



Speech by

Tim Nicholls

MEMBER FOR CLAYFIELD

Hansard Wednesday, 10 October 2007

TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr NICHOLLS (Clayfield—Lib) (5.30 pm): I move—

That this Parliament acknowledges the failure of the Queensland Labor Government to adequately plan for and provide in a timely manner both public transport infrastructure and services in south east Queensland.

Mr STEVENS (Robina—Lib) (5.30 pm): I second the motion.

Mr NICHOLLS: Yesterday the Premier and the new transport minister acknowledged 10 years of failure of Labor in government to plan for and provide in a timely manner public transport infrastructure and services. The Premier has finally acknowledged what the coalition and the commuting public of south-east Queensland have known for a long time—that our public transport network in south-east Queensland has failed to meet the demands and expectations of commuters in the 21st century.

As a result of 10 years of Labor's failure to address public transport needs, south-east Queensland now confronts a public transport crisis. This follows hot on the heels of the water supply crisis, the health crisis, the electricity supply crisis and the kids care crisis—in fact, 10 years of government by crisis. As I said yesterday in relation to the announcements made by the Premier, this rehash of an old plan that was first contemplated by the failed Goss government in the mid-nineties will not deliver one more train, one more bus or one more ferry—all of which are desperately needed to address the public transport crisis in south-east Queensland.

There are many examples of the Labor government's failure in the public transport area, but perhaps none more significantly demonstrates the failure than the government's demonstrated inability to deliver on the much-promised smart card integrated ticketing system. In August 2002 the then Premier announced with much fanfare, as per usual, the preferred tenderer to design, build and operate south-east Queensland's smart card integrated ticketing system. In his press release, the Premier stated—

Cabinet's approval of the preferred tender today is proof the government is on track to launch the new system in mid-2004.

It is interesting to note that a *Sunday Mail* article of 17 September 2007 stated—

The \$200 million scheme—first suggested by government in 1999—was supposed to be operational across the south-east by 2003.

So even at the time of the first announcement of the tenderer for the smart card project, the Labor government was already a year behind its previously announced introduction date. In June 2003 the then transport minister, Mr Bredhauer, announced—

Smart card technology would be progressively introduced from mid-2004.

On 31 March 2004 the new transport minister—the now Deputy Premier—announced—

This new equipment represents the first step towards progressively introducing Smartcards in 2005.

On 17 June that year, Minister Lucas made a revised statement, saying—

A trial of the new technology will start on bus routes and rail networks in the Redcliffe area in early 2005.

On 1 October that year the minister stated—

Once Smartcards are introduced from July next year ...

So we have gone from 2004 to July 2005. On 6 July 2005, that being the month when originally this new minister had promised the smart cards would be introduced, he stated that it would be rigorously tested through the second half of the year—that is, the second half of 2005 in case anyone is getting confused, and who would not be—before being rolled out across the network early next year—that is, 2006. On 15 July 2005, just nine days later, Minister Lucas again said—

There's more to come next year including the delivery of the \$136 million Smartcard system.

So let us go to July 2006. Minister Lucas stated—

Last year I told Parliament that we planned to have the Smartcard rollout in south-east Queensland by the end of 2006.

The end of 2006 has now come and gone, and we still do not see a smart card rollout. It has not been delivered, and the cost of the smart card system has not been cheap. In July 2003 \$130 million was going to be spent on delivering a turnkey system. Officers of TransLink have been quoted in articles, including the *Sunday Mail* and *mX* magazine, as saying—

The \$200 million Smartcard network is to be rolled out.

So where are we today? Today we are still waiting for an operational smart card. It has been trialled and trialled and trialled. It has been announced and reannounced and reannounced, and we are still yet to see the much-vaunted smart card. This government's ability to drive the development and delivery of this technology is woeful and the facts speak for themselves.

