



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA.

PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS.

R E P O R T.

Relating to the Proposed

Erection of an

AUTOMATIC TELEPHONE EXCHANGE AND CARRIER BUILDING

at

B A T H U R S T, N. S. W.

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PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS.

AUTOMATIC TELEPHONE EXCHANGE, BATHURST, N.S.W.

R E P O R T.

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works, to which the House of Representatives referred for investigation and report the question of the erection of an Automatic Telephone Exchange and Carrier Building at Bathurst, New South Wales, has the honour to report as follows :-

SECTION I - INTRODUCTION.

GENERAL.

1. Bathurst is situated in a 25 mile wide valley on the Blue Mountains tablelands and is 132 miles west of Sydney. It is the centre of a very rich agricultural district producing large crops of vegetables for city consumption and for local canning. Due to its richness in agricultural and pastoral production, it necessarily follows that there is considerable activity in the associated secondary industries such as canning factories, flour mills, butter factories etc., and, with the completion of a large dam on the Campbell River and other proposed expansion programmes, it is expected that there will be a further increase in both population and industries.

THE EXISTING BUILDINGS.

2. The first telephone exchange at Bathurst was opened in 1886, and, together with other postal activities, was carried on in two buildings flanking the Court House in Russell Street. As a result of Federation these buildings were transferred to the Commonwealth in 1906, and have served departmental requirements since that time without major alterations. Both structures are two storied, built in a colonial style with colonnades. While making a valuable contribution to the architectural atmosphere of the city the buildings have long become unsuited to the demands of modern facilities, and the departmental activities have outgrown them.

SECTION II - THE PRESENT PROPOSAL.

THE BUILDING.

3. The present proposal is to erect a new building, with a useful floor space of 15,296 sq. ft. to house the automatic telephone exchange, trunk exchange, and carrier equipment, with necessary offices and amenities for the staff required.

4. The building will be a two storey structure, having a reinforced concrete frame with a steel framed roof over the major part. Externally the building will have a red brick base and precast concrete stone facing on the walls, while internal walls will be of brick.

5. The structure will be placed at the rear of a site, recently acquired in Howick Street, so that space will be available for the construction of a large Post Office building in some years to come. It was originally proposed to include the Post Office building in this proposal, but, owing to the scarcity of materials and labour for the work, only the automatic Telephone Exchange project is put forward at the present time.

SECTION III - THE COMMITTEE'S INVESTIGATION.

GENERAL.

6. The Committee studied the plans and paid a visit of inspection to Bathurst, to view the proposed site, to see the present buildings, and to acquaint itself with the position obtaining at Bathurst in connection with the establishment, the staff and the equipment. The Committee took evidence in Sydney and in Bathurst from senior officials of the Postmaster-General's Department concerned with the planning of the proposed work, from the Director of Architecture in the Department of Works and Housing, and from various witnesses in Bathurst representing the professional, commercial and other interests in the locality.

THE BUILDING.

Architecture.

7. The building is a functional one, and, being placed at the rear of the site where it is to be obscured at a later date by the new Post Office building, no elaborate architectural features are required. However, the building is to be of pleasing modern design, having vertical louvres on the south west elevation forming a useful protection from the sun while adding a rather distinctive architectural feature to this facade.

The Ground Floor.

8. The Ground Floor will house the Automatic Telephone Exchange equipment and automatic Trunk Switch equipment. It also provides space for the heating and ventilating plant, power room, battery room, stores and toilets.

The First Floor.

9. The First Floor provides for the Trunk Room and large Carrier Equipment Room, as well as a technicians' storeroom and store. Various amenities will also be located on the first floor, and these will be available for Postal Institute, class room, lunch room, first aid, women's lockers, and toilets. When the building was originally planned allowance was made for a possible additional floor, and columns were shown in the centre of the equipment room. The Postmaster-General's Department now regard such an addition as very unlikely, so the columns have been omitted and a steel trussed roof substituted in lieu of the concrete slab and framed roof.

THE SITE.

10. The site proposed for the building is a level area of land having a frontage of 165 feet to Howick Street. It is considered to be the most suitable site for the purpose, and it is conveniently situated for the existing underground plant. A considerable amount of negotiation has taken place for some time past in connection with the acquisition of the site, but arrangements have now been made with the State Government for the purchase of the land for the project, subject to survey, and with certain provisos for the protection of

the existing technical college, and for the transfer to the State, when it is possible to vacate them, of the present Post Office and Telephone buildings. This agreement regarding the site was only concluded just prior to the investigation by the Committee

11. The area finally decided upon for acquisition is slightly smaller than that originally shown on the plans, and will affect the plan of the future Post Office building, indicated on the plans for the Automatic Telephone Exchange Building now being investigated. The Committee therefore made inquiries to ensure that the site, if used for the Automatic Telephone Exchange Building, would also be sufficiently large to provide for the future Post Office building. Investigation appeared to be necessary to the Committee particularly as the amended boundary cut off part of the Public Telephone Annexe shown in the Post Office plan.

