RURAL ADDRESSING

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JOHN JUDGE, surveyor registered in 1961 having declined an offer to give up articles and enrol in the fledging surveying degree course at the University of New South Wales.

He commenced duty with the Central Mapping Authority (CMA) in 1955 and was around for the publication of the first topographic map, the 31680 of Nelligen B (now Kiola) in 1958.

Thirty three years later, he was still around for the publication of the last, new topographic line map, the 25,000 of Wondalga in November 1991.

Having been responsible to the Consultative Committee for the preparation of the Rural Addressing Model, he is now seconded to the Australian Institute of Spatial Information Sciences and Technology (AISIST). There he is assisting in the preparation of training material and in the running of the Rural Addressing Program described in his paper.

INTRODUCTION

This paper looks at the problems associated with allocating addresses to properties that lie outside the "built-up" areas of our towns and cities. Having presented the problems, the paper then provides the solution and goes on to introduce a program of assistance to those councils wishing to implement the system.

What is an address?

An address is a means by which properties can be identified and located. It is a means by which one property can be distinguished from others in the same area or on the same road. Rural addressing is a simple and permanent means of identifying, locating and addressing properties in semi-rural and rural areas.

In a society where an address is sometimes considered as a "right" and taken for granted, the absence of an address is costly, inconvenient, and at times the difference between life and death.

Most rural residents have always been disadvantaged when compared with urban residents, in that they do not have an address.

The lack of an address is not always seen as a problem to those that live on the land. Obviously they know where they live. They can find it in the sunshine, in the dark, when a detour has to be made and even when coming from the opposite direction. The longer one has lived in an area the more people one gets to know and, just as importantly, how to find them.

The position is reversed for later residents. Although they can find their own property they do not know how to find others. Nor can others locate them unless it is by reference to the previous occupants, eg "so you're in the Smiths' old place".

It is a problem for the delivery of goods and services.

Whether residents are long established or new arrivals, the carriers from local transport companies, rural suppliers, timber yards, etc, have difficulty in locating properties for intended goods. The situation is far worse for stock or produce deliveries coming from locations hundreds of kilometres away.

Anecdotes abound of setting concrete being dumped on the roadside because the correct property could not be located. Of bricks being delivered to the wrong site and of livestock being dropped in the wrong paddock.

Who keeps count of the frustration, anger, lost time, lost money and lost opportunities caused by this lack of addresses?

Disruption is not confined to the commercial sector. The provision of Local, State and Federal Government services is hampered by the providers not being able to locate their clients.

Power is disconnected from the wrong property. Telephone cables are laid to the wrong house. Residents are placed in the wrong electorate. At some time or another, whatever can go wrong, does go wrong.

Emergencies are one situation where the difference between being readily able to be located and not able to be found, has a life or death result.

It is immaterial how long a person has lived in the area, if there is a machinery accident and the ambulance driver cannot locate the site in time, the consequence is just the same for both the long-term and the new resident.

Without an official or recognised method of addressing rural properties, residents and authorities have been forced to adopt alternative methods in an attempt to overcome the resultant problems.

In order to deliver mail, Australia Post developed a system based upon roadside mail delivery services. Upon application for a mail service a resident would be listed on a point to point description along a particular mail run. The mail contractor would deliver mail to the named mail box according to the description of that run. In some areas the descriptive number became common knowledge and that number was displayed on the mailbox. In order to assist mail sorters, residents are sometimes requested to include the delivery contract number in their postal address.

This system did not provide an address and its value was limited to Australia Post.

Some residents resorted to using their **Lot** number in an effort to describe their particular property. The display of a **Lot** number had mixed results and there was always confusion and mistakes caused by there being 2, 3 or more **Lot 1's** on the same road.

Acting against police advice, residents have sometimes used a combination of surname and **Lot** numbers to identify themselves. Even this was not always unique. One council reported three properties where the residents had the same surname but each lived on a different **Lot 5** on the same road.

Property names in themselves are not an address. They only serve to confirm a particular place once it has been located.

More compact rural communities have occasionally taken it upon themselves to allocate and display house numbers. While having immediate benefits to that community, it was very localised and was not part of a planned, overall scheme.

