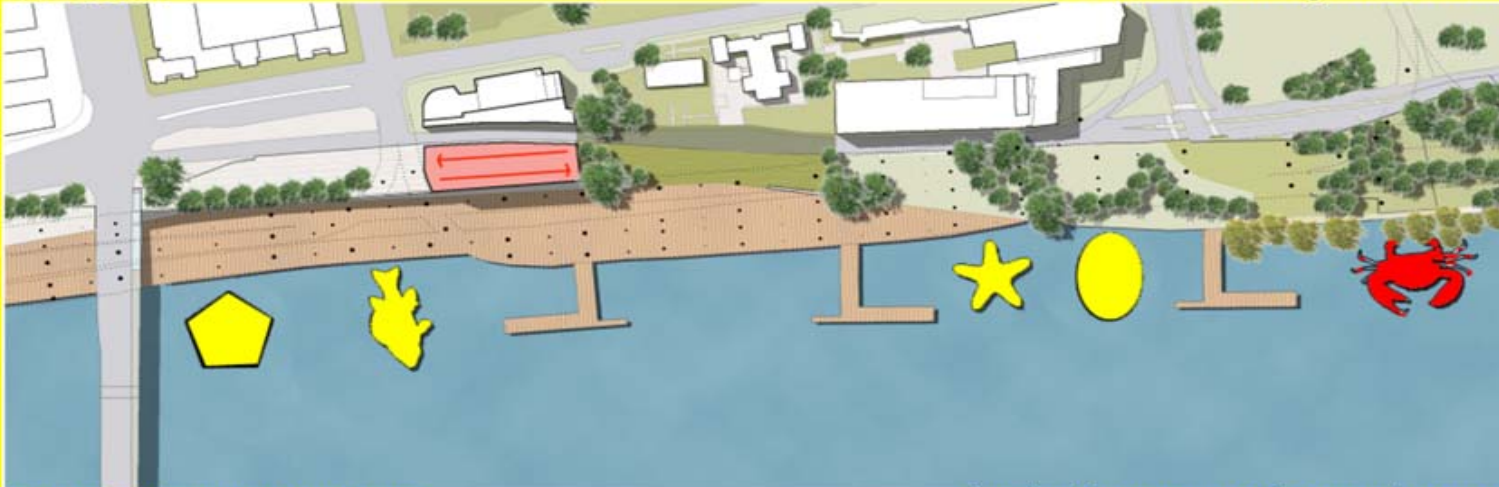


SENSIBLE IDEAS FOR THE NORTH BANK OF THE BRISBANE RIVER



For Q150...

...a two kilometre long work of art.....



...no buildings in our mighty river...

...just floating restaurants bars and venues...



...the expressway as a big verandah roof...

...over our new party deck...



... or keep it green...

...a two kilometre long hanging garden.

Some sensible ideas for the north bank of the Brisbane River.

Associate Professor Peter Skinner FRAIA, University of Queensland. 15 June 2008.

I have been invited to contribute to an Enquiry by Design for the future development of the North Bank project site by the Deputy Premiers office. To be asked to design is a great privilege. When you design you cannot be negative. You must approach the issue with optimism and hope, studying very carefully what has been and what is, and thinking very positively about what could be and what should be. Here are my ideas:

1. (Call for new tenders). Multiplex submitted a 'binding tender' proposal that proved unacceptable to 57% of respondents in public consultation. They were allowed to revise their binding tender and were given the 'green light' without the promised proper public consultation. Their design and the claim that the scheme would 'allow the Brisbane river to flow unimpeded as it does now' has always been preposterous impossible and wrong. The Enquiry by Design process should not be seen to allow Multiplex an opportunity to further amend their 'binding tender' - a third bite of the tender cherry.

2. Eliminate car parking from the site. Rather than introduce 1700 cars to service private buildings plus additional car parking for the public as Multiplex propose, we should aim to eliminate all but the most essential vehicular intrusion onto the site. Low value use of the site for government workers' car parking over the past decade has been a patent misuse of state resources. We should encourage public servants to serve the public greenhouse good by using green public transport. Offer salary sacrifice for Go-cards not cars.

