



Speech by

Fiona Simpson

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

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APPROPRIATION BILLS; REVENUE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (3.23 pm): Building a sustainable future for all of Queensland requires a different vision. There is a choice of philosophies between the Labor side of politics and our own: either Labor's high-density, centralised, urban living model where infrastructure construction is always in catch-up mode, never ahead of the game, like a dog catching a rabbit it will never catch; or our belief in a choice of lifestyle options through decentralisation which supports vibrant cities, towns and communities, a network of sustainable communities connected with quality transport linkages, particularly public transport.

Labor's planning model delivers hotter, more congested cities. Our vision promised cooler, greener cities and towns with greater water self-sufficiency. This is part of our ClimateProof policy released last month. I refer you to our web site www.climateproof.com.au. Our vision also rewards communities which innovate with green power and which can help supply the grid, and that is also part of our policy announced today by opposition leader Lawrence Springborg.

Labor's planning model rewards the big end of the development industry which, under Anna Bligh's plan, is winning ministerial overrides of local government, communities and environmental stakeholders. Under our policy we believe planning and approval schemes should be open and transparent, not favouring big or small developers but streamlined to deliver a fair and balanced approach for all, respecting the community, the environment and local government. It should be a system which works for everyone, not just a few. After the state government's appalling announcement to rush through new housing approvals with no extra public transport against the wishes of local council or without their input, we have to ask: who is in control of our local communities? Not local councils and not the local people.

Labor's Queensland is about control and centralisation. It is a Brisbane centric party with no understanding that having sustainable regions and neighbouring communities improves the liveability of Brisbane and those communities. However, as we heard this morning in question time, if we express concerns about growth without adequate infrastructure, be prepared for abuse from a tired old Labor government which believes it is born to rule rather than serve the people. I believe there is room for improvement in the development approval process, but it must be one with transparency and involving public consultation. It should serve local communities and not be skewed to a favoured few. It also requires timely infrastructure provision which helps communities adapt to climate change with better access to public transport, less congestion and access to localised services and work.

Let me talk about the borrowings in this budget, but I want to do so in connection with the cost blow-outs, because you cannot separate the two. Much of the increased borrowings in this budget are not about achieving greater service delivery; they are about bailing out the government's poor cost controls and scoping of capital projects and just lousy management. Let me be quite clear: we support responsible borrowing which can be serviced and repaid for economic-generating infrastructure for properly cost controlled projects. We do not support the state government borrowing money to simply cover cost blow-outs which are due to bad planning and bad project management.

Queensland's infrastructure budget has been badly impacted by cost blow-outs on existing projects such as the \$700 million cost blow-out in the western corridor recycled water pipeline—one project alone. This project rose from \$1.7 billion to over \$2.4 billion. But the Labor government says that it is not a cost blow-out. What cost blow-out? It still claims that its water projects are on budget. Boy, it has a strange definition of fiscal responsibility! Let us have a look at this: \$700 million is a lot of money and it is more than the total capital budget for the Department of Housing this year. It is also 10 times the capital budget for the struggling disabilities sector, four times the capital budget for emergency services and 2½ times the total capital budget for police and corrective services.

When I hear Labor Party hacks, who do not care about poor fiscal management and bad cost control, bleating that they do not care about that, let us look at the people who are hurt because it is those projects that suffer. Let me repeat: the \$700 million cost blow-out due to poor management on one belated water project of this government is equivalent to about 1,800 new public houses or 230 ambulance stations or 140 police stations. They have been taken away from the people of Queensland because of bad cost control and bad management by a government that does not know how to manage money.

The beneficiaries of that belatedly built water project have been rubbing their hands together with glee. It is well known that money is no object for this project which will go down in history as one of the most outrageously, poorly cost controlled projects of this government. They could see this Premier coming when she was the infrastructure minister and Treasurer. There was no care about or constraint on how taxpayers' money was spent. Queensland was desperate for water but there was no care about or constraint on the way this government applied funding for this project. There was also no cost control. It had gold plated contracts and invoice tendering. The wastage in this project is legendary in the construction industry.

