OUTER SUBURBAN/INTERFACE SERVICES AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Inquiry into growing the suburbs — infrastructure and business development in outer suburban Melbourne

Melbourne — 18 June 2012

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Witness

Southern Melbourne Regional Development Australia Committee
Ms A. Buczkowsky, manager, and
Ms F. FitzGerald, deputy chair
The CHAIR — On behalf of the Outer Suburban/Interface Services and Development Committee I would like to welcome our two witnesses today from the Southern Melbourne Regional Development Australia Committee, Ms Anita Buczkowsky and Ms Faith FitzGerald. Each member of the committee represents the interface councils to a varying degree. Whatever your contribution is going to be today, I just remind you that it is protected by parliamentary privilege. It is an opportunity for you to give us some unfettered input, but the privilege does not extend beyond this hearing on this date. Your input will be recorded by Hansard, and a hard copy of the transcript will be available to you in two weeks time. You may make some changes to spelling. Is somebody going to make some opening remarks, because we want to move to interact with you quite quickly.

Overheads shown

Ms FITZGERALD — Yes. We work as a team, so I will start, and I am sure Anita will contribute.

Thank your for the opportunity. This is an important topic, and we are very pleased to see that the Parliament has convened this particular committee, because its focus directly reflects the same purpose as we have had in this part of our work. I am the deputy chair of the Southern Melbourne RDA. The RDAs have 10 members and are essentially boards, as you would know, so I will not go into the background. The chair of our committee is the CEO of the City of Greater Dandenong. About 50 per cent of our members are senior local government personnel, and the rest of us — people like me — come from the community, but we all live in the area.

Like all operators we have a small budget, but we have used that to undertake a number of projects — consultancy studies essentially. The first one of those was the Casey-Cardinia region study into attracting investment into the Casey-Cardinia region. The reason we undertook that study was that we could see and we could hear from discussions with the councils within our region that the urban growth area within Casey-Cardinia was causing many problems on the ground.

You have probably been told already that a lot of the things that happen along the way as these policies play through and these settlements commence et cetera are really only going to be seen directly in the first instance by local government. It advises, the policies from state government are effected and the information flows through in the longer term, but it is the councils that are at the coalface, and they are the people who are seeing what is happening to their constituents.

In Casey-Cardinia, and only talking about the declared urban growth area at this point in time, within that area the population will double between about now and 2050. That means a 75 per cent increase, or another 250,000 people, between now and 2050. I said to the CEO of the Shire of Cardinia, ‘How do you know? How can you be so sure about the numbers of people you have?’ He said, ‘We count the new rubbish starts’. There are 85 new families a week moving into this area. So let us accept that it is rapid population expansion into what has been farmland, which has been rezoned in the usual way through the usual processes.

There are some differences between the new population in the area; it is a little bit younger than the average for Melbourne, there is a higher unemployment rate than for the average of the whole of Melbourne, and already there are apparent financial, social and health costs. There are many reasons for this. The local services are not adequate, and we have done some work around that, but really the primary reason is that there are just not enough jobs anywhere in an accessible ratio. Of course there will be some new employment created. When a population increases there are new shops and population-dependent employment. That has occurred, and there will be construction jobs while they are still building new houses. Of course that is temporary employment increase, but it does occur initially.

But 70 per cent of the working people in Casey-Cardinia have to travel out to get work. For the most part they either come in to the CBD or they go to Dandenong. The distances in travel for those two destinations are about the same. They are spending more than 1 hour each way a day, almost entirely in their cars because the public transport is just not there, or where it is there it is just not adequate. We have done some sums on the costs of that; they are in our submission to you. We reckon it is somewhere between $3000 and $5000 a year for an average family, and as petrol increases in price et cetera I suppose that might get worse — —

The CHAIR — When you talk about the cost of running a vehicle, are you including the cost of buying the vehicle and its maintenance, not just fuel and servicing?
Ms FITZGERALD — I am not sure about that detail. I imagine the consultants did take an overall cost of —

MS BUCZKOWSKY — I think it is based on the RACV —

Ms FITZGERALD — Yes, it is.

