

INFRASTRUCTURE WESTERN AUSTRALIA BILL 2019

Second Reading

Resumed from 4 June.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Members, just before I put the question, if you want the call, get up and seek the call and attract the Chair's attention, otherwise I will put the question and you will miss the opportunity potentially. I give the call to Hon Colin Tincknell.

HON COLIN TINCKNELL (South West) [3.18 pm]: My apologies, Mr Deputy President; I thought another member was going to get up.

I am very keen to talk about the Infrastructure Western Australia Bill 2019, which is an important bill. I commend the government on introducing this bill. At the start, I would like to talk about that a little.

Western Australia is the fifth state to introduce this kind of legislation and, hopefully, to pass it. I ask: why has it taken so long? Many other states have had a bill very similar to this and it has been advantageous for them in the past to gain federal funding because they had an overarching structure in place that created confidence. Infrastructure is very important to all states, especially a state like Western Australia that has massive regional areas. Although we may have certain funding issues in regional areas, the previous set-up for state infrastructure planning involved all government trading enterprises submitting strategic asset plans; some government agencies, but not all, submitting strategic asset plans; and plans being submitted to government through Treasury for funding consideration. The government made decisions based on what it received, election commitments, available funding, and policies et cetera. Strategic asset plans did not need to be made public, nor did any government considerations for such plans.

Under the new proposal, Infrastructure Western Australia will consider strategic asset plans from all state agencies, as normal, and it will actively assist them to do that. Infrastructure Western Australia will consider all plans and will prioritise according to state infrastructure strategy directions and findings. Exactly how indices are weighted in this process will be a matter for IWA. That is interesting, considering the state infrastructure strategy directions. It will be up to the government of the day to give that direction to the board.

Infrastructure Western Australia will report to the Premier on priority infrastructure plans. That is an overarching high-level strategy. It is good that that is proposed. IWA will also scrutinise business plans prior to submission to Infrastructure Australia. That is all very good.

I will read out a few quotes from the Premier's second reading speech in the other place. He said —

... the government's decision-making on infrastructure should be based on robust and evidence-based planning and not on short-term political gains.

In the second paragraph of his speech, the Premier stated —

It is clear that infrastructure decision-making in this state has at times been based on inadequate planning or information, resulting in poor outcomes and costly project delays or cancellations. Infrastructure investment has long been held hostage to political cycles. That reduces certainty and undermines the confidence of stakeholders, which ultimately impacts on investment in this state ... As the "Special Inquiry into Government Programs and Projects: Final Report" highlighted, the lack of a comprehensive and long-term infrastructure plan has led to too many projects being undertaken on an ad hoc basis and without adequate planning.

The last quote I would like to read out is in the third paragraph. The Premier said —

The lack of coordinated strategic planning and agreed infrastructure priorities has also meant that WA has at times missed out on its fair share of commonwealth infrastructure funding. With a more strategic evidence-based and bipartisan approach, we will continue to turn this around and secure a greater share of the funding from Canberra ...

I would like to hold the Premier to those words and make sure that Infrastructure WA takes a bipartisan approach and that its decisions are not held hostage to political cycles or made for short-term political gain. I will obviously be looking into that in the future.

The second reading speech refers to a 20-year horizon and a 20-year state infrastructure strategy. It states also —

The bill also requires government to prepare an annual state infrastructure program, addressing a time frame of 10 years. This will be done with input from Infrastructure WA.

I have a few concerns about Infrastructure WA, and I will talk about those in a minute. The role of Infrastructure WA is to provide an overarching plan for infrastructure proposals in Western Australia that are over \$100 million in

value, in consultation with business, the community and state agencies. That is simple. Infrastructure WA will develop a rolling 20-year infrastructure plan, to be amended or updated every five years, which highlights population growth, building trends, climate, and other concerns. Any advice given by Infrastructure Western Australia should be persuasive. However, it is not binding. That is something we must consider.

