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Mass media and mass transit: a newspaper's campaign on public transport planning in Sydney

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Abstract

The media has an important role in reporting transport news, but it can also engage in transport advocacy and shape transport policy and planning. In 2009, *The Sydney Morning Herald* newspaper launched an independent inquiry to develop a long term public transport plan for Sydney, with 500 page preliminary and final reports released in 2010 after community consultation including public meetings and submissions. Most members of the Inquiry team, transport professionals, donated their time to the Inquiry. The paper examines the campaign by *The Sydney Morning Herald* to develop a long term public transport plan for Sydney, independent of the NSW state government. It reviews the who, what, how, and why of the campaign. It analyses the impact and influence of the campaign in terms of the contribution to content in the newspaper and impact on government transport policy. The campaign is positioned in the context of civic engagement and social capital, as well as policy transfer. The paper finds that the *Herald* did not make as full a use of its sponsored Inquiry as it could have, suggesting dual reasons for the campaign of both content generation and readership, and civic engagement and social capital building.

1. Introduction

Many stakeholders use the media in their lobbying and advocacy efforts, such as disseminating surveys and research reports through media, and the media itself engages in political advocacy, such as editorials to influence voters' decisions in elections. But there appear to be few, if any, examples where a media outlet conducts extensive community-based research to build up knowledge in an area rather than focusing on reporting and dissemination. There are also relatively few examples of media actively engaged in transport advocacy and gap-filling in the government activities of this particular policy area.

This paper examines a case where a government-created policy weakness elicited a response from a leading civic institution to engage the community and activate part of the policy network in the area of transport policy. The unique element of this case is the role that a newspaper, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, has played in the debate about public transport in Sydney. The *Herald* sponsored a high-level transport consultation, engaging widely with stakeholders and policy experts, then issued a comprehensive and extensively distributed long term plan for public transport in Sydney. The paper finds that the *Herald* did not make as full a use of its own study as it could have. It is argued that one reason for this is that the exercise was not solely about readership building and opinion-leading but also about civic engagement and social capital building. The *Herald* Inquiry's process was as important as its product, the process being integral to building a policy network that might not yield immediate policy results (and indeed was limited in doing so by government dysfunction) but which might yield civic and policy returns in future when conditions were more favourable to implementation.

The paper is structured as follows: section 2 reviews the literature, section 3 describes the strategic context for the *Herald's* Inquiry, section 4 describes the Inquiry, section 5 assesses the impact and influence of the Inquiry, and section 6 discusses conclusions and implications for civic engagement, social capital and policy transfer.

2. Literature review

2.1 Civic engagement, social capital and policy transfer

How do policy plans and ideas get formed, disseminated, sorted through and ultimately implemented? What institutions play roles in these various stages and how do they play those roles? These are the basic questions of the policy transfer literature which is a foundation of the social capital, policy network and civic engagement concepts employed in analysing the *Herald*'s Inquiry.

The term 'policy transfer' is a relatively fluid term. Policy transfer is defined in an authoritative source as "the process by which knowledge of policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in one political system (past or present) is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in another political system" (Dolowitz 2000, p. 3; Dolowitz and Marsh 2000, p. 5). Dolowitz and Marsh (1996, p. 344) note that the term can also be referred to as "emulation and lesson drawing".

'Transfer' suggests the movement of something from one place, person or institution to another. Transfer of policy contains a complex set of ends and means. Policy transfer initially focused on government-to-government networks but has broadened out to consider the role of NGOs, of international institutions, of think-tanks, and of advocacy and professional groups amongst others, formulating and spreading policies and their adoption (Shipan and Volden 2008). Wolman and Page (2002, p. 477) have conceptualised policy transfer "as occurring through a communications and information framework" with a "focus on information networks that include producers, senders, and facilitators of information, as well as recipients".

One ultimate outcome of a policy network and policy transfer is the creation of 'social capital'. Bourdieu (1986, p. 248) defined the concept as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition". The 'returns' to social capital might be private (i.e. limited to the members of a particular network) but they also might result in a social 'externality' in which the overall society gains in some way from a capital base which was invested in by only some members of that society.

An influential successor to Bordieu's social capital conception is provided by Robert Putnam who defines the term as referring to 'features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit' (Putnam 1997, p. 31). Putnam's social capital theory operates in a framework where individual human behaviour is rational but where there can be group or network effects that are more than the sum of the parts of individual decisions and actions in isolation (Putnam 1995, 2000). Like other forms of capital, social capital has long term payoffs, and investments in social capital stock need to be at levels sufficient to ensure that society gets the requisite returns.

