



WHERE DO WE WANT TO BE?
COMMENTS ON THE RESIDENT FOCUS GROUPS
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BLUE MOUNTAINS CITY STRATEGY

SOME COMMENTS ON THE COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS

- Katoomba, Friday 2 November 2001. 9: 00 am and 1:00 pm
- Katoomba, Saturday 3 November 2001. 9:00 am and 4:00 pm
- Katoomba, Sunday 4 November 2001. 9:00 am
- Springwood, Sunday 4 November 2001. 1:00 pm

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1. Introduction

1.1 These workshops were held as part of the ongoing consultation process for the Blue Mountains City Strategy. In all, some fifteen workshops were planned, covering work with focus groups from each of the five urban/ rural regions of the Blue Mountains City. From each region a focus group was randomly selected to represent young people, people in family forming age groups, and 'empty nesters' together with 'seniors'.

1.2 The format of the workshops, techniques of recruitment together with any necessary follow-up to ensure attendance, and facilitation of the workshop process itself was developed by Illawarra Regional Information Services (IRIS) with significant input from Blue Mountains City Council. IRIS will be producing a detailed report on the methodology and content analysis of the workshops, so these matters will not form part of this report.

1.3 My assigned task in the workshops was to act in the role of 'listener'. I was not responsible for formal recording and content analysis of the discussions: these were tasks undertaken by IRIS. Rather, I was to sit in on the discussions in a reasonably inconspicuous way, make notes, and, in the penultimate phase of the workshop, to give participants feedback on the matters they discussed. This feedback was to be informed not only by my academic expertise but also by my long-standing association with the Blue Mountains as a resident and researcher. In particular, I was required to bring out any contradictions or paradoxes that might have arisen in the discussion as well as bringing into discussion information and ideas that came out of the earlier sessions at Wentworth Falls. It was also part of my brief to throw in ideas 'from left-field', so to speak, to provoke deeper exploration of issues under discussion. Nevertheless, it was not part of my duties to 'censor' ideas or to channel the discussion in particular pre-set directions. As a result of the discussions, and of my feedback, participants were invited in the final session to re-evaluate their own ideas in the light of the workshop discussion.

1.4 The comments in this report relate only to the sessions that I personally attended. As sessions were held simultaneously in different parts of the Mountains, I was only scheduled to participate in seven of the planned fifteen workshops. Ms Nuala Bigland, of the Council's staff, undertook the role of 'Listener' at the remaining sessions. Ms Rosemary Dillon, of Council's staff, attended parts of several of these parallel sessions to ensure reasonable consistency in the procedures adopted at all the workshops.

1.5 Because the planned workshop for Young people of Blackheath and The Mounts coincided with the main events of the Blackheath Rhododendron festival on November 3, only three young people were able to attend the session. It was mutually agreed with these young people and the session organisers that this session should therefore be postponed to a later date. This report therefore deals with only six of the workshop sessions.

1.6 The comments in the following sections are not meant to be a verbatim report and analysis of the proceedings of the workshops: that information will be provided in the

IRIS report. Rather, they consist of ideas that arose from the workshops together with some commentary on those ideas from my professional perspective. They are not intended as either a refinement of, or a filter upon, the workshops, but simply as additional information for Council's staff to consider in the complex task of reviewing the whole public participation process.

1.7 I have chosen to present my comments with the ideas from participant groups in each age category aggregated. Thus seniors, family-formers, and young people are treated separately, but in most cases I do not specify the geographical areas concerned. However, where there are important ideas and comments specific to geographical area (such as comments on rail service frequency beyond Katoomba, which affects Blackheath and 'The Mounts' people) these are mentioned.

1.8 Each of the workshops were conducted following the same protocol. After a brief 'breaking the ice' session, participants were invited to share their vision of the future with the rest of the workshop. Then followed a discussion session in which ideas were gathered on each of five categories : environment, people, employment, transport and lifestyle. Allowance was also made for discussion of 'wild card' ideas. After a short refreshment break I fed back ideas which I had gathered from the discussion. At the conclusion participants were asked on any ways in which their vision for the future had been changed by their participation in the workshop.