MS BUCZKOWSKY — The cents per litre in terms of what it costs to run a car. It includes maintenance, petrol, tyres and that sort of thing. There is an overall cost for running a car.

The CHAIR — And even the funding of the vehicle in the first place. Is that factored into it?

MS BUCZKOWSKY — I do not think it includes that, but it includes petrol, tyres and the sorts of costs there would be on an annual basis.

Ms FITZGERALD — For most residents it really would not be possible to do this travel any way other than by car. There is a train service to Pakenham; I know that. But only a relatively small number of the people we are talking about can access it or access it reasonably easily. That is a problem in itself.

What we notice when we look at that in some detail is that when an area is planned for residential subdivision, there are some things that could be done relatively easily and with relatively less expense than you may think, which would alleviate that. For example, the Monash Freeway is very busy at peak times, but nevertheless it is a good highway into Melbourne. But east–west access to get people to that link is not adequate. Increasing the scope of east–west roads — and we endlessly mention Thompsons Road because it has been on government plans or a long time; it just takes a while to come up to the top priority — those sorts of expenditures are relatively minor in infrastructure terms. That would make a lot of difference to the way people could get out to get to jobs. If they cannot get out to get to employment, then obviously it would be even more desirable if we could create employment within the region.

But we have all been around and we know you can talk about these things. The Growth Areas Authority — and this is where my parliamentary privilege will come into play — in its wisdom has aspirational targets for local employment. They are very generous. They are so aspirational as to be almost absurd. They are quite unrealistic. Everybody knows that. There is no way that you are going to be able to get enough industry into these areas to create the sort of local employment centres that would sustain the working population.

Ms McLEISH — Can I ask a question here? What do you think the reasons are for having high such aspirational targets, because I know there are reasons why people set such high aspirational targets. I am interested in your take on this.

Ms FITZGERALD — I do not know about the Growth Areas Authority. I assumed it might have been political window-dressing, but that is the scepticism in me. Usually when people say ‘aspirational’ they mean to be strived for. Maybe that was the intention here; that is the way the councils are dealing with it. They are going out actively marketing their areas. They have precincts in place. They are not sitting back whingeing; they are doing everything they can do to get industry into the area. They endlessly complain that the state government will not relocate its offices to Casey. It is probably not going to happen, is it? You might go to Bendigo or Ballarat next rather than Casey.

The CHAIR — There are only so many government offices to throw around as well.

Ms FITZGERALD — Of course there are. I heard the titles office was at last going to Ballarat, which will be great. You have to get some reality around these things. I do not know; there is no short answer to that. We cannot help but wonder, when we look at the way planning has occurred, if the pressure from the development industry and of course from the land-holders and the Growth Areas Authority, which is, if you like, aligned with those interests, is not very great on governments. There is always the carrot of blocks of land to be released with a ‘3’ in front of them instead of a ‘5’ or a ‘6’ — cheap land. That does happen; the land is cheaper in the first instance. It is only as time goes on that you realise what costs are being borne, and eventually the infrastructure has to be upgraded. That is a cost to the general taxpayer. If these costs were borne up-front by the development industry, that land would not be so cheap, but it might also make people rethink the policies — that is, maybe the region should be developed before the outer periphery.
I should just emphasise again that stimulating local business and employment is active policy. Our consultants produce some good marketing brochures. They have made suggestions as to how this has occurred effectively in other parts of the country, and the two local governments have now combined their two economic development departments — not in an organisational sense, but for these purposes they work together. There is very good cooperation at that level. We are talking about good, well-informed people who know what they are doing, and they will do everything they can to get jobs into the area. There is a government policy, a policy of this government and I think the previous government, which will support all this, and that is the expansion of the port of Hastings. But we know the time lines for that. We are doing a lot of work around that. We are actively informed about it, and we hope it happens. It will make a lot of difference to the south-east of Melbourne.

If some of the relatively inexpensive improvements we have suggested, in particular the upgrade of Thompsons Road, could occur in the short term, that will at least ease the travel time stress. There is also a series of detailed proposals in our report for extended local bus services and additional capacity on the Cranbourne and Pakenham passenger lines. These things are not impossible; we think they are achievable. We know the budgets are constrained these days, but even within that scenario they are achievable.

