

## **AIRPORTS AMENDMENT BILL 2006**

### **Second Reading Speech 20<sup>th</sup> March 2007**

[Mr KELVIN THOMSON](#) (Wills) (7.05 p.m.)—It is always a pleasure to follow the member for Corio, who has always got something interesting and worthwhile to say. His remarks about Avalon Airport were well chosen. I have taken a bit of an interest in the future of Avalon Airport myself and its prospective role in meeting Melbourne's aviation needs. I can also attest to the popularity of the air show at Avalon Airport. I remember teaching my son how to try a manual car and there was such a traffic jam on the way down to Avalon Airport that he had to do several hundred gear changes and he learned how to drive a manual car. The air show continues to be very popular, and with good reason.

I want to support the second reading amendment moved by the member for Batman. I had the opportunity to second the amendment back when this issue was being first debated on 1 March. That amendment says:

... whilst not declining to give the bill a second reading, the House condemns the Government for undermining public confidence in the Airports Act, through approval decisions such as that relating to the Perth Brickworks site, located opposite a residential area and the Essendon direct factory outlet, proposed without regard to the impact on local road infrastructure.

As member for Wills, my own personal interest is in the Essendon Airport site and its future.

By way of background: we have had rapid growth in non-aviation development at Essendon Airport and at other airports in recent years in the wake of the privatisation and leasing-out arrangements which the government has entered into. That development has had some good features—and it is certainly my view that the Essendon Airport site has outlived its aviation usefulness and that its future lies in non-aviation activities—but these developments have not come without problems, and I think that some of those have been created through essentially poor implementation of the planning and approval process by the Minister for Transport and Regional Services. If you look at Essendon, Adelaide and Perth, you will see that local communities have been sensitive to some of the commercial developments at airports, and rightfully so. It is indeed difficult to explain to a local community why they should trust the planning regime for airports—a regime in which they have no effective say—when successive ministers have delivered decisions like that in Perth of placing a brickworks on airport land opposite a residential development.

The government's record on airport development with things like the Perth brickworks or retail developments at Adelaide and Essendon means that we need to be cautious. Frankly, on this side of the House we are not prepared to accept reductions in consultation or approval time lines. The minister and the government have to have due regard to the concerns of local communities and the land use and infrastructure plans of local government authorities. We hope the minister has learnt from things like Harbour Town in Adelaide and the Direct Factory Outlets, DFOs, at Essendon that he and the government need to take into account the impact of commercial development on surrounding infrastructure such as roads. Local councils, state governments and local communities expect and are entitled to serious consideration of these issues.

To give the House a flavour of how seriously this issue is taken within my electorate: just three weeks ago, on Wednesday, 7 March, I organised a community meeting at the Strathmore Heights Community Centre in Boeing

Reserve, Strathmore. I invited local residents to meet with the private operators of Essendon Airport. Tim Anderson, whom the member for Corio referred to, is general manager at Avalon. He is also general manager at Essendon, so he has plenty of work to do. That meeting was attended by 120 local residents. Strathmore has a strong sense of local community, and Strathmore people have always turned out and been engaged in local community affairs. That is a fine thing. The fact that 120 people turned out just to have a discussion about the future of the airport site is testament to how seriously these issues are considered by local people. I take this opportunity through the forums of the House to draw to the attention of Strathmore people more broadly the things that were discussed at that meeting and how they relate to the future of the Essendon Airport site, and to use that as a backdrop for arguing that this second reading amendment we have moved ought to be supported in the House.

