

# Agencies get access to Opal user details

By Ben Grubb

NSW and federal law enforcement agencies have been given the power to access the travel history and home addresses of hundreds of thousands of commuters using the NSW Opal card.

Without a warrant, agencies including the police, Centrelink, the Tax Office and even local councils have the ability to request personal information kept on databases linked to the card when investigating crimes such as murder, welfare fraud, tax evasion or even littering.

NSW Police have yet to exercise the powers given to them, as the Opal card system is installed across the transport network.

But they have the power to follow the digital footprint for every train, bus or ferry journey taken by Opal card users.

"I think it's inevitable that law enforcement will request access to Opal records," NSW Council for Civil Liberties spokesman Stephen Blanks said. "There's probably more than 100 agencies that have law enforcement powers which could have access to Opal records under its privacy policy. It's everyone from the RSPCA through to environmental protection agencies and even local councils."

Mr Blanks said he was concerned that no warrant was required to access records and people "not even subject to any investigation" could be targeted.

"Traditionally, law enforcement has only had access to private records through a warrant system where they have to get approval from a judge and demonstrate that it's reasonably necessary for the warrant to be issued," he said. "This [Opal] privacy policy ... allows disclosure of information by Transport

for NSW without any warrant being issued and it's a serious weakness in the privacy policy."

In Queensland and Victoria, authorities have asked transport departments for access to records kept on smartcard systems for their investigations. In Queensland, civil libertarians recommended people concerned about their movements being tracked should remove their identification from their cards.

Although he conceded a warrant system would slow things down for police, Mr Blanks believed it was necessary to ensure accountability.

The NSW Privacy Commissioner, Elizabeth Coombs, agreed a warrant process as an oversight mechanism was "very valuable" to provide proper accountability, but didn't go as far as saying it was necessary for accessing Opal records.

According to Transport for NSW, Opal smartcard travel histories are stored electronically for 18 months before the data is then "decoupled from other personal information" and archived offline for seven years, in accordance with state record regulations. Since 2012, more than 360,000 Opal smartcards have been issued and 20 million journeys taken with them.

Opal users are required to register their smartcard and use their name. But this is expected to change once unregistered cards become available "in coming months", Transport for NSW said.

The agency said unregistered cards would let customers travel anonymously, and value could be added using cash if the user did not want to link their credit card.

Unregistered cards could still be linked to people through other means, such as security cameras, the Opal privacy policy states.

NSW Police declined to comment.

## Germany's Harmonie army won't cry for Argentina

By Henry Belot

The president of the Harmonie German Club, Hans Stoehr, broke down in tears as he watched close to 300 people from the German community jump for joy when substitute Mario Goetze netted the winning goal in extra time of the World Cup final against Argentina.

Mr Stoehr, who was slightly fatigued by the early morning match and subsequent celebrations, said close to 75 people had stayed at the club and were singing victory songs and sinking beers into the early afternoon.

"Mate, the crowd here at the moment, we're just singing so many songs and it's been 24 years, you know, it means so much to us," he said.

"We're singing all German songs and doing our adaptations of classics like *Don't Cry For Me Argentina*."

"I'm Australian-born but, mate, this morning made me so proud to be German."

Mr Stoehr was again emotional when he reflected on the closeness of the German community in Canberra and what the victory meant for everyone at the club.

"A couple came up to me after the match and said, 'Thank you, Hansy, for what you've done here'. I'm just so humbled to get such a response from the community," he said.

"There were so many German flags everywhere and German jerseys and it was just so fantastic to see."

Mr Stoehr said the World Cup had been a great occasion for Canberra's many multicultural clubs, which had opened their doors to football-mad Canberrans.

"We're a small club and all the multicultural clubs in Canberra are doing it tough. So, to see everyone



EXULTATION: The fans watching at the Harmonie Club react with delight as Germany scores in the World Cup final against Argentina. Photo: KARLEEN MINNEY

come down and support what the German team has done was just fantastic," he said.

"Like any club, without your

patrons you're nothing."

Mr Stoehr had no patience for anyone who may suggest the World Cup final was a dull affair with only

one goal scored in 120 minutes.

"I don't give a rat's toss if it was only 1-0, it could have been 8-0 for all I care," he said.

"It was pretty much a tic-tac-toe game.

"We pulled the right move right at the end and they got checkmated."

## A week is a long time at GovHack, it just takes application

By Markus Mannheim

They call it "GovHack", but don't be alarmed: these self-proclaimed geeks are here to help.

More than 1300 programmers, designers, students and other inquisitive folk took part in this year's weekend-long "hackathon" across Australia, which finished on Sunday night.

The fast-growing event has a simple premise: over 48 hours, build something clever with government data and have fun doing it.

This year's sponsors, including government agencies, will stump up prizes worth \$70,000 for the most creative and useful "hacks", or applications, crafted from public data.

However, GovHack's national coordinator, Canberra public servant Pia Waugh, says the end products – be they websites, smartphone apps or even 3D printed objects – are not what the event is really about.

"It's a competition to flush out ideas and to come up with new ways of doing things," she said.

Past GovHacks have come up with hundreds of uses of government data, such as simpler ways to search through archival photos and mobile apps to find the nearest public toilet.

One project, the Open Budget, which visualises how the federal government spends money, helped encourage the Treasury to make budget data easily accessible this year for the first time.

Communications Minister Malcolm Turnbull, who addressed this year's event, said one of last year's hacks inspired the government's

energy ratings app, which was released this month. "The free smartphone app uses publicly available data from the energy-efficiency star-rating labels on household appliances to help households and businesses save money on their power bills," Mr Turnbull said.

The winners of GovHack 2014 will be announced next month.

Last month, a Lateral Economics report suggested the economy would grow by an extra \$16 billion a year if government agencies made data freely available to the public.



THEY CAN HACK IT: James Treloar and Sam Moore of Canberra Grammar.



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