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Re: Fremantle Waterfront Development

I write to comment on the proposed Fremantle Waterfront development at Victoria Quay. Although I am strongly in favour of the general idea of a large mixed-use development on the Fremantle waterfront, the current proposal has three significant flaws that would prevent it from fully exploiting the unique opportunity that this area presents.

1. There is inadequate pedestrian integration with the surrounding facilities.

There must be clear, accessible, and easily discoverable pathways between the new development, the E Shed Markets, the WA Maritime Museum, and (most importantly) the Fremantle railway station.

Fremantle already draws large crowds of pedestrians, and any development with retail space is likely to draw even larger crowds over time. **It is essential that the development provide easy access on foot** between the waterfront precinct, the rest of Fremantle, the railway station, and the Maritime Museum, since the existing provisions for pedestrians in this area are very poor. Without improvements for pedestrians, the area will not seem vibrant or exciting (due to a lack of people on the streets) and so any commercial developments will likely fail.

The most important elements of improving pedestrian access are providing wide footpaths and a large number of zebra crossings across nearby roads. However, other possibilities should be investigated as well, such as an underpass beneath the railway reserve to directly link the waterfront with Fremantle station, or closing off some of the surrounding roads to vehicles in order to provide broad pedestrian thoroughfares.

2. There is too great an emphasis on car parking and roads.

The commercial development site is ideally positioned next to the Fremantle bus and train interchange, which already handles large volumes of passenger traffic and is capable of handling much more. By contrast, the roads in this area are small, narrow, and not suited to traffic volumes greater than what they currently carry.

Therefore, **integration with public transport is essential, and parking should be de-emphasised.** The current development proposal includes far too much parking space, which would place an enormous strain on nearby roads (particularly when staff in the development's offices arrive or leave at peak hour). Instead, **the amount of parking should be reduced,** from the proposed 700 new bays to 200 or less. This would allow the visual impact of the new buildings to be lessened, or would alternatively provide room for more commercial floor space. Similarly, new roads should only be added around the new buildings where absolutely necessary, so that access for pedestrians is paramount.

In the existing images and video fly-throughs, the footpath from the railway station appears to be a secondary, 'back door' entrance to the development. To ensure proper integration, **the main entrance for the new buildings should clearly be the footpath from the railway station.** This will encourage pedestrian mobility around the new development by making it easier to discover for new visitors, as well as providing better access to the new buildings for public transport users.

3. The skyline of the new buildings must not be boring and 'shed-like'.

Fremantle has a unique skyline and new buildings should integrate with it, rather than conflict with it. In this respect, Scheme B is superior to Scheme A because it presents a greater variety of building shapes and heights, but even Scheme B involves block-shaped buildings that would stand in stark contrast to both the heritage buildings nearby and the contemporary Maritime Museum.

In particular, **the western-most office buildings in both schemes are too 'shed-like' in their appearance and would not blend in** with existing buildings around Fremantle. Although they are vaguely similar in appearance to the Fremantle Port sheds, those buildings are only two storeys tall and are not so obviously block-shaped. If the development proceeded in accordance with the existing plan, the large blocky buildings would be visible as an ugly blight on the skyline from Monument Hill all the way down to Queen Victoria Street.

The western-most buildings might be better **replaced by three or four buildings with smaller floorplates but a variety of heights,** to provide a more interesting skyline that provides greater opportunity for architecture that is inspired by other buildings in Fremantle. From a distance (such as from Monument Hill) a larger number of smaller, narrower buildings would look more interesting, and would much better complement the existing skyline.

Thank you for your time.

Hourann Bosci
13 April 2006