

Speech Notes for Gary Prattley, Chair WAPC

UDIA Luncheon, Thursday 21 May 2009, 12.30pm

(Presentation – 30 mins plus question time).

Introduction

- Thank you for the invitation to talk with you today. I have now been in the chair for four weeks and welcome the early opportunity for a dialogue with your industry. The UDIA is, in my view, a very responsible and valuable group which I have enjoyed working closely with for many years. For the last three years I have chaired the UDIA NSW Awards 'judging' panel and presented keynote papers at the senior management training courses and many of their conferences!
- I'm delighted to be back in Western Australia after some eight years working with the NSW Government and a period in private practice. I have fond memories of my time in Perth and WA. I understand very much the challenges faced by Western Australia, having been the CEO of what was then the Ministry of Planning from 1997 to 2001.
- Today, I'd like to comment on some of the matters that we all need to focus on in the interests of future planning and development of the state. A top priority is the long overdue planning reform agenda and the initiatives that the Government and the Director General, Eric Lumsden have initiated. Equally we need to talk about regional planning initiatives that are urgently required and the critical issue of infrastructure coordination.

- Let me say from the outset that I have been delighted at the recent initiatives to reform the planning system and the approvals systems generally, and I would encourage all of you in the development and planning industry to be involved in this process of reform. I had my own mental list of the major things that needed to change, and most of them are already underway. My experience over the last three years working with Macroplan as National Planning Director and Director of Government Relations involved me in major strategic policy issues and development projects around Australia. The experience of working closely with economists, market researchers, financiers, and developers has been incredibly valuable, particularly on issues of land supply, how we generate employment, self containment in new growth areas, transit oriented developments, and what is required to actually deliver these planning outcomes. The best and most awarded plans are useless if they cannot be delivered by the development industry.

- In their discussion paper “Building a Better Planning System” DPI has identified a number of short term measures for approvals reform as well as longer term initiatives which require legislative change. I must say I think this is an excellent piece of work and I commend Eric and his team on it.

- The DPI priorities focus on:
 - Simplifying the planning approvals
 - More effective planning instruments.
 - Prioritising major projects
 - Comprehensive regional planning frameworks

- Integrated infrastructure planning coordination
- Improving governance and institutional arrangements.

- In terms of our own processes. I believe we need to focus on delivering timely outcomes. I am horrified at how clunky and sequential and repetitive our processes have become. We seem to be requiring so much detail at the high end level structure plan stages that the subsequent and very lengthy processes become superfluous. If we know the outcomes we want, and the work has been done to demonstrate they are achievable and deliverable, then let's have a highly streamlined process that delivers that. The national economy and the political environment around Australia can no longer tolerate the excessive timeframes for approvals that have become the norm, and this is why everyone from COAG down are focussing on these issues. As planners, if we cannot deliver a system to achieve this we will not survive. I must say I am also delighted at the enthusiasm for reform that is evident in everyone from the Premier and Minister Day down. There is a real opportunity to show leadership and demonstrate how the planning system can support growth in this state.

- From my own perspective I believe that the Government needs to have new and stronger instruments to help ensure its regional planning objectives can be implemented. I am a supporter of the Government having greater use of powers to initiate and to control strategic development, and to expedite critical development approvals. Most notably the better application and use of planning control areas and the introduction of call-in powers, or other

mechanisms, to allow for single decision making arrangements on projects of regional and state significance. (Reference NSW Pt 3A*)

- I am also an advocate of the introduction of development assessment panels. These have been used successfully in NSW and South Australia. In my view, the Minister for Planning should have the ability to require independent development assessment panels where councils are performing poorly in terms of consistent and timely decision-making.

- Perth is, in my view, the best planned city in Australia and that is largely because it has the WAPC and its predecessors that with a Metropolitan Planning Scheme and Metropolitan Region Improvement Fund has been sufficiently independent to avoid the vagaries of short-term political expediency.

- I would certainly encourage you all to become actively involved in this reform process. I understand that the Director General is establishing an implementation working group with key planning, industry, and local government partners, and I would encourage the UDIA's involvement.

- I believe that the WAPC needs to be a leader in the reform process. A seamless relationship between the work of the DPI is essential.

* Reference NSW Pt 3A - the only part of the NSW system that has demonstrably worked. In 2006-07, 319 determinations representing \$14.5 billion worth of investment and 34,500 jobs. (71 infrastructure and 70 industry). Approval times ranged from 5 months to 26 months with average of 12 months. (Qld 18 months, SA 24 months)

- I am pleased to say that we are now well on the way to developing a strong working relationship between DPI and the WAPC built on a partnership approach between the Director General and myself.
- I believe that the WAPC needs to reconsider its strategic role in the planning system. It must be primarily a strategic planning body and involved in state and regional issues rather than local development control. In recent times the WAPC has been too concerned about the details rather than the overall perspective. It also needs to take a leadership role on integrating and maximising the benefits of major development projects such as the Cultural Centre, Northbridge Link, transport hub and waterfront project.
- The WAPC itself needs to be reformed. We have some 25 committees and these have proved difficult to service and in many cases duplicate roles and are not effective in their operation. As a priority, Eric and I will be conducting a review of the number of committees and a rationalisation process will be undertaken.
- I also believe that the WAPC needs to be more open and accountable. We are considering how we can best communicate the decisions of the WAPC and provide opportunities for deputations and dialogue as part of the WAPC's decision-making process.

