




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR BONNEY

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**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL; REVENUE
AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr O'CONNOR** (Bonney—LNP) (3.09 pm): The Palaszczuk government has presented what they say is a budget 'unashamedly focused on our regions'. My part of the world, the Gold Coast, is a region with the state's second largest city and it has not seen any of that focus. Labor has decided not to focus on building more light rail. It has decided not to focus on building the Coomera Connector, or second M1, with no new money and even just the planning for that road pushed out until 2023. QTRIP shows that it has stretched out \$20 million in planning funding over five budgets. I am not an engineer, but I could go back to university for those five years and get an engineering degree and I still would not be guaranteed a job on the project at the end because Labor does not have any commitment to build this road.

There are very few new projects in the budget for the Gold Coast. Most of them had been previously announced, and this year's budget just provided the next piece of the funding. Some of the M1 projects, for example, were announced way back in 2016. If you look at the glossy pamphlet outlining what this budget provides for the Gold Coast, you see that 18 of the 33 initiatives have been copied and pasted from last year's pamphlet. I have circled them, and I will table that. I already have last year's copy, so I probably do not need this year's.

Tabled paper: Queensland Budget 2019-20: Regional Action Plan—Backing jobs for the Gold Coast, with annotations [1014](#).

That is not good enough for a city that is growing at a rate far higher than the average growth of our state. It needs infrastructure, better health services, more police, education and transport funding. The Gold Coast needs this investment to ensure the growth that it is experiencing is sustainable.

The lack of any funding for light rail was a complete shock to me. This project has had the detailed business case completed for over six months and it is ready to get started. We could have at least had funding to do the final planning or engineering work. I was sure that the transport minister was going to put forward a purposely lower amount of funding and then do what he always does and blame the federal government. He was not even capable of that. He is too busy firing off nasty tweets from the 'tower of power' up here in Brisbane.

This government makes a habit of blaming the federal government for its own inadequacies. It loves to selectively pick projects from other states where the funding split was more favourable to that particular state government. When it comes to light rail, that does not stack up. In Canberra they have just opened their light rail network. They built that with a 16 per cent funding commitment from the federal government, which is the same percentage on offer for the Gold Coast Light Rail Stage 3A. In New South Wales they have rolled out a whopping \$4.2 billion in light rail projects—perhaps that is a little higher because of some of the issues they have had. How much did the federal government contribute to those projects? It put in zero—nothing. That state government completely went it alone because it knew that it needed to build that infrastructure and it got it done.

With \$112 million provided by the Morrison government and \$98 million from the City of Gold Coast for Light Rail Stage 3A, we are already getting more funding from other levels of government than for any other light rail project in the nation. We have two levels of government already stumping up for this project, but the level of government that is responsible has not provided a single cent. Just like the reannouncement of old projects, it is another example of the government covering up the fact that it has no money.

One intersection I have been fighting for in my area to upgrade since before I was elected is at Olsen Avenue and Brisbane Road near Harbour Town. With the help of \$5 million from the federal government, the upgrade has now been funded and brought forward by a couple of years.

Further along Brisbane Road I was glad to see money set aside in 2020-21 for upgrades to Pine Ridge Road, Captain Cook Drive and Brisbane Road, although it is only for planning. I would have hoped for more funding to partner better with council who are upgrading their local roads in that section. This intersection causes daily headaches for businesses in the industrial hub along that stretch and for schoolkids from Coombabah State High School, with almost 60,000 cars going through that intersection every day. I know my good friend the member for Broadwater's constituents would go through that intersection as well.

Moving on from infrastructure, whilst I support the move to a new public transport ticketing system, time after time people tell me that it is the cost that is stopping them from using public transport more, especially when it costs over \$10 each way to get to Brisbane.

The Arundel police hub was a welcome addition in last year's budget. Any extra police resources given to the Gold Coast are, whilst rare under this government, much needed and warmly received. With \$2.4 million budgeted for 2018-19, I was hoping to see some construction start late last year after the land was purchased at the end of 2017, but we have only just started to see the site take shape—by that I mean we have some fences up and an excavator. Like many other empty blocks in my electorate, people are slowly waiting for this important facility to be built. I sincerely hope that the weather holds out so that we can have it finished by December.

With only \$0.7 million spent on this project in the last year, which is less than a third of what was budgeted, it is just one of a number of projects in my electorate that the government is not delivering on. On 1 August last year, the Southport Youth Foyer was announced, with funding from a year ago in the previous budget. Construction was meant to start in early 2019, with it opening later this year. Months of secrecy surrounded the site of the proposed foyer, with the minister refusing to tell me where it was. Finally, in October we had the answer. What has happened since? Absolutely nothing. The site is still untouched. There is not even a mention of the project in this year's budget. I sincerely hope that this project has not been dropped because our young people, especially those facing homelessness and trying to get ahead in life, deserve every bit of help they can get. This project has been mismanaged and we are left with an empty block of land in Southport.

I have similar fears for the Gold Coast Health and Knowledge Precinct at the old Commonwealth Games Village. I have spoken in this House before about my concerns with its progress.

Honourable members interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Pugh): Order, members! Member for Broadwater, you are not in your seat. If you are going to interject you will need to move, but there will be no cross-chamber chatter.

Mr O'CONNOR: I do not have confidence in the ability of this government and in particular in the minister responsible to attract tenants to the state land within the Gold Coast Health and Knowledge Precinct. Over a year on from the Commonwealth Games, it is concerning that the only property it has an agreement over is from Griffith University across the road. The Gold Coast is crying out for a diversification of industry, and this is a perfect spot for it—a hub of innovation, science and research; a place where new technologies are developed and new ideas come to fruition; and a place where the companies of tomorrow can find their home. What we currently have is a very large space of bitumen or, in some cases, dirt—

Mr Dick interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Minister Dick, the member for Bonney has the call.

