



Speech by

**Dr Alex Douglas**

**MEMBER FOR GAVEN**

Hansard Wednesday, 9 June 2010

---

## **CITY OF BRISBANE BILL**

**Dr DOUGLAS** (Gaven—LNP) (2.52 pm): I would like to focus on the outcomes of the processes of the bill. Everything else has been well covered by other speakers. This is a bill that represents the wishes of the incumbent Brisbane City Council in part. There have been reports in the local press that possibly raise concerns about accountability of the councillors. It would seem that these issues raised may have been emotional and sensational rather than addressing practicality.

Brisbane is the third largest city in Australia and will be the second largest within 10 years. The Brisbane City Council is the largest council in the world—certainly Australia's largest—and its budget is currently larger than South Australia's operating budget. This claim, as extraordinary as some may believe it to be, is true because of the size of the Brisbane City Council's current road, bridge, busway and urban renewal program. Moreover, it is due to the growth of the city beyond its 2.5 million current inhabitants. With growth comes demand for infrastructure, major new city planning and major spending related to higher population densities where previously there were fewer people per square metre.

Brisbane as a city is not just moving beyond splitting the old 32-perch block into 16 perches and building sixpacks on amalgamated blocks but also moving to become a city where the latest *Sunday Mail* report on 23 May is proposing unlimited height densities in the city, eight storeys at Wynnum, 30 storeys in the Valley including New Farm, 20 storeys on the south side, 10 storeys at Chermside and five storeys amazingly at Coopers Plains. We have gone beyond duplexes, semidetached and battleaxe developments. Brisbane is becoming a very diverse city that is going to test both the public and the governments in the next 20 years as Brisbane's population more than doubles. I say 'governments' because all levels of government—local, state and federal—will need to be involved. The Brisbane City Council act was drafted initially in 1859 but then the amalgamations came in 1925. Uniquely, it is a local government with its own separate state legislation. On reflection, this was probably a very sensible decision by a forward-thinking government of the day. We have ended up with a very good result from that decision.

Brisbane's urban sprawl, as homeowners and prospective homeowners are in ever-growing numbers, is growing still. The South East Queensland Regional Plan does make amendments to cater for far higher inner-urban density, infill development, urban renewal and better land utilisation. What the plan really cannot do is completely limit further urban sprawl that really is former satellite communities in different councils growing by virtue of the increased flexibility of the regional councils and their proximity to Brisbane. Improved transport corridors, better passenger rail and bus links to Brisbane and some decentralisation out of the city drives that. Without doubt, we are almost at the point where Brisbane is SEQ central, with the Gold Coast, Ipswich, Jimboomba, Beaudesert, Caboolture, Redcliffe and Redlands all merging as outer Brisbane.

The impact of this is that not much has changed in the wider perspective, but the act affecting Brisbane needs considerable adaptation because of these changes. It would seem that, in spite of many attempts at trying to drive change in Brisbane by town planning task forces, urban renewal groups and

road construction, the end result has been that the mixed effects of market forces, opportunity, evolution and tribalism have driven those changes.

Overwhelmingly, cost has been the major driver of change. Decentralisation appears to have been only marginally successful due to the mixed effect of individuals unwilling to move them or their families from the communities where they grew up and those in middle management being influential within their organisations, driven by the perception of negative impacts on their careers to move to outer-lying areas. In Brisbane, housing that has been built primarily near these larger industrial areas has a very mixed history, and the bill addresses those points.

Brisbane, like its railway system, is very much a city of determined provincial urban families. The metropolitan rail network has one western link to Ipswich through Indooroopilly and Chelmer, a northern line to Caboolture and the Sunshine Coast, a north-eastern line to Shorncliffe, a southern line to the coast and a south-eastern line to Cleveland. Only the eastern suburbs are not uniquely linked, but the river and Moreton Bay are their own critical links. The public in all of these communities are historically likely to wish to live near siblings, parents and friends. Policy of local government, particularly within the bill, needs to relate strongly to the considerable effects of these trends.

Incoming residents to the city are diverse and may pursue the same great Australian dream of homeownership, and the bill addresses that. There is a trend of empty nesters moving into the city into high-rise buildings. Family size is decreasing and there are fewer relatives to lean on. There is a major reticence to go into dependent care for the elderly, who tend to stay on too long living in their homes. This then causes an overhang in the market. But there are changes linked to both divorce and intergenerational change which are also having a significant impact on inner-city living.

