



Speech by

Mike Horan

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL (ESTIMATES COMMITTEE C)

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (11.54 am): In addressing this estimates committee report, I want to speak about three road issues in Toowoomba: Ruthven Street, the second range crossing and James Street. Firstly, with regard to Ruthven Street, I acknowledge the courtesies and interest that have been shown by the minister and the staff of the Department of Main Roads in endeavouring to address what is a fairly difficult issue. The Ruthven Street section that I am talking about is the section between James Street and Perth and Long streets, where work is being planned to deal with the increasing and expected increase in traffic along this road. Basically, it is an extension of the CBD. The western side of the road is almost entirely commercial interests, such as motels and shopping centres. The eastern side of the road is mostly schools. So there are some difficult issues there, particularly with regard to access.

The particular issue I want to talk about is that, in coming up with a plan for the road—it is currently a four-lane highway and part of the New England Highway—all of those big, iconic, beautiful and magnificent trees that are on either side of the road will be removed and instead some trees will be planted down the centre of this new road. The reason for all of that is to try to provide some widening of the road for entry and exit to the schools, or the side roads that lead to other small businesses in the area, or to one of the major shopping centres that is located in the area.

It is quite sad to lose these trees. I wonder whether the design could be looked at again. That design indicates that there will still be a four-lane road, we will lose the trees and we will lose access to a major shopping centre—it has been there for 30 years and employs 106 people—and in return basically all we get are two slip lanes in the middle of the road that are protected by new structures in the middle to make them safer. I can understand the dilemma that the Department of Main Roads is facing, but it seems a tragedy to lose these magnificent trees. If those trees are going to be replaced by trees in the middle of the road, I think it is important that we maintain access to important structures.

As I said, the shopping centre has been there for 30 years and employs 106 people in the various businesses there. It is also used by many other people simply to access an area on the fringe of the CBD that is difficult to access. There are lots of little narrow streets and dead-end streets there where there are many small businesses, such as motor vehicle related businesses. As late as May this year the shopping centre was given an indication that a right-hand turn into the shopping centre would be maintained. There was a letter to that effect subject to council approval and subject to the shopping centre undertaking works on their entrance, which they have agreed to do. I have discussed the matter with the department and with the minister. I am hopeful that we can get a good, sensible outcome. It is important for the business owners and the citizens of Toowoomba to be able to access this major shopping centre in a reasonable way. They are prepared to give up the exit that allowed people to cross the highway.

In relation to the second range crossing, I want to talk about James Street, which is the Warrego Highway—the major east-west road through Toowoomba. It is the heaviest freight-carrying road in Australia, with some 20,000 or more vehicles a day, 3,000 of them B-doubles which have to go through 16

sets of traffic lights as they go through Toowoomba to go either south to Melbourne and New South Wales or north to Darwin.

In addition, a huge number of coal trucks come through, because Queensland Rail is unable to carry the coal that is being mined on the Darling Downs. Also, a number of cattle trucks go through. Most of that cattle goes to AMH at Dinmore and Teys Brothers down the range. Those road trains have to be broken up west of Toowoomba. So James Street through the city is becoming badly damaged, particularly the lane next to the footpath. I know that we desperately need some funding from the federal government for that, because it is a federal highway.

With regard to the Toowoomba range crossing, since 1992 there have been 12 deaths and 153 casualties on the range crossing, and since 2002 there have been 159 closures of that section of the highway to Toowoomba. So we desperately need a second range crossing. The federal government has provided \$10 million for a business case study of a public-private partnership, which I know the minister and the department are working on. It seems a shame that the cost of that road has blown out from when it was first mooted in 1996 for \$300 million to about \$650 million and that we now have to have a PPP, which is the only way to fast-track it. Hopefully it will get the money from AusLink, too.

Time expired.