CORRECTED VERSION

OUTER SUBURBAN INTERFACE AND SERVICES AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

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

Melbourne—27 February 2012

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Witness
Mr J. Anka, Commercial and Operations Manager,
GOTAFE - Seymour Campus.
The CHAIR—The committee is about to start its formal processes again and I would like to welcome Mr Joe Anka, as the commercial and operations manager of GOTAFE from the Seymour campus, to the hearing of Outer Suburban and Interface Services and Development Committee in my capacity as the chair. Mr Anka, there are some formalities before you make a contribution to this hearing and I need to read out a formal passage to you. In welcoming you I want to make the point that all evidence taken at this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the Constitution Act of 1975 and further subject to the provisions of the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003 and the Defamation Act 2005 and, where applicable, the provisions of reciprocal legislation in the other Australian states and territories. Any comments you make outside the hearing, however, may not be afforded such privilege.

This is an all-party committee and the material that you are going to contribute today is going to be recorded by our transcription services and a hard copy of that would be available for your perusal and any typographical or spelling errors. Any input along those lines would be welcome. I am not quite sure how you want to start with your opening remarks. We certainly welcome them. If you could just give me an appreciation. Are you going to have a passage or a presentation because we certainly have some questions to put to you once we have established some background fundamentals from you. I would invite you to proceed.

Mr ANKA—Thank you for that warm welcome. Firstly, I would like to apologise on behalf of our CEO Paul Culpan who could not be with me today. Hopefully I will be able to answer all your questions. I do have a statement that I have put together which hopefully will not engender too many questions because the answers will be in there.

The CHAIR—We would invite you to make that statement now, Mr Anka, if you would like to do that.

Mr ANKA—Thank you. My name is Joe Anka, I am the commercial and operations manager for GOTAFE, Goulburn Ovens Institute of TAFE. Our head office is based in Shepparton. We have major campuses in Shepparton, Wangaratta, Benalla and Seymour. As an introduction, GOTAFE is a key regional, vocational tertiary education provider with the means and the potential to deliver education services to the northern outer urban growth area. It has a significant role in the provision of education for the Victorian government in the region and focuses on quality education delivery to regional and fringe communities. GOTAFE welcomes the opportunity to provide insight on the support services, primarily education, to this committee and is keen to assist in the strategic planning which is currently taking place in the outer urban growth region.

As a background, GOTAFE operates a campus in Seymour in the Mitchell Shire which was brought into the urban growth boundary early in 2010 after the Victorian parliament passed legislation to expand Melbourne's urban growth boundary. The southern boundary of Mitchell Shire is situated just over 30 kilometres from the centre of Melbourne with its northern boundary approximately 100 kilometres from the capital city. The shire is strategically located as the first municipality north of the Melbourne metropolitan boundary on the nationally significant transport links between Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane. We will need to have this preface in there for what I am going to be presenting a little bit further on.
Seymour is the main business industrial population centre in the shire, followed by Kilmore, Broadford and Wallan. Most of the rural area is used for agricultural purposes, including beef, wool farming, forestry, timber production, viticulture, olive production and hobby farms. Of note, one of the actions identified in the South Mitchell Subregional Plan 2010, was to investigate the potential for a campus of a major university to be located in the southern part of South Mitchell. This has subsequently been quashed by the new Mitchell CEO David Keenan who stated in a meeting with GOTAFE on 11 March 2011 that there will not be a university campus within Mitchell Shire in the foreseeable future.

Also of note, and as mentioned in the Mitchell 2020 Vision discussion paper, a new major activity centre will be agreed approximate to Beveridge and it will be a focus for the creation of a broad range of retail, business, community and education services. In time, Beveridge is likely to be a focus of approximately 50,000 persons. It has now come to pass that major developments planned for the Beveridge area include Mandalay, Lockerbie and Lockerbie North. GOTAFE is currently in discussions with Stockland—one of the largest residential development companies in Australia—to secure a greenfield site in this region for the purposes of developing a major facility incorporating trades training and tertiary and further education. There will be more on this to follow.