2. Workshops for seniors (Katoomba and Blackheath/ Mounts)

2.1 *Introduction.* These comments relate to two sessions held on Friday 2 November for people in ‘senior’ age groups and those whose children had left home. Both sessions were well attended. The discussion was lively. There was plenty of disagreement but this was conducted in good spirit, and in many cases participants reported that aspects of the discussion had induced them to change their minds about issues.

2.2 *Ice breaker.* The ice breaker, where participants were asked why they chose to live in the Blue Mountains, was in fact one of the most revealing parts of the workshop. While the environment was very important to the seniors, the sense and spirit of community that people experienced in the Blue Mountains was, if anything, an even more important factor in why they chose to live in the City. This was the case with both the Katoomba and Blackheath/ Mounts residents.

2.3 *Sharing visions and brainstorming discussions.* These were very lively and penetrating sessions. While there was enough disagreement in discussion to bring out important conflicts and paradoxes, there was also a spirit of tolerance and a willingness by participants to explore the merits of opposing points of view and move away from previously held positions as the discussion progressed. The following comments broadly cover the way that important issues were brought out and discussed by the groups:

- There was general agreement that the groups did not want to see a city that was, in their words ‘overdeveloped’. Notwithstanding this, there was also recognition that it would be difficult, if not impossible, to halt growth of population, and even if it were possible it would not necessarily be a good thing for the city. There was, nevertheless, unanimous agreement on the idea of population growth occurring only within ecologically sustainable levels. When it was pointed out that the supply of land for traditional subdivision and cottage development would soon be exhausted at current uptake rates, the groups recognised that the need for accommodating population increase, as well as employment opportunities, would necessitate changes in housing styles.
- There was pretty general agreement, however, that the group would not like to see the types of flats and housing currently characteristic of ‘medium density’ housing development in the suburbs of Sydney. While there was therefore some tolerance of the idea of different forms of housing, it came with the proviso that such housing would have to satisfy very strict urban design criteria.
- Extremely important in the discussion of both groups was that the towns and villages would have to retain their existing sense of community and individuality, notwithstanding growth of population. The comment “we do not want the Blue Mountains to become ‘just another suburb’”, was commonly voiced. The groups recognised the paradox involved in accepting (modest) levels of population growth while retaining a sense of community and

individuality in the respective towns and villages. They also acknowledged that retention of these qualities did not necessarily mean that the villages and towns had to remain just the way they were without any apparent change. Clearly again what they were calling for was application of clear policies and guidelines for appropriate development, which specific type of development was suitable for which specific locality, and also strictly observed processes of development control.

- A corollary of the maintenance of village character is the paradox of exotic trees and other plants. Some of the Mountains towns have developed a strongly individual appearance and character from the planting of exotic trees and cool-climate gardens using northern hemisphere plants. Nevertheless many of the plants used, and even considered by many to have some form of ‘heritage’ status, are in fact highly aggressive in neighbouring bushland and in that setting can be considered as a noxious weed. How can this paradox be resolved? There were wide-ranging points of view in the community. Some environmental activists maintain that any plant not indigenous to the Blue Mountains is a weed. There is an equally extreme view by some gardeners that their cool-climate plantings represent an aesthetic and social ‘improvement’ over the bushland that they replaced.
- The groups also discussed the possibility of using more efficiently the housing stock that is already in the Blue Mountains. Several participants pointed out that many houses and flats are owned by city people, who only occasionally use them. Was there any way of encouraging this empty housing stock to be used continuously and thus accommodate population increase without the need for further development?
- The groups recognised, in fact, the inherent paradox involved in the imperatives to ensure protection of the environment and continuation of an attractive, vibrant and progressive urban lifestyle. It was generally conceded that protection of the environment and remediation of environmental damage already caused by development was the ‘bottom line’: that social and economic improvement could not be bought at the expense of the environment. However, there was considerable discussion on ways and means of achieving sustainable development that achieved this desirable objective. The role of waste minimisation was important.
- Out of this discussion an interesting slogan involving words beginning with RE evolved. These grew in number as they were presented to subsequent workshops. This might be a useful promotional device for advocacy of ecologically sustainable development in the Blue Mountains:
 - REcognise environmental priority,
 - REfrain from unnecessary consumption,
 - REduce necessary consumption and waste,
 - RE-use things instead of discarding,
 - REpair goods rather than discarding them,
 - REcycle what cannot be re-used or repaired
 - REsist the blandishments of modern advertising that encourages poor environmental practices.