12. The Committee was informed, however, that the area to be acquired would be sufficient for the proposed Exchange and for the future Post Office building, though slight adjustments of the plans would have to be made to bring the structure within the new boundaries.

13. Inquiries were made regarding the bearing qualities of the land and the possibility of using any other site for the purpose, but it was generally agreed by all the witnesses that the site in Howick Street was the most suitable. The building for the Automatic Telephone Exchange will be placed at the rear of the site, and will occupy a gross area of 10,210 square feet, leaving the front of the block for the Post Office building when required.

14. As it will be some years before the new Post Office can be built, and it is considered that there is sufficient land for the proposed exchange as well as the future Post Office, the Committee is satisfied that the site is a good one and suitable for the purpose.

MECHANICAL SERVICES AND EQUIPMENT.

15. The original proposal included an air conditioning plant to serve the major portion of the building, particularly the equipment rooms, but, following the Prime Minister's directive for economy, further consideration was given to this provision, and it was considered that full air conditioning could be satisfactorily dispensed with in the climate of Bathurst. Accordingly the air conditioning system has been replaced by a mechanical ventilation plant which incorporates air filtering and air heating to serve the Automatic Telephone Exchange and Trunk Switch Equipment Room, Work-room, Clerical and Superintending Technicians' Room on the Ground Floor, and Carrier Equipment and Trunk Room on the First Floor.

16. The Committee made inquiries with the object of ensuring that the economy achieved by replacing the air conditioning system was not being made at the expense of satisfactory operation and maintenance of the equipment or the comfort of the staff operating the exchange. The Committee was informed, in evidence, that considerable thought had been given to the matter, and it was considered that, with the comparatively dry atmosphere at Bathurst, the refrigeration portion of the equipment could be dispensed with. Provision has been made, however, for the plant to be so designed that, in the event of technical circumstances demonstrating the necessity for full air conditioning in the future, conversion could be made without difficulty. Under present conditions this does not appear to be likely, and the system planned should prove satisfactory for the purpose.

17. Due to its geographical location, Bathurst is not subjected to the extreme humidity which applies on the coastal belt, and mechanical ventilation and air filtering, which are essential to provide dust free air to the equipment areas for its efficient operation and to provide a degree of staff comfort in the operating areas by providing air movement, are to be installed. A heating unit will be provided for use in the winter months.

18. As provision is made for future conversion to full air conditioning, if this should prove to be necessary, the Committee is satisfied that the mechanical ventilation as planned should be installed.

ESTIMATED COST.

19. The estimated cost of the structure as referred to the Committee was £167,600. Owing to amendments to the plans there is a reduction in the estimated cost of the building, based upon prices as at November, 1950, but this estimate may be subject to variation when tenders are called, as constantly changing circumstances are governing building costs to-day. The figures estimated at the above date are :-

| | £ |
|--|-----------------|
| Building work, including foundations | 105,600 |
| Electrical installation, including lighting | 7,600 |
| Plumbing, drainage, fire and gas services | 2,877 |
| Mechanical ventilating plant, heating, boiler plant, exhaust fans, hot water systems, cat head and hoist, fire extinguishers | 16,200 |
| Sealed roadway | <u>358</u> |
| Total | <u>£132,635</u> |

20. In addition to the building itself the establishment of the automatic exchange will involve a heavy expenditure in respect of equipment and installation. Based on the present cost of materials and labour, the estimated total expenditure to fully establish the automatic trunk and subscribers' exchanges is £344,635, made up as follows :-

| | £ |
|--|-----------------|
| Building - comprising ground and first floors | 132,635 |
| Automatic Exchange Equipment for 2,000 lines - to be installed on the ground floor and includes power plant and standby alternator | 90,000 |
| Trunk Exchange - 15 positions to be included on 1st floor | 22,000 |
| Automatic Trunk Switching Equipment - to be installed on 1st floor | 60,000 |
| Subscribers' equipment - cost of replacing subscribers' magneto equipment by automatic | 30,000 |
| Line construction - cost of diverting line cables | <u>10,000</u> |
| Total | <u>£344,635</u> |

FINANCIAL STATEMENT.