In NSW the responsibility for allocating addresses lies with local government. In urban areas this responsibility is accepted and implemented without question. An address is expected, as a right, by residents. There is no uniformity between the schemes of various councils, but apart from arterial roads in metropolitan areas this is generally no problem.

When it came to rural areas things were different. Councils did not allocate addresses to residents, and the residents themselves were not overly concerned about the lack of an address.

Although there are many reasons for this, it can reasonably be assumed that they would fall into two categories. The first is that only a small number of residents ever requested an address. The second was the sheer magnitude of the problem, and the absence of any guidelines on how to allocate an address to a rural property.

Times have changed. We are now in an era where rural lands are increasingly being subdivided into hobby farms and rural residential lots. The combination of these "new" rural residents, and an increasing awareness by "old" rural residents, have created a lobby group that is pressuring councils to provide them with an address. Councils are now finding that addresses are needed for improved administration.

Organisations charged with the responsibility of providing essential and emergency services are also advocating the need for properties to be addressed.

Responding to these pressures Councils began to provide addresses for rural residents.

In New South Wales there are 147 local government areas that have a component of rural ratepayers. In reply to a request by the State Electoral Office in March of 1992, eight councils indicated that they had completed some form of rural addressing, seven councils were in the process of doing so, 21 councils were thinking about it, 45 councils had no plans and the remaining 66 councils did not respond.

Even though most of the participating councils indicated that they were following the "Corio" model (a Victorian Shire that implemented rural addressing in 1986) it was soon apparent that there was a lack of consistency between the various systems being introduced.

This lack of uniformity had not gone unnoticed. The State Emergency Management Committee, while welcoming Rural Addressing, had already expressed concern that the absence of a standard would jeopardise the whole system.

But why is there a need for uniformity - what does it matter if each council designs and implements their own system?

There are two main reasons for a consistent approach.

The first is to ensure the continuity of addresses between local government areas. That is, that there would be an homogenous system across the whole State.

I come from Bathurst. Without a uniform approach there could be three different addressing systems along the road between Bathurst and Lithgow, three between Bathurst and Oberon and four between Bathurst and Orange.

The second is for mobility. Tourists, commercial travellers, transport firms, emergency services and the community in general operate across council boundaries. Without uniformity everyone would be faced with learning a new system in every district of their operations. Obviously the potential for errors is enormous.

In June 1992, the Surveyor General put a proposal to the Minister that a model be developed to standardise the way street addresses are ascribed to rural properties. With approval, a consultative committee was formed of representatives from organisations with a vested interest in the introduction of a rural addressing system for New South Wales. Under the Chairmanship of Mr P Kelly, Deputy Surveyor General, the Committee was composed of a representative each from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, Australian Electoral Commission, Local Government and Shires Associations, State Electoral Office, State Emergency Management Committee, State Land Information Council and the Valuer General's Office. The Committee sought direct assistance from Camden, Hawkesbury and Wollondilly Councils and from the Roads and Traffic Authority. Input was also obtained from other rural councils.

The model was finalised by the Consultative Committee in August 1993. It sought to minimise the elements of addressing which must be standardised, and emphasised means of efficient implementation.

In May 1994, a Rural Addressing Package was sent to every council having the responsibility of rural roads. The package contained a video, an information card for each councillor and a copy of the Rural Addressing Model. That initial distribution was followed by a launch of the system by the Hon George Souris, Minister for Conservation and Land Management.

The Model is divided into four sections.

Section 1 defines the scope and application of the Model.
Section 2 sets out the requirements or rules of the Model.
Section 3 is the guidelines on interpreting the Model.
Section 4 is the guidelines on implementing the Model.

The basic element of the system is the logically sequenced property numbers related to the distance of the property from the start of the road. Numbers increase by increments of 2 for every 20 metres of road frontage, odd numbers on the left and even numbers on the right hand side of the road.

One kilometre of road accommodates a number range of 100. The number 1450 indicates an entrance on the right hand side of the road, 14.5 kilometres from the start of the road. Similarly, the number 833 indicates an entrance on the left hand side of the road 8.33 kilometres from the start of the road. It follows that the two entrances are 6.17 kilometres apart.

