

## Report on Visits Made While Overseas – March/April 2000

*Margaret Shields*

### March 20/21 – London

My London appointments were arranged with the help of the UK High Commission in Wellington working **with** the Foreign Office in London. Throughout the two days I **had** an escort from the Foreign and Commonwealth Visitors' Branch, a charming and efficient woman called Felicity Hoare.

On my first day I had a series of appointments with a range of organisations loosely connected with local government. The first of these was perhaps the most valuable. It was with a fellow called Mark Barnett who is Head of Local Government Legislation Branch One at the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions. The UK is moving in much the same direction as we are in terms of reform of their legislation but appear to have a much harder job because of the size of the country and the nervousness of the Government. Their greatest difficulties lie with the tensions that exist with respect to differing views on the role and function of local government. The new legislation is given to providing wider discretion. They are wanting to move from a regime of delegated responsibility to one **characterised** by leadership and action. Clause 2 of the new local government bill (brought from the Lords on 13<sup>th</sup> March) is the first building block. It states;

“( 1) Every local authority is to have the power to anything which they consider is likely to achieve any one or more of the following objects –

- (a) the promotion or improvement of the economic well-being of their area,
- (b) the promotion or improvement of the social well-being of their area, and
- (c) the promotion or improvement of the environmental well-being of their area.
- (2) The power under subsection (1) may be exercised in relation to or for the benefit of –
  - (a) The whole or any part of a local authority's area, or
  - (b) All or any persons resident or present in a local authority's area.
- (3) In determining whether or how to exercise the power under subsection 1 a local authority must have regard to the effect which the proposed exercise of power would have on the achievement of sustainable development in the United Kingdom.
- (4) The power under subsection (1) includes power for a local authority to –
  - (a) incur expenditure,
  - (b) give financial assistance to any person,
  - (c) enter into arrangements or agreements with any person,
  - (d) co-operate with, or facilitate or co-ordinate the activities of, any person,
  - (e) exercise on behalf of any person any functions of that person, and
  - (f) provide staff, goods, services or accommodation to any person.
- (5) The power under subsection (1) includes power for a local authority to do anything in relation to, or for the benefit of, any person or area situated outside their area if they consider it likely to achieve any one or more of the objects in that subsection.
- (6) Nothing in subsection (4) or (5) affects the generality of the power under subsection (1).”

This is fundamental to the broad powers that are intending to be conferred. It is uncannily similar to what we are contemplating in the Local Government Act Review.

However it is clear that the British legislation is intended to be subordinate to existing restrictions in other statutes. This could create considerable **difficulties**.

The second building block is also very familiar (contained in clause 4) and provides for strategic planning and coordination as already provided for in our present Act. They are running into problems ensuring that this part of the Bill is not too prescriptive. It was interesting to learn that there is considerable resistance to the proposal (contained in "Modern Local Government: In Touch with the People") to pressure local government into having two level Councils consisting of an inner cabinet and the rest. (I will put copies of all the documents referred to above in the WRC library for those interested in the detail).

My next appointment was with a fellow called Ian Holmes – also from DETR but concerned only with highway maintenance. It wasn't particularly interesting although I was intrigued to learn that the Government has committed itself to reduced car usage. However this guy was almost totally cynical about this and had a very narrow focus.

Lunch was at Comey and Barrow Restaurant at 116 St. Martin's Lane and was very good. Of particular interest was Nick Sharman, Executive Director of the Islington Council and a member of the New Local Government Network – a sort of self-appointed ginger group formed by people who want to move rather faster than the LGA. Also present (and hosting the luncheon) were Mr Peter Carter, head of the North-East Asia and Pacific Division of the Foreign Office, Ms Sally Turner from DETR, Prof. Maurice Shutler who is (an Economics professor from LSE and surprisingly conservative), and Mr Alastair Totty, the NZ Desk Officer at the FO.

From the restaurant I was taken to London Transport to talk with Ms Clare Kavanagh who is Service Development Manager for London Transport Buses. In reality they have the same kinds of problems in letting contracts and keeping things competitive as we do (see papers). From there it was off to the British Road Federation where I met with the Director, Mr Richard Diment and two of his off-siders. It proved to be very interesting. Once again I was confronted with the reality that the UK is struggling with the same kind of problems as we are but on a much grander scale. They are very interested in getting into more road tolling (which I later found was the rule rather than the exception in much of Europe – at least as far as main highways are concerned). Initially they wanted to know how our **commercialisation** process was going and I had to tell them that this was definitely dead in the water.

The first appointment on day two was with the Borough of Southwark where we had discussions with, in order:

1. The Corporate Strategy Officer – Ms Mandy Skinner who told us about the new requirements to be a little more explicit about planning. In reality the Government is moving towards our sort of system of longer term planning. They are also moving into a system of having an inner "cabinet" to **scrutinise** all planning and policies which makes some sense when you have something like 60 councillors although there is some nervousness about how this will affect the democratic process. Certainly the Borough of Southwark is very cagey about the proposals.
2. While we were talking with Ms Skinner the Mayor, Mr Charles Cherrill arrived with his wife and joined in the conversation. Mayors in the UK, under the old system that is about to be changed to an elected system, currently have only a one year term

which might explain why he and his wife chose to wear their mayoral regalia in my honour. His greatest concern is to maintain the character of the area in the face of all the new development that is going on. In fact the whole area south of the river is being transformed into a highly desirable place to live. The Canary Wharf development is finally starting to pay dividends helped along by the vast sums of money that have been poured into the transport systems in the area. It is clear that access is almost everything.

