



Speech By  
**Michael Berkman**

**MEMBER FOR MAIWAR**

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Record of Proceedings, 11 October 2023

**MOTION**

**Cost of Living**



**Mr BERKMAN** (Maiwar—Grn) (5.01 pm): I move—

That this House:

1. notes that:
  - (a) the cost-of-living crisis is hitting Queenslanders hard, with transport costs a major contributor. According to the Australian Automobile Association, Brisbane households currently spend an average of 18 per cent of their incomes on transport, including fuel, registration, car loans and insurance, with Townsville households spending an average of \$355 per week.
  - (b) Brisbane public transport fares are among the highest in the country.
  - (c) according to TransLink data, weekly patronage on its South-East Queensland services has fallen by 16 per cent from pre-COVID levels in 2019.
  - (d) the Queensland government failed to meet the 2022 deadline for all train stations to be compliant with federal disability standards as required under the federal Disability Discrimination Act, and around a third of train stations across South-East Queensland are still not fully accessible.
  - (e) transport emissions are the third largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in Australia, with emissions from cars and light commercial vehicles contributing 11.6 per cent of annual emissions, and are also the fastest growing source of emissions in the country.
2. calls on the government to:
  - (a) commit to increase the general public transport concession to make public transport free for all users.
  - (b) commit to a binding, fully funded plan to make all of Queensland's train stations 100 per cent compliant with federal disability standards.
  - (c) increase investment in public transport frequency and connectivity including through investment in new routes and dedicated bus lanes along major transport corridors.

This motion has a really simple premise: that public transport is a vital public service, just like health care and education, that Queenslanders deserve to be able to access regardless of their income or their postcode. It is a simple premise with a raft of benefits for Queenslanders, from reducing congestion and emissions to giving our cities back to people, not cars, and relieving cost-of-living pressures. Queenslanders are dealing with crippling inflation and stagnant wages, and high transport costs are only making things worse. Brisbane households are spending an average of 18 per cent of their income on transport including fuel, insurance, registration and some of the most expensive public transport in the country.

Earlier this year 70 per cent of respondents to a local survey by my federal colleague Elizabeth Watson-Brown said that public transport is too expensive and they supported a fare-free trial. However, whenever I stand here and make a demand for basic services for Queenslanders I am called an idealist. It is the same old cries of, 'It's not really free; someone has to pay for it,' or it is just downright too expensive as far as the government is concerned. However, this government will spend \$8 billion on a desalination plant, announced overnight, and they will spend \$2 billion to knock down and rebuild the

Gabba stadium, knocking down a heritage listed primary school on the way. Someone has to pay for that, but it seems it is always the community who pays, not the government's banking, gas and property developer mates.

The government can make public transport free, frequent and accessible. Government already covers around 83 per cent of the cost of public transport, and we are simply saying that it should increase it slightly to cover 100 per cent of that cost. The gap would be about \$270 million in fares last financial year, which is only around three per cent of the whole transport budget in Queensland. An amount of \$6 billion is spent every year in building and maintaining roads, so \$275 million is small change for a government that wasted \$371 million on a privatised ticketing system or \$60 million this year on additional enforcement officers.

We have seen a major spike in the number of fines and warnings handed out to people who are clearly struggling to afford the exorbitant public transport fares in a cost-of-living crisis. Punishing Queenslanders who are struggling financially is not the answer. They need our help. We should help them with free public transport instead. This is not without precedent. Olympia in Washington saw a 20 per cent increase in users in the month immediately after scrapping public transport fares. Malta and Luxembourg both offer free public transport, as does the vast majority of Estonia. Germany has slashed some fares by 90 per cent to reduce fuel use in private vehicles. The benefits to Queenslanders would be felt in their hip pockets, in their homes and in the environment.

An adult go card user in Brisbane travelling between my electorate and the CBD to work each day would save at least \$30 a week in fares, not to mention the cost of fuel in their private vehicle, parking and time spent sitting in traffic. The average speed during afternoon peak hour on Coronation Drive is just 10 kilometres an hour. We can only reduce congestion by getting people out of their cars, which would mean people have more time to spend with their families and engage in activities outside of work.

On current trends, transport is projected to be Australia's largest source of greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, with 60 per cent of the transport sector's current emissions coming from cars and light commercial vehicles. Getting cars off our roads would result in not just creating the kinds of places we want to live in but also ensuring they remain livable. Queensland is and will continue to be hit particularly hard by climate change, and we should be leading the nation with bold and creative solutions like this.

The evidence shows that free public transport would increase use. For example, the New South Wales Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal found that fare-free public transport in Sydney would increase patronage by 40 per cent. We do not want a free bus that hardly ever shows up or a train that is free but not accessible to everyone, so that is why we are calling for network improvements at the same time. We want to see a high-frequency bus on every major road corridor in South-East Queensland. We want more frequent trains on the passenger network plus the long list of overdue expansions. We also need a time-bound commitment for fully accessible train stations in Queensland.

Public transport patronage still has not recovered from COVID-19. We are still sitting at 153 million trips a year in South-East Queensland compared to 189 million pre COVID. Again, getting those numbers back up would mean fewer cars on the road, less traffic and lower emissions.

This motion is not pixie dust. It is sensible, relatively cheap reform that Labor should support. Public services like schools and hospitals are beloved by Queenslanders because at least in theory they are freely available to all, and public transport should be no exception to that.