



ESTIMATES COMMITTEE F

REPORT – 2005

1. INTRODUCTION

Estimates Committee F was appointed on 11 May 2005 to examine and report on the proposed expenditure set out in the Appropriation Bill 2005 for the organisational units within the portfolios of:

- the Minister for Transport and Main Roads;
- the Minister for Communities, Disability Services and Seniors;
- the Minister for Energy and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy.

The committee conducted a public hearing on Wednesday, 13 July 2005 to take evidence from these Ministers.

For the purposes of examining the proposed expenditure for the organisational units allocated to it, the committee considered information obtained at the hearing, in conjunction with:

- budget papers and ministerial portfolio statements;
- written responses provided by Ministers to questions on notice prior to the public hearing; and
- Ministers' written answers to questions taken on notice at the public hearing.

During the inquiry the committee examined a wide range of issues, including those listed in this report.

Accompanying this report is a volume of 'Additional Information' presented by the committee to the Legislative Assembly.

The additional information includes the Ministers' answers to questions on notice asked before or during the public hearing, documents tabled at the hearing, and the minutes of the committee's meetings.

2. MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT AND MAIN ROADS

2.1 Department of Transport

Introduction

The total appropriation for the Department of Transport for 2005-06 is \$1,890,280,000.

The Ministerial Portfolio Summary for the Department provides the following output summary for 2005-06:

Output	Total Cost \$'000
Rail, Ports and Aviation Systems	538,268
Integrated Transport Planning	40,939
Road Use Management	219,056
Maritime Safety	93,452
Public Transport Systems	920,205
Total	1,811,920

Source: MPS, Minister for Transport and Main Roads 2005-06, page 1-8.

Issues considered by the committee

During the course of its inquiry the committee examined a range of issues including:

- safety concerns about stone mastic asphalt;
- the investigation of the tilt train derailment on 16 November 2004;
- rail corridors in south-east Queensland;
- the acquisition and protection of corridor land for future rail and major transport purposes;
- the roll-out of the urban rail infrastructure package and initiatives being planned for south east Queensland;
- expansion plans for the Cairns airport;
- public transport for the Gympie electorate;
- revenue gained from camera-detected offences;
- criteria for the selection of speed camera sites;
- the trucking industry and the pressures placed on many truck drivers to meet deadlines;
- passenger security and safety on the public transport system;
- young drivers DVD package;
- the Inner Northern Busway and the Buranda to Boggo Road Busway;
- the introduction of integrated public transport and ticketing into south-east Queensland.

2.2 Department Of Main Roads

Introduction

The 2005-06 appropriation for the Department of Main Roads is \$1,432,214,000.

The Ministerial Portfolio Summary for the Department provides the following output summary for 2005-06:

Output	Total Cost \$'000
Road System Planning and Management	854,371
Road Corridor Planning and Management	17,666
Road Operation	33,338
Road Project Maintenance	237,818
Road System Access Funding	86,108
Total	1,229,301

Source: MPS, Minister for Transport and Main Roads, 2005-06, page 2-8.

Issues considered by the committee

During the course of its inquiry the committee examined a range of issues including:

- the publication of performance indicators regarding speed cameras and red light cameras;
- investigations into the safety of stone mastic asphalt;
- dangerous incidents on the Bruce Highway at Tanawah;
- the allocation of revenue to the prevention of speeding and accidents;
- progress with works to alleviate congestion on the Sunshine Motorway;
- fibre composite technology as a possible source of alternative structural components for bridges;
- the Toowoomba bypass;
- upgrading the Bruce Highway, including proposed improvements between Cooroy and Gympie;
- the Samford Road duplication project;
- budget allocation for the Tugun bypass;

- proposal for a bus priority transit lane on the Centenary Highway;
- objectives of the Western Brisbane Transport Network Investigation;
- future of the Ipswich Motorway.

Under Standing Order 181, answers to Questions on Notice are required to be provided by 10:00am on the day prior to the hearing – in this case, 10:00am on 12 July 2005. The Committee notes that the answers to Questions on Notice in relation to the portfolio of Transport and Main Roads were sent by two email transmissions, the second of which (shown as being sent at 11:42am on 12 July 2005) was received by the Committee at 12:22pm.

3. MINISTER FOR COMMUNITIES, DISABILITY SERVICES AND SENIORS

Introduction

The 2005-06 appropriation for the Department of Communities, Disabilities and Seniors is \$449,488,000.

The Ministerial Portfolio Summary for the Department provides the following output summary for 2005-06:

Output	Total Cost \$'000
Community Policy and Services	165,289
Child Care Policy and Services	35,902
Seniors Policy and Services	9,331
Youth Policy and Services	122,940
Smart State Queensland	25,282
Total	358,744

Source: MPS, Minister for Communities, Disabilities and Seniors, 2005-06, page 1-5.

