

A More Sustainable Transport Future
The Effectiveness of
Personal Rapid Transport
in Edge Cities

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Submitted for the award of
Master of Built Environment (Research)

2012

To my lovely daughter Clara Teodora who wouldn't be afraid to bungee jump from a bridge, but strongly refuses to get behind the wheel and drive over that bridge.

Certificate of Authorship / Originality

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Monica Elena Zarafu

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor, Associate Professor Heather MacDonald for her continuous support and guidance throughout the course of my candidature. Her invaluable help and carefully considered suggestions on much of my writing helped me finish this thesis in time. I am also particularly indebted to my co-supervisor, Dr Garry Glazebrook, who accepted me as an international student and without whom I would have not carried out this research at University of Technology, Sydney. His kind support, encouragement and assistance continued even after he left the University for a position within City of Sydney.

I am also sincerely grateful to Professor Peter Newman and Professor Anthony Capon for the opportunity to be part of the collaborative research program under the CSIRO Climate Change Adaptation flagship cluster. I would like to express my gratitude towards UTS, Curtin University and CSIRO, who provided the funding for my research. I would also like to give my thanks to Research Fellow Katrina Proust and Associate Professor Barry Newell, who welcomed me and helped me integrate within a great team of valuable scholars.

Professor Martin Lawson from University of Bristol, founder and president of ULTra PRT was generous with his time during my visit in London. A sincere thank you to Martin and Mark Griffiths who facilitated my visit to ULTra PRT at Heathrow, and many thanks to all the staff who spent time answering all my questions about PRT. I would also like to acknowledge Robbert Lohmann from 2getthere and Martin Pemberton from Vectus, and thank them for their helpful information and insights into the PRT concept and technology. Special thanks to Richard Lawson, who was always there to ensure that Martin would make time to answer all my questions. Many thanks are also directed towards John Lees-Miller who provided the expert version of the ATS City Mobil software.

I would also like to acknowledge the great assistance given to me by Evelyn Karantonis and Blake Xu from the Bureau of Transport statistics, who provided large amounts of data on request although they were overwhelmed with ministerial and departmental work.

Thanks are owed to Charlie Lin who assisted me with patronage data for rail stations. Genuine thanks to Anthony Ogle from City of Ryde for his time spent guiding me through the politics, rules and regulations applicable to the area. I still owe him a coffee and my gratitude for influencing me to think differently.

I would also like to send thanks to Dr Peter Rickwood, Dr Sumita Ghosh and Dr Janet Ge for their helpful feedbacks from my Master's assessment, and thanks to Peter McNeil and Ann Hobson for organising very helpful workshops. My thanks also go to Nick Chapman, who has promised to be the first person to try the "flying cars", as he calls them. Thanks to the occupants of our "Active Brains" office for a quiet and stimulating environment. A great thank you to Alejandra for her help in integrating me into the postgrad world and for always having an answer to my questions.

And last, but surely not least, thanks to my great and lovely family. To my husband Marius who did a great job in editing the thesis even in the long night of the culmination of my work with the writing of these thanks, and thank you to my daughter Clara who gave up her time with friends and many potentially early nights to correct my writing errors. Thanks to my parents and my brother in Romania who supported any decision in my life, even if it meant a very painful separation.

Lastly, a big thank you to all those who have witnessed the progression of my work and provided their encouragement and support when it was most needed.

Contents

Chapter 1.

Introduction	1
1.1. Introduction	1
1.2. Statement of the research problem	1
1.3. Aim and Scope of the Thesis.	4
1.4. Thesis questions and framework for analysis	6
1.5. Research design and methods employed.	8
1.5.1. Selecting a case study.	8
1.5.2. Estimating demand	9
1.5.3. Developing land use and transport scenarios.	9
1.5.4. Modelling the LAPRT scenario	10
1.5.5. Evaluating and comparing environmental, health and economic impacts.	11
1.6. Contribution of this thesis to the body of knowledge	12
1.7. Structure of the thesis	12

Chapter 2.

Sustainable transport future	14
2.1. Sustainability: from a global to a local issue.	14
2.1.1. International context	15
2.1.2. Australian context	16
2.2. Sustainable Urban Transport: Meanings and Challenges.	19
2.3. Personal Rapid Transit (PRT)	26
2.3.1. History of Personal Rapid Transit	28
2.3.2. Current applications of PRT.	32

2.3.3. PRT research in Australia	40
2.3.4. Conclusions	43

Chapter 3.