In terms of the other matters that you ask about, we thought your terms of reference were well informed and interesting. There is an emphasis on skills. For the most part this is more a blue-collar area than a white-collar area. There are trade and technical skills certainly, but we do not think the lack of skills is the problem. Perhaps management support — and Anita will talk to you about a new initiative in the city of Casey to develop a new kind of business precinct — might be helpful; perhaps some of that where small to medium size businesses can be supported would be useful. But I cannot say often enough that it is jobs that these people need. They have skills; it is just that there is not work that is anywhere near accessible to them.

We also observe, and I think there is a lot of this around the urban development community, that the lot yields could be higher — the lots could be smaller. It is not our brief to get into all of this, the lower your infrastructure costs are in the longer term.

I will make one final point and then ask Anita to address you. Some of these areas would still be really good farmland. Southern Water has A-grade water which is not potable, but it is perfectly suitable for agriculture. The Bunyip food belt is a very good place for the export-oriented horticultural and agricultural industries. The now confirmed extension of the urban growth area is about 20 per cent —

**The CHAIR** — Is that going to enter into the Bunyip food area?

**Ms FITZGERALD** — Yes, 20 per cent of the food belt does under the extension. It was the previous government that planned the extension that has just been supported in this government’s logical inclusions policy. That is a problem.

**The CHAIR** — Ms FitzGerald, thank you very much for your openness and frankness. We certainly appreciate that very much. There is nothing worse than our having to sit with someone doing a circular dance around it. We need to arrive at the nub very quickly.

**Ms BUCZKOWSKY** — What Faith has asked me to refer to is some fairly definitive plans that the City of Casey has around creating what it calls a business accelerator.

**The CHAIR** — Yes, we are very interested in hearing about that.

**Ms BUCZKOWSKY** — The economic development unit of the City of Casey is based at Monash University at Berwick and has formed a quite strong partnership with the university. The plans for a business accelerator have gone past the feasibility study phase. My timing may not be exact, but I think in the next two years they are looking at developing and having that structure in place. Clearly a business accelerator is not the same as the old concept of an incubator, because these days business accelerators do not need to have walls. They are very much looking at ways in which they can support and grow businesses and get them out into Casey itself, or even Cardinia if need be, potentially providing employment for businesses, so employment for local people.
The CHAIR — When you talk about there being no need for physical walls around them, that they do not need to be in some converted warehouse or the sort of start-up models that we — —

Ms BUCZKOWSKY — Clearly that is often the framework that is there.

The CHAIR — Is it not important, if we have people in a business accelerator setting, that there are some synergies where there might be the services that they all need in the lifecycle of the development of a product or just marketing or patenting innovation? Do they not need an agglomeration, though, that cannot necessarily be achieved in a virtual environment?

Ms BUCZKOWSKY — To be perfectly honest, I think it depends on the type of business it is. I think some businesses can benefit from being part of a virtual environment. They might not be located at, say, Monash University at Berwick, but it might be that that is a hub for a number of other smaller business accelerators where other businesses are located. They may come in on a regular basis, so it is not that they are located physically in that business accelerator the entire time but have contact with it. Obviously virtual contact is one way of doing that.

The CHAIR — Sure. Okay. Within a business accelerator environment, what sort services, support, mentoring, physical and support infrastructure do you see being a basis for it all?

Ms BUCZKOWSKY — It is not my area of expertise, I will be perfectly honest with you, and I guess we are talking about this because we know about it and we have contact with the City of Casey, but generally speaking in the old incubators and in a business accelerator, the model that has worked really well is to have business services located there as well as advice, with the capacity to bring in other legal advice, business advice or more regulatory advice on an occasional basis.

Ms FITZGERALD — It is hard though. They are really good questions. I come from the information technology industry, and the most successful incubator I knew was actually here in the city, in the Bourke Street mall. It was called Information City. I don’t know whether you know about it and we have contact with the City of Casey, but generally speaking in the old incubators and in a business accelerator, the model that has worked really well is to have business services located there as well as advice, with the capacity to bring in other legal advice, business advice or more regulatory advice on an occasional basis.

