



SHOP TALK

ISSUES AND NEWS AFFECTING THE AUSTRALIAN SHOPPING CENTRE INDUSTRY

SHOPPING CENTRE
COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA

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*** SPECIAL EDITION ***

[Archive](#)

WHY ARE SHOPPING CENTRES BEING SINGLED OUT OVER MANAGED CAR PARKING?

Queensland Attorney-General, Paul Lucas, is waging a personal crusade against the introduction of managed car parking at shopping centres. Mr Lucas reportedly has legal advice that councils can impose conditions on shopping centre developments to prevent managed car parking. Mr Lucas has also urged the Brisbane City Council to introduce a Temporary Local Planning Instrument, which overrides the current planning scheme, to "address the issue of paid parking at other shopping centres". Brisbane City Council has so far been very measured in its response. Unfortunately it has been reported that Moreton Bay Regional Council is preparing such a temporary planning instrument to prevent managed car parking in its council area.

Mr Lucas has failed to articulate the reasons for his objection to managed car parking, whereby the first two or three hours of parking are free and only modest charges apply for subsequent periods. Perhaps that's because Mr Lucas's objections have developed only recently. When Mr Lucas was Minister for Health he proudly announced the opening of a new car park at Cairns Base Hospital which means people visiting hospitalised friends and relatives now have to pay for their parking. No free period, incidentally! Mr Lucas also foreshadowed the introduction of paid car parking at Townsville Hospital. Paid car parking for hospital staff and visitors is apparently fine for government-owned hospitals – as well as at state government cultural facilities – but not for shopping centres.

The primary responsibility of a shopping centre owner must be to serve the interests of the retailers of the centre. These retailers are not being helped if valuable car parking spaces, including those most convenient to the shops, are being occupied by commuters and others who are not spending at that centre. Unfortunately the strong support for this move from retailers and from the legitimate retailer associations is being drowned out by other noise in the media, much of it created by Mr Lucas. Managed car parking is well established, and well accepted, in both Sydney and Melbourne.

Usually fewer than 10% of visitors spend more than three hours at a shopping centre ([Shop Talk 27/10/11](#)). The vast majority of shoppers, therefore, will not be paying for their parking. This is different to most commercial car parks and local government council meters. Managed car parking at shopping centres is not, as claimed by the Shop Assistants Union (SDA), a "greedy grab for cash". The parking fees collected will barely cover the costs of operating and managing the car park.

The intervention of the SDA in this issue is not coincidental. Shop assistants who drive to work will now have to pay for their parking, although at a heavily subsidised rate. In this respect, however, they are in no different position to every other employee who drives to work. If they choose to drive, of course, they will actually spend less on parking than employees in other parts of Brisbane. Of course we know shop assistants *are* different from other employees. Their union is a very influential operator within the Labor Party and a significant donor to Labor Party election campaigns. It is to be hoped that Mr Lucas is not simply being a 'spear carrier' for the SDA on this matter.

Shopping centre owners must have the ability to make a commercial decision which they believe is in the best interests of their retailers and customers. Such decisions always involve a commercial risk that some customers will not accept the decision and will shop elsewhere. Shopping centre owners' rights should not be considered inferior to those of the owners of other property assets, such as office buildings, airports and hotels, or to those of governments. (Visitors to the Queensland Performing Arts Centre, for example, are charged for parking). If Mr Lucas were to announce the removal of car parking charges at all state government owned buildings, he might be in a position to criticise shopping centre owners. As the *Courier Mail* said this week: "This is not an area in which governments should be interfering after failing in the first place to provide the parking facilities near such an important transport hub".