



Speech by

Fiona Simpson

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

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APPROPRIATION BILLS: ESTIMATES COMMITTEE F

Ms SIMPSON (Maroochydore—LNP) (12.47 pm): No-one in their right mind would drive a car hands free or operate a train without a driver. Why then did Premier Bligh leave Queensland Transport leaderless with the transport minister whom she placed in charge? What we have seen in the two prime areas of government policy—the merger of Queensland Transport and the assets sale—is the minister floundering and unable to answer questions.

Let us start with the assets sale. Here is a minister who has publicly admitted that she knew nothing about the assets sale before it was announced only a few days later. Yet the Premier of Queensland claimed that she had told Queenslanders before the election about the assets sale including Queensland Rail. So who was telling the truth—Minister Nolan or Premier Bligh? That is the question. Premier Bligh said she told Queenslanders, yet her own transport minister claims that she did not know only days before the announcement was made. That is a major concern when we consider the size of Queensland Rail, the complexity of the issues and the impact that this will have upon those who use its services and those who deliver its services, the rail workers. We have a minister who is clearly not in control and has admitted herself that she has no idea.

I want to talk on another very important issue—that is, the merger of Queensland Transport and Main Roads. This is another issue where staff are hugely impacted. The director-general, David Stewart, said—

With the merger of the department we have actually got some surplus people. We will certainly be looking after those.

So I asked the minister—

How many surplus staff are there in the department after the merger that you are now trying to place?

What was Minister Nolan's response? 'None.' Clearly she did not even listen to the answer of her director-general, who said that they had surplus people. No wonder there is a lack of confidence in this minister. No wonder there was a great deal of sensitivity about how well this minister would perform at estimates. She was clearly found wanting on these very critical areas. This is a major portfolio. It is one that requires leadership. It requires a minister who is at the helm, who is actually taking direction and who is involved in those critical decisions—not finding out about them in the paper days after she has claimed those decisions were never going to be made.

There are other major issues facing this department, such as the new inner-city cross-river rail project. This has been languishing for years, yet there is a critical time frame looming because if it is not addressed we will find that the whole freight and passenger network will grind to a halt. This matter has not been adequately addressed in this budget and has still only gone into a feasibility study, rather than there being action to take this forward.

Another major issue is the TransLink Network Plan. The minister claims that this plan is fully funded, yet we have not actually seen the latest TransLink Network Plan. It has not been released. This is another issue that has been languishing with the government. Why will the government not release the TransLink Network Plan? Why is this also being hidden? We know that there are service providers who are

complaining that they do not have contracts. Their contracts have in fact lapsed. Queensland Rail Passenger is one of those areas. At the heart of this is the question about whether this government has truly funded the network plan to match the growth that is required to ensure that congestion is adequately dealt with on the roads and that people have an appropriate public transport system into the future.

The Auditor-General identified a number of critical issues in regard to future planning, but it also goes to the heart of the lack of key decisions that are being made today. One of those key decisions is this TransLink Network Plan, which remains hidden with this government and has not been released. I challenge the minister to release the plan. The minister should not tell people that it is funded when we have people complaining that they cannot get service agreements.

It is time the secrecy ended. It is time the minister released these documents and explained fully why she has not been signing off on contracts that have well and truly lapsed. This has left a lot of uncertainty about the future investment in the public transport network. It is time for less spin. It is time for actual decision making and a release of these network plans. These are a critical part of ensuring there is a plan to take people forward with adequate infrastructure and adequate services.