

THE ROLE OF TRANSPORT IN THE BIDDING PROCESS, POLICY IMPLEMENTATION AND LEGACIES OF MEGA SPORT EVENTS: THE 2018 GOLD COAST COMMONWEALTH GAMES

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to investigate the challenges of providing sustainable urban mobility to mega event hosting destinations. It focuses on three major stages of event hosting process, including the bidding process, the policy implementation stage before the event happens and the transport legacies left. It uses a multiple stakeholder evaluation of the challenges of providing sustainable urban mobility for the displacement of thousands of participants attending mega events. Among those stakeholders are policy makers, transport and tourism government and industry partners. A case study from the 2018 Gold Coast Commonwealth Games was used.

Keywords: mega sport events, transport policy implementation, bidding process, event legacies, 2018 Gold Coast Commonwealth Games

1. INTRODUCTION

Events have different objectives, vary from their types, length, frequency and perspectives as well as ranging in scale from mega-events through community events (Robbins, Dickinson et al. 2007). Due to its broadness, Getz (2007, p.18) described events as "... an occurrence at a given place and time; a special set of circumstances; a noteworthy occurrence" but alongside confirmed the unlikelihood of a general definition: "although planned events might be similar in form, some aspect of setting, people and program will ensure that the event is always tangibly or experientially different." While defining an event is difficult, events can arguably be seen as integral parts of destinations' tourism development and marketing strategies (Getz 2007). Hence, even though many events have arisen for non-touristic reasons, such as competitions, cultural celebrations or the need to raise funds for charity, the

(LOHMANN, Gui)

event industry itself can be suggested as part of the tourism field, described as the systematic development, planning, marketing and holding of events as tourist attractions (Tassiopoulos 2005). The visitors of events, on the other hand, have been suggested to be distinguished between visitors that stay overnight at an event destination and visitors that do not stay overnight but may visit another destination or return home at the same day of the event (Masberg 1998). The provision of transport service and infrastructure is paramount during the events day to cope with the high influx of both types of visitors and their demands for mobility to/from and within the destination.

This research examines the role of transport and mega events and how changes in transport infrastructure and policy influence shape in various stages of the planning process of events holding. Facilitating smooth and efficient access to events is an important component of any event's success but yet transport has not emerged as a core focus in the event management literature and vice-versa (Robbins, Dickinson et al. 2007). Transport related impacts on events could be twofold. At the one side the increased transport demand can cause short-term problems for destinations such as increased congestion and pollution (e.g. Robbins, Dickinson et al. 2007). On the other hand, however, efficient transport policies can motivate an increased use of public transportation which during mega events even may lead to improved air quality and road situations (e.g. Friedman, Powell et al. 2001, Hensher and Brewer 2002). However, in order to meet temporary short-term peaks during events, high amount of infrastructure investment might be required and subsequently difficult to justify in terms of its legacy. Also, tourism and event related transport acts as a major contributor of greenhouse gas emissions (Robbins, Dickinson et al. 2007). In this context, it might be important to investigate how event related transport investments and policies enable environmental and economical sustainable solutions. Hence, although the literature generally cites transport as the cause of many negative impacts, there can be the potential for positive benefits such as the increased usage of public transport due to the improved infrastructure and positive travel experiences of event visitors during and after the event (Robbins, Dickinson et al. 2007, Burke and Woolcock 2009).

While final data analyses were not available at the time of writing this paper, the results will be presented during the 2013 WCTR conference in Rio.

Aim and research questions

The aim of this research is to shed light on the relationship between transport and events hosting. The literature on transport and events is still scarce and there are a number of research questions that needs to be addressed.

Research questions:

- a) What lessons do the bid submission process and the policy implementation stage provide in order to improve sustainable urban mobilities?

(LOHMANN, Gui)

- b) What are the challenges to achieve sustainable mobility during mega events? How about in the particular case of the 2018 Commonwealth Games?
- c) What are the hard and soft legacies left by transport investments after a mega event hosting?