Cities, edge cities and sustainable development.	45
3.1. Automobile cities.	45
3.2. Multi-centred cities and sustainable transport strategies.	46
3.2.1. Stockholm - from monocentric to polycentric urban form	51
3.2.2. Paris – metropolis of “ville nouvelles”	54
3.2.3. Sydney - City of Cities	55
3.3. Edge cities around the world	60
3.3.1. The Archetype of The American Edge City - Tysons Corner	61
3.3.2. The European Edge Cities	63
3.3.3. Emerging Edge Cities in the Australian Context - Macquarie Park.	65
3.3.4. Urban form, land use and travel patterns in edge cities	67
3.4. Built Environment and Public Health	68
3.5. Conclusions	72

Chapter 4.

Macquarie Park Case Study - employment, land use and transport future	75
4.1. Background	75
4.2. Strategic context	78
4.3. Macquarie Park workforce travel profile	82
4.4. Macquarie Park land use	85
4.5. Employment forecast by 2031	88
4.6. Trip forecast to, from and within Macquarie Park	90

Chapter 5.

Land use and transport scenarios	95
5.1. Introduction	95
5.2. Business-As-Usual 2031 Projection (BAU 2031)	97
5.3. Transportation improvements currently planned for Macquarie Park - the “Planned” targets scenario.	98
5.4. Increasing local access by Personal Rapid Transit - the “LAPRT” scenario	103
5.4.1. Mode share assumptions for the LAPRT scenario	105
5.4.2. Distribution of trips under the LAPRT scenario	107
5.5. Towards Personal Rapid and Transit Oriented Development scenario - PRTOD	110
5.5.1. Mode share assumptions for the PRTOD scenario	112
5.5.2. Distribution of trips under the PRTOD scenario	114
5.6. Conclusions	115

Chapter 6.

Modelling the LAPRT scenario.	118
6.1. Introduction	118
6.2. Macquarie Park PRT network	119
6.2.1. PRT Network	122
6.2.2. Station locations	123
6.3. Estimating demand in the morning peak hour	127
6.3.1. Distribution of trips by origin stations	127
6.3.2. Distribution of trips between pairs of origin and destination stations	129
6.3.3. Simulation results for one morning peak hour	132
6.4. Estimating demand in the afternoon peak hour	134
6.4.1. Distribution of trips by destination stations	134
6.4.2. Distribution of trips between pairs of origin and destination stations in the afternoon peak	135
6.4.3. Simulation results for one afternoon peak hour	136

6.5. Estimating demand in the inter-peak hours	138
6.5.1. Distribution of trips between origin and destination stations during inter-peak hours	139
6.5.2. Simulation results for inter-peak hour	140
6.6. Discussion of simulation results	141
6.6.1. What is the passenger service performance of the PRT system?.	142
6.6.2. What level of PRT stock investment would be needed to offer the projected level of service?	143

Chapter 7.

Comparing selected environmental, health and economic impacts	146
7.1. Introduction	146
7.2. Passenger performance: travel time, waiting times, comfort, safety	148
7.3. Environmental and urban impact	149
7.3.1. Energy use and CO ₂ emissions	151
7.3.2. Noise	154
7.3.3. Land required for car parks	155
7.4. Health impacts: pollution, accidents, level of physical activity.	157
7.4.1. Air pollution.	157
7.4.2. Accidents.	159
7.4.3. Level of physical activity	160
7.5. Economic impact of Personal Rapid Transit System.	162
7.5.1. Capital costs.	162
7.5.2. Operating costs.	164
7.5.3. Cost-benefit analysis	165
7.6. Summary of the comparisons results	168

Chapter 8.

Conclusions. 176

 8.1. Summary of key findings 176

 8.1.1. What are the sustainability challenges of edge cities? 176

 8.1.2. How effective is the Personal Rapid Transit system
 in retrofitting edge cities? 177

 8.1.3. What are the likely environmental, urban and
 health impacts of different land use and
 transport strategies in edge cities? 180

 8.2. Future research 182

 8.3. Concluding remarks 183

Appendix 1. Thesis Related Software CD

Appendix 2. 184

Appendix 3. 188

Appendix 4 190

Appendix 5 194

Appendix 6 198

Bibliography 199

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1 -	Transport related energy consumption and CO ₂ emissions (1990)	22
Table 2.2 -	Prototypes of PRT systems	29
Table 2.3 -	PRT studies	30
Table 2.4 -	Transit line capacities for different passenger transport systems	31
Table 2.5 -	Infrastructure characteristics of PRT systems	40
Table 2.6 -	Vehicle parameters for PRT /GRT systems	41
Table 3.1 -	Sustainability ranking for 64 global cities	50
Table 3.2 -	Review of transport and land use policies in Stockholm.	53
Table 3.3 -	Land use and transport strategies for Sydney	56
Table 4.1 -	'Edge city' characteristics of Macquarie Park.	75
Table 4.2 -	Journey-to-work mode share for comparable business centres (2006).	84
Table 4.3 -	TOTAL future employment numbers by 2031	89
Table 4.4 -	Future growth targets	90
Table 4.5 -	Summary of 24-hour tours to Macquarie Park.	91
Table 4.6 -	Employment Forecast for entire Ryde Local Government Area (LGA)	91
Table 4.7 -	2031 Tours Demand to Macquarie Park as destination	92
Table 4.8 -	2031 Trip Demand of Macquarie Park Residents	93
Table 4.9 -	2031 Trip Demand to/from and within Macquarie Park	94
Table 5.1 -	Mode shares (2031) – Business-as-usual (BAU) Scenario.	97

