

Introduction

The Varsity Station Village project is transforming vacant land previously earmarked for industry into a modern, vibrant and attractive place for people to live and work, all within easy walking distance of the new Varsity Lakes station.

The Queensland Government is building the new Varsity Lakes rail station which is due to open in 2010. It is the newest station to be delivered by the state government. The primary objective of the Varsity Station Village project is to promote 'transit oriented development' as advocated in the *South East Queensland Regional Plan 2005–2026*. This form of integrated development encourages future residents and visitors to travel to and from the site by more sustainable transport modes such as walking, cycling, trains and buses.

The Queensland Government's aspiration for Varsity Station Village is to facilitate a successful contemporary urban place on the Gold Coast, anchored by the new transport and bus interchange. This will be achieved through the adoption of the Master Plan into a local area plan by Gold Coast City Council. There are several options for the development of the land, and these are currently being considered by government. The communication strategy for the next phase of the project will evolve as a decision is made about the future of the land.

The purpose of this report is to give a summary of the activities and outcomes of communication and consultation for the Varsity Station Village project.

Overview of communication process

A comprehensive three-stage community engagement process was implemented for the project to gain involvement from stakeholders and keep the community informed about the project.

This communication strategy aimed to facilitate regular, proactive communication and consultation with key stakeholders and the general public. The project team responded to immediate queries at events, and aimed to respond to emails and official submissions with as much information as possible in a timely fashion. Much informal feedback was received from people at community events, which was generally supportive and positive toward the project.

The strategy was designed to build and maintain awareness, gather feedback and information relevant to the planning process among key stakeholders and the local community throughout the life of the project. The activities undertaken to achieve this are summarised in the following table.

Stage	Time	Communications tools	Outcomes
1. Project introduction and awareness building	September 2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newsletter - 9500 distributed • Media release • Project website established • Project 1800 freecall number established • Project email address established 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phone calls and emails asking general questions about the project and time frames
2. Release of project strategy publication and requesting input/feedback on this publication	October/November 2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Village vision - 4500 distributed • Media release • 6 print advertisements • Static displays - poster • Letters to stakeholders • Ministerial media event 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 81 feedback responses • 100 people at events • 1152 visitors to website • Key issues identified and considered during master planning phase
3. Consultation on draft master plan	2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newsletter (April 2008) • Draft master plan (November 2008) • Village Guide - <i>Summary of the draft Master Plan</i> - 4500 distributed • Media release • 17 print advertisement • 4 community displays • Ministerial media event • 1 community bbq • 2 stakeholder events • Letters to stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over 300 people to events • 30 official submissions from stakeholders and community • Issues to address in final master plan

Phase 1: Awareness building/information – September 2007

Objectives

This phase of communication activity was very simple, and primarily aimed at raising awareness, offering contact details to field queries and providing information about the project and intentions for the site.

Activities

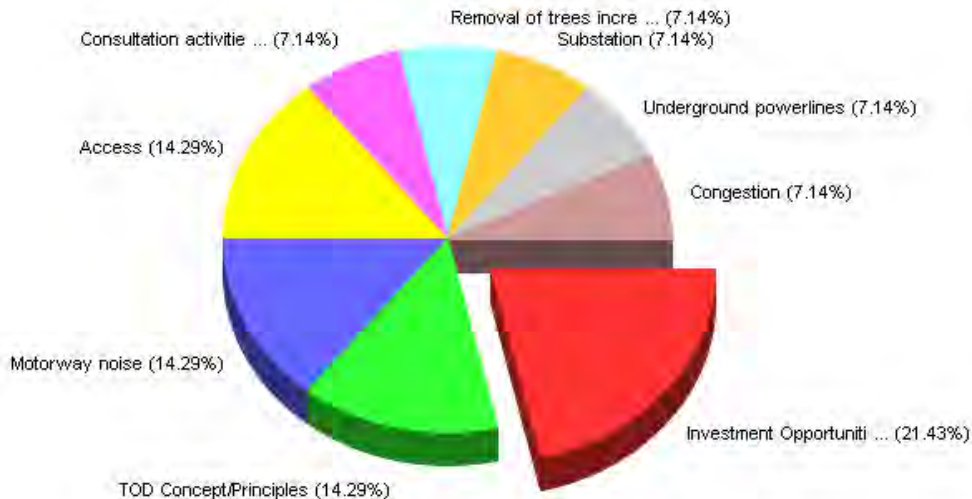
- Newsletter 1 - 9500 distributed
- Media release
- Project website established
- Project 1800 freecall number established
- Project email address established

Outcomes

There were 29 enquiries during this early stage of the project, and the most common question was about investment opportunities.



Issues Raised: 1 Sep 2007 - 14 Nov 2007



Phase 2: Initial consultation/information - November 2007

Objectives

This phase of the communication activity was based around the Village Vision, which outlined the principles of transit oriented development, and the vision for the project.

