



Speech by

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TRANSPORT AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (3.52 pm): I rise to speak to the Transport and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. It is timely to remark on the fact that there has been an infrastructure drought in Queensland for the last eight years under this government. While a lot of promises have been made about infrastructure, it is interesting that with the retirement of Terry Mackenroth the consideration of public-private partnerships is again being revisited by this government. In the past the government has talked a lot about them, but in reality it has done very little. We know that the previous Treasurer was opposed to public-private partnerships as another means of bringing infrastructure ahead and on stream in Queensland. It was that opposition which meant that anyone who had a proposal found that it was a very long, hard, expensive road to go down with this government. It had the policy documents but it did not have the will.

The legislation before the House has a number of interesting dimensions. It is really opening up the way not so much for the state government's plans for public-private partnerships as an option for funding infrastructure but for local governments. It is wrapping the state's acquisition intentions and those of local government into the one act.

Local government is being flagged as an entity that will be moving more in this area of infrastructure delivery. It may well want to go in that direction but, once again, I reflect on the fact that the state, which has the primary responsibility for the majority of the infrastructure delivery in the state, has actually done very little with regard to practically implementing alternative financial models for the delivery of infrastructure.

The legislation before the parliament is very important. We are very concerned to see timely delivery of infrastructure in Queensland, given that there has been a fall-off in real terms in spending on infrastructure in this state in the last few years. Some figures have been outlined by my colleague the shadow minister for transport and main roads, but I will recap on the amount of money allocated for capital works as a percentage of the budget in the last few years.

Under the coalition government in 1996-97, 29 per cent of the budget was allocated for capital works. In 2000-01 and 2001-02 the allocation had fallen to about 23 per cent and represented only 20 per cent of the budget in 2002-03 to 2004-05. It is only in this current budget that we have seen that rise to 24 per cent.

Mr Caltabiano: I bet they don't spend it all.

Miss SIMPSON: Yes, I bet it does not spend it all. That has been the problem. The government talks about it, but it very practically cannot deliver infrastructure. Our concern today is the need not only to talk about infrastructure but also to have new modes of delivery that are not just about glossy policy documents but literally put the rubber on the road and put the concrete underneath the structures so that we have the sustainability for this state's economy and for the lifestyle that we hold dear.

Let us look at roads as a percentage of the capital budget. Whenever I talked about what this government was spending on roads and the fall-off in actual real spend, the government would blame it on accrual accounting. I asked the government for a document to explain what accrual accounting meant with

regard to the real figures that have been spent on roads, but it has never delivered that. I asked for that at a briefing I had with the department some time ago and it was never delivered.

Let us look at the spending on roads in the capital budget. Back in 1996-97 the percentage of the capital budget spent on roads—the capital budget was already being squeezed as part of the overall budget—was 22.95 per cent.

Mr O'Brien: They were just the glory days, weren't they?

Miss SIMPSON: Yes, they were glory days under the coalition government. This government took spending on roads off the agenda and spending fell to under 15 per cent. In real terms we have seen spending on roads go from something like 22 per cent or 23 per cent of the capital budget down to about 15 per cent. In 1996-97 and early 1998 just under \$1 billion was being spent on roads.

Mr Caltabiano: What happened in the late 1990s? It was \$700 million.

Miss SIMPSON: That is right. In the late 1990s we saw spending fall to \$780 million. Over that period of time a lot of money was not budgeted for or spent in real terms. Now the pressure is on. There is gridlock. People are sniffing the petrol fumes caused by this government's inaction. They are angry, and they have a right to be angry. The pressure is on to deliver infrastructure in new ways.

I sound one note of caution with regard to looking for alternative options for funding. The projects have to be planned correctly and the right project management has to be put in place. Our concern has also been about the brain drain from the Public Service and out of the halls of government with regard to understanding what it takes to deliver infrastructure. There is a real concern that people simply lack the ability to know how to put these projects together.

