



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT

(Reference: ACTION buses and the sustainable transport plan)

Members:

MR M GENTLEMAN (The Chair)
MR Z SESELJA (The Deputy Chair)
MS M PORTER

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

THURSDAY, 14 JUNE 2007

Secretary to the committee:
Dr H Jaireth (Ph: 6205 0137)

By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

Submissions, answers to questions on notice and other documents relevant to this inquiry that have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the committee office of the Legislative Assembly (Ph: 6205 0127).

WITNESSES

AMPT, MS ELIZABETH, Director, Behaviour Change, Sinclair Knight Merz.....**40**

The committee met at 1.32 pm.

AMPT, MS ELIZABETH, Director, Behaviour Change, Sinclair Knight Merz

THE CHAIR: I commence the meeting by thanking everybody for coming this afternoon to the inquiry of the ACT Legislative Assembly's Standing Committee on Planning and Environment into ACTION buses and sustainable transport. This afternoon, we have before us Ms Liz Ampt, Director, Behaviour Change, Sinclair Knight Merz. Welcome to the committee. Before we start this public hearing, I will read the privileges card to you.

The committee has authorised the recording, broadcasting and rebroadcasting of these proceedings in accordance with the rules contained in the resolution agreed by the Assembly on 7 March 2002 concerning the broadcasting of Assembly and committee proceedings. Before the committee commences taking evidence, let me place on the record that all witnesses are protected by parliamentary privilege with respect to submissions made to the committee in evidence given before it. Parliamentary privilege means special rights and immunities attach to parliament, its members and others, necessary to the discharge of functions of the Assembly without obstruction and without fear of prosecution.

While the committee prefers to hear all evidence in public, if the committee accedes to such a request, the committee will take evidence in camera and record that evidence. Should the committee take evidence in this manner, I remind the committee and those present that it is within the power of the committee at a later date to publish or present all or part of that evidence to the Assembly. I should add that any decision regarding publication of in camera evidence or confidential submissions will not be taken by the committee without prior reference to the person whose evidence the committee may consider publishing.

Once again, Ms Ampt, thanks very much for coming this afternoon. I understand that you have a Powerpoint presentation for us and then we will go to some questions.

Ms Ampt: I just want to explain the background to what I do, really, at the outset. The presentation, which is only four slides, is to explain voluntary behaviour changes. Behavioural change is my specialty and what I do is encourage voluntary behaviour change. I thought you would find it useful if I put that into perspective with cartoons. There are only four of them.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

Ms Ampt: To start with, to explain voluntary behaviour change, I need to put it into perspective and my story is about watching television. Remember, once upon a time you just got one television when you had one child. Then, more children came along and you found yourself buying more televisions. Before you knew it, everyone was sitting in a different room watching television. That is usually called supply management: you have got another child, you buy another television. At some point, somebody says that you just can't buy televisions anymore; you need to have demand management. The third way of dealing with the television issue would be for the

family to sit around and have a discussion to work out how you are going to deal with the fact that you cannot keep buying televisions.

Why I tell you that is that there are three ways of bringing about the changes I have just mentioned. There is supply management, which is that when there is a growth in demand you build. So when you need more buses you just supply them and when you need more roads you supply them. There is demand management, which is about changes to reduce the negative impact of cars, let's say, without the construction of infrastructure, so without building roads. You might regulate: they are not allowed to park in the city. You might price: it gets too expensive. There might be technological changes and there might be education and awareness.

The point of those two is that they are top down. So you build and it is there. One day you regulate and it is happening to you. The difference is—and this is the discussion of the family working it through—that voluntary behaviour changes mean individuals making choices for personal reward because of personal knowledge or understanding without a top-down mechanism. My specialty is helping people to make change without a top-down mechanism. Often, you work alongside the top-down mechanism. You are going to introduce changes to buses, let's say, and voluntary behaviour change works beside that, or, if you are going to build a new road, the same sort of thing. I thought it would be useful for you to understand that that is my specialty, just so that you understand that, really, in a fairly graphic way. My special area is helping people to help themselves rather than telling them what to do.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. Can you tell us what work you have been doing with the federal government and local government, of course, on anything to do with buses or the sustainable transport plan?

