



Speech by

Fiona Simpson

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

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STATE BUDGET 2004

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (5.52 p.m.): The Labor members in this parliament should thank the federal Liberal-National coalition for providing a growth tax with revenues which flow to Queensland—a growth tax for a growth state which has exceeded all government expectations, as the GST revenues returned to Queensland this year an extra \$665 million over what would have been provided through the old grant system.

I have heard Labor members say today that this is the most Labor of Labor budgets. I would agree, as the money it reaps is not through the sweat of its own labour but that of others. The Beattie Labor government did not create the windfall gain to the Treasury coffers from the property boom or GST receipts, but in true Labor fashion it will spend it with an eye to the short term rather than the long term as it pats itself on the back.

The state taxes it does control will now reap a record \$536 extra for each average Queensland family. The tax take from payroll tax is expected to climb a further 10.4 per cent in 2004-05, and for land tax it will rise by a massive 20.5 per cent. The controversial ambulance tax, which has failed to deliver additional spending on ambulance infrastructure in real terms, will also rise to over \$90.

I will say, however, that there are positive announcements which I welcome, particularly in my electorate—I will come back to these—but there are also, in the context of Queensland and the future and in the context of the big picture in relation to growth and regional development, many lost opportunities. When the capital cake is cut up we see that infrastructure represents the smallest slice of government spending. Under the Borbidge-Sheldon coalition government six years ago, 29 per cent of the budget was spent on capital works. This percentage has progressively fallen under this Beattie government to an all-time low of 20 per cent in this budget.

On top of that, roads capital spending has also fallen in real terms. At a time when there are about 80,000 extra people in Queensland each year—on the Sunshine Coast that represents about 8,500 moving to our area—buying new houses and paying the stamp duty and paying the extra GST through their purchase of services, with all this extra revenue from the movement of people it seems that this Labor government has demonstrated again that it has sticky fingers, because it is reluctant to put it into the foundation that is necessary for the provision of sustainable economic growth in the future.

Infrastructure is the platform for economic sustainability into the future. However, in real terms the figures we see in this budget show that the government is not even treading water; it is going backwards. It is doing backstroke in real terms, once we start looking at the growth rates in this state. Once we start looking at the money being spent on infrastructure per head of population we see that we lag behind some of the other leading states in Australia. That is where we have to start looking if we really want to make sure the jobs are there and the support services are there in a sustainable way for the future.

I want to talk about roads. Despite claims to the contrary, road funding as a percentage of the capital spend has actually fallen. In the last budget delivered by the Borbidge government in 1997-98, the proportion of the capital budget that was spent on roads was almost 23 per cent. Under the Beattie government it is down to 13.43 per cent. Earlier I talked about the total tax take and spending. Increasingly

the capital budget as a whole has been decreasing, but as a proportion of the capital budget we also find that roads funding has been falling. It has not been keeping pace with growth in our community. That is what we are talking about.

Let us have a look at the figures. In dollar terms the funding allocated for roads has fallen. This is another interesting point in the budget. The government has allocated funding this year of \$812.4 million. On paper that is up from \$777.8 million in the previous year—an increase of \$34.6 million. But when we look at how that figure was spent last year we find that the government did not spend all of the \$777.8 million. In fact, it managed to spend only \$741.2 million—a difference of \$36.2 million. For those on the other side of the House who cannot do their sums, that means that the increase this year is less than the amount of money it failed to spend last year.

Queenslanders also need to be reminded that the government has allocated an extra \$120 million to make the New South Wales government accept the long-promised Tugun bypass. The truth about road spending must come out, because it is critical. I live in the south-east. I live in one of those coastal urban seats. I see the gridlock. It is being experienced by all the other members who represent south-east Queensland seats.

Let us look at the regional breakdown of funding. This is extremely telling. I will start with the Moreton area, because obviously the Sunshine Coast, the Gold Coast and the Beaudesert areas are all part of that statistical area. What was the increase in funding provided for in this budget? It is 4.12 per cent, despite the fact that growth in those areas has been steaming ahead. Where is the greatest percentage increase in funding from this budget for roads? It is in Brisbane, with 16 per cent. There is a 16 per cent increase for Brisbane, even though the areas outside of that—the Gold Coast and the Sunshine Coast—are growing at a higher rate. The bulk of the increase will be seen in the Brisbane area.

