





Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works

## REPORT

relating to the

# CONSTRUCTION OF MELBOURNE MAIL CENTRE, SPENCER AND LA TROBE STREETS, MELBOURNE

(Twelfth Report of 1985)



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#### 1985

# THE PARLIAMENT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA FARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS

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## MEMBERS OF THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS (Twenty-Eighth Committee)

Senator Dominic John Foreman (Chairman) Percival Clarence Millar, Esq., M.P. (Vice-Chairman)

#### Senate

House of Representatives

Senator Dr Glenister Sheil

Senator Gerry Norman Jones John Neil Andrew, Esq., M.P. Robert George Halverson, Esq., O.B.E., M.P.

> Colin Hollis, Esq., M.P. Leonard Joseph Keogh, Esq., M.P. Keith Webb Wright, Esq., M.P.

#### EXTRACT FROM THE

VOTES AND PROCEEDINGS OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES NO. 41 DATED 13 SEPTEMBER 1985

11 PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE - REFERENCE OF WORK -CONSTRUCTION OF MELBOURNE MAIL CENTRE: Mr West (Minister for Housing and Construction), pursuant to notice, moved - That, in accordance with the provisions of the Public Works Committee Act 1969, the following proposed work be referred to the Farliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works for consideration and report: Construction of Melbourne Mail Centre, Spencer and La Trobe Streets. Melbourne.

Mr West presented plans in connection with the proposed work.

Debate ensued.

Question - put and passed.

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#### PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS

## CONSTRUCTION OF MELBOURNE MAIL CENTRE SPENCER AND LA TROBE STREETS, MELBOURNE

#### REPORT

By resolution on 13 September 1985 the House of Representatives referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works for consideration and report the proposal for the construction of Melbourne Mail Centre, Spencer and La Trobe Streets, Melbourne.

The Committee has the honour to report as follows:

#### THE REFERENCE

- The work proposed under this reference comprises a three-level building with the operations area and truck loading bays at street level. Staff amenities and office space will form a small first floor section along the Spencer Street frontage, and a basement car park below street level.
- 2. The total estimated cost of the proposal including the acquisition of land is \$16.3 million.

#### THE COMMITTEE'S INVESTIGATION

3. The Committee received written submissions and plans from Australia Post and the Department of Housing and Construction (DHC) and took evidence from their representatives at a public hearing held in Canberra on 29 October 1985.

- 4. Written submissions were received from a number of organisations with an interest in the proposal. These organisations included:
  - the Administrative and Clerical Officers Association ~ Victorian Branch; and
  - Australian Postal and Telecommunications Union Federal Executive and Victorian Branch.
  - 5. In anticipation of the reference the Committee inspected the Victorian Mail Centre and the proposed site of the new building on 1 May 1985.
  - 6. A list of witnesses who appeared at the public hearing and the organisations which they represented is at Appendix A.
  - The Committee's proceedings will be printed as Minutes of Evidence.

#### BACKGROUND

- 8. Functions of Australia Post The Australian Postal
  Commission was established by and operates under the Postal
  Services Act'1975, which enables it to provide a national postal
  service; it is the common carrier of mail in Australia and the
  provider of postal services. The Commission trades under the name
  of Australia Post. On 30 June 1985 Australia Post completed
  10 years of operations.
- 9. Australia Post is required by its Act to operate
  Australia's postal services in a manner as will best meet the
  social, industrial and commercial needs of the Australian people.
  It is required to raise sufficient revenue to cover operating
  expenditure and to fund at least half of its capital expenditure,
  including working capital. It must also operate its services as

efficiently and economically as practicable and have regard to the special needs of Australians residing and carrying on business outside the cities.