The project team used the release of the Village Vision in November 2007 to facilitate community feedback on the project from the general community. The objectives here were to:

1. produce clear, consistent, integrated communication materials on time and within budget that meets the information needs of all audiences and support the communication goals
2. create awareness and understanding about the project and project consultation activities
3. create positive community perceptions of the project and project consultation activities
4. respond to project enquiries, in a timely and efficient manner that is, a minimum of 80% of enquiries logged and responded to within three working days, and
5. manage media responses in a timely and efficient manner within departmental media protocols.

Activities

	Summary	Dates	Distribution
Newspaper ads	Gold Coast Sun Gold Coast Mail Gold Coast Bulletin (Southport)	21 November 2007 23 November 2007 24 November 2007	
Village Vision document	More detail on planning process and what the village may look like through artist impressions and maps showing outline of draft design.	November 2007	4000 letterboxes within near vicinity of project site
Meet the team days	To give the community an opportunity to come and talk to the project team so that they can have their questions answered in an informal and relaxed environment.	November/December 2007	100 people attended over the two events
Letters to stakeholders	Letters sent to elected representatives, state and local government agencies, community and business groups and local schools	November 2007	
Email update	Advising people who contacted us from newsletter one that the "Village Vision" has been released and where they can obtain a copy.	December 2007	
Community meetings	Presentations were offered to several community groups, those that took the offer were: Varsity Lakes Progress Association Probus Club of Varsity Lakes Varsity Lakes Community Ltd Varsity Lakes Management Association Project team members attended the	November 2007 – June 2008	

	Summary	Dates	Distribution
	meetings and presented information about the vision for the Varsity Station Village site.		
MP briefings	Briefings with Diane Riley, former MP Mudgeeraba and Ms Christine Smith, MP Burleigh	August 2007	

Outcomes

Consultation

A diverse range of feedback was received following the initial community consultation period. Although there were relatively few formal written submissions, all verbal, internet and written feedback has been collated and considered in the evolution of the Varsity Station Village project and the development of the draft Master Plan.

The top three issues raised by stakeholders and community members so far have been:

- access to Varsity Station Village from the western side of the Pacific Motorway
- parking and traffic movement within and around the site
- opportunities to purchase or lease the site for future development.

Issues raised: 14 November 2007 - 1 April 2008	
Issue type	No.
Transport: access	8
Economic: investment opportunities	6
Economic: retail opportunities	6
Transport: timing/opening	6
Vision feedback	5
Traffic: congestion	5
Traffic: parking	5
Consultation: consultation activities	4
Housing: types of housing	4
Economic: commercial leasing	3
Economic: property values	3
Housing: density	3
Powerlines: underground powerlines	3
Safety: safe school access	3
Draft Master Plan submission	2
Housing: green space	2
Noise: motorway noise	2
Noise: train noise	2
Powerlines: substation	2
Safety: safety within the site	2
Total	90

Survey

A second newsletter was distributed in April 2008, with a feedback form attached, asking the community how much they knew about the project, and what ways they preferred to be communicated with. This survey also featured on the website, and was sent with a letter to key stakeholders. There were 65 responses to the survey from the newsletter and online. The results were adopted into Phase 3 of the communication strategy; some of the results follow:



How did you first hear about the project?

- Printed material in letterbox - 51%
- Newspaper - 33%
- Shopping centre - 11%

What is the best way of communicating with you?

- Printed material in letterbox - 63%
- Email or website - 33%

How do you feel about the project?

- Positive - 84%
- Neutral - 12%
- Negative - 4%

Which events are you likely to attend? (more than one answer)

- Information session on progress of project - 56%
- Shopping centre display - 58%
- Information session on transit oriented development - 40%
- Sausage sizzle - 32%

Website

The website was live from October 2007. Statistics from October, November and December 2007 are as follows:

- 1292 visits
- 1130 unique visitors
- 677 visits directly to the website (indication of people obtaining details directly off printed material)
- 615 visits via search engines or site referrals
- Around 40% of visits were over 60 seconds
- Second largest percentage - 30% of people looked at the site for less than 10 seconds
- Average of four pages visited per visit

Phase 3: Draft Master Plan

Community consultation – November 2008

The draft Master Plan was finalised and approved for public release in October 2008 and launched for public consultation on 4 November 2008. Members of the community and other interested persons and groups were encouraged to comment on the draft Master Plan through the condensed booklet “*Village Guide – Summary of the draft Master Plan*”.

The draft Master Plan gave a background to the project covering topics such as design statement, precinct plan, access and movement strategy, land use, urban form, open space and landscape strategy, infrastructure, sustainability and community safety.



Objectives

This phase of the communication activity was based around the draft Master Plan and *Village Guide, Summary of the draft Master Plan*, which gave an overview of the ultimate development.