Mr Anderson gave a presentation to the meeting stating that the broad aim for the future of the site is to sustain it as an airport while developing a high-end office and shopping precinct. Obviously, local people are concerned that we do not get the worst of both worlds here—having both aviation activities and non-aviation activities over which they have no say or control being approved. Mr Anderson made clear that residential development was at no stage to be considered or proposed. He said that there are new hangars scheduled to be built to replace the old ones, which are well past their use-by date. He said that the old land where the hangars had previously been located would then be used as part of a management plan to attract high-end office facilities. These plans are for boutique office complexes. The central plan will include the development of a boulevard inside the airport where locals and residents from other surrounding areas can come to do their retail shopping, grocery shopping and things like motor vehicle purchase. The design of the shopfront buildings on the boulevard will integrate the site's aviation history. For example, we were shown where angles of buildings are to be shaped in the form of an aeroplane wing.

Mr Anderson pointed out that the airport currently has only one access point and that management is now looking at introducing another access point. He noted that the car retailers currently located on Keilor Road are being invited to consider moving their dealerships to the airport site. Their current locations pose many customer parking issues, and the Essendon Airport Ltd proposal would see the dealerships located on the boulevard with a storage facility built behind properties located on the eastern border of the airport. The storage facility will also have a service road built off the airport's existing perimeter road which will allow for efficient access to the storage facility. The proposed service road will be located closer to the backyards of properties on the eastern border, but Mr Anderson said that landscaping would be located between the service road and back fences with the intention of minimising noise and other disturbances.

He also discussed the proposed Australia Post mail-sorting facility, its location and factors associated with it. It is proposed to construct a small lane to go from the facility into Mascoma Street in Strathmore. He emphasised that there is no proposal to build a full-scale road into Mascoma Street and that the proposed lane would be just wide enough to allow the mail bikes to and from the facility. He also talked about a planned bike track to run from existing parkland over Mascoma Street, behind some properties and end up in the airport's boulevard. The aim of the path is to encourage locals to either walk or ride to the retail facilities. He stated that future upgrade plans to the airport include construction of a new air controller deck with the old one planned to be reconfigured as an observation deck, and that would be situated towards the end of the observation deck.

He also talked about the issue of the airport security. To date, \$2 million has been spent by management on upgrading security through new fencing and new surveillance cameras. He noted that management is interested in pursuing land value creation and expressed the view that the planned developments have the potential to increase the value of surrounding properties. He believes that within four to five years there could be up to 5,000 people working inside the airport, providing jobs and creating a higher demand for housing in the area.

After this presentation there were many questions from residents and a vigorous discussion. That is a good thing. The first question was: are there any plans for an increase in air traffic for the airport? Mr Anderson responded by saying that for many years air movements at Essendon had been averaging around 65,000 per year. The figure has now significantly reduced to 55,000 movements per year. He says that no increase is foreseen because the airport is focused on high-end aviation, meaning that there are lower volumes of movements, and that most training flights have now been transferred to Moorabbin Airport.

There was a question asked as to whether the developments would result in an increase in traffic in Mascoma Street or other surrounding residential streets. Mr Anderson expressed the view that there would be very minimal impact on traffic flows in Mascoma Street and other surrounding residential streets because the airport's blueprint is looking at introducing a second entrance along with the original entrance. The intention is to encourage individuals to access the airport and its future retail precinct via the freeway.

Mr Anderson was asked whether Essendon Airport management would repair and upgrade Mascoma Street where it passes underneath the Tullamarine Freeway and whether management would extend the sound barriers from the freeway as part of the construction of the new road for the access point. The response was that VicRoads control that particular stretch of road, that they controlled the design and that noise levels have been measured and it was suggested that there was no current need for sound barriers. I should report that there was a considerable concern expressed by the audience to this. Many residents believe that if Essendon Airport management can build all the developments they talked about in their presentation then they ought to be able to build sound barriers and provide better protection from noise for local residents.

The question was raised whether, if Australia Post moves to the new sorting facility inside the airport, this would mean a lot more postie bikes up and down Mascoma Street seeing as the bike chute is to exit onto it. Mr Anderson's response was that the number of bikes travelling up and down this passage would vary depending on the time of the year. Obviously Christmas, Easter and other significant days might mean more motorbikes travelling up and down Mascoma Street, but the general advice from Australia Post is that 40 motorbikes will be using the bike entrance onto Mascoma Street each day.

