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PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS

REPORT

relating to the proposed construction of a

MAIL EXCHANGE BUILDING

at

Adelaide, South Australia

(Ninth Report of 1970)

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PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS

MAIL EXCHANGE BUILDING, ADELAIDE

R E P O R T

By resolution on 7 May 1970, the Senate referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works for investigation and report to the Parliament, the proposal for construction of a mail exchange building at Adelaide, South Australia.

The Committee have the honour to report as follows:

THE REFERENCE

1. The proposal is to build a mail exchange in Adelaide, having a part basement, ground and four upper floors on Commonwealth land at 272 Gouger Street. The work is estimated to cost \$5.5 million.
2. The building is planned to accommodate staff and equipment for the centralised processing of intrastate, interstate and overseas mail. Space will also be provided for a post office and for the functions of the Department of Customs and Excise concerned with examining postal articles for dutiable items. It will be designed to cater for Adelaide's expected mail traffic growth for the next 20 years and be capable of extension after that for longer term needs.
3. The proposed design and facilities conform to a plan for an integrated national network to increase mail handling efficiency in the capital cities. On completion of the Adelaide exchange in 1973, only the Melbourne and Hobart proposals will remain to be implemented.

THE COMMITTEE'S INVESTIGATION

4. The Committee received written submissions and drawings from the Postmaster-General's Department and the Department of Works and took evidence from their representatives at a public hearing in Adelaide. At the same hearing, we also took evidence from two employees of the existing exchange and from representatives of employees' unions and the Corporation of the City of Adelaide.

5. We inspected the present Adelaide mail exchange and the site for the proposed building.

THE NEED

6. Inadequacy of Existing Facilities In 1960, intolerably congested conditions in Adelaide's three dispersed mail handling locations were overcome by centralising the main activities in the Wilkinson Building on the corner of Wyatt and Grenfell Streets. The Committee were told that this building, which comprises a basement, ground and two upper floors, with an additional floor over the rear section, was converted for mail exchange purposes as a major respite to allow time for the orderly planning of future developments without the need to resort to more costly expedients.

7. At that time, it was decided that the City Section, involving private box facilities, locally lodged mail and the postmen's delivery centre, should remain at the G.P.O. because of its ideal location for these purposes. The intention that it should continue to remain there is consistent with planning in other capital cities.

8. We saw, during our inspection of the Wilkinson Building, evidence that the 110,000 sq. ft of space available is now inadequate for current requirements and this is adversely affecting the efficiency of the service, particularly in the receipt and despatch areas on the ground floor.

Although the building is structurally sound and another 13,000 sq. ft could be added by extending the uppermost floor laterally, congestion at the lower levels cannot be overcome.

9. However, the prime factor which has precipitated the need for the present proposal is the assessment of 260,000 sq. ft as the minimum first stage requirement to enable future mail traffic in Adelaide to be effectively handled. It is obvious that the Wilkinson Building alone is not capable of expansion or remodelling to meet this operational need.

10. A study of the possibility of leaving some sections of the mail handling activities in the Wilkinson Building and providing for the remaining sections elsewhere, demonstrated that in the next 20 years an arrangement of this sort would add some \$12 million to operational costs compared with the proposals submitted to the Committee.

11. Vehicular Access As the existing mail exchange is located in the central city area, the vehicular transport service to and from it is being severely affected by city traffic congestion, which was not serious when it was first established. Mail vehicles are required to enter and leave the exchange from Wyatt Street, a one-way thoroughfare only 30 ft wide. During peak load periods, vehicles are forced to queue at the street kerbside awaiting a position at the loading and receipt docks.

12. It is clear that this disability cannot be rectified and, in fact, it is reasonable to expect that it will be aggravated in the future. In this event, costly delays to delivery and despatch schedules will be a regular occurrence.

13. Growth in Mail Traffic In 1968/69, the Adelaide mail exchange handled 247 million postal articles and although this traffic was managed in the Wilkinson Building, there were pressures on space which suggest there is an immediate need to increase the available area by 10,000 sq. ft to 120,000sq. ft.