The Infrastructure WA board will comprise a chair and 10 members, of whom five will be from government and five from business and industry. The chair will also be from the private sector. Therefore, the balance of power on the board will sit with the non-government members. It might be better if the five members from the business and industry sector were chosen by the Parliament of Western Australia rather than the government of Western Australia. I would like members to think about that. The aim is that Infrastructure WA will be independent and free from political interference. The committee system of this Parliament works very well. I have a lot of confidence in it. There is no reason why a select committee of this Parliament could not be involved in choosing those five members of the board. The Premier cannot direct the board to change its report or priorities. However, he can ask the board to reconsider its advice. For example, the Premier may be privy to information to which the board is not. Whether a change is required is a matter for the board.

Infrastructure WA looks good. It looks as though it will work and be a major advantage to the state of Western Australia. However, I have a concern about its independence. Infrastructure WA will need a strong and independent board that will not be affected by political decisions. The government will obviously have a major part to play, as other members have said. However, the lack of independence of the board may bring that undone and mean that Infrastructure WA does not work as well as it could. Western Australia is one of the last states in Australia to introduce an infrastructure bill. Why has it taken so long for this state to introduce an overarching and coordinated infrastructure strategy? Will Infrastructure WA be a truly independent body if its board members are chosen by the leaders of the government?

That is a question for members of this Parliament to debate. Will it be truly independent?

Certain reports were made public through FOI rules. Consistent with other states, we have the state infrastructure strategy, the government response strategy, the state infrastructure program, the summary advice, the major infrastructure proposals, the annual report relating to the implementation of the project, the Premier's directions and the statement of grounds for removing a board member or CEO. Many reports are made public and that information is available.

There are possible gaps, question marks, issues and problems, whichever way we would like to describe them. If one of the roles of the IWA is to encourage or standardise state agency completion of strategic asset plans, what provisions will be made for a potential increase in agencies' budgets to accommodate a need to fulfil this requirement? That is a question that I would like to hear the government answer in reply. There is an opportunity to move an amendment to protect projects that have already commenced and been funded under one government. Examples are Roe 8 and Busselton Margaret River Airport. For instance, two surveys conducted by the Melville city council showed that 82 per cent and 71 per cent of people were in favour of the Roe 8 project continuing. I say to the government that people who live in the area where Roe 8 exists are generally in favour of Roe 8 continuing. Will this bill ensure that projects will not be stopped or abandoned and funding be redirected to election commitments unless there is a really compelling reason—in other words, signed off by an independent board of IWA? If we truly want to make it independent, these are the things we must consider.

There are some strengths in this bill for which I commend the government. Although the IWA will give well-considered strategic advice, and decision-making around accepting infrastructure plans will remain with the government of the day, the fact that the government will potentially be going against a 20-year strategy should mean it should be much more accountable. It has been 20 years or more since the Roe 8 strategy was planned, funded and talked about. This new IWA should hopefully do away with that, and the situation that has happened more recently will not happen in the future.

The power to appoint a chair sits with the Premier. I see that as a weakness. I would like that decision to lie with the independent committee. Obviously, I would like to see an independent board. We need the board and the chair to be free from political influence. This is a vital part of Infrastructure WA working well.

With regard to possible opportunities, Infrastructure WA should force government agencies to think about and make plans for infrastructure. Certain government agencies have not done that in the past. Now the government will be encouraging them to do so. I turn now to possible threats. IWA will identify and develop privatisation indices for making decisions about projects to promote and prioritise. This could work out. Who knows? That is a possible threat. Another possible threat or consideration is that privatisation will be weighted on a cost-benefit analysis, which would make it harder for major projects to get through the board. What would stop the government vetoing projects started by the previous government? Nothing at this stage stops that because this bill gives the Premier of the day massive powers. Let us hope that the bill will increase the federal government's confidence in WA's long-term future planning, because we have been regularly missing out to other states.

This bill is important and we are in favour of it passing through the house. We have highlighted areas in which it can be improved. The independence of the board is important. I understand that governments like to have the power to make changes and alterations, but when that is done purely for political purposes, it is to the detriment of the people of WA. WA is different from Victoria or New South Wales. It is a massive state and its future infrastructure needs are massive, especially in regional areas. Regional areas deliver the wealth of this state to the country—this commonwealth—and if infrastructure is not done right and is not completely supported by the federal government, we will suffer. We should not be relying on just GST returns. We need Infrastructure WA, but we need it to be done right and for it to be independent. That is my main area of interest in this bill.

