

One card, a lot of trouble

The government's new smartcard - with photo ID - is being managed with an eye to the political fallout.

Story Julian Bajkowski

project of large "houses in the sky", cutting the number of apartments from 221 to 76.

Tarasco has bought a penthouse, and will move there with his wife Christine from David Marriner's Westin Hotel in the city centre.

The Victoria Dock project will elevate Tarasco's Westgate Ports into the big league, alongside P&O and Patrick/Toll as the third major private player on Melbourne's waterfront.

Tarasco is spending \$80 million converting the 17.5 hectare site on the western side of the Bolte Bridge. It is mostly a greenfields site but also has two shipping berths and several wharf sheds.

A 40,000 square metre warehouse will be built to store and distribute cargo, while a freight rail line will take cargo out of the ports by train rather than truck.

When completed by 2008, it will handle about 30 per cent of Melbourne's container and break-bulk cargo.

Tarasco's vision includes inland "ports" at Lyndhurst in the city's east, Altona in the west and Somerton in the north, where he has big landholdings.

Shipping cargo would be taken directly by train to the ports, where it would be loaded onto trucks for distribution around

'Until the west and south-east have ports that are functioning, the central port will be congested.'

Victoria or the rest of Australia.

"The port will become a transit centre," Tarasco says. "The containers don't stay there, they come in and are unloaded and put on a train preferably and shot out to the inland ports . . ."

"The rail network requires some upgrading but certainly the 30 per cent [of container traffic] is achievable - but only if someone goes out and builds inland ports, because you need somewhere to send the train.

"Until the west and south-east have ports that are functioning, the central port will be congested."

The project has tacit backing from the state government, which wants to reduce the heavy truck traffic on inner-city streets and the frequently clogged Monash and Westgate freeways.

At 61, Tarasco appears indefatigable, but succession planning has begun.

Until recently, all three of Tarasco's children had jobs with Salta Properties.

Sam jnr and 27-year-old David remain in the family business but daughter Lisa, 29, has left to join Arnold Bloch Leibler after completing her masters in law.

For more than 23 years on any given lunchtime on any given business day, hundreds of thousands of Australians have left their workplaces to stand patiently - or otherwise - in a queue in one of 238 locations around Australia.

Welcome to Medicare: the last financial institution to require its customers to visit offices clutching paper claim forms.

For years, Australians have been extracting cash from automatic teller machines and paying bills on the internet. Medicare is one institution that has remained a technological fossil - at least in relation to transactions with its customers.

This situation explains, in part, the government's enthusiasm for its controversial project that will see an estimated 16.7 million adult Australians issued shiny new photographic smartcards at a cost to the taxpayer of \$1.1 billion.

At Medicare's shopfront office in Sydney's central business district, just off Pitt Street Mall, a customer in his late 40s who works for a bank and wants to be referred to as "Bob", says he can't understand why it has taken the government so long to automate Medicare payments.

"[Medicare is] the fastest moving queue in the country - but I'd rather not have to come here every time the kids go to the doctor," Bob says. "I don't really want this smartcard/ID card thing. I want a card you use for Medicare, Centrelink, tax on the internet and stuff like that. I'll believe it when I see it."

Bob's simple desire for a single government card to help him deal with a giant bureaucratic machine neatly summarises what Human Services Minister Joe Hockey is trying to do as part of efforts to bring the bureaucracy to heel.

The government has opted to create a single card that will save millions of Australians pulling out driver's licences, passports, Medicare cards and birth certificates every time they need to claim a government benefit.

Hockey has chosen his senior bureaucrats carefully. The smartcard project's chain of command consists of four of Canberra's most seasoned change managers.

The project's chief technology architect, Marie Johnson, recently returned from a stint at Microsoft's headquarters in Redmond as the global head of its government business unit.

Johnson describes the smartcard project as part of a greater transformation of how government services are delivered to the public and businesses.

This week she bluntly warned the technology industry that the government would not accept bids from smartcard suppliers that contained unproven or stand-alone technologies.

"This will not be a bespoke adventure," Johnson said.

She has previously stated the bureaucracy must realise the public will not engage with it online or electronically merely for the sheer pleasure of dealing with the government.



