

## Hello Shane

The reports "Cheap Parking at Echo Point" and "Free Ride for Coaches", following these initial comments, were first produced in February and May 2000 respectively as part of Katoomba Whispers. They were drawn, in part, from Gazette articles and from Council documents. Please attend closely to the comments of Blue Mountains Tourism Authority Manager, Daryl Buckingham, "On the one hand Blue Mountains Tourism make all their money from the coaches..."

You might note that while "Blue Mountains Tourism makes all their money from coaches" the town languishes (this is the reason that you chose Leura when you moved here). Unemployment is high. The City of the Arts is merely a name and has no manifestation in the Upper Mountains. One of the keys to the town's revitalisation and major promotion of the 1998 Charrette was a strong link between Echo Point and the town. You might analyse the failure to establish a Cultural Centre next to the Carrington in the light of Council's desire to focus operations at Echo Point. The battle was always obvious while I was secretary of the Taskforce (three years)

Some key questions should be answered before the Mayor moves to negotiate on behalf of the community without community input. Please note that the Taskforce which purportedly represents the Upper Mountains was cut out of any discussions regarding coaches some years ago. The tragedy is they didn't know they were cut out and still don't. The desire to focus energy at Echo Point forced major alterations to the final Echo Point plan in the interest of money gathering. In this context these questions must be answered:

**1. Section 94** - the previous owner of the Pavillion, Mr Stephen Roberts, laid down a bank deposit of \$800,000 as a Section 94 contribution. Has this been used?

**2. Coach Parking Fees** - how much has been raised from the coaches since the introduction of this system? Can we have these figures year by year.

**3. Yearly Coach Pass for Echo Point** - what happened to the year pass referred to by Tourism Authority's Daryl Buckingham in Feb 2000 (where did negotiations end up)?

**4. Why Waive Bus Fees** - if Council wants to waive funds from coaches it must explain the benefits to the broader community. On the surface, it appears that money gathered from coaches is merely used to subsidise marketing for Tourism Authority members.

**5. Is the Mayor going to sell us out again?** His record suggests he will. His position on this is indefensible. He is impressed by the arguments, you say. He should not be re-elected, I say.

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## **Katoomba Whispers**

### **CHEAP PARKING AT ECHO POINT BM Gazette 23/2/2000**

Bus companies paid only \$200 dollars last year in parking fees at Echo Point.

[Local residents Catriona Gillies and Alan Law complained of lack of cooperation from coaches]

But the acting General Manager of Council, Robert Greenwood, said they are working on finding a solution to the bus problem.

"Council is concerned that the tourist bus companies have not fully cooperated with the new arrangement," Mr Greenwood said.

But Mr Greenwood said council are "confident that through constructive negotiations a way forward will be achieved in the near future." [ We think this confidence misplaced See Free Ride for Coaches]

Mr Kevin Holden from AAT Kings Coaches said their company stopped going to Echo Point after the fees were introduced. [Has anyone seen an AAT Kings Coach at Echo Point?]

### **COACH ISSUE ON THE BOIL BM Gazette 23/2/2000**

**The chief executive officer of Blue Mountains Tourism, Daryl Buckingham**, said they have been working on a number of proposals with regard to coaches at Echo Point including a year pass.

But Mr Buckingham says the issue puts his organisation in something of a bind, saying the issue is a "really difficult one".

On the one hand Blue Mountains Tourism make all their money from the coaches, but on the other the coaches inject little money into the local economy and lap around residential strips waiting to pick up their passengers.

"We make most of our money from those buses with our souvenir sales, which pay for our whole operation," Mr Buckingham said.

[Unfortunately, Mr Buckingham had to leave before he was able to implement these proposals. We had his inestimable services for two years. He is now working in tourism in the far west coast of Western Australia]

And Councillor Hamilton tells us the big issue is the buses. She should talk to someone who can do something about it. It doesn't seem to be the Councillors. You see the coaches are not the issue. It is the fact that they have not been dealt with in the broader context of a tourism / local economic

development strategy. Maybe those responsible for this mess could do with a little help. How about it Councillors!!!

## **Free Ride for Coaches at Echo Point Continues and Where's the Report**

It would be some compensation if the Bus and Coach Association in their Annual Report would at least thank the people of the Blue Mountains and the people of Katoomba, in particular, for the enormous contribution we make to the coach industry.

But they don't. You can't say we haven't been considerate of their needs. In particular, Blue Mountains City Council deserves a big tick here. In 1997 council bureaucrats launched their airport landing pad design for Echo Point, tried to shift the town onto the highway to allow strip development, but the master stroke was drilling at Echo Point in preparation for an underground carpark along with plans to implement pay parking which is the subject of our discussion.

This met with considerable community opposition, but council ensured us that the project would be a winner, financially at least. It was described as a short term measure. We found it hard to believe that anything that increased council cash intake could be planned as short term. Of further concern to us was the fact that the parking meter income would deter the implementation of plans already underway to encourage strong links with Katoomba's commercial district. Why would council encourage this when their cashstream was at Echo Point? The considerable opposition of senior council bureaucrats to a trolley service linking Echo Point to the town only amplified our concerns

**19 December 1996** - as a result of a report to council, council entered into a contract with Reinhardt Australia for the supply of 26 ticket machines at Echo Point. There had been no public consultation on pay and display at this time. In fact, the Advisory committee would most definitely have been opposed to the concept.

**February 1997** - Pay and Display concept placed on public exhibition. Council met with representatives of the Bus and Coach Association, the Inbound Tourist Association of Australia and several major bus and Coach Operators. At that time Council proposed a fee of \$50 per coach or \$50 per hour. These representatives argued the fees were unreasonable, particularly in view of the Asian Economic Crisis, and that \$20 would be more appropriate.