HON TJORN SIBMA (North Metropolitan) [3.36 pm]: To allay the concerns of any other member of this chamber, I will make a brief and modest contribution to the Infrastructure Western Australia Bill 2019.

Hon Jim Chown: Your contribution is never modest!

Hon TJORN SIBMA: That is for others to judge.

Hon Sue Ellery: Is that a compliment or an insult?

Hon TJORN SIBMA: I suppose we are about to see that.

I very much like what will be the outcome of the bill, but I think the proof of the pudding will be in the eating. The Parliamentary Liberal Party's position on this bill is clear—we support it. Nevertheless, I want to make a personal observation. I do not see this bill or the creation of the Infrastructure WA agency as being the panacea to all planning ills or shortcomings in the strategic planning and delivery, and coordination of infrastructure provision within this state. I am concerned when second reading speeches contain a creeping level of self-loathing and refer to politics being taken out of decision-making. I think we need to be a little on guard and prepared to defend the appropriate role of the executive government in decision-making. I am concerned about this disposition—that we are availing ourselves of bureaucratic creep and that there is some virtue in rule by technocrats—which was in the second reading speech of this bill and is contained in elements of the Local Government Amendment Bill, which we will be discussing some time. I am very concerned about the spirit, and some of the language, in which this bill is presented. I think it is completely disingenuous for any political leader of any government of any shape, colour or disposition to say that they most ardently hope to take the politics out of decision-making. Frankly, that is nonsense. We are adults here and we should be able to call out that nonsense.

I am also concerned about another imputation in this bill—that the government has formed the view that somehow there is a skills gap across the 130 000-odd public servants in this state, some of whom, in their daily role in a government trading enterprise, such as the Water Corporation or Synergy, or an agency of government like the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage or the Department of Transport, collectively and individually lack the strategic acumen to put together the work that will be done by Infrastructure WA. I do not believe for one instant that we do not have that intellectual capacity in this state and that we need to create a whole other entity to fill that gap. I am concerned as well that the biggest problem in infrastructure rollout is delays in the decision-making process. Levels of bureaucracy do not make it easier to deliver any project in the state at small, medium or large scale. I would be a little more content if this agency was a doer rather than an adviser. Yes, I note the remarks made by Hon Alison Xamon. I know she sees a virtue in creating another layer of advisers but I do not. I do not think that is a good thing of itself.

Hon Alison Xamon: It's just someone who pulls it all together.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: It is the role of executive government to tie it all together. It has the wherewithal to do it. There are agencies and subcommittees of government and the infrastructure coordination working group of the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage, for instance. We have the capacity to do it. A firm Premier, a firm cabinet and firm ministers have the opportunity to have strategic meetings among themselves, and I think this kind of agency lets them off the hook. That is one of the dangers I see in this bill.

We are patting ourselves on the back by thinking that somehow a 20-year plan is a strategic plan. We would be among the most intellectually isolated people on the planet to think that a 20-year planning horizon is a strategic planning horizon. It is not; it is a nonsense. A strategic planning horizon talks in multiples of decades. This is just about managing the short to medium term. For example, when compared with a country like China or Singapore, we are not in the same strategic game, and if we are to do the right thing by the people of this state, we absolutely need to be.

One last point: the genesis of this bill is legitimate in that it was a priority and a policy the government made when in opposition. It has found some momentum for the drafting of this legislation out of the special inquiry report, the Langoulant report, which recommended something along these lines. In my view, that is an uneven document, but there are elements and suggestions there that it would be wise for any government to pick up, and one of those would, of course, be the creation of a parliamentary budget office, which this government has chosen not to do for

its own reasons. If this agency is to do its job and do it well, it needs to be possessed of the capacity to do that job. It needs to be intellectually honest as well and consider the likelihood of strategic shocks. One of the most significant strategic shocks this state has encountered in the last 10 to 15 years was a rapid growth in population that no-one saw coming. We can debate how well the previous Liberal–National government managed that time, but I am yet to hear any sensible or honest contribution from members on the other side about how they would have managed those circumstances any differently. All I want to say is that if this is going to work, we have to be sure that this agency engages in robust, intellectually honest planning and countenances the fact that we do not progress at a linear rate—that we deal with externalities and shocks. With that I will sit down.

