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Professional Responsibility in Integrated Land Use and Transport Planning in Brisbane's Inner Northern Suburbs

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This paper suggests ethical indicators be applied in evaluating the responsibility of professionals who participate in planning, including community consultation, in Brisbane's inner-northern suburbs. The author applies the indicators in an assessment of ethical violations in planning practice in the area. Ways these violations degrade the quality of planning outcomes are identified. Suggestions for improving the planning process are made.

Indicators of Responsibility

Criteria for responsibility are expressed in professional codes of conduct, and institutional and organisational codes for a wide cross-section of professionals who participate in planning activities in the inner-northern suburbs. The notion of planning professionals is widened here to include those members of the community who are professionals in areas other than planning, but participate in community consultation as part of planning practice.

Ethical indicators for planning conducted by the Brisbane City Council (BCC) and the Queensland Government and their contractors are expressed in the Public Sector Ethics Act of Queensland - a prescription for conduct of public office in post-Fitzgerald Report Queensland. Indicators for ethical conduct contained in the Act are outlined in *The Code of Conduct for Officers of the Queensland Public Service* (1994) and elaborated in the Criminal Justice Commission's *Corruption Prevention Manual* (1993). In addition, these principles are commonly reflected in codes of conduct of professional associations, and in industry and organisational codes.

A review of these sources suggests the following brief statement of ethical principles for planning practice:

- Work should be conducted professionally, including use of international best-practice principles, so as to avoid wastage of public moneys
- Members of the public should be treated impartially, with integrity and dignity
- Environmental sustainability, cultural heritage, inter-generational equity, diversity, and less-powerful members of the community should be respected

Failures of professionals to take responsibility in addressing these principles can degrade the quality of planning outcomes and risk corruption of decision-making processes.

Failures of Responsibility

The following assessment of planning practice identifies a number of failures of professional responsibility in ways the BCC and Queensland Transport (QT) have conducted integrated land-use and transport planning in Brisbane's inner-northern suburbs. Consequences of these violations include bias in decision-making processes, poor planning outcomes, and wastage of public moneys.

Bullying/abuse of citizens seeking reasoned debate of planning practice

Top-down bullying/abuse from within the BCC has included the public labelling of citizens raising valid concerns about integration of land-use and transport and air quality as "ratbags", "dogs", "greenies up trees", "stupid", "not representing the community", and "anti-road".

This bullying /abuse has also been extended to a City Hall Affairs reporter.

Threats of retribution have also been made to citizens raising reasoned issues. We are also aware of implied threats to the careers of those calling for better planning processes within state and local government.

This bullying/abuse intimidates members of the public and government employees, reduces the diversity of input to planning debates, and corrupts the decision-making process in favour of dominant interests.

Need for Procedures for Bringing Potential Conflicts of Interest to Public Scrutiny.

Lack of third party conflict resolution procedures risks biasing the planning process. There exist no mechanisms, eg, systems of appeals, to resolve conflicts over problem definition, methodology, selection of terms of reference for impact assessment studies, selection of consultants, or use of public consultation in the decision-making process, or over environmental and community impacts. Failures of professional responsibility in planning in the inner-northern suburbs can be discerned in the following areas:

Problem Definition and Methodology

The failure to undertake a comparative study of the City-Valley Bypass proposal against a community-preferred Integrated Solution consistent with IRTP criteria, and international best-practice, is an example of a failure of professional responsibility in the areas of problem definition and methodology.

The Integrated Solution includes: the Airport Rail; the Light Rail; the Exhibition Rail-Loop, including re-locating the existing station closer to the Royal Brisbane

Hospital; Bus-Lanes on existing roads; Integrated Ticketing; Improved rail-freight services; and lowering the toll for trucks on the Gateway Bridge – a package which renders the Bypass redundant.

Engineering Consultants Conducting Community Consultation Processes

The ongoing practice of hiring of engineering consultants, who earn a significant proportion of their income from major engineering developments proceeding, to organise or carry out public consultation processes, raises serious ethical risks.

Injurious Affection

A failure of professional responsibility also exists in relation to the problem of injurious affection. For example, a freeway may be planned to pass within metres of a property, without compensation for degrading effects.

Effects on Less-Powerful Members of the Community

While the BCC's encouragement of public housing in the urban renewal area of the inner-northern suburbs, including negotiation of short-term boarding-house deals is to be applauded, the consequences for thousands of the less-well-off facing higher rentals have scarcely been addressed. As the rent rolls and applications for assistance would indicate, a process of "cleansing" of the less well-off from renewal areas has been underway for several years – and the present response can only be considered token.

Air Quality and Traffic Modelling Statistics and Dammed Lies

By any reasonable assessment, the BCC has engaged in a process of manipulation of statistics to put the best gloss on the fact that it is expanding road space in the inner-northern suburbs, and this will have the consequence of encouraging more cars and trucks through the inner-city with consequent increases in pollution. Serious questions of the validity of the BCC's air pollution statistics do exist.

The widening of roads to add bus lanes acts to increase road space. Also, the proposed City-Valley Bypass is in fact a new freeway, which connects the South-East Freeway and the Western Freeway with the Northern traffic corridor and with Kingsford Smith Drive.

