THE PLANNING AND TRANSPORT RESEARCH CENTRE (PATREC) FORUM RECEPTION

ADDRESS
BY
HIS EXCELLENCY DR KEN MICHAEL, AC
GOVERNOR OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

TUESDAY, 19 SEPTEMBER 2006

Professor Stuart Hicks, AO, Chairman of the Planning and Transport Research Centre

Professor Fred Affleck, Executive Director of the Planning and Transport Research Centre

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great pleasure as the Patron of the Planning and Transport Research Centre to speak at this reception, which recognises research sponsors and others for their on-going support of the centre, and brings students, academics and practitioners together to continue their exchanges and enjoy some fellowship.

In addressing you this evening I will naturally draw on my own experiences.

In my varied roles in Main Roads Western Australia over many years, I well remember the benefits realised by effective research in improving the performance of the infrastructure, in developing effective monitoring systems, in simplifying the collection of data for use in strategic decision-making, and in developing methodologies to prioritise road transport projects, to name but a few.

The research was wide ranging and explored the broader aspects of transport and its applications to industry and the community.

They related to the difficulties faced in developing resource efficient road transport programs over the long term, which were both relevant and sustainable.

The transport environment involves many interested parties and is, in itself, quite complex. The complexity increases even more so as the focus moves more to triple bottom line solutions, addressing economic, social and environmental issues.

At that time, Main Roads worked closely with the then Department of Transport and other transport agencies to identify and coordinate initiatives across the transport portfolio. Greater focus was being placed on the outcomes being sought for the community and for development.

Planning continues to be a key aspect of all this. Identifying the right transport projects is of course key to a successful outcome, assuming sufficient resources are available for effective delivery.

Preparing for this presentation caused me to return to the 1955 Stephenson-Hepburn Report on developing a plan for the Metropolitan Region.

The report refers to the planning process and the need to consult widely, something with which we would all agree. A case in point is consultation with the professions, including planners, architects, engineers and surveyors. The report notes:

> *"We were fortunate in that the views presented to us* [the authors] *were very much in agreement with our own. The only major point of difference was that the committee believed the central railway line through Perth should be eliminated to permit the growth of the City northwards, assuming that passenger rail traffic in the future would become obsolete. As an alternative they favoured complete sinking of the railway below ground. For reasons which are given in the report we recommend a partial sinking, and are certainly convinced that far from becoming obsolete, suburban passenger rail traffic should increase greatly in importance."* [page 5]

Just to put the matter in context, the report went on to note:

> *"An underground railway would be prohibitive in cost, but a partial lowering would allow the main problem to be overcome by constructing that part of the track which*

> *would be below the normal water table in a reinforced trough. Pumping from the trough would only be necessary during periods of heavy rainfall. The longitudinal extent of the proposed depression would be from a point West of Thomas Street Bridge to the present East Perth station. The length of the trough would be, approximately, from Milligan Street to Lord Street."*[page 174]

The authors of the report then suggested a clearance for any future overhead bridges such that:

> *"This clearance would allow for an eventual change to standard gauge and overhead electrification."* [page 174]

Reflecting 51 years later, this is not a bad statement on what has eventuated, or is eventuating now, certainly in respect of outcomes being sought.

Planning requires vision and creativity, while applying a realistic, but not too conservative, view about the choices. The sensible allocation of resources will always play a key role in when and how the outcomes and the priorities will be achieved.

Planning is a dynamic process. Whatever the plan resulting from the process, it is sure to change in detail over time, but not necessarily in intent.

Stephenson and Hepburn expressed it another way:

> *"……planning is a continuous process in which many must participate. Unless this is recognised it cannot be successful"* [page 1]

And if we seek to go further back in time, Publilius Syrus, a Latin writer of maxims, said in about 100BC:

> *"It is a bad plan that admits of no modification."*

It is always difficult to go back in time and reflect on what could have been achieved. Plans change over time, but at some point in time implementation takes place and the result is based on the best information at that time.

I can relate this to the Graham Farmer Freeway. In the early 70s, I was involved, as a young engineer, in designing a bridge across the Swan River on an alignment which would have effectively cut the

golf course at Burswood in two. The proposed alignment then linked back to the Northbridge area at grade.

