

Roe Highway Stage 8 — Future Traffic Demands Study — Adjournment Debate

HON SALLY TALBOT (South West) [10.21 pm]: I rise tonight to clarify something about a question I asked this afternoon that seemed to cause Hon Simon O'Brien a remarkable amount of distress. I cannot think why he became so agitated as he tried to answer the question.

Hon Ken Travers: You answered that when you said "he tried to answer the question."

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Quite; I thank Hon Ken Travers. It was not a very brave or capable attempt, I must say. I asked a question about the study being conducted by the Department for Planning and Infrastructure and Main Roads into the future traffic demands in the south metropolitan area. We have raised this study several times before in the house in an attempt to understand exactly what is happening with the planned development of Roe Highway stage 8, which the Liberal Party, in complete contravention of all public opinion in the area, went to the election promising to build. I asked this question for a very particular reason. Honourable members will know that we on this side of the house are absolutely opposed to the building of Roe Highway stage 8. It is our belief that the road is not only unnecessary for traffic planning in the south metropolitan area, but also will destroy the Beeliar wetlands, which are a very precious part of the environment.

Sadly, in last week's budget we saw a fast-tracking of Roe stage 8. Where we had \$20 million allocated to some feasibility studies in the budget, that has now been changed and there is now a total budget allocation of \$550 million—more than half a billion dollars—to this road, and a substantial amount of funding, I believe in the order of \$160 million, is designated for the 2009-10 year. This afternoon I wanted to know whether this study into future traffic demands on the south metropolitan area had been released. I was trying to understand how the government could possibly have fast-tracked the construction of this road before the study had reported on the transport needs of the south metropolitan area. We have referred to the study several times before in the house. We know that it exists, because of the letter addressed to Hon Francis Logan, MLA, the member for Cockburn, signed by Eric Lumsden, the Director General of the Department for Planning and Infrastructure. In response to a letter from Mr Logan about the removal of Roe Highway stage 8 from the metropolitan region scheme, Mr Lumsden writes —

The Department for Planning and Infrastructure ... recently completed a road network analysis study for the South West Metropolitan Sector ... A conclusion of this draft study report was that a road network that included Roe Highway from Kwinana Freeway to Stock Road appears to perform better in terms of traffic flow than several alternative networks tested.

However, —

This is the key —

given the extensive development proposals in the South West and South East Metropolitan and Peel regions ... it is considered necessary to broaden the investigation of future traffic demand to the wider Southern Metropolitan Area including Peel.

Then Mr Lumsden concludes by stating —

This study is to commence shortly —

This letter was written on 6 October last year —

and it is estimated that DPI will complete the work around mid 2009.

In his "attempt" to answer my question this afternoon, Hon Simon O'Brien started off by saying —

The study that the member refers to cannot, by definition, be finalised until some other things have happened.

Hon Ken Travers: But we'll build the road nonetheless.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: But we will build the road nonetheless—exactly. What is going on here? We have raised this study several times before. We want to know what will happen to its findings. It has never been suggested before that the study cannot be finalised. Was Mr Lumsden wrong when he said that it would report midyear? I do not think so, because when we last asked a series of questions of the Minister for Environment and the Minister for Transport about Roe stage 8, there was no indication that the study was not going to report mid-2009.

I refer to a question that was asked by my colleague Hon Sheila Mills in this place. She asked Hon Donna Faragher, Minister for Environment, the following question —

I refer to the study being conducted by the Department for Planning and Infrastructure and Main Roads, —

This is the one I talked about this afternoon —

broadening the investigation of future traffic demand in the south west metropolitan sector to the wider south metropolitan area, which is due to be completed in mid-2009.

- (1) Has the minister been asked to provide advice about the environmental effects of building Roe Highway stage 8 through the Beeliar wetlands?
- (2) If yes to (1), what advice has the minister provided to the study?
- (3) If no to (1), will the minister seek to have input into this study?
- (4) If no to (3), why not?

Unfortunately, the minister was not able to answer that question in the house, and she asked for it to be put on notice, which Hon Sheila Mills did, and we have now received an answer. The answer is very interesting in the light of Hon Simon O'Brien's stumbling around, trying to construct an answer to my question this afternoon. The answer that we have received from Hon Donna Faragher states —

- (1)-(3) No, I have not been asked to provide specific advice on the study being conducted by the Department for Planning and Infrastructure and Main Roads.

Members will notice that there is no reference to the study being delayed or not able to report in line with the time lines that had already been announced.

Hon Ken Travers: All her role now is to be a tax collector, not to make any decisions for the environment.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: That indeed appears to be the case. However, it is the next part of her answer that is particularly interesting. She states —

However, the Department of Environment and Conservation is a member of the DPI's Strategic Coordination Group which comprises of key State and local government officials to provide guidance and strategic direction to achieve the State Government's Roe Highway Stage 8 commitment.

We had not heard of the DPI's strategic coordination group before. However, as Hon Simon O'Brien pushed his way through in his attempt to formulate an answer, in much the same way as the government is trying to push this road through the Beeliar wetlands, he said this afternoon, having said that the study group cannot report and that the study cannot be finalised until other things have happened —

What I have put in place is an optimum study group ...

That is something else. Is this a third inquiry that the government has set up? It will be interesting to see whether Hon Simon O'Brien manages to complete his urgent parliamentary business before I sit down so that he can illuminate us on this point. What I suspect is that when we put these two answers together, we will have an indication of what the problem is. We have Hon Simon O'Brien putting together an optimum study group. Unfortunately, he was not able to tell us what it was this afternoon, because he had a bit of a brain snap and had to sit down before something else snapped. However, I strongly suspect that this is the DPI strategic coordination group called by another name. The key is that Hon Simon O'Brien talked about an optimum study group that is supposed to be doing the work that this other study, set up by Department for Planning and Infrastructure and Main Roads, is unable to do for some reason that he is not quite sure about. However, from Hon Donna Faragher we have what, I suppose, essentially constitutes a term of reference for the strategic coordination group. Members will note, as I read out before, that she stated that the strategic coordination group —

... comprises of key State and local government officials to provide guidance and strategic direction to achieve the State Government's Roe Highway Stage 8 commitment.

What sort of study are we looking at here? It does not sound to me as if it is something that will look at the traffic needs of the south metropolitan area. It sounds to me as if it is a group that has been given one objective. This government is devoid of any kind of original thinking or any capacity to take real responsibility for any decisions, and it has asked this group, "How on earth do we do this? We've made this commitment, we've got massive community opposition to what we're doing and we have no idea what to do. We've got a problem; even our local members in government are arguing with each other about whether it should go ahead."

Every time Hon Donna Faragher and some of her colleagues talk about the environment, they say that they care. There is one way for them to show us that they care about the environment, and that is to delete Roe Highway stage 8.