To suggest publicly, as BCC officials have done that the Bypass will act to reduce pollution from the slower passage of traffic through the inner-northern suburbs and CBD/Valley, in the face of its enormous traffic generation potential, is a failure of professional responsibility.

To also suggest that the Bypass will have a significant effect on the volume of traffic passing through the CBD and Valley is also a failure of professional responsibility. While the BCC has failed to apply international best-practice modelling of induced traffic, ie, volumes of traffic the Bypass will draw in the CBD/Valley, the BCC's own statistics act to refute their claims. These include statistics projecting past traffic volume trends and related inefficiencies into the future which demonstrate that the

Bypass will quickly be clogged, and traffic densities will continue to worsen in the CBD and Valley.

One BCC study suggests the Bypass would remove only 3 in ten trucks from the Valley. Another study shows that only 30 % of the traffic in the area is through traffic, as observations of increasing residential and commercial activity in the area would tell us. The Bypass Impact Assessment Study models reductions of up to 25 % on some CBD streets as a consequence of the Bypass – yet without behavioural evidence or consideration of the effects of increasing Bypass volumes of traffic meeting the congestion on Kingsford Smith Drive, Sandgate Rd, Coronation Drive, or Milton Road. A simple fluid hydraulics modelling of these flows would tell us that congestion along the Bypass ramps will lead to an immediate re-filling of original through -City-Valley traffic streams.

Degraded Quality of Planning Outcomes

The BCC's departures from responsible planning practice in favour of the primacy of the Bypass-Freeway solution to the integration of land-use and transport in the area has the effect of leaving inner-northern suburbs residents and employees at risk from increasing volumes of air, noise and visual pollutants, legitimisation of an LA style car culture, less-than optimum public transport, and with wasteful expenditure of public funding.

Ethical failures in the decision-making process also divert investment into unsustainable solutions and away from employment and business opportunities, which might result from investment in the Community's Integrated Solution. These could arise from investing the Bypass moneys in the development of the neighbourhood-hub concept , including the linking of mixed-use hubs with a network of rapid-public transport modes – as in the Curitiba model.

Hegemonic interests in the current planning process arguably include those of: the “road lobby” encompassing common interests of road builders, road engineers, motoring associations, transport companies and trucking unions, as well as business and development interests centred on the CBD and Valley. This dominance acts to exclude diverse community, environmental, and cultural interests which might otherwise be a factor in the texture of a vital, sustainable, urban fabric .

Responsibility and the Silence of Professionals

Many community members in the inner-northern suburbs have commented on the apparent public silence of professionals in the face of ongoing ethical violations in planning practice, in the terms set out above.

In some cases the silence may be related to the involvement of professionals in other BCC and State Governments projects as consultants.

The BCC has also seems to have followed a policy of doing local “deals” with major institutions likely to be affected by proposals such as the Bypass, and this could create

a silence about a planning project where reasoned public opposition might be expected.

Unfortunately local/institutional deals can compromise health, the quality of life, environment, cultural heritage, and diversity throughout the area.

The relative public silence of hospitals, schools, and institutions along the route of the Bypass, given its destruction of Victoria Park, of 20,000 years of the traditional owners heritage, and of livability, and of the quality of air breathed by clients of these institutions, is of concern.

Ethical Practice to Improve the Quality of Planning Outcomes

The following planning practices could help reduce risks of ethical violations and improve the quality of planning outcomes:

- Use of the Charette methodology with ethical safeguards can ameliorate Balkanisation of competing interests, and the related "cleansing" of less-powerful interests from the planning process.
- Participation of community members in problem definition, setting terms of reference for impact assessment studies, in evaluation of study methodology and outcomes, and in final decision-making regarding IAS outcomes, and provision of third party/ombudsman lines of appeal/conflict resolution.
- Clear procedures for identifying and addressing conflicts of interest between public and private interests of government officials and contractors.
- Notification of involvement of private contractors running IAS studies in current or possible future engineering, design, financing, and/or construction of engineering projects commissioned by the government agency conducting the IAS.
- Declaration by professionals, who are steering or participating in impact assessment studies, of their involvement the BCC and State Governments as consultants.
- Notification of public officials' relationships to contractors supplying goods and services to projects falling within that official's sphere of planning influence.
- Providing forums, such as the BDA has, in which professionals may speak responsibly and ethically, both individually and on behalf of their institutions and employers, and share concerns with other members of the community, without fear or favour. Active dialogue between institutions affected, their clients, and members of the local community can help this process.

- Implementation of the Queensland Government's industry self-regulation guidelines *Bullying at Work: An Employer's Guide*, as released by the Division of Workplace Health and Safety (Qld) in the interests of providing conflict resolution mechanisms to maintain the quality, diversity, and participation in the decision-making process.

Note: *the Responding to Professional Abuse Conference*, to be held at St Johns College, 2-3 July 1999, will address issues of bullying/abuse in the professions and in professional-client relations. Enquiries: Ph 32168282; e-mail: helenjc@powerup.com.au