Ms Ampt: The main work that I have done anywhere on sustainable transport is not at all ever specifically with buses. It has usually been money funded by the AGO, the Australian Greenhouse Office, with the objective of reducing carbon dioxide emissions, and the voluntary behaviour change approach has been working with people to work out solutions to their daily lives.

Quite often, by the way, the way we start the conversation—and this has been for various governments around Australia—is to say, “When was the last time you used a car and wished you didn't?” The work we have been doing has been to help people find their own solutions. Sometimes that is: “The last time I was in a car was yesterday morning and the reason I hated it was that I got to work late and I hadn't read the minutes of my meeting.” They work out that if they had travelled on a bus they could have got there at the same time but could have read the minutes on the way.

The way that any alternative to a car comes into our work is when somebody works out that they get fitter on a bike or, in fact, that they would get fitter on public transport if they walked a bit. Buses in particular have never been an objective, but they have been a way that many people do choose to make the solution. Is that good enough?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Ms Ampt: Am I talking too much? I don't know anything about these kinds of things.

THE CHAIR: No; keep going.

Ms Ampt: If I misbehave, you should let me know.

THE CHAIR: Can you identify any projects that you have found to be successful when you talk about ways of encouraging people to move away from using cars?

Ms Ampt: There have been various ones of mine that have been externally evaluated and those are the ones that I prefer to talk about because in the beginning, 10 years ago, we used to evaluate our own projects and no-one would believe them.

THE CHAIR: They were good evaluations, though.

Ms Ampt: The external evaluations were very good. For example, in Sydney in 2004 we did a project using voluntary behaviour change in Ermington and in Woy Woy, two very different suburbs, one of very low income near Parramatta and one of older people on the Central Coast, and there overall we got a reduction of car use of 14 per cent. Interestingly enough, and the external evaluators told us this, the change in public transport use was extremely different. The figure is not in my head, but I could look it up. All I know is that the increase in public transport was much higher in the one near Parramatta, the low income, whereas there was almost no difference at all in the Central Coast area, even though the method we had used was exactly the same. Our conclusion was that public transport was not going to be the way to solve the problems of those people.

MS PORTER: Was that the one in Woy Woy?

Ms Ampt: Yes, Woy Woy was the other one. People did reduce their car use, but they didn't choose public transport as a way to do it.

MS PORTER: How did they get to where they were going, then? Did they car pool or walk?

Ms Ampt: I have to say that I truthfully don't know that. That was what the external evaluators said. I do not have the report of that in front of me. That was done by the Institute of Transport and Logistics Studies at the University of Sydney. The Department of Planning—I think it is called that—in New South Wales at the moment would have that full report. I can answer more generally, if that would be helpful.

MS PORTER: Yes.

Ms Ampt: Often, when they are solving their own problems, people do things like work at home for a day. They do car pool; that is quite true. Often they simply do things more sensibly. At one moment they are going out five times to do something by car and, when they start to think about it, they work out that they could just go once. The people in Woy Woy used those kinds of solutions. I am not saying that they did not use more public transport, but it wasn't as high as in Ermington, where there was a lot more around.

MS PORTER: With regard to the people in Woy Woy, as opposed to the people in the inner-city area, close to Parramatta—

Ms Ampt: Yes, that is right. It is called Ermington, by the way.

MS PORTER: What other variables were there? Was the public transport system dramatically different, for instance? You did say that there were age variables, but there would be other variables between the two places, wouldn't there?