2. TRANSPORT AND MEGA EVENTS

Mega events bid process are complex exercises that in many cases can involve several millions of dollars from public and private sponsored funds. The process of submitting a bid can take several years, as in the case of the Olympic Games when bids involve intense campaigns comprising multiple stages, including 'applicant cities', before they are shortlisted, and then 'candidate cities'. Each rights holder has their own set of criteria, which are usually available from their websites (e.g. IOC, FIFA, BIE). Even if there is a transparent set of criteria, the bidding process is notoriously political and any criteria is usually used to shortlist candidates rather than to select the host city. There are always official and unofficial reasons why host cities are selected; and the actual decision making process is often not very clear, which in the past has risen suspicious of corruption (Mason, Thibault et al. 2006), it is reasonable to assume that the Commonwealth Games will lead to a sharp increase of international and domestic visitors. Furthermore, previous event studies have suggested that the provision of a suitable transport and accessibility infrastructure is critical for the successful event host (Essex and Chalkley 1998, Hensher and Brewer 2002, Robbins, Dickinson et al. 2007, Gold and Gold 2008). Considering the sprawl development of the Gold Coast and the need for spectators and the Games family to travel long distances between airports, accommodations and venues, transportation will be a critical component for a positive event experience during the Games. Thus, in the following we aim to identify transportation-related issues that might affect the progress of the Commonwealth Games. We, thereby, integrate the report of the Commonwealth Games Federation Evaluation Commission which has reviewed the proposal of the Gold Coast bidding to host the 2018 Commonwealth Games (Commonwealth Games Federation 2011). There are a lot of lobbying, favors, dealing and personal persuasion involved, in addition to the official qualities that a host city needs to possess. Some rights holders (e.g. ASO – Tour de France) require prospective hosts to a pay for the privilege of hosting the event.

In spite of the importance of transport to the success of a mega event, the academic literature neglects a further explanation on the role of transport in bidding application processes neglects. This includes the works of Emery (2002), Griffiths (2006), Mason et al. (2006) and Shoval (2002). Westerbeek et al. (2002) provide one of the few attempts to analyse the decision factors used in the event-bidding process for hallmark sporting events, including infrastructure, which transport is part of. In their study, 'the ability to organize the

event', including aspects such as track record in organizing similar events, public and private funds to sponsor the event, event management expertise, event equipment availability and sport specific technical expertise, was considered the most important factor (mean=5.77 in a scale out of seven). This factor was followed by a group of three factors, including 'infrastructure' (mean=5.07), each perceived to be of similar importance. While considered a non-competition element, infrastructure is part of the primary criteria, which Ingerson and Westerbeek (1999) identified as being crucial for event owners to consider in the formal application.

2. DATA/METHODOLOGY

The data collection process involved the review of academic and industry literature and policies on the interface between transport and event hosting, as well as semi-structured interviews with key transport and tourism stakeholders involved with the successful bid and the planning stage of the 2018 Commonwealth Games. Interviews were undertaken between February and March 2013. Data analyses are current being undertaken and will be presented at the 2013 WCTR Conference in Rio.

The paper examines the degree of association between the transport policies and infrastructure required prior to the bid and how it has changed after the Gold Coast secured the hosting of the 2018 Commonwealth Games.

3. TOURISM AND TRANSPORT DEVELOPMENT ON THE GOLD COAST

In the particular case of the Gold Coast, it can be described as a product of the second half of the twentieth century (Mullins 1992, Bosman and Dredge 2011). From the 1840s until the 1940s, the Gold Coast area was first a timber-felling region and later an agricultural area (Prideaux 2004). At this time also known as a weekend and holiday resort mainly for Brisbane residents, the Gold Coast grew rapidly first as a domestic and then after the World War II as an international tourism destination. Further, from only 9,000 inhabitants in 1947, the Gold Coast area's population increased to 33,000 by 1961, 77,000 by 1971 and about 270,000 in 1991 (Stimson and Minnerly 1998). For much of the past 50 years the Gold Coast transformed itself into one of the largest and fastest growing urban areas in Australia with almost 500,000 inhabitants in 2009 and a growth rate of four percent per annum (Hoffman, Fainstein et al. 2003, Bosman and Dredge 2011). In 2011 the Gold Coast population at the Gold Coast counted 536,480 inhabitants (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012).

