Suburban routes and tracks

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Rare evidence of a hot issue

At the corner of Johnson and Collins Street in Annandale, an inner Sydney suburb not far from where I live, is a piece of graffiti. It's in white paint on the low brick wall of a 1930s block of flats. It reads:

> 18 TRUCKS WITH 200 COPS PASSED THIS SPOT AT 12.00 MIDNIGHT
> 1.2.77
> TAKING, SNEAKING URANIUM
> TO WHITE BAY
> WHAT MORE CAN I SAY?

The presence and movement of nuclear materials was a hot issue in Sydney and other capital cities in the 1970s and 80s, and this is a rare piece of physical evidence. The route was selected to minimise risk and to avoid notice. In contrast to most suburban routes it was used only once. Once was enough.

The same could also be said for the route used to take President Lyndon Baynes Johnson of the United States, from Melbourne airport to the City, in the mid 1960s. Just hours before his arrival, students of Melbourne University painted challenging messages on the pavement of Royal Parade, a handsome boulevard with avenues of plane trees, alongside the University. As a result, the official route was hastily changed to Rathdowne Street, where hundreds of students waited, on the road, the footpath and on the balconies of terrace houses, keen to express their disapproval of Australia's closeness to the United States, especially in relation to the Vietnam war.

The paint work was removed by the authorities and the route changed again (unofficially) so that the President was able to get to the heart of Melbourne, without the stain of public disapproval.

Suburban areas provide options for travel from A to B

The routes and tracks of suburban areas are many and various, especially in the areas developed in the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, whose road patterns provide many options for getting from A to B.

In more recent suburban areas, the options for routes are narrowed by deliberate road hierarchies. Indeed, the advent of motorised transport has led to the imposition of hierarchies for transport across Australian cities.

In Brisbane and Sydney, the steep terrain, the initial routes (now main roads) followed ridgelines, producing a pattern with fewer sensible options for getting from A to B than in Melbourne and Adelaide, where the initial grid patterns provided enormous choice.

The subject of my comments now is suburban Melbourne of the early 1950s. Here the grid pattern resulting from re-subdivision of the initial one square mile pattern, provided not only great choice for getting from A to B but also a way of understanding the whole fabric of the city, through the habitual use of routes, and by exploring the options.

Regular routes are adopted for all kinds of journeys: to work, to school, to shops, to visit friends and relations, to go to the city. People understand the city through its patterns of routes, for both public and private transport. In Melbourne the number 72 tram route is part of a loop through the city from the northern suburb of Coburg, to the eastern suburbs of Prahran and Malvern, Hawthorn, Camberwell Junction and Balwyn and Kew[1]. [The roads were suburb boundaries].

Some passengers on the number 72 tram, unusual in one way or another, became known to everyone travelling the route. The tram route, its features, sounds and personalities, known in all seasons, were a common bond between the travelers and the conductors, and often discussed by the young passengers.

My brothers and I caught the number 72 tram in Burke Road (Hawthorn one side, Camberwell the other) at stop 55. I travelled in one direction and my brothers in the other. Our dog, Wiskers, knew the route too: a mischievous animal, he followed us to the tram (at a distance) and sometimes made a last-minute jump to the running board, aware that we did know he was around, and generally causing a commotion. A fast runner of Olympian skill, he sometimes boarded the tram several stops along the route. He knew the route too!

Regular travel along suburban routes is the way of getting to know a city

I expect that most people have memories of regularly travelled routes. Memories of the features, with mental lists, or sequences, of the roads on either side, and memories of the landscape and landmarks derived from regular sightings.

When St John's Church Camberwell (in Burke Road) was destroyed by fire in 1951, my Sunday school friends and I were very upset, and so were our companions on the number 72 tram. In part this was a sense of duty, and the loss of the well-loved interior with its brilliant stained glass; but mostly it was because a familiar landmark – passed to and from school – had been irrevocably changed.

Travel on regular routes brought with it an incidental knowledge (and sometimes friendship) of the people who lived and worked along the route and travelers. Travelers became aware of each other's habits and inclinations, not only in dress, in the position on the tram, but also in reading material and the appreciation of the route and its landscape.

