

The Harricks Address, Engineers Australia.
Delivered by Michael Deegan, Infrastructure Coordinator,
Infrastructure Australia, Sydney, August 2, 2010

Thank you for your introduction and the opportunity to deliver the Harricks Address.

In preparing for this address, I took the time to look at the antecedents of Dudley Frances John Harricks, from his birth to his days as engineer-in-chief at the old Colonial Sugar Refining Company.

I thought it was fortunate that Dudley Harricks, the third son of an English surgeon, was born in the then colony of Queensland rather than on his father's home soil.

There was a tradition in the UK that the first son was the heir, the second the spare and the third and subsequent fit only for either the cloth of the church or the uniform of the army.

So rather than being a vicar or a colonel, and I hasten to add that I am not alluding disparagingly at either profession, Dudley Harricks entered a profession that is involved in so much, and delivers so much.

He became an engineer – and one of note.

I, on the other hand, became amongst other things a public servant – whether of note or not is not for me to determine.

And it is in my current role that I was invited to deliver this address, an invitation from a distinguished and eminent organisation I accepted without reluctance.

Part of what I was asked to address was sustainability in infrastructure planning along with the Infrastructure Australia approach in assessing projects.

To me the former is a part of the latter. They are inextricably linked.

Twenty, thirty years ago, sustainability, and it may not have even been called that, was the aberration and definitely not the norm.

A few enlightened professionals, engineers and architects, understood it and practised it.

Now, it is part not only of the project approval processes of the various state, territory and local government planning authorities but in the economic and strategic analysis and assessment made by Australian Government instrumentalities, including Infrastructure Australia.

Sustainability goes far beyond the harvesting of water in residential projects for toilets and gardens.

It is part of just about every project, from the reason for the project, its viability and assessment, through project construction and completion and then in the ongoing utilisation of the project itself.

Like budgets, our natural resources are finite and unless we inject sustainability into just about every aspect of our assessment, planning, construction and utilisation of infrastructure we will not achieve the best use of those finite resources.

Do we have one box marked sustainability that we tick off when making our assessments of project submissions, or that we tick off in our reports and recommendations?

The answer to that, is no.

What we do have is a reference to sustainability in, as I've said, just about every aspect of our assessment processes.

When we're developing new policies, as we are with cities, freight and ports, sustainability becomes even more important and more prominent in our final recommendations to either the Australian Government or the Council of Australian Governments.

In addressing the second thread of what I was asked to talk about today, I begin with the proposition that my organisation, Infrastructure Australia, has many similarities with yours.

I don't mean the professional similarities are with the members of your organisation, but rather with the work done by your organisation.

I refer to the Infrastructure Report Cards your organisation releases on the various Australian states.

You issue credible and unbiased report cards on the state of the states' infrastructure.

My organisation reviews submissions by the states and territories for future infrastructure and then makes reports to the Australian Government on those submissions.

You introduce your report cards with – and I'll use the Communiqué from your 2010 report on New South Wales – the statement that:

“Infrastructure in NSW underpins the delivery of services that affect every part of the lives of the community.”

In our latest report and recommendations to the Australian Government, our Chairman, Sir Rod Eddington, said, and again I'll quote:

“These recommendations are aimed at getting the fundamentals right for Australian infrastructure, instilling a discipline of long-term infrastructure planning that can meet Australia's future productivity challenge, and making better use of our existing infrastructure networks.”

The words might be different, but the theme is the same.

The same similar/differences apply to ratings and recommendations.

Whereas, Engineers Australia maintains the educational definers of
A,
B,
B+,
B- and so forth in its report card, we use different terminology – but with the same outcome.

Ours are “Early Stage”, “Real Potential”, “Threshold” and “Ready to Proceed”.

This is not meant in any “Yes Minister” way of obfuscation but in a realistic and unbiased appraisal of the projects submitted for review by Infrastructure Australia.

Our delineation of projects fits almost exactly with your division of the infrastructure core – Transport, Water, Energy and Telecommunications.

You review the existing in these fields. We review the proposed in these fields. You rate what you review. We recommend priorities in what we review.

The present and the future are, perhaps, the major differences in your organisation’s report cards and my organisation’s reports to the Australian Government.

What both our organisations do agree on is the premise that without infrastructure that meets the needs of the nation, and its people, this nation and its people won’t prosper and grow.