- 10. <u>Decentralisation</u> Until 1972 the traditional method of providing postal services in Australia was to have a Central Mail Exchange (CME) in each capital city. The functions of CMEs were to exchange mail between intrastate post offices and interstate mail exchanges, with overseas countries and with some interstate post offices. In May 1972 the Director-General of the then Postmaster General's Department approved a master plan for the decentralisation of mail processing in Victoria. The master plan for Victoria envisaged a network of mail centres comprising the following elements:
  - a State Mail Centre to process interstate and overseas mail and the exchange of mails between intrastate processing facilities;
  - a City or Melbourne Mail Centre to process central city postings;
  - five suburban and five country mail centres each processing mail originating and terminating within a defined geographic area.
- 11. Planning for decentralised mail centres was supported by the Vernon Commission of Inquiry into the Australian Post Office in 1973/74.
- 12. Australia Post advised the Committee that the main factors in favour of decentralisation relate to improvements to service, operational and staffing efficiencies. A continuation of the central mail exchange concept would involve very large staff numbers working at each facility. By the year 2000, 4000 staff would be required to be employed at a central mail exchange.

Experience and studies had indicated that a desirable upper limit of about 500 staff at any one establishment would be more conducive to maximising operational efficiency and industrial harmony. A decentralised system would be more secure against breakdown. The availability of mail processing equipment suited for smaller centres was a further factor which favoured the establishment of a decentralised system. Decentralisation would also improve staff employment conditions with mail centres being closer to residential areas.

- 13. Australia Post stated that 12 mail centres have been established in Victoria and others have been or are being established progressively in NSW (11), Queensland (9), Tasmania (2) and the Northern Territory (1). A further two mail centres are to be provided in NSW. Central mail exchanges are still operating in Adelaide and Perth.
- 14. <u>Victorian Network</u> The Victorian network of decentralised mail exchanges comprises central, suburban and country facilities. The central facilities comprise the Melbourne Mail Centre, the State Mail Centre and the International Mail Centre. The Melbourne Mail Centre was established in March 1979 in what Australia Post described as interim accommodation in the former Central Mail Exchange Building (the CME Building). At present the Centre employs about 480 staff to process mail posted in the Melbourne Central Business District and incoming interstate mail. The centre handles 886,000 standard letters each day.
- 15. The State Mail Centre was established in the same building in March 1979. The Centre processes bulk lodgement of mail and parcels and performs the interchange function for the Victorian network. It handles about 623,000 standard letters each day.

- 16. The International Mail Centre, established in 1981, is located in South Melbourne, processes incoming and outgoing overseas mail and employs about 450 staff, and handles about 224,000 standard letters each day.
- 17. Suburban facilities have been established in four centres and each serves a defined portion of the Melbourne metropolitan area. The centres, their year of establishment and the number of staff employed, and the average daily number of standard letters handled at each centre are as follows:

Centre	Year	Staff	Average no./day handled ('000)
Blackburn	1975	340	83 2
Clayton South	1978	470	964
Preston	1979	280	565
Footscray West	1979	210	364
	Total	1,300	

18. Country mail centres have been established in five provincial centres each serving a defined portion of country Victoria. The centres, their location, year of establishment and the number of staff employed are as follows:

Centre	Year	Staff	Average no./day handled ('000)
Geel ong	1975	80	192
Ballarat	1976	60	112
Bendigo	1977	60	113
Seymour	1977	50	121
Morwell	1977	60	131
	Total	310	

19. Australia Post advised that since the establishment of decentralised mail processing centres in Victoria there have been significant improvements in productivity. One of the benefits to customers has been the containment of costs.

#### THE NEED

- 20. The Committee was advised that the Victorian network of modern and decentralised mail centres is complete with the exception of the provision of a new Melbourne Mail Centre and State Mail Centre. Both centres, as mentioned above, have been housed in the major part the former Central Mail Exchange building on the corner of Bourke and Spencer streets.
- 21. The former CME building was completed in 1917 and was used mainly as administrative accommodation, with a Mail Branch and Post Office on the lower floors. The upper floors were subsequently adapted for mail processing operations and the building now houses the majority of the Melbourne Mail Centre and State Mail Centre.
- 22. During the Committee's inspection of the building Australia Post officials pointed out numerous deficiencies and restrictions to and on mail processing operations within and on the outside of the building.
- 23. These restrictions and deficiencies are generally a product of the age of the building, its multi-storey floor configuration and the limited access available to Australia Post and private vehicles. The following internal deficiencies were pointed out by Australia Post:
  - floor surfaces in some areas are breaking down creating safety problems and requiring frequent and costly maintenance;
  - fire protection facilities are in need of upgrading;
  - lighting requires to be modernised;
  - air treatment and circulation facilities are unsatisfactory;