In sparsely populated areas, the odd and even numbers can be rounded to a five or a zero without degrading the system.

With uniform adoption the advantages are:

- Continuity of numbering between local government areas along roads that traverse councils or cross/form local government area boundaries.
- A distance-based system that acts as a signpost to let people know how far to a destination from the start of a road, as well as how far to go to a destination.
- A method of establishing which direction to travel when a road is intersected at a mid-point.
- A numbering method that stands, irrespective of property size and allows for future development.
- A system that accommodates all types of areas and provides a standard numbering system that is universal to all areas.
- A system which provides sufficient latitude to allow different means of implementation.
- The flexibility to address other features as required.

The Consultative Committee realised that, while the preparation of the Model would enable the uniform introduction of Rural Addressing, the actual implementation was dependent upon council priorities and budget. They could see that if Rural Addressing was to achieve a significant coverage within a reasonable time frame, then councils would need assistance.

To put it another way - external funding would be required if the progress of rural addressing was to be accelerated.

Three new players now enter the scene. On stage left is the Australian Institute of Spatial Information Sciences and Technology (AISIST), and on the right is the Department of Education Employment and Training (DEET). In the centre, and surrounding each council, is a significant number of the community who, for one reason or another, are unemployed.

Although these players are new to rural addressing they are not new to each other. Each of the three players has interacted with the other two on various programs providing funding, training, employment opportunities and employment.

Members will all be familiar with the opportunities created under JobSkills, JOBSTART and JOBTRAIN programs administered by DEET. Members will also be familiar with the White Paper, "Working Nation", announced by the Federal Government in 1994. A key element of "Working Nation" is the New Work Opportunities (NWO) program.

Towards the end of 1994, preliminary talks between DEET and AISIST indicated that the NWO program could be used to provide trained personnel to implement Rural Addressing within councils. In arriving at this conclusion, due regard was paid to:-

- AISIST being a recognised provider of training with a proven track record on DEET funded projects

- that the project was in rural and remote areas

- that the project was ideal to assist the long term (18 months or more) unemployed return to the workforce

- that the project

    - was of value to the community
    - drew on the initiatives, concerns and needs of local communities, and
    - provided value for money.

AISIST followed up the discussion with a proposal to provide upwards of 60 placements in councils within the Western NSW region of DEET. This proposal has been accepted.

At the time of writing, (January 1995) the Commonwealth Employment Service (CES) is compiling an eligibility list of clients for interview by councils. The participating councils in this first session are Blayney, Evans, Greater Lithgow, Oberon, Orange and Rylstone. A rolling program is being prepared for the remainder of the region.

Similar proposals have been submitted to the DEET administrative areas of Coastal, Hunter Northern, ACT Illawarra and Victoria County. Separate proposals are required as NSW is divided into a number of DEET regions and a separate proposal is necessary for each region.

The contract with DEET, Western NSW, provides for AISIST to be the broker, participants to be JobSkills employees and for a council to be the employer. As employees, participants are entitled to award provisions such as holiday pay, superannuation levy and WorkCover.

AISIST will provide 5 weeks up front training and the trainees will then report to the employing council for the 21 remaining weeks of the 6 month contract period.

DEET have now advised that all the other proposals will be considered under different criteria. For these, AISIST would be the sponsor and the NWO participants would be trainees. The trainees would be paid a training allowance which varies with the skills level of the participant. They may also be eligible for a Fuel Assistance Allowance.

Not being employees, participants are not covered by award provisions such as holiday pay or superannuation. However, the sponsor is required to effect and maintain adequate insurance cover for public liability and workers compensation for project participants.

There are no "on costs" to be incurred by councils in this program.

Training and working arrangements are essentially the same for both programs.

Everyone has the right to an easily recognisable addressing system. The Rural Addressing Model enables a uniform system to be introduced across the State while the Federal funding provides a means of implementation for councils.

This paper has introduced members to the system of rural addressing and to the funding assistance available through DEET. Should you require more detailed information, please contact John Judge, Rural Addressing Project Coordinator, phone (063) 328491, fax (063) 328366.