Two critical questions are (1) what leads to accumulation and decumulation of social capital? And (2) how does social capital work to generate social returns? There seem to be two basic inputs to the building of social capital. First, individuals need to be adequately educated and motivated, and to be able to participate usefully in the networks that underlie social capital. Second, the existence and nature of these networks is critical to ensuring that social capital is generated and maintained (Putnam 2000, Halpern 2001).

As for how social capital generates returns, social trust is said to be a critical outcome. Social engagement is another critical outcome (Woolcock 2001, Cote and Healy 2001). Together these two elements serve to improve economic efficiency through the lowering of

transactions costs (informal trust replaces more costly formal enforcement mechanisms); increase public accountability through a more informed and active electorate; and increase the amount of positive collective activity (Putnam 2000). Some point out a negative 'sanction' dynamic as well, i.e. that the positive social norms generated by social capital can be informally enforced by the underlying social networks (Halpern 2001).

2.2 Role of media

Interestingly, amongst all the various actors and networks that the literatures cited above consider, the media figures very little. The implicit premise of much of the social capital and policy transfer literature seems to be that the principals engaged in the relevant networks are too sophisticated to see media coverage as having much utility for their higher-level purposes. The media is implicitly treated as a background conduit, to be utilised by network members, but not as interested and involved parties themselves. To borrow from Wolman and Page's (2002) schema, the media are mostly 'facilitators' of data flow not 'producers', 'senders' or 'recipients'.

Media institutions play a role in policy transfer and formulation. Whether intentional or not, the media influences public opinion on a wide range of issues by what is published, what is not, and the priority given to different issues. Vigar et al. (2011) reported on selling sustainable mobility through the reporting of the Manchester Transport Innovation Fund bid in UK media while Salomon and Singer (2011) reviewed the role of transportation cartoons in social experiences. In California, the *Los Angeles Times* developed a simple internet game, the LA Times California Budget Balancer game (LA Times 2010), to encourage the community to explore how they would balance the state's budget by cutting expenditure and raising revenue. Bray et al. (2011) mention media implicitly when they refer to government's attempt to communicate its transport ideas to the public. Wolman and Page (2002) have a theory focused on how that communication works, an area in which media institutions are central. But the case considered here goes beyond media as a transmitter or receiver of information. This is also associated with the idea of the media needing to position themselves as pillars of society, campaigning on behalf of the common good.

We argue that *The Sydney Morning Herald*'s chosen form of engagement in Sydney's transport debate is interesting because a media outlet actively invested in engaging the community including a policy network of professionals to produce a new piece of 'knowledge' (the Inquiry Report itself) rather than rely on a more traditional output of media reporting.

3. Strategic context for the Inquiry: government policy vacuum

In a recent review of Australian policy-making in transport, Bray et al. (2011, p. 528) argue that government takes a central role. Sometimes this role is active, sometimes more passive, but in all cases the State is in the centre of policy formulation, transfer and ultimately implementation. Transport planning is an archetypal government function. However, in Sydney, NSW in the past decade there has been significant transport policy thinking, formulation and dissemination occurring outside the government.

3.1 Non-government role in transport planning

The Sydney Morning Herald-sponsored transport plan was not the first non-government sector involvement in strategic transport planning for Sydney. The *Herald's* Inquiry built on previous work by the NRMA, Warren Centre and 10,000 Friends for Greater Sydney, and also on its own earlier Campaign for Sydney in 2005 (SMH 2005).

In 1995, the NRMA, a not-for-profit service association for motorists with over 2 million members, launched the Clean Air 2000 campaign to reduce air pollution from transport. It set up an Advisory Taskforce, and produced reports in 1998 in the lead up to the 1999 state election.

In 1999, the Warren Centre for Advanced Engineering at the University of Sydney initiated a sustainable transport project which was a not-for-profit collaboration involving over 200 transport professionals in Sydney over several years. The dissemination of the project's set of comprehensive Sustainable Transport for Sustainable Cities reports (Warren Centre 2002) was somewhat limited as it was not easily available electronically. The Warren Centre's project evolved into the 10,000 Friends for Greater Sydney not-for-profit group which has largely focused on transport issues, involving some of the transport professionals who worked on the Sustainable Transport project. 10,000 Friends released a Sydney Integrated Transport Strategy (10,000 Friends 2007) and have held public forums to focus on regional transport issues, with reports from these forums and other policy documents publicly available (10,000 Friends 2011). Other transport plans include the 30 year transport plan for Sydney developed by academic Dr Garry Glazebrook (Glazebrook 2009).

