

Sydney Airport issues being exposed by new media focus

NSW Premier Barry O'Farrell's acceptance of claims that Sydney Airport can handle the Asia century until 2049 is as convincing as using the Mayan Calendar for planning purposes

It should be apparent to anyone with a passing interest in Sydney's political and business affairs that the push for a 2nd airport is back and urgent, and being framed increasingly as an airport *for* Sydney's west, rather than one to which the users will come *from* Sydney's east.

For students of media affairs, it is perhaps interesting too that all of the major newspapers are now doing what they are best at, which is researching and reporting not only the environmental, social and technical issues, but the political and public administration issues. The PR handouts aren't getting cut and pasted, they are getting pulled apart, line by line.

For the sake of my colleagues who are still in print, it is earnestly hoped that the focus of the newspapers on these matters is well resourced and enduring. These are terrible times in the media, and leveraging the strengths of print into viable digital business models is crucial to having reasoned coverage of events that do not pander to demands to have it in 300 words or a series of dot points displayed in a tiny screen and placed inside walled gardens where people only read what they 'like'.

Unfortunately or otherwise, we live in times where there is a need to read about things we may 'not like' and do something about them.

Such as keeping Sydney relevant to the 21st century by having appropriate access to air, sea and land services that will feed an economy that creates the wealth to invest in the technologies and processes and community services that almost everyone aspires to, for themselves and their children.

An example of the new found focus on the need to build a **Sydney West rather than just a 2nd Sydney Airport** is found in today's SMH. It adds to the intense focus to these issues that it, and the *AFR*, and in particular *The Telegraph*, have brought to the topics right through the year, since an independent federal/state panel dared to endorse an airport at Badgerys Creek or the adjacent, less well defined Nepean site.

That recommendation was immediately castigated for its impudence by Infrastructure and Transport Minister Anthony Albanese, even though, to his enduring credit, Albanese is just repeating a party line he doesn't believe in for a moment if one researches everything else he has ever said or done about that site.

Labor's incredible capacity to botch everything it touches is alarming, but nowhere near as disturbing as the fixation of NSW Premier Barry O'Farrell on falling for absurd claims that the existing dysfunctional Sydney Airport can cater for the demands of the Asia Century until 2049, which is about as credible as using the *Mayan Calendar* for planning purposes.

O'Farrell has a fairy tale fixation with the notion that a high speed rail link between Sydney and Canberra Airport will make it Sydney's 2nd airport, when in fact it would remain just as fast to fly from Sydney to Canberra and surely he isn't really suggesting that we should all try and fly from Sydney to Canberra in order to then catch another flight.

There are so many fundamentals wrong with the O'Farrell notion that it is hard to summarise, other than to note that he seems oblivious to the fact that Sydney West is growing, and it needs its own airport, and there is a site for free, already owned by the Commonwealth, at Badgery's Creek.

When that site is sold or leased to the winning consortium to build and operate a Sydney West airport the \$2 billion or more purchase fee might make a useful contribution to sorting out other desperately needed public transport infrastructure in the Sydney basin, such as expanded city rail services that would actually facilitate people getting to the future site of a high speed rail terminal, which will be useless if it isn't accessible.

The O'Farrell government appears to have caught the same incompetency virus as the Gillard Government when it comes to its appalling indifference to planning and consultation obligations in its haste to approve a floating helipad for scenic flights over Sydney Harbour.

The concept is a good one. But good ideas need good government, not executive decrees that ride roughshod over some very important safety and environmental matters.

Today's *SMH* has an insightful article on the **political machinations over the harbour helicopters** plan, in the latest of some top reporting by itself and *The Telegraph*. Read the article carefully and ask whether or not it is suggesting that there may not be quite the money needed for the proponent to bring these scenic flights to fruition? Is the concept being sold in advance of the cash required? Full marks to Newcastle Helicopters for the concept, but are all of the other critical components of these excellent intentions in place, now, since we were being lead to believe that it would be up and running a few weeks ago?

What remains peculiar about the harbour helicopters story is the alacrity with which the NSW Government put itself behind it, in violation of due process, compared to its claimed sensitivity to community opposition to a 2nd Sydney basin airport no matter where it might be located.

Name the site, we'll oppose it, is a pathetic response to efforts to resolve Sydney's airport crisis.