Table 5.2 -	Total trips to/from Macquarie Park by mode of transport – BAU Scenario	98
Table 5.3 -	Traffic Increase from 2007 to 2031	101
Table 5.4 -	Mode Shares (2031) – “Planned” Targets Scenario	102
Table 5.5 -	Total trips to/from and within Macquarie Park, by mode of transport – “Planned” scenario	102
Table 5.6 -	Mode Shares (2031) – LAPRT scenario	107
Table 5.7 -	Total trips to/from and within Macquarie Park, by mode of transport – LAPRT scenario	108
Table 5.8 -	Trips using local access PRT	109
Table 5.9 -	Total trips to/from and within Macquarie Park, by purpose of travel – PRTOD scenario	113
Table 5.10 -	Mode Shares (2031) – PRTOD scenario	113
Table 5.11 -	Total trips to/from and within Macquarie Park, by mode of transport – PRTOD scenario	114
Table 5.12 -	Total home-based trips to/from and within Macquarie, by mode of transport	115
Table 6.1 -	PRT trips for one hour AM peak, average weekday	127
Table 6.2 -	PRT trips per hour at AM peak	131
Table 6.3 -	PRT Pod trips per hour at AM peak	132
Table 6.4 -	PRT trips for one hour PM peak, average weekday	134
Table 6.5 -	PRT pod trips per hour at PM peak	136
Table 6.6 -	PRT Pod trips per hour, PM peak	137
Table 6.7 -	Total estimated trips for people using PRT in one off-peak hour	138
Table 6.8 -	PRT trips to MP during one hour Inter-peak	139
Table 6.9 -	PRT trips from MP during one hour Inter-peak	140
Table 6.10 -	PRT Pod trips at Inter peak hour	141
Table 6.11 -	Simulation results for peak and off-peak hours	142
Table 7.1 -	Macquarie Park passenger trips per day, by mode of transport	146

Table 7.2 -	Distance travelled by mode, average weekday . . . . .	.147
Table 7.3 -	Distance travelled by local access system, average weekday . . .	.151
Table 7.4 -	Primary energy use for road vehicles . . . . .	.151
Table 7.5 -	Primary energy use for PRT systems . . . . .	.152
Table 7.6 -	Annual Energy use and Carbon Dioxide emissions . . . . .	.153
Table 7.7 -	Health impact from transport-related noise levels . . . . .	.154
Table 7.8 -	External costs associated with transport-related noise . . . . .	.155
Table 7.9 -	Floor space required for building new parking spaces by 2031 . . . . .	.156
Table 7.10 -	Emission factors (kg/km) for passenger cars . . . . .	.157
Table 7.11 -	Annual air pollution (tonnes/year) . . . . .	.158
Table 7.12 -	Air pollution costs (\$ million per year) . . . . .	.159
Table 7.13 -	Annual road accidents and their costs . . . . .	.160
Table 7.14 -	Total hours benefit due to increased physical activity . . . . .	.161
Table 7.15 -	PRT applications characteristics and capital cost . . . . .	.163
Table 7.16 -	Macquarie Park PRT – capital cost, operating cost and annual revenue . . . . .	.164
Table 7.17 -	Macquarie Park PRT network - Costs and benefits estimated for 2020-2050 . . . . .	.167
Table 7.18 -	Savings on CO ₂ emissions . . . . .	.170
Table 7.19 -	Avoided costs due to air pollution, accidents and lack of physical activity . . . . .	.173

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1.1 - Thesis structure	13
Figure 2.1 - Annual emissions of CO ₂ - four quarters to June quarter 2000 to 2010	17
Figure 2.2 - World liquid petroleum consumption, 2007-2035	17
Figure 2.3 - Changes in CO ₂ emissions by sector 1990-2008.	18
Figure 2.4 - Global Automotive Production	19
Figure 2.5 - Car use growth trend in 25 developed cities	20
Figure 2.6 - Implementation of IEA transport recommendations as of 2009.	22
Figure 2.7 - Implementation of IEA transport recommendations as of 2010.	23
Figure 2.8 - Increase in public transport share in Australian cities.	23
Figure 2.9 - Energy efficiency for modes of transport	25
Figure 2.10 - Heathrow PRT – Construction phase and fully operational system	32
Figure 2.11 - Computer screen showing network control	33
Figure 2.12 - Heathrow PRT - stations.	34
Figure 2.13 - Masdar PRT network.	35
Figure 2.14 - Masdar PRT - Construction phase and fully operational system	35
Figure 2.15 - Charging room and intervention through a tow-vehicle.	36
Figure 2.16 - Suncheon Bay PRT project area	37
Figure 2.17 - Station 1 and maintenance depot and Station 2	38

