




Speech By
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**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL; DUTIES AND
OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (6.01 pm): I rise to talk to the budget. I will make a couple of key points about the Transport portfolio while the minister is in the chamber. We have been waiting for a review of public transport in Toowoomba. I think the minister has been elected for about 18 months. I am wondering how long the review might take. We look forward to receiving the results of that review. The simple fact is that public transport in Toowoomba is absolutely atrocious. No amount of other people's money—no matter how much you might want to take off them—will be able to solve the problem without a decent plan. I am looking forward to seeing the plan. It should be a fantastic plan because it has taken a very long time for the plan to be drawn up.

There are a couple of other areas in relation to which the minister needs to answer a few questions. The first is the great rail rip-off that is going on in and around Toowoomba. We have been waiting for a long time, as has everybody to the west of us, to be able to take agricultural containers down the 150-year-old range crossing. Last year we were quite excited because \$58 million was allocated in the Capital Statement. Some of that money was spent. The figures are particularly interesting. When you look at the amount of money that was spent in 2015-16 and you update that with the total amount that has been spent on the project you see that the minister has achieved something absolutely remarkable. He has managed to get a negative spend of \$358,000 on the project. He has actually managed to reduce the amount of money they spent last year with the amount of money they spent this year. I will be interested to understand where the negative amount of \$358,000 comes from.

This is a productivity piece of infrastructure. We talk about jobs and we talk about infrastructure. I hear a lot of rhetoric from those on the other side of the chamber, but on the ground there is not a great deal of action. Last year's Capital Statement said that \$58 million would be spent on this project, and this year's Capital Statement says that the total project is \$32 million. So \$24 million has gone walkabout. \$24 million has been ripped from the program that was allocated in last year's budget. The project was much trumpeted. Forms were put out in my area telling everybody how much money was going to be spent. We have now found that \$24 million has been pulled out of it and nothing was spent. Last year I heard all of the rhetoric: 'We are going to invest in infrastructure. There will be jobs on the ground for everybody on the Darling Downs. Won't it be fantastic?' In fact, they did not invest anything. They actually invested negative \$358,000 and reduced the total spend by \$24 million. It is very interesting accounting.

Why do we need these tunnels? One train with agricultural containers on it takes 85 trucks off the road. We talk about congestion in Brisbane. The people of Brisbane have a wonderful public transport system that I am sure one day—Toowoomba is in the south-east corner when it is being taxed but out of the south-east corner when it is a service delivery area—will extend all the way to Toowoomba. It will obviously not be on the current rail line, because it takes about 4½ hours, but eventually it will. Wouldn't the people in the south-east corner like to see some trains coming down the

range from Toowoomba and the Darling Downs, with each one of them taking 85 trucks off Ipswich Road as they are trying to get to port; each one of them taking 85 trucks off the Gateway, trying to get around to the port; each one of them taking 85 trucks off the Warrego Highway. That flows on to maintenance, all of the work and investment that is needed. Labor could have done this by spending the money that it trumpeted it would spend last year but did not.

I want to talk about some other transport matters. I hope that the minister listens to what I am saying. The Toowoomba Second Range Crossing—1,800 jobs—is a project that I and the LNP team fought to have funded and delivered into our area to make sure local people got the jobs. What do we find now as this plan is developing? We find that the water will now be able to be brought out directly, saving about \$50 million, but it might affect other people's allocations. We find that five sets of traffic lights will be put out on the Warrego Highway, when we are trying to reduce the 18 traffic lights it takes to get through town.

There is all this talk about infrastructure again. Bear in mind that \$24 million has been taken off the rail project and a negative amount was spent last year. Some money was spent last year on the range crossing. That was good. We spent \$67.5 million. Unfortunately, the amount allocated in the Capital Statement to be spent last year was \$172 million. People in my electorate have been wondering where all the jobs on the range crossing are. They have been wondering where they have all gone to. Everybody is saying, 'There is supposed to be all these jobs. What is happening? I do not see anything happening. I do not see anything at all going on.' The government has the money. The government allocated the money in the Capital Statement 2015-16. I encourage people to go to the page and check it out. I was very excited last year when I saw it. I think I even offered congratulations that the money was finally being spent. Unfortunately, the shortfall in the actual spend is \$104 million. Is this how we create a surplus? We talk about what we are going to spend and then we do not spend it?

