 The consulting team was led by Eugene Smith from De Leuw Cather and monitored by
53 Laurence Dondanville, a Senior Vice-President of De Leuw Cather and Co. The team also
54 included staff from Alan M Voorhees and Associates Inc. and Alan Voorhees and Walter
55 Hansen both spent time in Adelaide. It also included staff from Rankin and Hill Pty. Ltd. and
56 several Highways Department, Municipal Tramways Trust and Adelaide City Council staff
57 members were seconded to learn and assist the technical work of the study.

58 **Figure 1 – Eugene Smith, Laurence Dondanville, Alan Voorhees and Walter Hansen**



63 **2 The study process**

64 The study aimed to produce a twenty-year plan for the transport development of the rapidly-
65 expanding Adelaide metropolitan area to maintain low levels of traffic congestion and attain
66 maximum safety and urban accessibility. The first stage of the study was the data collection
67 phase. The assembled travel data was most comprehensive and included household interview
68 travel survey data conducted by the study team in 1965 over 10,375 dwelling units, 1,807
69 commercial vehicle interviews, 480 taxi interviews, 25,259 inbound transit passenger surveys
70 and 30,800 roadside cordon interviews. It also included departmental traffic counts and it
71 relied on the Metropolitan Development Plan for demographic and spatial planning data
72 updated where necessary by the Town Planning Office.

73 Although not the first comprehensive urban transport study in Australia² to use computer
74 models, MATS was the first to use computerized network analysis techniques developed in
75 Australia. The Voorhees “TRIPS” model was converted to operate on Control Data

¹ REPORT ON THE METROPOLITAN AREA OF ADELAIDE, the Town Planning Committee of South Australia, printed 1963

² Brisbane and Hobart (1965) transportation studies preceded Adelaide. Melbourne started in 1966.

76 computers, keypunched and loaded on Adelaide University's Control Data machine and
77 processed overnight on a larger CSIRO machine in Canberra.

78 The MDP showed a preliminary, but extensive, system of freeways, arterials and public
79 transport improvements and it was recognized that it was necessary for MATS to fully
80 analyze these plans and develop their alignment, capacity and engineering profiles to a further
81 stage before seeking approval for their future staged development.

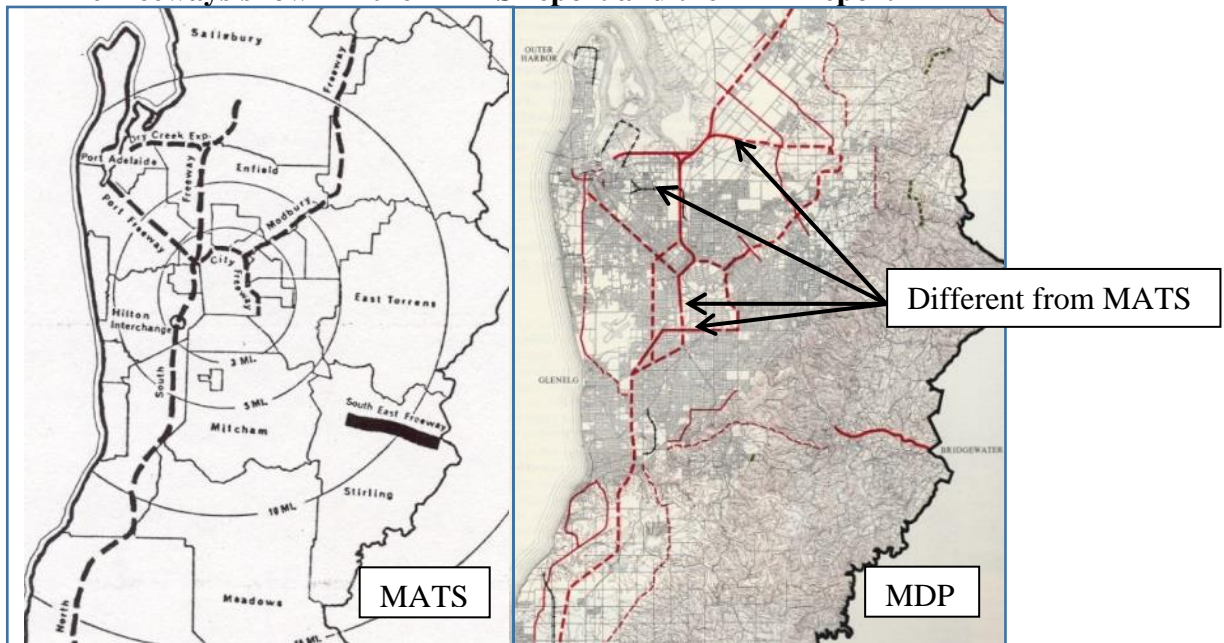
82 The seconded Adelaide City Council and Highways Department staff members spent almost
83 two years working on the study and were taught computer programming and many transport
84 planning, economic and traffic engineering techniques during the time they spent assisting
85 with the work of the study under the guidance of consulting staff from the USA. The public
86 was kept informed of progress during the study. An exhibit detailing the planning process
87 was prepared for the Royal Adelaide Show and 15,000 copies of the "MATS News" was
88 distributed.