Chief technology architect Marie Johnson warned suppliers the card would not be a 'bespoke adventure'. Photo Tamara Voninski

The political fallout from the card is keenly appreciated by some in the Howard government. The card's birth followed some internal labelling.

Almost a year ago, Hockey's proposal for a single welfare card containing a chip and a photo eclipsed a rival proposal being heavily pushed by Attorney-General Philip Ruddock for a national identity document.

Sources familiar with the tussle between Hockey and Ruddock claim that when push came to shove, Prime Minister John Howard's finely honed electoral antennae turned to how each proposal would look by the next election.

For Howard, Hockey's smartcard that streamlined payments to voters and carried voluntary identity characteristics easily trumped Ruddock's compulsory identity

document that would require Australians to be fingerprinted, deliver limited perceived benefits and be run by an increasingly ambitious security apparatus.

When the decision to approve the welfare smartcard went before cabinet, it came quickly. Hockey was summoned by Howard to return from a trek (with Kevin Rudd) on the Kokoda Trail in Papua New Guinea and put on an RAAF VIP jet back to Australia.

By August, the Prime Minister was standing in front of a private doctor's surgery flanked by Hockey and Health Minister Tony Abbott to demonstrate how an existing Medicare card could be swiped to claim a refund from an existing Eftpos terminal.

Hockey's plastic revolution for welfare had arrived.

But controversy remains, as the card will require a cardholder

photograph. It's the most contentious aspect of the plan that will see a single card replace 17 welfare documents - including the Medicare card, veterans cards and Centrelink documents.

The photo will be printed on the surface of the smartcard and also embedded within a microchip on the card, creating the single largest facial identity registry Australia has ever seen.

Between 2008 and 2010, most Australians will be required to front up to registration kiosks across Australia and snapped for posterity. The government will then use computer cross-matching technology in an attempt to "eliminate duplicates" - such as people who are looking to get more than one card to disguise their identity - before issuing the cards.

Ever eager to distance itself from any Orwellian connotations, the government has sought to reassure the public by saying that the welfare smartcard's photo-matching process will not include other photo registries such as passports or drivers licence registries.

Extra political protection has been added by new federal laws that will make it a criminal offence (carrying a jail sentence of up to five years) to ask for the welfare smartcard as a means of identity.

Yet people will be free to offer it as identification if they wish.

Businesses can also be slugged with fines of up to \$275,000, a move that has led business groups to warn that an immediate education campaign is needed.

Regardless of the sentiments, by this time next year the first welfare smartcards will be swiped through Eftpos terminals across Australia - 20 years after Eftpos arrived.

THE WELFARE SMARTCARD (ACCESS CARD)

What's on the card surface:

Preferred name, photo, signature, expiry date and card number. Date of birth if requested*.

On the government-controlled area of microchip:

Name, address, details of children or other dependants, biometric photo, image of signature, card number, Medicare or Veteran's numbers, expiry date, gender, concession status and entitlements, date of birth*, encrypted PIN (to control access), other benefit information.

On the cardholder-controlled area of the microchip (all voluntary):

Organ donor status, health alerts, blood type, allergies, emergency contact details, mobile phone number, name, address, other personal details or applications.

What will NOT be on the card:

Stored monetary value, credit card number, fingerprints, social security, health records, access to public transport ticketing.

Proposed new laws for the welfare smartcard:

Businesses or individuals cannot demand the smartcard for identification.



Maximum penalties: Five years' jail, \$275,000 fine for business, \$55,000 for individuals.

New criminal offences for commonwealth officers breaching privacy or trading in information: Maximum penalties 10 years' jail.

New criminal offences for fraudulently obtaining, trading in, counterfeiting, tampering or attempting to hack welfare smartcards: Maximum penalty is 10 years' jail.

*Inclusion of information is voluntary and at the discretion of

the holder, says the Department of Human Services.

Other smartcard deployments: Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and Hong Kong have smartcard-based national identity documents. Hong Kong, London, Melbourne, Brisbane and Sydney are implementing smartcard-based integrated public transport systems allowing other purchases. In London and Malaysia, transport smartcards can be linked to payment and debit cards. Most state and federal public servants are to be issued identification smartcards.