HON JACQUI BOYDELL (Mining and Pastoral — Deputy Leader of the Nationals WA) [3.43 pm]: I rise on behalf of the Nationals WA to indicate our support for the Infrastructure Western Australia Bill 2019. I also want to highlight some of the concerns we see with the passing of this legislation and therefore the set-up of Infrastructure Western Australia. I listened quite intently to the contributions of other members on this piece of legislation last night and today. A lot of the concerns National Party raises have also been acknowledged by other members of this house and in the other place, when the debate occurred there. I do not think there is any denying that it is a good intent and good outcome for governments to have a more coordinated approach to planning, funding and developing infrastructure projects within the state based on a 10 or 20-year plan as suggested, and even to have an annual update on the program, as has been suggested the Premier will table.

I want to take a step back and touch on some of the issues that Hon Tjorn Sibma just raised and which I also want to raise in relation to Infrastructure Western Australia being able to work with government while also following its own priority and strategy of long-term project planning and development within Western Australia. Governments have to deal with issues on a long-term basis, such as population growth. Other aspects also put at risk the capacity of governments to invest in infrastructure, particularly in Western Australia, as we are so aligned to the mining industry. If the mining commodities market were to collapse tomorrow, economic opportunities for the government of Western Australia would immediately be affected. I wonder how—not in theory but in reality—the processes of government and the decisions it would have to take as a result of things out of its control would work in with the priorities of Infrastructure WA, when IWA will have been given statutory authority to set a 20-year plan for the state of Western Australia.

I think the general public would have concerns about the perception that the authority and strategy of government and the democracy of Parliament could be slightly removed and given to Infrastructure WA through its planning for the delivery of outcomes. A long-held belief of our democracy is that governments are elected on a mandate, and that they set strategies to deliver on their election commitments and long-term planning for the state of Western Australia. Sometimes that is not agreed upon by opposition parties, because their idea of politics and how to deliver a state strategy is different. Believe it or not, we are always going to get that with the different political ideologies in the Parliament. I have concerns about setting up an outside structure such as Infrastructure WA, and how governments in the future will continue to act alongside a statutory body like IWA. Every four years, the capacity of members of Parliament and the government to deliver is tested—every four years. If people do not agree with a government's decision-making processes or long-term strategies, or the way it has managed the finances, they rightly get to have a say about the government going into the future. In turn, Parliament has the function of holding the government to account on its election commitments, financial management and long-term strategy to develop opportunities to the advantage of the people of Western Australia. The capacity of a statutory body such as IWA to set its own agenda, which may be different from the agenda of government, is a bit of a concern for me in terms of how the government will be able to work with this statutory body.

The Infrastructure Western Australia Bill has come from an election commitment, which had its genesis, I guess, in the Langoulant report. That concerns me slightly, because it has always been my position and that of the Nationals WA that the special inquirer report was politically motivated. Mr Langoulant himself will be involved in Infrastructure Western Australia. The special inquirer, who has a very specific position on the planning, infrastructure development, financial management and program development of the former government, now gets to set his own agenda through Infrastructure Western Australia, developed from his own special inquirer report. I am very concerned about the independence of Infrastructure Western Australia under that sort of guidance, and the precedent that has already been set, and that needs to be addressed in further debate on this bill. I am aware that Mr Langoulant does not have the opportunity to respond to my concerns during this debate today, but he has previously placed on record, through the special inquirer report and other comments that he has made, his point of view on the public service in Western Australia, and the capacity of executive government to make decisions.

Some people suggest that the opinions laid out in the special inquirer report are a little offensive to the public service, the executive government, and the role that members of Parliament play in holding the government to account. I do not believe it is clear whether we are setting up a fourth arm of government to set up a strategy and priority for the government to adopt, or whether the government will set up a strategy or plan with Infrastructure Western Australia itself. That causes me some concern, particularly for the Parliament, where we regularly

consider the decisions of government and the long-term planning of governments as part of the review function of the Legislative Council.

