



Planning FOR THE Future

With a number of high-profile projects being managed in the Sydney CBD, Infrastructure NSW is coming into its own.

Images by Scott Ehler

In 2011, the New South Wales State Government established an independent agency to provide advice on how to prioritise the delivery of infrastructure across the state. After only four years, Infrastructure NSW has certainly made an impact with its evidence-based advice, long-term plans for infrastructure, and management of public-private developments in the heart of Sydney's CBD.

Jim Betts was appointed CEO of the organisation in 2013 and brought with him a wealth of experience, having had a 25-year career in transport and infrastructure both in the United Kingdom and in Australia. Jim spoke to *The CEO Magazine* about the challenges of his role, what he believes makes a good leader, and the future of infrastructure in New South Wales.

The CEO Magazine: What was your professional background prior to coming to Infrastructure NSW?

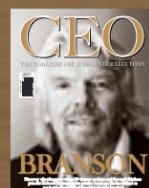
Jim: I have been working in transport and infrastructure for 25 years. Initially I worked with the UK government for 10 years in the UK Department of Transport. Then I spent a long time in Victoria after I moved out to Australia in 1998. I ended up running the public transport system for a number of years in Victoria, and then was head of the transport department for five years. I arrived in New South Wales a couple of years ago as CEO of Infrastructure NSW.

Despite my career to date, I don't have a technical background in transport. My degree was in history, and then I did an MBA after that. I guess part of what I have tried to

do in the various roles, including as the CEO of Infrastructure NSW, is not to operate as a technical expert but rather to work with people who are technical experts in the field and to enable them to tell their story and to carry the case for high-quality infrastructure investment within government.

Throughout your time at Infrastructure NSW, what challenges have you faced and how have you overcome them?

The main challenge that we face as an organisation is on one hand to provide independent, arm's length advice to government on what its infrastructure priorities should be, while on the other hand we are a very small organisation. We don't have any more than 20 people in our organisation at any given time, so we naturally rely on relationships >



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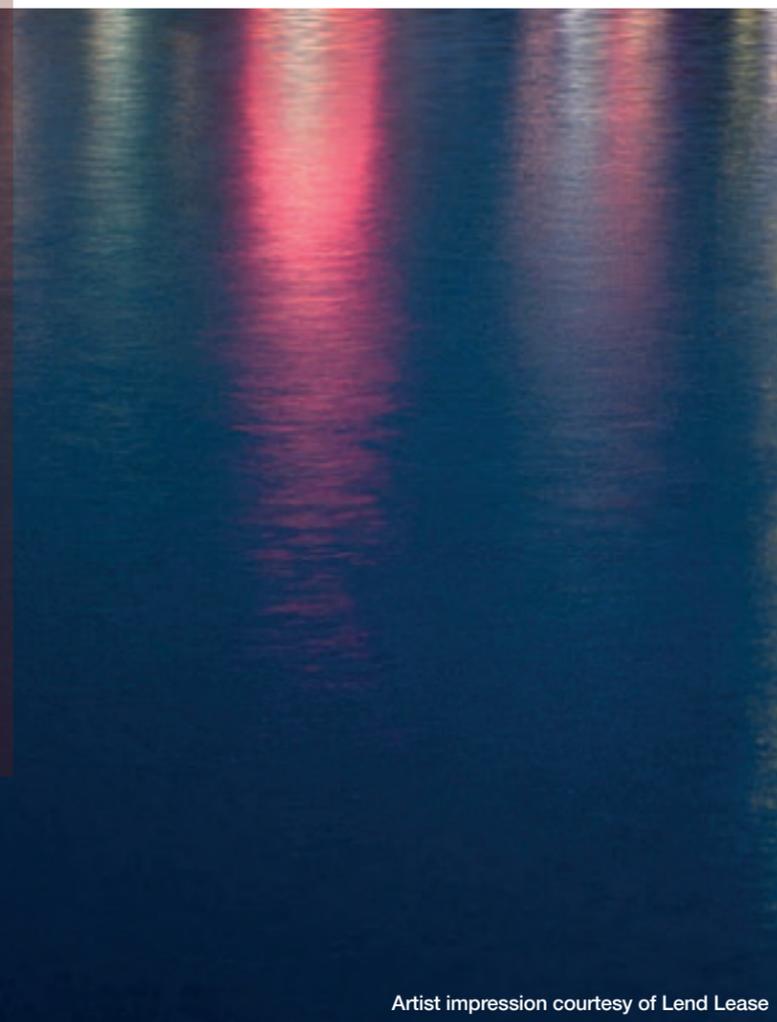
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with other organisations, both in the public and in the private sectors, to enable us to do our work—achieving the right balance between being independent and, where required, being critical of what other agencies are doing, while at the same time maintaining very strong collaborative relationships where those agencies feel comfortable and trust us with information.

That can sometimes be difficult. It really requires leadership to model what I want from people in the organisation—treating people outside with respect while not being afraid to ask the difficult questions, provided that it's done in a courteous and constructive manner. So I am always walking that line between independent advice on one hand and a strong level of collaboration on the other. That is one of our biggest challenges.

What difficulties are associated with being an independent adviser to government on issues that are very politically sensitive?

We keep out of politics. We don't get involved in party political discussions. Our job is to help inform the political discussion by undertaking research and doing analysis. Last year we produced a document which was made public with our advice to government on its long-term state infrastructure strategy in the light of the coalition's commitment, if it was re-elected, to privatise the electricity transmission and distribution networks. We were asked the question by the government about what should be the priorities for spending the \$20 billion worth of proceeds from that transaction. What we produced was balanced advice, supported by data so that it could be made public, and providing a degree of bipartisanship in the wider political arena.