While delivering on infrastructure is integral to our role, Infrastructure Australia also works to the Australian Government and the Council of Australian Governments in developing policy – for cities, for ports, for freight – as well as initiatives on governance.

We approach this through the contention that the three tiers of Australian government – national, State and Territory, and local – have to engage and work together for the nation.

National interests, a focus on outcomes for the Australian people must supersede parochial issues, rivalries and one-upmanship.

This is the approach Infrastructure Australia takes in providing advice to all governments and in developing major policy initiatives.

We also seek to identify regulatory reforms necessary to enable efficient and coordinated delivery of national infrastructure investment.

Streamlining governance means addressing issues like planning, especially in the cities.

Nowhere is there more need to address governance than in the planning and infrastructure delivery in Australian cities.

We are, and you don't need me to say it, a highly urbanised society – one of the most urbanised nations in the world.

And, if there is an economic core in this nation, then it is to be found in our major cities, those with more than 100,000 people.

These Australian cities contribute nearly 80 per cent of national Gross Domestic Product and employ around 75 per cent of the nation's workforce.

Governance of those major cities sees the hands of one national government, eight state or territory governments, and, 155 local governments.

On top of that, add the departments, authorities, instrumentalities and more.

Within that myriad of governance of cities, State and Territory administrations lay down strategic planning frameworks and local government implements planning policies – although at times States take over planning decisions.

When it comes to major infrastructure within those cities – and beyond those cities – local, state and territory governments increasingly look to the Australian Government for the capital to build the infrastructure.

In meeting those demands, the Australian Government must ensure that taxpayers funds – and that's what builds infrastructure – those funds must be allocated to deliver improved living standards and a better quality of life for all Australians rather than merely satisfying particular local demands.

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National interests, a focus on outcomes for the Australian people must supersede parochial issues, rivalries and one-upmanship.

This is the beginning of a new regime in governance in Australia. If projects are to be delivered then the national good and improved outcomes for people must be the drivers.

The cities are growing, inexorably and inevitably.

That's not unique to Australia.

Last week, I was in New Zealand, talking to local government and policy makers about what we're doing here.

And, last week, I even couldn't get away from electioneering.

The new, bigger, city of Auckland is in the throes of electing a new local government.

The new, bigger, city of Auckland now exceeds Australia's largest local government area – Brisbane.

The new Auckland, the amalgamation of smaller local government entities, now has a larger infrastructure palate to work with – along with increased demands, tight revenue streams and the myriad of problems replicated here in Australia.

I'm not saying that they have the answers. No, they are just addressing the problems and the issues.

What I am saying is that infrastructure deficiencies, competition between communities or states, delivery timetables and national direction over localised and individual demands and perceived needs are features of not just our nation.

By while the national outcomes obviously focus on the Australian Government, the reach of the national government is being expanded by engaging directly with local government in the delivery of projects, bypassing the States and Territories.

Such steps, such vital steps for the development of this nation, are not taken without some resistance.

That's to be expected.

But the steps are being taken, and will continue to be taken, as we examine and make recommendations on reforming and streamlining governance.

And that reform can be across many different and divergent activities of government.

In our work, for example, on developing a national transport policy and a national ports policy you can see how things can be governed better.

In the transport policy, the necessary networks, and they are networks of rail, road and ports, have to be financed.

They have to be priced right.

They have to have access regimes and regulation conducive to business and consumers.

They have to be interstate and intrastate and plugged in to international markets.

Nothing is in isolation. Everything is connected.

Take rail as an example. The tracks spread across the nation, across State and Territory borders.

Everyone, government, those responsible for the tracks and those responsible for the trains that run on the tracks, have a basic and unrelenting commitment to safety.

But from state to state we have different safety regulators and sometimes different regulations.

We don't have it in aviation but we have it in rail.

A national rail safety regulatory regime is obvious. We're about putting that into place.

I alluded earlier to planning. Those who create and deliver major projects and those who service those projects are national in outlook but state by state in application.

These are just a couple of the inconsistencies that Infrastructure Australia is examining for the Council of Australian Governments.

The outcomes we and the Council of Australia Governments seek reflect the views of the most important group of stakeholders – the Australian people.

In developing our cities policy we listened to the people who live in the cities.

The people who sit in trains, on buses and on ferries.

