

Planning Assessment Commission Notes –

John Blanch representing Blanch's Bus Company and Brunswick Valley Coaches

To discuss traffic issues / traffic generation in relation to public transport

When I stood here at the previous PAC meeting, I told people we could successfully provide services to the North Byron Parklands site. If I were to say it has all been plain sailing and there have been no issues to report, I'm sure you would pick me for being a liar. From the viewpoint of Blanch's / BVC, we still have that fire in the belly to get bus transport as right as we possibly can and deliver the best level of service as we can. There have been challenging transport experiences over the last five years that we know have adversely affected the local community and, particularly for Splendour, have caused issues for their patrons.. Those transport experiences also reflect badly on us as a service provider, so we are always keen to learn, develop and improve as much as we can.

So how has the bus network overall been organised to date.

The task is big, with multiple operators now involved.

- Surfside Buslines have supplied services from the north – basically the Tweed Coast area and the demand for those services appears to be growing.
- Ballina & Northern Rivers Buslines provide services from Lismore, Alstonville, Ballina, Lennox Head, Bangalow and other villages en route and advice indicates numbers are generally strong & consistent.
- Blanch's, BVC, J & B Buses work jointly to cover the local area encompassing Suffolk Park, Byron Bay, Mullumbimby, Brunswick Heads and Ocean Shores. Due to the passenger volume and school bus commitments of those operators, Koala Coaches provide additional support to assist services principally to Byron Bay. Again, passenger numbers appear strong and consistent overall.

So how have things really gone to date.

- The very good news is that as the site has been developed, negative issues that have arisen appear to get resolved either during the event or in time for the next event. I must acknowledge that patrons have been very patient and supportive even when things have not gone as well as expected.

And what has really gone wrong over the last five years.

- We have experienced traffic issues due to poor external site access.
- We have experienced traffic issues due to poor internal site access. Significant gridlock at both the venue and on to the roads outside. And I can assure you there is no worse a feeling

than looking at a crowd of people swelling at the end the night, as you watch from the driver's seat of the bus you are in, for an hour and you and every other vehicle around you, do not move due to gridlock.

- There have been times when there have not been enough buses and the bus timetable has not met the demand. Basically struggling to effectively cater to the needs of patrons. And that places everyone under immense pressure.

And what have we got right over the last five years.

- Most people dwell on the negative and most people have an interest in the negative. So what have we got right?? All those items that were mentioned in the negative have continuously been improved year after year. The external traffic management issues that were experienced in year one appears to have been addressed. Buses are no longer stuck at the Yelgun truck stop trying to access the site and now have access through Gate A.
- The bus timetable and bus frequency has improved from year one. More services to and from Ocean Shores, Brunswick Heads and Mullumbimby and Byron Bay. Do people still have to queue for a bus? Well yes but wait times have improved substantially. Go to any major event in Australia and at some stage you will find yourself in a queue, whether it is for the public transport to get you out of there, or the line up to the toilet facilities. At this stage I would also like to point out that there is criticism from some people in Ocean Shores that there is no bus service along Balemo Drive to and from North Byron Parklands. Mass transport just can't cater to every street of every location – and in this instance, it is no different to the passengers dropped at the Suffolk Park BP Service Station that then need to walk from that point. It also need to be acknowledged that in countering that particular criticism, there are also people that make contact with us trying to have buses operate on different routes away from their residence.
-
- The internal traffic management has improved considerably over the time, (and at this stage I would like to add that 2017 was the best it has ever been) but before everyone thinks we hold no criticism for Parklands, this is an area that does need further ongoing improvement. Better staging for buses at peak times and further minimised interaction with cars would speed up the transport task to make it more effective in getting patrons off site.

The Future.

- I can not honestly tell you today how our performance will rate as a public transport provider at the next festival, but I can say that we will be trying to make the experience as positive as possible. From a business viewpoint, I am definitely standing here today in support of North Byron Parklands and the festivals that are held there. Most of the staff we employ are engaged on a casual basis and voluntarily put their hands up to assist us in

providing services for festivals. These events give our business and staff the opportunity to receive a good income boost for what are otherwise quiet times of year. We also note the significant fiscal flow on to other businesses and residents of the Byron Shire. The ongoing success of Blanch's and BVC is tied to the ongoing success of all festivals in the Byron Shire, including those held at the North Byron Parklands Site.