What about policy for public transport in south-east Queensland? I have previously raised in this place TransLink's efforts to create a network plan. Indeed, in a question on notice in 2003 the then transport minister in answer to a question extolled the virtues of TransLink, describing in effect what the Premier yesterday described this new south-east Queensland transit authority was going to do. He talked about what it will do, including planning and policy and network coordination across the 17 public transport contract providers. But in fact for two years the network plan developed by TransLink was only a draft network plan, and it was only after I pointed this out in this parliament earlier this year that action was taken to finalise the draft plan into a proper plan that could be said to be finalised. No wonder the trains are overcrowded and do not run!

More interesting than the draft network plan is the government's attempt to formulate policy via a transport green paper. Announced in Queensland Transport's 2005-06 annual report, the transport minister stated that he would develop a coordinated public transport policy for the region. Alleluia! 'Smart travel choices for south-east Queensland: a transport green paper' was released in December 2005. That green paper got no further than completion of the consultation stage. So despite being issued in December 2005 and receiving over 1,750 comments by March 2006—that is more than 18 months ago now—and despite the annual report of the department stating that a white paper would be produced in the following year, no white paper has ever been delivered. This abandoned policy document was supposed to contain specific policies to address transport in south-east Queensland, including increased discounted fares for public transport, tighter controls on inner-city parking and an increase in the number of energy-efficient cars—all failures of this Labor government. In effect, it was to be the government's major response to the transport challenges in south-east Queensland. However, since then no action has been taken.

It is interesting to note that in September—the time this government's failure was reported—the green paper, the consultation document, the summary of responses and other information were all on the Queensland Transport web site. Out of interest I today visited the Queensland Transport web site to see if any further action had been taken in relation to it. I went to the home page for Queensland Transport to see what was there. I typed in the words 'smart travel choices'. I came up with 99 fully matching documents and 176 partially matching documents. I clicked on the link of the first one and what happened? What was I directed to? The Queensland government site headed up with a funny little logo and the words 'Page not found, exist or moved'. That is how this government deals with planning policy. It takes it off the web. It removes it. It tries to erase all evidence of its own incompetence. So we have clear examples of the government's failure—failure to deliver in terms of a smart card system for at least four years and possibly as far back as 1999 and the fact that the department's bureaucrats are reported as saying it is a \$200 million expenditure and the complete sham of going through a green paper process involving local governments and the public with 1,750 responses only to end up with a blank page on the internet. The litany of failures continues.

One only needs to look at today's story about the AAMI survey which shows that commuters do not believe transport in south-east Queensland is up to scratch. In fact, of the three east coast capital cities, Brisbane had the highest percentage of drivers who drive to work, uni or TAFE at a rate of 67 per cent. The percentage who use public transport to go to work at 11 per cent was worse than Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide. A quarter of Brisbane drivers said that they do not use public transport because it takes too long to reach their destination and 26 per cent said that it is unreliable. A massive 40 per cent said that they do not use it because there is no public transport near their home, their workplace or their university. That reflects the results of a Kelly survey earlier this year which found similar numbers and that fewer than

63 per cent of Queenslanders believed they had a choice of using public transport. And little wonder when one considers the number of train cancellations.

I have highlighted the number of cancellations in the rail network in the month of July, but one only needs to go to any interested web site to read about almost daily problems. For example, on 18 September Rail Back on Track issued a media release under the heading 'Citytrain—cancellations, congestion, chaos'. On 7 October it issued another release, 'Flawed Queensland Transport planning highlighted' in reference to the Darra to Springfield railway line and other comments are equally available.

In terms of delivery of infrastructure, we see that of 132 carriages promised in 2004 only 12 carriages have been delivered, with the remainder to be delivered by January 2009 despite originally being promised for 2008. It does not matter what the government says. It does not matter what the media releases it issues say. It does not matter what spin is spun. The cold hard facts are that the commuting public know this government has failed them.

Acknowledging failure is the first step towards fixing a problem. This motion acknowledges those public transport failures, which the former Premier was always willing to do, and he had good reason to do so. We all remember the art of the mea culpa. This motion ought to be supported. It is a motion that enables this government to acknowledge its failures and to start moving down the track to fixing the problems in south-east Queensland's public transport network.