Mr O'CONNOR:—empty blocks for which the minister responsible, when approached about allowing it to be used in the short term for a different purpose—to host NightQuarter—did not even bother to respond to a letter that I wrote to him. I was pleased to see that Labor has followed suit and come to the table with the LNP's policy on payroll tax.

Mr Dick interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Minister Dick, if I have to mention your name again you will be warned.

Mr O'CONNOR: It gives business the ability to employ more staff and to grow their business. Our economy will only grow stronger if our small and medium businesses are stronger, although relief like this does not make up for the many other tax hits imposed by Labor.

My electorate has the highest unemployment rate on the Gold Coast. Last year we saw the cuts to the Back to Work program for our city. It hit some of my constituents and businesses hard. Those who had planned to participate in the program suddenly could not. Those business owners who wanted to expand could not.

I am proud to represent the Gold Coast University Hospital and I will always fight for it to be properly resourced. This government can only dream of matching the rates of increase in funding we saw under the previous LNP administration, including a 16.43 per cent budget growth in 2013-14 and a 10.37 per cent budget growth in 2014-15. This government's funding increase barely got out of single digits. Recent statistics show GCUH is at capacity and struggling to keep up with the demand—43 per cent of category 2 patients are not seen on time and a huge 53 per cent of category 3 patients are not seen within the appropriate time.

I have met many of the hardworking doctors and nurses at Gold Coast University Hospital, and I am proud to call some of them friends. They are passionate about their patients and the care they provide. They want to see the best outcomes for those they look after, but they can only do what is humanly possible. They cannot keep up with the demand and they need more support.

Across Queensland no mental health targets were met. The crisis we face is not currently being solved. That is why I am pleased to see funding in the budget to help prevent suicide. The stories of suicide from around the country are alarming. From the young to the very old, it is a crisis we cannot ignore. If someone ends their life abruptly through suicide we know they have found themselves in the depths of despair, in a dark place they feel there is no escape from. For that person it can seem like there is no hope, but we need to provide them with hope. We need to give them hope that their life can get better. That includes services to care for them, to find the right help and to seek intervention to show them that life is worth living.

The reality of suicide is that it impacts far more people than the individual. The friends and families of those who have committed suicide are left broken and changed forever. They will always question and forever despair, and they will always seek the closure they are unlikely to get. This money is much needed, and my hope is that it will lead to fewer suicides and more help for those who feel they are alone. The Beyond Blue Way Back program gives support to those who have attempted suicide. It gives one-on-one non-clinical care and practical support people can relate to. This support significantly lowers the risk of these people making suicide attempts in the future. The mental health issues that our state faces are too large to ignore.

I have some standout schools in my electorate as well. Places in them are sought after and the students are excelling. Southport State High School was in the top five state schools for OP results last year. It is truly an outstanding school led by Nigel Hughes and his committed team of staff. The new building underway will increase that school's capacity and allow for the growth suburbs in my electorate desperately need. However, the other schools in Bonney have unfortunately been neglected. Labrador State School will turn 100 in 2021. Its current site is almost 70 years old. That school is desperate for upgrades, particularly a new hall, which needs to be brought up to speed with the newer schools being developed across our city, but there is nothing for that in this budget.

Musgrave Hill State School is over 50 years old and it needs upgrades to buildings, but it also received nothing in this budget. Arundel State School, which is 25 years old, has a shorter history, but it is one full of temporary buildings that were brought there on the back of a truck. Its original capacity has been far exceeded, with temporary demountables now housing many students, including all of the senior students, in four classrooms up the back. Through the Department of Education Arundel State School is paying \$15,000 to the Gold Coast City Council each year for land where two demountables that hold two classrooms currently sit. This is not a sustainable situation. Either the minister needs to renegotiate with the council and have the land rezoned to the school, or a larger permanent structure should be built on state land.

The LNP's commitment to air-condition every state school still stands. Whilst the government may mock that, our constituents do not. For those schools that have been air-conditioned by their P&Cs, their parents and teachers are eternally grateful. Teachers have said how much of a difference it makes in their teaching day with hours not lost as a result of the heat and kids being able to concentrate much more. Parents from outside of the catchment are trying to get their kids into schools based on whether

they have air conditioning or not. For those schools that do not, I have parents, grandparents and other concerned residents reaching out regularly to ask what can be done. Yes, it is a big cost, but the education of our kids is important. This move by the Liberal National Party to ensure their success is vital for our future.

I was also thrilled to see the extension of funding to the early childhood development program. Musgrave Hill State School in my electorate has one of these programs and it is much loved by our community. Last June I was asked to visit and see the work they do. I could immediately see the value it has, particularly in a preventative sense. After asking the minister about this program last year and hearing that it was guaranteed until at least 2020, I am glad the minister has seen the valuable work of this program and extended the funding over four years. The kids that attend our Musgrave Hill program enter an amazing supportive environment each day. I shared the news on Tuesday and received many messages of support. One woman commented—

The ECDP at Musgrave Hill State School had a massive positive impact on my son. If it wasn't for their guidance I would have been lost. ECDP is vital, as the earlier the intervention, specifically with children with ASD, the better ... I cannot thank Michelle and Gloria from ECDP Musgrave Hill enough for their work with my son.

Although that is one small victory, overall this budget lacks understanding and care for the Gold Coast region. It fails to adequately provide for its current population, let alone the growth it is experiencing. The budget fails on infrastructure, education, business, health and front-line services. I will keep doing what I can to fight for fairer outcomes for the electorate of Bonney and provide our community with what they need for the growth we are experiencing.