Figure 2.18 - Vehicle modular assembly.	38
Figure 2.19 - PRT track and Type 2 Street section	39
Figure 2.20 - Austrans vehicle	41
Figure 2.21 - Austrans rendering	42
Figure 3.1 - Polycentric urban form	47
Figure 3.2 - Growth patterns for cities	48
Figure 3.3 - Mode share of travel by car	51
Figure 3.4 - Satellite towns and railway in Stockholm	53
Figure 3.5 - Changes in traffic volumes (weekday) and travel times (morning peak hour), April 2005 compared to April 2006.	54
Figure 3.6 - Île-de-France transport network	55
Figure 3.7 - Strategic and local centres in Sydney	57
Figure 3.8 - Key transport corridors	58
Figure 3.9 - Metropolitan Transport Plan 2036	59
Figure 3.10 - Tysons Corner, aerial view	62
Figure 3.11 - Journey to work in Tysons Corner, 2009	62
Figure 3.12 - Macquarie Park, aerial view	66
Figure 3.13 - Journey to work, Macquarie Park	66
Figure 3.14 - Urban transport, climate change and public health.	69
Figure 4.1 - Macquarie Park Corridor	77
Figure 4.2 - Macquarie Park Corridor Major Sites.	77
Figure 4.3 - Global Economic Corridor.	79
Figure 4.4 - Employment by industry in Macquarie Park (2006)	79
Figure 4.5 - Macquarie Park employment 1996-2031	80
Figure 4.6 - Employment by industry, Sydney Statistical Division	80
Figure 4.7 - Existing pedestrian metric catchment for Macquarie Park rail stations	81
Figure 4.8 - Residential distribution of Macquarie Park workforce.	83

Figure 4.9 - Residential distribution of public transport work mode share for journey to work	83
Figure 4.10 - Epping to Chatswood Rail Link - Monthly Patronage	85
Figure 4.11 - Macquarie Park land use	86
Figure 4.12 - The existing commercial floor space in Macquarie Park.	87
Figure 4.13 - The predicted growth in floor space over the next 20 years in Macquarie Park	87
Figure 4.14 - Existing and future employment distribution within Macquarie Park.	88
Figure 4.15 - Ryde Map	93
Figure 5.1 - Macquarie Park street network plan	99
Figure 5.2 - Traffic Increase from 2007 to 2031.	100
Figure 6.1 - Schematic graphic of the network, stations and points of interest	121
Figure 6.2 - A visualisation of ULTra guideway design in an office park environment	122
Figure 6.3 - A possible design of a PRT station within a commercial centre.	123

ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates how effective a Personal Rapid Transit (PRT) system could be in addressing sustainability challenges in edge cities. The study aims to enrich debates and decision-making processes over a future vision of more sustainable polycentric cities.

A case study of an 'edge city' within an emerging Australian multi-centred form examines the potential of a PRT system to change travel choice in a car-dominated urban form. The Macquarie Park case study not only extends the number of studies which identified the evolution of edge cities in a variety of national and continental settings, but demonstrates that edge cities have also evolved in Australia over the past two decades.

The thesis develops a design-based solution for increasing the accessibility of main transit nodes in Macquarie Park through a PRT network, and tests its service performance under different levels of demand, during peak and off-peak hours for an average weekday. Simulation results show a positive system performance, at high capacity demand during busy commuting hours and at low capacity demand for all-purpose trips during non-busy hours. The high theoretical performance and the positive return rate of investment draw the conclusion that PRT may be worth considering in future strategies.

This study presents a preliminary analysis of selected environmental, urban and health impacts compared to a business as usual projection of current transportation trends by 2031 and current planned transport improvements. The analysis confirms the findings from other studies regarding the low environmental and urban impacts of the PRT system. Potentially, the urban space released by retrofitting edge cities with a PRT system could be redesigned to encourage greater physical activity and social interaction. The original contribution of this research to the body of knowledge is the analysis of health impacts that a PRT system might have. Nevertheless, it points to further research which should be undertaken to fully understand the health implications of implementing such a novel transport system.

The thesis concludes that a non-traditional transit mode such as Personal Rapid Transit could bridge the gap between the car-dependent urban forms we have inherited and the transit-focused urban future that is essential in order to meet sustainability goals.