- One suggestion was for the development of wind farms as a non-fossil energy source. While it was recognised that these can be visually intrusive, and therefore their location would have to be very carefully considered, the frequency of strong winds, especially in the Upper Mountains would appear to make the area especially suitable for such power generation.
- The groups very clearly felt that the railway could be better used and discussed possible changes that would encourage such use. The Blackheath/ Mounts group mentioned the relatively poor frequency of services beyond Katoomba. The discussion did recognise, however, the necessity for encouraging use to justify higher frequency of service. This was a ‘chicken and the egg’ sort of problem in that the rail authorities maintained that frequency improvement would follow greater use while the community maintained that greater frequency would encourage use. The Olympic experience, where frequency of service was greatly increased and there was a corresponding increase in usage, was cited by the groups.
- One of the Katoomba group had had a potentially dangerous fall when trying to step across a large gap between the train and the platform at Katoomba Station (by coincidence I was an eyewitness to the incident). This generated considerable discussion on ways of resolving this problem. An outcome of that discussion was that I undertook to write to the CityRail authorities requesting the incorporation of retracting ramps at the doors of trains. A copy of that letter is included in Appendix A.
- One of the more interesting changes in the views of the groups was in the way they regarded the Great Western Highway. Practically all had regarded the proposal to widen the Highway throughout the Blue Mountains as both necessary and as a *fait accompli*. It was pointed out, in the feedback session, that highway widening could bring major adverse consequences as well as benefits. Such consequences might threaten other important matters such as the protection of individuality of the character of towns and villages, or improvement in rail services. Most members of both groups were prepared to see a broad review of the advantages and disadvantages of current highway proposals as a necessary part of the City Strategy.
- Surprisingly, the Katoomba group did not even mention the importance of planning and design to minimise the impact of bushfires on the community. This was, however, a lively topic of discussion by the Blackheath/ Mounts group. It is worthwhile noting that 24 years have now elapsed since the last major bushfire disaster in the Blue Mountains. Those were the 1977 central Mountains fires which caused one fatality and burned more than fifty houses: the 1994 Winmalee fires, in comparison, destroyed about 9 houses and did not cause any fatalities within the Blue Mountains. This long span of time means that few residents of the Blue Mountains in 2001 have personally experienced a really disastrous fire, and therefore do not have fire mitigation among their personal priorities. Once the issue was raised, however, its importance was recognised.

2.4 *Revisiting the vision.* In this session participants, after some time for due consideration, revisited their initial vision for the City and reported on any changes in their thinking as a result of the workshop discussion. While about half of the participants reported that their vision was substantially unchanged, there were about as many who had changed their view in one way or another. The following points summarise some of the more significant final points to emerge from the workshop:

- There was greater tolerance of some degree of population growth, provided that such growth could be managed sustainably, than was apparent in the original vision statements.
- The groups recognised that sustainable lifestyles might mean trying to induce considerable changes in consumption habits. This would be a challenge to many of the assumptions that the broader community makes about consumer demand and economic growth. In other words a focus on *quality* of lifestyle might be very different from the more conventional approach which measures human welfare in terms of GNP/ capita, and is more accurately referred to as *quantity* of life.
- The groups saw the possibility of the Blue Mountains being developed and promoted as an example to the world for sustainable management of urban development in sensitive environments. They saw the Mountains as a possible centre of excellence in environmental education.
- Encouragement of alternative energy such as solar and wind power was discussed, including the possibility of mandating new housing to incorporate solar energy use by enforcement of appropriate development control regulations.
- There was considerable support for medium density housing in the right locations and of good design quality.
- There was a very strong consensus on the need for better quality of urban design and for stronger regulation of urban design.
- There was a very strong emphasis on maintaining the quality and character of individual towns and villages, but this did not amount to an imperative for no change whatsoever.
- The groups strongly favoured efforts to make the railway service better used, including greater service frequency and greater accessibility to stations. They also discussed to concomitant need for efficient feeder bus services to rail, possibly using smaller vehicles operating more frequently.
- There was concern about the highway and its impact on the community. While there was initial consensus on the necessity of the highway widening works the discussion, in the case of both groups introduced doubts about the current programme. The Blackheath group, in particular, called for a reappraisal of highway alternatives. Even possibilities such as a route through the national park, or a major tunnel were discussed as means of relieving the Blue Mountains urban communities of the burden of highway through traffic. When it became apparent that most of the traffic was in fact generated by the Blue Mountains communities themselves this concern was broadened to discussing