Ms Ampt: Yes. Again, that was analysed in the report that I am talking about. As to other differences, the rail service in Woy Woy was more a long distance rail service. It was good for going to Sydney but it wasn't very good for going shopping—it was useless for going shopping—whereas in Ermington you could have used the rail to go to Parramatta, for example. The bus service was much denser in Woy Woy than in Ermington; there were more buses.

MR SESELJA: You said that you were helping them to come up with ways of solving their own problems. Were you dealing with a group that had identified that car use was a problem because it was not friendly environmentally or that it was inconvenient? Was it a group that was convinced that car use was a problem that they needed to solve or was it a broader group for many of whom it would not be a problem to use their car a lot?

Ms Ampt: It was the latter. It was every single household in Ermington and every single household in a subset of Woy Woy. Therefore, there was a mixture. The voluntary behaviour change approach, based on psychology, recognises that if you have a problem, that is a good starting point. That is why we tended to ask a question such as “when were you last in the car and wished you weren't?” You are then focusing on one specific thing. No, they weren't a group of people who were particularly for or against public transport or necessarily had problems with the car. We tried to find that hook, I suppose you would call it.

MR SESELJA: It is interesting that you focused on that because I think that is important as a driver—no pun intended—of what people do in the sense that you have asked about when it is inconvenient to drive a car or when they have driven a car and it has not worked out and gone from there. The difference with Canberra as opposed to parts of Sydney is that for many people the driving of a car would still be very convenient, so you are going to have less of that negative driver to get people out of their cars. They will say, “It is great. It takes me 10 minutes and costs me \$5 to park. Why would I do anything else?”

Ms Ampt: I could give an example from Adelaide, not that Adelaide is that much similar, but it is a little more similar to Canberra, I suppose.

MR SESELJA: Yes, it is more similar.

Ms Ampt: We are currently completing a project which had exactly the same approach that I am talking about, and 22,000 of 60,000 households identified a problem with one bit of their travel by car. It is not as if the car is bad; they all like the

car. For your interest, we began the project by saying, “What bothers you about getting around Adelaide?” If you just think at a human scale, you would think, “Here is all my travel and I have to find something in it. No, I like the car.” We changed that question to “when was the last time you were in a car and wished you weren’t?” Nearly all of us can think of one time, which is not to say at all that we dislike the car. It is just that at that time it really drove you crazy. So we tended to focus on that method to find a way that was a problem. We have done this kind of work all over the place—Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra and so on.

THE CHAIR: What were some of the results you found in Canberra as to what they did not like about driving the car?

Ms Ampt: For the current project you need to ask the client. The current project began for ACTPLA and has now moved to TAMS. Anything to do with that I am not allowed to talk about, but I have a contact who is. But I can talk about a previous project in Canberra, if that would be any help.

THE CHAIR: Yes, go on, but I should let you know that, as a committee, you are free to talk to us about any information that you are passing on to your client, but not the specifics, of course, if you are concerned about that.

Ms Ampt: Okay. You guys made me nervous with all that legal stuff you sent me.

THE CHAIR: For your information, we are changing that. It is a bit scary when you first read it.

MS PORTER: We are making it shorter so that it’s not as scary.

Ms Ampt: It’s all right. Okay, let me just say something about the Canberra project and then I can give you some general ideas. The first thing is that we clearly were commissioned to bring about change as opposed to measuring the change. Somebody else, a different consulting firm, did a before and after survey to measure change. Do you get what I mean? Somebody measured the kilometres people travelled in Belconnen, which was where it was, before and after. So I don’t even know if what we did worked. Do you get what I mean? People—I have now forgotten your question.

THE CHAIR: What were some of the issues that came up with people driving their car? What didn’t they like about car use?

Ms Ampt: I see. It was always a specific thing. Somebody, for example, told us that she was getting fat because she had found that she used to walk a lot more and, now that her kids went to school, she started to take them school and she couldn’t walk to work any more. Then she worked out that if the kids actually started walking to school she could walk to work too. That was an example.