This is a scandal which deserves the attention of the parliamentary Public Works Committee. I challenge the Labor Party to allow its members to investigate this project. I have asked the committee chair whether the committee would investigate this project and her answer was that the subject of future inquiries is a matter for the committee as a whole. I ask the chair of that committee what that means. Does it mean that the Labor majority will determine whether or not this significant blow-out in the capital works budget will be investigated? I hope we will see this committee investigate this project urgently as it has implications for the rest of the infrastructure budget, particularly alliance projects and project procurement. I asked the Public Works Committee chair whether the committee has already been asked to consider this project. It is time it was investigated. I think the parliament and taxpayers deserve an explanation.

SEQIP, the South East Queensland Infrastructure Plan, has increased from a projected \$50 billion a few years ago to \$100 billion this week. There are many great projects in the plan which we support. The cost controls applied to these projects deserve scrutiny. This document is becoming an aspirational statement rather than an actual guide about the timely delivery or the actual delivery of projects. It has the credibility of a Nigerian lottery scheme when it comes to costings.

I would like to refer to some of those costings. Only last year the Ipswich Motorway upgrade—Dinmore to Darra to Rocklea—was estimated to be \$2.6 billion and this year it is \$3.1 billion. Let us look at the busway projects. The Northern Busway—from the Royal Children's Hospital to Kedron to Bracken Ridge—was last year estimated to be \$1.243 billion and this year it is \$2.53 billion. Let us have a look at the Eastern Busway—Buranda to Capalaba. Last year in SEQIP it was listed as a \$600 million project. This year it is a \$3,079 million project. There is a whole list of significant cost variations on estimates for projects in this document over the 12 months. The Gateway Motorway upgrade—Mount Gravatt-Capalaba Road to the Pacific Motorway—has increased from \$55 million to \$1,100 million. Let us look at the Brisbane urban corridor. It has gone up from \$260 million last year to \$991 million this year. The list goes on.

There are many worthy projects, but we have to wonder how on earth the costings were done 12 months ago given that they are so significantly different this year. How on earth can we have a government that says it is planning for the future when it cannot even get it right in the last 12 months! The cost variations are significant. The concern is that some of these projects have started but many of them are yet to start. We realise that this government has a very poor track record in terms of the cost control of projects already underway.

Let us look at debt. Our concern is about using debt to fund blow-outs, getting cost controls right and having an infrastructure plan that is properly scoped. This government is now looking at a debt of \$59 billion by 2010-11 and rising to \$65 billion in 2011-12. By 2010-11 there will be something like a \$3 billion interest payment.

We have heard the state government say that it really cares about affordability; it really cares about housing affordability. Yet what we have seen is a government that is willing to poorly manage the way it scopes its own projects, poorly manages projects when they are underway and then justifies them as not being cost blow-outs. I think householders know what a cost blow-out is.

I draw the attention of the House to other areas of Queensland and the regional budgets. There is a need to have 20-year infrastructure plans in place for the rest of Queensland. They are being left behind in this process. There is a lack of attention to the forward planning of the needs of these areas. A lot of the funding, particularly for water projects, still does not have actual allocations for construction. It seems that this government is repeating its past mistake—wait until there is no rain, wait until there is a drought and then it will consider whether it will build many of those water projects. That is a concern that I flag in this House.

I also refer to the lack of investment in road and transport infrastructure outside south-east Queensland. It is quite substantial. It is time that these things were put on budget and there were proper costings put in place to be able to plan to bring those things forward.

I want to address some issues in my own electorate. As we have heard in the last couple of days, this state government has decided to override local councils and their concerns about growth without adequate infrastructure and push through up to 75,000 new homes on the Sunshine Coast. Across Queensland the government is talking about bringing on stream several hundred thousand new homes.

Our concern is that if there is a problem with the planning scheme the answer is not to have ministerial override and to force things through without local input and no infrastructure in place to deal with the new housing stock that is brought on line. The answer is to ensure that we have a proper system in place to fairly assess projects and to move them to market in a timely way. We should not have this process that lacks transparency and takes away the rights of local communities.

In my own community it will be something like 2025 before the major public transport infrastructure CAMCOS is due to come on line. We are still waiting to see the multimodal aspects of that project and line projects allocated substantial funding so that they can service the whole of the Sunshine Coast. We are most concerned that this government has learnt nothing from other areas of high growth and it is wanting to promote high growth without public transport in place.