Apart from the growing suburbia of permanent residents, the Gold Coast is characterised by a wide range of hallmark projects initiated by entrepreneurs and major investors (Hajdu 1993, Prideaux 2004). Such projects are mostly leisure and tourism oriented such as a

The role of transport in the bidding process, policy implementation and legacies of mega sport events: The 2018 Gold Coast Commonwealth Games

(LOHMANN, Gui)

casino, four theme parks, golf resorts, numerous high-rise apartments, hotels and integrated tourist resorts including the Q1 which is the second highest building of the southern hemisphere (Lawton 2005, Bosman and Dredge 2011). Hereby, particularly Surfers Paradise and Broadbeach are seen as a leading example of 'tourism urbanisation' and as the nation's first leisure and lifestyle consumption city (Mullins 1990, Mullins 1991, Lawton 2005). However, the image of the Gold Coast contradicts itself due to its strong real estate development at one end and the relaxed beach culture on the other side (Bosman and Dredge 2011). Hence, the Gold Coast is perceived as being simultaneously brash, trendy, sophisticated, relaxed, overdeveloped and over-urbanised and as such has been argued to have at least four images (Stimson and Minnerly 1998): a city of leisure; a city of enterprise; a city of tourism; and a city in its own right within the South East Queensland sunbelt growth metropolis.

Apart from the strong real estate developments, the Gold Coast also began to change dramatically as a tourist destination in the second half of the twentieth century (Bosman and Dredge 2011). Up until then it had been Brisbane's traditional and affordable seaside and recreation resort. During this time Southport and Coolangatta have been the most visited towns particularly due to the completion of the Brisbane to Southport railway line in 1889 and the extension of the railway line to Tweed Heads in 1903 (Prideaux 2004). Further, Southport offered a wide sandy beach sheltered from ocean swells by a spit while Surfers Paradise's beaches were exposed to ocean swells. Open water swimming was not very popular at this time, which made the sheltered and relatively calm waters of Southport an attractive destination.

Until the early 1980s about half of all visitors originated from Brisbane and only one-fifth of visitors stayed in hotels and motels, which reflected the significance of second homes (Prideaux 2004). However after 1985 and enhanced by increasing air travelling, the Gold Coast rapidly became a popular international destination for tourists from Japan, Taiwan, Korea, Singapore and Thailand (Mullins 1992, Turner and Reisinger 1999). While in the 1980s most property investments were directed towards motels, flats, and apartments, after 1985 the trend changed towards a rapid expansion of luxury hotels and shopping infrastructure (Hajdu 1993, Hoffman, Fainstein et al. 2003). Much of the construction in the hotel and shopping sector was designed to capitalize on the mass Asian inbound market, particularly from Japan. By 1997, 38 percent of international visitors originated from Japan, followed by 37 percent from other Asian countries, a figure which remained steady into the 2000s (Tourism Queensland 2003, Prideaux 2004). Apart from that there was also a rapid surge in construction of serviced apartments and units that have become a popular alternative to higher-priced hotels, particularly in the domestic market.