The people who sit in motor vehicles, idling in congestion, waiting, frustrated, for traffic to move.

The people who walk or ride bicycles.

The people we've talked to may not be intimately involved in development and design of new infrastructure, but they are the ones who eventually pay for government projects.

They are also the people who use the projects. As both end users and project financiers, they have expectations, aspirations and demands.

They deserve to be listened to.

That's what we did!

You wouldn't be surprised to know that problems with urban public transport and road infrastructure are the most common areas of dissatisfaction among people who live in Australia's major cities.

Public transport is seen as overcrowded, unreliable, too infrequent, too slow and unsafe at night.

Roads, well that's simpler – they are choked and congested and residential streets are becoming clogged with parked cars.

There are limited or incomplete cycle paths.

Walkers suffer from distances, dangerous intersections, too many vehicles, too much noise and a sense of being crowded out.

People are also perceptive.

They know where the problems lie – they may not have the solutions but they look to government to find the solutions.

But government is not omnipresent – it needs information, analysis, debate and review in finding the path to the right solution.

That's where we come in, and that's where organisations like yours come in.

A few weeks ago your organisation released another of your studies on infrastructure, the Australian Capital Territory. That report showed that the infrastructure in the ACT was fast coming to the end of its life.

What Engineers Australia found in Canberra could be replicated in almost any part of Australia.

A new road, a new rail connection, upgraded and expanded ports, water and energy projects – it seems everyone has their own wish list.

Every item on wish lists can't be delivered.

The ports, the roads, the rail lines, the water and energy grids and pipes, the broadband telecommunications, all are vital to meet this nation's infrastructure needs.

But, just as vital as the concrete and steel of infrastructure that you can see and touch is the need to continue and promote reform in how we do things, how we price things and, as I've already alluded to, what forms of governance we work to, and with.

We also need to accept that, when it comes to delivering infrastructure we are not confined by borders.

This view and Infrastructure Australia's response was enunciated recently by Sir Rod Eddington, when discussing our task of developing a national ports policy.

“The New South Wales economy does not stop at the New South Wales border. Nor does Victoria stop at the border with New South Wales or South Australia”.

Ports, transport – road and rail – energy, water and telecommunications are, in economic terms, national, if nothing.

A national approach to infrastructure delivery is not only vital to the national economy, and the lives of all Australians, but its common sense.

The borders, drawn on maps in the 19th Century exist, and will continue to exist, but those colonial lines on a map no longer inhibit the Australian economy.

If some states want to resist the national approach, then, they are flying in the face of reality.

This is even more a denial of reality when you realise that it is to the Australian Government that the states look for the majority of funding for major infrastructure projects.

Across the national government we’re showing that we can get things done.

If we look to our major trading partners, the nations of Asia, we acknowledge nations that, in recent decades, have been almost synonymous with a “can-do” attitude.

Australia has the same attitude.

In financial and economic parlance – we are a “player” in the most dynamic and growing region in the world.

Infrastructure will not only keep Australia in the game – it will enhance our place.

If rail and road are the links to the ports that are our links to the world, then the National Broadband Network is the link to every corner of this nation.

The National Broadband Network is vital infrastructure for our future economy and, perhaps, it epitomises a change of approach for Australia.

Like transport, communications are a vital part of everyday life, commercial and personal.

The National Broadband Network will keep us in instantaneous contact with economies and people around the region, the world, as well as in the next Australian street.

In all aspects of what we do is the underlining theme of building and rebuilding this nation's infrastructure.

It's being done so there is growth and prosperity for the Australian nation and its people.

Infrastructure underlies productivity gains by helping what we do best perform even better, and more competitively.

In many respects, we've only just begun.

We've identified the infrastructure deficiencies.

We've appraised and recommended projects across the nation – projects being rolled out now or ready to begin.

We've developing strategies for the future of this nation's ports, its freight and its cities – so this nation is prepared to engage with our regional neighbours and the world.

We're working on redefining governance through cooperation and reform – statutory and economic.

And, we're listening to the people.

Through this combination of:

- forces and factors,
- of people and experiences,
- of a desire to grow and share prosperity,
- of acknowledging problems and resolving them, and,
- building for the future with governance that works for the future.

Through this combination, we're showing the potential of this nation.

Add the rollout of infrastructure and that potential is unlimited – as is the spirit of Australians.

Thank you.