Only about one per cent of people movements on the Sunshine Coast are by means of public transport. What we have seen in this budget this week does nothing to significantly address that issue. In fact, the announcement about high density overrides of local council will only make that worse because there is no investment in real public transport for the Sunshine Coast. That is setting the Sunshine Coast up to become congested and threaten our environment rather than a place we love and want to see properly sustained into the future.

I want to also mention cancer services. Two elections ago the state government made a commitment to roll out public access to cancer services on the Sunshine Coast by a contract with a private provider. The government was matching our commitment in this area. I was pleased that it did that. What has happened since then? It took four to five years before it signed a contract with the provider and then the contract was for 12 months only. That contract has not been renewed.

While we have the blame game about why it has not renewed that contract, we still have hundreds of public cancer patients who are unable to access services locally. They are finding it too difficult and too dear to get services locally and too difficult and too dear to go away for treatment. That is of real concern to me. I am calling on the government to address this issue of providing cancer and radiation services for the hundreds of patients who need these services. We have also had people from as far away as Rockhampton coming to the Sunshine Coast to access these services. It is a major concern that there is now no longer public access to services on the Sunshine Coast.

With regard to the new Sunshine Coast Hospital, yes, we are concerned that it is proposed for a very flood-prone area with road routes which are also extremely flood prone. It is time that this site was examined to ensure that we have the most flood immune site and one that is accessible for the residents of the Sunshine Coast. However, the major concern is about the funding model. The state government's cost estimates have seen this project blow out from about \$900 million up to \$1.2 billion and another year added to the likely delivery of this hospital. We have also heard that it is waiting for private sector interest—and there has been some surprise that there has not been any private sector interest—yet on the other hand we are told that it has not finished the business case. There are conflicting messages about whether there in fact is a straightforward process in terms of this major new hospital for the Sunshine Coast.

Mr Fraser: So do you support a PPP for it?

Miss SIMPSON: The concern here is that, if the government has not done the business case and it has been mucking around for the last 12 months, is it really serious about this? I say to the Treasurer that given the government still has not finished its business case it is not serious. It is time that we saw some commitment to this process rather than continuing to blow out the time frames of the business case. We already know that the transitional beds before the hospital comes online are half what the planning studies required in the interim, and that is also a major concern, because that means that ambulance officers will spend longer ramping up at emergency departments to unload patients and people will wait longer to get access to emergency services and still there is a lack of commitment to see that business model completed to move this hospital project forward.

I want to address the issue of law and order, and there is great concern about the rising number of issues around the Mooloolaba entertainment precinct. Also, the area has growth corridors where there are 30,000 people such as on the Maroochy North Shore and there is no permanent police presence. I call on the government to implement a full-time police station at Mooloolaba. Something like an extra 5,000 people flood into this town on weekends and holidays, yet the real numbers of police have not increased to keep pace. There has been a shuffling of police numbers across the stations rather than a real net increase of real additional police, and that is of concern. At Pacific Paradise there is a great advantage in that there is already crown land there which is very central to the North Shore that would be a fantastic site for a police station. The state government must ensure that the future of that site is set aside for that purpose, because strategically it is right on the airport access now with the realignment of the Pacific Paradise bypass, David Low Way and the new access point to the Sunshine Coast Airport.

With regard to another issue of importance to the Sunshine Coast community—though obviously public transport, the health issues and the justice issues are certainly the higher ranking matters—I want to mention the need for a Sunshine Coast arts and convention centre to ensure there is a deeper base in the economy, because the area has an economy that has tended to be very reliant on the construction industry and on tourism. It is necessary to see that economy base expanded with value adding by having a convention market and an exhibition market, as well as adding to our local arts and culture.

In this budget we have seen a lot of catch-up funding on existing projects. While I have strongly fought for and welcome the funding being spent on the Maroochy River Bridge, the Pacific Paradise bypass and Maroochy Road, we know that the infrastructure for the future has still not been committed to in this budget. That is why we are concerned about the lack of commitment to public transport on the Sunshine Coast. The Sunshine Coast's future sustainability necessitates investment in real public transport. The Sunshine Coast of the future, particularly given the numbers that the government wants to accelerate into our area, must have sustainable services as well as infrastructure. I would urge the government to rethink its current approach to override the concerns of the local community in terms of giving us greater congestion with no relief.

Time expired.