But this is also pertinent to the study we are doing on manufacturing, isn’t it, Anita. We have spent a lot of time and effort looking at manufacturing in the south-east because we have 40 per cent of Victoria’s manufacturing there. There is no doubt it is on the decline. There is no doubt times are tough, not just because of the Australian dollar — there are all sorts of reasons. Things are hard for those people. The conclusion that our consultants have drawn is that they need modern management expertise. I am not sure what that means, and I am just watching with interest to see what we can achieve. We will put more money into helping them get someone who can really work closely with the CEOs, especially where there is perhaps going to be a problem in the future for who takes over. With family businesses you often have succession crises — —

The CHAIR — And a family business often has problems accommodating external advice as well.

Ms FITZGERALD — I know. Even non-family businesses would appear to have problems. You have to be really careful with these guys. They know heaps, but they know about their own stuff. Some of the consultants are a bit inclined to say, ‘But they are not modern, they are not experts, they are not this, that or the other. I am not quite sure whether these are the answers, but you can only try. You can bring to bear expertise if you do identify an export. I have worked in opening up new markets in other countries, particularly in Asia but in America too, which is a very tough one, and it is something you really have to spend years of time doing. That means money and investment to put into it. There are agencies that can help. It does help to know that Austrade, for example, does this and that. There is information that can be useful.

The CHAIR — What are we looking at in terms of giving people wisdom when it comes to the product development cycle: when to hang on to the product, when to jettison it, the importance of positioning it and differentiating it, the importance of a brand and perhaps the classic regional branding strategy? If we think about the Hunter Valley, we think about how the wine industry has done; if we think about Geelong we think about other sorts of things. In terms of regional branding, here is an opportunity with the Bunyip food bowl that
should really be out there now so that there is a sense of anticipation. Once those products come through, whether it is white asparagus, milk-fed veal or a whole range of gourmet products they might come up with — the high-end offering — we need a port to get things out very quickly to market. It just seems to me that things are a little bit slack. There is a sort of hammock effect happening.

Ms FITZGERALD — It is too slow, isn’t it? No, you are right. We are looking at regional branding and the Casey/Cardinia region located within that, both for our manufacturing industry, which does go a bit further than Casey/Cardinia — we have to work that one through more carefully with Kingston/Frankston.

Ms BUCZKOWSKY — It tends very much to be Greater Dandenong based, of course.

Ms FITZGERALD — But there are sensitivities about Dandenong’s dominance and all the rest of it too. It is good point about regional branding. We are doing a study on the food belt; that is just starting — quite a large one. That is a good point. I am not involved with that, but Anita is involved with everything we do. You could bring that too.

The CHAIR — Is there some work being done to, if you like, have greater reverence for tracts of land such as the Bunyip food bowl? We could all say it is really important, and we can bring in the arguments for food miles and local jobs and diversity in terms of economic development and so on, but just this whole idea of the importance of the retention of land where we can grow food.

Ms BUCZKOWSKY — In fact we are just about to start a project that will look exactly at that. We are going to look at food production and food processing and look at the issues of food security. Obviously we are going to look at the issues of the production of food being located close to cities — we may not think that is important now, but we might in 10 or 15 years time — but also at what food is being produced and how it is being produced, going back to what Faith said before about potentially exporting, the clean green sort of view. But also there is the importance of food production and processing in terms of economic development and regional development, which is where we come from as an RDA.

The CHAIR — At Monash’s Berwick campus, for instance, is there any reflection on these sort of offerings in either undergraduate or postgraduate to support those aims and objectives of a new frontier — a new agricultural or industrial base?

Ms BUCZKOWSKY — Yes. I know Berwick has a number of business courses — business degrees. Whether they are related to agriculture and food — —

Ms FITZGERALD — I do not know how strong they are in agriculture either, but there is a business innovation centre just being established by one of our RDA members.

The CHAIR — Who is that?