Issues considered by the committee

During the course of its inquiry the committee examined a range of issues including:

- the Strengthening Non Government Organisations project;
- funding for the Adult Lifestyle Support Program;
- succession planning for families;
- access to respite services and state-wide enhancement of such services;
- review of the *Disability Services Act 1992* to improve protective measures for people with disabilities;
- assistance for people with spinal injuries to enable return to community life from acute care;
- funding for the Endeavour Foundation;
- assistance for children with autism;
- funding packages received by clients as part of the institutional reform process;
- the “intensive behaviour support initiative” to support adults with complex behaviour support needs;
- the “Young Adults Exiting the Care of the State” Program;
- Disability Action week;
- operation of the Local Area Coordination Program in Indigenous communities;
- the cost of administering the Seniors Card;
- provision of places in playgroups, recreational and day activities for children and young people being cared for by their grandparents;
- funding to seniors organisations for Seniors Week;
- program of prevention of elder abuse and initiatives for indigenous communities;
- development of evidence based innovative services for seniors;

- the Youth Justice Conferencing Program;
- measures to promote the wellbeing and safety of communities;
- the Schoolies Week partnership;
- benefits of Smart Service Queensland in delivering services to residents of Queensland.

4. MINISTER FOR ENERGY AND ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER POLICY

4.1 Energy

Introduction

The 2005-06 appropriation for the Department of Energy is \$372,148,000.

The Department delivers a single output: energy services.

Issues considered by the committee

During the course of its inquiry the committee examined a range of issues including:

- proposed capital works investment and the expansion of the gas industry;
- monthly monitoring of the performance of Energex and Ergon Energy;
- summer preparedness plans outlining actions to be completed prior to the summer storm and peak load period to ensure continuity of supply to customers;
- assistance offered by the Energy Consumer Protection Office to customers;
- monitoring of standards for distribution and service delivery;
- the Guaranteed Service Level Scheme and associated rebates;
- policy on undergrounding electricity lines;
- the review of provision of electricity to consumers serviced by SWER lines in regional Queensland;

- Energex and Ergon Energy's vegetation management programs;
- the Townsville Power Station;
- contribution policies for beneficiaries for capital expenditure;
- the development of a national electricity market;
- improving emergency response plans for managing large-scale disruptions to supplies of electricity, liquid fuels and gas.

4.2 Aboriginal And Torres Strait Islander Policy

Introduction

The 2005-06 appropriation for the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy is \$45,608,000.

The Department delivers a single output: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Engagement.

Issues considered by the committee

During the course of its inquiry the committee examined a range of issues including:

- responsibility of improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders to break the cycle of disadvantage;
- commitment to alcohol management plans and their progressive implementation;
- the construction of the Happy Valley facility in Townsville;
- evaluation of initiatives and recurrent funding;
- the government's \$55.4 million reparation offer and heightened community awareness of this offer;
- establishment of the community justice reference group and its achievements during the 2004/2005 financial year;
- funding for NAIDOC Week activities;

- the Rio Tinto Child Health Partnership;
- funding initiatives aimed at enhancing the quality of life for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities;
- delivery of intervention and diversion activities related to the abuse of alcohol and other substances;
- the Aborigines Welfare Fund;
- aims of the Queensland Indigenous Economic Development and Participation Strategy;
- the three-year Meeting Challenges, Making Choices communication strategy;
- funding of merit based initiatives;
- the appointment of an eminent persons group to administer the assets of the Aborigines Welfare Fund.

5. RECOMMENDATION

Estimates Committee F recommends that the proposed expenditures, as set out in the Appropriation Bill 2005, for the organisational units within the portfolios allocated to the committee, be agreed to by the Legislative Assembly without amendment.

6. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The committee thanks the Ministers and their departmental officers for their cooperation and assistance throughout the estimates process.

Andrew McNamara MP
Chair

29 July 2005

MEMBERS

Mr Andrew McNamara MP (Chair)
Miss Fiona Simpson MP (Deputy Chair)
Mr Gary Fenlon MP
Mr Shane Knuth MP
Mr Jason O'Brien MP
Miss Elisa Roberts MP
Mr Geoff Wilson MP

SECRETARIAT

Mr Stephen Finnimore, Research Director
Ms Ali de Jersey, Research Officer
Ms Andrea Musch, Executive Assistant

The transcript of the committee's public hearing is available on the Hansard web page at:

<http://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/Hansard/>

STATEMENT OF RESERVATION

TRANSPORT & MAIN ROADS

The first matter of concern has been the reduction of time to address the complex transport and Main Roads Portfolio. The time available for scrutiny has been reduced from 4 ¾ hours to three hours.