This wellspring of community activity suggests an active non-State policy network. But it also indicates a weakness or vacuum created by government inconsistency and lassitude in transport policy. Transport is an activity central to most parts of the wider society. Lack of action and coherent thinking on policy in transport may have encouraged various constituencies to act in lieu of government, culminating in the *Herald* Inquiry.

3.2 Immediate context for the Inquiry

The broader strategic context for the Inquiry in 2009 included the poor transport delivery record of the NSW state government, as well as the views of other stakeholders including the federal government, local government and the community towards transport planning in NSW. The NSW government does have a transport policy with a stated commitment to public transport. There was much government policy initiative, with transport plans released, but poor follow-through on delivery. This situation created the impetus for the *Herald* to step in and bring together elements of the community in a policy network to put forward a new transport policy and plan.

NSW Government

Despite a series of strategic planning documents which supported integrated transport and land use planning and supported public transport with nominated projects (NSW Government 2005, 2006a, 2006b, 2010a, 2010b), the NSW Government's delivery of transport projects had been disrupted by discontinuity in governance. Daniels (2011) outlined the impact of discontinuity in governance, caused by changes in NSW Premiers, Ministers for Transport and bureaucratic structures, on transport planning and delivery particularly on the North West Rail Link.

In June 2009, Premier Rees announced "a new super-agency NSW Transport and Infrastructure would take control of all transport and roads coordination, policy and planning functions" (Rees 2009). One of the three immediate priorities was cited as developing a Transport Blueprint that integrates urban growth and transport delivery. Less than six months later, Nathan Rees was replaced as NSW Premier by Kristina Keneally on 4 December 2009. *The Sydney Metropolitan Herald* reported in great detail on the comprehensive Transport Blueprint Premier Rees had been due to release the day before his overthrow (West 2009a, 2009b). Premier Keneally's replacement for the Transport Blueprint, the *Metropolitan Transport Plan: Connecting the City of Cities* (NSW Government 2010b), was released in February 2010, two weeks after the Inquiry's Preliminary Report.

Australian federal government

In the May 2009 federal budget when the Federal Government announced its first round of Nation Building funding for public transport infrastructure, NSW received only $91 million for continuing planning of the West Metro from the CBD to Parramatta. The Federal Government has been critical of NSW transport planning, with Saulwick and Besser (2011) reporting that

freedom-of-information sourced documents show that since 2008, NSW has failed to meet Infrastructure Australia's planning standards time and again.

Local government

The City of Sydney Council had been negotiating for many years with the NSW government over transport plans for the city. The Council's strategic plan *Sustainable Sydney 2030* released in 2008 (City of Sydney 2008) had a vision of a city with connected and accessible public transport. The Council supported light rail through the city as a solution to congestion and growth problems, but light rail was not in NSW government plans. In 2009, the Mayor appealed directly to the Prime Minister for federal funding for light rail.

Community and other stakeholders

In the lead-up to and during the *Herald's* Inquiry, there was growing dissatisfaction amongst community, professional and industry stakeholders over the NSW government's transport planning discontinuity (Daniels 2011). The community was disillusioned with the state government in general, evident from opinion polls on voting intentions, and on transport in particular, as shown in the poor expectations by NSW residents for transport in the quarterly ITLS-Interfleet Transport Opinion Survey (ITLS 2010). Professional associations such as the Planning Institute of Australia were critical of the government's transport plans for metro rail (PIA 2008). The Property Council of Australia's representative publicly resigned from the (defunct) Transport Blueprint Reference Panel in March 2010 when the replacement Metropolitan Transport Plan fell a long way short of what the industry was seeking (Property Council 2010).

4. The Herald Inquiry

The Inquiry is described in terms of what, why, who, and how.

4.1 What

On 22 August 2009, *The Sydney Morning Herald* announced that it was establishing its own Independent Public Inquiry, chaired by Mr Ron Christie AM and assisted by independent experts, to create the Long Term Public Transport Plan for Sydney. The public terms of reference stated that "The Independent Public Inquiry will create a *Long Term Public Transport Plan for Sydney* after receiving public submissions", and that "The plan is to be designed to assist both the public and future governments to make informed decisions about priorities for transport investment" (Independent Inquiry 2010a).