**22 April 1997** - Report on pay parking presented at Council meeting of this date. Early discussions suggested the fee for coach parking would be set at

around \$20 per coach. The coach companies screamed that they would need at least a year's advance notice to be able to absorb these costs. They advised that they work on a very fine budget.

**27 May 1997** - Council minutes purchase of three properties in Echo Point Rd with a view to developing underground carparking complex

**21 October 1997** - Council moved a resolution to trial the parking meters. It was stated at the time that the process would be reviewed within a year of its operation. The initial fee was set at \$20 for coaches and \$10 for mini-buses

**1 March 1998** - Bus and Coach Association requested that implementation of the proposed system be delayed until this date to allow it time to notify its members and council system commenced on this date

**17 March 1998** - Council met with representatives of the Bus and Coach Association, The Inbound Tourist Association of Australia, Murray's Coaches, Clipper Tours, Fantastic Aussie Tours, Great Sights and Grey Line, Mountain Link Buses. Their lack of cooperation with the new system was noted. Coach operators expressed concern that there was a lack of consultation with regard to implementation of the scheme. They also questioned the \$20 fee and noted the difficulty they will have with passing on the fee as in their industry the fees are normally set 18 months in advance. Coach operators also argued that we were one of the few destinations seeking such a fee.

Following their lack of cooperation the coach companies were rewarded with a reduction in the fee to \$10 for coaches and \$5 for mini-buses.

**7 April 1998** - A report to Council noted that following representation from members of the coach industry fees were reduced before they were implemented to \$10 per coach and \$5 per mini-bus. This report noted that coaches were not using the meters and were dropping passengers off in the existing bus zone and then circulating through residential streets.

**22 September 1999** - the bus meters did not work until this time due to "technical and programming problems". (And they are still not working).

**27 September 1999** - Council wrote to coach organisations and operators seeking their support in making the system work. Unfortunately, there were no responses.

**29 October 1999** - Value Management Workshop was held at Emergency Services Headquarters where organisations considered representative stakeholders included: Bus and Coach Assoc, Tourism NSW, Reinhardt Australia (2), Peach Coaches, Murray Coaches, Fantastic Aussie Tours (2), Lilianfels, Three Sisters Pavilion, Mountain Escapes, Circular Quay Tours (didn't attend), Friends and Residents of Echo Point and nine Council representatives including Councillor Hamilton and the Manager of Tourism. So it was a big meeting. The meeting was conducted by Value Management Study Team Denis Sullivan and Marilyn Morris

The results were both comical and disturbing. A summary follows:

Mark Bunch (Council Engineer) noted that income from the system was:

\$330,000 - \$500,000 income during first year of operation  
\$300,000 the cost to council of to set up the pay and display scheme  
\$268,000 Yr 1 on-going running costs  
\$85,000 profit expected for year 1  
\$400,000 projected income p.a. expected to increase  
\$200,000 - \$250,000 Operations and Maintenance costs should remain basically the same.

I've read this a number of times and I still can't figure out whether we made a profit. That \$350,000-\$500,000 looks a bit rubbery. Do we own the machines? Is there a maintenance cost?

Councillor Hamilton did not accept that the problems re coaches would be addressed. Councillor Hamilton (who was a strong advocate of Pay Parking)

**Comments from participants at Value Management Workshop**

Noted that the seventeen minutes average [stay at Echo Point] varies from one to another.

**John Cronshaw - Fantastic Aussie Tours**

**NOTE: Aussie Tours (or people connected with this organisation) has close involvement with Inter/Intrastate Coach Organisation Aussie Experience**

That the first 20 minutes should be free and that bus and coach operators "will find a way of avoiding paying they will, human nature."

**John Cronshaw - Fantastic Aussie Tours**

Recommended building an underground carpark at Katoomba High by 2020.

**John Cronshaw - Fantastic Aussie Tours**

Noted that the one hour parking limit too short.

**Craig Baldock - Pavilion**

He also stated that he thought Council should drop coach charging as if the ranger isn't there they don't pay.

**Craig Baldock - Pavilion**

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**End of Comments**

We have been seeking access to this report for a year. **The Advisory Committee was not told at any stage that such a meeting had taken place.** We simply knew that a report was due in keeping with an earlier Council resolution that a report on Pay and Display would be produced.

I first asked for a copy of the report late last year. I also questioned the availability of the report in February and March this year. The Chairperson of the Advisory Committee, Councillor Hamilton advised the meeting that the report was not available. Again no mention was made of the October 1999 meeting.

One year later we have the report. There was no community involvement in its production. It was left to the coach companies and council to continue this facade. They were given a further reduction in their fees and discussions took place on giving their own private parking space including toilets. Councillor Hamilton suggested the State Government might pay for it.

Do I need to tell you? The coaches still didn't pay!!!

**9 May 2000** - Further report to Councillors expresses regret that the coaches continue to roam through residential streets and will not use the meters and notes the annoyance to residents from this practice and the coaches companies' "need" to keep their engines running.

**This report also referred to the 29 October 1999 Value Management Workshop** which was described as a mechanism to canvas and address the issues, concerns and to obtain input from representative stakeholders in an issue.

This report recommended that:

An annual fee structure be established for buses and coaches

Reduced the fees to **\$4 and \$2** for coaches and mini-buses

That council get an undertaking from the coach **industry indicating their acceptance of the scheme** prior to incurring any further expenditure

That consultation commence with residents on Eastern side of Echo Point Rd

That a further report be brought to council within eight months assessing the use of the interim layover area

A further recommendation relating to resident parking.

Guess what? They are still not paying. But this time it's our fault. The meter is broken!!