# The road to Woy Woy

*Didn’t we have a lovely day the day we went to Woy Woy*

*Huck Finn’s closed, the Bayview’s hosed - the café and Vinnies open*

*Empty car park, No Stopping’s a lark, look at the Feds building a new one*

*What’s it to them, thirty mill ahem, and the wheels go around.*

## Woy Woy

And so, the pork barrel wended its way to Woy Woy, 72.6km by rail 92.0km by road from Central BigTown. Woy Woy, home of Spike Milligan’s mother circa 1959, unfairly praised as ‘Australia’s above-ground cemetery’ – an epithet fit only for toyTown.

The smell of crackling attracted attention of the Australian National Audit Office. Commonwealth spending on a ‘congestion-busting’ railway carpark being the source of the smell.[[1]](#endnote-1)

Congestion busting at a cost per parking space over $210,000 – a matter not advertised in the local leaflets distributed to keep the public informed.[[2]](#endnote-2)

One Audit Office observation: carpark options were too far, not attachable to - even 130 metres - from the station. That distance probably saying more about how Audit Office staff get to their Forrest ACT Office than being a cryptic slur on central coast layabouts. Depicted via a satellite map.



The Office was a bit coy about total gratuity for Woy Woy. Although the program from which the spending was drawn was in the order of $660m. A program ‘authorised’ by the *National Land Transport Act (2014).*

A quick calculation of 140 spaces (map top left) and the Community News per space estimate gives Woy Woy another car park at $29.4million. Happy to be corrected.

## Outrage

The Office’ report had some other niceties too – like most program money going to Melbourne when most congestion is in Sydney. No mind.

Outrage dominated the press and tv – albeit a distant second to promotion of politically puerile pandemic panic policy porn.

Which, after incessant ‘the next few days will be vital’, apparently has led many in Sydney, notably north of the kennel in the south west, to turn off ‘the news’ i.e., anything relating to the pandemic. And thus, not hear the latest anti-Covid Government instructions nor where the ‘hot spots’ are. Not even the 1,000 times more infectious Delta strain warning seemingly got due attention – perhaps understandable after ersatz experts and the publicity hounds of Victoria and Queensland earlier this year endlessly salivated over ‘hyper infectious mutants’ that nobody seemed to catch. Anyway, bless their stupid little hearts.

## Analyses

Digression over, and back on the road to Woy Woy.

Media observations: the car park is part of a pork barrel. Golly, gosh and shazam![[3]](#endnote-3)

Then the astute: it’s the Government’s fault. Supplemented by some incisive ‘*clear pork barrelling*’ damnation from Labor. And an allegation the Government had not done its homework - presumably less of a criticism of the barrel than where the pork was distributed.[[4]](#endnote-4)

The killer revelation, in the Guardian - of course - was:

*‘The ANAO found that projects had been identified in part through ministers’ offices canvassing the views of 23 Coalition MPs, senators and the Coalition candidates for six electorates then held by Labor or Centre Alliance.’*

Shock Horror. How did they get such an idea?

## The bureaucracy

But before denouement, a few things in the Audit Office report remained unworthily unnoticed.

Among these: the practical absence – not mere deficiency – of Departmental administration of the scheme. From the start – no criteria, in the middle – no rationale, in the middle again – no help from local or State governments who would need to issue approvals, to the end – no real records.

The last a ’la the NSW Premier’s office. At the time, excused by the Premier with the immortal ‘everyone does it’ line. Yet to be topped by the Department of Infrastructure(etc) whose best was: authority to proceed with 6 projects was a media release.

Departmental underperformance in excuse-making matched by unhelpfulness in pork target identification: of the 47 sites selected, 36 were raised by Government ‘colleagues’, 7 were election commitments, 4 had no parentage. Ergo, the Department’s contribution was 0.[[5]](#endnote-5)

## Laurels?

Yet despite its exposé the Audit Office is hardly worthy of laurels. It missed a bit. A big bit. Re the ability of the *National Land Transport Act (2014)* to support such spending of itself. It probably isn’t, even if there is an intergovernmental agreement such as referred to by the Audit Office.[[6]](#endnote-6)

Rather, validity of the spending may well rest on Constitution s.96 – that payments are made to the States on condition they be used to build carparks. Such condition needing to be set by Parliament.

So, what to make of the Audit Office’s categorisation of some carparks – a magnificent seven, compared with the Department’s claim of twenty-seven - being election commitments? A sprinkling of holy water? Despite the Department being responsible for advising the Minister on whether the proposals were eligible under the particular *Act*?

It looks like holy water. The Office made no comment on whether an election commitment trumps the Constitution. Or whether the *Act* could constitute a delegation of Parliament’s s.96 power to press releases.

Put that way, spending on carparks is outside the Commonwealth Government’s domain.

And the Audit Office virtually invited another round of promises of possibly illegal pork for the coming election.

## Denouement

The criticism of carparks being outside Commonwealth legislative competence eluded Labor too. Perhaps understandably given its performance at the last Federal election:

*‘Labor made a remarkable number of supposedly ‘nation building’ infrastructure spending promises prior to the campaign. Examples include: Maribyrnong River bike path extension; a business case for extension of a rail line Springfield-Ipswich; Pinjarra Heavy Haulage deviation; a bus interchange upgrade at Westlakes; West Tamar highway roundabouts; a shared footpath in Wanniassa. And the Woy Woy station carpark – which is a bipartisan initiative. [[7]](#endnote-7)*

The beagle lost count - after two hundred – of similar ideas in Labour’s election promises.[[8]](#endnote-8)

So: the Government stole both the Woy Woy carpark idea and the process that generated it from Labor.

## Last word?

 A repeat from a post at Mr Menadue’s blog two years ago:

*‘Smooth ‘golden words’ about infrastructure just cover-up another way to use your money to buy political support, brag about spending and peddle ‘job creation’ beat-ups – rather than do anything of substance or value to the community.*

*Labor has much to do on infrastructure to be ready for Government in the future.’*[[9]](#endnote-9)

Judging from criticisms of the carpark program there has been little or no progress since.

And the wheels go around.

J Austen

17 July 2017

1. <https://www.anao.gov.au/work/performance-audit/administration-commuter-car-park-projects-within-the-urban-congestion-fund> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. <https://coastcommunitynews.com.au/central-coast/news/2021/07/210000-per-car-space-that-wasnt-on-the-leaflets/> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jSpBwt4hFN8&ab_channel=BigMarkWard9999> [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/jun/29/government-committed-millions-to-commuter-car-parks-that-could-never-be-built-labor-says> [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-01-22/report-says-nsw-premiers-office-breached-laws-document-shredding/13084492> [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. <https://johnmenadue.com/john-austen-the-high-court-the-williams-case-and-transport/>

<https://law.unimelb.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/1586362/08ChordiaLynchandWilliams2.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. The beagle’s count stopped at 200: <https://www.alp.org.au/media/1902/nation_building_infrastructure.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. <https://www.thejadebeagle.com/election-2019.html> [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. <https://johnmenadue.com/john-austen-post-election-infrastructure-review/#_top> [↑](#endnote-ref-9)