The aim was to inform decisions by future governments on the priorities over the next 30 years (SMH 2009). It was intended a preliminary plan would be released in December 2009 for comment and a final report in autumn 2010. The Inquiry had its own website www.transportpublicinquiry.com.au, separate from the Herald website, with reference material including a 30 year public transport plan for Sydney (Glazebrook 2009), the Christie Long-term Strategic Plan for Rail (DIPNR et al. 2003), and the NSW Government's Metropolitan Strategy (NSW Government 2005).

The Inquiry itself noted that "In Australia public inquiries without any government sponsorship or control are conducted only in very unusual circumstances. More specifically, it is rare, indeed, for an inquiry into public transport in Sydney to be able to carry out its investigations and reach its conclusions with complete freedom and independence" (Independent Inquiry 2010b, p. 1).

The Inquiry's Preliminary Report was publicly released on 13 February 2010, and the Final Report was released on 31 May 2010.

4.2 Why

The motivation of the *Herald* to establish and sponsor the Inquiry includes stated and unstated reasons. In its page 1 announcement of the Inquiry, the *Herald* indicated that the reasons for the Inquiry were de-politicising the planning process ("produce a 30 year plan that allows this city to make the right decisions no matter who is in power"), improving transport planning ("the lack of a vision costs Sydney dearly"), and seeking community involvement ("we encourage your participation. We know that together we can find a solution that puts Sydney back on track") (Fray 2009, p. 1). The Editorial (SMH 2009, p. 10) on the day of the Inquiry launch said "The Rees Government has demonstrated that on transport questions, it cannot plan for all citizens of the state equally. So ordinary citizens must take up the task".

The most obvious reason for the Inquiry may have been to boost or retain circulation and readership by meeting readers' needs and interest in transport, and demonstrating intellectual interest in its namesake city. The newspaper industry is under pressure, with declining readership and increasing competition in content and advertising from new forms of media. The Editor-in-Chief of *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Peter Fray, has commented that "The *Herald* is the marketplace of ideas – about Sydney, about the shape of our lives, about the future. Read, think and tell us your ideas" (Fray 2011, p. 2). But as the content analysis below shows, the *Herald's* own reporting does not seem to be strongly consistent with this as a primary motivation.

4.3 Who

The Independent Inquiry was chaired by Ron Christie AM, a former roads authority executive and former NSW Coordinator-General of Rail and author of the Christie long term strategic plan for rail. He was assisted by a team of nine transport professionals many of whom have had a long involvement in Sydney's transport as academics, public servants and/or consultants. The members listed in the report in alphabetical order were: Dick Day (formerly of RailCorp), Innes Ferguson (formerly of Transport for London), Garry Glazebrook (University of Technology Sydney), Alex Gooding (consultant), Roderick Simpson (consultant), Sandy Thomas (consultant), Jarrett Walker (consultant), Jim Wells (formerly of RailCorp) and a person who chose to remain anonymous. The Inquiry (2010b, p. iv) noted that "most members of this Inquiry team generously donated their time". *Herald* journalist Andrew West said at a pre-election public forum that the "Inquiry would have cost several millions of dollars if the work had been paid for" (West 10 March 2011). The Inquiry also commissioned reports from Allen Consulting Group on funding advice and from the University of Technology Sydney Centre of the Study of Choice on market research into community willingness to pay for transport.

4.4 How

The Inquiry was conducted in several stages and used five main approaches to obtain community inputs (Inquiry 2010b, p. 55):

1. The Inquiry made a call for public submissions by 8 October 2009. The Inquiry received 490 formal submissions prior to the release of the Preliminary Report.
2. Immediately after the call for public submissions, the Inquiry held a series of public meetings around the metropolitan area in Castle Hill, Liverpool, Parramatta, Kogarah, Kensington, North Ryde, Dee Why and central Sydney (Inquiry 2010b, p. 2).
3. Follow-up meetings were held with individuals and groups making submissions, particularly to discuss proposals of special interest.
4. Extensive public opinion research was conducted by independent consultants commissioned by the Inquiry to guide the Inquiry's identification of the most important options for improvements and the community's willingness to pay for these improvements.

5. A Preliminary Report was released on 13 February 2010 accompanied by reporting in the *Herald*, and briefings of individuals and stakeholder groups. Public submissions were sought on the Preliminary Report to prepare the Final Report.