21. The following financial statement is based on the assumption that the date of cutover for the new exchange will be June, 1953.

| | £ |
|---|----------------|
| Capital cost | 385,000 |
| Capital cost, new and in situ | 479,000 |
| Annual working expenses | 30,460 |
| Total annual charges, including working expenses, interest and depreciation | <u>58,720</u> |
| £ | |
| Recoverable value of Assets to be demolished - | |
| Manual Exchange | 3,000 |
| Temporary Automatic Exchange | 18,000 |
| Magneto Subscribers' instruments | 1,500 |
| Carrier installation | <u>60,000</u> |
| | <u>£82,500</u> |

22. The annual revenue from telephone rentals, local calls and phonograms from subscribers' lines and public telephones connected to the Bathurst manual exchange during the year ended 30th June, 1950, totalled £13,000, whilst from originating trunk line calls the revenue was £14,000, making £27,000 in all. Based on the existing charges for rentals and calls it is estimated that the annual revenue will increase to a total of £49,000 by the date of cutover in 1953, and to £80,000 at the end of the 20 years' period in 1973.

THEir CONSTRUCTION.

23. It is estimated that, upon receipt of approval to this proposal, tenders could be called within twelve months, and that the time taken for construction of the building would be approximately two years, depending upon conditions of supply of materials and labour during the period.

NECESSITY FOR THE BUILDING.

Telephone Development.

24. One of the most important reasons which demonstrate the necessity for the new telephone exchange is the greatly accelerated development at Bathurst and the surrounding districts. A considerable

amount of valuable evidence was submitted to the Committee showing the growth of the population and of various business activities over the past few years.

25. Bathurst is the business centre for a large number of towns and villages, and omnibus services run to Bathurst from all End, Oberon and Burrega, serving intervening villages. A bus service also connects with Orange regularly so that air passengers may use the terminal at Bathurst and continue on to Orange. The population within the present restricted city boundaries is said to be approximately 13,000, with a further 5,000 within its environs. The Migrant Training Centre, established in the large military camp near Bathurst has had the effect of increasing the population, as many migrants are settling there.

26. The local call network covers a five mile radius from the Bathurst Post Office, and, at the end of last year 1,244 subscribers were connected, whilst 156 applicants were awaiting telephone services. The development in subscribers' services at Bathurst during the fifteen years prior to 1941 averaged 16 lines per annum. During the war years the rate of development rose to 25 lines per annum, and since 1946 the average annual development has reached the high figure of 110 per annum. It is estimated that the future growth of subscribers' lines will be 1,700 in 1953, increasing to 2,100 in 1958, and reaching 3,150 by 1973.

Development of the District.

27. In order to forecast the requirements for the district for the next twenty years it has been necessary to estimate the growth of the demand for telephones in the surrounding areas. This has been a difficult matter as Bathurst has proved a most suitable place for the establishment of large business enterprises in the past few years, and is likely to figure prominently in the movement to decentralise industry. Already there is marked growth in the establishment of secondary industries, with a consequent increase in primary industries upon which they depend for supplies of raw materials. The secondary industries include a large cannery, several farms on

which the products are grown; factories for the production of ladies' clothing and shoes; large flour mills, butter factories and a Rabbit Freezing and Ice works, Tomato pulp works, cement pipe works, railway workshops and various engineering establishments. Many other industries have been prevented from commencing operations at Bathurst in the past owing to the lack of sufficient water, but this is now being overcome, as a large dam is being constructed on Campbell's River, 12 miles above the city, and this will provide an adequate water supply for further development of industry, and will enable still closer settlement of the rich alluvial flats round the city. Lack of adequate telephone facilities is the only remaining obstacle to a great expansion of industries in the district.

Inadequacy of Present Exchange.

28. The present activities are conducted in two buildings, built prior to Federation and transferred to the Commonwealth in 1906. These buildings have served departmental requirements since that time without major alterations, and are now quite inadequate to meet the needs of Bathurst.

29. The Post Office Building accommodates the postal hall, Postmaster's Office, mail room and telegraph operating room on the ground floor, while the postal delivery staff and Postal Institute activities are located on the first floor.

30. The Telephone Exchange Building provides space for the power and battery room, technicians' workshop and store, and the equipment room on the ground floor. The first floor accommodates the District Inspector and staff, the manual exchange switch room and amenities for the operating staff.