89 3 The study recommendations

90 After examining several alternatives, the study recommended the construction of about 90
91 Kms of freeways, 32 Kms of expressways, 52 Kms of new arterial roads, the widening of 370
92 Kms of existing arterial roads, a new bridge across the Port Adelaide River and 20 rail grade
93 separations. MATS proposed 20 rail grade separations and 14 kilometers of new train line.
94 The most significant public transport project was to be an underground railway beneath the
95 city under King William Street to bring rail to the core of the CBD, to link with the main
96 north-south Gawler and Noarlunga lines. After skirting underground to the north of the
97 Adelaide railway station, the subway was to proceed under King William Street, and serve the
98 central city with three stations, before returning to the surface just south of Greenhill Road.

99 The number and length of freeways proposed in the MDP, all of which were to be constructed
100 before 1981, was greater than those proposed in MATS in 1986 as shown in figure 7.

101 **Figure 7 - The freeways shown in the MATS report and the MDP report³**



102

³ MDP freeways shown in full lines to be constructed 1961-1971, those dashed in 1971-1981.

103 The estimated cost of land acquisition and construction for the entire MATS proposals,
104 including public transport, was \$574 million in 1968, which equates to about \$7 billion in
105 2020. The cost of the recommended roads and highway network was \$436.5 million (\$5.3
106 billion in 2020) and its benefit-to-cost ratio was 2.67.

107 **4 Pre-release activities**

108 The Playford Government (LCL) had, in late 1966, released its first five-year plan for the
109 development of the State-wide road system and understood the long-term value of
110 infrastructure development in supporting the State's economic and industrial growth. It had
111 few concerns that the release of a major twenty-year plan for urban transport development
112 would incur serious opposition. However, to avoid land speculation it was decided that the
113 details of properties, which needed to be resumed for freeways, should not be released
114 immediately to the general public. It was recognized that this could not continue for long and
115 that it was good for the public to be informed and prepared to recognize the value of, and
116 necessity for, the freeway projects. Early release was also politically important because the
117 Minister for Transport⁴ had only recently severed his connection with the land agency bearing
118 his name.

119 It was also realized that it was necessary to protect the proposed freeway alignments from
120 further urban development. In the report, the freeways had been sufficiently detailed to
121 identify property boundaries. It was decided that the report was first to be circulated to
122 Local Governments, who were to cooperate by notifying the Commissioner of Highways of
123 impending Building Act approvals thus alerting him to possible land acquisition appropriation
124 on these routes.

125 This cooperation was not unusual as it had been introduced in 1946 as a part of the MRWS⁵
126 which sought to set back the boundaries of any impending development, or building
127 alterations, to provide future opportunities for road widening on designated roads. It had
128 been extended to cover the freeway routes outlined in the MDP. The streets within the
129 central City of Adelaide, set out by Col William Light, the first City Surveyor, were
130 considered to be quite adequate.