- staff amenities are of a poor standard;
- passenger lifts, which date from 1917 and operate on direct current power, are outmoded and difficult to service;
- windows are badly corroded and in need of replacement;
- the internal paintwork is in poor condition and the building needs repainting throughout; and
- the 3rd, 4th and 5th floors were restored in 1967 following a fire. The greater part of the restoration was designed to be temporary. The 3rd and 4th floors were vacated late in 1983 due to the use of asbestos to reinstate ceilings following the fire. Major refurbishment cannot be undertaken without evacuating the entire building.
- 24. In addition to the evident internal deficiencies mentioned above, Australia Post pointed out that multi-level operations, i.e., mail being required to be transferred by double conveyor belts from the ground floor receipts area to sorting areas on various levels, requries extra staff and equipment. Ideally, all sorting and handling activities should be carried out on a single level.
- 25. A third restriction on the expeditious processing of mail derives from limited vehicular manoeuvring area and parking space in the Spencer Street yard. The yard itself is extremely small, causing Australia Post and private vehicles delivering mail to queue in Little Bourke Street during daily peak periods. There is no capacity for expanding the vehicle yard. In the future, with larger sized vehicles designed to handle containerised mail, congestion caused by restricted access and inadequate vehicle manoeuvring space will worsen.

26. <u>Committee's Conclusion</u> Facilities occupied by the Melbourne and State Mail Centres have numerous operational deficiencies and do not reflect contemporary standards for the handling and processing of mail.

#### ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

- 27. Australia Post advised the Committee that until 1983 it had been planned to relocate the State Mail Centre to new premises on the fringe of the city and to refurbish the existing former Central Mail Exchange building to house the Melbourne Mail Centre and some administrative functions. The overall cost of this strategy, including the provision of temporary relocation accommodation was estimated at \$14 million. Following an examination of the economics, operational suitability and industrial consequences of this strategy, it was decided to vacate the 70-year old building and to seek new premises for both the Melbourne and State Mail centres. As a result of this decision Australia Post, in conjunction with the then Department of Administrative Services, placed advertisements in daily newspapers during April/May 1983, inviting offers of improved properties or for the construction of buildings to suit Australia Post's requirements for the Melbourne and State Mail centres.
- 28. Essential Requirements Essential location and building requirements for a new Melbourne Mail Centre are:
  - 10,000 square metres of floor space at ground level for operational activities;
  - located within three kilometres of the Melbourne GPO:
  - adequate space for staff and official vehicle parking;
     and
  - good public transport access for staff.

29. Any new Melbourne Mail Centre should also provide sufficient space and operational flexibility to overcome four other accommodation requirements. These are as follows:

- a facility at which customers can lodge small quantities of bulk mail (1 or 2 bags);
- a private box suite to replace the suite located on the ground floor of the former Central Mail Exchange Building;
- storage space for seasonally used operational equipment, archives, display items, finance and accounts records; and
- a relocated Dead Letter Office which is currently located in the group of buildings at the corner of Spencer and Bourke Streets which should be sold or redeveloped on completion of new Melbourne and State Mail centres.
- 30. Expressions of Interest A total of 33 expressions of interest from private developers was received in response to the advertisement. Most failed to meet one or more requirements in terms of size, location, and accessibility for operations and staff. All offers considered suitable involved the construction of new buildings. Of these two firms or consortiums were invited by the then Department of Administrative Services to submit more detailed proposals conforming with a detailed brief developed by Australia Post in conjunction with DHC. The two developers were:
  - Hollstone Properties Pty Ltd for a proposed development at the corner of Spencer and La Trobe Streets,
     Melbourne; and
  - Brady Investments for a development at 223-273 Normanby Road, South Melbourne.