At a time when the community is confronted with serious concerns about the likely impact of significant increases of population upon the transport infrastructure the Government has chosen to reduce the amount of scrutiny of this critical portfolio.

Despite the massive resources available to the Minister he again failed to provide answers to questions on notice within the time frames required. The Minister has claimed that the reason for this failure was because of the multi part format of some of the questions asked. These questions were permitted by the Committee and did not present the same difficulty to other portfolios who were asked similar Questions.

Even then the Minister decided not to provide details of internal audits undertaken within the Department or to provide details of training programmes undertaken by Departmental staff simply ensuring that the Opposition will have no choice but to pursue this information by way of the Freedom of Information process. This information is important because of previous abuse where taxpayer funds were spent on elaborate entertainment for public servants. The Opposition wants to examine if appropriate controls are now in place and operating effectively.

Of immediate concern to the Opposition was the admission by the Department concerning the “mistake” that had been made in the use of stone mastic asphalt at Federal south of Gympie. I stress that it was not the Opposition that said that there was a problem with the road surface it was engineers from the Main Roads Department. The Opposition’s concern has been that the history of fatal crashes at the site during wet weather has been extensive and we want to be assured that the processes in identifying the problem have been appropriate.

The initial response from the Minister was to say that the surface would be replaced early in the New Year. This timeframe was unacceptable to the Opposition and I have argued that it should be possible to replace the surface quicker than that. Finally, the Minister announced during Estimates that the work was to be brought forward, validating the concerns expressed by the Opposition that the original timetable was not appropriate. If it was possible to bring the project forward why was the earliest possible date not announced in the first place?

The Minister initially appointed a consultant to investigate the use of stone mastic asphalt who within hours was sacked when the media revealed that he had actually delivered professional papers on advising road authorities in raising legal defences against claims of low skid resistance. During questioning at the Estimates Committee Hearing it was established that in fact officers of the Department had attended the presentation of this paper. This information raises concern that the appointment of this particular consultant was a deliberate attempt to protect the Department rather than to establish the safety of the surface.

However, after further questioning by the Opposition, it was established that the replacement consultant has an extensive history of carrying out work for the department. None the less the Opposition is prepared to accept the professional expertise of the consultant and awaits public release of the report.

The Opposition was able to establish that a departmental technical expert's report into these and other safety issues already exists and was reviewed by senior management on the 30th of June 2005. A request for this report to be provided to the committee was denied on the basis that it was a draft and that further work is to be done on the report which is to be completed by the end of July. Again all that the refusal to provide the report has achieved is that taxpayer funds will now be used to access the report under freedom of information provisions.

Documents provided to the committee also established that the engineers in Departmental expert divisions were unable to ensure compliance with Departmental standards and were unable to act on evidence for fear of interfering with commercial relationships with the districts. This comment was made in the context of a discussion on Stone Mastic Asphalt and also referred to an emerging issue regarding electricity safety.

When the Opposition asked questions about this emerging issue it was revealed that this matter had been uncovered by one of the audits that the Minister had failed to inform the Committee about. It has now been established that state wide audits are being carried out and that in the case of Cairns electrical safety legislation has not been complied with in relation to Street lighting.

The documentation provided to the Committee by the Opposition also revealed internal departmental concerns that the programme for the replacement of timber bridges is not being progressed in accordance with risk assessment meaning that some bridges which are of higher risk are being kept in place whilst lower risk infrastructure is being replaced. This is also an issue of concern for the public safety and will be pursued further by the Opposition.

Once again the Opposition has established that none of the significant funding provided to the troubled Tugun Bypass project was expended last year and the funding provided this year represented accumulated carryovers from at least three budgets. Based on the response from the Minister regarding this year's allocations it appears that there is little prospect that any meaningful construction of the bypass will be achieved in the current financial year.

As an example of the inadequacy of road infrastructure provision to cater for the proposed South East Queensland development plan unacceptable delays in the provision of two particular projects were questioned.

Following persistent public pressure at the growing traffic gridlock on the Sunshine Coast, the Minister announced that construction of the Sunshine Motorway Bridge over the Maroochy River has been brought forward. Again this decision raises questions over the basis for establishing the initial time frame. Even with the advanced construction timelines the proposed delivery date will mean unacceptable delays in the future and is an example of bad planning by this State Government. Given the history of delays in actually delivering infrastructure in accordance with projections the Opposition harbours fears that this project will encounter further delays.

In the case of the Centenary Highway, the Minister clarified that in response to the doubling of population in the Western corridor within the next 20 years the existing Centenary Highway is to be extended to Yamanto.

The Minister acknowledged capacity problems with the existing roadway particularly between the Ipswich Motorway and Toowong. He advised that the only proposal to upgrade capacity of that infrastructure will be the addition of bus/transit lanes in each direction. Current infrastructure documents indicate that construction of these lanes will not commence before 2009.

