



Speech by

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URBAN LAND DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY BILL

Ms NOLAN (Ipswich—ALP) (4.04 pm): James Kunstler has famously said that urban sprawl will come to be seen as the greatest waste of resources in human history. This strikes me as a big call in a world that pulps Tasmanian wilderness and provides tax breaks for gas-guzzling four-wheel drives in the full knowledge of peak oil. But there is no doubt that even in the company of these abominations sprawl is a momentous waste of resources. Sprawl kills wildlife by consuming bushland. It chews up productive agricultural land and spits it back out as unproductive housing. It drives climate change by making public transport unviable and forcing car commutes, and it destroys the shared public space and a shared public experience that is the essence of healthy community. To its enduring credit, this government has taken serious steps to halt the almost endless sprawl that was, when councils were solely responsible for planning, threatening to destroy the liveability for which south-east Queensland is famous.

While Queensland had historically had no real culture of regional planning, that changed in 2005 when then Treasurer Terry Mackenroth produced the South East Queensland Regional Plan. With an urban growth boundary, an accompanying infrastructure plan that funded public transport and a commitment to transit-oriented development, the regional plan is essentially New Urbanist in principle. Two years down the track this Urban Land Development Authority Bill is a logical next step. The primary purpose of the bill is to address those minor aspects of housing affordability which lie within the gambit of the state. It does this in three key ways. First, it streamlines the development application process, reducing delays which cost developers money; second, it establishes clear and consistent mechanisms for infrastructure charges, although I commend the decision not to bend to the development lobby's pressure to abandon or reduce the contributions to public infrastructure which ultimately funds its profits; and, third, it will release public land for development, although it should be acknowledged, as I have argued in this place before, that the natural end of sprawl—the fact that we have simply consumed all of the land within an hour's drive of the CBD rather than artificial limits on land supply—is the primary driver of increases in land cost.

The bill will not entirely on its own overcome the housing affordability problem. Again, as I have argued before, there are a number of reasons for the housing affordability problem in this country. They include the perverse tax incentives that give investors tax advantages in the competitive market over first homebuyers and thereby push up prices. There are a number of reasons. A major reason for the housing affordability problem is that Australians choose now to build houses that are half as big again as those houses they were building in the 1950s despite the fact that about a third fewer people live in them. So there is also an element of choice in people building houses that are simply bigger than many of us need.

I noticed in the *Weekend Australian* last weekend Matt Price described as the new political incorrectness the idea that we should suggest to people that they moderate their expectations or indeed their aspirations by choosing the products which they can afford. There is an element of a new political incorrectness these days in suggesting to people, regardless of their income, that perhaps they cannot have absolutely everything they might want. I think that this bill is a substantial step on the part of the state government to manage those aspects of housing affordability like land supply and development costs which are within our power. But there are a number of other aspects of the housing affordability problem

which are quite simply federal matters and which the federal government should really step up and acknowledge. While it may not have been this bill's most publicised purpose, in establishing development areas and creating an Urban Land Development Authority with powers to purchase and consolidate land and write statutory plans for those areas, this bill creates the mechanism by which the state can take the next step from the New Urbanism embodied in the regional plan to a genuine embrace of good urban design, particularly in the inner city.

Just yesterday I had the pleasure of having lunch with the renowned Danish urban designer Jan Gehl, who was here for an urban design conference at the Gold Coast. Mr Gehl is one of the key people who has been responsible for the transformation of Copenhagen since the early 1960s. In Copenhagen, deliberate policies around walking and opening up public space have created an inner city where huge plazas are filled with cafes and pedestrians. The transport mix in that city is an astonishing 36 per cent of journeys taken by bike, 33 per cent by public transport and around 22 per cent by private car. It is easy for us to look at that and say, 'That is just Europe,' but that is just good policy. It was just inspirational to listen to Mr Gehl talk about what good policy has created in Copenhagen. He also talked about other extraordinary examples across the world. As I said, he talked about Copenhagen, Strasbourg and Curitiba in Brazil. Importantly for those of us here, he talked about Melbourne and the transformation that the Melbourne CBD has undergone as a result of good public policy around public transport and inviting public spaces.

With our beautiful river, our great cultural precinct and our subtropical climate, the possibilities for Brisbane as a result of this kind of good urban design policy are absolutely endless. There is real potential for Brisbane to become a world city that invites walking and biking and that has great public space. I would hope through some of the mechanisms that this bill envisages that we will finally begin to realise some of that potential for Brisbane as a city of great public space.

This bill, as I said, provides the catalyst for the state to move from regional planning into the whole new world of city design. It offers the same opportunity for the wonderful City of Ipswich. Let me explain why. At its heart, the regional plan aims, as I have said here before, to prevent the nightmare scenario for south-east Queensland: an endless, soulless and jobless sprawl stretching from Noosa to Coolangatta. It aims to do that by facilitating density and transit oriented development in Brisbane, but it also aims to do it, importantly, by drawing population to the west. Ipswich, with its existing sense of community, its industrial land for jobs growth and its existing road and rail infrastructure, is absolutely the key to the quality growth in south-east Queensland. If we can make the western corridor work as a host of jobs and population growth then south-east Queensland will grow well.

Already there is a strong commitment to that idea on the part of the state. Through the infrastructure plan, which was updated recently, the state proposes to spend \$11.2 billion on infrastructure in the western corridor in the years ahead, and that is not just a number on a page. A lot of that work is already underway. Stage 1A of the Western Corridor Recycled Water Scheme has commenced operation, the Centenary Highway extension to Yamanto is on track to open in 2009 and a rail corridor is being preserved to link Springfield through to Ipswich. While, as Aldous Huxley has said, human beings have an almost limitless capacity to take things for granted, we the people of Ipswich should not take for granted this enormous investment in infrastructure in our local region. This focus in terms of attention and dollars on the Ipswich region is historically unprecedented.