GOTAFE is the largest tertiary vocational education and training provider in north-east Victoria with the main campuses in Shepparton, Wangaratta, Benalla and Seymour, engaging more than 17,000 students per year of which a considerable number originate from the northern outer urban growth area. GOTAFE recently revised its strategic plan to include provision for the northern outer urban growth area as a result of an apparent gap in vocational tertiary education indicated by community feedback at both grassroots and political levels. GOTAFE has a strategic objective, our Strategic Directions Plan 2011-2015, to be the tertiary education broker within the South Mitchell area, and pledges to facilitate the best possible education opportunities for our students. To be successful in this it is imperative that we customise our service delivery and programs in a responsive and effective manner. I have a list of current programs that we deliver. It is quite exhaustive. I will not go through it but I will give it to you for further discussion if you would like.

Mr ANKA—Yes. The Seymour campus alone, from the Northern Mitchell Shire—and we do draw a lot of students from Southern Mitchell, Wallan, even into the Hume, through Whittlesea and places like that—of over 700 students a year. It is sustainable, yes. Currently we are doing nine nursing courses in the campus, ranging from certificate IV to advanced diploma level. I think it is division 2. We are currently doing seven community service courses. They are our strongest courses but we are actually doing furnishing, building construction, hospitality, business administration. There are three streams for the community services: there is aged care, child care and welfare. Traditionally a lot of the things that you would find in a regional TAFE campus we will deliver.

Mr ANKA—The way that contestability is structured now, if we get enough expressions of interest for those courses and they are on our scope of registration we can run them.
The CHAIR—But you are not running it at the moment?

Mr ANKA—We do have a certificate II in business administration course. That is where the interest lies at the moment for that course.

The CHAIR—Please proceed.

Mr ANKA—Thank you. The future education and training delivery models and facilities that we are looking at, some of the delivery models will be accessed or developed to address the needs of the northern outer urban growth area. We are looking at the higher Australian Qualification Framework for delivery in South Mitchell—that is the AQF. It is considered that some of the education and training needs for parents, typically with young families moving into the outer urban growth area, would involve completion of the higher AQF levels, for example, certificate IV, diploma, advanced diploma and bachelor degree. When considering the education and training needs for the South Mitchell population, it is important to reflect on both the workforce upskilling needs of the region and the aspirations of the resident population and their skills requirements for employment in the metropolitan area, as we know that Wallan, for example, is a commuter town. The development of strong vocational pathways within the VET sector—or vocational education and training sector—which leads to higher education is a priority.

Based on the current Mitchell resident population and the anticipated infrastructure and workforce development needs for a growing population in South Mitchell, it is anticipated that there would be demand for education and training in health, community services, children's services, disability work, aged care and business management. GOTAFE delivers a wide range of programs in this area, as well as having partnerships with a number of universities, such as Deakin, Ballarat University, Charles Sturt University, Latrobe University, and the University of Melbourne, to deliver integrated vocational university programs. The challenge in relation to these courses is their accessibility in terms of campus, delivery, location and time.

Also the region has been identified as having significant gaps in the current provision of programs that interface between TAFE and schools and we are tracked as higher education feeder courses. GOTAFE sees an opportunity to help ensure a locally relevant provision of post-compulsory education services and the strength of vocational training within the vocational education and training environment, the VET environment. Also embedded are language, literacy, numeracy support programs, or LLNP, and careers counselling would be a feature of this training model. Some of the delivery model ideas that GOTAFE has gone through—and we have had a bit of a think tank over the last 18 months to two years—GOTAFE has moved to a blended delivery model, meaning that we are aiming for no more than 50 per cent of delivery to be campus based.

