

**Submission
No 722**

SYDNEY'S NIGHT TIME ECONOMY

Name: Mr Grant Mistler

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Grant Mistler

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[REDACTED]

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Dear Joint Select Committee

Re: Sydney's Night Time Economy

Thank you for the resolution passed on 29 May 2019 by the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council concerning Sydney's night time economy. I appreciate the time you have taken to consult in relation to the terms of reference of your inquiry.

The issues surrounding Sydney's night time economy problem are complex and multifaceted.

My personal connection to Sydney's night time economy probably began when Herman Wilhelm, my grandfather's grandfather, emigrated from Germany in 1880, and eventually settled in Darlinghurst. As the Federation of Australia was sweeping through, at home in Woollahra on 14 January 1901, Herman ended his life. His wife and two very young girls were left destitute, and ten years later his wife passed away. Those two girls were aged 19 and 17 years. My pragmatic grandfather joined the navy and was meant to be drafted to HMAS Sydney, but a clerical error, a quirk of fate, saw his whole class drown aboard HMAS Sydney when it sank in 1941, with a death toll of 645 young men. My perspective here is the value of human connections, no matter what.

As a way of backgrounding the current issues at hand, my roles at ACON and at the University of New South Wales enabled me a unique insight in to the Kings Cross night time economy, and the lives of young people. As a volunteer with ACON during the 1990s, I facilitated Fun & Esteem workshops and drop-in nights for young same-sex attracted men in Darlinghurst and Parramatta. I also volunteered with ACON to be a Safe Sex Slut at major gay dance parties where we handed out condoms, Chupa Chups and advice. I was later employed by Dr David McInnes on a research project to assist in recruiting and interviewing Fun & Esteem participants, to help uncover a program logic model of workshop-based HIV peer education best practice. This was still in the era of the AIDS crisis, and then the HCV crisis started.

People who visited Darlinghurst in the 1990s still remembered that in 1984, NSW Police called for a halt in random breath testing, and they insisted on being issued plastic gloves, because they claimed HIV could be transmitted by saliva. In 1985, when local residents on the Central Coast became aware that a very young child was HIV positive, they eventually allowed Eve van Grafhorst to attend school, but only if she wore a plastic facemask at all times. Her family was eventually bullied out of Australia, and she passed away at the age of 11 in New Zealand. Such was the level of distrust by Australians.

Around the turn of the century, I collaborated on the Hepatitis and Health research project of 1,330 NSW school students, I led the research project on Cocaine Use and Risks for HIV and HCV Transmission among Injecting Drug Users in the Sydney Party Culture, and I coined the term "strategic positioning" to describe a folk pharmacological phenomenon that was aimed at reducing HIV transmission between serodiscordant men during unprotected anal intercourse in Sydney.

At the then National Centre in HIV Epidemiology and Clinical Research, for both of the longitudinal Health in Men Study and the Positive Health Study cohorts, I interviewed thousands of Sydney men who have sex with men about their drug usage patterns and their sexual activities. My final dissertation for my Master of Arts in Applied Linguistics matched notions of morals and stigma through a systemic functional linguistics framework to analyse 20 functional injecting drug users recounting the first time they injected an illicit substance in Sydney. I am very grateful for the time given to me by thousands of Sydney local experts, and for them allowing me to hear their fears and their desires, as they negotiated their own versions of the Sydney night time economy.

The point I wish to draw here is that sex and transport are the main pleasure and pain of the Sydney night time economy. The health promotion and health research work illustrated above are due to local community members becoming active and vocal during a terrifying time when the AIDS crisis meant seeing men with lipodystrophy, and men with Kaposi's Sarcoma trying to survive long enough for a 'cure' to HIV/AIDS. This was during the time of the Australian AIDS Memorial Quilt that was unfolded each year to remember the men who had passed away at very young ages. Brave local people from sex workers to drag queens, everyone in between, got together to fight the AIDS crisis by sharing knowledge and sharing strategies – and this was all through free volunteer work, because local people had skin in the game. These people created enduring cultures of trust and safety.

At the time of the dreadful 2012 coward punch of Thomas Kelly, I was advising the City of Sydney on their alcohol free zones and alcohol free areas, to meet legislation and to oversee GIS mapping of those zones and areas for regulatory compliance requirements. The death of Thomas Kelly caused a legislative over reaction that went too far – much further than the intent of the original consultations and briefings that I attended with local residents and local businesses. I sat within the designing out crime team who began producing the Sydney Night Time Economy report in 2011.

As a precursor to that 2011 report, a joint cost benefit analysis was commissioned through TBR, MAKE, Long View Partners and Philip Hadfield Consulting. A lot of thought, time, money and consulting with local residents and local businesses on the ground was already underway as the City of Sydney wanted to learn more about the untapped potential of creating a better Sydney night time economy experience for all people. Local experts naturally included people who visited Kings Cross for entertainment and recreation purposes – the joy factor, and the rites of passage in young male cultures is something that is extremely unique to Kings Cross for generations. It is what you did.

