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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

BILLS

**Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2016-2017,
Appropriation Bill (No. 2) 2016-2017,
Appropriation (Parliamentary
Departments) Bill (No. 1) 2016-2017**

Second Reading

SPEECH

Monday, 10 October 2016

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Page 1325
Questioner
Speaker Albanese, Anthony, MP

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Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler) (16:55): I am pleased to take the opportunity to speak on the Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2016-2017 and cognate legislation because it gives me the opportunity to speak about the failure of this government when it comes to long-term investment in the infrastructure which Australia needs for future economic growth and future jobs creation.

The fact is that when we came to office in 2007 Australia was ranked 20th in the OECD for infrastructure investment; when we left, Australia was first. In the first two years since the change of government, there was a 20 per cent decline in public sector infrastructure investment. That has a short-term impact on jobs, and we see that youth unemployment is higher today than it was during the global financial crisis. It has an impact on the living standards of people in the short-term. More importantly, it has a long-term economic impact. What we will see is a handbrake on future economic growth, as shown by this government's lack of vision when it comes to infrastructure and nation-building.

Quite extraordinarily, during the last election campaign—during the entirety of the longest campaign since the Second World War—we saw not a single new major infrastructure investment announced by this government. Not one. There was Labor out there announcing support for the Metronet in Perth; announcing support for Cross River Rail in Brisbane; announcing support for AdeLINK, the light rail expansion in Adelaide; announcing support for the Melbourne Metro; and announcing support for Western Sydney Rail, including a connection to Badgerys Creek airport so that public transport is open from day one and those employment lands in Western Sydney are opened up for opportunity. Yet we have seen nothing from the government—nothing whatsoever.

They had, indeed, 78 small announcements during the election campaign—the sorts of projects that you normally see in local government or maybe even state government. They added up to less than a \$1 billion. Of the 78 projects, extraordinarily, 76 of them were in coalition held seats prior to the election—76 out of 78! An extraordinary proposition! We will wait to see what the National Audit Office has to say about the government having their infrastructure policy determined not by Infrastructure Australia but by the electoral map. That is precisely what we see happening, including in the upper Hunter with a \$1 million road upgrade for something that is used for a billycart race! I know that bilycarts can be good fun, but in the 21st century—when high speed broadband, public transport and efficient roads are the key to economic growth—it says it all about the government that one of their priorities was a billycart road for a billycart race that is held once a year in a community. I am not saying it is not good fun—I am sure it is. I am sure it is worthwhile. But the fact that it came out of the nation-building budget says it all about the government.

Of course, Deputy Speaker Irons, you would know that, because you have in your electorate of Swan the largest road project that has ever been held conducted in Perth—the Gateway WA project. You were there when I turned the first sod on that project. You were there when that project began, and you were there also when, while we were still in government, parts of it were being opened. Yet, during the Senate special election and during the by-election for the electorate of Canning, we saw the government pretend that it was somehow new!

I had a repeat of that last Monday when I was in Redcliffe. The Redcliffe rail line extension was first discussed in 1884 and first promised in the Queensland state parliament in 1895, but it took a federal Labor government in 2010 to commit, with the Bligh government and the Moreton Bay Regional Council, to making that vision a reality. I was able to visit the new stations that have been built as part of that project. Indeed, it is an incredibly exciting project. Of course, the Prime Minister was there. The Prime Minister will never miss an opportunity to be at a ribbon cutting. The problem is that he is never there when a project begins. Under his watch not a single new rail project has begun anywhere in the country.

I quite like the fact that the Prime Minister likes riding on trains. I just want him to fund some or to fund one—that will do; fund one project. Fund AdeLINK, fund the Perth Metronet or fund the Cross River Rail. He does not even have to find new money; he can just put back the money that was cut in the 2014 budget from projects

like the Cross River Rail project. At the press conference after the opening of the Redcliffe rail line the Prime Minister was asked, 'What about some funding for Cross River Rail? We know that it will reach capacity within five years and that will have an impact not just on residents of Brisbane but on residents of the Gold Coast and the Sunshine Coast as well.' The Prime Minister said, 'We are waiting for more information.' Well I have got news for him. It was approved as the No. 1 priority project by Infrastructure Australia in 2012 and was subsequently funded by federal Labor in the 2013 budget.