The delivery of education and training by workplace delivery, eLearning and recognition of prior learning, or RPL, processes, would enable the effective of certificate IV and diploma level courses as a starting point to residents in the northern outer urban growth area. Additionally, some of our program delivery has shifted to an intensive workshop model where students are required to undertake substantial pre-reading and pre-workshop activities, much of it online, prior to attending intensive weekend workshops held throughout the year. GOTAFE has also formed partnerships with the universities who offer associate degree or bachelor degree programs which dovetail with a vocational education and training qualification diploma or advanced diploma. A broad description of these programs includes Deakin at Your Doorstep, with Deakin University. In 2010, GOTAFE began offering Deakin at Your Doorstep, in association with Deakin University at the Wangaratta campus.
This program is essentially an associate degree in arts, business and science studied concurrently over a two-year period with a GOTAFE diploma qualification in one of the four following programs: community services, accounting, graphic design, conservation and land management.

Several of the associate degree subjects involve the requisite skills to compare for tertiary education and are useful for students, whether they elect to continue with higher education with Deakin, or another higher education authority. It is not just locked into Deakin. Once students have completed their diploma, GOTAFE and associate degree Deakin, they are eligible for direct entry into Deakin University Warrnambool campus for their target degree, for example, accounting, into a Bachelor of Commerce. Completion of the student's target degree generally takes about 18 months. Some of the remaining subjects for a bachelor degree can be undertaken by distance education.

The Deakin at Your Doorstep program makes significant use of technology. At Wangaratta campus, lectures are streamed in on Thursday from the Deakin University Warrnambool campus. Tutorials are held on a Friday. The students then complete their diploma qualification with GOTAFE on other days. Given the opportunities afforded through recognition of prior learning and workplace assessment processes, coupled with intensive workshops, it may be possible to deliver a Deakin at Your Doorstep program from a South Mitchell campus, one day per week or perhaps through workshop style delivery, evenings or weekends.

The University of Ballarat—this is another delivery model idea. GOTAFE is also offering the Bachelor of Applied Management Studies with the University of Ballarat which commenced in July 2010. This program is aimed at a mature-age cohort and not school leavers. This program provides education applied management skills and is designed as a capstone year after a student has completed an advanced diploma in one of several disciplines but where management has been the focus. Many students have undertaken a diploma or an advanced diploma qualifications in management. However, people with extensive management experience with qualifications in other disciplines are also eligible for the program. The course has been designed around working para-professionals and is delivered through leadership and excellence and accelerated development workshops through flexible delivery and through online tutorials and support.

The CHAIR—I would like to interrupt you at that moment. In terms of these different delivery models inviting different cohorts in, what is your view and the university's view in terms of the upholding of the standards and the expectations for them to articulate into a university course from the programs available at GOTAFE, in terms of standards with these new delivery methods. Are the standards being maintained to the satisfaction of the universities?

Mr ANKA—Yes. We have all the processes in place. We have think tanks, we have discussion groups, we have student satisfaction surveys that we run. We also have the audit processes from Skills Victoria in place to see that the meshing of the programs and where they have been mapped across are functional, I suppose you could call it that. In short, yes.

The CHAIR—Yes. Please proceed.

Mr ANKA—Preliminary feedback from course participants last year has been very positive. Weekend workshops have been successful with students attending other workshops in metropolitan Melbourne if they miss the workshop delivery regionally.
It may be possible to deliver the University of Ballarat Bachelor of Applied Management Studies in South Mitchell if there is sufficient demand. A cohort of 15 to 20 would be required to make the program viable in the initial phases. Another delivery model idea was with Latrobe University. In 2010 GOTAFE signed a memorandum of understanding with Latrobe University which highlights a willingness to work collaboratively together for regional communities. GOTAFE has raised South Mitchell and Seymour education and training needs with Latrobe University and suggested that there might be opportunities to deliver bachelor programs in nursing and community services from a South Mitchell campus. It is considered that whilst it might not be possible to attract a university to establish a campus in this southern part of Mitchell Shire—some universities are currently downsizing their regional campuses, particularly in terms of lean student numbers—it might still be possible to deliver some higher education courses dovetailed with relevant vocational education and training programs.