Today the Gold Coast is the seventh largest Australian city and Australia's fourth most visited destination for international leisure visitors, characterized by its high rates of population mobility, the theme parks and numerous international events (Lawton 2005, Bosman and Dredge 2011). In 2002 the Gold Coast attracted almost 800,000 international visitors, 1.9

(LOHMANN, Gui)

million domestic interstate visitors and over 1.6 domestic intrastate visitors (Tourism Queensland 2003). These visits resulted in almost 22 million visitor nights spent on the Gold Coast in 2002. Particularly in international visitations, the figures showed a steadily growth in the subsequent years until a sharp drop in 2010/11. While domestic visitation only declined three percent (3.2 million including interstate and intrastate visitors), international visitation dropped 14% (720,000 international visitors) which is a three-year trend change of minus four percent (Tourism Queensland 2011). These declining figures might refer to a number of impacting variables but have been suggested to be due to the natural disasters in Japan and New Zealand as well as the ongoing economic instability in Europe. It should be noted, however, that in comparison to other parts of Australia the decline of international visitors hit Queensland's coast resorts hardest (Tourism Queensland 2012).

Because of the rapid growth that have dominated the destination's development, the Gold Coast is often described as a city without a real history or heritage and a symbol of excess, extravagance, tackiness, and placelessness (Turner and Reisinger 1999, Bosman and Dredge 2011). Indeed, the Gold Coast has been described as an increasingly flashy, bright and Americanised destination fuelled by gold lame bikini clad meter maids, tanned surfers extended shopping hours and theme parks entertainment in the 1980s and 1990s (Bosman and Dredge 2011, Dedekorkut-Howes and Bosman 2011). This image remains until today although recent attempts to incorporate the mountains and forests of its adjacent rural hinterland more in recognition (Lawton, 2005). During these times, many of the timber and iron holiday or second homes along the coast have been demolished and replaced by motels, which soon thereafter were demolished and replaced by the today's emerging high-rise architectural typology. Still today the Gold Coast is characterized by its high rates of building growth and re-developments indicated by the high building approval and commencement data (Bosman and Dredge 2011). What, however, remains underdeveloped is an adequate transport infrastructure, particularly in terms of public transportation provision.

Transport development

Land transport development

One important but still unexamined component of destination development is the provision of a sustainable transport infrastructure (Prideaux 2000, Lohmann 2003, Khadaroo and Seetanah 2007). Leiper (1990) for example identified transportation as a central component of the tourism system because of the need of tourists to travel from their homes to tourist destinations and back. Similarly, Prideaux (2000) proposed the transport system as a key factor for the tourism industry but additionally suggested that the basic elements of a transport system should not merely comprise the transport from the tourist's home to the destination but moreover the safe, comfortable, competitively priced and fast transport provision within the tourist destination. Supportively, Khadaroo and Seetanah (2008) found that on top of tourism infrastructure components, transport infrastructure is a significant determinant of

(LOHMANN, Gui)

tourism inflows into a destination. Also in the case of the Gold Coast, transport accessibility has been a key criterion for its development as tourist destination and residential area.

Tourism development on the Gold Coast was particularly dependent on transport links with Brisbane, in the early years, and national and international air connections, in recent years. The first transport infrastructure milestone was the completion of the railway line in 1889, which first went from Brisbane to Southport and extended to Tweed Heads 15 years later (Prideaux 2004). Before that, Gold Coast visitors had to travel on coastal steamers and stagecoach services. Later, during the 1950s growth in car ownership, combined with the improvement of the nation's interstate highways, made long distance travel by road feasible for the first time. The improvement in interstate motorways and rising car ownership changed the mode of travel and resulted in the closing of the rail lines in 1964 (Bosman and Dredge 2011). At this time the Pacific Highway was already subject to frequent traffic jams on weekends as Brisbane day visitors headed to the coast. The permanent congestions led to a further rebuilding and expansion program that was repeated at regular intervals and is still ongoing.

