

Preamble

This inquiry is a timely and very welcome rekindling of Commonwealth interest in how cities and regions actually function. My endorsement of its intent derives from a long-time professional involvement in the field, and a personal commonsense approach to how sustainable cities can be achieved.

For far too long it has been assumed that, because a majority of people use private motor vehicles for many of their trips, other forms of access and transport are of lesser importance. Even more damaging to public planning policy and investment has been the concept of mode competition – the ideologically driven '*cars v public transport*' approach.

Part of my professional work involves monitoring policy and action in the land use/transport integration field in places outside Australia. In the second half of last year, I visited and researched these matters in UK, Netherlands, and Germany. My investigations included the *Eco-Towns* and *Transition Towns* approaches in UK and a range of other locations where practical progress has been made in addressing sustainable development of urban areas.

Achieving sustainable urban development is a complex challenge. It embraces all elements of a pentagonal bottom line: social, economic, physical, time dynamic, and governance. The most obvious conclusion from my recent research is that Australia is way behind the best in current thinking and action. The activities of the Commonwealth and State Governments are currently riven by a '*silo*' mentality which guarantees waste of resources, and ineffectiveness. The attitude of '*we are doing better than before*' is a complacency that will continue to cost us dearly.

Concise comments on Terms of Reference

This submission is a series of concise dot point comments on each of the points of reference for the Inquiry. I would appreciate the opportunity to appear before the Committee when it meet in Melbourne on 30 March. I have attached a short description of my experience in the field for your information.

a. an audit of the state of public passenger transport in Australia

- An audit of the current state of public transport is important, but this task need not be exhaustive or take a long time. *Further layers of detail can be added if and when needed.*
- The audit should be forward looking, not just record the status quo. *The effort now can then also provide a robust framework for future monitoring.*
- There is already a substantial body of information available. *Government agencies, research institutes and the privatized companies have relevant data (some public, some private) that demonstrates serious inadequacies in hard infrastructure, service levels, rolling stock, signaling, and maintenance.*
- Don't overlook the obvious. *By any measure, there are obvious reasons why public transport, neglected over decades, has resulted in current facilities that are not up to the current task, let alone sufficient for a sustainable future.*

b. current and historical levels of public investment in private vehicle and public passenger transport services and infrastructure

- In assessing levels of public investment, it is important to take a holistic approach, not just the simple transport budget statistics. *Simple trend comparisons should be avoided (eg the pt budgets in Victoria have recently increased substantially, but this needs to be considered in the context of serious backlogs and shortfalls).*
- Use makers or de facto measures for items where hard statistics may not be readily available eg social equity. *Too frequently the economists and engineers omit these items with the spurious claim that 'they cannot be measured'.*
- It is also important to assess the effect of the Commonwealth primarily supporting roads but not public transport, sometimes justified by a claim that *'States do pt, not the Commonwealth'*. The Federal Infrastructure Fund is a mechanism to remedy this imbalance.

c. an assessment of the benefits of public passenger transport, including integration with bicycle and pedestrian initiatives

- Professionals who have worked in this field for a long time sometimes wonder why the benefits of public transport have to be explained yet again. But they do. *Other submissions are likely to provide considerable detail, but some examples include: reduces road congestion for those who most need to use the roads, including complex trips or difficult freight; reduces greenhouse gases, etc; improves economic productivity and social equity; contributes to healthier lifestyles; improves housing affordability.*
- It is often assumed that because car use is the predominant mode of travel, that this is the sovereign choice of people. *Invariably, there is very limited comparable choice for walking, cycling and public transport travel, the evidence of which can be readily assessed from the experience in other countries.*
- Because of the fragmentation of responsibilities between levels of government and lack of effective integration for public transport, bicycle and pedestrian initiatives the benefits are often dissipated. *Local government has an important role to play, but needs to be much better supported by both State and Commonwealth initiatives.*

d. measures by which the Commonwealth Government could facilitate improvement in public passenger transport services and infrastructure;

- The lack of Commonwealth involvement over recent decades (with the excuse that 'it a State matter') has resulted in a serious backlog of services and infrastructure. *Services levels are well below those taken for granted in many overseas countries, rolling stock is inadequate in quantity and quality (ref the recent laughable, though not funny, inability of the Melbourne train system to cope with the hot summer days of January/February), and infrastructure is substandard (eg the signalling systems are not only outdated but also very vulnerable to malicious damage).*

- There are a number of related layers where the Commonwealth Government can fulfil a critical facilitation role in improving public transport. *Advocacy (which doesn't cost much); strategic economic analysis; consideration of the broad economic benefits of a national approach (eg standard gauge rail, local rolling stock and signalling infrastructure).*

e. the role of Commonwealth Government legislation, taxation, subsidies, policies and other mechanisms that either discourage or encourage public passenger transport; and

There are many biases built into the provision of road transport and private car usage in Commonwealth mechanisms that discourage public passenger transport. *Roads are seen as a critical element of infrastructure, whereas public transport is seen as optional. The explanation that roads also provide for public transport is partly true, but does not seriously address the bias.*

- National roads are a given, whereas national public transport is minimal and, when compared with many other countries, a pathetic alternative. *This is reflected in Commonwealth funding processes.*
- Tax advantages (FBT encouragement to increase car usage, etc) in salary packages for Commonwealth Public Servants (and others) include subsidies for car usage, but not public transport usage. *This continues to send the biased message that 'public transport is for second class citizens'.*
- The recent controversial \$6B 'stimulus' to the car industry. *It could have rather better outcomes if applied to a nascent public transport manufacturing industry.*

f. best practice international examples of public passenger transport services and infrastructure.

- Australia has significantly different land use and transport patterns to some other countries, but there are best practice aspects which are readily applicable. *The most obvious is full integration between land use planning and transport provision, including substantial public transport facilities and services.*
- Many countries in Europe have a spatial planning approach which addresses the environment, settlement patterns and transport together. While not perfect, this approach provides a much more effective guide to achieving sustainability. *Given congestion on roads and public transport, the climate change situation, and the current financial situation, this approach is no longer optional for Australia. It is an urgent necessity.*
- Despite the perennial rhetoric about the importance of land use/transport integration, the reality falls far short of what is needed. *For example, in Melbourne, the recent State Government Melbourne@5million report nominated Ringwood, Dandenong and Frankston as CADs, second only in importance to the central Melbourne CBD. The EastLink Tollway road is already in place, but the Victorian Transport Plan has no mention, even in the long-term, of fixed rail link between these major centres, whereas in Europe this would be a given.*
- Some government cultural change is required. For example, a new housing area would never be approved unless it had adequate roads. The same nexus test should apply for public transport.

The examples are legion, where public transport proposals remain as lines on maps - until they are judged as to be not required because everybody drives a car! This is both ironic, and simply not true, and a self-fulfilling prophecy.

- The subject of land use/transport integration has been a focus a number of my overseas study tours over the past two decades. *For starters, the Committee could consider what has happened/is happening in: Berlin, Munich and Freiberg/Vauban in Germany; Amsterdam, Houten, and Culemburg in the Netherlands; Docklands other areas in London; regional cities in UK including Manchester and Birmingham; and Zurich in Switzerland.*

In conclusion

In conclusion, I consider this to be a very important subject and Inquiry, and the Commonwealth Government interest in the challenges it embodies are long overdue.