This is a project that stacks up. This is a project that is vital. This is a project that would be under construction today had Tony Abbott not cut the budget in 2014 because he had, quite frankly, the mad ideological view, as he outlined in *Battlelines*, that public transport was not the responsibility of the Commonwealth. He said that the federal government should 'stick to its knitting' and that we could be engaged in cities without having any public transport. Of course, that saw a distortion of the market into roads. We saw the money change to the East West Link in Melbourne, which had a benefit-cost ratio of 45c for every \$1 returned. As I have said to various coalition members over the years, if they are happy to give me \$100 I will give them \$45 back next time I see them. If they think that is a good deal, I am up for it. I am absolutely up for that arrangement.

Mr Pitt: I've only got a \$50 note on me.

Mr ALBANESE: The member opposite says he has only got \$50. Well I will give you \$22.50 back next time I see you. That would be a good deal, according to you. That is the economics of those opposite with their funding of the East West Link.

They took money not just off rail projects but off the M80. On the M80 last Sunday they had a sod turn on this new section of investment. The problem is that it was funded in 2013. Had they not cut it in 2014 they could have been there at the opening of the project, not at the sod turning. Infrastructure Australia, which now seems to just adopt things after the government and tick them off as a good little obedient servant of the government rather than actually being proactive, has said that the M80 is on the priority list. It was on the priority list five years ago. That is why it was funded. This is the last bit of the sections.

The Moorebank Intermodal project has been underway for years. It was put in a budget well before the 2013 budget. It has been underway. An Infrastructure Australia board member—Kerry Schott, who is a fine member—is the Chair of the Moorebank Intermodal Company and yet a press release came out today from Minister Fletcher saying that somehow this is new and is now on the infrastructure priority list. It is an absolutely extraordinary position taken by those opposite.

What we saw in the budget was a \$1 billion cut in infrastructure and investment over what had been allocated by the coalition government previously. There has been a \$1 billion cut, including \$853 million cut from the Asset Recycling Fund as well as a \$162 million cut. Since then we have seen the backpacker tax debacle that impacts on the tourism sector. Now out of nowhere there has been a \$5 increase in the passenger movement charge. It is exactly the same process that led to the backpacker tax debacle—no consultation and no economic analysis of what the impact would be.

This is a government that is simply not competent when it comes to infrastructure. In the WestConnex project we have seen a complete debacle. We see a road tunnel begun without knowing where it is going to pop up. We have seen more than a dozen design and scope changes to the project. This is the sort of thing that is going on in my electorate. I note that the person in charge of planning responsibility in New South Wales, Lucy Turnbull, did not even know that there had been more than 100 heritage homes demolished in one suburb—Haberfield—in my electorate. She was completely oblivious to it.

No wonder they are angry. I got this letter from a constituent in Northcote Street, Haberfield, just over the weekend. It is a copy of a letter to the WestConnex authority complaining about the works that are occurring. The writer said: 'On 7 October my work was disturbed midmorning—as you know from our face-to-face meetings I work from home—by the noise from tree cutting and mulching in the street. I went out to find a WestConnex team destroying the trees on the verge of the street as well as cutting the 100-year-old frangipani in my garden, without any permission being given on my part. I could have given them a lecture on the garden suburb planning principles behind Haberfield's inception and why that is still important in today's environmentally fragile world, but I would have been wasting my breath. This tree destruction work was all without notice, as the WestConnex team leader smugly advised me. To add insult to injury, a note was put in our letterboxes later that day stating that our trees were to be cut that day.'

That is this mob's idea of communication. It is what is occurring. Blackmore Park in Leichhardt is under threat. A whole series of decisions are being made without proper planning and without proper consultation with residents. That is why there is such a backlash, in particular against the Baird government but also because of this government's failure, when it comes to infrastructure, to undertake proper planning and make sure that it occurs. The funding came first, and then the planning and the approvals came much later. They have got it the wrong way up, and it stands in stark contrast to what they said they would do prior to the election. They said they would have proper analysis for all projects above \$100 million in value.

This government has changed some of its rhetoric on public transport and cities and urban policy, but it has not changed any of the policies, and it certainly is not changing any of the outcomes. That is why this government's infrastructure agenda has been treated with such contempt not just by communities around Australia but also by the business community, which understands that this is a government that has simply failed to deliver.