Regional planning and state infrastructure

- We need to streamline the approvals process not only for major resource projects but for all forms of development. We also need a whole-of-government approach to infrastructure planning and provision to facilitate development. We also need to address these matters in the context of Commonwealth Government initiatives. The proposed development of a State Infrastructure Strategy/Plan to be completed by mid-2010 is a critical initiative.
- The Commonwealth Government, through COAG, has issued a communiqué which details its aspirations for a taskforce to address existing strategic planning frameworks and to support the ongoing integration of state and national infrastructure in major metropolitan cities with land use planning and urban development.
- In the context of COAG communiqué, there is emerging recognition that Western Australia needs to develop a whole-of-system approach to the provision of infrastructure. This requires an alignment between strategic planning, land use planning and infrastructure planning.
- The WAPC is uniquely placed in Australia to provide for this coordination. It already has a legislated Infrastructure Coordinating Committee and more powerful coordination provisions than exist in any other state. These, provisions of course, need to be driven in a rigorous manner and the WAPC needs to show much greater leadership in this regard.

- I am very concerned that there is no up-to-date strategic planning framework in place for WA. The State Planning Strategy released in 1997 needs a thorough review to provide a contemporary strategic framework. However, it is still the only document of its kind in Australia and is still fundamentally sound, even though its existence has been ignored over the last few years. An updated State Planning Strategy is a critical accompaniment for the State Infrastructure Strategy and therefore the review needs to be achieved in the same timeframe.

- We also need an urban development program as a whole-of-government program to guide land release across all of Western Australia for the next 20 years. To be effective the urban development program needs to be linked to the State Budget process and be an integral part of an overall strategic framework for infrastructure provision and land use planning. Again the Metropolitan Development Program in this state used to be the best in Australia and we need to extend and redevelop it back to that status quickly.

- In the next few months I intend to work closely with DPI and the State Government to ensure that this task is addressed as a matter of state priority, and your industry must play a critical role in supporting this.

Regional planning committees

- The WAPC is in the process of establishing regional planning committees for the Kimberley, Pilbara, the Mid-West and the Gascoyne. This initiative is long overdue. For too long, local government has been left to

determine major regional issues and deal with major projects without any regional planning context and the consequences of that, and it's impact on the communities are unacceptable.

- Importantly, regional planning committees will provide a platform for a collaborative approach to planning. They will bring local governments, local industry and people into the heart of planning for their regions and provide a voice and real influence in their development. However, the tools we develop to achieve that need to be much more efficient and timely. We cannot simply replicate the Peel and Greater Bunbury models. We must understand that markets and opportunities will not wait for three to five years for us to get our act together.

Network City and a new spatial framework for the development of Perth and Peel Region

- I am pleased to be able to advise that a draft spatial framework plan for the development of the Perth and Peel regions will be released for public comment later in June.
- The spatial framework is not a replacement of the Network City strategy, but more a successor to Metroplan. Its purpose is to spatially define how we think the city should grow, identify structural changes necessary to support that growth and identify planning and policy priorities for implementation.

- The planning timeframe for the spatial framework is 2031, but we must of course look beyond that date. The framework supports a more compact city, but acknowledges that we have to work with the city we have. We need to have more efficient use of land and infrastructure and we need to prioritise land that is already zoned for development. The spatial framework should not be seen as an 'end state' but rather a 'work in progress' that needs continuing monitoring and review.
- By 2031 we expect to accommodate an additional 550,000 residents and will require some 328,000 additional dwellings. Fortunately we already have nearly 19,000 hectares of undeveloped urban and urban deferred land which can be utilised to accommodate much if not all of this growth. It is critically important within this to understand the status of landholdings as the Sydney example has demonstrated.
- I will not say more about the spatial framework at this stage, but will leave that for the launch of the document.

Activity centres strategy

- One of the key documents that will help implement the spatial framework is the new activity centres policy currently being considered by the WAPC. This policy has resulted from a review of the existing Metropolitan Commercial Centres Policy and is a refocusing on a greater variety of issues involving the development of activity centres.

- In my view the existing metropolitan centres strategy has had an unfortunate focus on what has been termed CAPS on the development of retailing in centres. The planning system needs to focus on the location and distribution of centres and the form of those centres, but should be less concerned about floor space and the centres ability to grow and develop. I have had considerable experience in NSW and in other states, where there are no CAPS on the development of centres. In each case a centre's development is considered on merit, based on the net community benefit and considerations of economic impact analysis. We should be in the business of ensuring vibrant and active outcomes, not protecting competitive regimes. The best centres in my experience are those where there is intensive competition and critical mass. I know the existing policy has been fiercely protected, but for what outcome? Our major regional centres are probably some of the best examples of worst practice and are a long way from the activity centre concept. This, of course, is my own personal view and it remains up to the WAPC to formally consider the matter.

- I am hopeful that this will be done at the WAPC's meeting this month and that we will also be able to release the draft activity centres policy for public consultation in June.

Concluding statement

- I strongly believe that the WA system is fundamentally the best in Australia other than for major project approvals. I accept that it has not been

performing in a manner which reflects that position but both Eric and I are totally committed to changing that.

- We have a huge responsibility to use the current window of opportunity that the economic downturn has given us to drive reform and get our systems in order to cope with the resurgence that will inevitably come.

- The political climate and will is there at both the Federal and state level and we must all work together within government and with our stakeholders to ensure we actively facilitate, and not frustrate, the economic development of the state and the nation.

- And that is not just about changing legislation and systems, but we must also challenge the culture within DPI and across government. That is harder to achieve than legislative reform, but both Eric and I are committed to providing the leadership to make that happen.

- The worst system in the world can still work with the right attitude and equally the best system can be frustrated by the wrong attitude.

- The increasing scrutiny we are all under does make it hard to create innovative risk management approaches but it is the responsibility of both us in government and you as an industry, to find ways to work in partnership within the current context and, most importantly, deliver better outcomes across the state.