



Observations from writers with an interest in planning, public interest and environmental controversies in the Fremantle region

Council Rezones Fremantle Highway Land

(despite rearguard action from the conservative clique)
(Ben Durruti – Transport Action Coalition)

Fremantle Council processes are now set up for an easy transition of the land in White Gum Valley and Beaconsfield when the State Government finally gets around to finalising its MRS Amendment to get rid of the highway reserve.

Five Fremantle councillors tried to resist the move towards a better deal for residents and for progress towards a sustainable transport system. Some of these councillors hid behind technicalities about whether Fremantle's planning scheme should precede the State Government's planning amendments (despite being on record as supporting the highway.)

If they had been successful it would have ultimately denied us \$100 Million in land sales, around \$350 000 in annual rates and more green open space. Fremantle's rate base is already small. Failure to expand the rate base now could lead to above average rate increases in the future.

It would be interesting to find out whether these councillors would want to bring back the Fremantle West End Bypass. Remember the plan to bring Roe Highway through South Fremantle and into the West End? That too was once defended as an essential 30 year old plan. Its deletion has been a great advantage for the region.

The City of Melville, in the form of Deputy Mayor and Liberal Party MP Mike Board staffer, Trish Phelan, continued meddling by attending the Fremantle Council meeting and questioning councillors. Trish Phelan, a regular sight at pro-highway meetings around Fremantle, had the nerve to question some councillors about 'vested interests'.

People may also remember the Melville funded pro-bypass misinformation campaign through the Samson area before the last local government elections. Questions are being asked whether this constitutes intervention in another council's business and elections.

People in WA are not only getting short changed by State Government delays in deleting the highway reserve but also, Fremantle residents are being poorly represented by some of their councillors.

Gallop Government Attack on Environment Protection and Public Rights

(by Geoff Evans. National Parks Conservation Society)

The Gallop Government recently released its recommendations on the Keating Review on Project Assessments. The Review has been driven by the section of the mining industry keen to wind back what little environmental protection exists in this state.

The government is using the "reform" agenda to not only cut red tape, which is supported, but also to remove landowner rights, local government powers and community organisations hard won environmental review rights.

The more insidious proposed actions include;

Recommendation 10 - Remove from Local Government the right to assess environmental aspects of development proposals.

Recommendation 8 – Limit review of environmental issues of projects. (This fails to take into account changing environmental circumstances or new public concerns.)

Recommendation 47 – Only undertake strategic planning for development sites on a regional basis. (This will limit the amount of essential site based assessment which is vital to proper environmental planning.)

The D'Entrecasteaux Coalition is also concerned that the Government has failed to reject two Keating Report recommendations which attack community access to the Mining Wardens Court and eliminate landholder rights. They are:

Recommendation 28 – To restrict community organisation access to the Mining Wardens Court to object to mining proposals on the grounds of public interest and environmental issues.

Recommendation 31 - End landowners' rights to veto mining activity on their land.

In addition, the Government has not supported Recommendation 25 which would ensure that mining lease grants must await the environmental review process.

A more detailed assessment of the Gallop Government's attack on environmental protection and people's rights can be found at:

<http://lakejasper.hostwa.com.au/reports.htm#state>

Will Perth's Urban Sprawl Stop?

by Mark Hingston.

(Mark is on the staff of a member of State Parliament. He gives a brief personal view of the urban sprawl issue.)

Is there any chance that the Perth metropolitan area will cease its endless sprawl? Cease the sprawl that is destroying biodiversity, water catchments, groundwater resources, enforcing car commuting and contributing to climate change? Unlikely without pro-active intervention on issues like environmental protection, population capacity/quality of life, sustainable transport and current economic policies. Intervention seems unlikely while political parties of the establishment are committed to the operation of the 'free' market.

Many academics and conservation groups argue that expansion of the suburbs must be controlled and urban infill increased. This is self evident except to those who believe that urban 'growth' can continue regardless of direct and indirect costs. The most recent calculation put the subsidy for creating an outer suburban block at around \$40000. Environmental costs are conveniently ignored.

North America: Some cities in North America have established rigid metropolitan boundaries to control urban sprawl. While this has been relatively successful in Portland and Vancouver for example, it has presented new problems, one of which is greater financial pressure on housing costs. This ultimately requires greater involvement by the government, eg rental caps, tenancy rights, social housing, funding housing cooperatives and proactive urban planning.

Population: Consensus on the population capacity of the country and the final extent of the metropolitan area have eluded us even though it is an important first step to sustainable urban planning. Successive governments have been committed to the 'business as usual' quantitative growth economic paradigm. That they cannot be induced to even debate this issue suggests the depth of the problem when addressing urban sprawl.

Urban Infill: Urban infill is touted as a cure-all for controlling sprawl. However, much of the owner/occupier urban infill that is occurring is in the middle to high price bracket. A look at infill around Fremantle shows that it is in the higher price range, eg. Woolstores, South Beach and Northbank.

People in the income twilight zone, middle-low, are still forced to look further afield and that means the suburbs and new urban estates on the fringes of the existing metro area.

We can ensure that the costs of new sprawl suburbs are factored into the price of the house and land but this further burdens those who can least afford to pay.

While governments provide social housing to compensate for difficulties low-income people experience in the housing 'market' it is mostly in the form of rentals. The middle-low income people miss out twice. Government rentals are generally unavailable to them and there are few quality low to middle priced infill developments in the western suburbs.

Sustainable Suburbs: New outer suburbs could be more sustainable if planned in an appropriate manner eg, important environmental areas avoided, public transit given priority over more highways, water recycling, local employment, etc. One problem has been, and still is, people who dominate the planning departments, the WA Planning Commission and EPA/DoE are often more interested in facilitating developers short-term demands than in promoting truly sustainable development.

Government Action: Governments also facilitate sprawl by providing generous tax benefits to housing investors. Investors compete with the first homebuyer forcing up the price of established houses. The first homebuyer's next stop is the new fringe estates. Given that tenancy rights in Australia are notoriously weak it is not surprising that many people want to own a home, resulting in the big demand for new housing.

The State Government's 'Dialogue with the City' is a carefully controlled process to make it look like something is being done. 'Business as usual' assumptions indicate its limitations. Government belief that the needs of community, economy and the environment are in competition and conflict rather than being fundamentally interconnected is also problematic. (A detailed critique of the 'Dialogue' will appear in UgliTown #5).

Will the situation right itself? Perhaps in the long run. But policies must start to reflect the real costs of sprawl and address the economic incentives that encourage sprawl now. If not, the ecological and social damage will be severe, and that will cost us dearly.

Denial

SMOG HEADS

Highway Robbery

The 'Bypass' Builders Gift

- \$100 million in land sales lost
- \$350 000 in annual rates lost
- More pollution and noise
- Urban bushland lost
- Schools impacted
- Local small businesses ruined
- High and South Streets widened
- Numerous local roads blocked

Highway Corp. Motto: Bypass and Bust