31. These two buildings are extremely congested, both from the point of view of personnel and equipment, and, during its inspection, the Committee was impressed with the difficulties under which the staff are working in these old buildings. As there is no further room to expand the services of the local exchange in the existing building, and space must be provided, it is proposed to install a 500 line automatic exchange in a temporary building on the front

portion of the new site in Howick Street, pending the provision of the permanent space in the proposed new exchange building.

32. Trunk Lines - Due to its geographical location, in the heart of a progressive farming, agricultural and pastoral district, Bathurst has communication facilities to surrounding towns and the broad community of interest to both Sydney and the Western districts of New South Wales, Bathurst has become one of the largest communication centres in the Western Tablelands area. It is an important trunk switching centre, with direct channels to Sydney and the surrounding districts.

33. Additional trunk line facilities to Sydney and to other districts are urgently required, and to provide these the installation of further long line equipment is necessary. During the next two years carrier and associated equipment must be installed at Bathurst, almost doubling the present facilities. It has been necessary, as a temporary measure, to move the District Telephone Officer and his staff to a prefabricated building erected on the permanent exchange site in Howick Street, so that additional space may be made available for cable equipment in the existing building.

34. New Trunk Cable is being laid between Sydney and Bathurst to provide improved trunk line service in the western portion of New South Wales. Provision is also being made for 132 channels on an inland route between Sydney and Melbourne, and Bathurst will become a switching station for this service. The installation of the cable is well advanced and is now beyond Lithgow, with the section to Bathurst to be completed shortly. This involves a very large capital expenditure and it is desirable that the cable be placed in service at the earliest opportunity. This inland route is regarded as particularly important also from a defence point of view, as it provides an alternative route to the more vulnerable coastal one. At the same time it provides facilities necessary in the development of the inland country through which it passes, and in which extension of telephone services are particularly desirable. It is therefore all the more important that a building suitable to house all the equipment necessary should be constructed without delay.

35. Postal facilities under the existing conditions are entirely inadequate and service to the public can only be carried out with difficulty. Every available space is overcrowded, and use is made of areas which should be reserved for amenities and other purposes. Satisfactory space for amenities for all the staff cannot be provided until the ultimate post office building is erected, but some alleviation is required at once from the congested and cramped conditions operating in the present buildings. As the post office building envisaged on the new site in Howick Street will not be available for years to come, it is essential that some of the space at present used for telephone purposes shall be released for postal use. This can only be done when the new automatic telephone exchange is built, thus further demonstrating the urgent necessity of proceeding with the erection of the proposed building.

36. As a result of its inspection of the existing buildings and working conditions, and after consideration of the various points emphasized in the evidence, the Committee is convinced that the new exchange is essential and urgent, and the project should be given a high priority in view of its important bearing on defence requirements and development of the country districts.

THE PLANS.

37. The plans referred to the Committee included those for the proposed automatic telephone exchange at the rear of the site, and also sketch plans of the new post office building to be erected on the Howick Street frontage at a later date, and the Committee was asked to consider the usefulness of the whole site for its ultimate purpose before the decision to erect the new exchange was put into effect, reserving for the future the use of this valuable site.

38. After giving full consideration to the requirements of the telephone exchange, and having studied the plans in the light of the evidence brought forward, the Committee is satisfied that the plans for the exchange building are suitable for the purpose and will provide a building which will be effective for many years to come.

39. The plans of the projected new post office were not considered in detail, as that part of the proposal was not referred to the Committee at this juncture. They were usual, however, in determining the best disposition of the existing building on the site, and it has been shown that the future development of the post office plans will have to include rearrangement of the rooms in order to plan a building which will fit on to the reduced area of land which has now been acquired for the purpose.

MATERIALS AND LABOUR

40. The question of the supply of material and labour for this project, particularly in regard to its likely competition with home building was considered thoroughly by the Committee. The evidence shows that the majority of materials to be used in this building will be drawn from supplies not used in home building, while some of the materials are available locally. It is generally agreed by the witnesses that the effect of this building would not be felt to any great extent in the house building programme for the district, particularly as a very large percentage of local houses do not use bricks at all, and it is essential that a new exchange building should be erected in order to assist in the development of a balanced building programme for the area. The Committee concurs with this view and recommends that the work should be proceeded with as soon as possible.

BRICK SUPPLY.

41. Bathurst appears to be in a particularly happy position in regard to the supply of bricks for building purposes. The evidence shows that the local kilns are producing at a rate sufficient to supply all requirements in Bathurst as well as supply some for use from the surrounding districts. The bricks are of good quality, while raw materials and labour are available to expand the industry considerably. The Committee was impressed with the possibilities of extension of this industry, and, in view of the serious shortage of bricks in other localities it is suggested that immediate steps should be taken to make use of this producing field to produce a sufficient surplus, after local demands have been met, to permit

considerable quantities to be sent to other localities where bricks are urgently needed.