The facilities that could be used may already exist to some extent, perhaps by using the Wallan Secondary College classrooms, if available, outside of the usual school hours. That was one thing that was looked at for that. We have had a look at the development of a facility in the Lockerbie North area and we have put together a snapshot of the type of facility that might be relevant to be put in place there. The delivery model to be developed to address the identified vocational tertiary provision would involve an educational precinct of at least 10,000 square metres on a greenfield site at the outer urban growth boundary, potentially in Lockerbie or Lockerbie North. Given that politically that Gunns Gully Road South is Hume, Gunns Gully Road North is Mitchell, GOTAFE does not recognise political boundaries. We could go to Hume. Some of the discussions that we have had with Stockland indicate that a site in Hume would be potentially more advantageous around the railway station, but we are also looking at a site north of Gunns Gully Road as well which we think might be better for our purposes to be dovetailed with Mitchell Shire Council.

Some of the things that might go into that site involve Mitchell Shire Council services. That is a part of this. The site lends itself to access to and from the site by both public and private transport from the surrounding growth areas, other parts of Melbourne and other tertiary education campuses. Accessibility to major industrial and employment sites in the region: the site is adjacent to a high order activity centre and is of sufficient size to enable staged developments of a multipurpose education precinct; access to advanced computing capacity and networking, and the potential for housing and employment suitable for students on or near to the education precinct, and for housing for staff in the region. This precinct would be developed in stages, the first stage providing access to a range of training and education courses, ranging from certificate III to potentially first year degree level, including first year trade apprenticeships. This would depend on the numbers. The second and third stages would build on the range and nature of courses offered and would include full university and trade qualifications, for example, building and construction, engineering and business. These students could then be provided with a vocational tertiary pathway if desired.

We have also looked at a community education hub. The latter stages, as I have indicated, would also involve the further development of the precinct to create a multiple-use, dedicated community education precinct which would also incorporate a commercial business education centre for business education and training. It could also be used by a number of providers for the delivery of adult and community education, delivery of VET by private registered training organisations, and would be utilised for education delivery by other TAFE institutes, schools, universities and industry-specific partner training organisations. It would have the capacity to grow over time to meet the needs of the growing community or region. This would need to be identified, and facilities and infrastructure acquired early in the developmental process. There are many advantages to this model and to those who may feel marginalised by a formal training setting. It would provide access to education and training close to home, especially to those wanting to go on to university studies. It would give a greater choice to those seeking education and training and would offer greater flexibility in delivery.
One of the main areas of focus of this community education hub would be on transition courses assisting students to develop the skills required for more sustained courses of study. It would act as an entry point for further education, and given the demographic expected to take up residence in the growth areas, it is expected that there would be a considerable group for whom such approaches are desirable.

The CHAIR—Mr Anka, has there been either a regional or a think tank basis for your plans being symbiotic with the concept of business incubators or technology parks? Have you extended the role that GOTAFE and its higher education articulation might offer this region if a new industrial base took off?

Mr ANKA—We have had discussions with the local business enterprise centre representative who is based at Kangan Batman in Broadmeadows, and there is a need for a business enterprise centre within Lower Mitchell. Initially discussions were centred around Seymour and there still is a possibility a small business enterprise centre could be focused in Seymour. But through our discussions we have recognised that the potential in South Mitchell is far greater, and so therefore any bid that we would use or any bid that we would make to get a business enterprise centre put into that area would be welcome by the Business Enterprise Centre Council Australia. We have had those discussions.

The CHAIR—That is encouraging, thank you. I am interested to know—time is marching on—in terms of your formal statement, how much input do you have left to provide for us?

Mr ANKA—A page and a half.

The CHAIR—Because the members of the committee will want to ask questions. Perhaps if you could compress that a little bit.