The Inquiry had an aura of a "government inquiry", being similar in having terms of reference, seeking submissions and producing a draft report. The Inquiry created its own logo, which closely resembled the NSW Government's stylised logo of a waratah, and used the logo in advertisements in *The Sydney Morning Herald* to attract submissions, similar to government calls for consultation on inquiries and reviews. But as a non-government process, the Inquiry had no formal powers.

4.5 The Inquiry's Themes and Recommendations

The Inquiry identified nine themes which consistently emerged in the submissions, in the market research and through the Inquiry team, which were described as (Inquiry 2010b, p. 21):

• We have tried the "do nothing" option for public transport. It has failed.
• We need a complete public transport network plan and an agency that can deliver it.
• A three-legged stool: urban form, pricing and transport.
• Public transport, not just roads.
• The need for a single, seamless public transport network.
• Cost-effectiveness.
• Short-term urgency and continuous improvement.
• The need for long-term commitment, now.
• Leadership, transparency and consultation for the hard choices that will have to be made.

The 26 individual recommendations were summarised to be about the three key themes of planning, funding and governance (Inquiry 2010a, 2010b).

5. Impact and influence of the Inquiry

Was the *Herald* aiming to create new social capital with the hope that it would generate its own returns? Did the *Herald* fear that promoting its report in a traditional way might somehow sully the returns that new social capital might generate? Or was the *Herald* trying to achieve multiple aims, i.e. generating content and readership on the one hand but also seeking to establish a network that would live beyond the release of the final report, ready to contribute once government institutions were ready to act and implement again.

We argue that the *Herald* took a lead in creating a policy network and created a policy plan based on that network. To come to this conclusion, we assess the impact and influence of the Inquiry in two ways using publicly available sources: impact on the *Herald* including contribution to content in the *Herald*, and external impact on government transport planning.

5.1 Assessing the Herald's motivation: Contribution to Herald content

The contribution of the Inquiry to content in *The Sydney Morning Herald* is assessed through contribution to total items, total words, page 1 articles, editorials and other content, and through the timing of content relative to the announcement in August 2009, the Preliminary Report in February 2010, the Final Report in May 2010, and after the Final Report. *The Sydney Morning Herald* online archive of articles (http://newsstore.smh.com.au/apps/newsSearch.ac) was searched to identify and extract all items about the Inquiry by using the search terms "Christie", "transportpublicinquiry" (which was the Inquiry's website address), "independent inquiry" and "transport", and checking all articles containing "public transport" as a final check. Items included articles, editorials, letters to the Editor and opinion pieces in the *Herald* and its sister publication the *Sun-Herald*. For each item, the information extracted included the full text, author, word count, page number and newspaper (*Sydney Morning Herald* or *Sun-Herald*). The search was restricted to the

News and Features section of the paper. The time period for the search was the month the Inquiry was announced to after the NSW state election on 26 March 2011 (1 August 2009 to 31 March 2011), a total of 20 months.

Timing of content in Herald

Table 1 shows that, over 20 months, the Inquiry generated a total of 111 items made up of 61 articles with over 33,000 total words including 10 page 1 articles in the *Herald*, as well as eight editorials and 37 letters to the Editor, and six items in the sister publication *The Sun-Herald*. The *Herald* wrote articles about the Inquiry itself, reported on the community meetings, reported on submissions to the Inquiry, and also linked the Inquiry to other articles on transport in Sydney by including Inquiry details and forum details at the end of articles about transport.

Table 1 Number of items and total words referring to the Inquiry in The Sydney Morning Herald and Sun-Herald (August 2009-March 2011)

	Launch (Aug 2009)	Process (Sept 2009-Jan 2010)	Draft Report (Feb 2010)	After Draft (Mar-28 May 2010)	Final Report (31 May-Jun 2010)	After Final (Jul 2010-Mar 2011)	Total (Aug 2009–Mar 2011)
Item	No. (Words)	No. (Words)	No. (Words)	No. (Words)	No. (Words)	No. (Words)	No. (Words)
Article	11 (8,273)	19 (8,336)	21 (12,092)	1 (172)	6 (3,222)	3 (1,320)	61 (33,415)
Editorial	1 (740)	1 (424)	4 (2,398)	1 (824)	1 (429)		8 (4,815)
Letter	11 (1,227)	4 449)	21 (2,196)			1 (155)	37 (4,027)
Opinion	1 (333)		3 (1,678)			1 (1,455)	5 (3,466)
Total items	**24 (10,573)**	**24 (9,209)**	**49 (18,364)**	**2 (996)**	**7 (3,651)**	**5 (2,930)**	**111 (45,723)**

Notes: Items in News and Features section.