42. USE OF EXISTING BUILDINGS.

The agreement with the State of New South Wales, for the site upon which to build the new exchange, includes a condition that the two old buildings, at present being used for postal and telephone services, shall revert to the State as soon as they are no longer required for their present purposes. This arrangement will not be possible, of course, for a number of years, until the new post office building and the new telephone exchange building are both completed.

43. In the meantime the existing buildings will be used for expansion of the services badly overcrowded and increasing at the present time.

44. Existing Post Office Building - There will be an expansion of the public space and corresponding increase in counter length, and an increase of the post office activities into the area now occupied by the Postal Institute. This will afford much needed relief to the Post Office and Telegraph activities at Bathurst and should meet the anticipated needs of this section of the department in Bathurst for a number of years.

45. Existing Engineering Building - When the new telephone exchange is completed and the various telephone and engineering activities are removed to their new location, the existing building will be available for the accommodation of administrative staffs at present housed in other parts of the city, some of them in rented premises, and some in a prefabricated building temporarily placed on the new site.

EMERGENCY POWER PLANT.

46. It was stated in evidence that it is proposed to install an emergency power plant, which will be in the order of about 40 kilowatts, so that the services may be maintained in the event of a power failure. The Committee considered the proposal to include emergency plant in this building in the light of similar proposals in other recent exchange projects, and inquiries were made to ensure

that this practice would not ultimately lead to the accumulated expenditure of large sums of money on costly plant in various parts of the State, only provided for occasional use. The Committee was informed, however, that the plant provided was small and relatively inexpensive in comparison with the amount of valuable equipment to be maintained in the exchange, and it was considered that the department could not afford to run the risk of being unable to give service in such an important centre through the lack of a small installation, which would cover not only blackouts but also power failures due to lines breaking, faulty insulators, or a number of other causes from time to time.

AMENITIES.

47. The Committee was concerned with the inadequacy of the present amenities which have had to be curtailed in the existing buildings in the general search for more space in which to expand the ever growing technical needs. The plans as referred to the Committee were subsequently amended, partly by the reduction of some of the space originally planned for the various amenities for the new building. Inquiries were made to ensure that the economics made in the plans were not carried to the extent of leaving unsatisfactory areas for the staffs.

48. The amended plans now provide for Postal Institute and Library, with folding doors to a large class room which can be used for recreation when required. They also provide a lunch room, locker room, rest room, and first aid room, and inquiries elicited the general opinion that these areas would be sufficient to serve the needs of the new building until the new post office building is erected. More extensive accommodation and amenities for the staff will be included in the new post office building, and a rearrangement of the staff accommodation will be made in order to cater for the whole of the staffs in the new exchange and post office buildings which will ultimately be constructed as a complete unit.

49. Some criticism was levelled at the placing of the lunch room next to the toilets, and the general question of the planning

of toilet accommodation in the various exchanges was considered. It was stated, in evidence, that the departmental welfare section had examined the plans and considered that they adequately catered for the staff who would use them, but it was agreed that further consideration would be given to this question, following the Committee's inquiry.

SECTION IV. - SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS.

50. The following is a list of the recommendations made by the Committee after a study of the plans and evidence :-

- (1) The proposed exchange is essential and urgent, and the project should be given a high priority (paragraph 36).
- (2) The plans for the exchange building are suitable for the purpose and will provide a building which will be effective for many years (paragraph 38).
- (3) The site is a good one and suitable for the Exchange building as well as for the new Post Office at a later date (paragraph 14).
- (4) Materials and labour to be used on the building will not seriously affect home building, and the new exchange should be proceeded with to assist in maintaining a balanced building programme (paragraph 40).
- (5) Good quality bricks are available locally, and it is suggested that steps could be taken to increase the output there to provide supplies for use elsewhere also (paragraph 41).
- (6) As provision is made for future conversion to full air conditioning if proved essential, the Committee is satisfied that the mechanical ventilation as planned should be installed now (paragraph 18).

- (7) Further consideration should be given by the Welfare Section to the location and planning of toilets (paragraph 49).
- (8) Owing to the importance of the new trunk cable from a defence point of view, and in consideration of the high capital cost involved, it is essential that the new building be erected as soon as possible, in order to bring this equipment into use without delay (paragraph 34).

G.J. RANKIN

Chairman.

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