Mr ANKA—Skim, okay. As mentioned, given the potential for training and education and associated uses for the facility, the space required reflects the need to plan for future development and expansion opportunities. The Central Ranges Trade Training Centre Consortium proposed for federal government funding has been successful to the sum of $11.3 million and is resulting in the establishment of a hub and spoke model for school linked trade training. This example of a hub is the Seymour P12 College, and the spokes are Whittlesea Secondary College, Broadford Secondary College, which is the lead school in the consortium, and Alexander Secondary College. GOTAFE considers to be an excellent initiative for regional skills based trade training, so much so that we have entered into a landmark agreement with Kangan Batman TAFE to better facilitate the successful outcome of this initiative. GOTAFE believe that the trade training centre model and the trade training centre itself would act as a feeder for those students wishing to transition to higher education in South Mitchell.

There is youth re-engagement via technical trade training. We feel this would be a major focus on that as well. The rapid growth that is forecast in South Mitchell will have an impact on the numbers of youth in the region over the next six to 10 years. However, there is a demonstrated current need for technical trade training for youth who are disengaged from traditional schooling. We can talk about VCAL, and that is another area, and we could be for another half an hour talking about that. If you need any background information later on, I am happy to send that through.
The CHAIR—Are there large numbers of young people who would need that?

Mr ANKA—It is becoming more and more unwieldy, if I can put it that way. This is anecdotal: last year we had 23 applicants for the VCAL course through the GOTAFE in Seymour. Through one reason and another this year we have had 78 applications for VCAL through the GOTAFE campus. I think things like the school-leaving age being raised to 17, things like no money for VCAL coordinators—yes, VCAL coordinator funding was taken from the high schools and now they do not have VCAL coordinators. There are a few other little bits and pieces that are also a part of that, but there is an increase and there is a marked increase in the number of young people leaving school and going to attempt to do the VCAL at regional TAFEs.

The CHAIR—Does the TAFE provide something by way of transition with regard to—

Mr ANKA—With regard to language, literacy and numeracy programs, yes.

The CHAIR—I am going to invite Craig Ondarchie to put a question to you at this point.

Mr ONDARCHIE—Joe, thanks for your presentation this morning. It sounds like you have done a lot of market research into the opportunities in South Mitchell. Given that, and there are aspirations about growing that end of the shire, what is the reluctance by the shire to develop with you a centre down there?

Mr ANKA—I do not see any reluctance.

Mr ONDARCHIE—You said you had an idea to build a campus in South Mitchell that was quashed by the CEO.

Mr ANKA—No, what we are talking about is a university campus. David actually said that there will not be a university campus in South Mitchell, but we are not a university, we are a tertiary and further education provider. One of the things I think I mentioned there was the fact that a lot of the universities are reducing the infrastructure, especially regional universities because they cannot afford it any more. They are certainly not going to look at building a new university in South Mitchell. We have recognised that there is a need for tertiary education and further education to be provided in the region, and we have created relationships with Deakin, Latrobe and the University of Ballarat to be able to offer the first 18 months or two years of a degree course to someone who wants to do it, to make it available locally for them to do, to offset any expenses that might be incurred in them having to shift to Melbourne and to try to find somewhere to live and get a job and all those sorts of things. You live and study locally and you get your degree at the end of it, and you would probably need to go to Melbourne for a year at the end of it to do your degree. It is creating greater opportunities for young people.

Mr ONDARCHIE—Given you have done an analysis in the south part of the shire, what is your relationship with well established organisations like NMIT?
Mr ANKA—We have very good relationships with NMIT. Our CEO, if he was here, would tell you that we have a lot of contact with them. We quite often have round-table discussions about the future of TAFE and things like that. Specifically, recently with the talk of reduced funding and things like that for TAFEs, that has been a big elephant in the room whenever they have been together. I think I know where you are coming from. I know—and again this is anecdotal—there has been talk that Kangan Batman might like to come up the freeway and sit in Lockerbie. But as far as I am aware the CEOs have had discussions and said, no, they will concentrate on Melbourne. NMIT, I do not think they want to come any further. They come up to Whittlesea and that is about as far as they come. We are it, basically, and again that is with the contact that the CEOs have with each other.

