




Speech By
Steve Minnikin

MEMBER FOR CHATSWORTH

Record of Proceedings, 13 May 2021

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

 **Mr MINNIKIN** (Chatsworth—LNP) (4.30 pm): To stand here in this august chamber and give my address-in-reply after being re-elected for a fourth term by the people of Chatsworth is indeed a true honour and one that I do not take for granted. I fully realise that it is a privilege and not a right to serve in this hallowed chamber. I am truly indebted to the people of Chatsworth. I thank them for giving me the opportunity of serving as their state member in this 57th Parliament.

I acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land where we all meet today, the Jagera and Turrbal peoples. I again reaffirm my allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and to her representative, His Excellency the Governor, Paul de Jersey, the institution of parliament and of course the electors of Chatsworth, who have entrusted me with a fourth term of electoral representation in this 57th Parliament. I take this opportunity to express my condolence on the recent passing of Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh. He was indeed the embodiment, the definition, of public service. Nine years ago I stated in my inaugural speech—

Our role and responsibility as a government is to provide an opportunity deposit slip for all Queenslanders and not an entitlement chequebook. It is our responsibility as the government to be an enabler of opportunity and not a provider of assumed entitlement.

Even though six months has passed since the last state election, I take this opportunity to once again acknowledge the valuable contribution made by defeated and retiring members from the 56th Parliament. I congratulate all returning and new members of this 57th Parliament. I also congratulate Mr Speaker on his reappointment to the role.

I acknowledge the incredibly moving speech recently given in this House by the member for Stretton, Mr Duncan Pegg. I share his love and passion for the institution of parliament and, although I obviously differ with his ideological views, there is a complete unity ticket when it comes to upholding the essence of democracy. I thoroughly enjoyed working with the member for Stretton as a Parliamentary Friends of Taiwan co-chair. His commitment to multiculturalism is genuine. I lament the personal health situation he finds himself in, but he has demonstrated to all members in this chamber that he never gives up, and I wish him all the very best.

I remain steadfastly committed to doing what is best for the Chatsworth electorate, which I am proud to serve. Whilst I am deeply honoured to be the shadow minister for customer service and the shadow minister for transport and main roads, as I repeatedly say the most important initials or title one can have as a politician is 'MP'. Without them you are not a minister, shadow minister, whip or anything else. It reinforces the notion in my mind that serving your local community as their MP is and always will be the highest priority. On this point, nothing has changed.

Since first being elected nine years ago, in 2012, my passion to make the local community I represent in the eastern suburbs of Brisbane a better place in which to live will continue to be the focus of what drives me each and every day as a parliamentarian. Being asked by the Leader of the Opposition to again take on the role of shadow minister for transport and main roads was a privilege. It is a portfolio I truly enjoy. This portfolio is crucial to the livability and economy of our great state. While it has its challenges, it certainly has plenty of opportunities.

The transport sector is also a diverse one, where operators range from family businesses to multinational companies providing goods and services to the community. I have continued to make it my business to meet as many of these people as possible: bus operators, taxi and ride share drivers, limo drivers, heavy vehicle operators, road and bridge contractors, train crews and toll operators to name just some of the incredible people who are helping to make this state great.

During my drive from Cooktown to Coolangatta in August last year and on other visits to regional Queensland, it was always a feature of my itinerary to meet with local government representatives to make sure I am learning about their concerns as well as their aspirations. I again place on the record my sincere thanks to those people who have taken me into their confidence, shared their concerns and helped me understand how I could best assist them.

I have always upheld the view that state controlled roads are not just kilometres of bitumen and asphalt; they are in fact vital economic arteries which connect this vast state and add to gross state product. The same can be said for our rail and shipping lines. A vibrant state economy, particularly in a resource-rich state like Queensland, is dependent on a fit-for-purpose transport network which is well maintained. I will come back to this point shortly.

