

Tuesday, 23 September 2008

Subject: North Bank Proposals

Dear Queensland Government

In promoting the North Bank development proposal, the Deputy Premier was reported in Hansard (27 Aug) as calling the Riverside Expressway 'an act of urban environmental vandalism' and 'a rolled gold eyesore'. He repeated his mantra of 'giving this stretch of the river back to the people'. He compared this CONSTRUCTION to the DESTRUCTION of Cloudland and the Bellevue.

To what select people does he wish to give the riverbank? Hundreds of thousands of people from all walks of life already enjoy the amenity of the Riverside Expressway every year. Would the relatively few owners or occupiers of a new cluster of high-rise buildings which would obscure the existing magnificent vista of Brisbane city with the Mt Coot-tha backdrop offered by the current drive into Brisbane from the Gold Coast, take precedence over the visual enjoyment of these hundreds of thousands of motorists?

When two access ramps were temporarily closed a year or so ago, the central city traffic came to a standstill until these vital arteries were opened again. What construction obstructions would be imposed on city traffic during an extended development program?

I don't understand what is driving the persistent attempts to impose a huge North Bank development, a blot on the landscape in the centre of a city which is already traffic log-jammed through poor government planning, or why scorn is poured on what was good government planning.

There was an excellent article by Patrice Derrington in the *Courier Mail* 'North Bank needs a lighter touch' Thurs 21 Aug, and there was another fine article by Kathleen Noonan condemning North Bank in the *Courier Mail* Sat 20 Sept.

I am a civil engineer who is proud to have worked on the design and construction of a magnificent asset to the city of Brisbane, the Gardens Point Bridge (now known as the Captain Cook Bridge) and the Riverside Expressway. These structures now seem to be taken for granted by those who benefit each day as they travel in and out of the city. The other night my wife and I dined at Southbank, and the beauty of the Victoria Bridge/Captain Cook Bridge/Riverside Expressway vista was a joy to behold - the utility was also clearly apparent as streams of cars took advantage of a well planned and executed facility.

The North Bank proposal as it stands is a dreadful concept - a camel, a horse designed by a committee. Building high-rise glass towers on concrete platforms protruding into and obstructing a river draining a vast hinterland is an abomination in itself. That these buildings are proposed to be supported on piles driven through unstable mud banks poses more problems which may not be adequately addressed (replacing a poorly constructed 90 m riverbank walkway below Admiralty Quays, built within the last 2 decades is reported to cost \$10 m). The glass towers will also cast shadows over parkland, reflect sun into the eyes of drivers using the freeway, and obscure what is now a pleasant vista of an elegant street of sandstone buildings, the closest Brisbane has to some historical heritage.

The money could be far better spent elsewhere, and it's time engineers acted together to educate and inform the populace of what it takes to create the bridges, dams, roads, railways and powerhouses to provide the lifestyles enjoyed by so many who use the cars and condemn the bridges, use the water but place 'No Dams' stickers on their windscreens, and use the power but want to shut down the power stations.

Let the planners approach North Bank from a different perspective. The terrain is generally below a freeway from which reasonable amounts of carbon dioxide are generated. CO2 is heavier than air, and the experience of Grand Central Park in New York could be followed, where foliage has been found to grow abundantly in a carbon rich atmosphere. Our Roma St parklands are well designed, well lit, and safe, and that is an excellent local model for a North Bank parkland development which complements the city Botanic Gardens and blends into the mangrove-lined reach of the river.

Could I recommend Patrice Derrington be commissioned to devise a Master plan for a parkland-based North Bank development which would be a credit to the city and enhance rather than obscure the beautiful old sandstone buildings which are currently under threat of visual obliteration. A 'signature building' which would allow the old Treasury Building to be glimpsed by peering between the legs of such a strange contraption, would only pay tribute to a grand foolishness.

Regards

John McRobert BE (Civ)