Between those two projects, \$120 million allocated in last year's Capital Statement was not spent when it was supposed to have been spent. To me that is a real shame, because there are people in Toowoomba who are unemployed and have the qualifications. In fact, two civil engineers live next door to me. One has gone north for work and the other has gone to New South Wales. In New South Wales they are spending some of the money they have to build some infrastructure—rather than just putting out brochures saying that they are going to spend the money and then not spending the money.

We find ourselves about \$128 million short, just in my little tiny footprint. This affects local people who are looking for jobs. They are looking for opportunities to get work. There are apprentices looking for opportunities to get an apprenticeship. Suddenly, hundreds of millions of dollars has been dragged back to the centre to try to scrape through some artificial surplus. At least the money in the range is still there to be spent in the future.

Mr Russo: Well, that should make you happy.

Mr WATTS: It does make me happy because that was the deal that was signed by us with the federal government, so unfortunately those opposite cannot get out of it because our government signed that deal. It does make me happy that they will spend the federal government's money eventually. Unfortunately, it would be nice to do it now. This is a frozen-at-the-wheel government: lots of talk, a few brochures, some pretty things saying that there are going to be all these jobs and everything else, but nothing is actually happening.

I turn now to Highfields State School. I was very proud to play my part in getting that school built. It was something that was announced when I was a candidate in 2008 running for the 2009 election. Kerry Shine, who was a good local member, is a very clever politician. A week after we announced it and after him being elected for eight years, guess what he did? He announced that he would build it too and he committed some money, yet in his next three years unfortunately he did not allocate one dollar to acquiring it and getting the construction underway. The previous government purchased the land but there was nothing to build the school. We allocated the money to build the school, stage 1 was built and the school is now oversubscribed by what was expected by the department. Interestingly enough, for big year groups coming through, last year it was allocated \$14.5 million in the 2015-16 Capital Statement. That is what was allocated last year for stage 2, and again I congratulated the minister on allocating that money. Unfortunately, we find that this year it has been cut back by \$5 million. School enrolments are higher than were expected and the design of the school was originally done in three phases, but we now find that \$5 million has been ripped out of it. While there are these raids and these rip-offs and these writedowns going on, what we find—

An honourable member interjected.

Mr WATTS: I am happy to take the interjection, because what we find is that \$24 million has been ripped out of the rail—that is the first one—\$100 million has been ripped out of the range crossing and \$5 million has been ripped off the kids at Highfields and their families. It is a great school and I really

hope we do not start doing second-rate stuff because someone is trying to penny pinch to get a surplus. Unfortunately, \$5 million is a third of the budget and it has gone straight out of the school. That is a real shame because the kids at Wilsonton did not get anything at all. I heard the member for Morayfield talk about how he was really pleased to get some money to enclose one of the school halls in his electorate, and I commend him for getting that money to enclose it. At least they had a cover to start with! I understand that the school in his electorate would probably have slightly different temperatures from Toowoomba in the middle of winter, but it will be nice because they will be cosy and warm in his electorate and in Toowoomba they will be standing outside!

Mr Power interjected.

Mr WATTS: I cannot hear the interjection from the member for Logan.

Mr Costigan: You're not missing much!

Mr WATTS: No, but I will take that interjection. If he wants to come up the front a bit, I am happy to take the interjections, because whatever it is he is talking about he is talking through his hat, and we all know that.

I am really keen to analyse the two brochures that were put out—the one from the budget last year relating to the Darling Downs and the one from the budget this year relating to the Darling Downs. What we find is that Labor is going so well in my area given that dwellings sold were at 6,088 in 2015-16 and under the stewardship of this government—it has really ramped it up—it is now 5,441, a drop of 647 houses. If you are a tradie in my area—if you are trying to build new houses or if you are looking for a new house—unfortunately, there are fewer around. There is less construction going on under the stewardship of this government. It had been going up previously, but it is going down now. In terms of brand-new builds—the first one was the dwellings sold and this one is the brand-new builds—what we find is that last year there were 1,922. They were obviously still coming off a bit of a boom from when the LNP was in government, because in 2016-17 we find that 1,576 residential dwellings have been approved for construction. That is only down by 346—another wonderful achievement!

Even better than that was the prediction of population growth. No wonder those opposite do not want to spend any money on infrastructure in Toowoomba. It would appear that by their own numbers people have already said, 'If you're not going to spend any money up there, we probably can't live there. We'll have to come and crowd in the south-east corner with everybody else,' because in one year we have managed to drop the predicted population by 20,000 people. By 2036 it will have dropped by 20,000 people. If this government stays in power, we should be able to buy a house really cheaply in Toowoomba because I do not think that by 2036, if we lose 20,000 people a year, there will be many people left living there at all! Again, this government is frozen at the wheel. It has all of these brochures and everything else about what is going to happen and how wonderful it is going to be and where it is going to spend the money, but what actually happens? Not very much on the ground at all.