3. Tear down the chainmesh and barbed wire. One of the greatest impediments to public access to the river is the 'security' fencing around government car park sites. The Government's Guantanamo Bay landscape strategy is an offence against good taste, but more importantly a highly dangerous environment for users of this area. It violates basic CPTED principles. Every day that it stands unchanged, tragically, the Government must be seen to bear responsibility for not

diminishing the likelihood of assault and muggings. I would like to see Enquiry by Design participants personally tear these dreadful fences down. Like the ripping down of the Berlin Wall or the toppling of Saddam's statue, the liberation of safe public open space here would be effective, symbolic and cathartic.

4. A generous boardwalk under the Riverside Expressway. A wide boardwalk zone should be created close to the current river walk level under the Riverside Expressway. This area is about forty metres wide, and should enable ample width for safe conduct of cyclists (including faster commuters) and pedestrians. Being under the freeway structure it is protected from summer sun and rain and thus would be a genuine complement to the more open and exposed South Bank. The deck should be shaped to accommodate mangroves. It should be left largely open so flood-waters can flow over it, but could accommodate small or temporary recreational elements or structures designed to accept and accommodate flood inundation. The only permanent constructions beyond the outer edge of the expressway would be the CityCat pontoons and moorings for tour boats and floating recreational structures.

5. Keep structure to the line of the existing expressway. Columns and water level bond-beams here already create a substantial series of impediments to water flow. It may be the case that a smooth fairing along the outer edge of the boardwalk may actually smooth laminar flow and marginally improve fluid dynamics. If the boardwalk plan follows that of the expressway over, no additional piles need be driven to support it. Lightweight structure can be hung from the tops of the Expressway columns, with vertical droppers supporting boardwalk decking with resulting spans a fraction of those of the expressway over, allowing particularly economical boardwalk construction.

6. Spectacular floating recreational facilities. To help to fulfil the River City slogan, major restaurants, bars and music venues should be provided in floating structures moored along the boardwalk. These should be conceived not as boat forms, but as an opportunity to explore spectacularly new design materials, ideas and forms. Being part of the river, rather than the land of the historic precinct, they may be conceived as spectacular ornaments, baubles or jewels dressing the river. Consider the possible forms of mud crab or oyster restaurants or music shells moored in the mangroves. Floating structures, of course, will rise and fall with the tides and floods, and need minimal piles for mooring.

7. A possible music venue? It is important to note there are no nearby residential buildings at the downstream end of the site. The low spaces immediately beneath the freeway as it drops at its south-eastern end are remarkably quiet spaces, while the spaces that parallel the Neville Bonner Building are loud with reflected noise.

In these most voluminous spaces it may be possible to site a substantial music venue that could partially compensate for the loss to the CBD of Festival Hall. Massive and absorbent walls would be needed to serve as sound baffles in both directions and the location of such a building may dramatically attenuate boardwalk acoustic levels. This is a very speculative proposition and the complexities of designing to accommodate intermittent flooding and expressway maintenance may render it unviable. There is something poetic about the thought of the buzz of lively boardwalk music at night mixing with the city traffic hum like Gershwin's *Rhapsody*. The contrast of the northern bank as a loud and lively night venue with South Bank as a day-time, family focussed venue again demonstrates a completely complementary relationship.

8. Connection to the city. The elimination of the cars and parking structures will dramatically open pedestrian access to the riverfront from Alice Street to Elizabeth Street. At the upstream end of the site we need to consider the major access way to this most historic of Brisbane's sites, the design should reflect and respect the history of the area. Queen's Wharf Road is the historic connection from Queen Street to the river, and its history, including its historic stone walls, should be celebrated in any new works. On the southern side of Queens Wharf Road, perhaps in front of the William Street Library, a building should be built that descends in levels to the rivers edge. Such a building would provide the safe, secure and non-discriminatory access that the Government has neglected to provide for the last decade. This should be an undercover access with covered links to the sheltered boardwalk.