The trams were peppered with characters, including people whose sole purpose was to travel on trams, noting and appreciating the particularities of the route, and the trams themselves. Timetables and landmarks were their stock in trade[2].

Travel on the number 72 tram, and other connecting trams, together with the walk to school and home at either end, were like traveling through an estate, or a marking of territory. The route was mapped in the mind and repeated like ritual. Explorations were made in the areas between our home or school and the tram route: for several months, or longer, the children in our street used to walk from the tram to home via the bluestone lanes, until we got the measure of them, relating the backs to the fronts, so to speak. The lanes also provided privacy from the public gaze, ever present then in suburban streets. A good place to eat chips in school uniform, without surveillance. The chips were hidden from sight on the tram and were only warm by the time we got to eat them. Walking 'around the block' or to the shops were other regular route for children and also for adults, partly for exercise.

Travel by car with family or friends broadened the scope of 'the estate', and made the choices and the factors influencing the route of travel clearly apparent. Along each route to the city and across the other side to Geelong, I learnt and appreciated the landmarks. Frank Sedgman's[3] Shell Garage on the corner of Riversdale Road and Glenferrie Road, the tram depot at Hawthorne Bridge, the Burney Oval – with the its billboard marked with Pig Iron Bob graffiti, past the Burnley Horticultural Gardens – each route had its features to be noticed – not every trip but on a regular basis. The Skipping Girl Vinegar neon sign in Richmond was a favourite with everyone. Walking to and from the tram and looking at the houses along the route, provided a introduction to the suburban architecture of Melbourne, to the scale of houses, the different types of bricks, and the character of gardens. High cypress hedges were landmarks.

Routes for the delivery of goods and services[4]

While travel to and from school, work and shops was the basis of travel for the residents of suburbia, in the 1950s each street was itself a part of routes for the delivery of numerous goods and services. In the early 1950s Mount Ida Avenue, where the Walkers lived, was on a route for the delivery of:

- Postman, twice a day (by foot)
- Newspapers, twice daily (boy with bicycle)
- Milk (evening) once a day (small open truck)
- Bread, Monday to Friday (midday or afternoon) (horse and cart, Ballock's Bakery)
- Ice twice weekly (truck)
- Grocer, green grocer (truck – Shiels)
- Council garbage collection, once or twice weekly. Council got very smart new trucks with curved hatches late 1940s?
- Aerated cordials, once fortnightly (truck)

- Butcher, weekly or twice weekly with orders by telephone (travelling in a black motorcycle with sidecar and uniform, and later a custom made small truck)
- Fishmonger, weekly (on foot Chinese man with wicker baskets on a pole) He covered the fish with wet hessian bags (to keep them fresh) and a net (to keep away flies), and he filleted the fish my mother selected alongside the gully trap near the laundry.
- Prince's Laundry, once weekly (used for sheets, towels, tablecloths, shirts etc.)
- Knife-sharpener/brooms – quarterly? (on foot, holding fitted leather cases)
- Rag and bone man, half yearly? (open cart with horse)
- Bottle-Oh collecting used bottle and glass – quarterly (open cart then large open truck.

In addition there were travelling salesmen with a wide range of goods: knife sharpener, carpet sweepers, vacuum cleaners, clothes, and insurance.

Mount Ida Avenue was a short steep east-west road with 20 houses on each side. Most, but not all, of the delivery vehicles came down the hill. The bread, delivered by horse and cart until c1959, always came up the hill. Every day, the baker stopped the horse and cart a few houses in from Tooronga Road, just before the steep section of road. Here the horse had a spell while the baker delivered the bread and visited one of the housewives for a cup of tea. Sometimes it might take an hour (or longer) for the cart to travel from this spot to near our place. To the children, all sorts of silly explanations were offered for this phenomenon, but never quite believed until closer to adulthood. As children we were only really conscious of this phenomenon on holidays, as the bread was usually delivered while we were at school. Warm fresh bread was highly prized, and sometimes stolen from the bread cart, with whole loaves being mutilated within minutes by a small group of fanatics who had been waiting for the arrival of the cart.