The theory of the development of Infrastructure Western Australia all sounds good on paper, but in reality how will it work with an elected government, the election commitments of government, and a mandate given to a political party to govern? We cannot remove the politics of what we do to form government from the outcomes for Western Australia in general. Infrastructure Western Australia will not get to seek a mandate from the people of Western Australia, and will not get to have its particular plan or strategy tested by the people of Western Australia. The role of the government in how it sets about working with Infrastructure Western Australia to ensure that the priorities of government are met through that process remains a challenge for the government, and is not entirely clear in the bill presented to the house. We will have an opportunity to further question the government on how it intends to instigate this plan, and not just have a plan for a plan's sake.

I recognise that Infrastructure Western Australia may create an opportunity for the state of Western Australia to work more directly with Infrastructure Australia. That is a good thing. The reporting strategies around Infrastructure Western Australia, the degree of flexibility the Premier has in his role of working with Infrastructure Western Australia, and, indeed, the influence of the Premier in setting priority planning for Infrastructure Western Australia, all need to be made clear in the committee stage of the bill. I am also concerned about the resource capacity for Infrastructure Western Australia to deliver on some of the key performance indicators listed in the bill, or the expectations of the general public of some transparency around the decision-making, the conclusions by which it will come to the 20-year plan, and how it will seek to work with changing governments in that time.

In theory, I do not think anyone would deny the principle of the idea, but how that is rolled out in practice and whether priority projects get equity in the decision-making of Infrastructure Western Australia and government remains to be seen. I suggest that when Infrastructure Western Australia considers priority projects over \$100 million, particularly in a regional and, indeed, in a metropolitan sense, it will need to measure social wellbeing and cultural outcomes, apart from the economic outcomes. Sometimes projects in regional areas do not stack up economically against projects in the metropolitan area in the first instance. The Ord River project is an example of a state-building project, which is a massive opportunity for the state, but in the early development of that project the numbers would not have added up for government investment. Will Infrastructure Western Australia or, indeed, government have the capacity to play an overarching role in building visionary and aspirational projects in regional Western Australia? With whom will the decision-making on aspirational projects remain? Will it be with Infrastructure Western Australia or government? Will it be the responsibility of government or Infrastructure WA to support people in regional areas or the metropolitan area who rely on the delivery of aspirational projects? I am sure Infrastructure Western Australia would look at a project's economic outcomes into the future. I agree it should do that, but there are other considerations, particularly in a regional sense. The regions do not have the population base and there are considerations such as transport issues at times and weather conditions, particularly in the north of the state, that require different and more expensive building requirements, and more expensive road and rail infrastructure delivery. How will Infrastructure Western Australia measure those outcomes? How will it make regional projects a priority and give them some equity in the decision-making space? Will social wellbeing outcomes be a factor in the formula of how we develop those aspirational targets and projects for Infrastructure Western Australia to continue to develop?

In bringing together the board and the skilled staff and resourcing required to support that board, if the skilled staff and the resourcing required, as determined by the special inquirer, cannot be found within the public service, which is an extremely professional and skilled workforce that has supported many governments, where will the resourcing to support Infrastructure Western Australia be found? Again, it is another question around how theory will translate into the practicality of what the government is seeking to achieve. When we go into Committee of the Whole, I think the government needs to consider that question and provide some answers to the chamber.

One of the last things I would like to cover is how Infrastructure Western Australia will interact with other bodies such as the Economic Regulation Authority and the Environmental Protection Authority. How will Infrastructure Western Australia put a mechanism of decision-making across government agencies to address what the special inquiry terms siloing and piecemeal decision-making? How will that come across in the whole of government working with Infrastructure Western Australia.

During the Committee of the Whole House, Leader of the House, the National Party may foreshadow a slight amendment to clause 21 in which the Premier's involvement is outlined, particularly subclauses (3) and (4).

Hon Sue Ellery: Is this different from the one already on the supplementary notice paper?

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: No; I am referring to that proposed amendment. Whether the government accepts that amendment will be a good discussion.

As has been touched on previously—one last point—how will the public have access to the transparency of the Premier's role when working with Infrastructure Western Australia and the transparency of the decision-making process? How will we ensure that the public continues to have confidence in the decision-making of government when working with a sort of outside arm of government that, I agree, should be an independent body? In my view, that will probably not be the case at the outset with Infrastructure Western Australia, given the special inquirer's involvement. However, that remains to be seen.