alternatives such as traffic demand management and using rail to take up excess demand.

- The groups felt that commercial enterprises in the Blue Mountains could present themselves more attractively: the area has not got a good reputation for quality of service.
- There was considerable consensus in the groups on the need for a strong focus on cultural, sporting and spiritual aspects of the community, including demand for a cultural centre.
- One particularly powerful statement that came from the Blackheath group was the need for younger people's needs to drive the development agenda. This included the idea that we need to get away from the idea that "we like things just as they are". Diversity is essential for vitality in the community. Nevertheless, the groups made the point that future residents will be attracted to the Blue Mountains for exactly the same reasons as present residents were attracted — the quality of both environment and community.
- The groups also saw the need for the vision informing the city strategy to be practical and achievable. For this reason, by the end of the workshop they were less enthusiastic about scenarios that called for a halt to population growth in the area.

3. Workshops for people in the family forming age groups

3.1 *Introduction.* These comments relate to two sessions held on Saturday 3rd November, and Sunday morning 4th November. While in both sessions the workshop groups were small — three and five people respectively — they were nevertheless particularly lively and valuable. A notable characteristic of both groups was the broad outlook of members of the groups. They were concerned not only with the needs of their particular cohort but also the needs of the young and elderly people in the community. This probably reflects the role of the ‘family formers’ not only in nurturing the young but also in caring for elderly relatives. In this respect I believe that Council can put considerable weight on the ideas presented by these groups.

3.2 *Icebreaker.* The natural environment and the sense of community again were the important reasons for these people to live in the Blue Mountains. The Blackheath group felt that their community was ‘dying a bit’ but had the potential to be revitalised, so they were not maintaining the proposition that, ‘things are fine just the way they are’. The village atmosphere of the Blue Mountains towns was important to the Katoomba group.

3.3 *Sharing the vision and brainstorming session.* Broadly the visions of group members focussed more on the urban and cultural issues than on the natural environment *per se*. Nevertheless, the environment was always in the background as the reason why the quality of the urban areas had to be maintained and improved, and protection of the escarpment and ridgelines was explicitly wanted. Individual character of villages and towns featured in the responses of both groups. Nevertheless there was recognition that improvement was possible and indeed desirable over what currently exists. Enhancement of village character was needed in conjunction with provision of better shopping, cultural and youth facilities. Both groups were seeking a community that was not elitist and that had sufficient population to support alternative ways of looking at life and community, as well as a vibrant night life that helped to attract tourists to stay overnight. A strong case was made to resist pressure to remove exotic trees from the urban areas (further discussed below). Affordable housing was important for the groups but with the proviso that it must not compromise the quality of the urban environment. The groups recognised the need to have diversity in housing choices so that residents would not be forced out by high cost or inaccessibility of housing. There was tolerance of the idea of medium density housing, appropriately located and regulated. The following matters were discussed specifically in the following brainstorming sessions:

- Protection of the natural environment was a clear imperative. In the management of the catchment areas for the Sydney Metropolitan Area, the groups saw the Blue Mountains as having a custodial responsibility for others. Protection of the environment also represented a broader custodial responsibility on behalf of the national and international community, particularly as the Blue Mountains now has World Heritage listing. The groups recognised that what we do now will result in the City the community

of 2025 will inherit. People then will, we hope, be grateful to us that we cleaned up the rivers and protected the bushland.

