



## Brisbane City Vitality Report Event

- DATE & TIME:** Friday 01 November, 12:00pm – 2:30pm
- VENUE:** QUT, Gardens Point
- MODERATOR:** **Ross Elliott**, Regional General Manager, APP
- PANEL:** **Steven Dickson**, Director Property and Facilities Division, University of Queensland  
**Chris McCluskey**, General Manager Development Services, ISPT  
**Hayden Hughes**, General Manager, Sofitel Brisbane Central  
**Kerriane Meulman**, Owner, Economist, Urban Economics  
**Malcolm Middleton**, Queensland Government Architect
- WELCOME AND CLOSING REMARKS:** **Gavan Ranger**, Strategic Director Arkhefield

At the Committee for Brisbane's City Vitality Report Event on Friday 01 November, Committee for Brisbane Members were welcomed by Gavan Ranger. Following this, Ross Elliott (moderator) introduced all panel members and speakers – Steve Dickson, Chris McCluskey, Hayden Hughes, Kerriane Muelman and Malcolm Middleton.

The focus of the panel discussion was the Committee for Brisbane's recently released 'Inner City Dashboard 2019' which was available for all guests and has been designed to measure the vitality of the inner parts of Brisbane and to delve deeper into city vitality issues, beyond the office market. Broadly, the panel discussion focussed on city access, the tourism economy and the influence of big box retail in inner city areas.

Opening the discussion, Ross Elliott noted that the event has been designed to discuss a cross-section of interests for the city. Ross acknowledged the contribution of Matt Miller in coming up with this approach and remarked that there are better ways to measure the city than just looking at the office market. Brisbane's CBD is the biggest mixed-use precinct in the city and it makes the city hum. With over 190,000 residents and 90,000 employees, it is important to recognise that much of the city centre is made up of the whole economy. As a city, it is an exciting time with big projects on the agenda including Brisbane Live, Dexus' Waterfront Project, Queens Wharf and others.

### The importance of city access

To start the panel discussion, Ross posed the first question, relating to the importance of 'city access', noting that there has been recent talk of city tolls and pressures on car parking.

Chris McCluskey was the first to respond, stating that if you want to achieve a genuine mixed use precinct, the imposition of constraints would limit the Brisbane CBD, at this point in time. Chris suggested that we should be focusing on opening the doors as well as placing an increased focus on investment in new uses and the consolidation of those that are existing.

Malcolm Middleton added to the discussion by stating that we are in an interesting time for Brisbane. Not only does the city need to be accessible, but it also needs to be cross-accessible. We need to think more broadly than just the CBD; Spring Hill, West End etc are all part of the inner city, with real potential



to contribute to city vitality. In considering cars and parking, there is a built form limit to how many cars can fit in the city and we need to be supportive of the mixed use precinct.

Malcolm observed that Brisbane doesn't link itself very well. As an example, he noted that the QUT Gardens Point Campus, where we are today, wouldn't be here in its current form without the presence of the Goodwill Bridge. At the time it was proposed, the Goodwill Bridge was attacked by the media, however everyone now admires it as a key component of inner city infrastructure. Malcolm affirmed that we need to let the patterns of the city expand to support vitality.

Kerriane Meulman joined the panel discussion by raising the findings of the most recent RACQ Parking Report, specifically that the Brisbane CBD has some of the most expensive parking in the country. Without doubt, this has a significant impact on business and the economy. In order to continue to contribute to vitality, businesses need vibrant and viable spaces.

Following this, Steven Dickson joined the discussion and identified that public access is a major issue for tertiary institutions, not just in Brisbane but globally. In looking at how the University of Queensland operates; transport is one of the largest issues that UQ deals with; the investment that UQ has placed in bus services has been significant. This investment has been focused on trying to encourage people out of cars and to encourage a travel behaviour change. Overall, we are well served in Brisbane and need to continue to build upon this strong foundation.

In addition to Steven's comments, Malcolm Middleton asserted that it is important to consider Brisbane Metro carefully. He suggested that it is a complex issue, but no one argues against public transport projects. Malcolm suggested that investment is needed to improve public realm outcomes and that infrastructure cannot be used as a 'bandaid approach.' As a city, we need good thinking on what we want to leave behind from a 'space' and 'place' perspective. Quite often, transport infrastructure projects don't envisage 'place' outcomes e.g. the original proposal for the Victoria Bridge didn't have bus lanes. Malcolm urged everyone to think about the end outcome, at the start of these projects/discussions.

Chris McCluskey re-joined the dialogue to note that in terms of investment from ISPT's perspective, Sydney is first, Melbourne is second and Brisbane is third. In terms of public transport infrastructure projects, the Sydney Metro has caused a lot of disharmony and a number of property rights have been affected. In contrast, Melbourne does things well. The engagement with the City Authority and Transport is generally done well.

### **The contribution of the tourism economy**

Ross moved the panel discussion from the importance of city access to cover the contribution of the tourism economy. Ross noted that when you compare Brisbane and the Gold Coast, Brisbane actually has a higher number of hotel stays than the Gold Coast but yet the Gold Coast has a stronger tourism reputation.

Hayden Hughes responded to this topic first and said that the Sofitel as an 'end user' is very reactive from a corporate response perspective. Brisbane is a gateway city to a significant number of tourist locations in South East Queensland and beyond. We should focus more on developing Brisbane, as we can do better in expressing our tourism elements, for example Tangalooma, Lone Pine Sanctuary. We should also engage more with the River, although Hayden noted that there are lots of discussions going on about this. As a city, we should support smaller river businesses as the experience around the city is everything. From a hotel perspective, it is pleasing to see the Valley starting to pick up, this is particularly noticeable following the opening of the Fortitude Valley Music Hall. We need to continue to develop these tourist experiences.

