




Speech By
Hon. Mark Bailey

MEMBER FOR MILLER

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APPROPRIATION (COVID-19) BILL

 **Hon. MC BAILEY** (Miller—ALP) (Minister for Transport and Main Roads) (4.23 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Appropriation (COVID-19) Bill 2020. As is well known, the health emergency has been one of the greatest challenges that I have seen in my lifetime. To this point, it has been managed well in Queensland because we acted early and we acted swiftly on health authority advice. Where we are at the moment is that we have had two days of zero positive infections identified in 24 hours in the last three days. Let us hope that there are many more of them. That does not mean that this challenge is anything other than what it has been since it was identified.

Despite the fact that we are doing much better on the health front than we feared early on, to be quite frank, there was a real concern about what it meant and what it might mean for the lives of Queenslanders. Queenslanders and Australians have lost their lives, but there have been a lot less than we expected. My heart certainly goes out to all those who have been affected and to all those who are fighting the virus. It is a terrible thing. What comes with the health challenge is also the economic challenge. That is what this bill is about.

We acted early—as early as late January—in Queensland. To give you an idea, we acted six weeks before the United States. They now have 40,000 deaths and growing. Some of their infection rates are starting to slow, which is obviously welcome. What we have seen in other countries has been horrific. So far it has been limited in our state and in our country, but we have to keep at it. We have to keep taking the health advice and we have to deal with the economic consequences that come with that.

We have a long way to go, but I am confident that we can continue to meet the challenges, as we have been doing over the last couple of months, with very strong leadership in Queensland from the Premier, the Deputy Premier and Minister for Health. I look forward to continuing to work with them on those challenges to protect Queenslanders and also to work our way through uncharted territory in terms of the economy.

This bill is necessary to ensure that the Palaszczuk government's \$4 billion COVID-19 relief package is approved and ready to go. The bill enables the government to fund the critical health services that Queenslanders rely on. That includes provision for \$300 million in cost-of-living relief, including the \$200 credit for all 2.1 million households in Queensland to offset the cost of water and electricity; and the \$2.5 billion commitment for measures including payroll tax relief, relief for businesses renting from government premise, and a worker displacement program to help unemployed people get jobs in sectors that are facing shortages. We saw an initial \$27.25 million package to assist local government, business and industry with resilience and recovery.

While we have brought forward this package to fund critical health services and support families, workers and business, we are also focused on other critical services like the delivery of road and transport infrastructure. That is absolutely critical to our economy. It has never been more important that we continue to deliver the Palaszczuk government's record \$23 billion road and transport investment program because that investment continues to mean jobs. That means much needed

incomes for Queenslanders and jobs for Queenslanders at a time when every job is essential for our economic wellbeing. Our record program of investment supports over 21,500 jobs across the life of the program here in our state.

Even though these are tough times, everyone is taking precautions and staying at home, and I would like to thank Queenslanders for their incredible cooperation. A lot of people have made a lot of sacrifices and have made commitments to look out for vulnerable people in their community. I think all members would know of many examples of people doing those sorts of things. It is the best in people that has been coming out. I would like to thank all those Queenslanders who have done exactly that and continue to do that and make the sacrifices needed to save the lives of other people, particularly our vulnerable members of the community.

The reduced traffic we are seeing on our roads as a result has meant that we have been able to do more work on our road and transport sites than we otherwise would have. With less traffic and disruption, we are seeing road-building crews accelerating their progress to take advantage of the low volumes. Our investment can be seen at work right now on projects right across Queensland, particularly in regional Queensland. In North Queensland, we have the \$514 million Bruce Highway port and river flood plain project upgrade at Giru, 40 kilometres south of Townsville, supporting 544 jobs. We also have the Townsville Ring Road stage 5 to come in the next 12 months.

We have the Mackay Ring Road—a \$500 million investment in joint funding, with 1,500 workers inducted on that site. Over 80 per cent of them are local to that region. After that, we flow on to the Walkerston Bypass and then the Mackay Port Access Road—a pipeline of jobs and road infrastructure for regional Queensland around Mackay.

We have the \$120 million Rockhampton northern access upgrade, supporting 260 jobs. The Rockhampton Ring Road is coming as well, with preparation well and truly underway. Also in Central Queensland we have the duplication of the Capricorn Highway to Gracemere, supporting 187 jobs. I have been out on that site. It is a fantastic project. On the Sunshine Coast we have the \$812 million upgrade of the Bruce Highway from Caloundra Road to Sunshine Motorway—I am sure you are very interested in that one yourself, Mr Acting Speaker—supporting 680 jobs. That is an investment by this government in conjunction with the Commonwealth—

Mr Powell: Eighty per cent from the federal government.

Mr BAILEY:—in a way that was never done under the previous government. I hear an interjection from the member for Glass House, who did nothing for transport infrastructure in the Glass House electorate and Sunshine Coast region when he was in government. He was a cabinet minister: he had clout. What did he do for the local community? He did not deliver anything in terms of transport infrastructure whatsoever. It is very hard to work out what he does with his time.

In the western suburbs of Brisbane the \$400 million Ipswich Motorway upgrade from Rocklea to Darra supports 471 jobs. All Ipswich got from the LNP was an attempt to sell off their assets. I welcome the new member for Bundamba, who was very involved in the not-for-sale campaign. He will be a great addition to this parliament. I look forward to working with the new member for Bundamba on his first day.