Ms FITZGERALD — You will know him; Tony Lupton was a member of this Parliament in a previous Parliament. Tony is now employed at Monash, and he is setting up within the deputy vice-chancellor’s area an innovation centre. That is another turn on the same phrases, isn’t it? The way that will work is in clusters. You know how you often hear that in relation to business support — clustering like industries that do share issues. When we were talking the other day I said, ‘Have you found your first cluster yet?’, and he said, ‘Yes, it is around a group of companies that are interested in software harmonisation around some deep software programming that would make certain things easier for them to do and reduce their costs’.

I cannot tell you any more detail on that, but we could always brief you about it. He has got a cluster manager, and that is what they will work on. I think it works like a round table — you gather these people together from time to time and they have discussions. They will only divulge in front of each other as much as they are prepared to, but if there is something in it for them, then they will share. That is another model. That is at the Clayton campus. There are people thinking about these things and worrying about them, but I am not sure that we have got all the solutions yet.

The CHAIR — I am just wondering where the drive and the impetus is coming from to get them past the studies and the good ideas.
Ms BUCZKOWSKY — I think what the RDA is trying to do at the moment is to gather the evidence base that will move beyond the studies and into practical projects.

Ms FITZGERALD — We are lobbying governments, and that is why we are here. We are actively telling the federal government in particular, which is where our funding comes from of course, things we think need to happen. A transport and logistics report we have just done has page after page of recommendations for improvement to transport and logistics to support the port and to support surrounding employment centres and the people in the outer south-east.

Ms HUTCHINS — I am interested in if you see a role for your organisation and state government and federal government around promoting the growth of home businesses and that interaction of them potentially moving into incubators as they get bigger or giving some sort of support.

Ms FITZGERALD — We have not done much work around home businesses. In half of our region — places like Bayside and Port Phillip, where I live — most of the businesses, apart from retail, are going to be home businesses. In fact we are just into our second three-year term, if you like, and with our next series of funding we need to look more closely at what is happening in those areas. I think it is a very good issue to raise, because there are good business networks out there; you know that. They have breakfasts, cocktails and this, that and the other. I go to a lot of them just to hear what people are saying and to meet the local people. They are certainly sharing; they are well attended. People are keen to get additional information and to access any offer of new ideas.

Ms BUCZKOWSKY — And they are keen to network.

Ms FITZGERALD — Yes, and to use each other’s services — and they do. I know because I see it happen.

Ms McLEISH — Earlier you mentioned that there were skills out there. People have the skills, but the jobs are not in the areas where the people have the skills. Do you think there are any areas where people in your region, the south-east, have skill shortages?

Ms FITZGERALD — I am sure there are, and we are just starting another project on exactly that. It is only on the Mornington Peninsula, but if it gives us good information, and Anita is going to run that one with somebody in the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council — —

Ms BUCZKOWSKY — It is actually the Mornington Peninsula and Frankston.

Ms FITZGERALD — And Frankston. That is better, because they are different, aren’t they?

Ms BUCZKOWSKY — Very different.

Ms FITZGERALD — Chisholm TAFE sits within our region, and we work closely with Chisholm; we have one of its board members on our board. We are trying to make sure we are linked into all these things. It is a very good question, Cindy, but I cannot give you specific answers now. Hopefully, that kind of work will — —

Ms BUCZKOWSKY — I think the areas of skill shortages are traditionally the ones that have always been in shortage, but more and more we recognise now that there are issues of skill gaps. People have skills, but there is a gap in their skills that needs to be upskilled.

Ms McLEISH — Do you have a view on how some of those gaps could be closed?

Ms BUCZKOWSKY — First they need to be recognised. Often the only way those sorts of gaps are discovered is when employers talk about the fact that they cannot get people.

Ms FITZGERALD — There is a time lag, though, isn’t there?

Ms BUCZKOWSKY — Yes, there is.

Ms FITZGERALD — I know from having worked at RMIT that there is — —
Ms BUCZKOWSKY — And obviously the structure of the TAFEs does not necessarily immediately reflect what is required.

