

# State's big density mistake

**BRAD PETTITT**



Anyone who cares about better planning and a more compact Perth should welcome more housing and greater density near train stations.

However, the State Government's announcement this week, which focused on density at 10 train stations, has fallen flat because it sidelines local governments and communities, and in the process, unnecessarily undermines the delivery of housing in transit-oriented station precincts.

It could have been an opportunity for collaboration, but instead, the WA Government chose to override local voices with the WA Planning Commission being the rule-maker, judge, and jury.

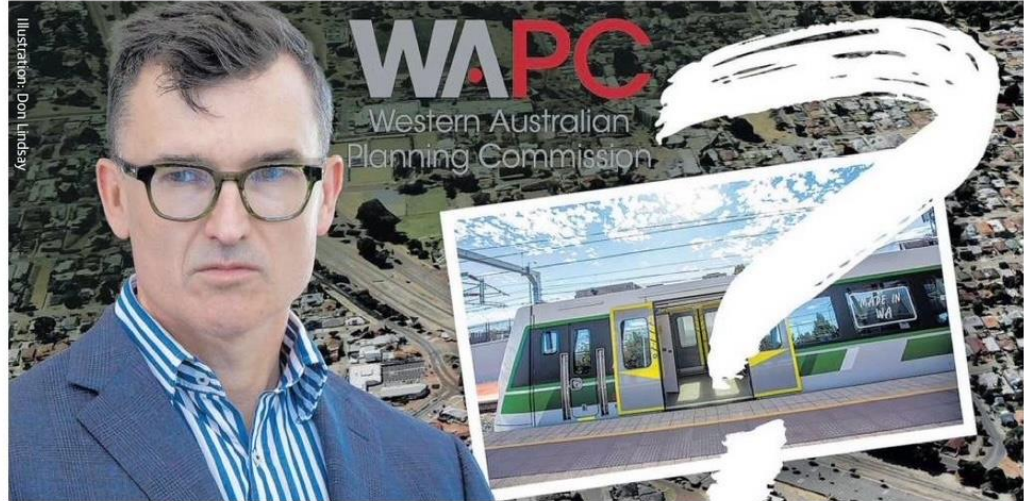
Perversely, the 10 stations in the announcement exclude the very train stations where local governments have been asking for higher-density developments through co-ordinated planning frameworks, including improvement plans.

Several local governments and communities have long been calling for higher density housing near train stations but have been ignored by the State Government and the Planning Minister.

Take North Fremantle station, where the Fremantle council has been calling on the State Government to collaborate with them on detailed planning for this potential station precinct. Done well, it could be the first fully integrated transit-oriented development initiated since Subi Centro almost 30 years ago.

This request by the Fremantle council is still live, but it started many years ago when I was the Fremantle mayor. The Fremantle council

Illustration: Don Lindsay



**The Cook Government's pathological disdain for local government risks undermining the delivery of well-planned developments at a time when it is needed most.**

wants to work with the State Government on the realignment of the station surrounded by medium to high-density residential development with appropriate coastal setbacks and improved links to the beach. But frustratingly, the State Government has dragged its feet on engaging in the necessary planning for this area. As a result, it remains no closer to happening.

Just up the train line towards Perth at Victoria Street Station, three neighbouring local governments have been trying to get the State Government to look at integrating transport and land use plans to enable an

integrated transit-oriented development next to an upgraded train station. It would be polite to say that these conversations have been moving slowly. Now they have been trumped by other station precincts nearby that are less likely to have local government and community support.

Then there are the station precincts that the State Government already has development control over but sit idle, with no new housing under construction.

Take the Bayswater station precinct, now the busiest train station outside of the Perth CBD. Development WA, the State Government's

development arm, took over planning control in 2021.

Despite this and the State Government also being major landowner in the precinct, in 2025 no major housing developments are under way.

A cynical eye might say the State Government is choosing to land bank rather than urgently developing this land right next to the Bayswater station for much-needed housing.

Down the train line at Burswood Station, the State Government once again controls the huge tract of land between the station and the casino. The giant casino carpark has been earmarked for a transit-oriented development in the Burswood Park plan, but there's no development in the area beyond the fast-tracked \$217 million racetrack.

Looking at the gap between Minister John Carey's announcement and reality, it's hard not to conclude that the State Government wants to be

seen to be doing something about density, rather than actually doing the necessary hard work in ensuring that it is delivered.

But sadly, the Cook Government's pathological disdain for local government risks undermining the delivery of well-planned and designed transit-oriented developments around stations at a time when it is needed most.

By creating an unnecessary and contrived battle with local government, the State Government looks like they're leading the debate against sprawl in the world's longest city, when in reality they're both failing to collaborate and failing to invest.

If Mr Carey is serious about delivering transit-oriented housing, he should join forces with local governments keen to support density and getting on with developing the station precincts they already control.

**Dr Brad Pettitt is the leader of the WA Greens**