




Speech By
Michael Berkman

MEMBER FOR MAIWAR

Record of Proceedings, 25 October 2022

MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Maiwar Electorate, Public Transport

 **Mr BERKMAN** (Maiwar—Grn) (8.17 pm): There are so many parts of my electorate for us to be proud of. Whether it is the beautiful jacaranda lined streets, the walks along the river or the Mt Coot-tha summit, it is pretty hard to beat in so many ways. However, we are also winning on a less satisfying front—that is, Coronation Drive is consistently one of the most congested roads in Brisbane and it will remain that way unless both the Brisbane City Council and this government seriously invest in better public transport for the west side.

I had hoped we might get some progress from the LNP council's recent bus network review, but they seem to have completely ignored the west side. Instead of using the new metro as an opportunity to design a properly integrated and connected network, they are tinkering at the edges while they continue to pour billions of dollars into road widening. The state government have not given us any reason to hope for improvement either. I wrote to the transport minister asking whether they would commit some real funding and work with council to coordinate a proper review to account for Cross River Rail and the metro. I am yet to get a response.

Locals consistently tell me that if they had access to frequent and affordable buses they would be far more likely to get out of their cars and leave them at home. Right now, folks in Bardon have no easy way to catch the bus to important centres in the electorate like Toowong and St Lucia, which is the second biggest generator of trips in the whole city. Fig Tree Pocket residents are still waiting for a bus along the eastern side of the suburb up Jesmond Road or regular buses to Indooroopilly and the city outside of peak hours. In the growing Long Pocket area, the single bus service—the 417—is incredibly infrequent, unreliable and totally inadequate on weekends.

If the government genuinely cared about fixing traffic, reducing emissions and making our cities more accessible, they would invest in more high-frequency buses, inter-suburb connections and dedicated bus lanes along main corridors like the Centenary Motorway. They would not continue to prioritise car-centric, short-term sugar hits like road-widening projects. They will spend billions to duplicate a highway, but will not upgrade the train stations across the state that still fail to meet disability access standards. If this government wanted to tackle our traffic woes and help Queenslanders out in a cost-of-living crisis, they would make public transport free.

Ms Boyd: Oh, make it free! Someone has got to pay for it.

Mr BERKMAN: Oh, the histrionics are back! Right now, fares cover only about 10 per cent of the total running costs for the transport network. Why is the government obsessed with wringing money from Queenslanders for such basic services especially when it is such a small proportion of the cost? Why not make developers pay with a windfall gains tax or increase gas royalties so that everyone can get public transport for free? The federal government's fuel excise cut is gone and petrol costs are through the roof. Now is the perfect time to encourage people to leave their cars at home with free fares. It would not only deliver hip-pocket relief for Queenslanders but also cut a whole lot of costs from our

public transport system, specifically the hundreds of millions of dollars being poured into a privatised ticketing system which will cost well beyond the \$371 million that has been poured into it already. How much are they spending on ticketing enforcement, on court and police costs for fare evasion, all to cover that measly 10 per cent of the cost of delivering public transport?

Governments are meant to use our taxes to provide basic services like public transport. You are meant to fund infrastructure for public benefit, not make deals with private corporations to wring Queenslanders dry for profit. The secret deal with QBIC for the ticketing system is one example; the Airtrain is another. Why is the minister defending this 35-year contract for a private provider to keep a monopoly on public transport services around the airport? What part of 'making Queenslanders pay a private company \$20 for a 20-minute trip' sounds like a good deal to the government? It is embarrassing.

This government's commitment to privatisation and outsourcing is embarrassing. I do not know anyone who catches the Airtrain. I am interested to know if anyone here does. We cannot wait until 2036 to review that monopoly Airtrain contract. The government should bring the airport service into public hands and make it free or at least cheaper for everyone to use. They could do it as part of the Cross River Rail project. They could have some long-term vision. Put an end to the secret deals with private contractors, invest in long-distance connecting services and high-frequency inter-suburb buses. Let go of this ridiculous neo-liberal 'someone has to pay for it' mantra and ditch the hassle and expense of fares. Not only would it make the trip along Coronation Drive a lot more pleasant but also across Queensland it would reduce traffic, pollution, cut living costs and give people real freedom to move around their communities.