Jetting into the SMART era

ANTHONY ALBANESE

MY EARLIEST exposure to smart infrastructure came from The Jetsons, that great television experience that was the space-age counterpart to The Flintstones.

Time-saving technology meant that George Jetson could keep the whole family fed, watered and clothed via his nine-hours-a-week job at Spaceley’s Sprockets.

Traffic lights and congested roads didn’t trouble the Jetsons. Across the sky they scooted in their 60s-look flying saucer, which conveniently collapsed into a briefcase when George arrived at the office.

Parking was never a problem in Orbit City.

Let me step back now to our future, and, be assured, I’m not expecting a rapid transit system to provide a personal spaceship any day soon.

But I am excited at what is coming out of the SMART Infrastructure Facility, full of creative minds and energy which is finding solutions to our real-life transport infrastructure challenges.

I was here a month ago with Prime Minister Julia Gillard at the announcement of the roll-out into Wollongong next year of the National Broadband Network.

SMART was the perfect venue because it is at facilities such as this where the benefits will be immediately felt.

It is significant that SMART is located in a major regional university, already home to two other leading technology facilities.

What this means is a growing cluster of creative minds and industries that are regenerating the skills base of the Illawarra.
We already know Wollongong’s university produces more IT graduates than any other in the country.

As centres such as this grow and flourish, it will mean more jobs for local graduates and a retention of the brain-power than comes with those young, energetic minds.

The Federal Government’s $35 million contribution to this centre is indeed an investment in our nation’s future.

Already, SMART is performing important research, such as the scenario work surrounding the expansion of the Port Kembla Harbour.

This What If tool allows for the testing of scenarios aimed at eliminating bottlenecks into and out of the port.

What if trains delivering coal were twice the length? What if we could load the coal twice as fast?

Testing scenarios and business cases can save millions of dollars.

This work ties in nicely with the Federal Government’s recent announcement of a further $25.5 million for the Maldon to Dumbarton Rail Link project.

The rail link has the potential to help make the Illawarra to the industrial powerhouse it once was by vastly improving the flow of freight.

Earlier this year, my department and SMART formally agreed to exchange information openly so that good research can become good policy.

Let me finish where I began – with the Jetsons.

The series is now almost 50 years old and as such, has provoked discussion about just how well it predicted the world we find ourselves in.

The American academic Jeffery Tucker wrote this year: “The whole scene – which anticipated so much of the technology we have today – is our world: explosive technological advances and a culture of enterprise that is very fond of the good life.”

I am not sure about “explosive” but I am confident that great technological advances and a culture of enterprise will also mark this impressive institution.

**Anthony Albanese is Federal Minister for Infrastructure and Transport.**