

Sir Andrew Fairley Lecture 2014, Latrobe Campus, Shepparton.

Tim Fischer AC 1830 Wednesday 16 July 2014 (DRAFT)

(CORE SPEECH - CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY)

At the outset, let me say greetings to all and as the sparks fly around the Federal Parliament, indeed also some of the State Parliaments currently, I remind everyone that tension between the two elected houses in bi-cameral Westminster systems is nothing new and can get very willing before the job is done.

Sir Andrew sailed from Scotland, delivering much over a lifetime dedicated to this community, to SPC and to the State and Nation. I salute Sir Andrew and his descendants here tonight.

Now Scotland is currently part of the UK and of course over the years the House of Commons has wrestled with the House of Lords, frequently.

Likewise here, in 1996 and 1997 it took me 11 months to get Trade portfolio budget related legislation through both the House of Representatives and the Senate with the legislation bouncing once but ultimately the job was done and the legislation (as required, in identical form) passed both Houses with all key ingredients attached.

Patience, diplomacy and courtesy (as the PM has said) does count but must be forthcoming from all our elected representatives.

In many ways the huge size of the new Federal Parliament House is not conducive to close contact with colleagues, in Old Parliament House Members and Senators – for that matter Cabinet Ministers – did not have individual toilets and so there were many informal encounters and discussions going to and fro, from the central bathrooms.

If all else fails perhaps the Parliamentary plumber should cut off all individual toilets, OK only joking but I recall advice I received when I arrived in Rome as Ambassador to the Holy See, from a long serving Ambassador. Diplomacy can be boiled down to just four words: Protocol, Vitriol, Alcohol and after a long day of networking for country, Panadol !

Let me say, community connectivity, cohesion and progress depends on many factors but also in my view, four overarching dimensions that are both essential and noble. Decades of studying why communities click, why some do better than others, if you like which cities and towns do well despite location advantage or disadvantage, have led me to the following erstwhile conclusions.

#### UNITY OF PURPOSE

Firstly and very simply there is a need for “Unity of Purpose” as bitterly divided, little progress is made and generally speaking enormous extra costs are incurred. There will always be healthy debate about particular Council or Local Government / State Government and Federal Government proposals but for regional cities and towns in particular, division can be bitter and costly.

Newcastle is an example of a major centre that has lost years wrestling with a key transport and town planning issue, it cannot work through to the obvious solution to opening up their waterfront by revamping the classic heavy duty rail link and main station.

Narrandera sits astride the “National Crossroads”, 1 kilometre of combined carriageway that carries both the Sturt Highway (Sydney – Adelaide) and the Newell Highway (Melbourne – Brisbane) but despite urgings, there is not one flag pole and until recently little beautification of what could be a goldmine.

For years Narrandera was divided by a huge debate over a Town Library project, bitterly divided at the time and so lost momentum and unity of purpose but it has turned the corner.

Conversely Holbrook on the Hume Highway has handled a tricky bypass issue well, plus injected some life into the main streetscape with everyone supporting the Holbrook Submarine project and this month it is coloured yellow not to salute Brazil but to honour the Beatles visit 50 years ago to Australia.

At another level, Paris and Rome have absolute unity of purpose on a key ingredient that helps build a creative difference, a strict building height code that has near total unified support. In Paris all skyscrapers are grouped near La Défense, central old Paris remains with a defining character helped by building height limitation with one notable exception, the Tower Montparnesse.

Likewise Rome, the skyscrapers are grouped down at Eur and nothing can be built higher than the Quirinale and St Peter's Basilica in central Rome. This sets up some superb vistas. I might add big changes can come late, it is less than 80 years ago that the defining Via Della Conciliazone was bulldozed through by Mussolini, from the Tiber River straight up to St Peter's Square.

#### GOOD LEADERSHIP

The second dimension is a logical extension to the first dimension and is necessary at more than one level in the matrix of our economy and society today, be it the eighteen large cities of 100,000 and more as well as key places like Shepparton.

Take Tom O'Toole, the Beechworth Baker. He arrived in Beechworth when the town was known as the place for the bad, mad and sad. On a Sunday morning there might be one or two cars in the main street where drunks the night before had left them. Today people drive from Melbourne for brunch at Beechworth, one motivational dynamo, Tom the town baker, has lifted the whole town.

Good leadership can come in many forms and at various levels, EG the interesting and colourful Mayor of Geelong, Darryn Lyons dominating the landscape and even ABC TV Q and A, he is starting to make a difference.

The handful who unanimously selected the design of the new Australian Parliament showed both leadership and unity of purpose and sometimes there has to be guided democracy, otherwise we might not have the Sydney Opera House today but a Stalinesque block building at Bennelong Point.

#### LATERAL THINKING

Thirdly, good ideas can make a huge difference, Europeans were always good at creating squares and plazas or piazzas for community gathering, in some ways the mass motor vehicle has been the death knell of the community using community gathering points.