In terms of timing, the Inquiry's major contribution to *Herald* content was at the time of the release of the Preliminary Report in February 2010 with 49 items totalling 18,364 words. Of the six items in the *Sun-Herald*, four occurred with the Preliminary Report release. The second largest batch of items came during the initial launch of the Inquiry itself in August 2009 (24 items totalling 10,573 words). This timing is consistent with the traditional role of a newspaper to generate content and report and disseminate that content, although in this case the paper itself was 'creating' the news through the Inquiry. The equal second largest batch of items was after the launch and before the Preliminary Report when the Inquiry process was reported on in September and October 2009. At 24 items including 19 articles and 9,209 words, nearly as much space was devoted to the process as to the initial launch.

More surprising is the paucity of coverage of the Final Report itself. The release in May 2010 generated only seven items (totalling 3,651 words), in late May 2010 and the first two weeks of June and there have been only five items in the nine months since then which included the lead-up to the NSW state election in March 2011.

Over half the articles (38 out of 61) were by Andrew West, the Transport Reporter as primary author, with another three articles as second author, although 12 different *Herald* journalists wrote about the Inquiry.

The content analysis is broad and not definitive but suggests that the Inquiry and the readership and content associated with it was not the only aim of the *Herald* in producing it. Why was there no large spike in coverage once the Final Report was issued? And why was there no spate of follow-up reporting, even negative reporting, showing how government was failing to take up these community-based ideas?

To illustrate the potential opportunities for the *Herald* to include the Inquiry in its content, Table 2 summarises items on "transport", "public transport", and about the Inquiry each month in the *Herald*. *The Sun-Herald* is excluded due to the low number of articles about the Inquiry. Table 2 shows that, of the 721 articles in the News and Features section containing the words "public transport" over 20 months, only 15% referred to the *Herald's* Inquiry. Even this overstates the references to the Inquiry as each letter to the Editor on the Inquiry was counted individually in the Inquiry column in Table 2, but included as one item (if published under the same heading in the online archive) in the "public transport" column in Table 2. The high percentages in August 2009 and February 2010 are largely due to the letters the *Herald* chose to publish, as shown in Table 1. Many of the "public transport" articles in the *Herald* were about the themes of planning, governance and funding covered in the Inquiry including the metro rail project, federal government funding, and the development of the NSW government's Transport Blueprint. However, few of these articles referred to the Inquiry, despite the opportunity.

Once again, this analysis shows that the *Herald* was restrained in referring to its own Inquiry. There are limitations to this data analysis, as the notes to Table 2 explain, but the illustrative order of magnitude shows that even considering the *Herald's* broader public transport coverage, its own Inquiry did not dominate its columns in most cases. Content-driven readership gains were apparently not the only hoped for (and perhaps not even the primary) objective.

Table 2 Illustrative summary of items on transport, public transport and the Inquiry in The Sydney Morning Herald by month (August 2009-March 2011)

Month	Items containing "Transport"[1]	Items containing "Public transport"[2]	Items on Inquiry[3]	Inquiry items as % of "public transport" items
August 2009	98	41	23	56%
September 2009	114	51	20	39%
October 2009	109	34	3	9%
November 2009	87	26	1	4%
December 2009	128	36	0	0%
January 2010	88	25	0	0%
February 2010	148	75	45	60%
March 2010	96	29	1	3%
April 2010	86	23	0	0%
May 2010	101	30	5	17%
June 2010	91	28	2	7%
July 2010	94	32	0	0%
August 2010	88	33	1	3%
September 2010	107	37	0	0%
October 2010	68	29	0	0%
November 2010	94	26	0	0%
December 2010	88	34	0	0%
January 2011	60	23	1	4%
February 2011	133	46	1	2%
March 2011	166	63	2	3%
Total: Aug 2009-Mar 2011	**2,044**	**721**	**105**	**15%**

[1] Items containing "transport" includes articles about freight and transport internationally, and transport as a verb.
[2] Items containing "public transport" includes articles about public transport in other cities or countries. Articles about specific types of public transport (buses, light rail) may not include the phrase "public transport".
[3] As reported in Table 1 (excluding *The Sun-Herald*).

