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## Stopping urban sprawl the key

18/Mar/2014

Anne Gartner, Guardian Express

### Comments:

CITY of Seattle principal urban designer Lyle Bicknell was in Perth last week to highlight the development of light rail and growth management in his city.

And his message was this: if you don't stop the sprawl it is very hard to move forward.

That was the key message from the Speaking at a Committee For Perth event, where Mr Bicknell explained how the north west American city developed its light rail system.

He described the similarities between the two cities, focusing on the significant suburban sprawl (single family, low density housing), booming economy, links to Asia and positive reviews by the New York Times.

Mr Bicknell said the City's first light rail line, which opened in 2008, was so popular that nearly 100km of additional line had been approved to be developed throughout Seattle.

He said the key factor in planning for successful light rail was smart land use, some increased density and defining where growth should happen by creating urban villages, rather than allowing more sprawl.

Mr Bicknell said planning for light rail had to consider that all users would start and end their light rail journey as pedestrians, mostly living in urban villages.

He said creating wider roads to accommodate rail lines was not necessary and could be a deterrent.

"As your roads get wider, which is the temptation of course whenever you are trying to build a light rail system, your pedestrian experience gets worse," he said.

"At a certain point when your road gets too wide you might as well give up because it will never be a pedestrian experience and it will never be a very good light rail experience."

Mr Bicknell said other key planning decisions needed to be around parking, connections with other transport and the needs of new generations.

During a panel session after Mr Bicknell's speech, Department of Transport principal transport planning and project manager Owen Thomas said that suburbs in Perth where light rail previously ran had continued to be popular such as Beaufort Street, Cambridge Street and Leederville.

"While those services were pulled out they set the urban form and set the scale which is that human scale... and they have continued to be successful," he said.

"Once we started developing more around the automobile you see that much more sprawling development and that loss of that community feel."

Committee For Perth chief executive Marion Fulker said the group would continue to push for light rail, the missing piece of the transport network, despite the State Government's decision to defer construction.