I will also say that although in theory Infrastructure Western Australia seems to be a great idea, with prioritisation of it—a 20-year plan; fantastic—it will, however, allow the Premier to have oversight, have a say and remove the independence of IWA as he or she sees fit, which will therefore undermine the entire objective of the bill. Clauses in the bill will allow the Premier of the day to do as they see fit, which raises the question of why we need the bill in the first instance, but we will get to that during the committee stage. Thank you, Madam Acting President, I look forward to the committee stage.

HON SIMON O'BRIEN (South Metropolitan) [4.02 pm]: I will keep my remarks on the Infrastructure Western Australia Bill 2019 brief because it is patently obvious that the house will read this bill a second time for all the right or wrong reasons. I want members opposite to all contemplate what I am about to say and say, "Yeah; yeah", and then come back to me after a couple of years and tell me whether I was right. I might be howled down today but time will prove what I am about to indicate. I have been around for a little while—in fact, long enough to go into government and take over government agencies after failed Labor government experiments. I know what it is like to inherit a joint ownership of the Department for Planning and Infrastructure and have to separate it so that it could function properly after it had been coagulated into one. I remember how appreciative everyone from directors general down were to have their proper role and function restored. I know what it is like to be given the job, a difficult job, of dismantling something like an Office of Shared Services, a misconceived and colossally expensive waste of money inflicted on us by, again, another blunder in machinery-of-government terms by a discredited former Labor government. I have seen all those things and more. I was here when some members opposite had "Kevin 07" bumper stickers on their cars, parked out on Harvest Terrace. I had him picked for a phony and a fraud then. Members opposite did not want to hear that then, but I will tell them what: I was right, and they all know I was right. I am looking at the Infrastructure Western Australia Bill 2019, and I can tell members: this is a misconceived notion. It was developed in the heat of, "God, we need something to run an election on. We'll get a list of 100 items that we're going to pledge, one of them being to name a room at Optus Stadium after Dennis Cometti."

Hon Michael Mischin: Two hundred bright ideas!

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: Two hundred bright ideas, and this is another one. The government is going to have its Infrastructure Western Australia Bill; it can stew in its own juice, because this is, again, a product of spin doctors and phonies. It is unnecessary. It is an absolute insult to the professional officers of the Western Australian public service who should be performing these functions, if the government would let them get on with it. I know them, because a number of them used to report to me, from agencies that used to report to me. This is an insult to them. It is a misconceived notion to put in place an artificial construct, probably at colossal expense, to interfere with the due processes of government. The government expects to be cheered to the echo; well, I am not going to cheer it.

I say this to the government: in due course we will see my general observations proved right. We will see that this proposed instrumentality will have a negative influence on the things it is meant to encourage. We will see that it is a vast waste of money. We will see the unnecessary appointments of well-paid people to jobs that should not be done by them. They will be accountable to no-one, and they will be appointed by a government that is prepared to lie to this house about how independent Infrastructure Western Australia will be.

If the government were dinkum, it would not fetter the processes of developing Western Australia's infrastructure with its own temporary, shallow, partisan politics. The government should go and have a talk to the people at Westport; I do not know where they sit within all this. They are trying to strategically plan the future port operations of metropolitan Perth, but they are not even allowed to contemplate and weigh up the effects of Roe 8 or Roe 9, which were discredited before they even began. What a dispiriting thing that will be for all the officers who are doing so much work on that, when they know that no matter how good their final product will be, it will count for nothing in the public domain because it has been bastardised from the very start by this Labor government, its spin doctors and the phonies who head it up.

The same thing is happening now with this legislation. Again, I say mark my words: Western Australia will live to regret this. An incoming Liberal—and possibly National—government will have to dismantle what will ultimately become an expensive —

Hon Sue Ellery: Is that the Liberal Party position?

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: It will be, in due course. The Leader of the House will see that that will be the position. It will have to be, because we are going to see another failure by the Labor Party in Western Australia, at colossal expense. The Labor Party won the election, and this is part of its platform; it can have it. But I will tell members now that people will be wringing their hands before this little saga is over. It will come to no good in the long term. It is basically already corrupted before it starts but, by gee, we have not seen anything yet on that score. Just wait until the government gets up and running on this particular exercise.