This is so, be it the Spanish Steps in Rome or the Swanston Street mall in Melbourne when Elizabeth Street between Collins and the clock tower on Flinders Street would have made a much better mall.

The tiny Victorian town of Clunes with its huge annual first weekend in May "Book Festival" is a good example of lateral thinking, likewise the "Tour Downunder" in SA in January and the terrific ceramic collection at the Shepparton Arts Museum.

On a larger strategic scale, Hugh Morgan and Sir Arvi Parbo put together a project involving natural gas from Balera in the south, sulphuric acid byproduct from Mt Isa and phosphate from Duchess to produce 1 million tonnes of quality fertilizer in northern Queensland. It is then sent by rail to the Port of Townsville: it took years but it is a great case of lateral holistic unified thinking.

Our nationwide rail network was strategic thinking of a different ugly kind, we invented 22 different rail gauges in this country, more than any other country in the world. We have at least four different gauges still in use more than 1000 kms today and the best efforts and plans of W C Wentworth MP still await implementation.

## HOLISTIC PLANNING AND DESIGN

My final overall dimension is the combination of much that has gone before, in the best traditions of that creative engineer, lawyer, businessman and General of the AIF – John Monash – the need for a holistic approach especially with planning and design.

Broadly Canberra is an improving dynamic example of a holistic town plan approach with the great work of Walter Burley Griffin, the mistakes generally involved departures from his blueprint. There have been a few, dare I say, enough to make him turn in his grave in Lucknow in India.

My last step out example embracing all four dimensions relates to Longreach in drought stricken Central Queensland. A few years ago a determined Mayor Joan Maloney, twisted the arm of Geoff Dixon at Qantas and obtained a jumbo jet coming out of service. She then extended the main runway at the airport just long enough for the jumbo jet to land but not long enough for it to take off ever again, in case Qantas changed their mind.

Today the Qantas Founder's Museum is anchored by a Jumbo and 707, across the road from the airport is the Stockman's Hall of fame and this small town does well against raging drought, boom and bust cycles of sheep and cattle plus some mining and the base regional service town role.

## CONNECTIVITY

In all of this, there is the luck of the draw re essentials such as water resources and key infrastructure, as much today as a reliable fast internet highway as well as a quality road and highway plus air and rail links.

Over the decades Australia (as Mark Twain remarked when here in 1895) has stuffed up rail as mode of transport. Field Marshal Herbert Horatio Kitchener wrote in 1910 that Australian railways are designed to help an enemy invade rather than a nation defend.

On freight we are getting it together, the world's newest transcontinental Adelaide Darwin has increased freight more than five times in the first ten years of operation, the big Pilbara iron ore railways are world's best practise and intermodal hubs are taking off EG Parkes in central NSW.

Commuter and regional / long distance passenger remain substandard, often tied to classic sub optimal hub and spoke layouts in our big capital cities. High Speed Rail remains a distant dream yet Shinkansen celebrates 50 successful years in October.

HSR is not rocket science and can operate best on Stephenson standard gauge 4' 8 1/2" or 1435 mm. Spain and others have switched from Iberian broad gauge to Stephenson standard for their AVE HSR system.

In my mind there is no doubt HSR can be developed in a sustainable way on the key corridor Southern Cross, Tullamarine, Shepparton East, Albury Hub, Wagga Wagga Airport East, Canberra thence Glenfield and Sydney Central. Later it can and indeed must be developed to Newcastle and onto Brisbane, indeed Newcastle Sydney Canberra might yet be considered to be the best first and second stage.

There have been enough reports and initial assessments to now allow Governments to move to the next stage, a call for expressions of interest and for this to be fully opened up to the international syndicates that are hovering.

In all of this, it should be remembered a steel wheel on a steel rail has one seventh of the friction of a rubber tyred wheel on a bitumen surface. HSR has a much lower footprint than air eg Sydney Melbourne, one of the biggest city pairs in the world.

European experience has shown once you drop below 3 hours HSR can deliver, Sydney Melbourne could be 2 hours 55 minutes running at typical TGV or Shinkansen speeds, depending on the engineering out of Sydney Central and how far the swerve is taken into Canberra and towards Shepparton.

The latest proposal involves a two minute plus swerve to a new hub station just east of Shepparton and it appears to stack up.

Pending HSR there is a real need to lift passenger train speeds to a benchmark of max 130 kph and where possible max 160 kph on key corridors. Lateral thinking can bring this about, including using the valuable air space above many inner city railway yards.

The Bathurst Bullet train is a good example of people wanting to travel by train even when operating at steam era speeds, likewise South Morang Parkway station another example of instant heavy demand for drive and ride the moment the extension was completed to the north east of Melbourne.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century sees Australia well placed in so many ways EG with regard to sensible holistic harmonised public policy on firearms control and safety, ahead of most of the world. There are many other areas where we are off the pace and exposed as a nation, areas where we need unity of purpose, good leadership, lateral thinking and a holistic approach.

ENDS

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