This did not eventuate and many years later the alignment at Burswood was shifted north to its present location. The planning process which followed eventually led to the current configuration, with the tunnel effectively bypassing the city and designed to accommodate development on top of the tunnel. The area at East Perth was opened up allowing the development which we see today. The focus was on achieving a community outcome, rather than a heavily trafficked transport facility alone at grade. Had the facility been developed all those years earlier, today's outcome may not have happened.

Plans do change – hopefully for the better as the planning process continues to focus on the desired outcome, as information, consultation and technologies improve over time. Planning is a dynamic process.

I had the pleasure of being associated with the East Perth Redevelopment Authority for many years. This is a case in point where all elements of the planning process come together in effectively one package, from concept to implementation, with feedback completing the full cycle.

From my perspective, this is not just about building homes or building commercial centres, but building a community – a liveable community. Once you use the word *liveable*, you start talking about social interaction, you start talking about convenience of services, accessibility and mobility – including through walking and cycling – and you talk about neighbourhood relationships.

Developing tools and methodologies and providing guidance through research to help planners steer their way through the maze of complexity that embraces the transport issues on the broad front are to be encouraged. I note that some of today's presentation would appear to touch on this very aspect.

We are fortunate in Perth to have had, and continue to have, good planning in place, both in respect of the Metropolitan Regional Plan itself and also in the planning processes which support it

through the respective agencies. This extends beyond the metropolitan area into the regions.

The Minister for Town Planning at the time of the Stephenson-Hepburn Report was the Hon Gilbert Fraser, MLC, who said in the Foreword:

> *"We have, perhaps, an ideal opportunity in that while the Metropolitan Region is clearly at the beginning of large expansion, development has not proceeded too far to prevent us correcting many of the faults which are apparent in the large cities of the world today."* [page iii]

Generally, the transport reserves put in place all those years ago have benefited the developments that are taking place today.

With the increasing complexities being faced, the need for specialised analytical systems to help assess situations is abundantly clear to me.

Research results are having practical outcomes in policy formulation, assessments both in respect of priorities and efficient resource allocation, tools to assist in modelling situations, traffic

analysis, smart technology, transit oriented development, freight logistics, alternative energy sources. They are but a few of the issues which come to mind and which add substance to the increased complexity argument being faced by planners.

Some of this was faced by me in Main Roads or since, either directly in the road transport program, or more broadly through the Transport Portfolio, the Western Australian Planning Commission or the East Perth Redevelopment Authority.

Excellence in transport research is achieved through the continuum of:

Research → Policy → Practice (informing) → Research

Importantly, the feedback or informing role through implementation into practice provides a measure of the extent to which the research has been effective and may give rise to other opportunities for research for even greater improvement. It is a continuing cycle of investigation, application and feedback.

Research outcomes play a major role in impacting the development of policy.

Policy development itself can be quite complex. It impacts the way in which we respond to issues and guides us towards effective outcomes. As always, its success is measured by the extent and quality of the responses received. Inevitably policy borders on practice and there is often debate on where policy finishes and practice begins.

My simple approach is to consider the policy as embodying the "rules of the game" and practice as the "game" itself.

Decision-makers benefit from research that attempts to unravel the complexities invariably evident in the transport environment and provide them with guidance in arriving at a better outcome overall.

The business sector can also benefit directly from the consideration of research outcomes, opportunities that are so evident in Universities today through commercialisation of research.

One of the strengths of the PATREC is that it brings together people with very strong national and international experience in research, industry and government, ensuring that its programs are highly relevant to contemporary public policy, planning and business issues. And by being able to use resources from all four

public universities in the State, PATREC can address a wide range of research issues. As well, academic resources can be supplemented by other resources from industry.

Research is critical to the future trends, changes and outcomes for the industry, and in this regard the centre has strengthened this component by creating long-term industry-supported post-doctoral research programs and PhD-level degree programs.

In a very relevant move last year, PATREC began offering a new professional Masters Degree in Transport Studies in which students can enrol in any of the four universities to undertake significant research as part of their degree.

The PATREC research forum which many of you attended today is a great avenue for research students and staff affiliated with the centre to present results of their research to a wider audience of professional practitioners and other academics.

The PATREC initiative is an excellent example of collaboration amongst universities and the benefits are beginning to come to the fore – relevant and complementary co-ordinated programs, which work towards understanding and improving the policy, social and business elements, so necessary for the safe, effective and efficient movement of people and goods and so vital to the future needs of our communities and the State's economy and growth.