3. The Head of Planning and Regeneration – Mr Savas Sivetidis; the Planning Policy and Research Officer – an Australian called Ingo Kunic and a New Zealander called Ross something from Takapuna. They gave us a full presentation on the “modernising agenda for Local Government” and how this would be affecting them. I have full printed notes on that.

Following this meeting Felicity Hoare and I went off to St Katherines Dock, a very pleasant area, where we had lunch before heading off to meet a fellow from the Docklands Light Rail. Mr Jim Gates is the Managing Director of Docklands Railway Management Limited. This is a separate organisation from Docklands Light Railway Ltd which simply owns the infrastructure on behalf of the Department of Transport and will eventually pass it on to the new Mayor of London. The Management company is an arm of SERCO and is responsible for the maintenance of the signalling etc as well as the operation of the system. Although it has only 30 kms of track in toto the system carries 100,000 passengers per week-day. There is absolutely no doubt that this system combined with the new Jubilee Line has been the single biggest factor in the renewal of the South Bank area – already having attracted two major banks and a number of supporting industries to the entertainment world. Mr Gates was also keen that I should spend time in Manchester visiting the Metrolink light rail service to see a system that is running on a former railway line. Unfortunately I did not have time to do this but Stuart and Ted might well find this a useful thing to do while in the UK.

It was time to head off for Westminster where I was to meet with the Chairman of the New Local Government Network, Lord Geoffrey Filkin, who turned out to be both charming and extremely well informed on the whole question of local government reform and the push towards “best value” etc.. (The requirement for “best value” and the details of how to go about achieving this are contained in the UK Local Government Act 1999).

The scene here has many parallels with NZ but the scale is immense and therefore there are many additional problems. I had thought, until I spoke with Geoffrey Filkin, that the New Local Government Network was simply a ginger group or think tank set up in opposition to the LGA. This proved to be only partly true. It encompasses a group that is much broader than simply local authorities (see m’ship list). It is very policy oriented and is committed to ensuring that policy is not controlled or held back by the most conservative authorities. Lord Filkin retains a healthy cynicism about “best value”. It is meant to be a system for contracting out service delivery when it is a better option than retaining it within the local authority. He admitted that decisions were still more frequently taken on the basis of ideology. He also seemed to think that the system whereby the best performing local authorities received extra funding from the government had not solved the problems of the most needy. There are nearly two hundred measures of efficiency! Geoffrey Filkin is yet another person that Stuart and Ted should meet up with.

### ***Tree- Planting in Israel***

During my time in Israel I managed to make an appointment with the Jewish National Fund. The purpose of my visit was to **find** out a bit about how they manage their memorial tree planting. The briefing from the National Fund people was excellent. There were two people, a young Sydneysider called **Elfie** Horowitz and her boss, **Eliran** Keissar, who is a Sabra. They have two kinds of tree planting; trees planted with your own hands which they referred to as “active planting” and trees planted on behalf of others where the service as well as the tree is paid for. Only those people who have bought at least 1000 trees can have their trees **labelled** although people are told, on their **certificate**, the section **of the** forest where their own trees are planted. This does away with the problem of accounting precisely for each tree.

When agreeing to a tree planting it is made clear to the “customers” that tree planting may not take place immediately as it is necessary to plant at the right season. It is clear that the full price of the tree is not charged. The charge is US\$10 per tree but they estimate that it costs about US\$15 to get a tree to the stage where they are “independent”. Good **signage** of the sites is considered very important so that people can **find** the place where their loved ones are remembered. Similarly the foresters who look after the plots replace trees that fail to thrive.

**Eliran** was keen for us to consider the possibility of some kind of partnership whereby people might be given the option of planting a tree in Israel at the same time as they plant a tree in New Zealand. Having sorted out as much as I could it was too late to go to the actual site so I headed back to the hotel. It was quite an expensive expedition. I spent US\$25 on taxis.

### ***Visit to the Deputy Mayor of Bologna***

My appointment in Bologna, for which I made a special trip from Padua, was with Sr Giovanni Salizzoni, the Deputy Mayor. He turned out to be very easy to talk with and we spent about an hour and a half talking about the various similarities and differences in our local government systems.

Communication and Participation: One of the things that Bologna has had a lot of publicity about was their experiment with the introduction of high tech – internet use – for communication with their citizens. Sr Salizzoni said that this has not proved to be very successful and they are about to try something quite different. They already have about 60 places throughout the city where people can go to **find** out about what the Council is doing or to lay complaints etc.. Now they plan to train the staff of all the **Lotto** outlets and this will boost their contact points to 300. They figure that even their elderly residents will talk local government issues with the person who sells them their weekly **Lotto** ticket. It would be good to keep track of how successful this experiment proves to be and to know the details of the contract with the **Lotto** authority regarding time and costs.