The example I gave about not getting the minutes read before work was another one. There were those kinds of examples where they would say that one specific car trip drove them mad. Occasionally, somebody actually said, “I have noticed that there is a bus stop outside my door and I don’t know how to use it.”

A part of the methodology that we use anywhere is that we develop what we call journey plans, but they are really specific. We say, “You live here,” and we draw a picture of their house, and then we say, “Your nearest bus stop is here. You want to go here.” We will have another map for that, and then we say, “You get on the 123, which leaves your home at 8.23, and you get here at 8.42,” and we do the return trip as well.

That is part of the voluntary behaviour change in the sense that you have just said, “I thought about going to the Legislative Assembly by bus and I seem to have noticed a bus stop, but I don’t know what to do.” So you have actually expressed the will and we are helping you to help yourself. Sorry; I am not pointing at you in particular.

MS PORTER: That’s all right; I do that. I catch the bus just outside my house and it drops me off over there, but not very often, I am afraid.

Ms Ampt: The thing about the method we use is that most people would simply give you a timetable and say, “Here, use it, silly,” whereas the journey plans I am talking about actually have your name on the front. It would say “Mary” on the front. We would assume that you had not done it before, so it would say, “It is all right to talk to the driver. You don’t have to have the correct change. When you want to get off, you push a button or ring a bell.” It is about all the fears we have learnt over the years that people have. It is not just chucking you a timetable. I should tell you that there is research to show that only 84 per cent of people can read matrices, which is a bit shocking to us. That means 16 per cent of people cannot read any matrix, let alone a timetable.

MS PORTER: I was just at a function with Vision Australia, and there is a bus company in our region—for all I know, ACTION may be looking into this as well—that provides bus timetables in braille. Also, partially sighted or vision impaired people can go onto a computer and access, I suspect, voice-activated bus information. They also teach their drivers how to speak to the passengers about where they are getting off et cetera in a language that does not confuse a person that is not sighted, because we use language in our day-to-day life that sometimes confuses people who cannot see where they are going. That was interesting about being frightened to use a bus or any other form of transport for that matter.

Ms Ampt: In Adelaide, the current project is in what is called the legacy phase, where we are teaching people to do things without us when we are gone. Lots of organisations have asked us to help them teach their clients how to phone the information system. In Adelaide, it happens to be any public transport. You might think that that is elementary, but when we generated the list of questions that you actually need to be able to answer to catch a bus, it is not what the Adelaide bus people tell you. They tell you in the wrong order for you, because you want to know what time to leave home and then you want to know where the bus stop is and then you want to know what time the bus leaves—you can get the gist of it—whereas their normal way of telling you is out of order.

We have written down a questionnaire that people can actually have at the phone when asking questions and, if the person on the other end of the line jumps around, you can say, “Hang on a minute, I need more information.” A lot of community

organisations which have clients who need to use public transport are now using what is really just a simple questionnaire. They give it to their people, who could be sighted or not. I thought of that because I was saying that some people cannot read timetables but most people can talk. Not everyone can, but most can. So you could do that as an alternative.

THE CHAIR: Have you had a chance to look at the way ACTION works and whether it has been successful in its performance in relation to the sustainable transport plan, or is that not part of what you have been doing?

Ms Ampt: No, I literally haven't really done it. I have used the buses in Canberra. We trained all of our people in the project by getting them on the buses, but I haven't looked at any performance criteria at all.

THE CHAIR: Is your client going to come back to you and tell you whether you were successful?

Ms Ampt: Yes, they told us that in September we will be able to give a full presentation. We want to know if we were successful and then we can give a presentation as well.

THE CHAIR: There being no further questions, thank you very much for coming before the committee.

Ms Ampt: It has been a pleasure.

THE CHAIR: We will get a copy of the transcript to you as soon as we can. If there are any changes that you feel need to be made to it, let us know. When we have finalised a report, we will get a copy of it to you as well. Thanks again for coming.

The committee adjourned at 1.55 pm.