I experienced the official crime data was already trending downwards before the 2012 coward punch, and the demographic and behavioural characteristics were also in flux, as Sydney was rapidly changing. It is worth noting that there were over counting errors within the data reported by BOCSAR, and that lack of data quality cannot be ignored. In the twelve months to March 2011, BOCSAR had mistakenly inflated the number of drug use and possession offences by 7,096 events, or more than 30%. It appeared that Sydney was out of control and extra policing was urgently needed, so it appeared that the extra policing was working when in fact the data quality was simply improving. Your thinking was tricked by that bad data from BOCSAR. That further encouraged wowsersism, and it further emboldened zero tolerance advocates.

Although the Kings Cross foot traffic count at that time was similar to a New Years Eve crowd every weekend, nothing was being done to address public transport that was identified as a major pinch point for Kings Cross. Even back on 7 November 1946, The Sydney Morning Herald article "Relieving a Traffic Bottleneck" on page two reported on traffic snarls at Kings Cross, and the "delays caused by intolerable congestion during peak transport hours". That was a Greater Sydney heading towards a population of 1.5 million people back then. One solution they identified then was "the construction of the eastern suburbs railway" line, which did occur, but only some 30 years later.

Kings Cross station was built, and opened on 23 June 1979. It used to close with the last train heading south at 12:22am every single night, according to the train timetables held at the NSW State Archives and Records. Trains departed every 15 minutes then. Fast forward 40 years to June 2019, and the last train heading south leaves Kings Cross station at 1:01am during the week, and at 1:41am on Friday, 1:44am on Saturday and 12:54am on Sunday nights. In forty years, only a few extra trains have been added around 1am. At least from the 1950s onwards, Kings Cross has been the place to go out on weekends. In the 1960s, American soldiers on rest and recreation leave introduced heroin and injecting practices to Kings Cross. Who goes home at midnight in 2019?

Taxis were always a problem in the 1990s with the taxi change over between 2:30am and 3:30am leaving streets empty of taxis, and taxis generally picking and choosing passengers based on how far they wanted to travel away from Kings Cross. When I was living in a squat in Glebe in the 1990s, we would have to say an address much further away, and then 'change our minds' to get out near Glebe to 'visit a friend', otherwise we would not be able to get a taxi to Glebe. The cost of taxis was also prohibitive with extra surcharges on weekends, and another surcharge for being late at night. There were no Uber ridesharing then, and no smart phones either. It quickly became apparent that many young people and those of low incomes were marginalised by the Sydney night time economy being built and planned exclusively around the extensive purchase of paid leisure, which is more pronounced in spheres of middle class and 'respectable' consumption patterns. From 2012 onwards, the Safe Sex Sluts were locked out. The simple joy factor started slipping away, as that long cultural history of Kings Cross was dying. The value of human connections became a safety problem to solve.

Young people who were exhausted, broke and trapped in Kings Cross still needed to wait until the train lines restarted at about 5am – which we also used to do in the 1990s. The new lockout laws however were designed to move people on to the last trains out of Kings Cross, and the City of Sydney encouraged that with posters advertising the last trains out of Kings Cross, as well as the new taxi ranks. Kings Cross started to feel like the 11pm taxi rank at Sydney Airport, and the all-male bouncers started to dress like Robocops with protective padding. People who never went out in Kings Cross, people who were not locals, people who had no idea of the cultural significance of Kings Cross, redesigned the Kings Cross night time economy experience. The men with HIV/AIDS, who died in the 1980s and 1990s, took their creativity and knowledge with them. A large party generation was lost forever. Social media and binge viewing Netflix cannot replace the value of human connections.

Now thinking of the transport pain, patronage on the inner west light rail line exploded from 3.9 million to 10.3 million journeys between 2013-2014 and 2017-2018. Commuters will have to wait at least another two years before new trams will be purchased to help reduce passenger crowding on that 13 kilometre line from Central to Dulwich Hill. The NSW State Government is building a new city for 1.3 million people around the Aerotropolis hub with no hospitals, and a disjointed public transport system. George Street looked like an open cut mine for three years, and local businesses and the Sydney night time economy were damaged. There was no creativity or knowledge there.

What is also surprising is that the Inner West local government area should be a bastion of thriving creativity, particularly in regards to the Sydney night time economy. Last month however, the Greens NSW Councillors voted down their grants program to help local music venues host more gigs by assisting with noise insulation, fire safety and equipment. Inner West Council staff recommended a number of excellent venues who applied, but the Greens NSW Councillors opposed them all, and that took money away from Camelot Lounge, The Newsagency, Butchers Brew Bar, Bridge Hotel, Pratten Park Community Sports and Bowling Club, LazyBones Lounge Restaurant & Bar, and Old 505 Theatre. This comes after the Greens NSW Councillors killed off the long awaited Sydenham Creative Hub last year, which would have exponentially increased premises available for music in and around the Marrickville area. The Sydney night time economy is still piecemeal and hamstrung by politics.

In the past five years, the Greater Sydney population has increased by an average of 95,000 people per year, and education is Australia's fourth largest export market at \$35 billion per year, while overseas tourists is our fifth largest export market at \$22 billion per year. Sydney plays a major gateway for young people visiting Australia to buy education or to have a holiday with their families.