The BCC act needs to be reflective of the changes that are occurring in the market. It would appear that the Labor state government is overly focused on its own needs rather than on the outcomes required by Brisbane residents. This is not only regrettable but may potentially be a serious error. The evidence for this statement is the two recent decisions of the incumbent state government and a further review of the SEQ plan itself. The first is the failure to correct the lack of links between the eastern suburbs, the bayside, the northern suburbs and the city with Teneriffe and New Farm. The second is the recent announcement of the conceptually flawed cross-river rail link, which merely moves the bottleneck to either side of the river from the Merivale Bridge for five years at best. This \$8.5 billion plan opposes all other major international best practice metropolitan transport solutions. All other major cities of greater or comparable size and some of lesser size embrace circle lines which mirror ring-roads in the city. This is not radical thinking; this is the norm. The proposal here is clearly that the cross-river tunnel is in the wrong place.

The SEQ plan, which relates to this bill, and in significant part has been raised by the member for Aspley, was Labor's grand statement on the future of SEQ. What has happened under Labor has been a consistent process of highly dubious approvals for developments that are exemptions to the SEQ plan. Much of this creep into both greenfield area and green zones is highly dubious at best and destructive at worst. In between, it has placed intolerable demands on the current infrastructure plan and spend by the BCC that should never have occurred. When one adds the failed council amalgamation strategies in surrounding areas, particularly with regard to the Scenic Rim, one sees that it then has an impact which has to be picked up within the BCC plan.

The current proposal to promote the idea of proportional representation of councillors in regional councils outside Brisbane, rather than by a divisional election, will only compound the negatives of the amalgamation as it applies to Brisbane, particularly with regard to growth impediments and a focus on process over outcome. The flawed water grid is a clear example, particularly when it applies to the Brisbane solution.

The Brisbane City Council's initiation of the original Airport Link was groundbreaking. The state then took it over and initiated BrisConnections, and I think the decision on that is out for the time being. If you compare the two plans, I think there is a significant difference. What I am saying is that there are two plans going on in South-East Queensland and the state is focusing on jingoistic name plans using the words 'future proofing' very frequently, whereas the BCC is focusing on needs and outcomes for everyday people. That is what the bill entrusts them to do. There can be no greater example of this than the cross-river tunnel at \$8.5 billion for the state, and the comparison to the BCC's Go Between Bridge and the Clem7 tunnel, particularly at a time when the Clem7 tunnel is receiving great criticism.

At the moment, 50 per cent of all existing freight movements continue out of the Hamilton wharves. Also, cattle and coal haulage trucks come in mass convoys through Toowoomba into the city from the north-west. However, the cross-river tunnel plan continues to move the freight through the city. The BCC has massively focused itself on linking the inner south to mass transport and the inner city commercial transport to effectively bypass the city at reasonable peak hours for a \$5 billion expense. This means that the state government planning is focusing on maintenance of the status quo, whereas the BCC is focusing on the future and keeping pace with it. Fortunately, the existing act has delivered this change for Brisbane.

Honourable members may all falsely believe that none of these so-called distant, interrelated facts do tell the common story I have presented, but you all should reconsider, particularly those on government benches. The flaws in the theory that 'if you build it, he will come'—which is from the famous movie *Field of Dreams*—are as follows: one, the building needs to be planned and be thought through with an economic and social impact assessment; two, the building needs to be real, not just hype talk advertising future projections or, worse still, a pack of lies; and, three, the building needs to be appropriate, whether this means energy efficient, comfortable, proportionate, affordable, et cetera.

The BCC act, as big as the bill is now, may not be appropriate for a capital city of Brisbane's current size in a tropical climate in a First World country so close to Asia. Is the bill too prescriptive? Is there far too much emphasis on trying to limit the BCC because of fear? This is the concept of a state government becoming more irrelevant as local governments become more relevant. Is the problem that the size of the Brisbane council—it being almost like a state—makes the current Labor government feel threatened by the BCC, especially with a progressive, forward-thinking LNP mayor in Campbell Newman who has been a very agreeable fellow? Is local government taken seriously enough by the Labor government here in Queensland? Is it time for the state government to start taking the idea of partnerships between itself and the BCC more seriously?

