

1964-65

THE PARLIAMENT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

*Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works*

# REPORT

relating to the proposed construction of a

## POST OFFICE AND TELEPHONE EXCHANGE

at

Wollongong, New South Wales

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*Presented pursuant to Statute; ordered to be printed, 6th April, 1965*

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COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Department of Works,  
Canberra, A.C.T.

Departmental No. 31

MINUTE PAPER FOR THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

Executive Council Meeting No. 64.

*Public Works Committee Act 1913-1960*

Recommended for the approval of His Excellency the Governor-General in Council that the proposal—Erection of a Post Office and Telephone Exchange at Wollongong—N.S.W.—(particulars of which are set out in the attached statement) be referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works for investigation and report to the House of Representatives.

J. G. GORTON,  
Minister of State for Works.

Approved in Council.

DE L'ISLE,  
Governor-General.  
18th December, 1964.

Filed in the Records of the Council.

BRIAN F. COX,  
Secretary to the Executive Council.

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# PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS POST OFFICE AND TELEPHONE EXCHANGE, WOLLONGONG, NEW SOUTH WALES

## REPORT

On 18th December 1964, His Excellency the Governor-General in Council referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works for investigation and report to the House of Representatives the proposal to erect a post office and telephone exchange at Wollongong, New South Wales. The Committee have the honour to report as follows:—

### GENERAL

1. The Committee visited Wollongong on two occasions. The site of the proposed work, suggested alternative sites and existing postal and telecommunications facilities were inspected. Evidence was taken from representatives of the Postmaster-General's Department and the Department of Works as well as from the Mayor and officers of the Council of the City of Greater Wollongong, representatives of Wollongong commercial organisations and Federal and State Members of Parliament.

### CITY OF GREATER WOLLONGONG

2. *Extent and Importance.* The City of Greater Wollongong comprises that part of the Illawarra district from Helensburgh and Stanwell Park in the north to Dapto and Shellharbour in the South, extending for approximately 30 miles along the New South Wales coastline. Situated 50 miles south of Sydney, Wollongong itself is the commercial heart of the industrial region centred on Port Kembla.

3. The district has an abundance of hard coking coal and is the nation's largest steel producer. The new inner harbour at Port Kembla, the first section of which was opened in 1960 will eventually provide berths for 46 interstate and overseas vessels. About seven million tons of cargo were handled in 1962-63 and the value of industrial output in that period was £270 million.

4. Associated with the development of the steel and coal industries, Wollongong has become a major commercial and retail centre serving the needs of the growing population in the Greater Wollongong area. Many large metropolitan department stores have established branches in Wollongong in recent years. Multi-storey office blocks have been erected in the business centre and there has been steady suburban residential development.

5. *Population Growth.* The population of the city is approaching 150,000. It has grown at an unusually high rate in the last 15 years, having more than doubled in that period. Population forecasts are for a regional population of over 300,000 by the turn of the century.

6. The demand for public service and utilities which the expected population increment in the next 20 years will create includes a need to supplement postal and telecommunications services. The proposals referred to the Committee are intended to meet this requirement.

### DEVELOPMENT OF EXISTING FACILITIES

7. *History.* A two-storey building occupying a site 60 feet by 120 feet in Crown Street, the main business street of Wollongong, was built in 1892 when the population of the municipality was about 3,000. At that time, the ground floor accommodated the post office and the Postmaster's residence was on the upper floor. The residential accommodation was taken over as working space in 1936 to meet the growth pressures which had developed to that time.

8. Additional accommodation was expected to be needed as the population of Wollongong grew and another site was acquired in 1947 for future postal and telephone facilities. This site, which is the one on which the proposals in this reference are to be built, was well situated in Crown Street about 200 yards west of the commercial centre and some 800 yards from the existing Post Office.

9. To provide for increased postal and telephone business, a new local automatic exchange was established in a temporary building on the new site in 1952. The area vacated by the exchange in the post office building was taken over for postal purposes. The temporary local automatic exchange was extended in 1956 and in the same year, a permanent trunk exchange was erected adjacent to the local automatic exchange. Removal of the trunk equipment from the post office building gave further relief to postal sections.