Kerriane Meulman said it has been good to see a significant growth in new hotel rooms. Not only do we have new hotels, but occupancy rates are increasing as well. The new hotel stock has promoted an improved level of competition and choice for consumers/tourists.



Hayden Hughes re-joined the discussion at this point and identified that the Sofitel Hotel is very established and has an existing niche in the market. He also noted that new hotels are good for Brisbane but it is difficult for existing hotels in the shorter term. The hotel market has shifted since the peaks of the mining boom and has come through a period of being a little bit stale. With new approaches being 'guest focused' guests have benefited in having access to new stock, brands and variety. The negative side of this situation is that moving room rates down is good for the short-term but puts pressure on profit in the longer-term. As a sector, hotels need to prove the offer to the market. This isn't just focused on hotel rooms, as it can include function and conference spaces, large meeting rooms etc.

Ross Elliott questioned whether Brisbane has enough large spaces and Hayden suggested that with Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre, Royal International Convention Centre and Howard Smith Wharves, that yes, we do. Hayden noted that the best way to market yourself (as a hotel) is to market the city and that we need to work together to do this. Our approach is now more mature and enables competition.

Malcolm suggested that as a tourist city, we should be thinking about progressive investment in the public realm. He noted that we people look back to the 80s that they often think of Expo 88 but 1988 was also the year when the investment decision was made in the Bicentennial Bikeway (from Toowong into the City). This piece of public infrastructure facilitates access to river front land, and it provides an interesting journey and setting for residents and tourists alike. The commitment to build the Bicentennial Bikeway was only the beginning. We need to progressively recognise the need to keep building and improving the city.

Steve Dickson suggested that the de-centralisation of UQ's campus facilities is responsive to the latest thinking on how a university campus should operate. The knowledge economy is very important and that we should not underestimate the contribution of this part of the economy to Brisbane. Currently, Brisbane has 130,000 international students coming to Brisbane. Steve also noted that UQ has recently undertaken a Financial Impact Assessment which has recognised that UQ is worth \$9 billion to the economy and that universities across Queensland is worth \$25 billion.

Ross Elliott questioned why there is an increased shift in universities to CBD areas. Hayden referenced the University of Western Sydney's new Parramatta Campus (vertical campus). The modernisation of universities and facilities aligns with CBD campus buildings. Most students are working, and universities need to diversify the offer. It is not just UQ doing this (looking to announce an increased CBD presence in the coming year), Griffith University is also looking to increase their CBD offer in Brisbane.

As a city, we need to invest back into future students. We need to remember that transport, quality student accommodation and safety is very important for international students. As a city, Brisbane does this pretty well. We need to ensure that we deliver differently to Sydney or Melbourne. Hayden noted that 3 international students is worth \$1 million to the Brisbane economy.

Ross asked Hayden about how Brisbane can be globally competitive for international students. Hayden responded by stated that Australia has benefited in the reduction of visas available for students to go to the US and that we also need to be careful about political statements regarding immigration as international students are sensitive to this.

### **Big box retail in our city**

Ross turned the panel discussion to the big box retail spaces in the city. We have these large spaces being fixed up and alternative uses drawing people into the CBD. As an example, Myer and David Jones have not adapted well and will most likely continue to struggle. It was noted that in Perth there is a large Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) investment in the CBD. There is opportunity in the Myer Centre for the retail sector to consolidate in the next ten years. There are also volumetric opportunities for the Myer Centre.



Kerriane Meulman informed the discussion noting that there is a global change in big box retail, for example New York. We are also observing change from traditional retail spaces to WeWork office spaces. We need to all remember that retail isn't the only drawcard for our city centre.

**Audience question – has Brisbane planned well enough for the electric scooter?**

Malcolm responded, noting that this is an interesting point. His view is that we are well positioned but that Brisbane really is a car based city. We need the courage to connect the city with further green bridges. The temporal change of existing infrastructure is a good way to experience with emerging forms of transport technology.

The discussion then ventured towards the idea of drone taxis. Malcolm stated that this is extremely interesting but incredibly difficult to regulate and that in his view, it will be a long time before we see these sorts of transport options in our city.

**Summary**

To conclude the event, Ross requested that each panellist summarise their view on city vitality in sixty seconds.

**Steve Dickson:**

- Excited about the future, Brisbane has a massive future with the big investments coming our way through Queens Wharf, the 2032 Olympics Bid – we are positioning Brisbane as a destinational city;
- The population growth that we are experiencing is beneficial as is our knowledge economy status;
- We need to work hard to differentiate ourselves as the destination of choice.

**Chris McCluskey:**

- Brisbane has turned a corner and the next epoch will be marked by the next big projects coming our way;
- It is clear that the institutions are investing in Brisbane and that there is capital to deploy in Brisbane in the coming years.

**Kerriane Meulman:**

- The metrics indicate that in the next 12-18 months we will be seeing significant change in the city. We are seeing an increase in the diversification of what the city offers, and we need to continue to support health, knowledge and retail as we continue to grow.

**Hayden:**

- Hotels in Brisbane have been forced to work harder in recent times, however the new economic drivers (e.g. the Second Airport Runway, Queens Wharf, Cross River Rail) are all assisting in future growth;
- Hotels with an 80% occupancy is health and this is what we are seeing;
- We should push for more corporate headquarters in Brisbane to further assist without growth.

**Malcolm Middleton:**

- As we continue, we need to examine City Governance. Brisbane is a city with a good strong Council with significant State Government land holdings and investment. We should not continue to have skirmishes on we will lose opportunities for new infrastructure and investment in the city.