Inquiry extension: Hunter Independent Public Transport Study

The *Newcastle Herald*, also a Fairfax media publication, announced on 10 November 2010 that it was holding its own version of the Sydney Inquiry for the Hunter region. This suggests

that the media company thought the concept was valuable in achieving its objectives, and that sufficient local eminent transport professionals thought it would be a useful and valuable exercise to agree to serve on the Steering Committee and Advisory Panel. The Hunter Inquiry was similar to the Inquiry for Sydney in aim ("aimed at ending the politicised approach to planning"); the team with a Steering Committee and Advisory Panel of experts, including experts who worked on the Sydney Inquiry; and approach with public forums and public submission (Harris 2010). It published a discussion paper in November 2010 (Newcastle Herald 2010). The Hunter Inquiry's website was part of the *Newcastle Herald*'s site (http://www.theherald.com.au/specialfeature.aspx?id=4154), not separate as for Sydney.

Herald Transport Forum

The *Herald* built on its expertise in transport generated by the Inquiry. In the lead up to the NSW state election on 26 March 2011, the *Herald* organised, promoted and hosted a Transport Forum on 10 March 2011 at Epping with the Minister for Transport, Shadow Minister, Greens representative and three experts including a transport consultant who worked for the Inquiry. The Forum was hosted by *Herald* journalist Andrew West. The Forum generated a page 1 article the next day in the *Herald*.

5.2 External Impact: Transport planning

The impact of the *Herald's* Inquiry on transport planning in NSW is unclear due to discontinuity in governance in NSW and the short time since the Inquiry was completed. The impact of the Inquiry on policy transfer is better assessed over the long-term. When Kristina Keneally replaced Nathan Rees as NSW Premier on 4 December 2009, Premier Rees had been about to release his comprehensive Transport Blueprint the day before. The Transport Blueprint was discarded, and the new Premier began drafting her own transport plan. The *Herald* reported that Premier Keneally said of the Inquiry's Preliminary Report: "We read it with great interest and I will be asking both treasury and transport to evaluate the inquiry's plan and provide us with their views and feedback on it" (Hall and Moore, 15 February 2010, p. 1). The NSW Government released its own Metropolitan Transport Plan two weeks later on 21 February 2010 (NSW Government 2010b).

Contrasts between the Independent Inquiry and the Metropolitan Transport Plan are summarised in Table 3. A major difference is the comprehensiveness of the plans, with the Inquiry Report being for a longer time period and more detailed. In terms of public transport projects, the major difference between the plans is the priority of the North West Rail Link project. In terms of governance structures for transport planning, John Robertson became the new Minister for Transport in May 2010, and in June, announced a restructure of the transport department with NSW Transport and Infrastructure to become Transport NSW (Robertson 2010). The Minister said "the new agency Transport NSW will integrate the operation and planning of all modes of transport including trains, buses, ferries, cars and bicycles" (Robertson 2010). This was a response to increasing calls for integration from many stakeholders including the *Herald's* Inquiry, as well as a continuation of the integration started in June 2009 with Premier Rees' announcement of super-departments.

The impact of the Independent Inquiry on the (then) Opposition's transport plans is also unclear. In the lead-up to the state election in March 2011, the Opposition made the North West Rail Link and South West Rail Link its highest public transport priorities, before the Parramatta-Epping Rail Link. The (then) Opposition supported an integrated public transport agency. Following the election of the O'Farrell Liberal/National government on 26 March 2011, Transport NSW is being restructured as an integrated transport authority, Infrastructure NSW is being created to develop long-term plans and prioritise projects, and work on the North West Rail Link is progressing as a priority. The O'Farrell government has not yet expressed a clear view on funding for transport.