14. Forecasts of future mail traffic based on an increasing number of postal articles per head of population and the expectation that the South Australian population will grow by about 50% in the next 20 years, indicate that at the end of that period well over 600 million articles will be passing through the exchange each year. The Committee noted that in assessing the expected greater use of the mail at the rate of 4.1% per annum, the Post Office has assumed that the present growth rate will remain fairly constant and will follow trends in comparable countries overseas.

15. We concur in the conclusion that the volume of mail traffic passing through the Adelaide exchange will inevitably grow and consider that the basis used in assessing the extent of this growth is reasonable.

16. The Committee's Conclusion The Committee noted that in the experience of the Post Office, the practice of locating capital city mail exchanges in a single self-contained building on the periphery of the city area, in an easily accessible location, convenient to transport terminals, is the most satisfactory method of providing these facilities. Not only was it clear to the Committee that the present facilities are inadequate for current needs and are unable to meet the needs of the future, but they are poorly located.

17. We therefore believe that there is a need for a new mail exchange building in Adelaide to overcome the disabilities of the existing accommodation and to provide for future growth.

THE SITE

18. The proposed site is located within the block bounded by Gouger, Brown and Grote Streets and West Terrace. The Post Office either owns or is acquiring a T-shaped piece of land between Grote and Gouger Streets with a 345 ft frontage to the former and a 487 ft frontage to the latter. The mail exchange portion of the site has a frontage of 210 ft to Gouger Street, a depth of 212 ft and at the rear abuts the P.M.G. transport garage which faces Grote Street.

19. The area at present set aside for the mail exchange is about one quarter of the Post Office land. The long term intention is that when the exchange requires extension, the transport garage will be re-established on a permanent basis on the eastern part of the site to make the extension possible. Meantime, the transport facilities are adequate and use is being made, for other miscellaneous departmental purposes, of another building on the site which will eventually be demolished.

20. The site, on the fringe of the city area, is ideally placed from a departmental transport viewpoint as it adjoins the department's garage. It is, furthermore, close to existing and planned arterial roads linking the city and suburbs. The G.P.O. is less than three-quarters of a mile away and the rail and air terminals are only one mile and $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles distant respectively.

21. The Committee consider that the site selected is suitably located not only for immediate needs but in relation to long term requirements.

PLANNING OF THE PROPOSED BUILDING

22. Outline Broadly, the mail exchange is a centralised location for the receipt and despatch of all types of mail which by a system of electronic and/or mechanical and manual sorting is progressively split up and localised

to particular basic destinations. The proposed building has been designed to fulfil this role in respect of mail handled in Adelaide. The aim will be to minimise, where possible, the manual sorting of mail and the manhandling of bags of mail by the use of automated mechanical plant.

23. The building has thus been planned to permit the installation of mechanical mail handling plant and otherwise provide accommodation and staff amenities for the requirements of the 20-year period after completion. At the same time, the planning recognises the need that will inevitably occur for the expansion of the exchange after that time.

24. Allocation of Space The basement will accommodate the electrical substation, emergency power plant and control, a pump room for hydraulic services, maintenance workshops and storage areas for garbage, waste paper, cleaning equipment and materials. Amenities will also be provided for staff working in this area.

25. The ground floor will be mainly used for the receipt and despatch of mails. Vehicles will have double lane access from Gouger Street, as well as entry from Grote Street through the transport garage. Areas for the Department of Customs and Excise and a post office, with public access from Gouger Street, will also be included at this level. The entrance foyer for staff will occupy the south-eastern section of this floor.

26. Most of the first floor will be used for the final sorting of interstate and overseas ordinary mails, as well as for parcels. The rest will be for administrative offices, the dead letter office and amenities.

27. On the second floor, areas for the final sorting of ordinary mails, the primary sorting of parcels, and for the registration section will be provided in addition to a conference room, P.A.B.X. room, offices for engineering staff and amenities.

28. Provision will be made on the third floor for parcel bag opening, primary sorting of ordinary mail, toilets, lockers, a first-aid room and a female rest room.

29. The fourth floor will be used for ordinary mail opening operations, a cafeteria, Postal Institute and recreation activities, a supervisors' common room, a training school and toilets and locker room. A courtyard for open air recreation is also planned.

