



Speech by

Fiona Simpson

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

Hansard Thursday, 10 June 2010

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL; REVENUE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Ms SIMPSON (Maroochydore—LNP) (2.55 pm): This Labor budget is highway robbery. A quarter of a billion dollars has been cut from road funding in this disgraceful Labor budget, while motorists are forking out a record amount in taxes and fees—three-quarters of a billion dollars more from petrol tax and registration hikes. Queensland motorists are now the heaviest taxed in Australia, paying an extra \$220 per person, thanks to the broken promises of Premier Bligh and Labor. This comes on top of higher water, power and toll charges, public transport fees and other costs, which add up to an extra \$1,200 per person. This is a heavy burden in increased costs of living for each household.

Motorists now pay another 9.1c a litre thanks to Labor, up to 23 per cent more for registration, 30 per cent more for tolls and as much as 40 per cent more for public transport. In the fairytale, Robin Hood stole from the rich and gave to the poor, but in Queensland Premier Bligh and her merry band of incompetent ministers are robbing from everyone and creating poverty. After they have put their sticky fingers in the pockets of hardworking Queenslanders to rip out their last dollar, Labor ministers turn around and sell off the house to pay the grocery bill. That is, in essence, Labor's dishonest sale of Queensland's assets.

I want to see this proud state restored to be the leader again in regards to being an investment attracter for jobs and providing an affordable cost of living and livability. Today, we have heard some of the plans the LNP has to achieve that: freezing rego in the first term; reclaiming the AAA credit rating that this government lost—government members should hang their heads in shame, as it is costing more than \$200 million every year in penalty interest rates to pay for the loss of that AAA rating; stopping the mining tax that their buddies in Canberra want to foist on this state which will take away jobs from Queensland; providing electricity relief for seniors; helping small businesses by paying them quicker under government contracts; having transparency of contracts; and lifting the freeze on infrastructure.

The LNP has a commitment to changing the government and making Queensland an affordable place to live again, with efficient services and where the focus is on government serving the people, not serving itself, as this government has done. Our key policy focus is to cut waste and ensure those precious dollars are spent efficiently and well for maximum service delivery.

Cutting road congestion requires a SEQIPP and a RIP which are properly scoped and which give greater certainty to the market and the public, and we are not seeing that. SEQIPP, which is the infrastructure plan to accompany the South East Queensland Regional Plan, and RIP, which is the roads plan for Queensland, no longer have the certainty that was so much prized, particularly with the RIP. I will come to that when we look at the cuts in spending on Main Roads and infrastructure.

Our focus is about bringing back professional engineers into government, into the department. We have a commitment to the professional public sector with a focus on value for the taxpayer and project delivery. We are not about more paper pushers; we are about getting more bitumen, more concrete and more outcomes.

Our focus is on making sure it is not just about more planning studies, which this government pours endless money into, but is also about actually building those plans. For example, this government has spent \$6 million just on the planning documents for CoastConnect, the bus priority measure for the Sunshine Coast. But has it taken a shovel, dug some ground and put some bitumen down or wired a bus priority measure? No! That \$6 million has been spent just on planning and there is no evidence of any outcomes. The padding of projects and delaying rather than delivering value for money is typical of this government, be it in relation to bus stations or other roads and priority measures. It is typical of how this government is running as a whole. Labor's plan is bigger debt, bigger deficits, selling Queensland's income-earning assets, waving goodbye to the AAA rating of government, new taxes and a higher cost of living. Certainly the government is all about waste and inefficiency.

I will present some more facts about this dishonest Labor budget. The only transport system Ministers Wallace and Nolan can be trusted with is a barrow. They are good at pushing their own barrow, but they are not good at delivering major projects that have been properly costed. Road charges are going up, but road spending is diving in this budget. But what's new? Last year the Transport and Main Roads portfolio underspent by \$200 million on what was promised in capital works. If we add in Queensland Rail and the port projects, the figure was down \$342 million on what the government promised to spend on vital infrastructure. This year Transport Minister Nolan has the audacity to announce an increase by taking the \$180 million in capital that her department did not spend last year and adding it to this year's capital budget. She announced it as if it were new money. It is not new money; it is rollover money.

However, the cheekiest bit of spin relates to boasts about increases in transport. When we look at the fine detail we find out that, yes, there is an extra \$30 million but what is it for? Guess what? It is to pay for the bloated budget of the dumbest smart card we are yet to see. We are yet to see it, but we are already seeing the bills for it. Queenslanders are already paying for the new Queensland driver's licence, which the budget papers initially costed at about \$20 million. It then crept up to more than \$80 million and—guess what?—this year it is more than \$112 million. Over the next few years motorists will be paying back even more as the cost of a five-year driver's licence more than doubles to over \$150. That is not value for money and that is what Queenslanders are sick of. The new smart licence was supposed to prevent criminals ripping people off, but we find that the government is doing it instead. The smart card bungle is a money-laundering exercise for an incompetent Labor government.