Members will know, however, that I have long argued that the key to making the western corridor work is not just the infrastructure spend; it is also absolutely crucial that we revitalise the Ipswich CBD. If the Ipswich CBD is not an attractive place which draws people to work, to shop, to listen to a band or just to spend time, then the western corridor will simply be 'commuterville' on the edge of Brisbane.

I would like to see Ipswich declared as a development area under the provisions of this bill so that the Urban Land Development Authority can play a role in consolidating holdings and structure planning in the inner city. I have a strong interest in urban design and planning and to me, as I am sure to many others, the possibilities for the Ipswich CBD are immense. Ipswich people should pause for a moment and imagine a city that is easily accessible by bike from all the inner suburbs. Imagine a city where there are walking paths along the river from One Mile to Booval. Imagine a city with more than one road bridge so that the main street of town does not have to be a busy arterial road. We should imagine a city where people want to walk around, where there is public art, where the heritage buildings are being restored rather than simply decaying before our eyes and where there is a feeling that this is a green, happy and healthy place to be. We should imagine that Woolworths is gone so it is an easy walk from our world-class Ipswich Art Gallery, which incidentally the state government built, to River Heart and on to the Workshops Rail Museum.

There is no reason why Ipswich cannot be a world-class small city. Indeed, it has to be if the western corridor and, hence, the regional plan are going to work. In recent years, we have made substantial steps in that direction. Six and a half years ago when I was elected, the construction of the art gallery and the Workshops Rail Museum, thanks to David Hamill's efforts, were underway but they were not yet open. River Heart did not exist. There was no street dining in the centre of town and there were no plans to do up

the railway station, something which today is just about to get started. So in six and a half years an enormous amount of progress has taken place in inner Ipswich. While all that progress has been made, the city, however, has two substantial challenges. The first is that the Riverlink development tragically has been allowed to be built at more than 10,000 square metres of additional retail space than the state government, in fact, approved. This has created 10,000 extra square metres of unlawful competition for the Ipswich CBD. Despite the improvements that I talked about such as River Heart and other public infrastructure, today many CBD traders are finding it harder than they have before.

The other real difficulty I believe and the other real tragedy of the Riverlink development is that they have simply shown very little inclination to meet their development conditions. The pedestrian bridge still has not been built. I have to say I find it hard to believe the promise that it will be built by Christmas. The developers had to be dragged kicking and screaming through the courts by the state government to meet their other conditions around provision of traffic lights on main roads. To some extent it is too late to do anything with Riverlink other than continue to pursue the conditions, which is something that the state government is very diligently doing. We do, however, have another substantial ongoing problem and that is Memo Corporation, the owner of the Ipswich City Square, which refuses to either invest in or sell its property, the city square. As I said in this place in 2001, Memo's attitude to the people of Ipswich through its neglect of the city square remains an absolute disgrace.

Right now the state and the council are doing the work necessary to plan a better Ipswich CBD. The \$2.2 million Ipswich CBD master planning process now underway is bringing together some world-class urban planners and designers in a public master planning exercise for the city. I am thrilled with the quality of work that is being undertaken here, but I do remain concerned that the planning and urban design problems of the Ipswich CBD cannot really be fixed while Memo Corporation continues to take this negligent approach to its management of the city centre's most prominent landholding. Given the importance of central Ipswich to the prospects for quality growth in south-east Queensland, I think there is a real crying need for intervention. I would hope, as I said, that the government seriously considers gazetting Ipswich CBD as a development area so that the Urban Land Development Authority can take legislative and planning control and can take a role in consolidating some of those holdings which have been so disgracefully neglected over a period now of almost two decades.

This bill is very exciting stuff. As I have said in this chamber previously, it is my very firm view that in the decade ahead the world will fundamentally change. Already in the last year or so we have seen a substantial change in the Australian political debate as finally we have begun to get it about climate change. The real issue though will be that in the very near future we will start to understand peak oil and we will start to realise that, all things being equal, it is reasonable to suspect that world oil supply will begin to decline in the years ahead and that the price of oil will substantially rise.

We will also begin to confront other real challenges of resource shortages, just as we have recently begun to confront some real challenges—I think on the part of this government very well—in the area of oil. Peak oil is an enormous challenge. If we do not deal with it well, it could be an utter disaster for our society. But planning for it well involves a number of things. It involves investing in public transport, it involves creating more dense urban areas so that people can walk or ride their bikes, it involves recreating urban spaces and it involves protecting agricultural land close to the city where we live.

To a great extent the regional plan creates a very good framework through which we can do those things. The great opportunity for us is that, although peak oil is in itself utterly frightening, many of the remedies that we would use to plan for it are, in fact, great opportunities to create better cities than we have currently—to create cities with great public spaces where people walk, where people cycle, where people come together in the streets and where we enjoy again a wonderful urban life. This bill is an important step in creating those great urban spaces in both Brisbane and in Ipswich which people can genuinely enjoy and which lead to a good quality of life.

Therefore, in my view this bill creates some important powers to help us deal with the enormous resource challenges that we confront. But it also creates a great opportunity for us to embrace once more the urban spaces and the urban life that are the key to livability and quality of life in south-east Queensland. I firmly commend this bill to the House.