Labor's future—just like the incoming LNP government's would be—is very much linked to the success or failure of Brisbane. So what do we need to see in the bill beyond those questions I have raised? We need maturity in relationships, and I think we need to look at Sydney and Melbourne. We need town planning, and this should be about thorough town planning because currently it is terrible, it is too slow and it is not progressive. We need to be creating families and we need to think about models of cohobitation. We need to reduce the idea of focusing on process over outcome. There needs to be easy transfer of title. There needs to be ease in sectioning off granny flats because of the intergenerational issues. We need to think about growing communities. We need to get those community feelings going again. We need to focus on community volunteering programs that lead to interconnection. The focus needs to be overwhelmingly on connections and not just on cars and transport, like with the current issue of tunnels. The other issue that could be reconsidered is the reinstating of trams. Light rail on the Gold Coast has been currently suggested and this may be an alternative for Brisbane.

There are a considerable number of process issues in the bill. There is the issue of building high-rise if you have to—that is, we are going upwards. Communities are having greater densities whether they like it or not. We need space for 156,000 new dwellings by 2031 and we need to cater for the 40,000 new residents. I had heard that figure was 50,000, but these discussions are about 40,000. We need to make the idea of the quarter acre block a redundant concept.

You might ask why this is of interest to the electorate of Gaven. The short answer is the micro-economics of globalism, economics, practicalities and commuters. Once the M1 was built, and in part the railway line to Robina initially on the Gold Coast, there was a direct link between Gaven via Nerang and Brisbane. It is indivisible. It exists for all the other areas I named earlier as well. There is a heavy emphasis on construction and there are people employed or contracting in my Gaven electorate, and there is also a high number of people currently employed in Brisbane but living a hinterland existence of bliss in my electorate. What occurs in Brisbane is of importance to my electors. This applies to many outer Brisbane regions, so what ticks in Brisbane has great significance beyond the city itself.

To analyse the bill in another way, this bill addresses population numbers, density and vertical solutions. It does not address connections, understanding communities, innovative state solutions, horizontal growth and the connections of those. I agree with the statement of opposition councillor Milton Dick in the *Sunday Mail* on 23 May, when he stated, 'The plans had not lived up to their expectation of listening to residents' concerns.' He did not look to where the blockage was or was too afraid to state the obvious. The Labor government talks connections but delivers population and higher population density. This is short-term nonsense that only enriches the real estate speculative bank balances of Labor mates. It ultimately destroys communities.

Connections is about transport only in part, and cars are only a part of that. We need to link communities to one another. We need to build better links in communities. This bill is about Brisbane and talks about where it should start. The cross-river tunnel as proposed does not make sense. It is too deep at the Petrie Bight end of Edward Street to be cost effective and it replicates the transport connections we already have. There should be cross-river tunnels at Merivale Street under the existing Merivale Bridge and there should be a new tunnel between New Farm and Woolloongabba via Hawthorne. New Farm is all about urban renewal and high density and it has very limited transport options, as have the eastern suburbs.

An inner circle of trams should rotate around and link to the eastern suburbs at Park Road through South Bank and Merivale Street. There should be new tunnels through the city to take the load off the current existing network. The existing Ipswich, Gold Coast and Cleveland lines could then rotate around

the loop, with the Gold Coast going straight through to the airport. The Cleveland line terminates at Ferny Grove currently and Ipswich terminates at Caboolture, but by utilising the loop configuration this would end.

So this is what the state Labor government should be doing, and this is what should be done with integration within the bill. It behoves a forward-thinking state government to get it right. To be fair, the minister seems to have followed the script given to her. Our futures are all collective. It must be strongly emphasised that if we get it right for Brisbane it will synergistically work for the state as well. If changes in the bill are a mixture of agreement to the less contentious issues, general agreement to the bulk of procedural issues and not enough flexibility on necessary changes needed for the future, then the bill is a failure. Maybe there is far too much status quo, with too much suburb after suburb hub and spoke sprawl included.

For those members who do wish for something greater for the state capital of Brisbane, it will not occur without some political pain for those on the government benches. Some of you are wondering what political pain that may be and fear the unknown. It is the very problem that confronts Labor and it is one that it alone created. It is that suburb after suburb blandness that drives the Labor machine, seat on seat constituency. It will be destroyed in part by the very things that are needed to resolve greater Brisbane's problems.

For those government members who are looking to the future, if you embrace those changes your party has an equal chance of claiming the future back as your own. Just how many amongst the factions have the courage to put the public interest ahead of their own—I suspect the answer is too few.