



Speech by

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Hansard Tuesday, 22 February 2005

APPROPRIATION BILL (NO. 2); APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL (NO. 2)

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (3.45 pm): In rising to speak in this appropriation debate, it is important to consider just what are the infrastructure needs of the state and to start addressing them. The problem we have had is that in budgets there has been a falling proportion of funding available for infrastructure. Six years ago approximately 28 per cent of the state budget was spent on infrastructure, and that has fallen to 20 per cent.

What does that actually mean in a state that is growing so fast? It means that the bucket of money that is available for necessary capital works as a proportion to growth is actually under great strain. Here we are in the growth state. Many areas that are experiencing the pressure of that growth are fighting over a bucket that has not expanded at the rate that it needs to expand to ensure that there is not only economic sustainability in the future but also livability. Road infrastructure, for example, is something that supports the economy and also supports our lifestyle.

As part of that 28 per cent fall to 20 per cent of the state budget being spent on infrastructure, we have seen road funding fall from 23 per cent of that capital bucket down to only 14 per cent. With the figures in the budget papers in the last six years, what we have seen in real terms versus growth has been a fall-off in investments in infrastructure at a time when there should have been an increase in infrastructure funding. These are the challenges that we will certainly be looking at and putting under greater scrutiny when the Treasurer brings down the infrastructure plan in April. Certainly the detail and the forward indicative funding and projects that will be indicated in that infrastructure plan will be of great interest.

We will also be looking to see what the government's position will be in regard to public-private partnerships, which are another means of delivering certain types of infrastructure. We have just seen the Gateway project finally announced by this government. It is running late—12 months later than even the time Steve Bredhauer had announced. It was one of the projects that was touted as being likely to be a PPP, a public-private partnership, yet that one has in fact been knocked off the list. We have to ask: what projects are going to get up? What projects are going to involve a true public-private partnership when we have such a critical need to invest in infrastructure in this state? Ultimately, there have to be projects that do stack up financially for the private sector. With the briefings we have had about some of the Labor governments interstate that have been able to successfully enter into these projects with the appropriate probity, looking after the public interest and delivering infrastructure more cheaply and more efficiently, we have to ask: why is there such a philosophical stumbling block with this government? We know that there is a tremendous need for infrastructure to be funded not only from the public purse but also by taking advantage of other innovative arrangements for infrastructure. There simply has not been enough infrastructure built in this state in the last few years.

That issue has raised a number of questions in the construction and finance industries. This government is not serious about looking at all of its options for making sure that the best building platform

for the future of this state is actually put in place. The opposition will be looking at the detail of the infrastructure plan that comes down in April.

I want to put on the record some of the things that I will be looking for with regard to my own area. There has been between seven per cent and nine per cent growth on sections of the Sunshine Motorway. Construction of the Maroochy River bridge on the Sunshine Motorway was finally announced after the state election after I lobbied very hard throughout the state campaign on that issue. The state government finally announced that it was going to duplicate that bridge but not until 2008-09. I urge this government to do all that it can to bring that project forward, because currently there are 10,000 vehicles a day over and above the feasible capacity of that bridge. It is frequently gridlocked.

What about north of that area? I will be looking to see whether this government is going to put indicative funding to bring the Sunshine Motorway duplication north of the Maroochy River into the budget process. After the other sections back to the highway, that is the next section which needs to have funding allocated to it. That road is already groaning and congested as it passes through Coolumb and not only my electorate of Maroochy but also the electorate of Noosa. Unless we start to see that planning take place now and the funding allocated for construction in the next few years, that is going to be another debacle in that traffic will be gridlocked, there will be negative comments in relation to people's experiences in travelling to the Sunshine Coast and, ultimately, there will be congestion which is not only costly in economic terms but also costly in environmental terms.

Let us talk about congestion from the figures that we know about the Brisbane road network. The state government said that it will look at the western bypass. It looks like that is going to be another lengthy process which will hang over people's heads without resolution. That is a matter that needs to be studied and resolved quickly, because there needs to be a western bypass. There needs to be a western bypass that achieves the job and minimises the impact upon property but does not cause this long, lengthy and very distressing process where people wonder if their house is going to be affected. That type of planning that hangs out there for decades is bad planning. It is about time this matter was resolved for the sake of these people and that the right options are put on the table, studied and consulted upon and that the matter is dealt with and built. That is something that we have seen this government promising for too long, and it is a process that needs to be humanely and appropriately addressed.

Tugun is another example of how this government talks about what it is going to do with infrastructure delivery, but the process continues to drag. Talk about an embarrassing situation as far as this government's inability to deliver basic infrastructure in time! I have talked about the Gateway running behind time, but Tugun is the other example of this government's inability to get its act together and actually deliver in a timely way on infrastructure. Meanwhile, there is congestion that not only causes economic dysfunction in these communities but also impacts upon people's lifestyle—just being able to get to and from school with their kids let alone get to their businesses.

Maroochy Road is another piece of key infrastructure in my electorate on the Sunshine Coast through the key regional centre of Maroochy. Funding has finally been allocated for the complete duplication and a bypass section to take that road through from Kunda Park to the Bruce Highway by 2007-08. Curiously, in the midst of this, there is an at grade intersection that will be upgraded. But, as I understand from briefings from Main Roads, even after the full four laning of Maroochy Road through to the highway, that intersection will only have a further eight years before it experiences problems in terms of capacity.