- The Blackheath Group raised the issue of bushfires, whereas the Katoomba group did not raise the issue spontaneously. It was recognised in discussion that planning regulations to mitigate bushfire would not only result in more costly development, but would also require a higher degree of community involvement in the process, even down to the individual street level, than currently exists. However the cost was necessary and the degree of community involvement could even enhance the sense of community and village atmosphere that was so important to residents. The basic incompatibility of prescribed burning patterns for environmental conservation as against those for property protection was pointed out to the groups. It was recognised that different fire management regimes would have to apply to different areas, depending upon whether environmental conservation or property protection was the priority in that area.
- Both groups spontaneously raised the dilemma of management of exotic trees and garden plants. Many species introduced to the Blue Mountains have become much loved and indeed contribute to the built heritage of the area and its village character. The plane trees in Katoomba, Leura and Blackheath are highly valued by residents, as are mature stands of radiata pine in those towns. However it was recognised that plants which are appropriate in urban areas can be a menace in the natural bushland. There are obvious species, such as gorse, broome or morning glory that should not be planted in gardens because of risk of spreading to bushland. There are seemingly innocuous species such as the London planes which are appropriate in the towns and present little risk to the bush, but there are also a lot of species in a 'grey area'. These latter have long been planted in the Mountains, and are widely cultivated in gardens and as street landscaping. Nevertheless their likely impact on bushland in the long term is not well understood. Radiata pine is one notable species within this category.
- Waste management will be critical in maintaining the quality of creeks, rivers and wetlands. The limited life of current tip facilities is recognised and the groups discussed ways of reducing waste and prolonging the life of these. The groups contributed one or two more REs to our growing list (REspect the environment and REhabilitate it). Reduction of waste depends heavily on lifestyle choice and there was not strong disagreement in the groups with the proposition that the privilege of living in the Blue Mountains demands a cost in adoption of a less consumerist lifestyle. Given such a less materialistic community the area can sustain higher levels of population and employment. Given a highly consumerist society then the area can only sustain a much lower level of population — perhaps less even than the current population.
- The groups did not react positively to development scenarios that favoured curtailment of population growth in the Blue Mountains, though they did agree that any growth should be within the sustainable limits of the environment. They felt that unless population reached reasonable thresholds the community would not develop the vitality and choice in employment and

lifestyle choice to maintain reasonable prospects for younger people. Unless population continued to grow at a reasonable rate, more of the services the area required (such as medical services) would be provided outside the region.

- Will young people be able to remain in the Blue Mountains? What education facilities would be required to retain a reasonable proportion of young people or to attract young people to replace those who leave? Is a university campus in the Blue Mountains feasible? What do we have to put in place now to ensure that young people are respected and happy in the community in 2025? How can the specific needs of young people be met, not only in the Blue Mountains as a whole, but also in particular communities such as Blackheath? These were the sorts of questions that the groups constantly came back to in the discussion.
- When it was suggested that the available supply of land for traditional forms of subdivision development will be exhausted within 10 to 15 years at present rates of development, the groups did not accept that this in itself will curtail population growth. They were open to the possibility of greater emphasis on redevelopment and in particular to demand for housing being met by a variety of housing forms. However, this tolerance of different housing styles and forms could only be sustained with strict emphasis on good design and effective urban design regulations and controls.
- Discussion on population and its composition flowed into discussion on employment. There was fairly general agreement that local employment generation needed a vibrant economy, demand for a wider range of skills to provide a variety of jobs, and in particular the sorts of jobs to attract highly qualified people to the Mountains. All this presupposes an active and most likely a growing population. While the groups were unanimous in their opinion that heavy industry was not appropriate in the Blue Mountains, they saw the need for an expanding economy and a reputation for business efficiency and service. The rather conservative and complacent local business culture and its poor reputation for service was mentioned several times.
- Some members of both groups saw in the management of the environment a fruitful source of both highly skilled and less skilled employment. The world is moving into an era when environmental expertise will be highly valued. The Blue Mountains is an ideal place to generate such expertise. Research and teaching in the environmental field, possibly as part of a tertiary education institution in the region, could be what makes the Blue Mountains a centre of world renown and therefore an important destination for international visitors in the field. It would not be difficult for a tertiary institution, particularly one that teaches extra-murally (i.e. by distance education), to 'grow' a campus in the Blue Mountains from modest beginnings, provided there were sufficient student numbers offering.
- There was also seen to be potential for expansion of home-based industry and employment. Such employment is mostly compatible with the strict environmental constraints required in the Blue Mountains.
- The groups were both insistent that in future more of the passenger and goods transport task across the Mountains be met by the rail system. The Great