Transport Projects: Bologna has extensive experience of Design, Operate and Transfer contracting and has found it to be a good system for them; except that they have encountered serious delays in the completion of projects. This could be called the Italian problem. Now the main responsibility for transport planning, environment, water and civil defence rests with the provincial level government. This is the equivalent to our

regional level. There is a third level called regional government but they simply carry out a funding function to the other levels that is delegated from central government ). Planning requirements are very similar to New Zealand except that the planning horizons are one year, three years and five years. There is much more Party involvement in local elections and the five year plans are generally the party platforms. The three years provide for overlap from the previous regime and so it goes on. Sr Salizzoni would be very interested in receiving a copy of our LTFS as well as our transport planning documents to see how we go about our communication process.

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### **Other Matters**

Whilst in Europe I had the opportunity to use and study many different systems of transport and to learn about them. Of course the population factor in the big cities makes a great deal of difference. Nevertheless there are some common practices that we can learn from.

#### **Road Tolling:**

The use of DBO in highway (autostrada) construction in Italy has led to the inevitable use of quite high levels of tolling. This is managed by having toll booths at every entrance and exit onto the autostradas and one pays according to actual usage. There is always an alternative route but this does not seem to discourage usage in any significant way. Certainly the huge trucks that trundle up and down the country are major users of the autostrada and are rarely found on the free secondary routes, except when making local deliveries.

#### **Public Transport:**

Almost everywhere we went we found extensive use of exclusive corridors for public transport. This meant that there was a real incentive for people to use public transport – in some places in preference to taxis – as it was the fastest mode. There was extensive use of fully integrated ticketing. We did not visit any place where there was not a fully integrated system. The most common practice was to have a ticket available for a given time; usually an hour or 75 minutes, for which a ticket was valid. There were generally additional options available such as whole day tickets, three day tickets and weekly tickets. All tickets needed to be validated at the beginning of the first ride and this could be done before getting on trains or on the machines that are in the buses. The fines for being caught without a ticket or with a ticket that has not been validated are quite stiff, (the equivalent of about NZ\$50 in Italy).

Train travel throughout Europe is magnificent. The services are frequent and extremely well patronised. The standard of the rolling stock is generally excellent too.

We were particularly interested to see the little electric buses that are in use in Rome and Florence. Many of the streets in these cities are too narrow for standard buses and they have little 28 passenger electric buses that weave their way through the tiny cobbled streets. These are battery driven, not trolley buses, and seem to be very effective and popular. They are also very attractive to foot weary tourists! In addition they fit in with the newly acquired environmental consciousness of the Europeans.

The desire to reduce pollution by the use of environmentally friendly means of transport was also evident in East Berlin. The old tram fleet has been replaced by new and beautiful trams that service the whole of East Berlin although there are also bus and train services in that sector. Prague, too has trams, trains and buses operating in their integrated system.

With more time I am sure that a great deal could be learnt from an examination of the systems operating in Europe, especially if one was able to spend more time with the people responsible for running and using the systems. This is simply a summary of what we could see in a very short time. If it can be organised, and there is support in the form of interpreters, it might be helpful if Stuart and Ted could visit one or two centres in Europe as in many respects they have developments in the public transport area that could be of special interest. In Italy I would recommend Rome and Bologna (the former is of interest because it has been working on problems such as some very difficult and narrow corridors and severe land constraints while the latter is about the same population size as Wellington Region). In Germany I would recommend Berlin because of its present involvement in a massive revamp and integration of its public transport systems following re-unification.

**Finally:**

There were two visits that I have not explicitly reported on. These were;

1. Lunch with the Chief Executive of the UK LGA, Brian Briscoe, and his PA on Friday 17<sup>th</sup> March. This meeting was in substitution for a meeting with the Chairman of LGA who was at home in Newcastle at the time. This meeting gave me very useful background information for my meetings the following week but did not elicit any information that has not been reported on elsewhere. The LGA in the UK seems a somewhat conservative organisation and they are reluctant to express opinions on policy issues.
2. A meeting with the International Relations Officer for the Commune of Padua on the day that I went to Bologna. Dottora Antonia Ranieri wasn't as knowledgeable as I would have wished on the things that I wanted to know. However I did improve my knowledge on the structure of local government in Italy. This was particularly useful preparation for my meeting, later in the day, with the Deputy Mayor of Bologna.

And did we learn anything else on our journeying. There was a great deal. We particularly like the Tee-Shirt that we saw in the market in Florence. It was entitled United Europe and carried its own peculiar definition of Heaven and Hell;

In Heaven:

- The cooks will be French
- The dancers will be Spanish
- The lovers will be Italian
- The policemen will be English
- The bankers will be Belgian

And it will all be organised by the Germans.

In Hell:

- The cooks will be English
- The dancers will be Belgian
- The lovers will be German
- The policemen will be French
- The bankers will be Spanish

And it will all be organised by the Italians.

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