10. Postal development was thus contained until 1960 when, because of extreme congestion, three garages at the rear of the post office were converted to accommodate postmen. By 1962, the growth of mail and telegraph traffic necessitated erection of a timber framed hut adjoining the garages. The expansion of the mail room, telegraphs and accounting sections was thus made possible.

11. As a result of the extension of the Commercial area of Wollongong, a second post office, also in Crown Street and situated towards the western end of the area was established in 1946. This office was called Wollongong Central. For some years it was conducted in leased premises, but these along with adjoining properties were purchased in 1959, for demolition, to make way for a large regional shopping centre. When the centre was completed, space in it was leased for the post office. Counter space only is provided at this office, there being no letter or telegram delivery, mail processing or private mail boxes.

12. *Existing Postal Services.* Wollongong Post Office is a Grade V office providing full postal facilities including letter and telegram deliveries. It is also the main mail exchange for the Greater Wollongong/South Coast area. Growth in the region is therefore reflected in the work handled at the Wollongong Post Office.

13. The Committee noted that the counter area and public space are severely congested at peak periods and the pressures on working areas are such that it is not possible to meet requests for additional private postal boxes. The existing space in all sections is now inadequate and there is no space for expansion to meet expected future demands. The site is almost fully built on and no worthwhile additional working space can be gained by further extensions without further complicating the problem of access to the rear of the building.

14. *Existing Telephone and Engineering Services.* The area served by the local automatic exchange includes the city area as well as Mount Ousley, Mount Pleasant, Keiraville, Mount Keira, Figtree, Coniston and Gwynneville.

15. When the temporary local exchange was built in 1952, the equipment was designed for 2,400 lines, with an extension of 2,400 lines planned. At that time these lines were expected to meet demands until 1970. However, subscriber growth has been such that the present 8,400 lines are expected to meet needs to only June, 1966. The current demand is for about 500 new lines each year.

16. The expedients necessary to provide maximum accommodation for switching equipment have greatly increased the difficulties in maintaining these facilities.

#### PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

17. *The Need.* The existing post office and mail exchange are located in the main street of Wollongong but are no longer capable of satisfactorily meeting the requirements of the main postal facility in the City. Since the original building was constructed, the business centre has moved westwards and the intention is to establish the main post office and mail exchange where they can efficiently satisfy the existing and developing needs of that area and of the city generally with the greatest economy.

18. The existing telephone exchange buildings cannot house any increase in telecommunications services and more equipment space is urgently required. The urgency of the need is emphasised by the fact that the time to complete documentation and construction will be at least 32 months from the time an approval to proceed is given. In other words, in the most favourable circumstances, there will be a time lag of about two years between the time all available local exchange lines are taken up and the provision of the new exchange accommodation.

19. Wollongong is a rapidly developing area and the Committee, from inspections and evidence, are agreed that the existing postal and telecommunications accommodation is inadequate. There is therefore an urgent need for the accommodation which is the subject of this reference.

20. *The Site.* The proposal is to erect, in a single building, on the unoccupied portion of the site on which the telephone exchange buildings have already been built, additional accommodation for telecommunications equipment, a post office and mail exchange. The facilities are designed to meet present and expected needs over the next 20 years.

21. On the proposed site, the requirements for supplementary postal facilities near the business centre of Wollongong will be met. In addition, the site is on the optimum "copper centre", i.e. the location where cabling costs from external services can be kept to a minimum thus satisfying the economic requirement of telecommunications cabling. The proposal presented to the Committee will permit the close association of the existing large trunk channelling installation and the trunk switching equipment to be placed in the new building.

22. *Views of Local Authorities.* In accordance with the usual practice the Department of Works at various stages conferred with the local government authority, in this case the Council of the City of Greater Wollongong, on the development of the proposals referred to the Committee. Until immediately prior to the hearing of evidence, the Council had had no serious objections to the proposals.

