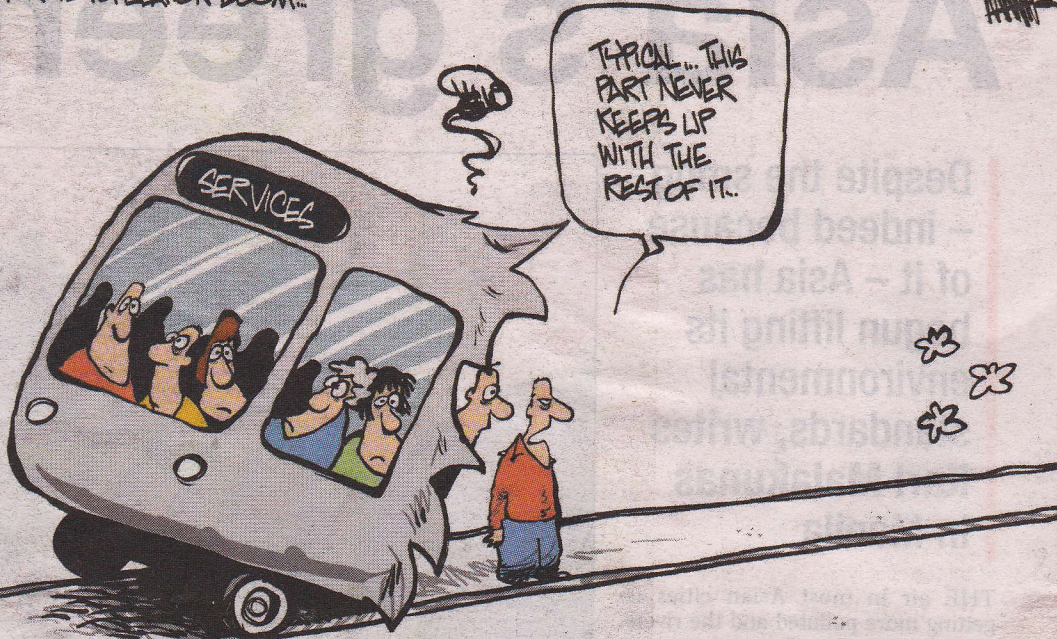


LIGHT RAIL POPULATION BOOM...

HAUNT



Editorial

27/6/11

Light rail the best option for the future

Gold Coast Bulletin

THE Gold Coast light rail project has the potential to transform this city upon its completion in 2014.

Some have derided it as a mere tourist shuttle, albeit a flawed one because Stage 1 will not link with the airport at Coolangatta.

But in the decades ahead the mass transit system could change the demographic make-up of the Gold Coast.

The current downturn, which has slowed the number of new residents to a trickle, is likely to be a blip.

It is inevitable that we will again see the inflows of new arrivals that characterised the 1970s, '80s and '90s.

In a city hemmed in by mountainous national parks to the west, high-density housing on the coastal strip linked by the light rail is an obvious solution to population growth.

The council recognises this, hence its plan setting out building heights and mixes along the route.

The Gold Coast is already renowned for its towering buildings but in the next 20 years there will need to be a change in their use.

Currently, most of the apartments on the coastal strip are for holiday use.

Over time, more full-time residents will need to move into highrise units, placing new demands on infrastructure.

Families will need better parks, schools and shopping; singles and retirees will demand cultural facilities and entertainment other than nightclubs.

Surfers Paradise will need to be "cool" to live and work in again.

It will need to become a place where people spend years, not days or weeks.

There is a template for this success.

Former Victorian premier Jeff Kennett brought people back to Melbourne.

He opened the door to inner-city living and the city now thrives not only on tourism but locals who demand good food and entertainment in the city.

We need to do the same.

Infrastructure surrounding the light rail stations will need substantial improvement in the form of bike paths, walking tracks and safe open spaces.

The light rail has the potential to entice locals to move back to the hubs, to trade their homes in the west for one of the plethora of units sitting on the market at the moment. Only then will the Gold Coast become a true, living city and discover its soul.