



Speech by

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BUS TRANSPORT, SUNSHINE COAST

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (7.15 p.m.): I strongly believe that the Sunshine Coast deserves a world-class public transport system, one that moves the most number of people with the greatest frequency and flexibility and with the greatest cost efficiency. The CAMCOS public transport study on the Sunshine Coast was always supposed to be a feasibility study that seriously looked at all public transport options, but this has not happened and it has run off the rails, so to speak. There has been a heavy focus on rail; modern busways have largely been overlooked.

Powerful arguments exist in favour of a sophisticated, integrated busway system. For example, an important United States Department of Transportation study has established that buses can provide the most cost-effective rapid transport services, especially in low urban density areas such as the Sunshine Coast. According to this and other studies, buses can operate at speeds competitive with or superior to rail transport, but with capital costs per passenger only one-fifth that of rail systems. Furthermore, the operational costs are far lower than for rail. We must not forget that in a high urban density area such as Brisbane, city trains are subsidised by taxpayers by more than \$150m per year and they are still having to retrofit busways.

Around the world, cities such as Nagoya in Japan, Curitiba in Brazil, Johannesburg in South Africa, Ottawa in Canada and Toronto in Canada—I have actually seen both the latter systems in operation and they are quite outstanding—and many others in North America have proven that they can achieve much lower costs per passenger kilometre using buses than any other rapid transport system, including rail. I am speaking of cities that have a far higher population density than the Sunshine Coast.

I believe that CAMCOS needs to treat these studies very seriously. They seem to go a long way towards proving that buses represent the least costly rapid transport alternative for the Sunshine Coast region, in terms of both capital cost and the need for operating subsidies. What is more, buses offer far greater flexibility. Rail will not service Buderim or Noosa but modern busways can. On the Sunshine Coast, express buses could operate on specially built high-speed bus tracks, on high-occupancy vehicle lanes, as they already do in Brisbane, and in normal mixed traffic conditions. Importantly, too, it has also been proven that highly flexible bus services have a superior ability to attract passengers. By comparison, those studies show that rail systems achieve peak hour volumes barely comparable to those carried by one single freeway lane.

As the Queensland Labor Government's Budget becomes tighter and more constrained, the extension of new rapid transport services throughout the low density areas of the Sunshine Coast can only be achieved using the most cost-effective system. Overseas experience with bus rapid transport seems to clearly demonstrate its capability in providing superior levels of mobility at far lower costs than rail. Economics apart, the major problem with a rail service to the Sunshine Coast is that it would offer just one route. If one does not live nearby, or if a rail line does not go where one wants it to go, forget it. Worse, once the track is built the route cannot be changed. Rail offers very little flexibility. By contrast, an efficient rapid bus transit system could cover the entire Sunshine Coast urban area, not just one narrow slice. It would service not only residential suburbs but downtown business and retail core areas, and also provide rapid transport connections to the Sunshine Coast airport, main railway stations and interstate and intercity long distance coach services.

In particular, I am now calling on the Labor Government to provide the community with detailed information on the economic feasibility of the various public transport options. When it does that, it should not be forgotten that all over the world freight traffic is the big earner for rail, not passengers. I believe that we on the Sunshine Coast deserve a proper economic feasibility study so that people can get the facts for themselves, so that they can weigh up the options for themselves and have access to information about world-class systems.

As a member of Parliament, I have been fortunate to visit and have on-the-spot tours and briefings of these systems. I believe that the Sunshine Coast needs to make sure that we get the most cost-efficient, effective system that covers most of the Sunshine Coast. Let it not be forgotten that rail systems rely heavily for their profits on freight, not passenger travel.

Time expired.