131 No properties were to be compulsorily acquired until needed and those required properties as
132 they came on the market would be purchased, compulsorily or by agreement, at fair market
133 value and leased by the Highways Department until demolished for construction, but further
134 site development would be prohibited.

135 Traffic congestion in Adelaide was not severe and only parts of Main North Road, South
136 Road, Port Road and some radial routes near the central city were operating at, or near,
137 capacity in 1965⁶. The need for congestion relief would have to be taught, if the public were
138 to accept the necessity for large and expensive freeways, which were new to Adelaide.

139 Therefore a team of Highways Department staff members were trained in public speaking
140 especially for this purpose. They were not to "debate" the MATS plan but were simply to
141 "explain" and answer questions about it and avoid political issues. Local Government bodies
142 were asked to assist them in presenting it to the public as soon as it was released.

⁴ Minister Murray Hill

⁵ Metropolitan Road Widening Scheme previously mentioned

⁶ MATS report

143 The plan was released to the media and public in August 1968 and the State Government
144 promised a six-month period of non-commitment during which the public could make
145 representations and objections to the plan.

146 **5 The public reception**

147 On release the Highways Department telephones began running hot – about 2,000 personal
148 and telephone interviews were conducted each week⁷. The publicity was clearly effective
149 and the public wanted to know how they were affected by the need to acquire properties for
150 the freeway. It was easy to inform them as the MATS report illustrated aerial photographs
151 with the freeway alignment and acquisition boundaries overlaid so there could be no
152 ambiguity.

153 In the early stages, several prominent academics and civic leaders gained media publicity for
154 their adverse views of the plan claiming that air pollution would become unhealthy and also
155 that wasteful urban sprawl would be encouraged by the plan. Special interest groups became
156 active – initially those who thought that the plan had not sufficiently expanded the public
157 transport role or who thought that electric traction was preferable to diesel traction for
158 railways. In November 1968, just two months after the plans release, the University of
159 Adelaide’s Department of Adult Education hastily convened a conference to discuss the
160 MATS plan and the future development of Adelaide⁸.

161 The University’s Professor of Architecture, despite having previously been a fervent advocate
162 for the urgent need for freeways in Adelaide, vigorously opposed the MATS plan.
163 Essentially the town planning debate contrasted what might be called the “Menzie’s Dream”
164 that every family should own its own detached home with garden, which inevitably meant
165 reliance on private motor vehicles, with the “Architects’ Dream” of soaring down-town high-
166 rise edifices that favored public transport.

167 The conference papers also reflected concern that insufficient attention had been paid to both
168 the industrial economy and social planning aspects of the MATS proposals, while
169 acknowledging the difficulties in dealing with these topics. It may be that the dissertation
170 about property values at the conference should have given greater warning to members of the
171 MTC. It relied on anecdotal evidence but was highly relevant. However, although it had
172 been agreed that an independent summary of the ensuing discussions would be provided to
173 the MTC, this was not provided nor included in the papers⁹. It would have been very useful
174 to them.

175 The speeches at public meetings called by Local Governments began to attract crowds. This
176 interest accelerated in frequency and Rotary clubs and school, church and social clubs
177 eventually sought to hear the Highways Department speakers, who eventually addressed
178 about 200 meetings. By this time the trained Highways Department speakers had fallen into
179 a pattern and the questions became familiar.

180 The MDP report had shown a photograph of a 10-lane freeway cutting a swathe through Los
181 Angeles suburbs, which was far wider than any proposed by MATS.

⁷ anonymous – “The political history of the Metropolitan Adelaide Transportation Plan”

⁸ The Metropolitan Adelaide Transportation Study and the Future Development of Adelaide - University of Adelaide Department of Adult Education – Papers Nov 1968

⁹ Minutes of the Joint Steering Committee later the Metropolitan Transport Committee MTC.