On the M1 we have seen the completion of \$195 million worth of upgrades at the Gateway merge. We will not ignore the M1 like the previous Newman government did. There was not a single new dollar spent on the M1 under the previous government—not one dollar. On the Gold Coast we are very close to finishing the \$197 million upgrade from Mudgeeraba to Varsity Lakes, which supported 257 jobs. In the electorate of Mount Ommaney the Sumners Road interchange, an \$80 million investment, is supporting 105 jobs. That project was cut by the previous government. It was funded and ready to roll under the Bligh government and it was cut by the Newman government. It was left to Labor to deliver.

These major construction projects are happening now, keeping Queenslanders in work. While the relief measures provided by this bill are very important, it is also important that we keep as many people in work as possible. The best form of economic relief is in fact jobs for these communities.

Ms Trad: One hundred per cent.

Mr BAILEY: Thank you, Deputy Premier. We invest in road and transport infrastructure. We do not cut like those opposite: we invest in Queenslanders. We recently awarded the first contract on the \$1 billion M1 Varsity Lakes to Tugun project—the next M1 upgrade—supporting 850 jobs on the Gold Coast thanks to this Labor government. We have announced the start of early works for the \$709 million Gold Coast Light Rail to Burleigh, supporting 760 jobs. Once again, every stage of the light rail was driven by the Queensland Labor Party. Without us there would be no light rail on the Gold Coast. We had the foresight to build it. We did not call it an affliction, like the member for Mermaid Beach. We did not say it would cause traffic chaos, like the member for Surfers Paradise. We understand what good investment means for congestion on the Gold Coast.

On the Sunshine Coast early works will start this year on the \$662 million six-laning of the Bruce Highway from Caboolture to Steve Irwin Way, supporting 664 jobs. There is even more transport infrastructure on the way to the Sunshine Coast under this Palaszczuk Labor government. We will not ignore the Sunshine Coast like the LNP do whenever they get elected. In Cairns there is progress on the \$164 million Smithfield bypass, supporting 115 jobs, and on the \$104 million Cairns Southern Access Corridor stage 4, Kate Street to Aumuller Street, there are 113 jobs for Far North Queenslanders.

Critical to our progress on these and future projects is our very close working relationship with the civil contracting industry and all industry participants, whether they be the industry supply chain, contractors or the unions. The COVID-19 health emergency and its impact on supply chains and project delivery demands that government and industry work closely together, and that is what we are doing to identify and address emerging issues affecting the delivery of our transport and roads investment program. That is why I convened a regular round table with the civil contracting industry to ensure that any issues would be ventilated early and at the highest level so we can work together through this crisis.

While our industry partners have also had to put in place physical distancing and other hygiene measures on job sites, to their credit this has not slowed down the delivery of road and transport infrastructure in Queensland. TMR has now established a working group with industry partners to work through the issues raised. The delivery of our roads and transport investment program is critical to the underpinning of economic prosperity in our state, and project delivery maintenance must continue safely and effectively. We are doing everything possible to ensure the civil contracting industry is supported throughout this pandemic and into the recovery phase.

We are looking at all options to respond to the coronavirus emergency, including working with our colleagues at the federal and local level, to maximise jobs through joint investment. A lot of work is going on behind the scenes to plan what this might look like. We are looking at things like increased investment in maintenance, accelerated delivery, increased and accelerated investment, more efficient ways to deliver our program and many other options.

I want to emphasise that nothing is off the table when it comes to our government's resolve to help Queensland recover from the health crisis as quickly as possible. Queensland is already in a pro-infrastructure and pro-jobs position due to our government's increased investment in roads and transport infrastructure. In four out of five budgets there have been record spends by this government. Thanks to our deal with the federal government in November last year in relation to the inland rail project, that deal alone saw an agreement reached on over \$1.6 billion in infrastructure investment with well over \$600 million of federal funds being accelerated for projects in Queensland. When this health crisis hit, Queensland was well-placed and our government acted early and decisively. This \$4 billion relief package is evidence of that.

Let's not hear lectures from those opposite; let's look at their record. The last time the LNP had their hands on the economy economic growth fell to 0.7 per cent—it had a zero in front of it—unemployment surged to 7.1 per cent—that is a seven—14,000 people were sacked and electricity prices went up 43 per cent. All of this in only three years! It was quite an extraordinary achievement. It is no wonder they lost after only one term. I will not accept lectures from the LNP on economic competence because the economic illiteracy on that side is vast. You only need to look at their position when it comes to the airline industry.

The Australian market is a natural duopoly. We have a small number of people across a vast distance. We are a small market by world standards. If you do not support a competitive market you are supporting a monopoly and you are supporting higher airfares, particularly in regional Queensland. Our state is the most affected of any other state when it comes to regional airlines. We are the most spread out, the most decentralised and we have the most destinations. If you do not back Virgin to survive as a going entity you are supporting higher airfares right across Queensland. You are supporting less competition in the freight sector, which means higher prices for everything in the supermarket because there is less competition. Just like you did back in the Newman government, you are selling thousands of jobs and Queenslanders down the drain. Virgin employees deserve support, and this government is backing them all the way. They have the total support of the Palaszczuk government. We will continue to work hard. The Premier, Deputy Premier, Minister for State Development and I are all working for the best possible outcome for our economy and for Virgin workers.

I commend the Deputy Premier and Treasurer and Premier for their work. We will continue to work through this health crisis. I commend the bill to the House.