- 31. Spencer and La Trobe Street Site This site is considered by Australia Post to be the most suitable for a new Melbourne Mail Centre. It is close to the main mail generating points in the CBD which assists in reducing costs and ensures compliance with advertised service standards. The site is also adjacent to major arterial roads, has good public transport access and is supported by staff associations.
- 32. The site is smaller than originally sought. An 'ideal' site would have all activities, including car parking, at ground floor level. The topography of the site nevertheless suits the provision of basement car parking, drive—in customer lodgement and private box facilities and satisfies the prerequisite that all processing operations be carried out on the ground floor. (See Locality Plan, Illustration C-1, Appendix C.)
- 33. The site has an area of 11,750 square metres and currently contains a number of old industrial buildings used by the State Transit Authority for workshops. The land is owned by the Victorian Government and will be sold and the title transferred to the Australian Postal Commission. The site is presently zoned 'Railway Reservation'. The Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works advised that no objection will be made to the land being re-zoned 'Public Purposes Commonwealth Use'.
- 34. 223-273 Normanby Road This location was rejected because it is more remote from the CBD catchment area and would therefore attract additional transport time and costs. It has limited access to public transport compared with the preferred location and was viewed unfavourably by staff and their organisations.
- 35. Other Alternatives Redevelopment of the Australia Post owned Spencer/Bourke Street property complex to provide a new mail centre was also considered. Australia Post advised that three conceptual schemes based on this location were considered. Costs ranged from \$12 million to \$20.9 million. This alternative

location would not overcome the access problem and the provision of temporary accommodation for the activities carried out in the existing premises.

- 36. A further alternative involving the lease or purchase of the Montague Shipping sheds in South Melbourne would have provided a satisfactory location for a new Melbourne Mail Centre. However, Australia Post preferred this location for a State Mail Centre and planning proceeded on that basis. The Committee was advised that after Australia Post had negotiated for 13 months for the aquisition of the site with the Victorian State Transport Authority, it was withdrawn in November 1984.
- 37. A new site and development offer for the State Mail Centre is being negotiated. The Committee understands this proposal will be referred early in 1986.
- 38. <u>Committee's Conclusion</u> The site at the corner of Spencer and La Trobe Streets offers advantages over other sites examined.

#### THE PROPOSAL

- 39. The proposal is to construct a new Melbourne Mail Centre on the preferred site at the corner of Spencer and La Trobe Streets.
- 40. Building Design The proposed mail centre will be a three-storey building with the operations area and truck loading bays at street level. Staff amenities and office space will be housed on a small first floor section along the Spencer Street frontage, while a basement car park will cover the entire site below street level. (Construction details are in Appendix B. Floor Plans are at Appendix C Illustrations C-2 [Basement], C-3 [Ground Floor] and C-4 [First Floor] Building elevations and Sections are at Illustration C-5.)

- 41. Functional Planning The design achieves the following objectives:
  - efficient loading and unloading of mail from road transport and containers with minimum internal traffic congestion;
  - high security of mail articles, including registered articles, and ease of staff supervision;
  - operational safety of staff;
  - the provision of staff amenities to nominated standards;
  - adequate car parking for official and staff cars and for mail vehicles;
  - single level operations area;
  - minimal local access and traffic hazard.
- 42. <u>Functional Areas</u> The proposed allocation of functional areas within the building will be as follows:

Basement - Total Area 8900 square metres.

- Drive-through customer lodgement
- Dead Letter Office
- Private boxes
- Car park 120 cars
- Storage area
- Plant rooms, stairs, lifts

Ground Floor - Total Area 9930 square metres

- Vehicle docks under canopy
- Mail Sorting operations
- Operationally related administration
- Staff amenities
- Stairs, lifts

Part First Floor - Total Area 1400 square metres

- Manager and staff
- Staff amenities
- Plant rooms, stairs, lifts
- 43. <u>Design Life</u> Australia Post advised that the building has been sized to meet forecast needs to the year 2005. The design and specifications have taken into account a wide range of future possible developments including mail growth, present and future technologies, staffing assessments, and equipment and space requirements based on the application of known and estimated productivity rates and standards. The Committee was advised that Australia Post projections indicate a continuing growth of 2 per cent per annum compounded, during the life of the building.
- 44. Australia Post believes the design meets adequately the functional requirements to the design year. DHC advised that the proposed layout is consistent with the schematic diagram provided in the technical brief to developers.
- 45. Amenities The building has been designed to incorporate amenities in accordance with relevant Australia Post codes. Amenities will include a lunch room equipped to dispense food under the cook/chill method. This is a catering system whereby food is prepared and cooked in central kitchens, freshly chilled and stored in low temperature conditions, \*ransported and finally re-heated and served. Seating in the lunch room will be provided to accommodate the maxmum number of staff on a meal break at any one time. Space for active and passive recreation will also be provided.