In any case, the addition of these additional lanes is likely to have serious implications for the resumption of private property along the route as well as consequential degradation of noise and air pollution in adjacent residential areas. The Opposition is also concerned at route constraints. The undertaking given by the Minister will require additional capacity for the Jindalee Bridge as well as additional capacity for critical overpasses along the route.

In conclusion, the Opposition has identified serious structural concerns in the department which indicate that appropriate engineering and safety standards are not being complied with. Further there is significant concern that infrastructure spending will not be adequate to provide for increased usage in accordance with the SEQ development plan in particular. Similar concerns exist state wide but the full extent of these potential deficiencies will not be identified until the relevant regional development plans are progressed.

Finally the Minister was unable to explain why an increase in Commonwealth Road Funding had been described in the Ministerial Portfolio Statement as a decrease and despite the Minister assuring me that he would give an explanation, none has been forthcoming.

FIONA SIMPSON MP
Shadow Minister for Transport and Main Roads

STATEMENT OF RESERVATION

DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

The inability of the Estimates Committee to pursue matters regarding one of the State Government's largest electricity Government Owned Corporations, namely Energex, is one of the most appalling displays of unaccountability witnessed by the State Opposition to date.

The contention the Minister did not have to answer any questions in relation to the internal monitoring and standards of Energex is quite simply ludicrous. Particularly when one considers the following:

- The Minister is one of just two share-holding Ministers in Energex.
- Since the time of the last Estimates Committee hearing the State's Auditor General personally raised serious concerns about the internal auditing and accountability mechanisms within Energex; and,
- Furthermore, the media reported that the Minister had personally involved himself in discussions with Energex over the payment of the late Greg Maddock's funeral expenses.

If similar attempts are made in the future to deflect questioning by share-holding Ministers about the Government Owned Corporations [GOC's] over which they have a direct control then one would seriously have to question the purpose of the Estimates Hearings altogether.

FIONA SIMPSON MP

Member for Maroochydore

STATEMENT OF RESERVATION

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITIES, DISABILITY SERVICES AND SENIORS

The process of Estimates Committee hearings in relation to the Ministerial Portfolio Statement for the Department of Communities and Disability Services Queensland highlights yet again the weaknesses in the operations of Estimates Committees in Queensland as a mechanism for scrutinising expenditures by government Departments.

These weaknesses include:

- the limit on the number of Questions on Notice able to be asked as part of the Estimates process.
- the receipt of replies to such Questions on Notice less than 24 hours prior to the actual hearing meeting of the Committee, and the correction of those responses during the hearing, preventing further scrutiny.
- the limited time available for the conduct of hearings for each Department thus limiting the capacity of the Parliament to explore issues of concern to finality.
- the limit on each questioning session generally to 20 minutes thus inhibiting the capacity to pursue issues of interest until finality is reached.
- the use by Ministers and Government Members of questions to provide a basis for propaganda statements rather than genuinely exploring issues relating to Departmental Expenditures.
- the failure of Ministerial Program Statements to contain comprehensive, consistent and readily understandable performance standards that are consistently applied on a year by year basis.
- the grouping of inappropriate activities in programs and subprograms that inhibit capacity to explore individual activities by government.
- the failure to permit statutorily independent officers and organisations to be directly responsible to and answer questions directly by Members of Parliament thus undermining their independence from Executive government.

In addition to these general comments about the Estimates Committee process, there were a number of matters pursued during the hearings of Estimates Committee F which the Shadow Minister remains concerned:

- the inability of the Minister to quantify those families living in rural and remote regions who are unable to access respite services and the admission of the Minister that delivery of these services will continue to be problematic in the future.
- the high level of unmet need within the community across a range of services. It is particularly concerning to note the high number of Priority 1 and Priority 2 clients that are not receiving the funding or support that they require.
- that a significant proportion of the allegations of abuse, harm or neglect that were reported from 1 July 2005 to 30 June 2005 had occurred at the Basil Stafford Centre, despite the fact that only 13 long-term residents currently reside there.

- the long-term care options of the 228 people under 50 years of age that remain in nursing homes and urges the State Government to work cooperatively to meet the needs of these people.
- appropriate revision of clients' care and support needs under the Project 300 program.
- the inability of the Minister to acknowledge State responsibility in providing assistance to grandparent carers.
- the inability of the Minister to provide details of the percentage of Seniors Card holders against eligible persons within the Indigenous community, and following his undertaking to apply his mind to this matter I look forward to hearing more on this issue at a later date.
- funding for youth crime prevention initiatives has not increased from 2004/05 to 2005/06.
- the inability of the Minister to provide details of support provided by the Department to schoolies celebrations across Queensland.
- expresses concern regarding the low level of gambling initiative funding.

Signed

Shane Knuth MP
Member for Charters Towers