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Letter of Transmittal:

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The Committee Manager
Standing Committee on Public Works
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney N.S.W. 2000

Dear Sir,

The following report is a submission to the Legislative Assembly Inquiry into Graffiti and Public Infrastructure.

The report was authored by Kellie Morrissey on behalf of graffiti removal organisation, Graffiti X.

The report addresses the social and economic impacts of graffiti. It also discusses the effective and ineffective elements of both mural painting projects and graffiti resistant surfaces.

Additional information relevant to the issues raised in the submission report can be obtained by calling 0416318200.

Yours Sincerely,

Kellie Morrissey

Graffiti and Public Infrastructure Inquiry Submission

Client Organisation: Graffiti X

Submission Author: Kellie Morrissey

Title: The Writing's on the Wall

Monday 3rd May 2010

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i. Executive Summary

This submission report discusses the negative social implications of mural painting programs. It also identifies that graffiti resistant surfaces are a more socially viable option in terms of graffiti management and the protection of public infrastructure. Recommendations to abolish mural painting programs and the introduction of mandatory application of graffiti resistant surfaces have been made to the Parliament of New South Wales through this report.

1. Introduction

The following report is a submission to the Legislative Assembly Inquiry on Graffiti and Public Infrastructure. The submission is written on behalf of graffiti removal organisation, Graffiti X. The following submission aims to identify the problems arising from graffiti and also aims to identify opportunities to allow for the more efficient removal of graffiti. It has been identified that mural painting programs employed by the New South Wales and local government agencies are ineffective and have negative social implications on society. It has been further identified that graffiti resistant finishes are a suitable and viable option. This submission report will discuss both issues and from this evaluation, recommendations will be formed.

2. Mural Painting Programs

2.1 Mural Painting Programs Create Mixed Messages

It is estimated that graffiti removal costs New South Wales public authorities over \$100 million each year, with this figure not taking into consideration the removal of graffiti by the private sector (New South Wales Attorney General's Department 2007 cited in Iveson 2009). Graffiti occurs on many levels in many different places. Essentially, it is difficult to draw the line between what is good graffiti and what is bad graffiti.

Mural Painting Programs, in the right context, can be effective. The graffiti alleys in Melbourne, Victoria are greatly revered for their artistic expression. The recent removal of an artwork by world renowned British graffiti artist, Banksy in Melbourne sparked international interest. The news was picked up by *The China Post*. *The Age* revealed the Lord Mayor,

Robert Doyle, had praised this street art as a “legitimate expression of artistic outlet” (Gill, 2010). However, in regards to graffiti in Newcastle, the painting over of the graffiti wall at South Newcastle Beach Skate Park did not spark public outcry, rather community satisfaction. *The Newcastle Herald* states that City Presentation Services Manager, Lisa Scully revealed “we have been given clear direction that legal graffiti walls are seen to be contrary to improvements we are trying to achieve” (Jones, 2010).

Mural painting programs in the wrong context, such of that in Newcastle, have more negative implications than positive. Mural Painting Programs are an artistic outlet. Such programs allow artists to use aerosol spray paints to create large scale art. However, the graffiti problem that much of New South Wales is experiencing is not as a result of these artists not having these creative outlets. According to the New South Wales Crime Statistics Bureau the local government of Newcastle is the second worst in the state for graffiti attacks (Page, 2010).

The graffiti problem involves tagging. As Callinan (2002) states, graffiti writers aim to expose their tag in as many places as possible. Tagging is not done in an artistic capacity. Tagging is carried out with the intention to deface public property. The majority of taggers are teenagers and young adults.

These teenagers and young adults are not looking for an artistic outlet. Taggers tag because it’s illegal, it’s a form of rebellion. Tagging is part of an identity formation process. Giving them an environment where they can legally carry out their tagging is not what they want. Provide these youth with the environment, such as that created through the mural painting program, and it can almost be guaranteed that taggers will simply continue to tag illegally and deface public infrastructure.

Conversely, this report alludes to the idea that it is not whether New South Wales has the capacity to possess a culture that could potentially embrace graffiti as an artistic medium, rather, that allowing some forms of graffiti and not other forms of graffiti sends mixed messages. Given that the majority of taggers are juveniles, they are in a very influential age bracket.

The promotion of mural painting programs makes it difficult for juveniles to distinguish

between the supposed good graffiti and bad graffiti.

This mixed message predicament also spills over to the sale of graffiti writing material – aerosol spray paint. If graffiti is permitted to be carried out at designated mural painting programs then the graffiti writers must be able to access aerosol spray paint. But how can suppliers of aerosol spray paint monitor the supply such that only participants of the mural painting programs have access to the aerosols? The initiative of the New South Wales government to make it an offence to possess aerosol spray paint cans unless for education, employment or legal art is ambiguous. How does a juvenile prove their intentions relative to the possession of aerosol? What's more, if a juvenile proves that possession is with the intention of legal art, what stops the juvenile from tagging all the way to the designated mural facility? This promotes a grey area in terms of regulation and one which can subvert the mural painting program and instead, promote a wider spectrum of graffiti.

