



LOCAL GOVERNMENT
ASSOCIATION
OF QUEENSLAND INC.

Submission to the Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport

Inquiry into the investment of Commonwealth and State funds in public passenger transport infrastructure and services

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The scope of the inquiry is to investigate and report on the investment of Commonwealth and State funds in public passenger transport infrastructure and services.

Urban Public Passenger Transport in Context

From the Associations' perspective a key issue for some time has been the lack of involvement by the Commonwealth in urban public passenger transport infrastructure and service provision. Increased levels of Commonwealth funding for urban transport will be an essential element of that sphere's investment in the overall Australian transport network.

To date in Queensland the funding of urban transport has predominantly fallen to state and local government, with Commonwealth funding directed to major road improvements through programs such as Roads to Recovery (R2R). The R2R program has been an excellent means of addressing infrastructure needs on our road networks but in our urban areas meant only a part of the overall transport task had been tackled. There have been exceptions in the past, such as the Gold Coast Railway from Beenleigh to Robina, which was partly funded by the Commonwealth under the former 'Building Better Cities' Program. Unfortunately that program whilst well regarded was discontinued following the Federal election in 1996.

In terms of an urban transport context a 2005 paper on “Public Transport in Australia” produced by the SCOT Australian Passenger Transport Group provided a good summary of the issues and challenges in this area. This was work prepared for SCOT by Professor Jeff Kenworthy - “Developing a National Focus on Urban Public Transport to Reduce Car Dependency and Improve the Sustainability of Australian Cities” and by Therese Miller - “Passenger Transport”. Key points included:

- 80% of Australia’s population resides in the capital cities and coastal areas around them and this proportion is expected to rise in the coming decades - a congestion conundrum has arisen as people in sprawling suburbs have poor access to services and employment and are reliant on the private motor car for transport.
- Over the past four decades, public transport has struggled to compete with the car this has been a period with rising living standards, sustained low energy costs, greater choice and availability of cars and significant expansion of the urban road network.
- Private passenger transport in Australia accounts for 12.2% of metropolitan GDP and public transport accounts for only 1.2% - these figures compare with the West European average of 5.5% for cars and 1.8% for public transport. (The data does factor in the costs of externalities).

The LGAQ has in previous submissions on transport related issues identified a need for the Commonwealth Government to play a more engaged role in urban policy and more importantly, the direct funding of urban transport infrastructure projects. If we reflect on the past examples of when the Commonwealth pro-actively engaged in urban affairs such as with the Better Cities Program there is evidence that longer term engagement and investment in urban transport initiatives could have more directly influenced delivery of policy initiatives around affordable housing, urban renewal and densification.

From a Queensland perspective the question of urban public passenger transport is especially relevant for local governments in the ever expanding south-east corner of the state and increasingly for councils in fast growing regional centres like Cairns. In Queensland both local and state governments have had roles in providing and funding public transport infrastructure and services.

In particular, Brisbane City Council has a major role in this respect having direct responsibility for Brisbane Transport buses and the ferry network. Local governments in Queensland have both voluntarily taken on responsibility for funding extra passenger services demanded by their communities as well as met state legislative requirements for funding maintenance of bus stop infrastructure. This has also included the Commonwealth requirements to meet Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) requirements for access.

In a recent 2009 submission to a Queensland parliamentary committee the LGAQ highlighted a point which is alluded to in the invitation by the Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport. That is a need to integrate public passenger transport with bicycle and pedestrian initiatives. The Association would strongly endorse this point and more so stress that both of those elements

themselves need to be part of an integrated transport plan which addresses all elements of the transport task including travel demand, road and land use.

They are a part of an integrated transport and land use plan that manages and balances the needs for public transport, freight, general vehicle movement, non-motorised transport and travel demand in a single process. In this way, the interactions between each element can be understood, and solutions developed that balance competing objectives.

Commonwealth, state and local government must work together to address the network holistically including national highways. The community's view of the transport network is not limited to administrative boundaries and nor should the transport planning. It is a true system and each part is mutually interdependent.

