



Speech by

Fiona Simpson

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APPROPRIATION BILLS; ESTIMATES COMMITTEE D

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (12.36 p.m.): It is with pleasure that I rise to speak in regard to Estimates Committee D. Firstly, I want to thank the parliamentary staff who supported our committee and the departmental staff who also attended. In regard to the Main Roads and Transport budgets—and first of all in relation to Main Roads—we have to say, 'Don't just judge this government by what it says that it is doing, but what it is actually doing.' In this budget, what we have seen has not in real terms been an increase in spending on roads. When we take into account that last year \$35 million was underspent in the capital works budget and that has been rolled into this budget, we find out that the increase is actually neutral compared to last year's budget. That is when we consider actual spending against the budgeted spending for this year.

I want to refer to spending on roads as a proportion of the overall budget. Once again, this government is quick to say what it is doing in regard to infrastructure, but the actual reality of what it is doing is very different. The government talked a lot in this budget about investing in infrastructure, yet in real terms infrastructure spending in this budget has fallen to only 20 per cent of the budget. Six years ago, under a National-Liberal coalition government, nearly 28 per cent of the budget was spent on infrastructure.

This issue is extremely significant because if the government is going to sustain growth and sustain jobs as well as take into account the livability issues in our state, the government has to put the investment into the appropriate infrastructure. Yet this government has increasingly gone to the recurrent budget. It has taken its eye off the ball in regard to infrastructure. We have seen that with the electricity industry. It is interesting to note that this minister, in fact, presided over the Energy portfolio and now the government cannot work out why it suddenly has a problem. It is because the government simply does not invest in infrastructure in a timely way until it bites everybody on the face.

The matter of roads funding as a proportion of that capital works budget is extremely interesting. Over six years ago, something like nearly 24 per cent of the capital works budget was being spent on Main Roads. Under this Labor government, that spending has now fallen down to under 14 per cent. It is interest to see where the Labor government's real focus is.

In this budget there are a number of very good announcements about future roadworks, which I have welcomed, certainly in my own electorate. But we note that the majority of these new roadworks are not within this term of government. They go into the next term of government. It has put these projects out another four or five years. One could say cynically that that is because it is another election cycle, and I would say that is correct. It is also because there has been a lack of consistency and capacity within these departments.

I have been talking to engineers in this state, and they tell me that it would have been good if there was consistency of work and a build-up of work whereby they were able to put on young apprentices or bring on new graduates so that they had trained personnel in these areas. One of the great concerns we are seeing in construction in this state is that, because of a lack of infrastructure spend and consistent work in the last six years, there simply has not been corresponding training and opportunity for graduates.

Those engineers are not there. In four or five years, as the construction companies are being asked to come on line and bid for that work, we will see a situation that has been contributed to by government because of the lack of consistency in infrastructure spend. It is bad planning, it is bad government and it is bad for people who are trying to get out of gridlock when they need those roads now. This is not an extraordinary situation. This is not a crisis that just happened, as the government keeps trying to claim in relation to the electricity industry; it is something that was foreseeable. Now the government is in catch-up mode.

I turn to other issues in the budget. The minister also revealed under questioning that \$400,000 allocated from the Smart State Building Fund is to be paid back as a result of the reforms to be implemented within the rail system. But he was unable to indicate any projections of the savings that are to be achieved as a result of these reforms so that the people of Queensland, in particular rail workers, can have an appreciation of the impact of these as-yet-unspecified reforms. That clearly is not good enough.

We also see that the Travelsafe Committee's recommendations about a trial of drug impairment to be assessed by police have not been taken up by this government. It must be noted that this is a significant issue on which we disagree with the government. I also refer to the 'secret state' agenda with regard to how speed camera revenue is being allocated. Still the government has not outlined on a detailed basis where all this funding from speed cameras is going.

Time expired.