In addition to the goods and services, the residents of Mount Ida Avenue were regularly visited by the Salvation Army band. It stopped several times along the length of the street, while members collected funds from householders. For a few years the street was also on the route of a Scots Pipe band, who were only exercising themselves and their lungs. The sight and sounds of the pipe band was a wonderful treat. After Mount Ida Avenue they usually marched to nearby Anderson's Road Park for a short informal concert, then back to their hall.

The marching of bands through Hawthorn East (and other suburbs) was possible and pleasurable because cars had not yet taken full command of the streets. It was practicable to march up or down the street without concern for traffic, although dogs were sometimes a problem.

I know nothing about how these routes were chosen or adapted, and anyone who did is probably dead now.

Connections between travellers and people along the route

As a child, while I was aware of the phenomena of routes and travel, I was not always aware of the subtleties of encounters between people along the route. I was aware of the horse troughs erected by the Binns', and of other acts of goodwill to children and tramps by unknown householders, but I was unaware of the relationship that can develop between people unknown to one another. These relationships are the subject of two short stories by Patrick White; one of these – 'Five Twenty' – is about an elderly couple watching for a man in a pink and brown car who passes their house on Parramatta Road at 5.20pm each day. They contemplate his life and become concerned for his welfare. (You'll have to read the rest[5].)

Patrick White was conscious of his own regular routes of travel, in his walks around the block of Martin Road and Robertson Road, in bus travel to the city, and in his walks (along regular routes) with Manoly Lascaris in Centennial Park across the road from their home, and which they regarded as their 'living living room'.[6]

In 'The Barton Bus', the Canadian writer Alice Munro used the bus trip from the suburb of Barton to the center of Brisbane as a setting for a story about an affair and its indivisibility from the discovery (and appreciation) of Brisbane's character.[7]

Patterns of routes

While I haven't made a formal study of how people choose routes, from my own behaviour and from travelling with others, I know that we each develop a system of routes for travelling through the city and suburbs. This system is influenced by traffic, time and the directness of the route, but also by terrain, territory and our interest in things along the route. From my experience, people travelling by car don't always travel by the quickest or most direct route.

Travel outside our daily or regular system of routes is the basis of many jokes about travel between Sydney suburbs. People in the eastern suburbs have a natural reluctance to go to the upper north shore. This is not merely a concern about traffic or time – it's just too far away and certainly many times the actual distance, or travel time. The problem is that travel to another part of the suburbs is outside our territory, beyond our familiar routes, where the features and landmarks are full of experience and meaning.

Whilst people develop systems of routes and travel, the pathways of travel develop their own image as a route. George Street is known as Sydney's main street. It is always included in parades (such as those to celebrate sporting achievements) many of which start or stop at the Town Hall, on the corner of Druitt Street. Railway stations become known for their gardens, encouraged by advice and awards up to the mid-twentieth century.[8]

Parades

Another type of suburban route is the parade, held for local and national celebrations. In Liverpool, NSW, the opening of the Memorial Swimming pool in 1958 was an occasion

for an absolutely splendid parade, with floats and marching girls.[9] In Melbourne, May Day and Moomba were well celebrated, in the center of the city.

The Gay Mardi Gras is the most well known parade in Australia. I'd have said the Anzac parade myself, but what do I know? It is an annual parade from Hyde Park, along Oxford Street to Moore Park using the old tram route now used for buses.

A word about management and heritage practice

For me the knowledge that counts – keeping and remembering suburban life – has mostly been written about from the domestic perspective, with fewer accounts from the perspective of traders/business people. To my surprise, my brother Huan Walker, enquiring on my behalf at the local history library, found very little about the people who delivered goods and services to Mount Ida Avenue, Hawthorn. Nothing about the baker, nothing about the Chinaman (whom I also researched at the Chinese museum in Melbourne), The exception was an oral history of Mr Ireland, one of the family who owned the local Irelands' Dairy, where milk was bottled using the most up to date techniques. Mr Ireland recalls his experiences of Hawthorn in the 1920s and 30s.