9. Queensland Showcase. The connecting building on Queens Wharf Road could lead visitors down by escalators, ramps, stairs and lifts past several levels of gallery space to the Boardwalk level. These gallery spaces would be the visitors' prime arrival point in the city, linking Queen Street to the immensely popular CityCats. The galleries could provide general, historic, or environmental information. They could celebrate and inform about Indigenous Queensland. They could be the showcase for the mooted Centre for Design. In any event they should be seen as a vital piece of tourism infrastructure, an arrival in central Brisbane.

10. Endemic subtropical landscape. North of the boardwalk zone, and on the exposed banks and retaining walls there is significant opportunity for rich planting. This should focus on species endemic to the Brisbane rivers edge and hopefully exclude exotic species. I do not believe there is a garden or park in the central city area that accurately records the indigenous flora of this river. The following description is from J.G. Steele's, *Brisbane Town in Convict Days*, p.28.:

A CONVICT DESCRIBES HIS ARRIVAL IN BRISBANE.

...It looked as though some race of men had been here before us and planted this garden of Eden...

The water for miles on each side of the river was dense vine-clad jungle, festooned with the blue and purple convolvulus, while on the tidal brink grew the beautiful salt-water lily - its flowers white as alabaster, its glorious perfume filling the air with fragrance.

One of the most enchanting spots within the Brisbane area was an immense jungle in the western portion of South Brisbane. It began at almost the spot where the Victoria Bridge now stands, and it followed the course of the river right away to Hill End, along the length of what is now the Montague-road.

This jungle was a tangled mass of trees, vines, flowering creepers, staghorns, elkhorns, towering scrub palms, giant ferns, and hundreds of other varieties of the fern family, beautiful and rare orchids and the wild passion-flower.

Let us plant this beautiful garden again for current and future generations.

11. A competition for a two kilometre long work of urban art. I believe that an opportunity has arisen to conduct a competition to design the State's longest public artwork. This may be the best opportunity to have come out of the whole North Bank debacle. To celebrate one hundred and fifty years of Queensland independence the Government should run a competition for Queensland artists to create a two-kilometre long artwork. Think of our greatest Queensland artists, and their most amazing achievements. What could our most brilliant contemporary multicultural and indigenous painters, sculptors, installation and multimedia artists propose as signature artwork for the city. A quick competition would be great and could be run to fit the Q150 timetable. The long southern edge of the expressway could be turned from a problem to our greatest opportunity. Here are a few very basic ideas:

a. Colour Theory 101. This is grade nine level art stuff but nobody's ever thought to explain it to our civil engineers. The substructure to the expressway is pretty messy so it should be painted to visually recede with dark, cool, river blues and greens. The crash rails above the expressway edges should also be dark to recede and compete less with the panoramic views out to the river valley and mountains. The sinuous lines of the concrete edge-beam structure of the expressway are actually pretty interesting when viewed from South Bank or the river and serve as a cohesive visual underpinning to the cityscape. This line should be picked out and celebrated with brighter colours like the gold on the Government logo or by more sophisticated visual strategies. If necessary, this could be a proposal that doesn't cost a cent- we could just wait till the next time the freeway needs painting and swap the paint cans. At another extreme the whole expressway structure could be coated in gold leaf, for a fraction of the Multiplex budget.

b. Linear form and light. We have the Great Dividing Range, the Great Barrier Reef and the Creation Serpent and the Milky Way, so we shouldn't shy away from long, complex and interesting things, maybe long colourful and perhaps long sparkly things. This longest element of our city parallels and accompanies linear promenades along the river by cyclists, strollers and cruisers. Ebbing and flowing water, rising and falling tides, waxing and waning moons could activate a changing display of small lights and sparkles or even (keeping it cheap) simple transport reflectors that borrow sparkle from the passing traffic.

c. Design for a moving viewer. Currently there are some absolutely brilliant Queensland architects who are doing truly creative work with the visual perception of structures from a moving vantage. Consider m3 Architecture with their absolutely unique design for the visually pulsating Girls Grammar School wall; DBI with the undulating Wave apartment building at Broadbeach or Donovan Hill with the more subtle State Library elevation treatments that vary visually with light conditions and vantage. Even Cox Rayner with Christina Waterson have explored serial sculptural effects.