When we were initially established, the then premier had an ambition to take the politics out of infrastructure, but that's a very hard thing to do in a democratic

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- Jim Betts



society. Infrastructure is such an important thing. Political parties are always going to have different views, but our role is to enable consensus-building. There is actually quite a lot of consensus, and our role is to highlight that and to try to build it up and strengthen it through good solid data and analysis.

What do you think makes a good leader?

My job as CEO is not to do everyone's job for them or to micromanage people but rather to create a framework within which they can fulfil their role and be successful and flourish. I think leaders are really about creating climatic conditions in an organisation so that people feel comfortable, they feel passionate about their work, and they feel that they are making a real difference to the community.

Painting that big picture about the meaning of people's work and the impact they have on the wider community is a very important part of my leadership style. In order to do that, I think it is very important that leaders treat everybody in an organisation with the same level of respect. Whether they are the receptionist or the CEO of the organisation, everybody should be treated equally, and that is something that I am very passionate about. Everybody has a role to play, and I think hierarchy can get in the way of a really good and collaborative team.

What are the key values of Infrastructure NSW, and how do you ensure all staff apply these values in their work?

I think integrity is important, and this includes being open and honest about what our views are. When we are dealing >



with other agencies and we have unanswered questions or we are concerned about the quality of the analysis that has been undertaken, we're open about that and we share that and give them the opportunity to provide the information that we're looking for. I also think there is an important value around humility. Sometimes when organisations are set up to provide independent advice or they're set up as regulators or auditors or whatever it might be, there's a danger that it can go to their heads and a level of arrogance can creep in, and that's something I am very keen to avoid in our organisation. Humility is really important.

What are some of the highlights of the work Infrastructure NSW has been doing?

We are undertaking a major public-private partnership at the moment to transform Darling Harbour. That's a partnership with the private sector to build a new exhibition, convention, and entertainment destination at Darling Harbour. It's about modernising that critical piece of infrastructure for the visitor economy which generates so

much of our income here in New South Wales, and making sure that our convention and exhibition facilities are competitive not just in Australia but also with other cities around the Asia-Pacific region.

To support the industry during the redevelopment, we built a temporary new exhibition centre at Glebe Island during the back half of 2013. It went up incredibly rapidly, and we've had fantastic feedback from exhibitors and from the trade shows, a sign of things to come at Darling Harbour.

One of the most exciting things about the Darling Harbour project is that it is only a part of a much wider transformation of the western side of Sydney's CBD. When you think about the Barangaroo redevelopment next door, you think about the light-rail project where construction is going to take place later on this year, the reconfiguration and redevelopment of Wynyard Station, and the connection through to Barangaroo—there's so much going on in that part of the city.

And looking to the longer term, Sydney Rapid Transit is a \$7-billion rail upgrade project.

"Working alongside Infrastructure NSW to deliver the Sydney Exhibition Centre at Glebe Island was a milestone experience for Aircon Rentals. We knew that the tight construction deadline had to be met. This was delivered on time and budget and to the satisfaction of all parties."
- David Loomes, Managing Director, Aircon Rentals Pty Ltd



"When issues have arisen, we have resolved them in an amicable way, recognising that we are in a long-term partnership and it's about maintaining a relationship that will endure over many years."

- Jim Betts

There's also the prospect of a Western Harbour Tunnel within 10 years. There is so much going on in Sydney, and it is great that our organisation, which generally plays an advisory role telling government what its priority should be, is also playing a hands-on role in such an important project as the transformation of Darling Harbour.

How does Infrastructure NSW collaborate with suppliers to ensure success of these projects?

We do have very successful relationships with our suppliers on the Darling Harbour project, and we have worked very closely and openly with them. When you are building a public-private partnership with the value of \$1.5 billion—and that's just part of a bigger \$3.4-billion transformation—there are always going to be times where you run into difficulties. That might be to do with different interpretations of the contract, or it might be to do with external factors influencing their capacity to deliver the project.

It goes back to those values of respect and openness, and we have found that those values by

and large have been reciprocated. When issues have arisen, we have resolved them in an amicable way, recognising that we are in a long-term partnership and it's about maintaining a relationship that will endure over many years. Sometimes we have had disagreements with our suppliers, but they have resolved in a mutually respectful way at all times. We have stuck to those values throughout, as have they, so it has been a very positive experience.

What does the future hold for Infrastructure NSW?

When we produced the infrastructure strategy advice to government late last year, we recommended to the government \$20 billion worth of investment over the next 10 years. It's a once-in-a-generation opportunity with projects like the second harbour rail crossing and the Western Harbour Tunnel, but also major investments in schools

and hospitals and cultural and sporting facilities.

The future of Infrastructure NSW is about helping the government ensure that a massive program of investment is delivered effectively and delivers outstanding results to the community. We want to make sure that the opportunity isn't missed and that we get maximum value from the dollars that are going to be unlocked as a result of the long-term lease of the electricity assets. We'll be providing our advice to government to make sure that agencies are doing adequate upfront planning, that they are thinking in an informed and intelligent way about the risks associated with those projects, and that they have the capacity and capability they need.

Infrastructure NSW will always be there to help and to make sure that agencies are collaborating with each other, because you only get the really good results in



government when agencies like transport and planning and education and health come together and work as a single team. That is something that Infrastructure NSW can certainly help with. •

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