Ms FITZGERALD — That is because they have to have quality processes for their programs et cetera. I think that is a good question that we should take on board, because often these things come back to short skills training, when you do not need a certificate-level let alone a degree-level qualification. If people understood that and if they knew there were jobs in X over there and they just had to go — —

Ms McLEISH — That is exactly what is happening.

Ms FITZGERALD — That is where you are coming from. We will take that on board. I think we need to feed that back to our members.

The CHAIR — With the people who support your efforts, you have your stakeholders from local government and from the Department of Business and Innovation. Could you describe a little bit about the role of your relationship with the Department of Business and Innovation? What kind of person is that, and what would your expectations be of them? In fact what are they delivering?

Ms FITZGERALD — Yours, Anita.

Ms BUCZKOWSKY — You are obviously aware of the federal-state relationship, and we all know that federal-state relationships can be somewhat tenuous at times. In other RDAs based in other states, the RDAs have what I would probably describe as a reasonable amount of autonomy. Because the state has responsibility for the contract with the federal government in terms of RDAs in Victoria, some of that autonomy can occasionally be in question. In terms of the support that the state government provides to the RDA, if I can be honest I actually do not think there is that much support. They try to support us administratively, but it is like an octopus, if you want. There are tentacles everywhere, and it takes ages for anything to get through.

I also think that because of the state — —

The CHAIR — Would you put that into a red-tape — —

Ms BUCZKOWSKY — Yes, absolutely.

The CHAIR — It is almost counterproductive.

Ms BUCZKOWSKY — It is absolutely counterproductive, and I think because the state and the federal governments are different colours, there is some sensitivity potentially about projects that we put up, and the regional food plan, which I mentioned before, is one of them because of the recent state announcements about the extension or the logical inclusions. Obviously our regional food plan would be looking at that issue and probably making some comments about it. In some ways, it is difficult for the committee to then second-guess what the state might or might not like, particularly at the moment, when there are some sensitivities around some issues.

The CHAIR — Do you feel that you have to play a political appeasement game and that you cannot actually be objective and say what needs to be said at the time?

Ms BUCZKOWSKY — I would suggest that there is some of that going on.

Ms FITZGERALD — I think we have been able so far to achieve objectivity because the way we work is to commission expert reports and then use those. We design them and we know where the issues are, so I guess we are focusing them, but nevertheless we stick to the facts and then we talk to both levels of government about them. It is more often the state, to be honest. We are often on about infrastructure. At the end of the day, the big funding for infrastructure will come from the federal government. We tap on the door of Infrastructure Australia, and that is a very hard door to be heard from.

The CHAIR — Sore knuckles?

Ms FITZGERALD — Yes, but nevertheless we try — and we do get a hearing. I think there are advantages in being able to communicate with the state government. The senior departmental officers in the Department of Transport, for example, are quite available from time to time and are very knowledgeable, very good. We get to
see the people in the Port of Hastings Development Authority. If we really wanted to find somebody within the state government, I think the people in DBI — I can never remember what it is called these days — would help in that way and would help to make the contacts. I mean, they are trying to make us work.

The CHAIR — But there is not someone specifically deployed to look at your interests and be on the ground and responsive?

Ms FITZGERALD — We have a person. You report to somebody in the state government, effectively, don’t you?

Ms BUCZKOWSKY — Yes, I have three masters, effectively. I have the federal government, I report to a manager in the state government and then I report to my chair and my deputy chair.

The CHAIR — That sounds exhausting.

Ms FITZGERALD — She is very skilled.

Ms BUCZKOWSKY — That would give you a sense of it. I think the state adds an extra level of complexity, and some of that complexity is advantageous because it means we have a door into state government. The other complexity is disadvantageous.

The CHAIR — But are there other benefits than just a door?

Ms BUCZKOWSKY — Not really. What do you think, Faith?

Ms FITZGERALD — I do not think so — not that I can observe. If I were in your position as the state government, I would probably keep it this way because what you do not want — what is the expression, hares running? — is things like these regional groups to get out of control. If you give them power and you give them money, which has happened in the first iteration of this committee — —

The CHAIR — They grow like Topsy — is that what you are saying?