While I will always strive to remain positive with the responsibilities of my role, clearly there are times when the government needs to be held to account for its performance. I will not shirk this responsibility. Whether it is fighting for better public transport services or road upgrades, trying to secure a better deal for motorists with backlog maintenance issues or seeking to improve processing times for transport operators, I will always maintain a problem-solving attitude along with a relentless approach to keeping the Palaszczuk Labor government focused on delivering on its transport and main roads commitments.

My role as the shadow minister for transport and main roads is to hold the minister I shadow to account, and I intend to do just that. Let us look at some of these issues, starting with Queensland Rail failures. In a recent speech in this House, the Minister for Transport and Main Roads described things in his portfolio as 'awesome'. I refer to SPADs. A recent Australian Transport Safety Bureau investigation into a 'signal passed at danger' incident by a Queensland Rail Citytrain said—

Such a 'completely missed' SPAD can have very serious consequences as there were limited risk controls or defences in place on the ... Citytrain rail network to recover from the situation.

The driver overrode a safety system as a reflexive response. Overriding systems should not happen so often that it generates a reflex response. There was a real risk that trains could have collided. That is why it is concerning that the September 2020 SPAD figure jumped to 1.89, up from 1.68 the previous month. In October 2020 the figure was up again, to 1.94. The Queensland Rail CEO advised at the estimates process back in November that the rate had dropped; in fact, in November the figure went up to 2.04. In February 2021, the latest data available, it is up to 2.3. It is rising. That is concerning. As you sit on a train heading towards that red light, you have to wonder whether the government has lost control of transport safety.

Tabled paper: Extract, dated 27 July 2018, from the *Record of Proceedings*, Queensland Parliament, page 11 and chart titled 'Safety and security: Signal passed at Danger (SPAD)' [649](#).

The transport minister also is not meeting his own commitment to publish this data promptly. I table estimates minutes from 27 July 2018 where the minister committed to publishing the data on or around the 10th day of each month; however, as the tabled document shows, March data is over two months late. When the numbers go bad, the government simply stops releasing data. This is not exactly 'awesome', Minister.

Another signal that the passenger rail network is under pressure is the increase in the percentage of skipped stations. Between January and February this year, the percentage of skipped stations almost doubled, from 0.07 to 0.13. If you are at one of those 142 stations skipped in the month of February, it is a case of 'too bad, too sad'. Data shows a steady increase in skipped stations since May last year, when 35 stations were missed. Now it is up to 142—another sign that Labor has lost control of the passenger rail network. Again, this is not exactly 'awesome', Minister. Drivers are running red lights and stations are being skipped to try to preserve the on-time running statistics. Doesn't this all sound very familiar?

The transport minister has his own call centre of excuses: press 1 to blame the current federal government; press 2 to blame the previous Newman government; press 3 to say it is all due to COVID; or press 4 if you would like to hear these choices again. The transport minister needs to take responsibility so that we do not have another 'rail fail'—not exactly 'awesome', Minister.

What about Cross River Rail—a project which is becoming a big financial black hole? The government is now referring to the opening of Cross River Rail being in 2025—we heard that from the minister this morning—yet it was always set to open in 2024, and I refer to an article in the *Brisbane Times* on 26 April 2020 on or at about page 8. How can a \$5.4 billion project blow out by a year and

remain on time and on budget? Halfway through construction we see major alignment changes in the southern construction zone. It is like something out of a *Faulty Towers* episode: 'Sorry, we got the curvature of the track wrong!' Allegedly they did not talk to Queensland Rail before signing off on the design. If only it was like a Hornby train set where the track has a set curve! It would appear that cost implications have not been fully disclosed nor a proper operational plan disclosed.

There was a recent report in the media about secret plans to introduce spoil haulage from Roma Street on a Sunday. There is the incorporation of approximately a third of the Roma Street Parklands into the priority development area without proper community consultation—another example of secrecy and lack of transparency. We see the Labor spin machine going into rinse cycle with the softening up of language in a bid to condition the taxpayers for a lesser outcome with the Cross River Rail project. Again, not exactly awesome, Minister. Let us not forget the ballooning backlog maintenance blowout now approaching \$6 billion and rising for state controlled roads, bridges and culverts. This is definitely not awesome, Minister for Transport and Main Roads.