The government overspends on dud projects, underspends and delays the rollout of others, and provides a whole lot of uncertainty to the market at a time when the market wants to see certainty with infrastructure delivery and improved passenger and vehicle travel. The government says that it is borrowing in order to build. Let us look again at the budget papers. Last year \$17 billion was budgeted for infrastructure. How much has been budgeted for this year and the next few years? It is down to \$9 billion. We have record borrowing, record debt and a slash in the amount of money that is going into infrastructure. This government does not know how to manage the precious dollars of Queenslanders and it is not delivering what is vitally needed.

Let us look at some other projects that have slipped behind, despite this high-charging, high-debt state government. The capital spend on national and state highways is down \$213 million, or seven per cent. The capital spend on busways is down \$10 million, or nearly three per cent. Dealing with a number of other specific projects, last year the Gold Coast light rail project was actually underspent by \$90 million, the Ipswich Motorway by \$200 million and the Cardwell Range by \$16 million. Last year the Cooroy-Curra section, which I heard the minister going on about, was underspent by \$150 million and the Pacific Motorway additional lane between Springwood South and Daisy Hill was underspent by \$65 million. Last year the Calliope Range realignment with the Dawson Highway was underspent by \$26 million. All that funding was rolled over into the next year. They pat themselves on the back and pretend that it is new money, but in reality the whole budget is going down. There are many other vital regional and urban roads that desperately need investment, but there is no certainty in the program that the government is rolling out.

One thing that industry operators say to me, particularly small to medium sized operators, is that they want to be able to operate and deliver infrastructure in Queensland but the thing they hate the most is the uncertainty. The thing they hate the most is when a tap is turned on and suddenly it is turned off, and no-one can tell the truth about when there will be a steady stream of works. Once again the projects that the government is presenting do not deliver that.

Let us look at what happened with the Transport and Main Roads capital budget by region. In this budget, Brisbane is down by \$147 million, the Gold Coast by \$95 million, West Moreton by \$9 million, the central west by \$27 million, Mackay by \$152 million and the far north by \$23 million. Looking at the total capital budget by region, Brisbane is down by \$640 million, the Sunshine Coast falls by \$75 million, West Moreton is down by \$239 million, the south-west is down by \$72 million, the central west is down by \$43 million, Mackay falls by \$128 million, the northern region falls by \$47 million and the far north is down by \$295 million.

This story has been repeated. The government says one thing, but in reality we see cutbacks in areas where we need to see our economy stimulated and we need certainty of spend. Once again, government is borrowing record amounts and raising record taxes, but it is not going into the areas that really should be about driving the jobs in our regions throughout Queensland.

What about the sale of Queensland Rail and the delivery of freight certainty, let alone passenger certainty, into the future? The transport minister claims that she has her ear to the ground. Last year she was so tuned in that when I asked in this parliament on 21 May about the sale of Queensland Rail she said, 'Queensland Rail is not for sale.' Four days later in the newspaper, guess what was being flagged by the government? It was looking at the sale of Queensland Rail. If I knew that they were looking at the sale of Queensland Rail, the public sector was leaking like a sieve and the minister was so away with the fairies that she did not know about it, how on earth will the minister be in a position to protect the best interests of Queenslanders as her cabinet colleagues proceed with the sell-off? What is missing at the cabinet table is someone to protect the interests of this asset for our communities. This government is more focused on saving itself rather than looking at the long-term interests of Queensland, Queensland workers and communities that depend upon this vital Queensland asset to get products to market.

Increasingly we hear how under this minister's watch Queensland Rail is retracting regional services, even at the risk of jobs in her own electorate. This is appalling mismanagement. A lack of certainty about livestock trains is a real threat to Queensland abattoirs, including one in the minister's own electorate. Week by week we hear stories of how services have been pulled and how people have found that they cannot get stock to market. That is an absolute disgrace. More and more people are being forced to put their cattle onto trucks and transport them by road, bypassing abattoirs in Queensland. This minister has done nothing to address that issue, which has ramifications across the state.

In Bundaberg the brickworks is closing down. The operators blame this government and Queensland Rail, which has not had a policy to invest and ensure that transport infrastructure is able to grow and help our regional economies develop. That brickworks has been in operation for decades but it is closing, and many jobs will be lost because of a lack of certainty of access to affordable transport infrastructure, which it used to have with Queensland Rail.