30. Mechanical and electrical plant and lift machinery will occupy the fifth floor.

31. Equipment The Committee were told that at this point a decision has not been made on the mail handling equipment to be used in the new building. An evaluation is still being made of the possible alternatives in the light of experience in other exchanges and the particular requirements of Adelaide.

32. We received a firm assurance nevertheless that the building design proposed is consistent with the requirement of any of the equipment likely to be ordered and that in any event, there has to be flexibility in the design to allow for changes or developments that might occur after the exchange has been in use for a period.

AMENITIES

33. Amenities to be provided will include locker/change rooms, a cafeteria, an indoor and outdoor recreation area, a first-aid room, toilets and washrooms in accordance with the standards of the amenities code for the Commonwealth Public Service and local ordinances. It was brought to our attention that although these standards are to be complied with, there is no specific requirement for facilities designed to dry or ventilate rain-soaked outer clothing. We believe that the Commonwealth should look into this matter with a view to assessing the need for ventilating lockers or providing some other means of drying wet clothing.

34. At the end of the 20-year period after the building is completed, it is expected that a staff of 1,262 will be required to service it. Of these, up to 971 could be on duty at the one time. Based on some possible expansion of this staff beyond that period, the scale of amenities proposed is based on a total staff of 1,400.

35. Hot meals and light refreshments will be available in the cafeteria for both day and night staffs and those employed in the adjacent transport garage. Meal breaks are to be arranged so that seating capacity of 300 persons will be adequate.

THE BUILDING PROPOSAL

36. Site Planning The proposal is the first part of a three stage development. Stage two will involve lateral extension of the exchange to the Grote Street frontage on the land now occupied by the transport garage, while the third stage will also be a lateral extension over the remainder of the land facing Gouger Street.

37. Design The Committee were told that the internal design will satisfy the need for the efficient arrangement and operation of mail handling equipment and provide a suitable environment and working conditions for staff.

38. As the function of the building is of a light industrial nature, the external appearance has been designed with this in mind. Externally, it will have an expressed concrete frame and face brick panels providing an interesting architectural pattern of simple and bold elements. Windows will be positioned to permit natural lighting to offices and provide visual relief for staff in mail handling areas. Elsewhere they will be kept to a minimum to reduce the solar load on the air conditioning plant.

39. Structure and Foundations Steel-framed construction is proposed to allow flexibility in positioning future changes of mail handling plant. The frame is to be encased in concrete for fire protection purposes. Floor beams will be spaced to facilitate future floor openings for equipment.

40. Preliminary site investigations indicate that foundations of spread footings under columns will be required.

41. Finishes External walls will be reinforced cavity brick in non-load bearing panels supported off the external wall beams. Windows will have anodised aluminium frames and grey, glare reducing glass. The roof over the plant room will be pre-coated galvanised steel decking carried on steel beams. The open deck at the fourth floor level will be paved.

42. Internal walls generally will be brick or concrete with a smooth off-form finish. However, those of the entrance lobbies will be timber panelled. Toilet walls will be tiled.

43. Floors generally will be covered with vinyl tiles except in toilets, the canteen and recreation areas and the entrance lobbies, where ceramic tiles, parquetry timber flooring and sawn granite respectively will be used. Ground floor loading docks will have timber decks and the concrete driveways and loading bays will be surface sealed to obviate dusting.

44. Suspended acoustic ceilings will be provided in office areas and the cafeteria and recreation areas. Elsewhere, ceilings will be painted off-form concrete.

45. Mechanical Services Except for the vehicle docks, the basement and the kitchen, all occupied areas will be air conditioned including the cafeteria, recreation and training facilities and the escalator halls. Other areas will be mechanically ventilated. Air curtains will be installed across the driveway entrances.

46. Other equipment will include kitchen equipment, drinking water units, sanitary incinerators, hoists, compressed air supplies and a domestic hot water system. As well, two emergency diesel generating sets, each of 420 kW capacity

are proposed, to ensure continuity of electricity supply to essential equipment.