I am also very honoured to have been named the first shadow minister for customer service by our new LNP state leader, and that is something very near and dear to my heart and I will be speaking further in relation to that shadow portfolio in future speeches. It was great to recently visit Minister Victor Dominello MP, the New South Wales Minister for Customer Service. What New South Wales government agencies can see on their iPads, their PCs and their digital dashboard of the whole of government is truly amazing and outstanding and we are being left in the dark.

Other issues I intend to pursue during the 57th Parliament include Commonwealth-state financial relations and competitive federalism. This incessant, ridiculous blame game between the federal and state governments especially in the key areas of health, transport infrastructure and education is beyond a joke. As I have previously stated in this House, urgent reform of our constitutional responsibilities is paramount. I again quote Alan Fenna when he states in his book *A People's Federation* at pages 134 to 135—

The high degree of vertical fiscal imbalance (VFI) in Australian Federalism gives the Commonwealth enormous power to intervene at will in the many areas of jurisdiction assigned by the Constitution to the States ... Australia's current fiscal arrangements obscure lines of accountability substantially.

Vertical fiscal imbalance and the duplicity of service delivery across the three tiers of government is holding this nation back, and the sooner this important area of public policy has informed national debate and dialogue the better. It is a cop-out for our current federal and state politicians to relegate this vital area of public policy to the backburner merely because it is too complicated.

All politics are local and I will continue to fight hard for the constituents of the Chatsworth electorate and look to improve amenities in my electorate. Leading into the 2020 state election I put forward my vision and plan for Chatsworth. This included \$55,000 to build a wildlife crossing for Old Cleveland Road to connect habitats of our local fauna, a \$4 million investment for allied health services for the Clem Jones Centre, \$300,000 for a new outside school hours building at Camp Hill State Infants and Primary School, a million dollars for Gumdale State School for classroom upgrades and fast-tracking solar panels for Belmont State School, as well as adding a pedestrian overpass and removing traffic lights and better traffic signal coordination on Old Cleveland Road and also to get the Eastern Busway back on the agenda.

I am proud to have lobbied for many of these important projects leading into the state election and I am flattered that, like clockwork, many of my commitments, funnily enough, were followed by announcements from the Labor government. Following the 2020-21 Queensland state budget, Gumdale State School has been allocated \$2.4 million out of a \$6 million total spend for new classrooms. I welcome that. The new Allied Health and Wellbeing Centre for the Clem Jones Centre was allocated \$2½ million of a \$5 million total spend. That is welcomed and I am glad that the government is following my lead and great to see. I will continue to deliver these essential projects and make sure that they are delivered on time.

Despite launching a petition which received hundreds and hundreds of signatures, I am disappointed the Labor state government has ignored the voices of our community and is yet to find a fauna crossing for Old Cleveland Road. I will continue to fight to see this important infrastructure built to ensure that we give our wildlife the best chance at survival. You do not need to superglue yourself to a bridge to show true concern for the environment. It is something dear to my heart. Old Cleveland Road is killing fauna at a rapid rate. We need to do a very simple fix and have a fauna crossing. Circa \$80,000, it is money that will be repaid time and time again over and over again. I again urge the minister to give that due consideration—that is, a fauna crossing on Old Cleveland Road.

The biggest challenge though in my electorate is reliable and frequent public transport. I am pleased that construction of the Eastern Transit Way project has finally begun and has been given \$8½ million of a \$30 million total spend to start, but this is simply not good enough. Old Cleveland Road

is the major eastern road corridor connecting the city with the Redlands and it needs relief now. The Eastern Transit Way jump lanes at intersections will not provide a long-term solution for Old Cleveland Road. Ideally, a designated busway is the only viable long-term solution and I am committed to getting a detailed business plan on track before the next state election. I would urge the minister to consider getting fair dinkum with Old Cleveland Road with a dedicated busway. I will continue to fight to see the best possible outcomes for my own electorate of Chatsworth.