The issue of the emergency services air wing and helicopters residing at the airport was also raised. Concern was expressed about the amount of noise and smoke that they produce, and the question of the helicopter pad being moved closer to homes was raised. The response to this was that management is trying to design the airport so that planes and helicopters are centralised and located in a way which minimises disturbance to the residents. Mr Anderson said that the design incorporates the use of buildings as a sound-shielding device to minimise disturbances. There was quite a lot of concern expressed about the way in which

emergency services helicopters conduct themselves. For example, the issue was raised as to why they do not use the flight paths designated for regular aircraft. Helicopters are more technically advanced and they do not have to use the flight paths, but local residents have made clear their view that they should use the flight paths designated for regular aircraft.

Issues were raised about damage to property from flooding and rainwater runoff. Management was asked whether they have any plans for more effective drainage systems and whether they can make an investment to protect the property of residents from runoff. Of course, runoff is a natural phenomenon, but Mr Anderson said that management is spending substantially on the construction of basic infrastructure within the airport, including on things like drainage, and there was a willingness expressed to discuss these issues further. A question was asked as to whether the airport should design a system to collect the rainwater runoff, noting that water these days is a very valuable thing and perhaps ought to be collected and harnessed at source. The response to this was that collecting rainwater above ground might attract waterbirds and the like, and obviously that is undesirable under federal air regulations and in trying to avoid bird strikes at airports, but Mr Anderson stated that underground tanks are being considered.

The issue of the proposed bike path and any implications it might have for the security of locals was raised. That will be followed up, but at present there are no formal proposals to secure the bike track or to prevent users climbing rear fences of residential properties and things like that. The issue of connecting the DFO with the new developments was raised and whether there were any plans to build a road. Mr Anderson said that a connecting path would be considered; however, it would most likely not allow for cars to travel down it and that management is interested in encouraging more people to walk and ride rather than travel by car.

Another resident asked whether there would be public transport travelling to and from the airport once these developments were established. Essendon Airport management responded by saying they have been in extensive discussions with the state government and a number of bus services in order to establish a permanent and reliable public transport line to and from the airport and they are interested in pursuing the idea of those developments and creating greater demand for the site.

The residents also raised the issue of a curfew on aircraft, with respect to allowable times for landing and departures. Tim Anderson pointed out that there is currently a curfew on jet engine aircraft between the hours of 6 pm and 10 am and that there is no proposal for this to change. This is another sore point with local residents. People believe that the curfew is ineffectual, that it is frequently broken and that more needs to be done by airport management to ensure the curfew is adhered to.

Other issues raised by residents concerned noise prevention walls in Paljan Court, whether management could introduce double lines going towards Melrose Drive to prevent right-hand turns and an increase in public transport to minimise potential traffic congestion. The response to those issues was that a lot of them fall within the jurisdiction and responsibility of VicRoads, but airport management is happy to continue talking about those issues.

Airport management was also asked whether they have any plans to build access roads from the Lebanon Street border into the airport. Management responded by saying that they had contributed \$100,000 to the upgrading of Lebanon Street, which was previously a dirt road, but that there is not going to

be any access into the airport. Moonee Valley City Council will not support that or provide approval for it. They had also given some consideration to building a service tunnel that would run underneath the airport, but they have scrapped that idea due to cost projections.

Residents also asked whether there was a possibility of relocating the helicopter pad to the rear of the existing water tanks. That issue has been looked at previously and there are no present plans to move it to that particular location. These and other issues were raised. The fact that so many people show up and raise so many issues shows just how important the question of proper consultation with local residents is, taking into account their genuine and legitimate concerns. That is why we have not only a second reading amendment but a number of amendments which we will move at the consideration in detail stage which we believe could improve this bill. We hope that the government will take our amendments seriously and adopt them. *(Time expired)*