



ratio consultants newsletter march 2011

Major cases list - an update . . .

After being introduced as a pilot program by VCAT in May 2010, the Major Cases List (MCL) has proven a resounding success by streamlining decisions on cases involving key building projects in Victoria valued at more than \$5M. Waiting times for major cases have been substantially reduced and in recent times, we have also seen a reduction in waiting times for standard VCAT cases.

Presenting in front of an audience at the '2010 Year in Review', Deputy President Helen Gibson claimed the feedback on the program from both private and public stakeholders has been resoundingly positive.

The popularity of the of MCL has far exceeded original estimations with the number of cases more than doubling original forecasts. In the first 9 months already around 340 projects have been listed under the MCL compared to original estimates of 150 for the first full year.

Deputy President Gibson stated that more funding is being pursued from the State to extend the program beyond the current financial year, however stopped short of confirming whether the program will be established on a permanent basis. It was also clear that the \$5 million threshold for development to qualify under the fast track system will be under review, particularly in instances where estimated costs of construction nominated on planning application forms were pushed over the \$5 million threshold when lodged at VCAT. Given the popularity of the system, the Department of Justice will review whether \$5 million represents an appropriate threshold for major cases or whether a higher figure is more appropriate.

Further updates will be issued when more announcements come to hand.

Matthew Guy & the Lib's – what to expect

We are often asked how the new Minister for Planning will compare to the previous, and what the change in government will mean with respect to town planning policy and planning approvals.

I attended a VPELA seminar on 15 February 2011 where Minister Guy addressed a packed house full of professionals in the industry. I was prepared to be unimpressed. The Lib's spin leading up to the last election had caused me personal grief in terms of balancing my political beliefs with my professional views. However, I must say my first impressions were that this "guy" was really switched on and had a good (realistic) grasp on the issues and challenges facing his portfolio. He was at pains to say a new government did not just mean a 'shifting of the furniture', but would result in a new 'culture' and a different way of approaching matters. I guess the jury is still out whether this amounts to spin or substance.

In terms of how this government will address housing supply and affordability, the key components of their platform are:

- A new 200ha 'inner city growth corridor' at Fishermans Bend. He said this will be an enduring legacy of this government (much as Southbank was to the Cain government and Docklands was to the Kennett government).
- Also identifying other major redevelopment opportunities within the urban areas for redevelopment (such as Richmond train station and E-gate, to be facilitated by a newly formed Urban Renewal Authority).
- Clearly defining activity centres, and encouraging substantial growth within the nominated centres.
- Dealing with variations to the UGB on their merits (pointing out they have a majority in both houses of parliament to achieve this).
- Encouraging growth in regional centres within about 100-150km from Melbourne CAD, including promoting employment and infrastructure in such centres (noting he considered these centres would compliment the role of Melbourne, rather than be regarded outside the MMA prism).

He was less clear about what was going to happen in the established urban areas, which is where a lot of clients are active. The pre-election spin was that these areas would be protected and major future growth would be directed elsewhere (as detailed above). Amending the planning scheme to delete specific (but not indirect) reference to higher density development along main road and transport corridors went some way towards achieving this – at least in a 'public perception' sense.

Whilst it is fair to say there may be an added level of risk associated with development in the residential areas outside activity centres (potentially requiring a tempering of development expectations), in reality we are hopeful that it will be business as usual in these areas (i.e. – development outcomes based on their individual merits).

Other matters of interest include:

- The establishment of a new legislation to deal with corruption. We gather this may influence matters such as the use of "facilitators" and the extent to which one can approach Councillors or other elected representatives.
- Reviewing Metropolitan strategy (although I gather there is no particular hurry with this).
- Still keeping the door open for Ministerial call-ins to matters that advance government policy, although clearly indicating he would want this to be the "exception rather than the rule".

We will endeavour to keep you informed of any future developments or insights into the government's performance and strategies vis-à-vis town planning and traffic engineering issues.

David Crowder - Director

Have your plans ready . . .

Proposed reforms to the Tribunal's procedures include extending the timeframe to amend plans prior to a final hearing from 4 to 6 weeks (20 to 30 working days).

The tighter timeframes imposed on applicants is intended to enable Council's, referral authorities and other parties more time to review and prepare for a final hearing having regard to any late changes made by applicants to their development application.

The changes reinforce the importance for applicants to be well organised in establishing the final plans that will be pursued on review at the Tribunal, particularly for developments tracking under the MCL where timeframes are already reduced.



This issue, we cast our eyes on Robbie McKenzie - Senior Statutory Planner

Likes: Hawthorn Football Club, Golf, Tottenham Hotspur FC, Horse Racing and MUSE.

Favourite TV shows: 'The Office', 'Entourage' and anything that comes on Fox Sports.

What am I reading right now: 'All Bets are Off' - biography of David Schwarz.

If on a desolate island, which three people would you like to be stranded with?

Cyril Rioli (to have a kick around with), Miranda Kerr (no comment) & Bear Grylls (Man vs Wild).



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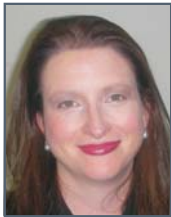
Our new staff members:



Blair Mather

STATUTORY PLANNER

Blair joins the statutory planning team after starting his career in New Zealand and having more than a year of local experience in another consultancy.