Table 3 Comparison of Independent Inquiry and NSW Government transport plans

Process	SMH Independent Inquiry: Long Term Public Transport Plan	NSW Government: Metropolitan Transport Plan
Date of release	13 February 2010 (preliminary report) 31 May 2010 (final report)	21 February 2010
Size	527 pages	45 pages
Timeframe	25 years	10 years
Team	Ron Christie, with (mostly) voluntary team of transport professionals	Led by Dept of Premier and Cabinet
Community	Extensive submissions Market research on Willingness to Pay	No evidence of consultation before release
Content		
Funding	New funding sources proposed	$50 billion fully-funded plan over 10 years
Governance	Proposal for new Transport for Sydney body	New integrated structure of Transport NSW announced in June 2010
Projects – heavy rail	Support for North West Rail Link Continue South West Rail Link Plan for Merrylands-Parramatta-Epping Rail	Western Sydney Express Line/City Relief Line before NWRL Complete NWRL in 2024
Projects – metro rail	Support only after heavy rail network complete	Cancelled CBD Metro project
Projects – light rail	Extension of light rail into CBD	Announced light rail extension to Dulwich Hill
Projects – buses	Network planning reforms	Growth buses including Metrobuses
Fares	Integrated and simplified fares system with no interchange penalty	Government announced MyZone fare reform in January/February 2010, for implementation in April 2010
Land use	Support for integrated transport and land use ("European" vs "East Asian" scenarios)	Support for integrated transport and land use

6. Conclusions

The Sydney Morning Herald's Independent Inquiry to produce a long term public transport plan for Sydney was a major effort that involved a complex and relatively long process of civic engagement. This paper argues that the Inquiry constitutes an example of policy-network and social capital building led by a major media institution. This appears to be a unique case, both in policy development generally and in transport planning and policy in particular.

Media advocacy in a policy arena is quite common both in terms of stakeholders (including government) using media to argue their case in the public eye and in terms of media institutions themselves attempting to influence policy by taking positions through editorials or public information campaigns. The *Herald* Inquiry could be seen in this light, especially since it built on earlier work in strategic transport planning by the non-government sector and this area has seen much public debate in Sydney. Additionally, newspapers rely on readership growth and content creation to attract that readership. Urban transport is certainly an issue of

great interest to the public and the *Herald* could be seen as using the issue to maintain or increase its circulation.

It is very likely that there was more than one motivation behind the Inquiry. But if the intent was simply to generate content, interest and sales, the process adopted for doing this, including getting reader submissions, holding numerous forums, doing community surveys, engaging experts, and issuing a preliminary report for comment and feedback, appears to be an inefficient and resource-intensive way of achieving that goal. It would have been faster, for example, to pay a consultant to prepare the report and then promote it, if the *Herald* editors only wanted transport planning and policy content to sell. This suggests that engaging the community and building a social network was an important desired outcome of *Herald* publishers.

Moreover the process itself seemed to be more the point at times than the actual product generated, the Preliminary and Final Reports. The *Herald* reported on the process, but after the Final Report was issued, its coverage of its own Inquiry fell off dramatically. In particular, the reporting which many newspapers engage in after sponsoring some kind of investigation, typically consisting of noting government failure to respond and 'keeping up the pressure' to prod government into action, was largely not engaged in once the final report was released. Perhaps, then, the Inquiry process was more about returns to a social capital invested in by the newspaper than generating saleable content.

The process engaged in by the *Herald* resembles less a standard press reporting campaign and more a government process, which suggests that the Inquiry was designed to fill a policy vacuum created by government failure to deliver in this area. Strategic public transport planning in Sydney, traditionally a State-centred policy network, was not functioning and the *Herald* appears to have re-engaged and re-mobilised at least part of that network to produce what such networks are supposed to produce: a social capital that generates policy returns.

One empirical indication that the policy vacuum was an important element is the *Herald's* own coverage of its own initiative. If the process was about generating content to fill newspaper space, the analysis conducted shows that it was a missed opportunity on their part. The *Herald* reported much less than it could have on either its process or product, something it would have pursued aggressively if the effort had just been about selling newspapers.

There are other questions not answerable by public sources such as whether the final Inquiry report fully reflected the inputs such as the public submissions generated by the process. It is not known how many of the written submissions were incorporated into the recommendations and how many were left out. It is also not clear what biases there might have been in the process – whether some key experts and stakeholders were not invited to participate, or chose not to participate, or how their inputs may have been filtered.

If this process was about social capital building and an associated policy transfer, as argued here, it will take a longer timeframe to evaluate its effectiveness. The change of government in NSW in March 2011 complicates interpretation of the impact on government policy due to discontinuity in governance. But discontinuity in governance and its impact on transport planning and implementation, even without a change in government, was the reason for initiating an independent process to produce a long term public transport plan for Sydney.

This preliminary, systematic view of the Inquiry, using the publicly available source of content in the *Herald*, illustrates a good example of how community institutions, in this case a newspaper *The Sydney Morning Herald*, can respond to blockages in policy institutions and networks and in the making of policy.

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