

# Light rail to encourage compact urban style

## ***Greg Forgan-Smith reports***

The GCRT or light rail project promises to do more for the Gold Coast than any other single piece of infrastructure since the upgrade to 8 lanes of the M1 to Brisbane, and the heavy rail both of which opened in the early to mid-90s.

Whereas the transport upgrades benefited commuters and encouraged Brisbane workers to live on the Coast the light rail will encourage a new more compact urban form of living to develop within the city and be of huge benefit to existing residents.

Better access through modern tramcars will diminish the use of the motor vehicle in our more intensely developed suburbs and stimulate greater opportunity for diversification in land uses – in short, better (closer) access to a greater variety of activities.

SDGCI remains involved to ensure that the city fully recognises this potential and is keen to see the Council make some positive contributions to fast-track approvals for development in the light rail corridor. Sadly, the new planning scheme to be released next year will not contain any incentives. However, work within the strategic planning framework of the scheme should facilitate a less heavy handed approach by officers when the many supporting studies being carried out by Council consultants support more and a better mix of development along the corridor.

Sustainable development at a city level is no better supported than by a light rail. In Melbourne over the last three years 67% of new development took place within one city block of a transport route – according to a presentation at Council's last Urban Design Conference on the Coast.

Interestingly, the Gold Coast initially won Federal Government support for the project as research indicated that we were the most compact city in the country and that our concentration of higher density would ensure the highest probability of financial success of a light rail system.

Stage 1 from Broadbeach to the Knowledge-Health Precinct in Southport is now under construction with expected completion later next year.