Western Highway posed a problem. While the growth in traffic demand and the bad accident record of the highway appeared to make the proposed widening works imperative, those works in turn would contribute towards the bifurcation of existing towns and villages, reducing access for many residents to town centres. In addition a wider highway would directly compete with the railway for commuter journeys and goods transport, and would encourage more car-dependence in the community. The answer to these problems might lie in *demand management* (perhaps by leaving strategic two-lane sections of the highway in place so that there is an upper limit on capacity). Excess capacity could then be directed to the rail system. Clearly the Great Western Highway presents decision makers with a fairly unpalatable ‘Hobson’s choice’: any decision, whether to expand the capacity of the road or not, will have some pretty unpalatable outcomes. Is it possible to ‘tame’ or ‘calm’ the highway?

- When it came to discussion of lifestyle — ‘living and playing in the Blue Mountains’ — retention of the village atmosphere seemed to be particularly important to both groups. Other ideas advanced included: respect for the urban-bushland edge; sealing of roads and appropriate tree planting in urban areas; multi-use of sports ovals and community facilities; a desire for facilities for entertainment, sport and culture to encourage a vibrant night-life, and a more interacting community.
- Integration of all people, and especially the young and the old, into community life seemed to be particularly important to the groups. There was a specific fear that the process of gentrification — where the community might be dominated by the requirements of a wealthy middle aged group — might erode the sense of community already felt within the Blue Mountains. Both groups made the point that the young and the elderly seem to be marginalised in current Blue Mountains communities.
- Lifestyle was also seen as important to the key objective of protecting the environment from further degradation and remediating damage already done to it. Attitudes towards creation and disposal of waste were discussed. The role of cars and private transport in environmental impact was particularly important. If the population chose a very car-dependent and consumerist lifestyle then the population that the Blue Mountains urban communities could sustain would be quite low — perhaps even lower than the population already existing. If the people, on the other hand, accepted constraints on their right to own and use cars — if they walked and used public transport for most journeys — then the sustainable population for the area could be considerably higher. Housing possibilities, such as those based on permacultural principles and even car-free housing (designed in key locations for residents preferring not to own and run a car) might encourage walking for short journeys, cycling for trips of up to 10 kilometres, and public transport for other journeys. Increasing patronage of public transport services will lead to increased service frequency and reliability.

3.4 *Revisiting our vision for the future.* When the visions and issues were revisited after discussion the groups had important and valid ideas to contribute:

- Preventing environmental and social problems in the first place is much less costly than trying to fix them up after they have occurred. The City Strategy should help all members of the community as well as the Council, to make wise decisions.
- The conundrum of continued highway development, that ‘improvement’ might actually lead to further problems, was recognised. Furthermore it was also recognised that there was no simple solution to this conundrum which would fix the problems for all time. The problems would still press on the community into the future as the demand for vehicular travel outstripped the means to satisfy it. A four-lane highway *might* be OK, according to the groups, but certainly not six lanes.
- There might be potential for a ‘kibbutz’ style youth project focussed on lifestyle education and emphasis on community living.
- A University facility specialising in environmental research and education could be a significant attractor of the right sort of employment and social activity to the Blue Mountains.
- Tourist industry should be contributing more to the community. This means more emphasis on promoting overnight and longer visitation. The day-trip industry contributes little to the local economy but requires visitor facilities and parking provided by the community.
- Any developmental solution should aim to bring all age groups, and particularly elderly and young people, together in the community rather than segregating them. car-dependent communities tend also to be segregated communities, so planning should be towards making the community less car-dependent.