I acknowledge that in the time my colleague the member for Gregory was the transport and main roads minister he was able to put a project in place and get it under way—the M1—in the very brief time that we were in government.

Mr Lucas: You want to talk about cost blowouts?

Miss SIMPSON: That road is operational today because of decisions that were made and implemented. We got on with the job. What we see, though, as an alternative is a state government that does not count the cost of delays in delivering infrastructure to the state. There would literally be billions of dollars spent because of delays mucking around and procrastinating over delivering infrastructure to this state. Let us look at the Westgate proposal. I would like to ask the government what it is doing to consider the impact upon the roads that would feed off some of those proposals and to look at some of the current land use issues where there is a lot of development going on in those areas. I would like a response from the minister as to where those proposals are at and what is being done in that regard because the public needs to know and we have a right to know in this parliament. Once again there is nothing in regard to the state government's action to deal with its responsibility on this road network.

In relation to social policy issues, I acknowledge that not all projects are appropriate for public-private partnerships. We certainly saw an example of that on the Sunshine Coast in regard to a tollway. That was not a public-private partnership, but not all projects are appropriate for public-private partnerships or necessarily for tolls.

We saw what happened on the Sunshine Coast where initially that toll facility was built by a conservative government and the Labor government promised to get rid of the tolls. The Labor government promised to get rid of the tolls in the 1989 election and it lied. It broke its promise. It shifted the tolls and gave us an additional toll plaza. In other words, it punished the Sunshine Coast and it lied to the people. We found that the way the state government configured those tolls and the additional toll plazas divided communities and caused a lot of social dislocation.

I would like the minister to give an assurance to this House that, as he is extending the potential for tolls and for roadways to go through communities and disrupt local road networks, he will give a commitment that he will not dislocate communities and take away the same level of local access by any of these new corridors or new arrangements that are being put in place potentially through this legislation. Actions of governments over the private citizen are always very powerful. We need assurances from the minister. I know that we are very wary about Labor governments and their promises about toll roads because they promised one thing and they broke their promise; whereas when the coalition came into government in 1996 we kept our promise and removed those tolls. We acknowledge that there should not be dislocation of local communities. It is something that is very important. That was an existing road corridor and it not only had tolls put on it but also it had additional tolls put on it after the Labor government promised to remove the toll. We have not forgotten that the minister promised something and failed to deliver it.

I am proud that my coalition colleagues, when we came to government in 1996, kept our promise and those tolls went. There is an important principle that I do not want to see slip under the radar in regard to how this government allows their toll provisions or local government's toll provisions to proceed in the future. Local communities must not be dislocated. Local access must be maintained so that people do not

have to pay a toll to get from one side of their suburb to another or find that the so-called alternative route requires them to take a greatly circuitous trip.

I agree with the member for Chatsworth in regard to the duplication of the Gateway. This should have been a PPP; this should have been an opportunity to free up government capital into other areas of necessary infrastructure delivery. The government flirted with it; it involved people in the process for a long time and cost people a lot of money. Unfortunately that is typical of the way that the government does business in this state. It costs business a lot of money while it flirts with ideas and turns them around. I believe that there are ways that PPP delivery can be addressed that maintain appropriate accountability and probity.

Mr Caltabiano: They have an international reputation.

Miss SIMPSON: I take that interjection. They do have an international reputation for mucking this one up. The way this mob runs things is a bad signal to the wider community that may have a legitimate role in helping deliver infrastructure with partnerships to the private sector. They could not run a chook raffle.

It is interesting when you look at other government experiences, for example the Victorian experience. Even with a Labor government, it has been able to look at the issue of where it is appropriate to have PPPs and to implement them. I would like to also look at some of the overseas experiences. We are not saying this should apply carte blanche everywhere, but there does need to be appropriate consideration of social policy issues to ensure that there are the right planning options in place for the community. When we look at the fact that other places have been doing it quite successfully for some time it is strange that it has been such a contorted, expensive and ridiculous process under this Labor government. It has no credibility in regard to infrastructure delivery.