23. At one of the hearings, the Mayor and officers of the Council presented a well documented case against the location of the postal facilities on the proposed site and suggested a number of alternative sites. The Council did not object to the telecommunications services on the Crown Street site.

24. The main criticisms of the proposals by the Council were—

- (a) the site is inconvenient from a public usage viewpoint;
- (b) there is a lack of customer parking;
- (c) on-site employee parking is not adequate;
- (d) the site is too small to meet present and future needs; and
- (e) the building is not outstanding in an architectural sense.

25. The Committee considered at some length the Council's submission and the contrary arguments advanced by the departmental representatives and members of various Wollongong commercial organizations. The alternative sites were inspected.

26. The Committee were agreed that the site proposed is most satisfactorily and logically placed from the viewpoints of customer convenience and operational efficiency. The section of Crown Street, west of Keira Street is at present inadequately served with postal facilities, and the site is readily accessible particularly to pedestrians who comprise a major portion of post office customers. When the new building is completed, its services and those in the existing post office will provide the city area with an excellent spread of service for many years.

27. In considering the alternative sites, it was clear in each case from the customer viewpoint and the distribution of postal services that none was as suitably placed as the site proposed. The Committee were sympathetic with the desire of the Council to encourage major commercial development in streets adjacent to Crown Street, but concluded that it was not appropriate for a major postal service to be built there at this stage.

28. As the building will not be as densely occupied as an office building owing to the considerable installations of machinery and equipment and as a proportion of employees will be working on shift, the Committee considered that the ultimate provision of 30 on-site parking spaces was reasonable. There is no doubt that the new post office will generate an additional customer parking requirement in the locality and, while it is appreciated that parking in Crown Street itself is difficult, we believe there is adequate public off-street parking in the near vicinity.

29. Planning by the Postmaster-General's Department has embraced, as far as is possible at this stage, the postal and telecommunications needs of the city area over the next 40 years. It is thought that in this light the proposed site is being economically used and there is no reason to believe that the site is too cramped. The Committee recommends however that the Department should continually review the adequacy of the present site and the availability of adjoining land in the line of natural expansion to assess whether future requirements are being safeguarded.

30. The Council was critical of the architectural design of the building but did not pin-point any particular deficiency. We recognise that judgment on design can be largely a matter of individual preference but in this instance the Committee were unanimously agreed that the design and materials proposed are first-class, are consistent with the nature of the building and will make a worthwhile contribution to the street architecture of Wollongong.

#### OUTLINE OF CURRENT PROPOSALS

31. *Postal Services.* The proposal is to provide a modern post office with increased facilities for serving the public, additional private mail boxes and public telephones and increased internal space for mail handling, telegraph and associated facilities.

32. Coincidentally with the establishment of the new post office, the Wollongong Central Office is to be closed.

33. The existing Wollongong Post Office will be re-named East Wollongong and reorganized to provide only counter and other indoor services. Adequate public space and counter positions will be available for the business expected to be handled at this office and those who wish may retain their private mail boxes there. Conversion to counter service only will have the effect of making considerable space available in the existing post office building. The District Postal Manager and his staff will move into this space.

34. The following basic features in the new building, together with the reorganization of the existing Wollongong Post Office, are expected to satisfy postal requirements for the next 20 years:—

- (a) a public counter providing 13 positions;
- (b) a mail room in which an annual load of 27½ million letter class articles and 2 million other articles such as newspapers, packets, parcels, etc. can be processed;
- (c) a telegraph and phonograms section to handle an annual load of 360,000 messages; and
- (d) initial provision for 800 private mail boxes with scope to expand the installation to 2,000.

35. *Telecommunications Services.* The estimated 20 year requirement at Wollongong includes local exchange switching apparatus for 24,250 subscribers and 2,400 lines of automatic trunk switching equipment. It is proposed to meet this by providing two equipment floors in the new building. One floor will accommodate 15,000 lines of local automatic exchange equipment and ancillary apparatus and the second floor a further 15,000 lines and 2,400 lines of automatic trunk switching equipment.