4. Workshops for young people

4.1 *Introduction.* It was perhaps unfortunate that the workshops for young people were held at weekends. In the case of the Blackheath group the meeting time coincided with the main events of the Rhododendron festival and the group agreed to postpone the session to a more suitable time. Ten young people attended the Saturday afternoon meeting in Katoomba and contributed to a very lively and thought-provoking session. While only three attended the Sunday afternoon workshop at Springwood, those who did attend contributed many valuable ideas in a most interesting and forthright session.

4.2 *Icebreaker.* It was quickly realised that the icebreaker question was not necessarily applicable to young people since most of them grew up in the Mountains or moved there because their parents made the decision to move. They therefore did not *choose* to live in the Blue Mountains. The question, ‘What do you like about living in the Blue Mountains’, had to be followed by, ‘What do you **not** like about living in the Mountains’, for a valid perspective. However, it was not long before the responses to the second question emerged spontaneously. By and large the young people enjoyed the quiet laid-back lifestyle, the bush, and the feeling of safety in the community. What they did not like was the intolerant attitude of many older residents towards young people, and the fact that there was so little for young people to do. There was little work (‘Not everyone wants to be a waitress’) and little in the way of entertainment. They cited a concrete example of both problems combined when a rock band festival was successfully promoted for Katoomba, but it was cancelled by the Council at short notice.

4.3 *Sharing the vision and brainstorming session.*

While young people discussed many of the same issues that other groups had covered, their perspective was often different and refreshing. Surprisingly, they tended to be more conservative in their opinions, with less tolerance for population growth and for different styles of housing to accommodate the needs of different groups. The idea that, ‘if you want to live in medium density housing or flats you should choose to live in the city’, was not infrequently put forward and this perhaps reflected a preference for the style of housing they were used to. Nevertheless, it is the young people who are preeminently those for whom the City Strategy is being prepared, as members of their generation will be the ‘family formers’ of 2025. Their views, therefore, must carry some weight.

- Young people were particularly concerned about the environment. One suggested an appropriate citizen committee to monitor changes to the environment and to liaise with bodies such as the national Parks and Wildlife Service. They discussed the issues of waste and litter and added REact (against environmental degradation) to our growing list of RE words and slogans.
- The groups recognised the essential paradox behind the arguments for and against growth: That while population growth will be likely to stimulate economic activity and employment it will also, *prima facie*, contribute to environmental degradation. A halt to population growth was virtually spelling out a halt to the

- possibility of providing the services needed to provide a living and entertainment to young people in the Mountains.
- Neither of the groups of young people raised the issue of bushfire protection spontaneously. This is perhaps not surprising for few if any of them would have experienced major bushfire disasters first hand and memories of such disasters also fade readily from the consciousness of older members of the community. Thus it is unlikely that vivid recollections of previous bushfire events would have been passed on to them by older residents.
 - Being mostly public transport users, young people were only too conscious of the deficiencies in service and frequency currently provided. They referred to the Olympic experience and how much better things were during that fortnight when train frequency was doubled and services continued through the night. It was easier for them to access the City, and especially for the entertainment.
 - Socially there were many concerns: There were few places for young people to simply 'hang out' and they frequently experienced hostility from older people and were being 'moved on' by the police simply because they were congregating in favourite places (such as the top end of Katoomba Street). They also felt unfairly treated by Council's precipitate cancelling of the 'Prankfest' band festival and cited this as an example of older people ignoring their legitimate needs. They were, perhaps surprisingly, opposed to the development of franchised fast-food businesses (Such as McDonalds, Kentucky Fried Chicken etc...), seeing these as inappropriate to the special character of the Blue Mountains.
 - In common with the other groups, however, they recognised the importance of retaining the character and identity of the individual towns and villages in the Blue Mountains. They realised, albeit with some reluctance, that it might be possible for villages to grow and change somewhat without losing the essential qualities of their character.
 - Employment was, understandably, a big issue for young people. They did not want just any job but good quality careers, and most recognised that they would be forced to move away from the Mountains to pursue their goals. They mostly did feel, however, that it would be nice to be able to move back when they had families. The suggestion of environmental management as a driver of employment, especially in conjunction with a tertiary education facility was very warmly received.
 - The groups also reacted very positively to suggestions for the revitalisation of Lurline Street Katoomba as a special tourist and entertainment precinct with a 'swinging' night life for all sections of society.