2.2 The Negative Social Implications of Mural Painting Programs

Mural Paintings can invoke more graffiti; they can offer the opportunity for taggers to paint over. Once an area displays graffiti of any nature, the area becomes renowned among graffiti writers as an acceptable area to carry out graffiti. Taggers do not respect the mural painting as an artistic expression; they just see it as an opportunity to write a tag.

Furthermore, once graffiti writers deface the artistic expressions represented on the mural wall they look for other areas to tag and this exponentially increases the density of graffiti in a given area. Once taggers have defaced the mural painting area, they will seek other surfaces to deface. Taggers will tag areas surrounding the mural area and then continue to extend their tagging radius.

An example of the expansion of a tagging radius can be seen in the case of the South Newcastle Beach Skate Park in Newcastle. The wall has been a hot spot for graffiti. The wall was introduced for a short time as a legal aerosol art wall under the Newcastle City Council's 'You Write Mate' program. The workshops were conducted by an artist under the premise that writers had to agree to only engage in this legal outlet. However, this was deemed largely ineffective.

Signs on the wall now declare that under the Graffiti Control Regulation Act 2009 “graffiti is prohibited on this wall and all other structures within this area”. The signs have not deterred graffiti writers. Half the incentive of tagging on the wall is the fact that it is illegal. However, the route from Newcastle train station to South Newcastle Skate Park is clear; as it is tagged. Graffiti writers get off the train at Newcastle with the intention to write graffiti on the Newcastle Skate Park, however, they do not restrict tagging to this specific area. Whilst this is not a legal mural painting wall, the principle is the same. Regardless of whether the graffiti wall at South Newcastle Beach Skate Park is legal or not; it still proves that graffiti writers are not intent on tagging in one specific area.

3. Graffiti Resistant Surfaces

3.1 A Proactive Approach rather than a Reactive Approach

Graffiti writers want to make their work seen; they want to make their work as permanent as possible. Graffiti writers will seek do this with both the material they use and the material on which they write on. *The Newcastle Herald* revealed over the past five years, more than \$32 million worth of damage was carried out on council and railway property (Page, 2010). It is therefore, effective for both graffiti removal organisations and the wider community to minimise the permanence of this tagging. There are both sacrificial protective surfaces and non sacrificial protective surfaces. Sacrificial surfaces are removed when the graffiti is removed, whereas non sacrificial surfaces remain regardless of how many times graffiti is removed from the surface. While the application of non sacrificial protective surfaces would be ultimately desirable, any surface that allows for ease of graffiti removal is a positive.

Through experience it is evident that the quicker the tag is removed the higher the chance the tagger will not reoffend. Furthermore, if a tagger continues to frequent an area and carry out vandalism, it is the persistent removal of the tagging that ultimately deters the tagger from tagging in that area.

Thus, for the effective and fast removal of graffiti; mandatory graffiti resistant surfaces as a feature of public infrastructure development are necessary. Whilst this acknowledges that graffiti does happen, perhaps this is a more realistic approach. Graffiti writing is both an intergenerational and intercultural problem. Realistically, it is not something which can be

eradicated over night. Accordingly, an initiative which ultimately aims to deter graffiti writing on public infrastructure - through faster and easier removal, combats graffiti in both the short term and has the capacity to address the problem in the long term.

Fundamentally, this puts forward the notion that the crime prevention principles, known as Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) has the ability to effectively deal with the graffiti problem. The draft provisions released as part of the Review of the Infrastructure State Environment Planning Policy (SEPP) will have substantial benefits for the proactive response for graffiti management. The use of colours that deter graffiti, the use of graffiti-resistant surfaces and rapid graffiti removal schedule, all features of the draft provisions - will be effective in preventing graffiti on public infrastructure.

The effective introduction of CPTED for the graffiti management of public infrastructure also has the capacity to influence the design of infrastructure in the private sector – specifically, private business and homes. It can be argued that graffiti is as much of a problem in the private sector as it is in the public sector. The New South Wales government has the capability to be revolutionary in a proactive response to graffiti. The effective implementation of these practices would raise awareness of the products and initiatives that can increase the response time for the removal of graffiti whilst also making the process of graffiti removal easier for graffiti removal organisations.

Such graffiti management, through graffiti resistant surfaces, would allow for graffiti removal organisations to easily remove graffiti. This results in an increased efficiency of graffiti removal and the increased satisfaction of Graffiti X clients brought about by the prompt removal of all traces of graffiti.

4. Conclusion

Thus, it is essentially evident that the problem of graffiti needs to be addressed in a proactive capacity. Addressing the graffiti problem through funding and organising designated graffiti outlets through mural painting programs does not guarantee the management of graffiti. It is far too vague in its approach. Making it more difficult for graffiti writers to deface public (and incidentally, private) infrastructure and easier for graffiti removal organisations to remove graffiti, creates a far more effective approach to address the graffiti problem.

5. Recommendation

Therefore, there are two recommendations for consideration. The first recommendation is for the eradication of mural painting projects which are currently employed by New South Wales state and local governments. Mural painting projects are not effective for the management of graffiti, thus time and funds should be allocated to initiatives which are more effective in managing graffiti.

The second recommendation is to make graffiti resistant surfaces and other building materials, mandatory infrastructure design requirements. This allows for an efficient and effective graffiti management scheme to be implemented in the public infrastructure sector and eventually in the private infrastructure sector also.

6. References

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