

Christopher L. Watson

11/4/08

The Secretary
Joint Standing Committee for the National Capital & External Territories
Parliament House, Canberra ACT



Joint Standing Committee on the
National Capital and External Territories

Submission No: 67.....

Date Received: 15/4/08.....

Secretary:

Re Inquiry into the Role of the National Capital Authority

This Submission will address a Prime example of Planning Disharmony in the ACT & Region; viz. the Unbridled (non – aeronautical) Growth of the ACT's Airport Precinct.

Your Committee would be well aware of the continuing development of business & retail areas on land leased by the owners of Canberra's airport: one already established group of office buildings is promoted as "Brindabella Business Park" while a retail mall is named as "Brand Depot". Further constructions continue unabated!

It is most unfortunate that these developments, unrelated to the main functioning of the airport, are legally permitted on this Commonwealth leased land (Airports Act 1996). As noted in the letter to me (attached) from ACT's Minister for Planning, Andrew Barr, neither the ACT Government nor the National Capital Authority (NCA) have any regulatory say in such developments. The Minister's letter should also have listed other affected regional jurisdictions such as the Queanbeyan City Council and relevant N.S.W. Government Departments.

Given the very serious planning consequences of the Airport Act (1996), that is no excuse for the NCA, or indeed other appropriate Commonwealth agencies, to be so silent in recent years on the whole host of very untoward planning implications for the ACT & region. Citizens of Canberra have waited in vain to be alerted by NCA's planning professionals.

Transport planning principles, especially, ignored

I wish to dwell on the obvious lack of planning foresight in implementing rapid & efficient – let alone more environmentally sustainable - transport systems for travel to the airport precinct from all parts of Canberra and surrounding regions.

The problem of vehicle snarls and gridlock at peak hours has already received much press coverage (see, for example, the Sunday Canberra Times article "Airport routes lead to gridlock" on March 23, 2008). Of course, one should not be surprised at this impasse: the above article notes that the number of workers coming into this precinct has grown rapidly, estimated to be now around 6,500 and reaching some 8000 by 2013!. Presumably, virtually all would be commuting by car.

1 (of 2)

Moreover, people using the airport itself for flights are also caught in traffic jams. Taxis now commonly refuse to service the airport at peak hours because of slow turnaround.

Obviously, a transit lane for buses and taxis should be designated as a matter of urgency. It is indeed shameful that this airport precinct has become a rapidly growing employment hub without the provision of a public transport system integrated with regional services particularly that of the Canberra government.

Both Commonwealth, ACT & local Government need to be indicted for their complete lack of environmental awareness in the provision of more sustainable transport modes; viz. those that minimise use of fuels and cut carbon emissions. Commuters must be given the option to travel by fast and fuel-efficient bus or trains.

Now that the Kyoto Protocol has belatedly been signed, and the Review by Professor Garnaut instituted, we should soon be getting some new policies from the Commonwealth. We have waited in vain for the ACT Government to act; its planning authority, ACTPLA, does not even have responsibility for transport planning!

Concluding Remarks

At this juncture, without appropriate amendments to the Airport Act (1996), other means need to be found for the implementation of the necessary planning reforms. For example, a current editorial (Canberra Times April 11, 2008) is headed "Time to force Airport into Plan".

Presumably reform of the 1996 Airport Act will not be easy with vested interests throughout Australia. [See Freestone, R. et al. "Fly Buy Cities: Some Planning Aspects of Airport Planning in Australia", Urban Policy and Research, 24, pp.491-508 (2006)]. However, that is no excuse for the NCA and the other parties in the ACT region to continue to ignore this sorry state of affairs.

Sincerely,



Christopher L. Watson

(enc!)



Andrew Barr MLA

MINISTER FOR EDUCATION AND TRAINING
MINISTER FOR PLANNING
MINISTER FOR TOURISM, SPORT AND RECREATION
MINISTER FOR INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

MEMBER FOR MOLONGLO

Christopher Watson

Dear Mr Watson

Thank you for your letter of 10 December 2007 in relation to development at Canberra International Airport and its integration with planning in the ACT.

In response to the matters raised in your letter, it is important that I note the history of the airport site. Canberra International Airport (CIA) purchased the airport from the Commonwealth Government in May 1998. The Commonwealth Government sold the airport with a comprehensive set of development rights, in order to secure the future viability of the airport.

As a result, there are few limitations on development, except as contained in the *Airports Act 1996*. Neither the ACT Planning and Land Authority (ACT Government), nor the National Capital Authority (Commonwealth planning organisation) regulate development at the airport.

There is no doubt that development at the airport has challenged the established planning practice of directing growth into a series of town centres such as Woden, Belconnen, Tuggeranong and the developing town of Gungahlin. The town centres provide a focus for the surrounding residential population and are well served by public transport and the arterial road network.

While the airport is not conceived as a town centre and the ACT Government has no regulatory control over the site, Government nonetheless considers the airport precinct in its strategic planning. This ensures that the airport is integrated into local, metropolitan and regional planning.

For instance, Government's 2004 *Canberra Spatial Plan* recognises the airport as an important regional asset whilst noting the challenges of its integration with surrounding areas.

Furthermore, a current study of the eastern side of the ACT (from Majura to Hume) is evaluating in detail, the role of the airport and its relationship to adjoining lands.

ACT LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

London Circuit, Canberra ACT 2601 GPO Box 1020, Canberra ACT 2601
Phone (02) 6205 0011 Fax (02) 6205 0157 Email barr@act.gov.au


In addition, the ACT Government, through its Office of Transport at the Department of Territory and Municipal Services, has engaged consultants to undertake a study into Canberra's future public transport service needs. To assess the potential for achieving the goals set out in the *Sustainable Transport Plan*, the study is developing a conceptual Strategic Network of public transport services, designed to fit the development patterns outlined in the *Canberra Spatial Plan*. Links to the airport are being investigated as part of that study, which will inform Government decisions on future investments in public transport services.

The Government also regularly liaises with the airport, by making submissions on the draft airport masterplans (such as the current masterplan on public exhibition) and in funding local infrastructure works such as the upgrading of Pialligo Avenue (to commence early 2008). Where appropriate, the ACT Government also makes representations to the Commonwealth Government concerning issues associated with the airport.

The ACT Government is committed to improving the traffic conditions surrounding the airport, with appropriate contributory funding from the airport and Commonwealth Government. The latest draft Canberra International Airport Masterplan (www.canberraairport.com.au) also envisages improved public transport to the airport via the provision of bus services from the town centres.

Thank you for raising this matter with me. I trust this information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely


Andrew Barr MLA
Minister for Planning

18 JAN 2008