Sydney's night time economy is intrinsically linked to our education and tourism markets. For people visiting from Mainland China for example, Australia represents a taste of democracy, a glimpse of preserved clean natural environment, and an abundance of genuine and uncontaminated food supplies.

Something 'big' is urgently needed to reboot the Sydney night time economy, to link past successes with a healthy future that includes everyone who wants to participate, and to foster the value of human connections with a respectful nod to Sydney style.

I welcome the inquiry, and I look forward to receiving your final report.

Yours faithfully

Grant Mistler

Recommendations

Below are my nine recommendations to directly answer your questions regarding measures to maintain and enhance community safety, and measures to maintain and enhance individual and community health outcomes:

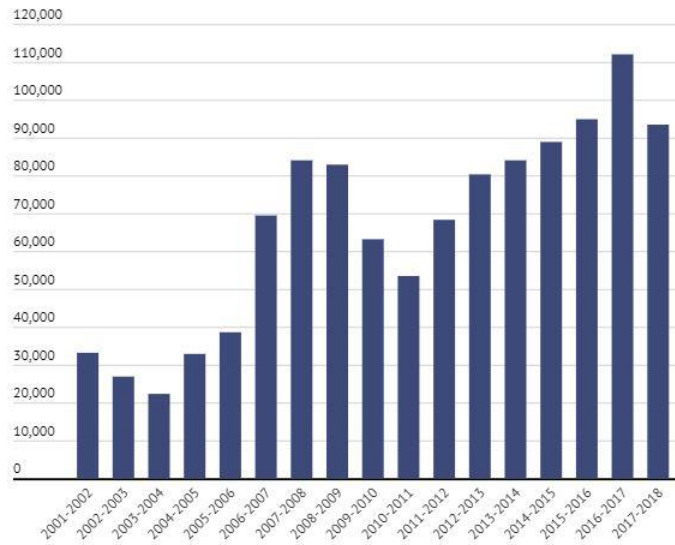
1. Create an independent Sydney Night Time Economy Commission to co-ordinate sensible and timely funding, advocacy, safeguards and protections to our city-wide economic asset
2. Decouple disjointed and piecemeal barriers and impediments from disparate agencies such as Transport for NSW, Liquor and Gaming NSW, and local government councils
3. Utilise the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion as a guiding framework to include diverse local communities and their diverse local knowledge
 - www.who.int/healthpromotion/conferences/previous/ottawa/en/
4. Utilise a Health Impact Assessment framework such as that used during the revitalisation of the Cheonggyecheon area in Seoul, as it is a practical approach used to assess the health impacts of policies, plans and projects in diverse economic sectors using quantitative, qualitative and participatory techniques to produce recommendations that maximise the positive health effects while minimising the negative ones
 - www.health.vic.gov.au/regions/southern/downloads/Intro-to-HIA.pdf
 - www.slideshare.net/benharrisroxas/health-impact-assessment-18080595
5. Utilise a Precede-Proceed Model to undertake social, epidemiological, educational, ecological, administrative and policy assessments, in order to identify the state of our health and wellbeing as the predisposing, reinforcing and enabling factors
 - www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21656942
 - www.injuryprevention.bmj.com/content/injuryprev/3/4/282.full.pdf
6. Revisit the Sydney Night Time Economy research produced for the City of Sydney from 2011
 - www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/131739/NightTimeEconomyCostBenefitAnalysisReport.pdf
 - www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0014/132224/2013-054826-OPEN-Sydney-Strategy-and-Action-Plan-FINAL-version-February-2013.pdf
7. Fix the transport bottlenecks with longer train line operating hours on weekends
8. Legislate for double or triple glazed windows to reduce noise entering apartment buildings
9. Design in accessibility for people with disability, young people, and people on low incomes

RELIEVING A TRAFFIC BOTTLENECK

It is a pity that the City Council should so often divide on party lines over problems of civic betterment. The proposed King's Cross traffic circus is a case in point. This is a question of traffic engineering, not of party politics. There is room for honest differences of opinion about the utility of the scheme in relation to its cost, and disturbance to business premises and residences during the present building crisis is a serious matter. But the need to relieve traffic congestion and downright confusion at the Cross is very pressing, and the roundabout system, which has long proved its value in London, will undoubtedly aid the continuous and orderly flow of vehicles at one of the busiest points in Sydney. It will also greatly improve the appearance of King's Cross. What it will not do is to solve the basic problem of the grossly overloaded roadways to the eastern suburbs. Only the implementation of the King's Cross tunnel project, together with the construction of the eastern suburbs railway, will accomplish this. Sydney, as Alderman Carter remarked during the debate on the circus plan, is a "traffic-sick" city. Attack on its worst bottlenecks can no longer be delayed. Reconstruction schemes are expensive, but so are the delays caused by intolerable congestion during the peak transport hours. The longer reforms are postponed the more costly they will become. The Cross circus will be a worth-while beginning, but it cannot be regarded as any more than that.

Sydney's population growth since 2001

What the population in the Greater Sydney region grew by (each year)



Source: ABS, SGS Economics & Planning.