As I have stated in the past and will continue to acknowledge, there is one aspect of being a politician that unites all of us in this chamber regardless of our various ideological beliefs. None of us can aspire to high office without the help of our wonderful support base. Therefore, I wish to place on record my sincere thanks to several important people. Firstly, to the local LNP branch members, thank you yet again for your dedication and professionalism during the last state campaign. None of you are paid a dime, yet you give up your time and effort in order to support me and the LNP overall. I thank you, thank you and thank you. Just like the previous three elections, there were several days during my fourth state campaign when the mercury was rising and the weather was humid and decidedly uncomfortable. Notwithstanding this, my dedicated support team continued to hit the pavements and letterbox drop targeted areas of the electorate as well as roadside duties and doorknocking.

To the many supporters both from within the LNP and personal friends who assisted with the pre-poll in the weeks leading up to election day, my deepest thanks. I acknowledge Matt, Hayden, Mike, Drewe, Ken, Paul, Charles, Greg and many others. They say it pays to advertise, so I again acknowledge the several hundred supporters throughout the Chatsworth electorate who enabled my mighty campaign team to erect signs along their front yards and fences.

COVID-19 travel restrictions made sure, unfortunately, that my interstate friends Lauren and Ben could not be with me physically for this fourth campaign, but they offered support wherever possible. Yet again my mother, Denise, was exceptional in her support throughout the entire fourth campaign, particularly rising to the occasion with pre-polling. My love for her knows no bounds.

As was the case several years ago when I first ran for preselection, my greatest support base is my immediate family. My two adult children Heather and Lachlan worked tirelessly around their university, school and sporting commitments to assist with my campaign. For the fourth election in a row I was full of pride and overwhelmed with their work ethic and dedication during the campaign. However, nothing politically will ever surpass my pride in watching them grow into fine, free spirited and thinking young individuals. It was with immense pride that I handed my youngest son Lachlan his first ever how-to-vote card, because he had just turned 18 about a month before the election date and cast his first vote—hopefully for his own father, who, like many parents, doubles occasionally as an ATM machine. As I have felt from the very moment I first laid eyes upon them when they were born, I would give up my life for them in a heartbeat.

Nine years ago I described my wife, Roslyn, in my inaugural speech as my rock of Gibraltar. This description is just as apt today. Politically, everything I could have achieved as a member of parliament could only ever have been done with the support and assistance of my wife of over a quarter of a century, Ros. She has done a phenomenal job not just throughout the campaign but throughout the course of my political career. Ros is a consummate professional in everything she does. She is meticulous and matches this precision with a real passion to help people. My success in being elected for a fourth term is due in no small part to her efforts. As a teacher she is a busy professional in her own right and virtually runs the entire household when I am consumed with politics. To my extraordinary wife, Ros, I thank you again from the bottom of my heart.

I have previously stated, and will again reiterate, that our ideological battles here in this hallowed chamber are an important part of the overall democratic process. Indeed, robust debate is an important part of this but, as the approximately 1,200 names on the honour board of past members of the Legislative Assembly attests, our time here is, relatively speaking, short-lived as a proportion of our entire life's experiences. I believe it is incumbent, therefore, upon all of us to use our privileged time here responsibly in pursuing tangible outcomes for the electorates we serve.

In closing, I dedicate my fourth address-in-reply speech to all those Queenslanders who have been affected by this dreadful COVID pandemic, especially our emergency services personnel. I am truly honoured to be returned for a fourth time and, in closing my address-in-reply speech, I will again quote Hal Colebatch, who stated, 'The high privilege of democracy cannot be maintained unless the equally exalted responsibilities attracting to it are understood and observed.'