d. Vertical Landscapes. I have a childhood memory of the awning roof to the interstate platform at South Brisbane Station absolutely bedecked with hanging baskets of fishbone ferns, staghorns, elkhorns and orchids as a verdant subtropical welcome to the Sunshine State for visitors from Sydney. From the Musée du quai Branley in Paris to the Ferry Road Markets at Southport, architects and landscape architects are developing and refining lightweight vertical gardens. Imagine ultra-lightweight sections of blue and purple convolvulus gardens hanging in removable and replaceable panels from the side of the expressway. A two kilometre long floating, flowering, hanging garden.

e. Ephemeral and Intermittent Celebrations. At Christmas, at Easter, at Eids, at Buddha's birthday, and especially on Queensland Day, the long subtropical artwork could be bedecked with appropriate baubles lanterns or banners to complement the South Bank events banners across the river.

12. Throw out the 'North Bank' title. Just as Toowong Village is the absurd antithesis to any known village - so has the 'North Bank' moniker has been absolutely debauched by Multiplex's mangled misappropriation of the term. The use of these words to describe proposed structures that are far from the river's bank and likely to cause the river to break its actual banks upstream is linguistic and semiotic torture. The title of this stretch of riverbank deserves to be reconsidered to distance it from the odium that clings to the Multiplex debacle. Queen's Wharf, Queensland Wharf, or even Queen's Landing, may bring with it some of the history of this important place, and link it etymologically with the origins of our statehood. The third 'pun-ish' title could be quite apt if the monarch is invited to step ashore here amidst our sesqui-centenary celebrations.

13. Respect the William Street Library. Built shortly before the fiftieth anniversary of Queensland's separation, the library had a major annexe built to celebrate the state's one hundredth anniversary. Fifty years later it appears threatened by heartless and mercenary development, with a jackboot of hotel rooms about to descend on it.

14. Respect the history of the area. Include Turrbal and Jagera engagement in the Enquiry by design process. Respect the fact that over 184 years the area between William Street and the River has grown as the state's administrative, executive and symbolic precinct, proudly visible to all on approach to the city. The relatively recent decision to allow gambling interests to infest the Treasury and Lands Administration buildings was very unfortunate, but thankfully is not irreversible in time. The Precinct as a whole needs protective legislation to protect it from this sort of mercenary assault in the future. From the extant buildings in this area it is still possible to reconstruct, sense and celebrate key elements of our state's history.

15. No net cost to taxpayers. What a malign and mean mantra this has turned out to be.

No other street or footpath in the CBD is expected to run at a profit, let alone generate three million dollars per lineal metre. The 'no-cost' motto if applied is a shirking of responsibility for civic planning and a gross insult to past generations who have poured their resources, noble ambitions, and hard work into the magnificent buildings of the city. If the Government is not investing any funds in the project, it has no incentive or mechanism to rein back the private partner from excess and folly. As for the developer, the bigger and more expensive the project, the more they stand to gain. This is a sure-fire recipe for disaster.

It would appear that \$65 million can be found for a seemingly redundant and frivolous pedestrian bridge at Tank Street, yet it is claimed there isn't sixpence of taxpayers money to be spent on the most fundamental provision of safety and amenity for the users of Brisbane's City Cats and visitors to our city.

The net cost to taxpayers must surely be measured as the expenditure minus the benefit. Calculated properly the Multiplex scheme has a huge and ongoing cost to Queenslanders, starting with the loss of their river and ending with an increased risk of loss of property and life. By contrast, the proposal outlined here involves relatively miniscule expenditure and should return handsome benefits, starting with improved safety and accessibility, working through a more attractive welcome to the tourism market and ending with a redemption of pride in the achievements of Queenslanders over our ancient and recent history.

Implementing the fourteen ideas above would fulfil all of the aims and provisions of the North Bank Strategic Plan in a way that the Multiplex scheme patently doesn't and can't. There is nothing outrageously expensive in these proposals and by obviating the need to drive piles into the river and erect high-rise towers over the water and park thousands of unneeded cars, it will of course cost only a tiny fraction of Multiplex's budget.