36. This space will permit the early replacement of the existing "step by step" exchange accommodated in the temporary building on the site. Maintenance of this equipment is becoming increasingly uneconomic due to the substandard accommodation.

37. The estimated 40 year requirement for the Wollongong Exchange is 40,000 subscribers' lines. This, together with an increased trunk switching requirement, will necessitate at the end of the 20 year period two additional equipment floors to accommodate:

- (a) a further 10,000 lines of local automatic exchange equipment;
- (b) an additional 2,400 lines of automatic trunk switching equipment; and
- (c) 3,000 square feet of trunk amplifying and carrier equipment.

38. The space for trunk amplifying and carrier equipment for the post 20 year period will also accommodate coaxial cable and radio broadband bearer and channelling equipment. This will be required for the expanding subscriber trunk dialling services expected to result from the growth of the area. Space will also be required in the extended building for television relay equipment.

39. The introduction of subscriber trunk dialling will obviate the need to provide additional manual operating positions in conjunction with the trunk exchange facilities except for a few positions now being used for special purposes and service sampling. These will be taken over for trunk purposes.

40. There will, however, be a requirement to provide for up to five manual operating positions in conjunction with the local automatic exchange. These positions which will be located in the new building together with switchboard positions and equipment will deal with service sampling, changed numbers and redirection, cancelled and unallocated numbers, absentee subscriber services and malicious calls.

#### DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSALS

41. *The Site.* The site is centrally situated in Crown Street (Princes Highway) Wollongong, approximately 200 yards west of the commercial centre of the city. It is irregularly shaped with a frontage to Crown Street of 202 feet 6 inches. The depth which varies from 170 feet to 260 feet includes those portions of the site on which the local automatic and trunk exchanges are located. Service access is from a 20 feet wide laneway on the western boundary. The proposed building will occupy the entire Crown Street frontage to a depth of 60 feet leaving a service yard at the rear and vehicular access to the mail room.

42. A steep fall of approximately 20 feet from the buildings at the rear of the site to Crown Street has influenced planning of the building proposals.

43. The building is to be set back six feet from the present boundary line to meet the road widening requirements of the local council. A height restriction limits development on the site to six floors. The ultimate development incorporating two future additional floors conforms to this requirement.

44. Space in the service yard at the rear of the building will be available for service purposes and initially for parking 16 vehicles.

45. The two buildings at the rear of the site housing the local automatic and trunk exchange equipment respectively will continue in operation after the building is completed. However, it is expected that the local automatic exchange equipment will be recovered within five years of the cut-over of equipment in the new building. The temporary building will then be demolished. At that stage, on-site parking space will be available for 30 vehicles.

46. *General.* The design provides for a structure of ground and three upper floors initially, with provision for two additional equipment floors at a later date to cater for the expansion of telecommunications services. The two lower floors will generally be occupied by the postal services including the mail room. The upper floors will contain telephone exchange facilities.

47. *Space Allocation.* The ground floor will contain the post office and its related facilities including public spaces, private mail boxes, public telephones, telegram and phonogram rooms, offices and staff amenities. The lower part of the cable chamber, the electrical sub-station and the mechanical services plant room will also be located on this floor. Site levels permit equipment access to the plant room and sub-station from the service yard level.

48. *The first floor* will house the mail room, staff amenities including a Postal Institute area and the upper level of the cable chamber. Mail transport between the post office on the ground floor and the mail room will be by mechanical conveyor. Conveyors will also operate between the mail room and the mail loading dock which will be about 5 feet above the first floor because of the site levels. A clear ceiling height of 12 feet 6 inches will be the same as for the exchange equipment floors, so that should it become necessary in the future, telecommunications equipment could be installed.

49. *The second floor* will accommodate automatic telephone exchange equipment, the main distribution frame over the cable chamber as well as power and battery rooms, associated areas and staff amenities. An external access gallery will be provided at this level to enable movement of staff between the proposed building and the upper floor of the existing trunk exchange.

50. *The third floor* will contain the initial installation of automatic trunk switching equipment, manual operating positions and staff amenities. The eastern part of the floor will not be required for equipment for ten years after the building is completed and 6,000 square feet of floor space will be available for other departmental purposes during that period.

