

46 Elizabeth Street
Holmesville NSW 2286
22/04/05

The Committee Manager
Standing Committee on Public Works
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Re: Inquiry into Infrastructure Provisions in Coastal Growth Areas

I write in relation to the above inquiry.

(1) **Coastal Population growth and urban consolidation trends in NSW**

Recently Maitland City Council approved a large, low density, housing estate of approximately 50-60, 1 to 2 hectare building allotments. The Mayor Mr Peter Black more extolled the “virtues” of this “wonderful” development on local ABC radio news. One of the last types of this kind of development, land for families (wealthy?) to build and expand! I believe that this type of land development typifies the problems in providing infrastructure requirements, and the “easy” decisions made by local councils. No concern seems to be shown by the council for the continued urban sprawl that such developments signify and no thought appears to have been shown in the provision of local transport other than the motor vehicle. Those populations are further away from the provision of services and that additional expenses will be encountered in providing basic services such as sewerage, water, electricity telephones roads etc. That any consideration was given to the need to provide suitable public transport I feel sure was a minor transitory factor soon forgotten in the haste to approve such a housing estate.

If we are to all fit onto the limited land available then such developments with their oversize blocks should be abandoned in favour of small block sizes and fewer “Greenfield” development sites. *This may mean that private land that is already cleared may well have to be resumed in order to protect the stressed flora and fauna that exists still in the uncleared areas.*

(2) **Short and long term needs of coastal communities...**

It is my perception that in most “developments” approved by councils, those basic infrastructure requirements are not a priority. Whether it is electricity, or sewage, water or roads it seems that forward planning is just that. Many real problems are left to be solved well after the development has been approved and construction well advanced. Recent electricity failures, which involved Holmesville, centred on an Energy Australia Substation not being able to take the additional loads

imposed on it by housing estates nearby. Whether it is electricity, sewerage, water roads or public transport it seems that forward planning is just that! Any real thought is left for the future and problems, easily foreseen, at the planning stage are left despite the adage “a stitch in time saves nine” until they become expensive and time consuming. I have been advocating that just as EIS plans have to be developed then Infrastructure Impact Statements (IIS) should be prepared. Once prepared and approved, no developments should be able to started until all necessary infrastructure is in place.

It is worth noting that in terms of the published reference in the press advertisement from the committee, public transport is not mentioned! In my view very remiss of the committee.

This omission on behalf of the committee is I believe, part of the reasons why there is so little real meaningful planning by any of the planning authorities, local or state. We are fixated with the cheap easy solutions, using personal motor vehicles to solve all the infrastructure problems. Motor vehicles overcome lack of proper planning!

Street design is typically one that can only be navigated by motor vehicles. Large vehicles such as buses, or light rail trams are therefore automatically excluded. There is never money for public transport as an alternative to the motor vehicle. Planning seems to place the onus onto private input for personal transport despite the obvious environmental costs associated with continued over-use of motor vehicles.

If one were to look at the Lower Hunter transport system 70 years ago and compare it with today one would find that there was a loss of rail and light rail services whether on private or public lines which is particularly noticeable while motor vehicle use has grown exponentially. That both the rail and tram easements still exist in many cases through population growth areas, and that they are not used is an indictment at the lack of proper urban planning.

Indeed that such a situation exists is in my view a dereliction of the duties reasonably expected of governments. The present government makes a big issue of Greenhouse Warming, with numerous articles in the SMH by the Premier Bob Carr, yet it still persists with the solution of using personal motor vehicles. The hypocrisy is galling!

(3) Coordination of commonwealth, state and local government...

Much more expenditure on the provision of suitable and reliable infrastructure is needed. The Federal government is the “keeper of the counting house” and as such federal authorities should provide the majority of the money to provide upgraded and adequate infrastructure. The other provider of the cost is the anonymous amorphous environment, which is continually being degraded.

Environment costs are usually not counted in any development costs. A selling point, yes, a cost, no! Environmental degradation continues aplenty. An illustration of this cost comes from documents published by Lake Macquarie City Council. LMCC I believe is typical of many coastal types of council. In the document called '2020' published several years ago, loss of bushland was quoted as being 168 ha per year. This was reckoned as being quite unsustainable! In the 2004 environment report published by LMCC reports that 460 ha were cleared. The front page of the Land newspaper this week illustrates the outrage of inland farmers about the seeming lack of clearing controls on coastal lands Vis a Vis inland rural lands. In my view drastic action is needed now. In order to force proper planning on all the various government levels in coastal areas, a SEPP equivalent to SEPP 45 should be promulgated which places an instant moratorium on all further land clearing until infrastructure issues are sorted out.

(4) **Best practice methods to plan, manage and provide infrastructure...**

I have already mentioned the need to have Infrastructure Impact Statements prepared for new developments whether in existing urban areas or in new areas. In order to ensure that both EIS and IIS studies are best practice I believe that the study should be done after a public tender for the work and the report should be the property of either the relevant local government or of the state government. *Too often in my view, EIS studies as presently done are not impartial but are slanted towards the implementation of the proposed development. The relevant legislation should be changed to ensure EIS studies are quite impartial and independent of the developer. IIS studies should be treated in a similar manner.*

(5) **Management of social, environmental and economic considerations...**

In managing the social, environmental and economic considerations there has to be recognition that there is an equivalence of considerations. In my view, too much emphasis is given to economic considerations in most, if not all infrastructure decisions. Clearly it is usually cheaper to provide roads rather than to provide attractive, efficient public transport.

In looking at a whole range of developments across the coastal hinterland almost **no** thought is given to efficient public transport. We have a "rail spine" that runs for most of the coast, north from Nowra to the Queensland border. Absolutely **no thought** has been given to using it to pursue local transport needs. As a school student at Coffs Harbour I remember students from Boambee and Macksville used the rail line to attend high school at Coffs Harbour. Why don't we have local trains running between towns like Coffs Harbour, Grafton? Macksville, Kempsey etc? Why not Gloucester to Taree?

State governments in a manner similar to lepers in the 19th Century have treated public rail transport. As the outlying limbs atrophy due to age and stiffen due to lack of investment they are simply "snapped off". Recent examples include the

closure of the Lismore to Murwillumbah rail line and the mooted closure of the passenger rail line to Newcastle. In the case of Newcastle it seems a decision motivated by undue influence from developers anxious to build units without a rail line “spoiling” their views of the harbour.

Outside the Sydney metropolitan area no new rail services have been built for perhaps 80 –90 years. Like the 19th Century leper all the lines have atrophied and died. Certainly in some areas like the south coast and certainly in the Lower Hunter many transport corridors used to transport coal still exist. With thought and proper planning and finance many of these lines could be re-used to provide a safe and efficient local train services. Certainly there is a need to provide the Central Coast with new lines which loop eastwards towards the coast to pick up many of the growth areas and link them with Gosford and Sydney to the south and Newcastle and Lower Hunter to the north. The ill-informed views of the NSW Premier Bob Carr towards an inland rail line are mystifying. Such a line would mean that freight trains travelling between Melbourne and Brisbane could use this route, freeing to a large extent, the coastal route for use as a passenger rail corridor.

In conclusion I look forward to the committee having the nerve to challenge the “economic slavishness” and lack of lateral thinking of cabinet members. The process of downgrading social infrastructure has been a national past-time by governments for the past 30-40 years leading to the demise of thoughtful, useful, socially and environmentally responsible planning in almost all housing developments along the whole of the coast. This lack of planning must be halted, and proper public transport infrastructure planned and implemented.

Yours faithfully,

Bernard Griffin