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Riding on the southbound train across the Sydney Harbour Bridge on a wintry, July morning, the view is stunning. Beneath the magnificent arches of the bridge, sailboats weave among a fleet of green and yellow ferries. The mere sight of the iconic opera house extending into the harbour conjures up decades of enchanting music. Rising above Circular Cay, Sydney's distinctive and spirited skyline beckons the traveler.

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Australia



Sydney

CITY PLANNING DOWN UNDER

However, this is not the only view from that southbound train.

Looking across the bridge, one sees several modes of transit, ranging from various toll lanes and dedicated-use bus lanes to pedestrian and cycle paths. Below, large ferries carry morning commuters from the North Shore, while smaller ferries with minimal wake approach from the Parramatta River in the western suburbs. Beneath the

harbour, a tunnel assists in handling the enormous burden of the transit corridor. Amidst the urban skyline, pockets of green point to parks and open spaces. Residential apartments compete for space among elegant financial and commercial hubs. And beyond the Central Business District, miles of suburbs stretch from the Pacific Ocean to the Blue Mountains. If one looks carefully, one may glimpse Sydney's past and her future.

As I rode this train to Town Hall to begin the first day of my urban planning internship in the Mayor's office, I was unaware that my experience in Sydney would change what I saw as I crossed the Harbour Bridge. During my two months in Sydney, I began to see the way in which a city functions and to understand the interaction between urban design, land use, transportation, economic factors, and the environment.

And with each commute over the Harbour Bridge, I understood better how the City came to be the way it is, and in what ways planning and policies can shape its' future.

My internship was in the office of the Lord Mayor, Clover Moore, who serves a dual role as Mayor of Sydney and Member of Parliament in New South Wales. As I climbed the steps of Town Hall (a

modest name for the grand, Victorian building in the centre of Sydney) the first Monday morning in June, I had no idea what to expect. I wondered whether my urban planning aptitude or coffee brewing ability would be tested first – and which one would I be most prepared for?

Two hours later, I found myself sitting across from Clover at our team meeting, struggling to follow the discussion of foreign neighborhoods and streets, new political issues, and planning topics I had only touched on in classes, when the Mayor looked up and said, "Dylan, can you look into that for me?" Before I could respond with embarrassment that I was unsure what she was talking about, another staff member caught my eye and gave me a slight nod – the go-ahead to say "Yes," and the assurance that I was not without guidance.

My internship was focused on planning, but rather than working directly with the City's planning department, I worked with the Mayor's policy team of five others. While my primary task during the internship was researching controversial issues in development applications that were likely to come to Council meetings, much of my time was spent dealing with a wide array of issues on a daily (or hourly) basis, as they arrived. One minute I could be drafting a response to a citizen concerned about the inappropriate planting of a Weeping Lilly Pilly Fig, only to have the Chief of Staff ask me to write a briefing note to

Clover outlining the city's plan for a \$15 million redevelopment of Goat Island in the Sydney Harbor. Throughout the internship, I was offered a huge amount of support from a progressive,

competent, and inclusive staff, and given the tools and resources necessary to contribute to planning and policy-making in Sydney.

My mentor while in Sydney was John Mant, a lawyer and private planner for Sydney. John served as the principle advisor to former Prime Minister Whitlam, and is currently an influential, though controversial, figure in Sydney. Our weekly meetings were always informal – over a cup of coffee or perusing the Paddington markets. Some of our time was devoted to my work with Clover, providing context and answering questions about planning and Australian politics. But mostly he just shared experiences and his outlook on planning, such as his

theory that being able to walk to an excellent café latte is the ultimate performance measure of good urban design.

Above all, I got to know Sydney. I was able to immerse myself in a city of 4.1 million

people and have the opportunity to observe and question what was around me. There is certainly a mass of literature about transportation planning, but nothing could substitute for the hours spent traveling in trains, buses, light rail, monorail, ferries, cars, bicycles, and on foot, all the while noting fares, travel times, reliability, comfort, and connectivity of different modes of transit. The experiences of simply living in and examining the City were profoundly informative, and an essential complement to my internship with the Mayor.

My Burch Fellowship did not give me the answer to planning, but did teach what questions to ask. I learned how to see a functioning city, and what strategies can be used to effectively ask, "Where do we want our city to be in the future, and what do need to do to get there?"