The people delivering goods and services to suburban areas in the 1950s must have known the areas they visited (and their customers) in great detail, and in a way that will not be known again in the same way.

There is little large-scale evidence of routes or practices of deliveries. Evidence is not in features along the route, but in the details of the suburban house – side entrance to the back door, hatches for placing deliveries of milk, enameled signs 'no hawkers or canvassers'. If possible, this evidence should be kept in renovations, although concerns about security might prompt people to secure gates so that side entrances are not useable.

I notice that many of the horse troughs erected around Australia by the Binns family have been removed. Perhaps they should be the subject of a study, so that at least some of them can be protected. In the suburban townscape, I expect that many of the premises of local dairies and bakeries (now absorbed or replaced by larger business entities) are likely to be kept, at least for their utilitarian value, if not for their heritage. Many were built from the 1930s onwards, and it is likely that – with the focus of development on residential buildings – many will be demolished to make way for residential development.

Heritage studies for local government could adopt a more integrated approach to understanding suburbia and travel, rather than the current theme-based models where residential development is separate from the facilities that served it. The connection of studies to oral histories is another possibility, including a reference group to provide input.[10]

Another implication for practice is the need to recognise the meanings of places for people who pass them on a regular basis. The Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter 1999 defines associations and meanings as follows:

1.15 *Associations* mean the special connections that exist between people and a *place*.	Associations may include social or spiritual values and cultural responsibilities for a place.
1.16 *Meanings* denote what a *place* signifies, indicates, evokes or expresses.	Meanings generally relate to intangible aspects such as symbolic qualities and memories.

Places that are landmarks are likely to have meanings to people travelling past on a regular basis. Other features along the route might also be the subject of meanings. Obviously, there would be practical constraints on providing opportunities for these 'associated people' to participate in decisions about a place; however, the Internet and local publications and signs are among the means that might be used to capture peoples experiences – for example in oral history. In heritage practice, many of us will have experienced the value/liveliness that personal perspectives give to place-based history, and how the 'transfer' of these meanings to others adds value to the place itself in the local community. Interest in the recent past, including our own past and those of our parents, is growing. People in heritage practice have been fortunate to hear the recollections of others and to also have some of the responsibility for ensuring that associations and meanings are recorded and passed on to others. Perhaps one of the highlights of change in heritage practice will be a continued shift from the glorious and mysterious distant past to the partly-known and tantalisingly-close recent past?

Endnotes

[1] The number of the route changes at the city and become 72 for its journey to and from Cotham Road Kew, via Burke, Malvern and St Kilda Roads.
[2] As a teenager and young adult I knew the routes and numbers for most of the tram services in the eastern suburbs (and had traveled on many of them); but my knowledge of the northern and southern routes was sketchy only.
[3] Frank Sedgman was a famous Davis Cup Tennis Player in 1940s and early 1950s.
[4] This list was compiled with assistance of my mother Merle Walker and my eldest brother Huan Walker.
[5] 'Five Twenty' has been published several times, e.g. in Alan Lawson ed., *Patrick White – Selected Writings*, University of Queensland Press, 1994.
[6] Patrick White and Manoly Lascaris' walking routes through Centennial Park and around the block, are part of their strong association with the neighbourhood, or in Burra Charter terms, the setting of their house at 20 Martin Road. Meredith Walker et al, 'The future for 20 Martin Road, Centennial Park and the neighbourhood of Patrick White and Manoly Lascaris', Report prepared for the NSW Government Heritage Office July 1996.
[7] In a collection of short stories, possibly *The Moons of Jupiter* published in the 1970s.

[8] The sources for this observation are: my observations of Sydney and Melbourne, discussions with railway heritage specialists, a discussion with Robert Moore, and reading advice prepared for railway gardeners .

[9] Meredith Walker et al, 'Liverpool memorial Olympic Pool - Significance and Policy' A report for the Liverpool City Council 1997.

[10] Heritage studies of local government areas have lots of expectations around them, and modifications to the studies are limited by the funds available and the use of standard briefs by governments.