Members can vote for this, as a house, if they want, but they should do so in light of what I have told them, and I will wait for them all to come crying to me in due course when they see that what I have said is absolutely right, because I have seen it before. Many speakers have said that they are not sure about this legislation because it is not quite clear how it will work. I can tell them how it will work: it will be an absolute disaster. But if members opposite want it, they can go for it.

HON MICHAEL MISCHIN (North Metropolitan — Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [4.09 pm]: I rise to make a contribution to the second reading debate on the Infrastructure Western Australia Bill 2019. Much of what concerns me about this bill has already been mentioned to a greater or lesser extent by other members of this house. This was an election commitment of the McGowan–Wyatt–Cook Labor government and we have indicated that we will not bar its passage. It is one of the matters that it brought to government from opposition and it is entitled to play around with it. However, I have some serious reservations, which I wish to raise.

It must be said that the idea of long-term planning for infrastructure and the like is a laudable objective. I think Hon Diane Evers simplified it rather too much by suggesting that government departments simply build roads for the sake of building roads because that is their job. That is not quite the case. There is a requirement that governments look at the long term. In fact, there have been a number of long-term projects. There was one called the Stephenson study, which was a long-term plan for Perth, part of which, as I recall, was a system of roads that included Roe 8 and Roe 9. That was long-term infrastructure planning. What has happened to that? The exigencies of government and populism have thrown elements of that away. We now have a government that is lauding the importance of long-term planning beyond an election cycle and well into the future as a “pipeline for investment”—whatever the devil that means—and is lauding the importance of certainty, but is prepared to simply tear up contracts when it suits it in order to achieve a few votes. That underlines some of the hypocrisy behind this proposal. I have little doubt at all that the McGowan–Wyatt–Cook government will disregard whatever comes out of Infrastructure Western Australia in due course that does not suit it. If it does not suit Labor’s election campaign or how it wants to spend Western Australian taxpayers’ money on some pet project, then the money will not be spent, whatever this board recommends after whatever process it engages in. There is no question about it. This government has demonstrated that time and again in its last two years of government.

There are also problems with long-term planning. Twenty years! Seriously? As I recall, we had a transport plan that took us up to 2030. Ellenbrook did not appear in that to be built immediately, because there was no need for it. So much for long-term planning for the future! Labor made an election commitment to build a railway out to Ellenbrook, whether people want it or need it. So much for long-term planning! The hypocrisy cries out to us! Yet here we are, predicting 20 years into the future. As I recall, over the course of the so-called boom while we were in government, we had the biggest population influx in Western Australia’s history, and then it declined. That influx involved spending on infrastructure. We had to scramble around to build schools, police stations, roads, hospitals and other infrastructure in order to cope with that sudden influx of population. That was not predicted 20 years ago. What was the last Labor government spending money on from 2001 to 2008? What about Perth Arena? I wonder whether Infrastructure Western Australia would have predicted the need for a Perth Arena—or RAC Arena, or whatever company the government has sold the name off to—let alone Optus Stadium or Elizabeth Quay. I understand that the Premier is quite happy with Elizabeth Quay now that it has been built. It was a vanity project before, but that has been a boon to Western Australia and the city. Would that have been on the books of Infrastructure WA? I think not. What about Perth City Link? Labor had one plan after another for that, but we built it. Would that have been on the agenda of Infrastructure Western Australia’s board? I think not. Would the schools that were built during our term in office have been part of Infrastructure Western Australia’s planning back in 2005? I think not.

This agency will plan 20 years into the future, then there will be five-year plans and 10-year plans. We saw how successful Stalinist five-year plans were! Nazi Germany had four-year plans and it could not get it right! Now we are going to have 20-year plans and five-year plans and 10-year programs. It is absolutely ridiculous. What this is can be found in what passes for a second reading speech, and I will get to it in a moment. The second reading speech reads like a desperate piece of rhetoric.

Debate interrupted, pursuant to standing orders.

[Continued on page 3726.]

Sitting suspended from 4.15 to 4.30 pm

Extract from *Hansard*

[COUNCIL — Wednesday, 5 June 2019]

p3709c-3716a

Hon Colin Tincknell; Hon Tjorn Sibma; Hon Jacqui Boydell; Hon Simon O'Brien; Hon Michael Mischin
