

# Chapter 15

## Contesting ‘Sustainability’ in Infrastructure Planning: The Debate of the Public Interest in Brisbane’s Boggo Road Busway Development

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### ABSTRACT

*Sustainable infrastructure demands that declared principles of sustainability are enacted in the processes of its implementation. However, a problem arises if the concept of sustainability is not thoroughly scrutinized in the planning process. The public interest could be undermined when the rhetoric of sustainability is used to substantiate a proposed plan. This chapter analyses the manifestation of sustainable development in the Boggo Road Busway Plan in Brisbane, Australia against the sustainability agenda set in the South East Queensland Regional and Transport Plans. Although the construction of the Busway was intended to improve public transport access in the region, its implementation drew significant environmental concerns. Local community groups contested the ‘sustainability’ concept deployed in Queensland’s infrastructure planning. Their challenges resulted in important concessions in the delivery of the Busway plan. This case demonstrates that principles of sustainable infrastructure should be measurable and that local communities be better informed in order to fulfill the public interest in regional planning.*

### INTRODUCTION

Since its first appearance in The United Nations’ Brundtland Report in 1987 (United Nations, 1987),

sustainable development has become an essential doctrine in regional and urban planning, both in developed and developing countries. The concept is now applied to the protection of the environment, the conservation of heritage, infrastructure development, economic development, tourism

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and the promotion of social equity. Yet, many acknowledge that its ambitious vision has scarcely been achieved. There are three main reasons for sustainable development policy failure. Firstly, the concept of sustainable development has been built on internally conflicting and competing ideas from its outset (Beder, 1994). This inconsistency tends to be exposed when sustainable development policy is implemented. Secondly, its policy implementation process has too often been beset by the lack of accountability and transparency, as well as by ill-judgment. Finally, and most importantly, the predispositions of those who have the power to influence policy outcomes are of great importance in shaping an idea of 'sustainability' in plan-making. These flaws have prevented sustainable development policy from being successfully implemented.

This chapter discusses why planning policy which aims to achieve sustainable development often fails, and how this failure occurs. The focus of the analysis in this chapter is infrastructure planning which has long-term impacts on sustainable development in regions. Because of this impact, infrastructure development needs to be carefully considered and thoroughly examined before its implementation. The Boggo Road Busway development plan in Brisbane, Australia is a very good case to investigate an actual 'sustainability' concept in infrastructure planning. The Busway will be part of Brisbane's public transport network connecting the city centre and suburbs. Brisbane is the fastest growing region in Australia; therefore, sustainable infrastructure development is crucial to underpin Brisbane's future – both for economic investment and human settlement.

Although the South East Queensland Regional Plan (SEQ-RP) has declared its commitment to sustainable development (Queensland Government, 2005), the Boggo Road Busway development plan encountered fierce protests from local communities who challenged the sustainability of the proposed Busway plan. To investigate why the government and communities could not agree

about the proposed plan, the chapter first analyses the concept of sustainable development from its origins to its subsequent development. The discussion is followed by the close examination of the ideologies of engineers and planners who have powerful influence on policy outcomes of sustainable development. Then, the analysis will move to the examination of the sustainability discourse deployed in SEQ-RP and the Busway plan against the sustainability concept claimed by the local communities. In the following sections, the chapter details the Busway's planning and consultation process as well as its outcomes. The final section of this chapter discusses problems in implementing sustainable development policy based on the case study of the Boggo Road Busway Plan. In conclusion, the chapter explores the theories of sustainable development and implications of this case study for future infrastructure planning.

## **The Origins and Progress of Sustainable Development**

In 1987, the UN's World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED: The Brundtland Commission) generated the concept of sustainable development, explaining new approaches to economic development in developing countries. Its novelty lies in the statement that, for the sake of future generations, economic development should not compromise the quality of environment and social equity (United Nations, 1987). The concept was further developed as a global principle in planning and development at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992 (The Earth Summit) to promote the protection of environment, social equity and the eradication of poverty. World leaders finally acknowledged that environmental degradation at a global level (such as climate change) is a threat to the survival of all humankind.

The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development is a global consensus that all member

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