



Speech by

Fiona Simpson

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

Hansard Wednesday, 27 August 2008

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (5.09 pm): I am delighted to rise to speak on the report to the parliament of Estimates Committee C particularly as, since the estimates proceedings, I have taken on the responsibility for main roads for the state opposition.

An honourable member: Well done.

Miss SIMPSON: Thank you. I acknowledge and thank my colleague the member for Warrego, Howard Hobbs, for his role in this portfolio for the opposition. This is a great portfolio and it impacts on every Queenslander. It is a serious portfolio, but I want to briefly bring the lighter side of things to the parliament by sharing an incident that occurred during the great opening of the Maroochy River bridge on the Sunshine Motorway last year, which both the minister and I attended.

Sunshine Coast residents fought hard for that infrastructure and we were excited to see it come on line. As the minister and I stood on the bridge on that prestigious occasion waiting for the moment when the ribbon was to be cut, a man in a fluorescent mankini flew past us. I thought that he was a very game man because the minister had a very big pair of scissors in his hand and a gleam in his eye. It was quite a variation of de Groot and the Sydney Harbour Bridge. It certainly made the bridge opening, which was already a great occasion, an unforgettable occasion. I thank the minister for his attendance on that day. We are delighted to see the bridge open. What has been even better has been the fast-tracking of the upgrade of the existing bridge to allow it to take additional capacity and that project has come in ahead of schedule. When it was announced that the project was completed ahead of schedule and that the lanes were to be opened, I went out as early as possible to be one of the first to see vehicles using that road.

It was a battle for the bridge and it was a great fight. Certainly I had run-ins with a predecessor of this minister about the need to build the bridge as it was the missing link on a very important arterial through the Sunshine Coast. As the bridge project comes to the point of conclusion, I acknowledge the workers who have done a great job. There are further works to be completed such as the Pacific Paradise upgrade and interchanges, as well as works back to Maroochydore Road which are still underway, but which will all be greatly welcomed by the community.

Another issue that is still a point of great contention for residents in Queensland is the Centenary Highway. Under the government this very congested road has suffered another bungle with planning studies into promised transit and bus lanes already delayed by two years and the announcement that studies are still to take place. The government has now proposed the possibility of a toll for low-occupancy vehicles travelling on what is a free motorway. In September 2005 in parliament then Minister for Transport Paul Lucas stated—

Additionally, \$250 million has been provided for the construction of bus priority and transit lanes on the Centenary Highway from the Ipswich Motorway to Toowong, with planning to start next year.

This month, more than three years later, Main Roads Minister Warren Pitt announced that the study had finally begun. In 2005 when the plan was first announced the Centenary Highway already looked like a parking lot and in 2008 things are only looking worse. Under Premier Beattie and now Premier Bligh, this government has failed to commence the study in a timely way and it has allowed the congestion to build,

and the people will have to pay for that broken promise. What happened to the \$250 million that Minister Lucas promised in 2005? Now that there are no current real allocations for the construction of that road, again people are asking when the road will be built and how much it will cost. When will they see it come on line to relieve the congestion? As this road is currently toll free it is a major concern that it has now been mooted that motorists may be forced to pay tolls on the road as the Bligh government continues to struggle with its blowouts in costs on infrastructure projects.

The 2005 plan proposed to have the transit and bus lanes completed by 2026. We raised concerns that that was too far out anyway. Now there is no time frame to clearly identify when the works will be underway. In 2005 we argued that the work was urgent and needed to be brought forward. South-east Queenslanders just want their roads fixed, but the Bligh government has proven once again that it is unable to deliver essential functions of government on time and on budget. For Queensland to deal with its ongoing growth, it must have timely infrastructure. It needs government to execute those plans in a cost-effective and strategic way so that Queenslanders can keep the lifestyle and the economy that they so treasure.