Rachael O'Neill

**ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR
Statutory Planning**

Rachael has over 15 years experience in Statutory Planning in Victoria. Rachael's experience includes Local Government and for the last few years has worked in consultancy. Rachael has extensive VCAT advocacy skills and experience and will provide an added wealth of knowledge to the Statutory Planning team.

Xanadu the Musical

Ratio Consultants is proud to be engaged for traffic and transport planning services for Xanadu The Musical, which opens at Waterfront City, Docklands on March 3, 2011 for 10 weeks. So pull out the leg warmers, neon and even your roller skates and get set to return to the 80's.

The production comes to Australia after taking Broadway by storm, where it was nominated for the prestigious 2008 Tony Award for Best Musical. Based on the Universal Pictures' cult classic movie which starred Olivia Newton-John and Gene Kelly, Xanadu rolls along to the chart topping tunes including "Magic", "Party All Over the World", "Suddenly", "I'm Alive", "XANADU" and many others.

Xanadu The Musical will be performed in one 90 minute, interval-free performance. Set in XanaduLand - a one-stop entertainment extravaganza featuring bars, concessions, live music and the Grand Xanadu Marquee - this multi-million dollar complex has never been seen in Australia.

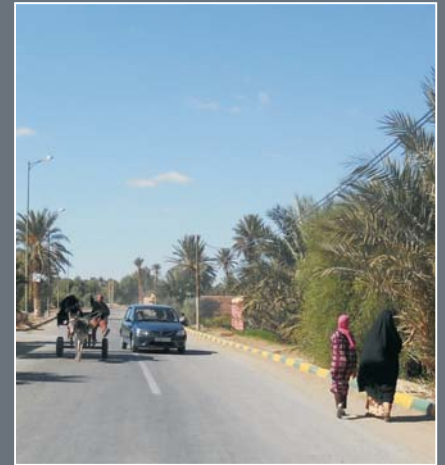
Ratio's work included pedestrian traffic management planning, event traffic & transport planning

and liaison with relevant road and transport authorities (i.e., VicUrban, Department of Transport, VicRoads and City of Melbourne), as well as the preparation of an Event Traffic and Transport Plan. This scope of work is similar to that for other "event" traffic and transport planning work we have done recently, such as the 2010 UCI Road World Championships in Melbourne and Geelong.

Diary of a Transport Planner abroad . . .

I arrived in Casablanca, Morocco to be met with some much anticipated heat and a chaotic line at immigration (which is to be expected). What I didn't realise was that this experience in line was going to mimic my experience on the roads here. A single file line at Immigration quickly became two lines when a Moroccan lady decided to create a second line out of nowhere. The reasoning behind this soon became clear on my journey into Casablanca.

Originally intending to catch the train from the airport to the city (even Morocco has this sorted out), that soon fell by the wayside considering it only leaves once an hour on the hour and there was now a forty minute wait, and I had been awake and on the go for 13 hours!! So off towards the taxi rank I ventured and clambered in with all my gear. The taxi itself - an OLD Mercedes Benz - was an experience all of its own. Not only did it not have any seatbelts (I think they are optional over here), but the rattling of the car and the speedo stuck on 90,000kms did not inspire any sort of confidence whatsoever. I wasn't entirely sure the car would make it into the city!!



Next I noticed that cars, people and donkeys just seemed to go wherever they wanted to with little regard for road markings of any sort. Drivers suddenly created lanes in the middle of two others and lurched out in front of other vehicles/donkeys/people without indicating. Now the line at immigration made sense. This was just how things worked over here. CHAOS!

Pedestrian crossings are in the middle of nowhere across what appeared to be major highways and instead of our notorious window washers, they have people selling an array of stuff from car air fresheners to tissues. Closer towards the city it became clear that cars and pedestrians in Casablanca have established a very strange relationship that seems to work for them - for tourists however there is a bit of risk taking involved. Pedestrians just step out onto the road and if they are lucky cars slow down or swerve although I did see a few close shaves. Casablanca's soundtrack is just the constant tooting of horns which looks like it is the way in which drivers know that the light has turned green as they all seem to stop halfway through the intersection.

The other cities I have visited are not as crazy but I still would not recommend driving here yourself unless you have a really good insurance policy!

The public transport runs on "Moroccan time" - in other words always late but they do have a very good taxi service. The petit taxis (different colours in different cities) are a fantastic and cheap way to get around and they are EVERYWHERE.

Casablanca is even in the process of constructing a tramway although I'm not quite sure how a tram will cope with the craziness of cars, donkeys, people and not to mention all the cats of Ca(t)sablanca. All in all, Morocco is a pretty colourful country though and keeps surprising me.

That's all for now. More from my travels through Eastern Africa later.

Hayley McFadden



quirky melbourne facts

Melbourne's Queen Victoria Market, the largest open air market in the southern hemisphere, was originally built on the site of Melbourne's first general cemetery.

Melbourne survived the financial crisis of 2007-2010 better than any other Australian city with more jobs created in Melbourne in 2009, than any other Australian capital.

Melbourne is home to the world's largest tram network and the world's oldest operating roller coaster (Luna Park in beachside St Kilda).