From this perspective the Commonwealth has a strong interest in how the transport network in urban areas is impacted by and itself impacts on the national transport network. The level of funding into the national and local systems through programs like Blackspot and R2R make the Commonwealth an important stakeholder. The Commonwealth is also in a unique position to play a role in influencing travel demand through legislation, subsidy and in particular taxation.

At a national level the LGAQ has worked with ALGA and other state associations in advocating State and Commonwealth Governments commit to developing integrated, holistic transport solutions in partnership with local government to achieve a balance between urban amenity, freight efficiency and viable alternatives to the use of private motor vehicles including urban passenger transport. In relation to our current economic challenges the Commonwealth has noted there is no silver bullet - the same principle applies to the urban transport task whereby investment in public transport is critical but will not be the lone solution.

In 2006 the LGAQ worked closely with other state local government associations and ALGA to develop a nationally focused Local Government Draft Roads and Transport Strategy Action Summary Paper for the ALGA Roads and Transport Advisory Committee. Through this process the LGAQ developed the following as a contribution to the national urban transport strategy from a Queensland perspective. These priorities we think are relevant to this inquiry and possibly a useful reference for the Committee:

Objective

Achieve balanced and sustainable transport systems in urban areas, to improve urban amenity and provide viable alternatives to the use of private motor vehicles.

Short Term Priorities

Congestion, Efficiency, Amenity and Planning

- 1.1 Allocate priority within COAG and the Transport Ministers Council on urban based issues including on the review and scoping of urban congestion issues.***
- 1.2 Develop advocacy position that drives a balance between economic imperatives such as the protection of freight corridors with quality of amenity.***
- 1.3 Advocate for the adoption of a strong whole of government approach to addressing urban transport issues as a national priority.***

- 1.4 Support current initiatives to review traffic management and pricing solutions as a means of addressing urban congestion.*
- 1.5 Actively lobby for and promote improved inter-agency coordination on integrating land use and transport planning.*

Funding

- 1.6 Advocate for increased, whole of government approach to the funding of urban public transport ensuring that states/territories do not diminish their major responsibility for the adequacy of urban transport services and urban design.*
- 1.7 Engage the Australian Government on the application of an R2R type special purpose funding model to transport projects that meet individual community needs.*
- 1.8 Engage in broad based advocacy to lift the priority of urban transport funding particularly for outer metropolitan areas and communities in need.*

Community Transport Solutions

- 1.9 Collate and showcase best practice models of urban community based transport solutions, and of local government partnerships with state/territory governments to establish innovative transport solutions that address community needs.*

Strategic Objectives

- 1.10 Local government is an equal partner with other governments in establishing sustainable transport solutions, and in the national planning framework being established to consider urban congestion and passenger transport issues.*
- 1.11 Support state associations in developing a partnership approach with state/territory governments that embodies integrated transport and land use planning.*

On a final note the renewed interest the Commonwealth has demonstrated in urban transport since the last election is welcomed and something the LGAQ has advocated. Both the Queensland Department of Main Roads and Queensland Transport have a long standing collaborative working relationship with our members and the Association itself. In this spirit we have asked our State Government colleagues to continue to take a leadership role among their peers at the national level to ensure Queensland is represented in this debate within Canberra. The State and Commonwealth will need to work closely with local governments in cooperation with their communities to address the issue of urban transport within the context of the total urban transport task.

Key LGAQ messages for the Standing Committee

- Commonwealth reengagement in urban transport infrastructure investment and services is welcomed.
- Our urban areas are economic engines and urban transport in our cities plays a key role in how people get to work to generate national wealth.
- Whilst urban transport is a critical component of the transport task equal attention must be given to the other transport elements including land use, roads, cycling and travel demand management in policy areas like road pricing.
- Continue to work directly with Queensland local government and collaboratively with the State Government within current regional/local planning frameworks.