




Speech By
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CROSS RIVER RAIL DELIVERY AUTHORITY BILL

 **Ms SIMPSON** (Maroochydore—LNP) (9.43 pm): I rise to speak to the Cross River Rail Delivery Authority Bill 2016. This bill comes from a Labor government that, according to now Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk, had a Cross River Rail project that was, allegedly, shovel-ready in 2013. I would say that it is a Tonka toy shovel that the government was modelling this project on, because there was not a shovel-ready project that had a properly constituted funding plan and delivery plan. This is typical of what we see with a Labor government that is very good at communication strategies based on glossy brochures, but when you dig a bit deeper—not into the sandpits where the Tonka toys are but in the real world where people who build major infrastructure exist and people who know what it takes to responsibly finance and manage the projects exist—you see that this government has never had a project that is properly scoped and managed. I will talk a little bit more about what real project delivery looks like.

This is a government that is more about being Tonka toy ready than it is about having a real rail plan. After all, it is a rail plan with no trains. I recall that, in some of Labor's previous expansion plans, it also planned trains without seats. This Labor government's recent Redcliffe rail experience has resulted in up to 200 fewer services across South-East Queensland because it simply did not plan the rollout of that network to ensure that it had tracks and trains with drivers.

That gives me no confidence that this Labor government will be able to deliver a project of the magnitude of Cross River Rail—not the one that it has been talking about. After nearly two years in government, all we have seen is more studies, more glossy brochures and more announcements about reviews but no tangible progress. Cross River Rail is a huge project. The capital costs alone are expected to be \$5.4 billion, but that does not include the cost of the trains, the auxiliary station works or operational costs, which means that the total cost of the project could exceed \$16 billion—and it is totally unfunded. So far, all we have seen is funding to set up—wait for it—a new bureaucracy. That is something that this government excels at. In its own words, it really has a mandate to set up bureaucracies but not to build the infrastructure that turns the wheels of industry.

In the last budget, this Labor government committed funding towards the proposed delivery model. Prior to that the government had announced \$800 million in in-principle funding for the Cross River Rail project from a \$1.5 billion infrastructure fund. It is not clear what conditions were on this in-principle funding allocation, but if Labor were serious about this project it would have included the funding in the 2016-17 budget.

I thank the Turnbull government for honouring its election promise and committing \$10 million towards the delivery authority, but there is clearly a large financial hole in the state government's budget that needs to be filled to commence this project. During the five years that it would take to build this project, it would consume around 11 per cent of the average annual capital budget. I will say that again: during the five years that it will take to build this project, it would consume around 11 per cent of the average annual capital budget. That would significantly reduce the government's ability to provide other infrastructure projects.

It is important to talk about these issues, because I and the other LNP members support additional rail capacity to address the bottlenecks in the network. We have seen too much of a Labor government that says, 'We've got a problem; we'll throw money at it. Don't ask the nasty questions about how it is going to be funded in a way that it does not suck the guts out of all the other infrastructure projects, because we need it.'

We will never forget what occurred with the disaster of the water grid in this state. We are still paying for that absolutely appallingly mismanaged water grid.

Mr Seeney: \$9 billion.

Ms SIMPSON: That was a \$9 billion project. That is debt that has hung around the neck of every Queenslander. It is an albatross that has hung around the necks of subsequent governments. It was appallingly mismanaged, because there was a disaster committed under Labor that allowed a situation where they did not progressively build water infrastructure. When they had a need, they threw so much money at it in a hurry, with no business plans and no attention as to how that money would be spent. There was a need, so the former Labor government threw money at it and they did it so badly that Queenslanders are still paying off that debt in Queensland today.

We have a right and a need to ask questions about how this money is going to be spent on Cross River Rail, because this Labor government and its predecessors have form. It is not good form, because we are paying the cost of that today. Where is the extra money going to come from? As we know from the water grid, which is now debt that is languishing against the state budget and is, in fact, causing great difficulties in ensuring that forward infrastructure programs are properly rolled out, we must get value for money. We must ask those tough questions. There must be transparency in regard to infrastructure project delivery. There must be no more of this silly situation where Labor members laugh it off and say it does not matter. We want to see the business plans. We want to see them scrutinised. We want to see that there is integrity in the way that infrastructure is delivered.

In my mind it is a form of corruption when taxpayers money is taken and there is a failure to apply a standard of accountability by making it transparent to parliament and the people. What we see with this Cross River Rail project, in the way that Labor is bringing it forward, is unfortunately more than just a shadow of what happened with the water grid. In fact, it is a large and looming black hole—in fact, a sinkhole—that lies underneath the future budgets of this state. It must be opened up to a process that allows us to scrutinise how that money is spent.

From the leaked summary of the business plan that has not been released to the public we see that there has been mooted a congestion tax to be paid by motorists of about \$1.2 billion; a registration levy, paid by Queensland motorists, who are already paying huge rego increases thanks to the failure of Labor to plan, of \$1.22 billion; land tax on nearby property owners of \$1 billion; a public transport infrastructure tax on property owners of \$2.6 billion; a ticket surcharge paid by public transport users of \$1.08 billion; and higher rates on nearby property owners of \$285 million. Queenslanders have a right to know, but Labor has kept them in the dark about the true cost of Cross River Rail. Who will pay for it? They will. The LNP believes Queenslanders have a right to know how they will be slugged by the new taxes and charges that this government is trying to keep under wraps.

I support the amendments that my colleague the Deputy Leader of the Opposition is putting forward to bring about some integrity in relation to this matter under the Right to Information Act by allowing issues to be brought into the open. We must see full business cases brought forward rather than this government hiding behind commercial-in-confidence. Commercial-in-confidence my foot! It is just another example of a government that does not want to be open and accountable in how this is going to be funded.

This is another example of the typical lack of transparency from a Labor government that resulted in invoice tendering and the absolutely abhorrent blowout of the cost of the water grid in Queensland that we are all paying for today. We have seen examples of infrastructure costs blowing out under Labor due to poor planning and being beholden to construction unions that also do not want to be accountable and open to scrutiny. The business case should be released. We should be able to see the way this project is put together. Most of all, we should see what the plan is to fund it rather than have it hidden under the carpet.

This bill seeks to exempt the proposed Cross River Rail Delivery Authority from the Right to Information Act. This is a totally unacceptable avoidance of public scrutiny. I support the proposed amendments which will ensure that the Cross River Rail Delivery Authority is not an exempt entity from the Right to Information Act. The LNP remains supportive of additional rail capacity to unlock the rail network, but it must be affordable, it must be value for money and it must not be an albatross around the neck of every other infrastructure project in this state. In my own area we need to see not only rail lines extended but also roads.

(Time expired)