51. *At roof level* a plant room will be provided for mechanical services equipment and lift machinery. When the two additional equipment floors are required, a new plant room will be established at the new roof level for the needs of the enlarged building.

52. *Amenities.* Amenities are to be provided in accordance with the Commonwealth Amenities code and the relevant building legislation. The Committee noted that the proposals had been discussed with representatives of the various unions whose members will be employed in the building. No major objections have been raised but some minor amendments to the proposed amenities are being made as a result of these discussions.



### DESIGN

53. *General.* Despite the restrictions imposed by the limited and awkwardly shaped site and the requirement for the ultimate maximum use of the site by the addition of a further two floors, the Committee believe that a functionally efficient and aesthetically pleasing building will result from the proposals. The erection of the building as proposed is therefore recommended.

54. The Crown Street elevation will harmonise with the adjacent and other major commercial buildings in Wollongong and the Committee consider the proposed building will set a good standard of design.

55. The post office section on the ground floor has been designed to provide an attractive public area protected externally by an overhanging canopy. Considerable areas of glass are to be used at this level to harmonise with adjoining retail development.

56. Windows have been introduced to the upper floors to the Crown Street elevation to maintain this same harmony. They are, however, limited in area as a compromise between the desire to protect the functional equipment located on these floors by the complete absence of windows and the wish to present a facade in keeping with the overall street scene. The two future additional floors will match the present treatment in detail and material.

57. *Structure.* The building will be framed in reinforced concrete designed to carry equipment loads. Provision is to be made to support the two future additional equipment floors. One structural bay will be strengthened to support any future microwave antennas that may be required.

58. Considerable excavation will be necessary due to the steep fall on the site and underpinning will be required to adjoining buildings. The Department of Works foresees no difficulties in this regard.

59. A clear height of 12 feet 6 inches will be provided throughout the main floor areas to permit maximum flexibility for equipment. The floor slab for the future fourth floor will be provided as part of the present project to facilitate the ultimate extension. The slab will be protected by a metal roof.

60. Subsoil drainage connected to a sump will be provided to prevent any possible entry of water from adjoining areas. The cable tunnel walls will be constructed in reinforced concrete with a water proofing membrane.

61. *Materials.* Materials have been selected for their suitability and ease of maintenance. Externally, the walls will be cavity brickwork using selected brown face bricks. The spandrel walls on the Crown Street elevation will be white glazed brick. The column faces to this facade will be covered with extruded aluminium sections anodised black.

62. The original proposal submitted to the Committee was for the use of copper roofing. However, the current high price of copper and the fact that the roof will be removed when the future extension is built is leading the Department of Works to reconsider this aspect. Furthermore, it is noted that copper in this instance was not chosen for aesthetic reasons as the roof will not be visible from street level. The Committee believe the use of copper is not warranted on a temporary roof and recommend the use of a cheaper appropriate material.

63. Internally the walls are to be cement rendered and finished with ceramic tiles, vinyl tiles, paint or sprayed coatings according to requirements of individual areas. Floors will be screeded and surfaced with terrazzo, ceramic or vinyl tiles according to use. Suspended ceilings will be provided in some areas but generally, the requirements of equipment areas will be met by sprayed finishes applied directly to the concrete surfaces.

64. *Electrical Services.* Electric power will be supplied by the Illawarra County Council which will provide and erect the sub-station at ground floor level at no cost to the Commonwealth.

65. The electrical installation will be divided into "essential" and "non-essential" supply to meet departmental needs. Lighting will generally be fluorescent and in accordance with the appropriate code of the Standards Association of Australia.

66. The fire alarm installation will have a new common control and indicator board for the whole site. Smoke detectors will be installed in telecommunications and power equipment areas and thermal detectors elsewhere.

67. A combined purpose passenger/goods lift with a rated load capacity of 3,000 pounds and operating at a speed of 300 feet per minute will be installed initially. The car will be designed to carry telephone equipment racks on special transporters. Space will be provided for the addition of a future passenger lift when the building is extended.

