

March 1, 2003

Professor Peter Newman  
Director  
Sustainability Policy Unit  
Department of the Premier and Cabinet  
15th Floor, Governor Stirling Tower  
197 St George's Terrace  
Perth WA 6000

Dear Professor Newman

I have just completed reading "Focus on the Future: The Western Australia State Sustainability Strategy," and want to strongly endorse this exemplary document and the promising approach to advancing sustainable development that it embodies. I would begin by underscoring the value of this document as a catalyst for enhancing Western Australia's future. The vision that is embodied here offers WA a path to begin addressing the most important challenge facing human civilization in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, namely how to transform social structures and economic processes that currently demand more from the natural environment than can be supported by either global and local ecosystems.

From climate change to the impending war in Iraq, signs that "business as usual" is generating physical and political forces of immense destructive potential are increasingly abundant. The risk that humans run by ignoring these signs and signals of ecological danger seems to grow by the day. Amid the surge of violence that has been flooding the world since September 11, 2001, "Focus on the Future" stands out as a lucid alternative to addressing global problems by constructing preventive measures, rather than through massive destruction. It is my sincere hope that Western Australia's leaders will embrace the vision laid out in the State Sustainability Strategy and quickly launch vigorous implementation measures. I see two areas where such efforts could yield particular success that would demonstrate the value of moving forward on other elements of the strategy.

By building upon Western Australia's internationally recognized achievements in revitalizing regional passenger rail services and community redevelopment, local and state governments could demonstrate how dividends paid by sustainable development will rapidly accrue to individuals and firms that engage this vision. Fremantle stands out as proof positive of the value that can be unlocked from renewing older neighbourhoods and transportation infrastructure in tandem. It was this success that brought me to live and work in Fremantle during a sabbatical leave in 1998. Choosing to live car-free during my sojourn, I became very familiar with Transperth's excellent rail operations, as well as the potential to improve its bus services. Expanding Perth's electric passenger rail network in conjunction with creating transit oriented development around new stations in a range of urban, suburban, and even rural settings should become a "flagship" initiative of WA's new sustainability vision.

I would like to stress the importance of using electric power to sustainably meet Western Australia's local and regional mobility needs, since this is the sole energy distribution infrastructure that is fully capable of enabling alternative energy sources (including renewable energy sources which could offer great promise in Western Australia) to be used in both freight and passenger transportation. Any energy source, from biofuels to hydrogen, could power an electric grid that would be used by "off the shelf" electric train, tramway, and trolley-bus technology. The same wires that power a trolley-bus network could also be used for local freight delivery by adapting trolley-trucks that already exist for mining applications. By building up its electric powered transportation capacity, Western Australia will both enhance energy efficiency while also gaining the ability to blend the widest possible range of energy sources to meet future mobility needs.

Now that Western Australia has such a promising sustainable development strategy, people need a way to invest in it easily. One such way would be for the Western Australia government to launch a sustainability savings bond program. Funds invested in these bonds would receive a guaranteed return that was comparable to other public borrowing, perhaps with some incentive such as tax-free interest. The capital raised by these bonds would be invested in ventures that met sustainability covenants and showed commercial promise. Another option would be to invest a share of public sector pension funds in ventures that are certified to meet sustainability goals as set out in the official plan. In either or both cases, the flow of resources can accelerate private sector pursuit of sustainable development goals and targets in Western Australia.

I would like to close by commending you and your staff for producing such a powerfully reasoned and thoughtful draft sustainability strategy. Its principles and approach to articulating a vision that is both concrete and innovative can serve as a blueprint for many jurisdictions. I wish you every success in pursuing this vision.

Sincerely

Anthony Perl, Director  
City University of New York Aviation Institute at York College