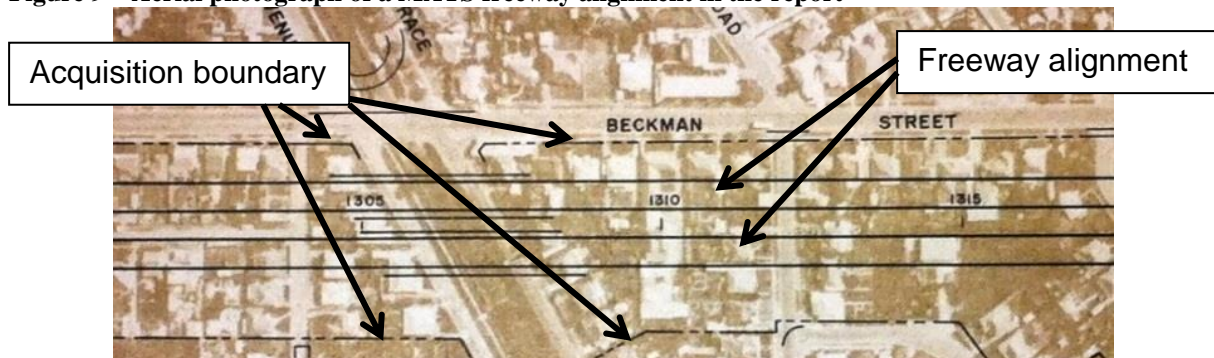
182 **Figure 8 – Part of the photo of a freeway in the MDP report**



183

184 This encouraged groups with more personal interests to form. People were worried about the
185 loss of their homes or amenities following the construction of the freeways, (the Noarlunga
186 Freeway alone required the acquisition as many as 3,000 properties, including over 800
187 residential dwellings), or the potential loss in value of their homes if located near to a
188 freeway. The aerial photographs assisted these groups to identify and expand their
189 membership and to gain signatories to their petitions.

190 **Figure 9 – Aerial photograph of a MATS freeway alignment in the report**



191

192 Some of the freeways were planned to be elevated structures and, as legislation prevented
193 compensation to those suffering from extra noise or “ugly concrete monsters” people up to
194 400 meters away from a freeway alignment signed petitions and joined in letter-boxing or
195 wrote letters to the papers or politicians. It was the intense activities of these interest groups,
196 centered directly on their personal interest in the plan’s freeways, which attracted the most
197 political attention.

198 **6 The political reception**

199 The plan’s release, and the subsequent public agitation, started a deluge of questions in
200 Parliament. Activity in the lower house was led by Mr Geoffrey Virgo, Member for Ascot
201 Park and Secretary of the Labor Party, whose electorate was therefore among those impacted
202 by the freeway plans. Hindmarsh, Thebarton and Mitchell Park were all areas represented by
203 Labor at the time. Mr Virgo recognised the effect of the plan on these areas and tirelessly
204 attended meetings, asked questions and gave evidence¹⁰.

¹⁰ anonymous – “The political history of the Metropolitan Adelaide Transportation Plan”

205 The Study caused great consternation due to a major freeway interchange in Hindmarsh,
206 where approximately 25% of its area would eventually be lost. The Mayor of Hindmarsh
207 reported in 1978: “The consequent social and environmental impact on the Hindmarsh area,
208 particularly in the Bowden Brompton area, was devastating.” A survey of the many houses
209 owned by the Highways Department showed that their standard fell much below the general
210 standard of housing in the area, contributing to a further downgrading of the district noted by
211 the remaining residents. Bowden Brompton’s higher than average proportion of elderly,
212 immigrants, separated and divorced people tended “to make it a fragile community little able
213 to withstand the disruptive effects of Highways’ activities”¹¹.

214 **Figure 10 – Aerial photograph of Hindmarsh showing the freeway interchange overlaid**



215

216 No resettlement, urban renewal or redevelopment plan had been put forward for the suburb of
217 Hindmarsh, the heart of Mr Virgo’s electorate, or any other area affected by MATS although
218 some “hardship” cases were being reported to the MTC¹².