When I queried the fact that it was a false economy not to put a flyover in and to put the planned future overpass into that road at the time of this construction, I was told that it will be starting to get congested, but it will still have capacity to take it further into the future. It was clear that there were going to be problems within about eight years. This seems to be crazy to me—that is, have a situation where there is a major upgrade and then still in the middle of it have an at grade intersection, not a flyover that has in fact been designed for. It seems to be a false and dumb economy and bad road planning.

While on that point, there is another local issue with regard to the Menzies Drive and Ocean Beach Drive intersection with the David Low Way. This is a long-running problem. A supermarket has been not only approved but also opened, and this intersection is in fact a major access point to that supermarket at Pacific Paradise. There is now also talk of a child-care centre being put near this intersection. I have to ask: how long before the main roads department will take its planning and put it into action? It is unacceptable to have a child-care centre now added to the shopping centre that this intersection services. It is just so dangerous. One can see it with their eyes and also with the figures indicating the number of accidents at this intersection. Once again it is an indication of just how long it takes for basic infrastructure to get delivered in this state. The capacity to deliver in terms of the number of people who have the contractual ability and the capacity to deliver these contracts in a timely way and project manage these things has really been whittled away from the main roads department. There are good people who work there, but there are not enough to do the sheer amount of work that needs to be rolled out with regard to infrastructure across this state.

Tragically in the last few days a pedestrian was killed at Marcoola—a situation which is always a fear where there is high-density living and an extremely busy main road. The David Low Way snakes through these communities, but the situation has been made worse because high-density living has been developed on one side of the motorway with shopping centre complexes on the other side with no development contributions that have helped to provide pedestrian access points.

The local community and I lobbied for a safer access point. In fact, we have tabled a petition in this parliament. A pedestrian refuge was built by Main Roads. There were problems with design issues, but ultimately I agreed with the community that the safest option is in fact traffic lights at this intersection. It may not have saved the life of this gentleman who died recently, but it would make it easier for this community to bridge the divide—that is, to be able to safely get across this road but also for traffic to be able to more safely traverse the David Low Way, which has become so busy.

There are many other road issues that I could address throughout the state, but I want to take the opportunity to talk about the mental health system in Queensland—an issue which has been particularly hot and heated since the Cornelia Rau incident. I heard what the Premier had to say this morning in terms of what he did not think was good enough about the federal inquiry. Quite frankly, I am unimpressed with what Queensland is doing. It is so hard for a truly mentally ill person to get admitted to a Queensland mental health institution or into a hospital bed. It is just a disgrace. I have had letters and phone calls from parents whose children have had trouble getting admitted. Some of them have been admitted when they were suicidal but were let out too early. What happens? They have ended up, in some cases, under trains or in the middle of intersections. They are very much a danger to themselves and others because of the holes in the mental health system.

I call on the state government to get its act together, to take responsibility and to review the mental health system in Queensland. In particular, it needs to look at the holes in the service. It needs to look at the early discharge problems or the difficulties of access for those who do need access to mental health services. There also needs to be easier points of access into mental health services in this state. People have to be so acutely bad that they finally get accepted whereas we need a system which can be accessed at earlier points. There needs to be transitional housing—supported housing—to keep those people out of a hospital setting so that they are able to be maintained and kept well and released back to independent living with support.

There also needs to be transitional places with support for people who do get discharged from hospital. A lot of people who have had a mental illness find that their families are burnt out. There are families who are able to hang in there, but there are a lot of families that get burnt out after dealing with people with severe mental illnesses. So the person with the mental illness is discharged from hospital, released back into the community, falls through the cracks and either ends up being a danger to themselves or others when they end up being in the traffic after being psychotic, or they cycle back into the public health system after more acute phases of their illness. It is dumb health planning and it is a dumb way to manage people who are truly in need.

I ask the government to look urgently at the need for a mental health review and to look at other transitional and support housing arrangements. We need places where people can get the necessary medical support so that they are able to rehabilitate and go back to living independently in the community. At the moment it is difficult for people to access hospitals. They are discharged too early and do not have the necessary support. It is a disgrace. These people are falling through the cracks. It is only when terrible situations of people trying to access services occur or a tragedy occurs that these issues hit the media.

There are many other health issues on the Sunshine Coast. Having infrastructure and services closer to people is critical. It is the human capital and making sure that those issues are maintained and there is proper management of funding for recurrent services that is even more critical than the hard infrastructure. While we want to see more infrastructure closer to people, the big and tough issues with health continue to be how the social infrastructure is actually being managed.

The next issue relates to the south-east Queensland regional plan. It is the economic plans and the regional economic plans that we are waiting to see. The feedback I have from people regarding the south-east Queensland regional plan is the difficulty they have in making an informed submission in the absence of some indication as to how the infrastructure plan and economic plan are being formulated. We cannot have a land use plan without an economic plan. We have to look at how the regional economies are going to be developed. Those three components are very important and interrelated.