CLEARWAY FOR TRAFFIC CHANGE?

Bob Cotgrove’s vision (Talking Point 17/1/18) for a less traffic congested Hobart CBD to encourage locals and visitors to appreciate strolling around the city environment is worth pursuing. Underground carparking works well in Salamanca and additional spaces would help that area.

His advocacy of government assisted commercial development in the growing hubs of Kingborough, Clarence and Sorrell (to which I would add New Norfolk) would focus travel and traffic to those radial centres and away from the CBD. Devolution of State non service employees to these hubs would help reduce Hobart’s third place amongst the nation’s congested cities.

Now that the Hobart City Deal has been launched by Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull with its emphasis on public transport, light rail and urban renewal expect a revisting of the issues raised by the Mercury in its useful series which involved infrastructure and transport.

Public transport was examined in detail by the Standing Committee of the Legislate Council in 2013.The then CEO of Metro Ms Hazelgrove advocated the Adelaide passenger bus service model where the South Australian government owns most of the buses and depots, ticketing infrastructure and radio network. The provision of bus services is competitively tendered. Ms Hazelgrove suggested that the Tasmanian government might wish to sell the Metro, keeping its assets but contracting out the services. This could be an option worth examining for a restructure of delivery of passenger services statewide.In 2015 Minister for Infrastructure Rene Hidding blamed the proliferation of carparks in Hobart’s CBD and resistance to dedicated bus lanes on city arteries as the reason commuters preferred cars.He told the Legislative Council into government business enterprises that buses “provided the biggest bang for your buck over light rail”.In January 2017 the Tasmanian government funded $31m to Southern Prospect of Wynyard for 100 new Metro buses.

In a remarkable recent u turn both Minister Hidding and the Tasmanian government have given the green light for light rail from Mawson Place to Bridgewater subject to yet another study. Not only does this rethink discard the advice of past consultants, costing over $1m rejecting the viability of light rail, it also validates the views of Professor Newman who has argued that light rail would revitalise the Northern Suburbs rail corridor. It should be noted that as much as DIER produced passenger figures based on Metro data which cast doubt on light rail’s viability Perth got its light rail in the teeth of opposition from the West Australian Transport Department.Given Labor’s pledged support for light rail there is now a bi-partisan guarantee that the project has the likelihood of becoming reality.

As to ferries the creation of a trans-Derwent service and beyond will be subject to business plan and the valuable input of Bob Clifford to advise on suitable jetties to enable a network to be developed probably with tourism support.Like light rail ferries should be integrated within the Metro system particularly its world class ticketing system.

The matter of traffic congestion can be partly solved by bus expressways on Davey and Macquarie Streets. So far the Hobart Traffic Congestion Plan has met with the stumbling block from the Hobart City Council .It has raised the issue of pedestrian access on these routes which should be resolved ,if necessary, by the Minister taking control of both links under State government control as is the Brooker Highway. If the Hobart CBD is to be more pedestrian friendly traffic light sequences and timing needs to be audited by the Department of State Growth to better ensure a smoother traffic flow.

One solution that will not be worthwhile or viable is to construct a Western Bypass diverting a proportion of traffic from the Davey/Macquarie couplet to a bypass linking the Southern Outlet to the Brooker Highway. A 2012 GDH Report by DIER for the Hobart City Council included an analysis for a tunnel with a similar link. The Report concluded that in 2031 there would only be 1180 vehicle per day(pm) and 100(am) in a tunnel.to Additionally,0nly 14% was through traffic as distinct from that CBD bound. It follows that with low amount of the traffic on the main feeder routes a Western Bypass (which the Mercury backed in its editorial of 18 January) is not justified and would not be worth the considerable cost.

There is now at last an opportunity for clear vision for all political parties to show in the related goals of Hobart’s urban renewal and solutions for transport traffic and tourism. Its been a long time coming but there is now a clearway.

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