CrossCity Tunnel
Paul Ashton
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Sydney is in a secret sort of way a city of tunnels. Many people are unaware of the extent of these tunnels. They spread for hundreds of kilometres under the city and parts of the metropolis forming a subterranean world. This is subterranean Sydney. And this was the title of a book written more than twenty years ago by Barbara and Brian Kennedy.

These tunnels take various forms. There are water, sewerage and drainage tunnels; telecommunication tunnels, railway tunnels, waster pressure tunnels, electricity tunnels, a coal mine and electricity tunnel from Balls Head which runs under the harbour, road and pedestrian tunnels, gun emplacement tunnels at the North and South Heads and the Eastern Suburbs railway line which took an eternity to build.

The Cross City tunnel is it seems an unwelcomed addition to subterranean Sydney. And it is certainly not part of Sydney's secret tunnel life. Though this is not to say that it not mysterious: there are many things mysterious about this tunnel including a Toll Notice from Cross City Motorway Pty Ltd advising me that my vehicle was recorded using the Cross City Tunnel without paying toll of $3.56 and noting that I have now incurred a $10 administration fee for being either technologically incompetent, forgetful or criminally inclined. Let me put on record here tonight that I have never used this tunnel.

Mystery surrounds this tunnel for a number of other reasons. These include the decision making process via which the tunnel came about; related but unnecessary road and lane closures; and its likely overall impact on traffic congestion in Sydney. I share a theory with a few planners that traffic is like water; it will spread into any available space and distribute itself in the most inconvenient ways at the most inconvenient times.

But this is not a lone tunnel, at least historically.

The Cahill Expressway was the product of was in part the product of the completion of the underground railway extensions which saw the opening of Circular Quay railway in 1956. The Cahill expressway opened in 1958. But it also produced a tunnel in the form of the four-lane underground extension to Woolloomooloo which opened in March 1962.

When the expressway opened in 1958, Premier Joe Cahill commented that 'the whole of the [expressway]… could be called a triumph of democratic planning, in so far as citizens and leading experts were consulted as to the ultimate design' he was on extremely shaky ground.[i] The expressway, however, had been angrily opposed by many citizens and professional and other organizations at different points in time over three decades. Drawn out, dogged by conflict and bemusing to many observers, the design and execution of the Cahill Expressway was telling of the fraught and fickle politics of urban design and the chequered and, in the long view, dismal history of

much about town planning in Australia. Rounds of appeals and protests over more than thirty years failed to stop the construction of this environmentally unsympathetic structure which for many people today stands as a symbol of a damnable heritage.

The politicians, however, did not win entirely. During the opening on 24 March 1958 after a twenty-minute speech by Joe Cahill and seconds before he was to cut the ceremonial ribbon, three youths attempted to undertake this duty for him. 'A wild struggle ensued', the *Daily Mirror* reported, 'as detectives grabbed the youths. Others, believed to be university students, joined in the melee'. Some women screamed. While this De Groot-like 'incident was in progress at the ribbon', the *Daily Telegraph* told its readers, 'Other students posted a calico notice on the railway half-way along the roadway…. It said: "Joe's Drive-In: Bridge on the River Quay. Starring Joe Cahill and his cost of millions. Took 30 years to build."'[ii] Police removed the offending banner. Twelve uniformed and eleven plainclothes officers guarded the roadway's entrance adjacent to the Conservatorium.

The Cross City Tunnel has generated powerful reactions. But these have not translated into outcomes. Planning, too, has also become somewhat slight of hand. As the late town planner George Clarke correctly described it, planning as a process concerns narrowing down conflicts to their basics so as to

> reconcile those of them that prove to be *unnecessary* conflicts.
>   Those irreconcilable conflicts which *cannot* be reconciled through processes in which we mere employed professional planners… maintain, or attempt to maintain, the thin veneer of civilised behaviour that enables our society to change in an orderly fashion … ultimately go into the political arena where they are decided on the basis of political power.[iii]

It would be salutary to follow the advice of many commentators and urbanists who press for independent authorities representing the 'public interest' to make decisions about the fate of our built environment. But in the current selfish political environment it is difficult to see how comparable mistakes will be avoided. Process, indeed, seems now to be almost entirely arbitrary. This was powerfully demonstrated in 2005 when the Commonwealth Productivity Commission released its draft report on historic heritage conservation in Australia.[iv] Directly reflecting the Federal Government's conservative ideology, the Commission's key finding included the need to bring to an end 'an over reliance on prescriptive regulation', to curtail or limit regulations that restricted 'development and use', to protect 'property rights and values' and to minimise heritage listings.

About: Dr Paul Ashton, public historian
Associate Professor Department of Social Inquiry UTS Sydney

Phone   +61 (02) 9514 2310
Email   Paul.Ashton@uts.edu.au
Select Publications: *The accidental city: planning Sydney since 1788*, 1993; *Planning Sydney: Nine planners remember*, 1992; *Sydney takes shape: a history in maps*, c2000.

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[i] ibid.

[ii] *Daily Telegraph*, 25 March 1958, p3; *Daily Mirror*, 24 March 1958, p1.

[iii] George Clarke, 'Address given at the… Action Planning Forum, Wednesday, 22 November 1972', p1 in George Clarke Papers, quoted in Ashton, *Accidental City*, p102.

[iv] Productivity Commission, *Conservation of Australia's Historic Heritage Places*, draft report, Canberra, December 2005, pxvi.