4.4 *Revisiting our vision for the future.* Interestingly, the areas where young people had revised their vision related to matters of direct social interest to young people. They were less insistent on environmental issues, though these were not entirely forgotten and were probably important as the essential bottom line of Blue Mountains living.

- The groups felt that business enterprises attracted to the Mountains should be those which were compatible with protection of the environment. Suggestions included promotion of the area to self-funded retirees, establishment of a

tertiary education and research campus focused on environmental research and management, and environmentally-based tourism.

- Population growth was not seen to be an environmental problem in itself so much as the consumer attitudes that came with it. perhaps the Blue Mountains could accommodate more population but only if it were less consumerist.
- It was particularly important that the city of 2025 provide more activities for young people, especially those under the age of 18. The idea of the 'Lurline Street drag, as an activity and entertainment precinct for all ages appealed very much to these groups and Kingsford Smith and Catalina Park were also specifically mentioned as potential activity centres. The resentment at the cancellation of 'Prankfest' also resurfaced in this session.
- The need for places, public places, where young people could 'hang out' and be tolerated by older members of the community was emphasised. The Katoomba group specifically cited the difficulties that they experienced when they were simply congregating in Katoomba Street.
- The groups recognised the need for balance between the needs of young people and others, and this is possibly why the suggestion of a tourist/entertainment precinct based on Lurline Street appealed to them.
- Better quality of public transport and issues of safety on public transport were important for these young people who are mostly dependent upon public transport.

5. Common issues emerging from the workshops.

5.1 All of the six workshops I attended produced a very lively discussion and very valuable ideas. The record of those discussions and formal presentation of the statistics of the ideas will be contained in the IRIS report. These comments are a more impressionistic overview of the main themes that emerged from the workshops.

5.2 It is important to recognise that protection of the environment was indeed the main concern of all groups, implicitly for the young people and quite explicitly for the other groups. This is the irreducible 'bottom line' upon which all plans for development of the Blue Mountains must be based.

5.3 All groups, possibly except the younger people, were accepting of the need for some degree of population growth to allow for a vibrant community with ample economic activity and employment. Nevertheless this had to be consistent with the principle that the natural environment should not be further degraded by such growth, and indeed remediation of existing environmental damage occasioned by development should be part of the City Strategy.

5.4 All groups, with perhaps the young people less so, were tolerant of some variety in housing to accommodate future development and growth. They recognised the necessity, in view of the proximate exhaustion of 'green fields' land supplies, for a higher proportion of future housing demand being met from medium density types and perhaps (less strongly tolerated!) flats. However, the over-riding condition on this tolerance was the implementation of strict and appropriate urban design regulations to ensure that the individual quality of towns and villages was maintained, and that the environment was not degraded by development.

5.5 While some of the workshop groups were small, all contributed very valuable ideas on the future of the City and there was considerable consistency, in broad directions if not in detail, expressed by the groups. The discussions of priorities seem to also be consistent with the findings of the IRIS community survey. Put together they perhaps point to desire for a City of 2025:

- with villages and towns still retaining strong individual identities,
- with the bushland surrounding villages and in the interstices between them valued protected and nurtured by the community,
- with a strong awareness of the ecology of bushfires and a preparedness to live with fire hazard without undue disturbance to the bushland fringes of urban areas,
- with communities that are much more environmentally aware than those at present, and who are less focussed on material consumption,
- with perhaps a somewhat higher level of population and economic activity than at 2001,
- with an economy based on sustainable tourism and knowledge industries springing from the sciences and arts of environmental management,
- with a thriving arts, education and entertainment culture, and

- where the people conserve materials and energy in the way they live, and
- where the people walk and cycle more, patronise public transport more and use cars less.

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