219 The Leader of the Opposition in the house (Mr Don Dunstan) initially criticized only the
220 Government’s handling of the plan but, in 1969, after he returned from Boston USA (where
221 he met a consultant whom he believed could “evaluate” the MATS plan and suggest
222 alternative actions) he started to criticize the plan itself, announcing in a pre-election speech
223 that a Labor government would revise the MATS plan¹³.

224 Although the Highways Department, with tied funding and in anticipation of the expected
225 Commonwealth Aid Roads Act 1968, believed it had sufficient funds to implement the roads
226 plan at the time when funding would be needed, funding for public transport components of
227 MATS would require new heavy taxes for which the Government had few answers.

228 Nevertheless, in 1969 the Steele Hall (LCL) government approved the MATS Plan, excluding
229 some proposals which were to be further reviewed, and a resolution was passed which gave
230 the Joint Steering Committee, now renamed the Metropolitan Transportation Committee
231 (MTC), six months for further analysis of the objections it had received and to conduct a
232 review of sections of plan including the alignment of the proposed Noarlunga Freeway for
233 which alternative routes had been proposed.

234 **7 The Review of the Noarlunga Freeway**

235 Four alternative routes for the Noarlunga Freeway were proposed to the MTC for review in
236 addition to the MATS alignment. The MTC invited submissions from interested parties and

¹¹ Dr Susan Marsden – “Hindmarsh – a short history”

¹² Minutes of the Metropolitan Transportation Committee (Formerly the Joint Steering Committee)

¹³ Adelaide Advertiser

237 to support their submissions verbally before the Committee if they chose to do so. Staff from
 238 the Highways Department and the State Planning Office (SPO) then completed a detailed
 239 investigation of the effects of each route on different community facilities including their
 240 costs, potential for accidents, the number of dwelling units, community buildings, parkland
 241 reserves and industrial or retail sites required, the number of dwelling units within 300 feet
 242 and the number of streets severed. Table 1 shows the evaluation, by the SPO, of the
 243 properties affected by the freeway.

244 **Table 1 – The property impact of the Noarlunga freeway alternatives**

Route	Dwelling Units	Community Buildings	Public Reserves	Industrial Sites	Residences < 300 feet	Streets Severed
1	915	7	10	28	667	41
2	926	22	17	143	811	39
3	595	21	14	153	459	13
4	770	23	12	160	436	16
5	783	22	13	157	511	16

245 Source: Metropolitan Transportation Committee, “Noarlunga Freeway Alternatives” brochure.

246 Table 2 shows the data prepared by the Highways Department staff.

247 **Table 2 – The Costs and accident toll of the Noarlunga freeway alternatives**

Route	Cost \$Million	User Costs \$Million	Accidents	
			Fatalities	Injuries
1	\$ 55.4	\$ 39.1	26	1,200
2	\$ 55.4	\$ 41.7	28	1,330
3	\$ 58.1	\$ 43.5	29	1,360
4	\$ 65.1	\$ 43.3	29	1,360
5	\$ 57.6	\$ 43.4	29	1,360

248 Source: Metropolitan Transportation Committee, “Noarlunga Freeway Alternatives” brochure.

249 Members of those interest groups who had given submissions were invited to the public
 250 offices to view the work in progress and question the engineers and planners working on the
 251 investigation. When the initial investigation was completed, the staff prepared and
 252 circulated 1,060 copies of the data to the public to provide “an opportunity for all persons to
 253 study the assembled data and offer any additional information which they believe will be of
 254 assistance to the Committee in its task of identifying the most appropriate route”¹⁴.

255 The next task was to update and expand the data from community responses and to establish a
 256 value system with which to compare the alternatives. While there was ample evidence to
 257 support the value attributed to some of the data items, and some studies provided information
 258 on subjects such as the cost of relocation¹⁵, some were considered to be beyond the scope of
 259 accurate assessment even by stated preference surveys. These latter issues were then
 260 assessed by mutual agreement by staff members and subjected to sensitivity tests to establish
 261 the effect of errors on the final result. The resulting assessment clearly pointed to the MATS
 262 route (No 1) which accrued about 11% less “social costs” than the next lower route, despite a
 263 large number of sensitivity tests.