Due to its urban sprawl development, the population of the Gold Coast is characterized by its high dependence on private motor vehicles and consequently to a rising car ownership (Yigitcanlar, Fabian et al. 2008). The M1, which represents the freeway connection between Brisbane and the Gold Coast since the 1980s, has been permanently improved and expanded but can still not handle the daily traffic demand (Hoffman, Fainstein et al. 2003). The last major upgrade to four lanes was completed in 2000; its extension is currently under way. Further, the major investment in public transport infrastructure has been the 2001 extension of Brisbane railways to connect the Gold Coast to Brisbane and the Brisbane Airport. Currently the railways run until Varsity Lakes, which means that other suburban areas such as Burleigh Heads, Palm Beach and Coolangatta as well as important transportation links such as the Gold Coast Airport remains disconnected from rail public transportation.

Public transport development

Today's deficiencies in the public transport infrastructure on the Gold Coast had already been perceived during the 1960s (Hoffman, Fainstein et al. 2003). In 2008 there are one train and 38 bus routes operating at the Gold Coast (Yigitcanlar, Fabian et al. 2008). However, these routes concentrate on the coastal areas while particularly western parts of the Gold Coast remain only poorly captured or not served at all by public services. The most poorly serviced corridors are east-west routes because of the strong emphasis on inter-city public transport investments for promoting further Gold Coast's urban and tourism development. Thus, most people are dependent on the daily usage of private vehicles (Yigitcanlar, Fabian et al. 2008): in 2006, 286,386 private motor vehicles have been counted among the total of 472,280 people living at the Gold Coast.

The role of transport in the bidding process, policy implementation and legacies of mega sport events: The 2018 Gold Coast Commonwealth Games

(LOHMANN, Gui)

Currently, in no suburb of the Gold Coast is the minimum household motor vehicle ownership level less than 82 per cent, while in some suburbs this figure even ranges up to 100 per cent (Yigitcanlar, Fabian et al. 2008). Further, the total number of daily journey to work (JTW) trips on the Gold Coast is 155,986, with 91.2 percent of these trips made by private vehicles. Thereby, the average one-way trip distance to work is 31.9km, which suggests a daily average commuting distance of over nine million kilometers covered by private vehicles (Yigitcanlar, Fabian et al. 2008). However, JTW trips only constitute one-third of the all trips, and these figures do not take into account around the journeys of 60,000 daily visitors (Hoffman et al., 2003).

A main concern of Gold Coast's infrastructure is that public transport within the area is poorly developed and a good spatial and temporal access to transport is only available for a minority of the population (Queensland Transport 2005). With the aim to improve the current public transport infrastructure, there are a number of projects under way. The stage 1 of the project, linking Southport, Surfers Paradise and Broadbeach, should be completed by 2014. A light rail system will connect Broadbeach with Helensvale and at a later stage Broadbeach with the Gold Coast Airport (Hoyle 2011). This light rail project will be reinforced by an efficient bus feeder system in order to connect light rail with the other rail services (Yigitcanlar, Fabian et al. 2008). Once completed this improved public transport network should unload the major transit routes at the Gold Coast. Figure 1 illustrates the major public transport systems on the Gold Coast.

(LOHMANN, Gui)