47. Electrical Services Electricity will be supplied by the Electricity Trust of South Australia through a high voltage cable to the transformer substation in the basement and then reticulated through the adjacent switchboard. Separate submains will be provided for essential and non-essential loads.

48. General purpose power outlets and distribution boards will be installed as required. Lighting generally will be fluorescent and a master and slave clock system will be provided.

49. Lifts and Escalators Two goods/passenger lifts, each designed primarily for bulk mail transport will serve the basement to fourth floors and the ground to fourth floors respectively. A third lift will be used for the transportation and automatic discharge of mail wheeler bins between the ground and third floors.

50. Escalators will be provided for the movement of staff between the ground and fourth floors.

51. Hydraulic Services Water, sewerage and drainage services will be connected to mains in Gouger Street.

52. Water storage tanks will be installed for domestic supplies, mechanical equipment and the fire protection system. Water for domestic and hot water systems will be treated by softening equipment.

53. Fire Protection The building is to be of fire resistant construction and will include two fire isolated stairways to be pressurised in the event of fire. An automatic sprinkler system connected to two separate sources of water

supply will be installed. The kitchen cooking equipment exhaust hood will be protected by a carbon dioxide system operated by smoke detectors.

54. Hydrants, hose reels, manual alarms and fire extinguishers will be located as appropriate. Provision will be made for the shut down of the air handling plant and the mechanical extraction of smoke in the event of fire.

55. Committee's Conclusion The Committee recommend the construction of the work in this reference.

CAR PARKING

56. The proposal submitted to the Committee does not provide on site car parking spaces for staff within the building. We noted, however, that when the proposed building is finished and until the ultimate development is completed, 72 or more parking spaces will be available on the undeveloped portion of the Post Office's land for employees' vehicles. These spaces would be shared between the staff working in the exchange and in the other Post Office buildings on the land.

57. Representations to the Committee from two employees of the present exchange and from an employees' union suggested that off-street employee car parking should be provided at Commonwealth cost as part of the project. The Corporation of the City of Adelaide also made a submission on similar lines to further its plans for redevelopment of the city area.

58. We learned from informal discussions after the hearing in Adelaide, with officers of the Department of Works, that it is in accordance with current policy that off-street car parking for employees' vehicles should not be provided in this instance. This approach is generally consistent with that adopted with other Commonwealth buildings in comparable locations in other capital cities.

It recognises not only the cost of providing land and parking facilities but also the availability of public transport and other parking facilities in the area.

59. We noted, furthermore, that an inter-departmental committee is now being formed with a view to considering the Commonwealth's involvement in the provision of employee parking and to make recommendations to the Government on future policy.

ESTIMATE OF COST

60. The estimated cost of the work when referred to the Committee was \$5.5 million made up as follows:

	\$
Building work	3,312,000
Mechanical services	1,440,000
Electrical services	376,000
Lifts and escalators	372,000
	5,500,000

PROGRAMME

61. After an approval to proceed is given, preparation of working drawings and tender documents is expected to take approximately 9 months. Construction time for the work is estimated at two years after a contract is let.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

62. 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.

Paragraph

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|----|---|----|
| 1. | THE PRESENT MAIL EXCHANGE FACILITIES IN ADELAIDE ARE INADEQUATE FOR CURRENT NEEDS, ARE UNABLE TO MEET THE NEEDS OF THE FUTURE AND ARE POORLY LOCATED. | 16 |
| 2. | THERE IS A NEED FOR A NEW MAIL EXCHANGE BUILDING IN ADELAIDE. | 17 |
| 3. | THE SITE SELECTED IS SUITABLY LOCATED NOT ONLY FOR IMMEDIATE NEEDS BUT IN RELATION TO LONG TERM REQUIREMENTS. | 21 |
| 4. | THE COMMITTEE RECOMMEND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE WORK IN THIS REFERENCE. | 55 |
| 5. | THE ESTIMATED COST OF THE WORK WHEN REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE WAS \$5.5 MILLION. | 60 |

C.R. Kelly
(C.R. KELLY)
Chairman

Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works,
Parliament House,
CANBERRA, A.C.T.

8 July, 1970.