14 METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE, 1970 “Noarlunga Freeway Alternatives” brochure.

15 Christensen & Jackson “Problems of relocation in a major city: Activities and Achievements in *Baltimore, Maryland” HRB Bulletin

264 Optimism ran high that the public would accept this assessment. However the Committee's
265 value system caused further public disagreement and discussion and a "Community Values
266 Advisory Committee" was mooted to advise the Committee how to proceed.

267 Given the widespread media publicity, the Committee, who continued to ensure that the
268 public were fully informed, were surprised by the results of a private survey¹⁶ which revealed
269 that 25% of its respondents (people living within or near to the freeway alignment) were not
270 aware of the proposed freeway when they acquired their property. Similarly only 50% of the
271 respondents were able to give a good estimate of the distance of the property from the
272 proposed freeway. Virtually none of the respondents saw the freeway as an advantage but
273 only 26% considered it a moderate or serious disadvantage. It could hardly be said that
274 "interested" parties were in fact informed or interested. Perhaps they recognized that
275 construction of the freeway would still be many years ahead.

276 **8 Political rejection**

277 In early 1970, the Minister of Transport was caught out attempting to bias the results of a
278 newspaper survey into the MATS plan and the accompanying bad publicity added to the
279 problems facing the slender majority of the Hall Government (LCL), which, in June 1970, fell
280 at election to the Dunstan (Labor) Government. Although the MATS freeway debate
281 certainly paid a part in the election, it would be inappropriate to suggest that it was the
282 primary cause of the Hall Government's defeat. There had been a growing sentiment that the
283 "old guard", on both sides of the house, needed younger leadership. Dunstan was a very
284 charismatic politician.

285 Having gained government, Premier Dunstan announced a moratorium on the MATS plan
286 and Mr Virgo was appointed Minister for Transport. The Boston consultants were engaged
287 later that year. After several months in Adelaide where the consultants had access to and
288 examined all available reports and data and addressed a number of Rotary and other
289 Community Groups, they prepared a brief report¹⁷.

290 While not unsupportive of MATS, they recommended that immediate implementation of the
291 freeways was premature and could be deferred but the "transport corridors" should be retained
292 and land continually acquired. Emphasis was to be placed on economic public transport and
293 on innovation.

294 Their report is remembered mainly for their surprise recommendation to scrap the proposed
295 railway under King William Street although some of their recommendations were
296 implemented – for instance the Dial-a-Ride experiment. However the recommendation to
297 form a Department of Transport, which had oversight over the autonomous Highways and
298 Railways Departments¹⁸, had a more lasting effect.

299 Following the moratorium period the Government rejected the MATS freeways, although
300 most of the remaining MATS recommendations have since been implemented. However
301 Premier Dunstan did not go as far as selling all the road corridors already acquired but
302 announced that there would be no freeways constructed for at least 10 years. Some in the
303 Government considered that public transport could not be expanded sufficiently to do the

¹⁶ R LUCK, 1970 "Residential Property Values and the MATS Noarlunga Freeway Proposals" – BA (Hons) Thesis, School of Social Sciences, Flinders University.

¹⁷ "Adelaide Transportation 1970 Report" – Social Technology Systems Inc.

¹⁸ Both Commissioners acted under Acts of Parliament which gave them virtual autonomy

304 job¹⁹, as a third of all trips were by public transport in 1958. Instead Premier Dunstan
305 investigated new technologies in public transport and planned to replace the planned Modbury
306 Freeway with a light rail line. This was not built, but instead an O-Bahn bus route was built
307 following the Modbury freeway corridor. The subway under King William Street was
308 abandoned because of its high cost and possibly because the Premier was told that the train
309 noise might interfere with live performances with the Festival Centre above.