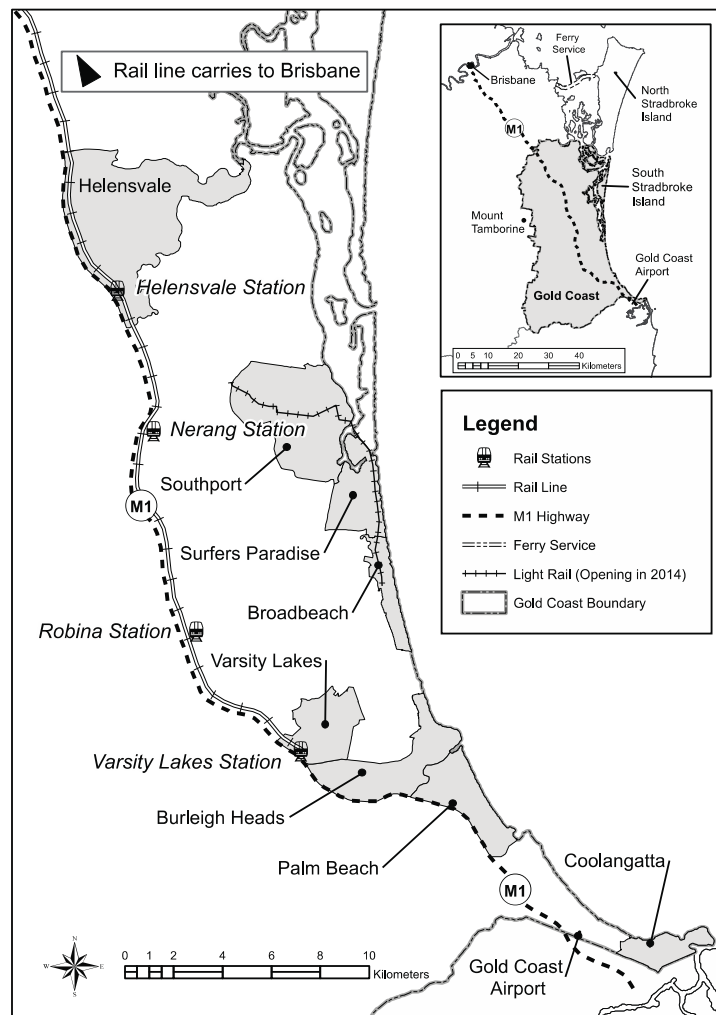


Figure 1. Major public transport systems on the Gold Coast

Air transport development

Apart from the land transport infrastructure, the Gold Coast Airport developed towards a main entry point for interstate visitors to the Gold Coast. Over the past 65 years, the Gold Coast Airport has undergone a major transformation from an initial emergency landing strip for airmail services flying between Sydney and Brisbane towards an international airport and currently the sixth busiest international airport in Australia (Gold Coast Airport 2012). Today the Gold Coast Airport is the Australia's fastest growing airport with over 5 million passengers movements in 2010 (Gold Coast Airport 2012).

The first regular passenger services commenced in 1939. At this time the airport consisted of three grass strips. This was until the early 1950s when the runway and taxiways were sealed and the construction of the northern part of the original terminal was completed by 1958 (Gold Coast Airport 2012). At this time also direct flights from Sydney to Coolangatta

The role of transport in the bidding process, policy implementation and legacies of mega sport events: The 2018 Gold Coast Commonwealth Games

(LOHMANN, Gui)

commenced which led to an increase of annual passenger movements to around 12,000. In the following years direct flights were established from most of Australia's major population centers, enabled by improved aviation technologies which led to increased passenger comfort, reduced travel times and reduction of airfares (Prideaux, 2004). By 1981, the annual passenger movements exceeded 655,000. In order to cope with the increasing demand the construction of the existing terminal complex went underway in the 1980s (Gold Coast Airport 2012).

The access by air was soon affordable from international origins. Particularly, direct airline connections from Brisbane to Asia and Europe enabled the strong international tourism growth at the Gold Coast in the 1980s (Dedekorkut-Howes and Bosman 2011). It was, however, not before 1999 when first regular international air services commenced from the Gold Coast (Gold Coast Airport 2012). The extension of the Coolangatta airport towards an international airport has happened after its privatization process. Initially in public hands, the Coolangatta airport was acquired by Queensland Airports Limited on 29 May 1998 (Gold Coast Airport 2012). The annual passenger numbers at this time counted around 2 million. Since then the Gold Coast Airport has been mainly targeted by low-cost carriers (Queensland Airports 2012). In 2007, the runway was extended to 2,500 meters to enable the operation of long haul international aircraft services. Later in January 2010, the Gold Coast Airport completed a \$100 million terminal redevelopment, which has been the first purpose-built low-cost carrier terminal in Australia (Queensland Airports 2012).