Let us continue down the list. Wide Bay has about a seven per cent increase, but where it is really telling is north Queensland. North Queensland in fact goes backwards by 13 per cent. I have not heard the north Queensland members in this parliament standing up saying, 'We did not do too well out of this budget.' In fact, they have done appallingly out of this budget. In real terms the budget for the northern region has gone backwards by 13 per cent. The Far North goes backwards by 20 per cent and the north-west goes backwards by 1.8 per cent. Where are the north Queenslanders, because what we have seen has been a radical reduction in the funding available for those roads? This is not a government that is looking after the growth areas. It is also not a government that is looking after the whole of the state. When we start to drill down through the figures, we start to see a very interesting picture.

I want to congratulate the Leader of the Opposition for his comments on what we would do to see critical infrastructure expanded. We have a keen focus in seeing infrastructure spending restored to enable sustainable economic growth in this state. As he announced, with regard to Redcliffe and Springfield we would be looking at the delivery of public transport services under PPP arrangements or funding arrangements to ensure they were able to be brought forward. We would also be looking at the public transport needs of the Sunshine Coast. With the CAMCOS process there are allocations for acquisition of land, but still the delivery of those public transport facilities is some time off into the future.

Public transport is something that we cannot just have an ideologically warm feeling about. There has to be an actual road map for the delivery of those services. Despite the targets that the government is setting for moving people on to public transport, there is not that road map. There is not that plan that shows the roll-out and the strategies to make public transport infrastructure available.

TransLink or integrated ticketing is something that we support, but we are still waiting to see a true integration of services. This goes to the heart of looking at the issue of dovetailing that with proper growth management because the facilities of the future, the viability of railway lines into many areas, will be ensuring there are proper plans to enable that to be dovetailed with appropriate development. We need infrastructure in those areas that will bring online public transport, and it should go hand in hand. They are the sorts of innovations which need to be not just talked about but also delivered. We still have not seen that from this government. There is a lot of talk about managing growth but no actual delivery or road map for implementation as far as how the infrastructure will go alongside the growth.

One of the positive things I wanted to acknowledge was that I stood in this place a number of times and asked questions in regard to the need for the duplication of the Maroochy River bridge on the Sunshine Motorway. During the election campaign I did criticise the government because we were willing to commit to this infrastructure but the government was not. I raised this issue again with the new minister after the election. To the credit of the new minister, where this was not on any funding program previously, he has included it on the funding program. Granted that most of the funds are in out years and it will not be finished until another four and a half years while we have about 30,000 vehicles a day on a road that is designed to take only 20,000, and granted that that road is currently growing with five to eight per cent growth rate of traffic each year, I acknowledge that he has put that on a funding program where previously it was not. I have been very critical of the government, but I am pleased that it was listening to the issues that I raised in that regard.

The Pacific Paradise bypass and the network has been an interesting story as well, and that was one that I originally put on the public agenda by getting a feasibility study initiated when Vaughan Johnson was minister. Unfortunately, it took Steve Bredhauer six years to see that study completed. That study has still not been released publicly, but we gave a commitment during the election that we would fund that and the government matched that. I am pleased that those funds are in the budget papers, though most of that is still in the out years. I guess my comment about growth and infrastructure going hand in hand is that ideally these projects should have been brought forward a lot earlier.

Looking after the amenity and providing infrastructure for Queensland is also an environmental issue. Queensland is increasingly having people sitting in traffic at levels that they do not even see in Sydney, and we used to always bag Sydney as being the gridlock capital of Australia. Now we find in the south-east, in a lot of these areas of high growth, that people are sitting in traffic for longer periods of time than they would in Sydney, and that is a basic issue of air quality. It affects air quality, and as the population grows we do not want a longer period of time spent in traffic because that is pumping pollution into the atmosphere and it is also an unnecessary burning of fossil fuels.