The project team used the release of the draft Master Plan in November 2008 to facilitate community feedback on the project from the general community. The objectives here were to:

1. produce clear, consistent, integrated communication materials on time and within budget that meets the information needs of all audiences and support the communication goals
2. create awareness and understanding about the project and project consultation activities
3. create positive community perceptions of the project and project consultation activities
4. respond to project enquiries, in a timely and efficient manner that is, a minimum of 80% of enquiries logged and responded to within three working days, and
5. manage media responses in a timely and efficient manner within departmental media protocols

Consultation commitments

- The project is committed to a proactive, engaging and responsive approach to stakeholder consultation. It is aimed at ensuring timely and comprehensive information dissemination, achieved via two-way communication between stakeholders and the project team.
- The project team seeks to maximise local community knowledge about the area, whilst maintaining the desired outcomes of the project.
- The team recognises that the community will have valuable input to feed into the Varsity Station Village master plan, and will encourage relevant contributions to enhance the outcomes where applicable.
- The project team will be proactive in providing information to stakeholders including media at the appropriate times.

Activities

	Summary	Dates	Distribution/comments
Feedback newsletter	A project update with a tear off survey to find out what communication channels people prefer to be contacted by	April 2009	9000 letterboxes within 2km radius of project site
Newspaper ads	18 advertisements Gold Coast Sun Gold Coast Bulletin	Ran from 6 – 29 November 2008	Gold Coast Sun 143,011 Gold Coast Bulletin 42,529
Postcard	Advertising the events and contact details	Delivered 5 November 2008	9000 letterboxes within 2km radius of project site
<i>Village Guide – Summary of the draft Master Plan</i>	A 40 page booklet summarising the key aspects of interest to the community	Released with draft Master Plan, 4 November – 5 December, 2008	4000 letterboxes within near vicinity of project site
Community displays	Displays set up in key local locations	4 display days Robina Town Centre Stockland Burleigh Heads Tree Tops Shopping Centre	Approximately 268 people attended
Community BBQ	A larger community display event that incorporated Trackstar and Main Roads to inform the community of the master plan	Held at Hope Church auditorium, Varsity Lakes	85 people attended
Business breakfast	Invited local business and associations were briefed about the master plan	Held at Bond University, 12 November 2008	39 people attended
Stakeholder briefing	Invited stakeholders were briefed about the master plan	Held at Bond University, Varsity Lakes, 8 November 2008	150 people invited, 20 attended

	Summary	Dates	Distribution/comments
Email update	Email outlining the upcoming consultation activities, and link to website.		Emailed to community members and business people who registered interest in the project.

Outcomes

Survey

Following community consultation a survey was sent to all stakeholders to find out how people had heard about the project and whether they felt they had ample opportunity to make comments or submissions. The key results are as follows:

How did you hear about the project? (more than one answer)

Newspaper article	66%
Newspaper advertisement	45%
Material in the letterbox	43%
Internet	17%
At a shopping centre display	26%
Through someone I know	13%

Did you feel you had ample opportunity to provide comments?

Yes	95%
No	5%

Did you provide comments?

Yes	44%
No	56%

Consultation

Community consultation on the draft Master Plan closed on 5 December 2008. A total of 30 official submissions were received, which were all considered and some changes have been made in finalising the master plan to reflect the feedback.

All submissions have been responded to individually, but a summary of the results can be found below and in more detail in Appendix 1.

Issues Raised: 1 November 2008 - 1 April 2009	
Issue	Events
Powerlines: substation	6
Transport: bike/pedestrian	6
Traffic: parking	5
Transport: access on and off freeway	5
Economic: retail opportunities	4
Housing: density	4

Issues Raised: 1 November 2008 - 1 April 2009	
Issue	Events
Housing: green space	4
Traffic: congestion	4
Transport: bus services	4
Economic: investment opportunities	3
Economic: local business	3
Transport: access	3
Economic: tender process	2
Housing: visual impact	2
Noise: construction noise	2
Powerlines: underground powerlines	2
Safety: safe school access	2
Traffic: configuration	2
Economic: commercial leasing	1
Economic: property values	1
Housing: types of housing	1
Safety: crime	1
Safety: lighting	1
Safety: rail safety	1
Traffic: motorway	1
Transport: pedestrian access across freeway	1
Transport: timing/opening	1
Total	56

Website

Website statistics from November 2008 – December 2008 are as follows:

- 1526 visits
- 1251 unique visitors
- 506 visits directly to the website (indication of people obtaining details directly off printed material)
- 1020 visits via search engines or site referrals
- Around 40% of visits were over 60 seconds
- Second largest percentage - 30% of people looked at the site for fewer than 10 seconds
- Average of four pages visited per visit
- Average time on site 3.5 minutes