68. *Mechanical Services.* The postal areas on the ground and first floors and the telecommunications areas on the second and third floors are to be air-conditioned. Equipment will include chilled and hot water plants with three air handling units to ensure flexibility and economy. Other areas will be mechanically ventilated and the lunch room and Postal Institute on the first floor will be heated. The provision of a cooling coil will permit the latter two rooms to be cooled at off-peak periods.

69. The two emergency diesel generating units will be manually started from a remote control. Essential telecommunications services will be maintained by a small no-break set. Other mechanical services will include domestic hot water, drinking water coolers, incinerators and mechanical handling equipment.

70. *Clock.* We noted from evidence that the Postmaster-General's Department has not provided external clocks on recently constructed post offices. It was thought that in this instance a clock incorporated in the design would be an attractive and useful feature on what will be a prominent and important building. Estimates of cost indicate that a suitable clock would only cost about £500. The Committee therefore recommend that an external clock be incorporated in the proposals.

71. *Art Work.* It was suggested to the Committee that as the southern facade, which fronts on to Crown Street is exposed to the prevailing wind, the design would be improved by a screen in the public external lobby at street level. The proposals submitted proposed no form of art work on or associated with the building. The Committee believe that a suitably designed metal screen depicting local industry and backed by a glass panel, would embellish the building and at the same time provide a measure of protection from weather penetration. The estimated cost of such a screen, including the commissioning of a reputable artist, would be of the order of £2,700.

72. The Committee suggest that consideration be given to the erection of a suitably designed metal screen backed by a glass panel in the public external lobby at street level at an estimated cost of £2,700.

### CONSTRUCTION PROGRAMME

73. It has been estimated that the preparation of working drawings and tender documents will take eight months after instructions to proceed are given. Tenders can be called and a contract let about three months after the completion of documents. The construction period is estimated to take 21 months.

### COSTS

74. The cost of the work included in this reference is £644,500. The details are:

	£	£
BUILDING WORKS		
(including excavation and underpinning)		449,000
HYDRAULICS		
(including water supply, sewerage and fire hydrants)		12,000

## MECHANICAL SERVICES

Airconditioning .. ..	79,500	
Mechanical Ventilation .. ..	13,000	
Diesel Generating Plant .. ..	36,000	
Miscellaneous Mechanical Services .. ..	6,500	135,000

## ELECTRICAL SERVICES

Light and Power .. ..	25,000	
Fire Alarms .. ..	4,500	
Passenger/Goods Lift .. ..	19,000	48,500
		<u>£644,500</u>

This figure would be increased to £647,700 with the inclusion of an external clock and a metal screen.

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

75. The summary of recommendations and conclusions of the Committee is set out below. Alongside each is shown the paragraph in the report to which it refers. Recommendations appear in bold type.

	Paragraph
1. The Committee are agreed that the existing postal and telecommunications accommodation is inadequate .. ..	19
2. There is an urgent need for the accommodation which is the subject of this reference .. ..	19
3. The site proposed is most satisfactory and logically placed from the viewpoints of customer convenience and operational efficiency .. ..	26

4. The Postmaster-General's Department should continually review the adequacy of the site to assess whether future land requirements are being safeguarded ..	29
5. A functionally efficient and aesthetically pleasing building will result from the proposals .. ..	53
6. The erection of the building as proposed is recommended .. ..	53
7. The use of copper on a temporary roof is not warranted and the committee recommend the use of a cheaper appropriate material .. ..	62
8. The committee recommend that an external clock be incorporated in the proposals at a cost of about £500 .. ..	70
9. The Committee suggest that consideration be given to the erection of a suitably designed metal screen backed by a glass panel, in the public external lobby, at street level, at an estimated cost of £2,700 ..	72
10. The estimated cost of the proposed work including the clock and a metal screen is £647,700 .. ..	74

W. J. BRIMBLECOMBE, Chairman.

Office of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works,  
Parliament House,  
Canberra, A.C.T.  
1st April, 1965.