- 46. <u>Security</u> Security features will be installed to protect the entire building and the yard and their contents. The perimeter of the site will be provided with lighting.
- 47. <u>Vehicle Accommodation</u> Parking bays for nine trucks will be provided near the dock area. Parking space for four visitors' cars and four Australia Post cars will be provided in the basement. As well, 120 spaces for vehicles belonging to the staff will be provided in the basement car park. This number meets local council and Australia Post requirements. Vehicle access to the parking area will be from Spencer Street and access to the loading docks will be from La Trobe Street.
- 48. Involvement of DHC The involvement of DHC in this proposal has been one of adviser to Australia Post in the preparation of the technical brief as a basis for prospective developers submissions and the subsequent review of the submissions. The review tested submissions to ensure compliance with briefed standards, finishes, equipment performance, safety and accommodation. DHC requested architectural and engineering consultants to the developer to provide a more detailed description of the building and its services. These were studied and discussions were held with the developer's technical consultants, State and Local Authorities to ensure compliance with the technical brief, Australian standards and local regulations.
- 49. <u>Committee's Conclusion</u> The design of the proposed building adequately reflects contemporary mail handling and sorting requirements and provides sufficient space to cater for forecast needs to the year 2005.

#### ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

50. DHC advised that the proposed new development will not have an adverse effect on the physical or visual environment. A Notice of Intent was submitted to the then Department of Home Affairs and Environment which advised in November 1984 that an Environmental Impact Statement was not required.

#### CONSULTATIONS

- 51. Australia Post advised that the project has been discussed with staff organisations in accordance with normal practices. The staff organisations agree with the project and Australia Post advised that consultation with them will continue throughout its development.
- 52. Submissions to the Committee from the Australian Postal and Telecommunications Union and the Administrative and Clerical Officers Association requested that the new centre be provded with a child minding area. This request is similar to one advanced at the public hearing into the proposed construction of State Head Office Building for Telecom Australia, Sydney (Committee's Eighth Report of 1985, Parliamentary Paper No. 267/85). Australia Post advised that it would comply with Government policy concerning the provision of child minding centres at Commonwealth establishments. The Committee understands that this is under review by the Government. DHC advised that should a change in policy emerge, the upper floor of the building could be adapted to provide child minding facilities.

#### COSTS AND TIMETABLE

53. The estimated capital cost of purchasing the site and the building is \$16.34 million at January 1985 prices. Construction of the building and all engineering services is \$10.76 million

at January 1985 prices. Upon Parliamentary approval for the work to proceed, the Minister for Communications will be asked to approve a contract to purchase the development. The developer's offer allows for the completion of the design and construction of all work within 28 months of written acceptance of their offer.

54. <u>Committee's Recommendation</u> The Committee recommends construction of the work in this reference.

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

55. The recommendations and conclusions of the Committee and the paragraph in the report to which each refers are set out below:

		Paragraph
1.	FACILITIES OCCUPIED BY THE MELBOURNE AND STATE MAIL CENTRES HAVE NUMEROUS OPERATIONAL DEFICIENCIES AND DO NOT REFLECT CONTEMPORARY STANDARDS FOR THE HANDLING AND PROCESSING OF	
	MAIL.	26
2.	THE SITE AT THE CORNER OF SPENCER AND LA TROBE STREETS OFFERS ADVANTAGES OVER OTHER SITES	
	EXAMINED.	38
3.	THE DESIGN OF THE PROPOSED BUILDING ADEQUATELY REFLECTS CONTEMPORARY MAIL HANDLING AND SORTING REQUIREMENTS AND PROVIDES SUFFICIENT SPACE TO	
	CATER FOR FORECAST NEEDS TO THE YEAR 2005.	49
4.	THE ESTIMATED CAPITAL COST OF PURCHASING THE SITE AND THE BUILDING IS \$16.34 MILLION AT	
	JANUARY 1985 PRICES.	53
5.	THE COMMITTEE RECOMMENDS CONSTRUCTION OF THE	
	WORK IN THIS REFERENCE.	√ 54