Today the Gold Coast Airport offers a number of domestic and international services including domestic direct flights to Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra, Newcastle, Adelaide, Cairns, Townsville, Mount Isa and Darwin as well as international direct flights to Auckland, Christchurch, Queenstown, Tokyo, Osaka and Kuala Lumpur (Queensland Airports 2012). It should be noted, however, that although the growth of international scheduled flights (i.e. 4,042 in 2009/10 vs. 4,247 in 2010/11), seat utilization has actually declined from 77.9% to 74.5% (BITRE 2011). In comparison to other airports in Australia, this figure has been reported as relatively stable. Moreover, the years from 2009 to 2011 show a decline of the total aircraft movements into the Gold Coast (142,039 in 2008/09 vs. 100,434 in 2010/11) while the largest decrease was recorded at non-scheduled aircraft movements with a decline of 24.6% (BITRE 2011). Thus, with the inclusion of international charter passenger airlines, total international aircraft movements into the Gold Coast recorded a steadily decline in the last three years. Comparing these decreasing figures with the high growth during the earlier years (international passenger movements for example almost doubled from the years 2004 to 2005 (Department of Transport and Regional Services 2005) and the tourism trends at the Gold Coast, a high dependency of the Gold Coast Airport from the mass tourist destination Gold Coast can be suggested.

Transport provision and the 2018 Commonwealth Games

In the case of the Gold Coast bidding process for the 2018 Commonwealth Games, transport has been categorized among one of 15 main themes of the bidding process (Commonwealth Games Federation 2011). The proposal described the public transport system at the Gold Coast, supported by park-and-ride facilities, as the foundation for the Games transport concept (Commonwealth Games Federation 2011, p. 52-55). More specifically, it has been suggested, that despite the currently low usage of public transportation at the Gold Coast (e.g. Yigitcanlar, Fabian et al. 2008), spectators will be encouraged to use public services. This aim has been said to be achievable by introducing an integrated ticketing system that allows the free use of public transportation for ticket holders as well as restricting access for private vehicles to the venues. Further, considering the strong car culture at the Gold Coast, the spectator transport strategy additionally includes the change of the spectators travel behaviour (Commonwealth Games Federation 2011). Such change has already shown to be successful at previous events such as during the Games 2000 in Sydney (Hensher and Brewer 2002).

The public transportation network during the Commonwealth Games will be supported by a heavy rail line that connects the western part of the Gold Coast and venues such as the Robina Stadium and Oxenford Studios with Brisbane and the Brisbane Airports (Commonwealth Games Federation 2011). Further, a new light rail line will be developed by 2014 and will consequently serve the Commonwealth Games Village and a number of venues situated at the eastern coastal area. The remaining venues and particularly the connection to the southern Gold Coast and Gold Coast Airport will be accessible via bus services in connection with park-and-ride facilities (Commonwealth Games Federation 2011). The Games family on the other hand will be provided with dedicated fleets and lanes and as such should enable travel times between the Commonwealth Games Village and eight competition venues within 20 minutes, to further three venues within 35 minutes and to two Brisbane-based venues within 60 minutes. Similar travel times are expected for the media and VIPs. However, it might be considered that such special lanes may reduce the road space that is available to the public during the event and therefore could lead to increased congestions and bottlenecks within the Games' road networks when private vehicles are used as travel mode.

The biggest venue of the 2018 Commonwealth Games will be the Carrara Stadium which is located within 20 minutes from the Games Village and will be upgraded towards a capacity of 40,000 seats (Commonwealth Games Federation 2011). This stadium will host the ceremonies and athletics events. Identifying a preferred site for an Australian Football League stadium at the Gold Coast, Burke and Evans (2009) mapped the accessibility via the public transport system. In doing so the authors considered the principal components of accessibility when using public transportation, namely (1) the walk access from home to a public transport stop; (2) waiting time for the public transport vehicle; (3) travel time on the public vehicle; (4) if necessary, interchange with other public transport services; and (5) the walk access from the final transport stop to the proposed stadium. Further, because people generally conceive travel length in of time, timed measures instead of distance measures