What we find on the ground is that the people I represent are saying, 'Trevor, where are the jobs? I thought they were going to employ locally. Where are they?' I have been asking questions on notice—members can check the record here in the parliament—about what is a local, where are the jobs, what is going on, what is the communication plan, what is happening. We know what is happening now that we see it in the budget. What is happening is that \$100 million is being shuffled away from the Darling Downs and the Toowoomba second range crossing to plug some black hole that exists somewhere else—\$100 million ripped out of that.

With regard to dropping \$24 million from rail, what the people really need with the rail network is some certainty, because the rail network is in desperate need of investment and there is a great opportunity at Charlton to invest in putting stuff on rail. Each train would take 85 trucks off the road, as we have said. There is 150-year-old infrastructure that needs just a little bit of help. The money was allocated and everybody agreed that it was a good idea, but absolutely nothing happened apart from we managed to get a negative spend.

These businesses need to at least know that what is in the Capital Statement this year will get spent this year, so I ask the minister to put out some kind of guarantee. We are talking about people who want to invest hundreds of millions of dollars to try to move freight in this nation. They need some confidence from the minister that what he said is going to happen will happen and that next year we will not be back here with another \$24 million ripped out of the \$32 million that he has allocated this year and there is nothing much happening on the ground. They need some confidence. It is the same with the second range crossing. Businesses need to know that this is going to open on time, yet it is going to be hard to get it open on time if we do not start spending some money on it—money that was allocated but then has been ripped back out of it—soon.

There are a couple of the things that are worrying me in my area. There is the Wilsonton campus hall. If ever there were something that pained me on election night, I have to say that probably the most disappointing thing for me was knowing that I had won my seat but this government was not going to help the kids out at Wilsonton.

Mr Power interjected.

Mr WATTS: I hear the member for Logan squawking away up the back there. Unfortunately, the people of Wilsonton put their faith in Labor. They were looking for Labor to deliver for them and they have been abandoned—completely abandoned. Their children are at a school that has around about 800 kids and they are standing outside. There is not even enough area to protect them from the rain.

Let me go through a couple of other things. We have all seen the Captain Risky ads on TV. What they are really trying to say with those Captain Risky ads is that if you moderate your risk you will pay a lesser premium. I know that is a really difficult concept, but if you tune in and watch the commercials you will start to get some understanding of it. We had a system here to provide for the future of our public servants and their retirement that was second to none in the country. What do we find? This Treasurer, much like the Captain Risky guy in the ads, is throwing caution to the wind and is squandering that money, which will inevitably lead to higher rates of interest being paid as people quantify the risk of the government of Queensland borrowing more money. The reason the credit rating is important is that we end up giving less money to merchant banks. Those members opposite need to try to understand what they are putting at risk. We do not need any magic tricks or anything else from the Treasurer. We need a sensible budget that delivers.

What happens if something goes wrong? There was a nickel refinery up north that was travelling really well. People were getting a Mercedes bought for them. People were getting trips overseas. Everything was wonderful and fantastic. Then what happened? When there was a bit of a crisis, all the gloss came off and we found that people could not get their entitlements because the provision for their entitlements had been squandered. Some people got a Mercedes, some people got trips to Fiji—everybody had a good time—but when pressure came on the nickel refinery, their entitlements had been squandered.

Fortunately, we know that, under legislation, these defined benefits will be paid. Those opposite need to think about who is going to pay those benefits if we encounter a crisis and they have squandered the money like Clive Palmer did on Mercedes cars and trips overseas. The people who will pay the benefits will be their children and their grandchildren. Their taxes will have to go up—

Mr Russo: Rubbish!

Mr WATTS: Mark my words, after a crisis, the member for Sunnybank will come into this place and know that he has made his children poorer by spending their money. Not only were there dodgy growth predictions in the budget, but \$3.4 billion was taken out of public servants' long service leave allocation, \$4 billion was taken out of the superannuation fund for public servants, \$4 billion in debt was switched from the government to the GOCs, and the government let itself off from paying \$2 billion in superannuation. That is \$13.4 billion. What is the surplus this year? Is there a \$13.4 billion surplus? This is money that has been taken. This is money that someone has to pay back at some point. This is not some pretend money. Our children will have to pay back this money. I implore members not to support this budget.

(Time expired)