

The Sydney Morning Herald

Exclusive Politics Federal [Government grants](#)

Internal documents show department was unsure if commuter car park projects had merit

By [Shane Wright](#) and [Katina Curtis](#)

Updated October 15, 2021 — 7.02am, first published at 5.00am

The Infrastructure Department was unable to tell the federal government whether its plans to spend almost \$400 million on car parks at suburban railway stations had merit or could even be built just days before Prime Minister Scott Morrison signed off on the promises.

Documents released under Freedom of Information laws to *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age* confirm the department itself did not have “detailed information on train station car parks” ahead of Mr Morrison and then infrastructure minister Alan Tudge approving funding for 27 separate car park sites.

Ahead of the 2019 election, the Coalition used a \$660 million commuter car park fund to promise 47 car parks near train stations. A [scathing Auditor-General’s report](#) found more than three-quarters of the projects were in Coalition-held electorates, and two thirds were in Melbourne.

The Auditor-General found the sites were nominated by ministers or Coalition MPs and although some asked for information from councils, it was unclear whether those councils knew funding had been sought or approved. The Auditor-General’s office revealed [a government-compiled list of the 20 most marginal seats ahead of the 2019 election formed the basis](#) for the program.

In the more than two years since the election, three have been built, construction has begun on several more and six were cancelled. The federal government says that by the end of 2022, 33 of the projects will either be [completed or under construction](#).

The heavily redacted documents, released after *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age* sought an internal review of the department’s initial decision not to release any documents, show there was still little official information about the proposed car parks in March and April 2019.

On March 26, the day before Mr Morrison announced \$35 million for car parks at Gosford and Woy Woy in the marginal NSW seat of Robertson, the department noted it could not recommend funding at that stage.

“The department is not in a position to recommend allocating ... funding ... or provide detailed advice on the relative merits, scope or funding profiles, given the limited time and information

available,” it said.

Both projects are listed as “in planning”, with particular issues around sourcing a site at Woy Woy.

On April 5, just days before Mr Morrison called the election, the department again noted it could not recommend projects, admitting it did not have important information about the proposed car parks.

“The department is not in a position to recommend funding the proposed projects or provide detailed advice on the relative merits, scope or costings of the potential projects, given the limited time and information available,” it said.

“Commentary and analysis on the proposed projects for the CCF (commuter car park fund) are particularly general as the information provided was based on stations alone, with no further details as to current car parking or capacity upgrades envisaged. The department does not currently have access to the detailed information on train station car parks.”

Five days later, Mr Tudge and Mr Morrison formally approved funding for 27 projects worth a combined \$389 million. Each car park would be announced publicly during the election campaign.

While the department said it could not find any spreadsheets with the title “top 20 marginals”, the redacted documents do show there were spreadsheets created to identify possible projects.

A departmental search of emails identified more than 3000 relating to the commuter car park fund.

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25 March 2021

Robyn Legg
Assistant Secretary
NSW, ACT and Targeted Roads | Infrastructure Investment Division
Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications

Dear Robyn,

**Commuter Carpark Project, Gosford
Project ID 101283-19NSW-UCO**

We refer to the \$30m Federal Government funding proposed to be allocated towards a 600-space commuter carpark in the Gosford CBD and the numerous discussions between local and federal government staff members.

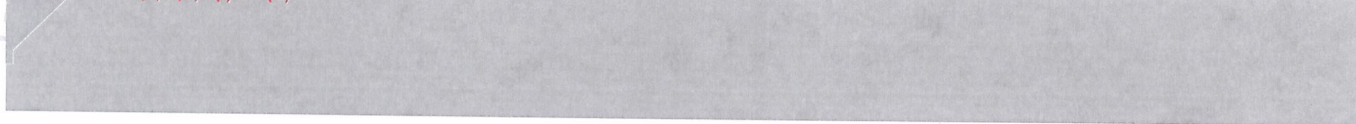
As you have become aware Council is currently in Administration. Part of the Administrator's responsibility is to assure Council's long-term financial position. One of the key future restrictions on Councils financial recovery is a limit on the future Capital works program that is linked to future depreciation of all capital assets.

s14 Table cl 1(c)1(e)1(f) & 1(d)

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Council has consulted with Lucy Wicks (Local Member for Robertson) in relation to its financial position and its inability to proceed with the project. s14 Table cl 1(c)1(e)1(f) & 1(d)

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We understand, based on recent discussions between our staff members, you will brief the Minister (Paul Fletcher) and advise Council if the Federal Government will directly discuss with the State Government delivery and ownership of a carpark at the above detailed site location.



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We thank you for your understanding and we look forward to working with the Federal Government with future endeavours.

Yours sincerely,

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Rik Hart
Acting Chief Executive Officer

BB / Mr B Brown
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Teleconference – Woy Woy CCP

July 2021

TELECONFERENCE DETAILS

Invitées / Attendees:

Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications

S14

Contact No: S14

Transport for NSW Attendees

Michael Childs, Mark Roberts, Jason Chang, Abhay Singh, Chetan Thaker, Sharbel Sarkis

Contact No: (02) 9422 7043, S14

Microsoft Teams

1. Current Status

Action Items / Outcomes of previous teleconference

Project Status

Completed activities (including date of completion)

- Finalisation of 5% Design

Upcoming activities (including expected date of completion)

- Cost estimation and risk adjustment
- Finalise SBC document
- Draft Development PPR
- S14 Table cl 1(c)(e)(f) & 1(d)

Current sensitivities		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existing environmental impact (trees) Existing services on site
Current Risks		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existing environmental impact (trees) Existing services on site s14 Table c1 1(c)1(e)1(f) & 1(d)
2. PROJECT ADMINISTRATION		
Project Cost	Total Estimated Cost	TBD
	Funding committed by Aust. Govt.	\$5 million
	Funding committed by State	\$0.00
	Payments to Date	N/A
	Payments in 20/21	N/A
Community Consultation	Update and planned activities	N/A
PPR's	Update and upcoming submissions	Currently drafting Development PPR
Property Acquisition	Update and issues	N/A
Design	Update and issues	Finalising definition design
3. CONSTRUCTION		

Commencement of Construction (actual or expected)			TBD			
Completion Open to traffic (actual or expected)			TBD			
Delays/ variations to date			N/A			
Building Code Checklist						
4.INDIGENOUS PARTICIPATION PLAN – ** only Applicable to projects in Delivery Phase with federal contribution above \$7.5m**						
N/A						
5.MILESTONES						
Is the project on schedule to meet its next federal milestone?						
Key Agreed Milestones – Payment Claims			YES			
No	Milestone Description	Agreed Month /Year	Revised Month Year	Status Complete= C In Progress =I	Payment Amount \$	Comment (used to explain variations)
1	Complete Draft Concept Design	10-Jun		C	\$250,000	
2	Submit final Concept Design and Draft Development PPR	7-Jul	30 July	I	\$250,000	Financial year end closure
3	Submit Final and approved Development PPR	9-Aug	30 Aug	I	\$100,000	Financial year end closure
Other Key Milestones – Not linked to Payment Claims						

No	Milestone Description	Agreed Month /Year	Revised Month Year	Status Complete= C In Progress =I	Comment (used to explain variations)
1	N/A				
2	N/A				
3	N/A				
6.MEDIA					
Previous events held					
Media issues and community concerns					
Potential upcoming events		No planned State Government events			
7.Other					