310 In 1980, the Tonkin (Liberal) Government committed itself to selling off the land acquired for
311 the MATS plan ensuring that even if needs or public opinion changed, the construction of
312 most MATS-proposed freeways would be impossible.

313 In June 1983, the North-South Corridor, the last surviving element of MATS, was abandoned
314 by John Bannon's new Labor government, after consultation with the State Parliamentarians
315 whose constituencies bounded the MATS freeways, and it was identified that the Highways
316 Department had only acquired 30% of the residential properties needed for this freeway in the
317 South-West suburbs up to that time, although 70% of the overall land had been acquired.

318 **9 Aftermath**

319 Attitudes towards MATS in the present day are mixed. With the completion of the freeway
320 to Murray Bridge, Adelaide residents enjoyed their first experience of free-flowing traffic and
321 public interest in segments of the MATS plan revived.

322 Although no longer Premier, Steele Hall still believed abandoning the plan was a mistake and
323 he continued to push for the plan to be implemented. The debate about whether the MATS
324 plan was good or bad continues today in the press and social media although the passing years
325 have dimmed memories. Freight transport and motoring lobbies generally favored the plan
326 heavily and, periodically, refer to the rejection of the MATS plan as a lost opportunity.
327 Major road lobby groups continue to call for a North-South freeway in particular with the
328 State Government joining calls for funding under the Federal Government's "AusLink"
329 Program.

330 The Southern Expressway has been constructed partly following the alignment of the southern
331 section of the Noarlunga freeway and the current 15-year plan is to complete a "seamless
332 north-south corridor with no traffic lights between Gawler and Noarlunga"²⁰. If MATS had
333 chosen this alignment it may not have caused such debate. The Port River Expressway was
334 opened in 2005, which partially follows the original Modbury to Port Adelaide ("Dry Creek")
335 Expressway proposed by MATS but does not extend eastwards. Construction of the
336 Northern Freeway created little public reaction, nor has South Road widening caused much
337 debate, so perhaps there is a future for freeways in Adelaide.

338 Despite the gradual construction of these roads, Adelaide still has fewer kilometers of
339 freeways than any other State Capital, including Hobart²¹. It has no toll roads. The Bureau
340 of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics released a report²² in 2015 stating that
341 congestion costs in Adelaide were expected to rise from \$1.1billion annually in 2015 to \$1.5

¹⁹ "Highways A history of the South Australian Highways Department" Peter Donovan ISBN 0 7308 1930 2

²⁰ South Australian Integrated Transport and Land use plan – Hawker Britton October 2013

²¹ OZROADS

²² Traffic and congestion cost trends for Australian capital cities / Australian Government Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development, Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics

342 billion by 2020. The MATS freeways and highways would have paid for its estimated \$5.3
343 billion²³ cost in just over 3 years.

344 **10 Conclusions**

345 There can be no doubt that the Hall Government and the Highways Department did
346 everything they possibly could to win support for the MATS plan in Parliament and with the
347 public. The plan was robust and clearly presented. They clearly identified, and listened to,
348 all those who were genuinely affected by the plan and had the means and intent to fully
349 compensate them. They understood their concerns although perhaps not their power to
350 mobilize political opposition. The other interest groups that initially made submissions were
351 those who were expected and party-aligned opposition was, of course, expected in Parliament.
352 Mr Virgo's actions in Parliament were fully consistent with a member attending to the
353 interests of his electorate. So there were initially no real surprises except perhaps from the
354 few prominent citizens who obtained publicity for their adverse views. Very few of the
355 plan's many recommendations received adverse criticism and many have been acted upon,
356 such as the introduction of express buses, the Port River crossing, many road/rail grade
357 separations and intersection improvements.

358 However, the intense social objections to the plan centered on the impact of the freeways.
359 The land acquisition policy received inadequate publicity although the Department issued a
360 publication "Your highway, your property and you" to assist in allaying the fears of those
361 who believed their property value had been adversely affected by MATS. While none of the
362 freeways were intended to be constructed in the short term, the Highways Department perhaps
363 did not make the timing clear enough. It is possible that some residents thought they would
364 lose their homes immediately.