Ms FITZGERALD — Well, whether they grow or not, they do stuff and they have theories and they will start to be heard and they will start to be understood and people will tap into it out in the community. If I were the state government, I think I would want to kind of have a bit of a watching brief. I do not know how resource intensive it is. There are always questions around that, of course. That is my private view. We have a very tactful chairman who is used to local and state politics, and when there is a little bump he is good at getting on the phone in a quiet way. I think that with sensible people and good intentions you can make these things work.

The CHAIR — What is the most exciting thing out there in terms of regional development at the moment, the Business Accelerator?

Ms FITZGERALD — No.

Ms BUCZKOWSKY — That is the City of Casey.

Ms FITZGERALD — Exciting or important?

The CHAIR — Promising.

Ms FITZGERALD — I was going to say manufacturing. I think the most exciting thing that is happening in south-east Melbourne is the strong emergence of the City of Greater Dandenong and the business centred around Dandenong as Melbourne’s Parramatta — can I put it that way? — or Melbourne’s second CBD. There has been investment, really good investment, in Dandenong for a long time by both state governments. The city has been transformed. There is good building stock in the place. It is even looking good — you would never have thought that possible in the past, but it is improving — and there are new business precincts there. There is a very strong, good council bureaucracy — the Cambodian mayor is great; I have met him a few times now — and it is a centre.

South Gippsland can tap into it. There are a few jealousies. Frankston wonders why. These larger councils are quite well staffed, with extremely strong administrative and bureaucratic skills at the local council level. Local
government sometimes gets a bad reputation for its staffing, but I have been impressed by the people I have met through this process.

The CHAIR — Is that uniform?

Ms FITZGERALD — Probably not, but at the top level the three councils that I know best personally through this process, which are Dandenong, Casey and Cardinia, are very strongly managed. There are some differences between the ways Kingston and Frankston work, but there is also a lot of evidence on the ground that they are doing a lot of very interesting stuff too. Some of our next phase of work will have us working more closely with them. That is part of our quite overt agenda. I cannot say much about Stonnington and Glen Eira — I live in Port Phillip and know it for other reasons — but there are differences.

Ms McLEISH — You asked a question before — exciting or important.

Ms McLEISH — You have said the exciting bit. What is the important bit?

Ms FITZGERALD — The important bit is the transport logistics industry stuff. It is a combination of helping manufacturing to steady, probably at a new lower level of activity, and in some cases to find new ways through. It is the food bowl, because we see that as an industry, if you like, or a business of high-class horticulture or something urban-peripheral — horticulture, agriculture, land. It is the centring of activities and getting closer to Gippsland and some of the opportunities that exist there. None of it can happen without the road and rail links and the port, so our top priority whenever we try to model — —

The CHAIR — So if we look at the Bunyip food bowl, are you pushing for that infrastructure to happen in terms of the road and rail links into the port of Hastings?

Ms FITZGERALD — Absolutely. We have just done a huge study on that which we have been sharing with bureaucrats in the state government very closely. Probably John Bennie will approach the government where there are opportunities to talk to relevant ministers about it. We are entirely supportive of the government’s policy, which is to upgrade the port of Hastings as the longer term option. I know there is a small upgrade of Webb Dock proposed. We have our heads around that, and that is fine. That is an interim, but that is seen by everyone in the industry as an interim. It is Hastings that would come next.

The CHAIR — That sounds terrific. We have gone a bit over time. Ms FitzGerald and Anita, thank you very much for coming along today. We really value your input, and we are really appreciative of how we got to openness and frankness. We all felt comfortable about that, so that is terrific. The committee, through our executive officer, Nathan Bunt, may want to follow up certain things as things are framed. We are reporting on this in December this year. We are formulating another report before that on Melbourne’s liveability, but the Growing the Suburbs one will be in December. As we frame that, it may come about that we want a sharper focus on some things and might want to contact you and drill down on some points, but the Business Accelerator is exciting.

Ms BUCZKOWSKY — I am happy to give you the contact for that if you want to actually drill down a bit more around that.

The CHAIR — We will just say that the proceedings are now finished for the day as far as Hansard is concerned.

Committee adjourned.