Ms HUTCHINS—With the evidence we have heard this morning about the population boom projected for this area, obviously you need to expand your infrastructure and staffing levels to meet that demand in the future. What do you think you need from the state government in securing and setting up that Gunns Gully Road site, whether it is in Hume or Mitchell? What support do you require?

Mr ANKA—I did not bring it with me but I do have a breakdown on what is required for the infrastructure that we need to put in place. But as I have indicated it would be a staged approach. We have already had discussions with Seymour and Kilmore, we have spoken to the universities, and spoken to Mitchell Shire Council. We are dealing with Stockland at the moment. Anybody and everybody who might be of benefit to set this up and to make this happen we have already approached and spoken to, and have had positive responses all around. With the staged approach, getting the name on the gate and saying, 'We're open for business,' that would be in a small way out of the boot of a car. A lot of RTOs are operating that way. The thing with GOTAFE is we have large infrastructure costs. We can go that way, especially with the blended delivery, a lot of delivery on line. We can start working out of the boot of a car. We can work from spare classrooms at Wallan, we can look further afield for space, and as soon as we start getting the numbers in and as soon as can start making the argument that there is a need for that, that is when we will start pushing for a bigger and better support. As far as putting a monetary number on it, I could not do that. I really could not do that.

Ms McLEISH—What do you think the demand is, as we speak, because—as Natalie was talking about, and we have heard—the future growth is there? How do you think the demand is right now and for what?

Mr ANKA—Again off the top of my head there are not a lot of people that come up the freeway to Seymour. But having said that there are people that come. We have had people from Craigieburn, and I know there is someone from Kalkallo, there are a couple of people from Broadmeadows. It is only half an hour by train. They do prominently nursing and community services. They are the two big, strong points. We also notice that with the trade training centre being built in Seymour there will be a lot of certificate II and certificate III trades, young people coming out of schools within the next, say, three to five years. There is nothing in place to catch them at the moment. What I would dearly like to do is to buy a big property in Seymour and set up an auto electrical engineering, building construction workshop, that we can start looking after these young people as soon as they come out of school. Beveridge is only half an hour away or 20 minutes by train, something like that. If we incorporate this into that, they will be there. It will be there for them. We envisage, say, three to five years for somewhere to start picking up a lot of these young people. Again we are looking at 130,000 people, roughly, just over the other side of that hill within the next 10 years. The potential is there and I have to say the business case is there for that to be GOTAFE's largest campus.
The CHAIR—With the different delivery methods, there were some models that have worked within the school system. When an estate such as Lockerbie comes into being, part of the housing stock is used as centres of learning and then it is recycled back onto the market as a refurbished house. You might be looking at a five to eight year cycle until the numbers build up. In terms of dual purpose, that turnover of property, not specific, the ideal campus mapped out but more or less a beachhead and immediate service provision, perhaps in courses, your many and varied forms of service delivery, would be quite a logical approach. Have you thought about that approach in terms of dealing with the—

Mr ANKA—that is not a model that we have discussed, but having said that we are open to ideas.

The CHAIR—it has been done in other places. We have seen it.

Mr ANKA—Yes, and I am sure there is someone in our organisation who has dealt with something like that. I know that our deputy CEO, who has been around since Noah was a lad, would know of that type of delivery model. If it was mooted, 'Hey, Russ, here it is, can we have a look at it,' he would probably say, 'Yes, let's go and have a look at it.' It is very open-ended.

The CHAIR—I want to make a particular comment as to the light in your eyes when new ideas come forward and it is very encouraging. We are running into another person's time allocation. Does anybody have a question before we sign off here? It looks like it is not to be the case but we really valued your input, Mr Anka. Thank you very much for coming along today. I am happy to accept a hard copy of your statement to make sure that any of the points you had to skim over, we have at our fingertips.

Mr ANKA—Yes, thank you for the opportunity.

Witness withdrew.

Hearing suspended.