365 In addition it was probably a mistake to illustrate so vividly the extent of land acquisition
366 despite the probity involved. It left little scope for future opportunities to optimize design.
367 The present South Road underpass (illustrated) achieves some of the benefits of the North-
368 South Freeway proposed by MATS with substantially less property acquisition.

369 **Figure 12 – South Road underpass today**



370

371 The fact that no resettlement, urban renewal or redevelopment plan had been put forward
372 further fuelled public anxiety.

²³ Costs inflated to 2020 prices

373 However it should be acknowledged that Minister Virgo established a group in his Ministry to
374 attend to the “hardship” of those affected by the freeway plans, especially those who had lost
375 value on their properties²⁴. Even so, the public opposition grew to a stage where it attracted
376 virulent political interest.

377 In addition, in retrospect and in the author’s opinion, there were two related political events
378 which seriously undermined support for the Hall government and the plan.

379 The first was the foolish and overly eager attempt by the Minister of Transport to support
380 MATS by attempting to bias a newspaper poll about the plan. Being caught out seriously
381 undermined his credibility and made even supporters wonder why he thought it necessary to
382 take action like that. It obviously lost the plan’s support from a prominent newspaper. It
383 may have been the last straw for the Hall (LCL) Government.

384 The second event was the meeting between Mr Dunstan and the Boston consultants, S
385 Bruening and T Kettanah from Social Technology Systems Inc, who, in the author’s opinion,
386 seemed to be not very familiar with the concepts of comprehensive urban planning embedded
387 in the Adelaide Metropolitan Development plan. Despite this, it is difficult to find fault with
388 their report.

389 This lack of regional planning experience may have been because Boston, despite being the
390 oldest city in USA, at that time had no city-wide or regional planning agency – local
391 governments cooperated at their boundaries with no overarching planning body.
392 Consequently it had no freeways but had a comprehensive rail and public transport system –
393 its subway being the oldest in the United States. Boston’s regional planning body was only
394 established in 1980.

395 It was the first time in South Australia that politics overcame a major set of recommendations
396 from the Highways Commissioner, who, since Commissioner Fleming’s time, had possessed
397 full autonomy over roads. Governments and Parliament were induced to take more
398 responsibility for Departments and, as illustrated by the investigation into the Noarlunga
399 Freeway alternatives, the Department learned that they had to take a greater interest in
400 community consultation and social values during the planning process, not after.

401 In addition, it is now obvious that the population projections, on which the MATS plan was
402 based, were grossly optimistic. The MDP report had estimated a population of 1.384 million
403 by 1991, but it reached just 1.086 million then. By 1986, the final year for the MATS
404 planning, it had reached just 978 thousand, whereas MATS was based on a 1986 population
405 of 1.241 million. This population was only reached in 2014, 28 years later. No doubt the
406 reduced population growth forecasts reflected the State’s economic turndown after the 1970’s.

407 The actions of subsequent Governments are harder to understand except that, by then, the
408 MATS plan had become an embarrassing memory such that intense public reaction could be
409 expected if any freeway were to be proposed.

410 Any major infrastructure plan of the scale of MATS must expect a degree of public
411 opposition. Responsible governments, while striving for the greater public good, must
412 acknowledge the political risks they run. When the government’s political margin is slight is
413 no time for this type of risk.

²⁴ Dr Scrafton

414 They expect to be on safer ground when they listen to the advice of their public servants or
415 expert consultants. In this instance many public servants even entered the political sphere by
416 willingly acting as public speakers “explaining” the plan to public meetings and they were
417 treated with respect.

418 The political risk may have been better managed by affording more sensitive and generous
419 compensation to those badly affected. The current generation of transport planners and
420 policy makers in Adelaide are much more aware of the need to manage community concerns
421 through engagement with the community and genuine quality mitigation of adverse effects.

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425 the newly formed Department of Transport in the 1970s.

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427 of “MATS News” in my possession printed by the Government Printer.

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