(LOHMANN, Gui)

have been suggested as appropriate for the accessibility analysis (Burke and Evans 2009). Assuming total travel times within 45 minutes to the stadium as high accessibility and travel times within 75 minutes as reasonable accessibility, Burke and Evans (2009) showed that particularly Nerang provides a high public transport accessibility as is accessible by around 92% of the Gold Coast population within 75 minutes. The Carrara Stadium is the most efficient within a 45 minute timeframe but has been shown as particularly unsatisfactory accessible by spectators travelling from more distant suburbs of the Gold Coast or from the state capital Brisbane due to the stadium's location away from the heavy rail line (Burke and Evans 2009). Hence, in 2006, for 17.5% of the Gold Coast population total travel times to the Carrara Stadium exceeded 75 minutes when travels were to be conducted by public services. Due to the on-going sprawl development, this percentage might even have been risen during the last years.

Apart from travel distances to venues within the destination, the Gold Coast itself is mainly accessible via the two international airports in Brisbane and Coolangatta. The Brisbane Airport (86km north of the Commonwealth Games Village) might serve as the main entry point for international visitors and athletes because the Gold Coast Airport (36km south of the Commonwealth Games Village) merely serves six international destinations directly (Queensland Airports 2012). Nevertheless, the Gold Coast Airport is significant as a domestic airport as it provides daily direct connections to all Australian major metropolises (Queensland Airports 2012). Yet, the Gold Coast Airport does not provide frequent public transport connections to Southport and Surfers Paradise. Travel times to these destinations via public transportation vary between 50 and 90 minutes and requires at least one transfer (TRANSLink 2012). The same distance by private vehicle would take from 35 to 50 minutes. Differently, the Brisbane International and Domestic Airport offers frequent connections to the western parts of the Gold Coast via a heavy rail line. However, in order to reach destinations like Southport or Surfers Paradise, the current train connection still requires travellers to transfer to bus services which ultimately leads to a total travel time of over two hours (TRANSLink 2012). The same distance covered by private vehicle would take around one hour. Besides from that, the airport train does not provide any overnight services which requires travellers that arrive and depart overnight to use private airport transfers (Airtrain 2012).

Our examination of the current public transportation system at the Gold Coast and in regards to the host of 2018 Commonwealth Games indicates that particularly the transportation links from and to the airport might lack reasonable travel times and comfort for visitors. Further, it appears that some sport venues are disconnected from certain public transportation modes. While, for example, the Robina Stadium and Oxenford Studios are directly accessible by the heavy train line, the Carrara Stadium and Southport Broadwater Parklands are only accessible by interchanging to other public transport services and vice versa. Hence, depending on the place from which spectators will be travelling to the venues, public transportation might not always be a convenient and efficient option.

3. RESULTS/FINDINGS

The preliminary findings of the research indicate that, as in the case of other event hosting destination such as Athens, the expansion of the urban light rail was followed by criticism of the local population and daily commuters as a consequence of the increase in traffic jam generated out of the construction of the East-West tram route. A comprehensive analysis of the results, findings and implications will be presented during the 2013 WCTR conference.

4. IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH/POLICY

The analysis indicates the conflict between public transport policy in a sprawl city where average households have two cars and public transport is expensive and lacks integration, particularly in the East-West displacement. While the construction of the light rail is much needed for the future development of public transport in the city and the hosting of the mega event, it has not been supported by the local population as a result of the costs and inconveniences of building such railway system. The results of the paper provides a contribution to the literature in understanding the planning and provision of public transport and the policies involved while hosting a mega event and the need to take the local population on-board.

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The role of transport in the bidding process, policy implementation and legacies of mega sport events: The 2018 Gold Coast Commonwealth Games

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The role of transport in the bidding process, policy implementation and legacies of mega sport events: The 2018 Gold Coast Commonwealth Games

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(LOHMANN, Gui)

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