

Media Piece

6th February 2009

Think Global, Act Local

This was the 1990's catchphrase of many international businesses striving to expand into lucrative foreign markets where local customs and tastes often dictated variations to global marketing strategies. For many it was highly successful, proving that local execution of a global strategy can be much more effective than a rigid one-size-fits-all approach. Fast forward to 2009 and we find businesses struggling to survive due to the global financial crisis, with many closing their doors or curtailing operations in once profitable foreign countries.

It is now governments of every developed nation who are trying to adopt the business mantra of "think global, act local" in order to stimulate economies and provide an environment in which investment can be encouraged and jobs protected. Almost every major government has sought to spend incredibly large amounts of money to halt the slide into recession. All of these packages are different, yet all of them have attracted opposition and criticism from outside as well as from within their own borders.

It is easy to be critical of any government spending, especially when it is of such magnitude and introduced with such haste, however we must remember that we are in uncharted territory. No useful precedent exists for the current crisis facing the world, so governments at a local level must respond in a way that will provide the greatest chance of success and maximum impact for their constituents.

The Rudd government's \$42B stimulus package covers a broad range of activities that tick many of the boxes that the Committee for Ballarat has set as objectives based on membership initiative and feedback. These objectives have been developed into active projects on which the Committee has been working, and on which it has lobbied Local, State and Federal governments for some time.

Two key projects are the Western Arterial Road link and the Ballarat West Employment Zone.

Well before the global financial crisis began, the Committee realised that existing road and rail linkages for Victoria, which had Melbourne as its centre and roads connected radially to that hub, would be inadequate to support growth and efficient transport between major regional centres, particularly those in the western part of the state. The Deer Park bypass was the first major step towards recognising a dire need for smoother flow of commercial (and commuter) road transport from the west. Almost equally important is the need to upgrade the Midland highway from Geelong through Ballarat and further north and the establishment of a road and rail freight hub in Ballarat to service the needs of businesses in the region more efficiently.

In terms of jobs, the Committee for Ballarat has lobbied strongly for the establishment of a Ballarat West Employment Zone in the airport precinct, in which new industries and jobs would be created. Already there is strong support from aeronautics training and related businesses as well as a burgeoning solar energy provider to establish operations in the precinct. Clearly, locating the rail and

freight hub in the same area with an upgraded road link north and south would be a further attraction to new businesses as well as an advantage to established industries in Ballarat West.

The Committee for Ballarat's Workforce Skills and Participation Project which has now transferred to the City of Ballarat is further evidence of the synergy of effort to improve job opportunities for local people and one which will benefit from the stimulus package.

Other parts of the package are also welcomed by the Committee. Tax relief for struggling families and drought affected farmers in our region will help ease the burden of making ends meet while the investment in schools will not only create employment but will ultimately provide better education through improved resources. Although the stimulus package makes no direct provision to facilitate community contribution, the Committee for Ballarat's Leadership Ballarat and Western Region programme is complementary to the intent of the stimulus making other deep and long term contributions to community cohesion and intergenerational change in leadership across the region. It is a permanent and valuable reminder of the importance of local people in providing strong leadership, social cohesion and confidence that will be critical to sustaining the region's success.

Whilst the Rudd government's stimulus package has been prepared at break-neck speed, much of the spending is complementary with projects that the Committee for Ballarat has been passionately advocating and actively progressing. Whether this is purely serendipitous is not important. What is important is that the government has translated a global need for action into a local stimulus package that will ease the pain of recession and build infrastructure and capacity to benefit our region so that Ballarat will be well-placed to attract new investment and employment in the near future.

Mr Tony Chew

Newly elected Committee for Ballarat Chair-Elect