(D.J. FOREMAN) Chairman

Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works Parliament House CANBERRA

14 November 1985

#### APPENDIX A

#### LIST OF WITNESSES

- Bickerstaff, I.S., Esq., Associate Director (Projects),

  Department of Housing and Construction, 239 Bourke Street,

  Melbourne, Victoria
- Fernell, K.J., Esq., General Manager, Estates Management
  Department, Australia Post Headquarters, 71 Rathdowne
  Street, Carlton South, Victoria
- Marshall, G.B., Esq., Consultant, C/- Lines, MacFarlane and Marshall Pty Ltd, 19 Carpenter Street, Brighton, Victoria
- Robinson, P.J., Esq., Project Manager (Telecom Postal),

  Department of Housing and Construction, 239 Bourke Street,
  Melbourne, Victoria
- Saunderson, D.F., Esq., Manager, Special Projects, Estates Management Department, Australia Post Headquarters, 71 Rathdowne Street, Carlton South, Victoria
- Venning, R.W., Esq., Manager, Planning and Technical Services
  Department, Australia Post, 191 Queen Street, Melbourne,
  Victoria

#### CONSTRUCTION DETAILS

- 1. <u>Foundations</u> Foundations will consist of pad and strip footings. DHC advised a design bearing capacity of 200 KPa will be specified. Preliminary approval has been obtained from the Melbourne Transit Authority to construct pad footings over the Melbourne rail loop tunnels which pass under the site.
- 2. <u>Structure and Finishes</u>. The building structure will be a reinforced concrete frame with concrete block walls. Exposed external surfaces will be clad with an applied crushed marble finish. The roof will have a steel frame covered with zincalume. Window frames will be anodised aluminium with sun screen protection.
- Internal finishes will be of painted plasterboard in offices and concrete blockwork in operations areas.
- 4. Floors will be seamless epoxy except for offices which will be carpet, and toilets which will be ceramic tiled.
- 5. <u>Mechanical Services</u> All internal functional areas will be air conditioned to provide comfort conditions for staff. Air conditioning will be zoned to facilitate conservation of energy by switching of air conditioning to zones when not occupied. An electronic energy management system will be provided to control energy consumption.
- 6. Ventilation and exhaust systems will be provided in accordance with Australian Standards. Truck exhaust fumes will be excluded from the operations area by positive pressurised air conditioning and flexible entry doors.

- 7. Heating will be by fan coil units serviced by hot water from a gas fired boiler.
- 8. <u>Electrical Services</u> Power will be provided from an existing sub-station adjacent to the site. Emergency power will be provided by an automatic start Diesel generator which will provide power to run all loads with the exception of the air conditioning chillers.
- 9. Lighting will generally comprise fluorescent fittings to Australian Standards. The lighting will be zoned to reduce power consumption. Emergency evacuation lighting will be provided. An audible emergency warning system will be installed throughout the complex.
- 10. Bydraulic Services The existing water supply is sufficient for both domestic and fire fighting flows with no pumping required for sprinklers or hydrants. The sewerage system is a conventional gravity flow type to mains of adequate capacity. Stormwater drainage will require the upgrading of street inlets to handle run-off from the new development.
- 11. Fire Protection The building will be protected throughout by automatic sprinklers, hose reels and portable extinguishers. The layout and building materials have been selected to minimise fire hazards.
- 12. <u>Security</u> Secure areas will be provided for registered articles. A closed circuit television system will monitor internal security. A secure area of solid block wall construction will be provided adjacent to the loading dock area for holding suspect materials pending investigation and removal.