In recent times we have heard nothing from this government about the cross-city rail. There is barely a whimper about it in the budget papers. If there truly is a focus on building for the future, the government should ensure not only that there is a plan to deliver projects in a timely way but also that the system has the capacity prior to that new infrastructure coming on. Nothing in these budget papers addresses the failure of service delivery here in South-East Queensland in relation to the Citytrain network.

There will be some upgrades of some stations but there is nothing in the budget papers to address the issue of the failure of trains to turn up on time. There is nothing to address the fact that there are increasing breakdowns. There is nothing to address the fact that more and more passengers are sick of the lack of certainty. That situation is going to get worse unless there is some intervention to deal with the ongoing maintenance of the rail network. The capacity issues are going to get worse before gridlock is reached in 2016.

The Cross River Rail project is supposed to address any future gridlock. The reality is that all the reports are warning about the need to address the lack of capacity in the system before then. There is nothing in this budget to do that. I fear that the gridlock that Queenslanders face on their roads due to a lack of planning by this government is increasingly more likely to occur on our rail system which is already struggling. That will not only have an impact on passengers who are wanting to get to work on time and know that their service is going to arrive on time but also an impact on freight which is one area that makes money for this state. We will see a lack of slots and a lack of certainty due to this government's failure to address capacity prior to bringing on the Cross River Rail project—a project which is behind schedule. It was first promised in 2005 that we would have a feasibility study done. That feasibility study has not been completed.

I want to address some issues with regard to my own electorate. I have mentioned before the CoastConnect project. CAMCOS and the multimodal corridor have now been rolled into one project by this government. We are yet to hear an announcement as to what it is doing with respect to those three projects.

CAMCOS was supposed to reach Caloundra by 2015. There has been no announcement from this government as to what has happened to that time frame. In good faith, we were using the existing programs of this government in terms of the forward planning for CAMCOS but it made no announcement that it had pulled the project time frame. It has gone silent on its investment schedule on this and on many other critical public transport infrastructure projects.

This is the issue. The government is ensuring that there is population growth in our regions but the infrastructure to make that growth sustainable has not kept pace. Now we see a \$17 billion infrastructure spend drop down to \$9 billion and no connection between growth and timely infrastructure.

It is time that the growth in Queensland's dollars into the future were increasingly set aside to address the debt that is ripping the guts out of our budget and to ensure that there is certainty when it comes to our infrastructure spend. This budget does not deliver certainty for our infrastructure spend. That is why we are seeing a situation where the growing deficit is undermining our ability to meet service delivery.

Why is this happening? The shadow Treasurer outlined a number of examples of waste. I will outline yet another one, that is, the Northern Pipeline Interconnector stage 2. That was proposed as a drought measure. Guess what? Is there a drought today? No. Is the government still building that pipeline? Yes. Why is it building a pipeline costing half a billion dollars which has the capacity to carry 200 megalitres of water a day when it will only at the most sometimes, maybe, possibly carry 20 megalitres a day.

This is typical of the way this government has been building infrastructure. It does not do its plans. It does not do its business studies. In fact, there was no business study for this particular project. The government turns around and says, 'We can justify it; there is a drought.' Guess what? There is no drought and yet it has committed itself to build a half a billion dollar pipeline. That money should have been spent on the Sunshine Coast Hospital. That money should have been spent on delivering timely infrastructure instead of being spent on a wasteful project. That pipeline was really a Traveston Dam pipeline. So we should add that to the other half a billion dollars that was wasted by this government on its fraudulent Traveston Dam project.

That is why we have seen such wasteful spending by this government. That kind of rot has got to stop. That has not changed under this government. It blatantly will not say sorry for the mistakes it has made and the costs that it has imposed on ordinary Queenslanders who are now some of the most heavily taxed in Australia. We see real examples where regions like mine are suffering. We have a 450 hospital bed shortfall. My region has more people in its catchment than Townsville and yet we have a situation where we are 450 hospital beds short. Still this government builds a pipeline to nowhere for half a billion dollars.

This government has no shame. It does not care for the people who are dying at the doors of our hospitals—even just a few months ago because there were no hospital beds available. This government has its priorities wrong. It is time for a change of government. It is time for a change in how government is done so that the precious dollars of Queenslanders are spent with care and due attention to ensure that people get value for money and no longer get ripped off by a government that has made this the highest taxing, lowest service delivery state in Australia.

Productivity is about getting value for Queenslanders. They deserve better. They deserve a change of government. They deserve a focus on ensuring that there is investment in this state that will create the jobs that they need, particularly in my area when it comes to tourism and construction. We need the expansion of job-creating industries.