Mr Caltabiano interjected.

Miss SIMPSON: Absolutely. It has no credibility. I talked to the head of British Columbia's transport department earlier in the year. It is interesting to see the Australian companies that are going overseas and successfully involving themselves in infrastructure projects and public-private partnerships. The project that is under way to upgrade the link between Whistler and Vancouver is significant because, as I understand it, that is coming in ahead of time and below the projected cost. That is a consortium that includes Macquarie Bank as one of the stakeholders. I think we will be looking at that project with a great deal of interest, as we will projects in other places, because it can be done. We need to learn from the areas where things work, why they do not work in some areas and why there is such a phobia in this state to understand what it takes to deliver timely infrastructure and to look at the road blocks to doing it better. There are road blocks and there is such a concern that, despite the spiel about the 20-year infrastructure bucket of money, this government still has a hole in its system as far as understanding how it can deliver that.

I want to talk about acquisition of land. This is an issue that is very dear to my heart because I believe that the power of government over the individual is huge. There must be appropriate protections for people to ensure that their rights are protected. When it comes to acquisition of land I have concerns about this process where the Acquisition of Lands Act will be implemented. Local governments will be involved in that process. At least with the Main Roads department there is provision, where there are hardship cases, for people who are potentially affected by future works to be bought out voluntarily. Many local governments do not have the funds or policies for acquiring property ahead of the construction phase under hardship provisions. Potentially there could be a lot more lines on maps and people who are potentially faced with a road through their house but they will not be able to get out of that. Every time they try to sell that property it will come up with a search that shows they have this project going slap-bang through the middle of their place but they will not be able to be bought out ahead of time under hardship provisions by many local governments because that is a policy area where local governments are lacking. Many local governments, to be fair, say that they do not have the funding base to acquire a lot of property ahead of a project. That has a real impact on people's lives. The road may not be built for 10 years, but it is something that affects their lives. I have had constituents who have literally had heart attacks over acquisition issues because of the stress it puts in their lives. It is one of the most stressful things they can face, even if the process is fair. When the process is not fair it is such an inhumane burden on people's shoulders.

I would also raise that there is a real need for a review of the Acquisition of Lands Act to address policy where there is inadequacy in compensation. Why should a few pay the burden for the public good? The indirect impact upon landowners is perhaps one of the greatest burdens of infrastructure that needs to be addressed. The indirect impact on someone's property can be missed. They do not get bought out but they may be left with a six-lane highway beside their property. If members have dealt with people who have gone through that stress they would know that the stress is incredible. I am particularly talking about residential property. I am not talking about someone who has a commercial benefit—that being that they

get access to their property and their values go up. There are a lot of people who are left in deficit. It can literally kill people. It is not fair and it is not right. It needs to be addressed.

There are a lot of corridors that need to be identified and set aside to address future needs. They will never be set aside because governments are too scared to plan those corridors because they know that there will be a number of people affected and left out of pocket at the end of process. The acquisition of land is not only a social justice issue but also a matter for good planning. It is needed to ensure that works that are required in the future are undertaken.

There are a number of potential projects that could benefit from alternative funding streams. PPP is a way of delivering these projects. The Toowoomba range crossing is one of those particular projects. It needs the will of government to bring them forward. There are a number of other infrastructure issues that time will not permit me to address. The axle loading and rail issues in that area are of great concern. My challenge to the government is this: it has talked a lot about infrastructure, but it has delivered very little, so we need to see the roadblocks to the delivery of infrastructure removed and we need to see processes put in place so that the necessary infrastructure to deal with the current gridlock can be fast-tracked.

There is also a very real issue concerning the requirements for infrastructure within the 20-year framework that have not been brought into the planning scheme. It is time that proper planning was also brought forward on some of those future projects so that as money becomes available we are able to roll with them rather than delay and string out processes because the planning has not been done. If this is not done it becomes more complex in the long run.