One of the other roads that I am pleased to also see indicated in the budget papers—once again, it will not be completed in this budget and a substantial amount of money is in the out years—is the Maroochydore Road section between Kunda Park and the Bruce Highway. This is something that I was committed to fighting for and have been on the record in correspondence in the parliament. It is pleasing to see that finally that is on the agenda. We recognise that the capacity of the Main Roads Department has not been ramped up for a number of years. If we are to see infrastructure built in a timely way and also at a reasonable cost, we need a continual and sustainable roll-out of programs and to ensure there is also a very clear understanding of what the programs will be for the future.

Another item I welcome is something I also lobbied for, which was \$2 million for the new manual arts block at Maroochydore High which will be well received. This is one of the older high schools in our area. It missed out on the bulk of the secondary school renewal funding because of changes in administration at the time at the high school and some related issues, but it has a great staff and some fantastic kids. I really welcome the funding that we will see address that situation.

Funding for training and making sure that sustainable programs are available for our young people is so essential. As my colleague the Hon. Mike Horan has mentioned, there are some tremendous opportunities for young people to take up apprenticeships and to look at vocational training. Some of those jobs are paying a lot more money than some of the jobs they would get out of certain university courses. To have an eye to what people have a passion to do and then what they see as being a skill that will also provide them with a standard of living, we need to talk more about the great opportunities that there are through apprenticeships and appropriate training.

I turn to the issue of health. This is something that I feel very passionately about. I have done a lot of constituency work not only in my electorate but throughout Queensland in my previous time as shadow minister. I acknowledge the great work of my staff as we strove to provide timely assistance to people who were often distressed because of incredibly long waiting times in the public system—waiting times that also extended, tragically, to cancer care services to give people an opportunity of prolonging their lives.

One issue I fought for was access to radiation therapy on the Sunshine Coast. That was a commitment that we gave. After we gave that commitment, the government matched it. I understand it is to purchase that from a private provider. I am still waiting to see the detail of that arrangement. We had people making hundreds of trips each year to Brisbane when there was a facility on the Sunshine Coast. We are very keen to see the fulfilment of that commitment for those people not to have to travel to Brisbane when there is that available infrastructure already on the Sunshine Coast.

On the subject of health services, I heard a couple of members before say, 'Isn't this great? We're getting a vascular surgeon at Nambour Hospital.' We used to have one, but this government lost that surgeon and lost that service. This is the problem. It is a reannouncement of something that this government in fact managed to kill off previously. My comment is that one of the best policies you can have for your medical and nursing staff is to look after them, to treat them with respect, and not to say you are going to give them something and then not give it to them. One of our commitments was very much in that regard. We saw a lot of great staff leave the public hospital system on the Sunshine Coast heartbroken after timely and wonderful service.

The government now talks about increasing surgery. There are not enough anaesthetists. I have not heard a statement from the minister about how the government is going to address that. Our commitment was to particularly target the rebuilding of the anaesthetic services on the Sunshine Coast. I issue the challenge to the government to show us what its plan is to restore the services that have been taken away. I say to the government: do not just put out press releases reannouncing what we used to have; show us how you are going to recruit, and particularly look at sustainable services, because many times one job is advertised when two people are needed, so that one person is not on call 24/7 trying to provide that service. No wonder the staff leave. Then there is the appalling way that people get treated sometimes by

the high levels of the health bureaucracy. Show your staff some respect, listen to their concerns, and do not accuse them of being industrial militants. I know that sounds strange coming from a conservative member, but I have been appalled by the way that health staff have been treated.

The Premier's Department has had an \$80 million cost blow-out. We could fix an awful lot of dental problems in Queensland if we were not paying all that additional money for showing a toothy Peter's grin throughout Queensland. As the Leader of the Opposition said, it costs more to run the Premier and his cabinet than it does to run the royal family in England. An \$80 million blow-out last year would have gone a long way to helping a lot of issues, not just going to infrastructure but also to some of those areas where there are still cavities in our system of government and service delivery.

My time is short. I wanted to address a number of other issues. The Mooloolaba Harbour and the river mouth was an issue that I fought hard on. We got the dredging to allow our vessels and I welcome the funding for this strategy.

Time expired.