



Speech By  
**Steve Minnikin**


**MEMBER FOR CHATSWORTH**

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**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL**

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 **Mr MINNIKIN** (Chatsworth—LNP) (7.49 pm): I am pleased to rise tonight to respond to the Palaszczuk government's 2021-22 budget. The opposition leader rightly stated in his budget reply speech earlier in this debate that every budget handed down sees each minister getting up and spruiking words to the effect 'I am proud to announce a record budget for XYZ portfolio'. As I stated earlier last year, throwing ever increasing amounts of money into key government areas such as transport and main roads, health and education is not in itself a real measure of success. It is about the effectiveness of outputs, not just input efficiencies. Simply put, it is what you actually do with resources rather than just throw borrowed money continually at an issue.

Given our state debt level will now blow out to \$127 billion over the forward estimates, this budget continues to fail future generations by avoiding the tough decisions required to be made by this generation. Unfair intergenerational debt will continue under Labor. I stated in my last budget reply speech said that there was nothing wrong with borrowing for income producing assets. This is indeed basic finance 101. Given that marketers define a generation as around about 25 years, any piece of infrastructure which lasts for, say, 100 years will obviously have four generations of taxpayers derive economic utility from its use. It is extraordinary, however, that billions are being borrowed for recurrent expenditure rather than capital expenditure, state building assets.

I will now comment on the budget in my capacity as the shadow minister for customer service and shadow minister for transport and main roads. When one breaks it down, I mentioned late last year that the *raison d'être* of the transport and main roads portfolio is all about delivering an efficient and responsive statewide transport system that will connect people from one end of our vast state to the other, both now and into the future. Yet again Labor's incompetent approach to the 2021-22 budget, in particular for this key portfolio, means that this worthy goal is still a long way off. The Minister for Transport and Main Roads wants to talk up the Transport and Main Roads budget and tell us it is a record. In effect, it is definitely more a smoke and mirrors exercise than a credible financial document for the future.

Let me begin a deep dive into the Transport and Main Roads portfolio and look at Labor's record. The minister talks about a record \$27½ billion QTRIP, but what really is Labor's record? It is one of project cost blowouts and delays. Of course, the obvious starting point is the Palaszczuk Labor government's signature infrastructure project, Cross River Rail. Let us start with the cost. Minister Bailey has said numerous times in this House that Cross River Rail is a \$5.4 billion project.

Extracts from *Hansard* going back to page 310 on 9 March show Minister Bailey talking about the \$5.4 billion Cross River Rail project. That is repeated in *Hansard* on page 15 on 23 February 2021; on 5 February 2020; 11 December 2020; 26 November 2020; 22 October 2019; Cross River Rail, a

\$5.4 billion transformational project, on 15 October 2019; 21 August 2019; back to June 2019, \$5.4 billion. But what is the true cost? Page 126 of the Capital Statement shows \$6.725 billion with \$162 million in returnable works. If you believe that number you believe anything.

Make no mistake, this project's budget is under massive pressure. Project changes have been made to compensate and environmental standards are being lowered. There is spoil haulage from CBD construction sites on a Sunday, which has never previously been allowed. The Clapham stabling yard will now take spoil 24/7. Is the project on time? The actual completion date for the project was raised at estimates last year. In a subsequent media interview a Cross River Rail Delivery Authority representative said—

It has been noted publicly on multiple occasions that major Cross River Rail construction works are due to be completed in 2024—this remains the case.

...

Following construction, an extensive safety testing and commissioning phase will commence.

As has been stated previously, Cross River Rail passenger services are expected to be operational in 2025.

The use of 'remains the case' implies that services have always been scheduled to start in 2025. However, a government media release from 4 April 2019 says—

Minister for Transport and Main Roads Mark Bailey said because of the Palaszczuk Government's decisive action, Cross River Rail will be ready to service the South-East by 2024.

Another release from the former deputy premier dated 19 August 2019 says—

Ms Trad said fans will begin accessing the Gabba via the new Cross River Rail underground station in 2024.

Labor have been caught out trying to rewrite history to cover up a project delay. I know the minister likes to wax lyrical about things being awesome, but maybe he should concentrate on getting things done. What about the perceived benefits? How predictable that the spin from this government has well and truly begun. It is now backtracking on the benefits of the project.

In 2018 the project was promised to deliver Sunshine Coast commuters a train every six minutes in the morning peak. Now the Cross River Rail website says they 'could' get a train every 15 minutes. In 2018 the project was promised to deliver Ipswich commuters a train every five minutes in the morning peak. Now the CRR website says they 'could' get a train every 15 minutes on the Ipswich-Rosewood line from the Rosewood station. Finally, in 2018 the project was promised to deliver Redlands commuters a train every 5½ minutes in the peak morning period. Now the Cross River Rail website says they 'could' get a train every 15 minutes on the Cleveland line. We knew this was coming. The 2017 Infrastructure Australia assessment said that 'the project benefits as set out in the business case are significantly overstated'. Let me repeat that quote: 'The project benefits as set out in the business case are significantly overstated'.

When it comes to rolling stock, the budget raises serious questions about whether the additional 20 trains that this government says must be delivered for Cross River Rail will be ready on time. Almost 60 per cent of the project budget will be spent after the 2024-25 financial year. How is that possible if Cross River Rail services will start in 2025? Either the trains will not be ready for Cross River Rail or Cross River Rail will not be ready for the trains. Pure genius. Are we being prepared for further delays to Cross River Rail? Make no mistake, this so-called signature project is being overseen by a transport minister who is completely out of his depth. He continues a long line of failed former Labor transport ministers when it comes to this project's delivery.

