




Speech By
Stephen Bennett

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

Record of Proceedings, 27 October 2015

BUILDING QUEENSLAND BILL

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (5.16 pm): In speaking to this legislation, it is important to remember the commitments being presented from those opposite in its so-called grand plan. They promise to create a new statutory body to ensure delivery of projects that have the greatest value and community benefits. There is a grand plan to change the name from the LNP's Projects Queensland to Building Queensland. There is nothing too hard in that. Those opposite announced that the same staff would be retained and rolled into this new bureaucracy, an independent statutory body.

Leading business analysts, BIS Shrapnel, forecasts that public spending on important infrastructure projects will flatline between now and 2018, ensuring 40,000 workers will move interstate into the progressive booming state of New South Wales. It is time Labor stops blaming everyone else and takes responsibility for its poor choices and lack of a plan. BIS Shrapnel's study has shown the value of government funded construction in the south-east has halved to \$4.1 billion this year and has no capacity to change over the next four years. When this is added to the private sector deserting Queensland under this government, we will see the workforce shrink from 230,000 to 190,000 by 2018.

When the Palaszczuk government started on this destructive agenda, we saw a 15 per cent drop in investment in this state during the March quarter alone. Queenslanders need the thousands of jobs on desperately needed projects to deal with the ever-increasing population boom. In the south-east corner we face a congestion crisis that is getting worse every day. However, sadly, we have the same rhetoric and examples of no plans or ideas to deal with new rail crossings and the great project that is the duplication of the Sunshine Coast rail line. This is a government with no ideas on a way forward. Those of us in regional Queensland can name a myriad of projects that need attention, whether it be upgrades to the Bruce Highway, duplication of the inland highway, roads to open up and secure regional Queensland's future or local projects in my electorate such as flood proofing and the replacement of numerous bridges. Even after a shambolic community cabinet, we had not one new project announced for our region. There is absolutely nothing for us in this plan.

While we see indecision and inaction from those opposite, it is important to reflect on history to prove that successive Labor governments do not have what it takes to deliver infrastructure for Queensland. I will give some examples. In 1997, under the Briztram project, the Howard government committed \$65 million towards the Borbidge government's \$230 million, 14-kilometre light railway network linking Fortitude Valley, Newstead, West End, the CBD and South Bank. What happened? The incoming Beattie-led Labor government scrapped it. In 1998, the Brisbane light rail project was rebadged, although it was three kilometres shorter. Briztram resurfaced under the Beattie Labor government but was dropped again when expressions of interest to build under Labor government management made it too expensive. In 1998, the local council first proposed the Gold Coast Light Rail project. Sixteen years on, under the LNP government the project became a reality, running 13 kilometres between Broadbeach and the University Hospital.

Opposition members interjected.

Mr BENNETT: We have all made claims, so I think that it is fair that we all continue down that path. In 2004, if we look at what happened under the then lord mayor of Brisbane with the construction of Legacy Way, the Clem7, the Go Between Bridge and Airportlink, we start to see a real compare and contrast. In 2007, we saw the \$250 million Smart City light rail project plan for a tram system to rival the system in Melbourne. It was to link South Brisbane with New Farm and Bowen Hills, with the possibility of expanding it to the busways. However, in an all too familiar occurrence, under the Beattie Labor government the project was shelved. In 2008, we saw more examples as the Bligh government unveiled plans for a \$14 billion grand idea for an underground four-lane rail network with underground stations at Springhill, the CBD, Newstead, the Ekka, Woolloongabba and West End. There was no way to fund it and no plan to deal with the still accumulating and massive debt legacy, which we still have today, although I suppose another \$14 billion was not to be worried about.

In 2010, the Cross River Rail Project was spoken of but it never eventuated, even after being described as 'the rail revolution' by the then Bligh government. The government said it was its No. 1 priority, but still could not make it happen. However, it did not stop there. In 2015, the government introduced another proposal, the Cross River Rail mark II. Again, Labor is talking up some sort of Cross River Rail Project, but it cannot quite work out what it is prepared to deliver. I suspect it will be like most of its other projects: a touch of failure. Not to be outdone, we see this government's fingers all over the Cedar Woods development at Upper Kedron and the Deputy Premier calling in and delaying renewable energy projects, wind farms and the solar energy project in the Burdekin, delaying many jobs for those desperate in that region.

It should not be that hard. We have a federal government wanting to fund infrastructure and we have a state government promising jobs—if only it was not Labor. We all agree we are facing a public transport crisis that can only be averted by massive infrastructure investment that would employ thousands of Queenslanders. Information from the Australian Infrastructure Audit says that without further investment, the cost of congestion across Brisbane will blow out to \$9.2 billion. The bad news continues. Recent reflections on the city's bus system reveal that sections of the \$2.5 billion busway network are already at or beyond capacity. It is clear that the inner-city section of the rail network will be unable to cope after many years of neglect. In releasing the audit, the then assistant federal minister for infrastructure, Jamie Briggs, said that Queensland is at risk of grinding to a halt under this government and that opportunities will flow over across the border as New South Wales is booming.

It is no wonder that we see and hear of the dark cloud of no confidence around Queensland, as there is a lack of information about what this government wants to do or how it is going to pay for any of it. We have a fair idea of what will happen. As is the Labor way, we will just borrow more with no regard for debt management and we will put up taxes. We can expect those opposite to put more hefty tax rises on hard working Queenslanders. Queenslanders are now expecting debt to rise dramatically, above \$90 billion.

With all the rhetoric being delivered in today's debate, I was wondering if anyone had heard Reserve Bank Governor Glenn Stevens recently reiterating that sustained investment for a number of projects was needed to improve capacity and help restore confidence in the economy. He also raised the state's debt position, highlighting the inability to continue to borrow without significant cuts to expenditure, otherwise we are on target for future credit rating downgrades. Of course we can expect cynicism from the industry when we hear this government talking about planning. We have seen failures of so-called independent authorities deciding on future projects. A good example is the failed federal Labor government's disastrous Infrastructure Australia plan. Colleagues will remember the announcement, just before an election, of the Redcliffe rail project, which is another project that never stacked up but conveniently travelled through some marginal Labor electorates.