- a.** The two-kilometre artwork is the right project, in the right place, at the right time to be funded from Sesqui-Centenary budgets. We've got eleven and a half months- lets go!
- b.** Just as the Regatta Hotel contributed to the construction of the Toowong City Cat terminal, the obvious beneficiaries of upgrading of the CityCat stops should also contribute. The Treasury Casino will benefit substantially from the upgrade of the North Quay stop, it should obviously be a key contributor, it already gets free place name advertising from CityCat announcements. Queensland Parliament and QUT will also benefit greatly from a safe and attractive river entry at Gardens Point and should contribute to the funding of the second stop in the style that will advance their corporate identities. Our politicians and their distinguished guests surely deserve better than the current Guantanamo stylings.
- c.** Upgrading of the premier tourist experience in Brisbane should be a priority for funding from the tourism infrastructure budget. Post-Kyoto, the explosion of rare fossil fuel in Indy Cars and fire-crackers over South Bank need phasing out, and the Government should redirect resources into carbon-friendly visitor transport systems and subtropical land-scaping. Rather than rerunning offensive and demeaning pre-feminist bikini-girl promotions, we need to look forward and invest into long-term infrastructure for the Brisbane visitor experience.
- d.** No attempt at buck-passing and blame-shifting can absolve the two levels of Government from their fundamental obligation to provide safe, secure and non-discriminatory access to and through the site and from City Cat stops to the pedestrian paths and malls of the city. The State and City have undertaken no apparent maintenance or improvement since the City Cats began operations a decade ago. Accrued savings over this time offers a clear budgetary nest egg. Potential further savings to government arise through avoidance of liability for serious falls on the ramshackle and non-compliant North Quay stairs or the prevention of one more mugging through application of CPTED principles could be significant. This overdue expenditure may also help to mitigate ministerial culpability should injuries arise that may have been avoided by timely investment from recurrent government funds.
- e.** The major ramped gallery building connecting William Street to the River could be a very centrally located showcase and information building. It would be

ideal for a Queensland Centre for Design gallery and I believe that a substantial budget may already be earmarked for just such a project. In any event, this is the principal welcoming point for visitors between Queen Street and the river and can be easily linked to tours and cruises. It is important that such a critical orientation point should be run to promote all Queensland enterprises, through public sector or NGO management, rather than a sole commercial operator.

- f.** Serious entrepreneurs will be keen to find a way to participate in the construction of the floating facilities, market opportunities beside the walkways or flood-aware structures under and behind the expressway. In my view public benefit will be maximised if these components are released as separate tender opportunities, rather than by bundling them into a single development project that may stifle the benefits of market competition.
- g.** If it were up to me, I would like to see the developers, consultants, politicians and bureaucrats who have threatened the people of Brisbane with this preposterous and dangerous scheme over the past two years, run out of town on a rail. I am however realistic enough to appreciate that sorting out legal obligations and expectations from seven years of procedural, administrative and design bungling may hamper such a simple and direct outcome. There may still be some bizarre reason why the developers can't be prised loose from the politicians. There may well exist somewhere a legal 'vibe' that says they should be allowed to build something hereabouts. Maybe they still suffer from unrequited Petronas envy. Should this be the case, I would recommend corralling them in the Alice, Mary and William site where in my view the sky could well be the limit.

The net cost to taxpayers must surely be measured as expenditure minus benefit.

Today we can look back at the Transit Centre or the Oxenford Tavern or the Bellevue Hotel site and shake our heads and chuckle at the good old days of those rascals Joh and Russ. It is my hope that in a few decades time we'll be able to still look upon this stretch of river, reminisce together and enjoy the bumbling ineptitude that characterises this slap-stick episode in Queensland's built history.

Property developers with billion-dollar aspirations should go back to what they used to do in the olden days, actually buy some land and make some 'product'. Architects with form-making aspirations could rise to the challenge of developing advanced floating and living architecture for the third millennium. Artists should make art. Ministers and bureaucrats should fiercely defend the public realm and advance the public interest. Taxpayers, citizens and their elected representatives should once again start to trust one another. Turrbal and Jagera people should sleep well at night knowing Maiwar will continue to flow as it always has and always should.

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