Despite what the Minister for Transport and Main Roads says, the LNP has always acknowledged the need for a second rail river crossing in Brisbane. It is true that we differed in relation to the design and project scoping, as the initial plans under the failed Bligh Labor government were totally inadequate, but it was always acknowledged that a cross river rail solution would eventually be required. However, as I have repeatedly flagged, we hold concerns about the lack of transparency by Labor regarding Cross River Rail's cost and benefit. Is it any wonder the cost-benefit analysis was not supported by Infrastructure Australia.

The minister puffs out his chest every time he boldly declares that Queensland will fully fund the Cross River Rail project on its own. Is it any wonder the Commonwealth, which along with the Brisbane City Council is fast becoming the de facto transport and main roads provider, refused to fund a project that did not stack up? Gold Coast Light Rail stage 3 is another example of project delays and cost blowouts.

Prior to the 2020 election Labor said that John Holland had been selected to build the project and construction could begin before Christmas. What did we find out after the election? There was a \$334 million cost blowout. The contract had not even been signed. Now the minister hopes to have

construction started by this Christmas. Let me be perfectly clear here: this project is only going ahead because of a \$126 million bailout by the LNP federal government—yes, another bailout for Minister Bailey.

Turning to the Coomera Connector, construction is due to start in mid-2021. However, we understand that the contractor has not been appointed yet. After questioning at estimates last year we were advised that the whole project from Coomera to Nerang would be completed by 2025, but—hold the phone—the TMR website says construction timing for the central and southern sections is yet to be confirmed. This year's QTRIP shows that 41 per cent of the budget will not be spent until the 2025-26 financial year so do not bet on a 2025 completion.

What about the reduction in the 2021-22 QTRIP spend? So far I have focussed on major projects in South-East Queensland, but I can tell the House that disappointment in this year's budget is spread right across this vast state. Let us look at the forecast 2021-22 spend from last year's QTRIP compared to this year's QTRIP. This year across the state \$763 million less will be spent on transport infrastructure compared to what the Labor government promised only eight months ago. That is a drop of 11 per cent. This government is pushing projects further out into the forwards to cover over a budget black hole.

The Bruce Highway, the Cunningham Highway and the Warrego Highway, all key corridors, have projects that have been hit. Let us talk about bridge strengthening at Palm Tree and Blackrock Creek on the Bruce Highway, between Mackay and Proserpine. Last year QTRIP said there would be \$8 million spent in the 2021-22 financial year. This year QTRIP says just \$410,000 will be spent. This is the Clayton's approach to funding, where you allocate a miniscule amount for show when you really do not want to be funding it in the first place.

Let us talk about safety improvement on the Isis Highway between Bundaberg and Childers. Last year QTRIP said \$12 million would be spent in 2021-22. This year's QTRIP document says just \$4 million will be spent. This year to date 119 people have died, sadly and tragically, on Queensland roads. That is 16 more than at the same time last year. Very tellingly, \$8 million of safety improvements have been delayed.

What about the inland freight route? The creation of an inland freight route was a key commitment of the Labor government prior to the last election. In a media release the Premier said—

We'll also build on our existing \$125 million partnership with the Federal Government to improve the inland Townsville to Roma corridor by committing \$200 million for the 'Second Bruce' to take trucks off the Bruce Highway.

On 10 May this year, the Prime Minister announced that the federal government would commit \$400 million to the inland freight route. 'Beauty!' I thought. 'That is \$600 million for this project.' Imagine my surprise when I read QTRIP. In his forward, Minister Bailey said—

We will be working with the Australian Government to identify and deliver projects under the joint funded \$500 million upgrade on this corridor to encourage more trucks to move freight inland via the Carnarvon, Dawson and Gregory Highways.

I know maths may not be a strength of those opposite, particularly the transport minister who I believe was a former high school drama teacher. It would appear that he is much more interested in English than maths, given his penchant for private emailing. However, 200 plus 400 does not equal 500. Where has the other \$100 million, committed to by this government, gone? For the past two terms under Labor the Queensland Transport and Roads Investment Program, QTRIP, which outlines the current transport and roads projects, resembles a lay-by agreement, outlaying a dollar today, a few more next year and the rest off into the never-never.

What about backlog maintenance? For six years Labor has neglected Queensland's roads, cutting infrastructure spending and allowing approximately \$6 billion in backlog maintenance to build up. According to the Queensland Audit Office, the figure will reach \$9 billion over the next six years. Thanks to Labor, our roads are more congested than ever and less safe. In this budget the maintenance spend has been increased from \$4.4 billion to \$4.466 billion. Of course, any increase is welcomed but we know that this level of funding is not enough. The transport minister has advised that as of 30 June last year the asset sustainability ratio was 51 per cent. That means we are only providing about half the funding needed just to keep the network in the current condition. In other words, we need to double the amount we are spending on maintenance. This budget does not do that. For Queensland motorists that means more potholes, more dodgy bridges and less safe roads.

I have always said that the role of an opposition is to hold the government to account but not to criticise just for the sake of it. In that spirit I again congratulate the Department of Transport and Main Roads in relation to the department's Service Delivery Statements, page 7 of which outlines their customer experience standards and effectiveness measures. I am very honoured to be appointed the first shadow minister for customer service by the opposition leader and I congratulate Transport and Main Roads staff.

At the end of the day, this budget is simply as bereft of visionary reform as the Treasurer is of showing humility. You cannot escape the responsibility of tomorrow by evading it today—Abraham Lincoln.