

Dear Sir

I would like to make a submission to the Inquiry into Sustainable Cities. I write not as an expert in any field, but as a private citizen who takes interest in current affairs and major issues. My views are mainly relating to two issues - transport and water.

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For cities to grow sustainably, governments and authorities need to get infrastructure right. Living in Sydney, I know that there are major problems relating to infrastructure here, and I suspect that this is so in other Australian cities. My views are based on what I've seen around Sydney.

TRANSPORT

Poor transport results in traffic gridlock and major air pollution. As Sydney grows, so do the numbers of cars on the roads, and new roads are being built but public transport seems to remain poor. We have to get people out of their cars, and to do that we need to provide good alternatives. The only major public transport initiative in progress in Sydney at present is the Parramatta Rail Link (which itself has been altered for the worse), and Sydney needs more new rail lines. Unfortunately, the Government is scared of committing to them because of the cost of building them and no guarantees about passenger usage, as happened to the Airport Rail Link. Despite the initial costs, the Government must build them (unless the private sector will, subject to the chances of making a buck). I suspect that similar stories could be told in the other major cities.

There is currently an inquiry happening in Sydney (the Parry Inquiry), where the NSW Department of Transport is looking at public passenger transport and how to improve it. Already an Interim Report is out, and a final report is due soon. See <http://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/ministerial-inquiry/> for info.

One new transport method being suggested is a network of automated transport vehicles, developed by Bishop Austrans. From what I've seen, these vehicles look like they could run above the ground like monorails, and in the middle

of major roads. They might be ideal along major roads where rail networks aren't close by. An outfit at Sydney University, called the Warren Centre for Advanced Engineering, seems to be strongly advocating use of these vehicles. I agree with the idea of these vehicles, and they must be looked at in other major cities as well.

Again, if we are cut air pollution, we have to get people out of their cars, and to do that we have to provide a reliable and affordable alternative. This can mean both heavy and light rail, and these Bishop Austrans vehicles.

If we develop these links carefully, we can cut pollution in the cities, and reduce the need for new motorways, which seems to appear by the sackful.

Here in Sydney, we've seen several new motorways built over recent years - ironically under a Premier who is often at great pains to stress his environmental or "green" credentials. Elsewhere, I note that Ken Davidson of the AGE newspaper in Melbourne has over time documented similar development of new roads, especially under the Bracks Labor Government, while public transport has suffered. Also, the COURIER-MAIL newspaper in Brisbane has lately run a series of stories about transport in that area of Queensland, which all helps to open up debate on this issue.

WATER

Here in Sydney we've got major problems with water. We've had many rainy spells this year, and even flooding in some cases, yet at the moment we've got water restrictions happening because the rain has not fallen as much over Prospect and Warragamba, Sydney's major water sources. This is not a pleasant state of affairs - so much rain has fallen but it's not been collected and stored. In fact there has been talk for some time about damming the Shoalhaven River to provide more water for Sydney. It is time that we stored water from the rain where it has fallen. We should be encouraging, if not forcing, the installation of water tanks across suburban areas, as in many instances we don't necessarily need pure, clean, drinking water (like for flushing toilets, or watering golf courses). Also, the Government should consider developing an underground network of tunnels and pipes to collect water after rain, especially after storms. There are ocean outfalls for stormwater - they should be closed and the water stored.

We need to recycle water. And as most of Australia's major cities are along the coasts, these ideas may be applicable. I read somewhere that in country towns, they recycle much of their water, as they'd otherwise run out. And over times of drought, this is too true. Why can't cities do the same?

OTHER THOUGHTS

Encouraging people to settle in country towns would help take pressure off our major cities. For years people have been leaving towns to live in the major cities, and with most new immigrants also settling in cities like Sydney and Melbourne, it's unsustainable. Paul Sheehan, author of *AMONG THE*

BARBARIANS, highlighted in his book that the problems of "country drain" and "city strain" are linked. NSW Premier Bob Carr is right in publicly stating that too many immigrants settle in Sydney, as he has done for years. But as everyone knows, regional Australia has suffered through the drought, and the problems of our river systems are well-documented. Peter Andren, MHR for Calare, told Federal Parliament in 1999 that river systems in regional Australia weren't coping with even a rather small population. He argued that before we settle more people in regional Australia, to take pressure off the major cities, we must work out what sort of infrastructure is needed for regional centres to cope. He also argued that, with our river systems, we must work out how to make better use of what water we have, before we divert water from elsewhere (or "water Australia", as some put it).

Billionaire Dick Pratt talks about converting existing irrigation channels into pipes, to stop water evaporation and guarantee water for both farmers and the rivers - this is an idea worth looking at. While I realise that the relevance of these views to sustainable cities is perhaps questionable, I hope that I've done enough to link them to each other.

We should also set aside land for environmental reasons. I've heard that wetlands can help to improve river health, and I feel that this is needed for the Sydney basin, to improve the health of the Nepean and Hawkesbury Rivers. They might also limit how far the city can spread, swallowing up open space in the sprawl. I'd also like to see a nature reserve or "green corridor" south of Brisbane, to prevent it from sucking the Gold Coast into one huge metropolis. While nature reserves and national park attracted bad publicity after last summer's bushfires, including those that ravaged Canberra, they can be a good buffer to limit urban sprawl, as long as they're managed properly. And I have expressed this view to various politicians at Federal and State level.

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I hope that the Inquiry will take my submission into consideration. Again, I write as someone who is interested in this issue, and what I've written is based on what I've read and heard everywhere. While many of my views may be

more appropriate for State governments, the Federal Government probably will have a role to play in development of our cities. And finally, if any Inquiry hearings will be held in Sydney, I'd be keen to come and witness proceedings, or perhaps appear before the Inquiry myself. I'm very happy to participate in discussion or debate on this important issue.

WARREN GRZIC, a very keen observer.