

TRANSPORT — PUBLIC AND PRIVATE

48. Mr J.M. FRANCIS to the Minister for Transport:

Perhaps on behalf of everyone, I wish Oliver Peterson from the ABC a happy birthday today.

Several members interjected.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: The minister recently took the time to visit my electorate of Jandakot and address some of the issues affecting my electorate and also around Cockburn Central. In particular, we looked at the 470 new parking bays going into Cockburn Central and the expansion of the Kwinana Freeway south. Given that, could the minister please explain to the house what else the government is doing to address transport and public transport issues around Perth?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL replied:

Thank you, member for Jandakot; and thank you for your hospitality. The member is right; we were out at Cockburn Central—where the member for Cockburn’s office is and we can show him how to get there one day—looking at the 470 new bays that are now underway. We went down onto the freeway and in a death-defying act the member was able to manoeuvre between the concrete barriers so that we could park moderately safely and have a look at the new lane on the freeway. But it got me thinking about the size of the government’s investment in public transport and roads.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Thank you, members!

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: What I uncovered in answer to the member for Jandakot’s question was that every year the government subsidises public transport—that is, tops up the amount paid in fares so that the public transport system can continue to operate—to an amount of \$735 million. That is this year’s figure. Over four years, that is \$2.95 billion. Capital spending on public transport over the next four years is \$1.4 billion. That is \$2.95 billion in subsidy and \$1.4 billion in capital. Main Roads Western Australia anticipates that over the next four years it will spend \$2.2 billion on asset investment—that is, on things such as the widening of the freeway. It will also spend \$2.3 billion over the next four years on the maintenance of roads in the metropolitan area and around the state.

As I looked at the sheer quantum of those numbers, I was reflecting on a couple of comments and announcements made last week. I reflected on the Leader of the Opposition’s speech in response to the Premier’s Statement and there were two things I noted from that. Firstly, I have never seen the word “I” used more in one speech in this place, which is perhaps an interesting reflection on the member for Rockingham. Have a look—with the number of things the member claims credit for, I would not be surprised if there was a team of workers on scaffolding trying to carve his head into the side of Mt Augustus! But, anyway, we will move on. The second was —

Several members interjected.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: It may not be big enough!

Several members interjected.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: We could always bring in some fill; that is a very, very good point, member for Eyre.

The second one was that the Leader of the Opposition criticised the government for the levels of debt that we face. The second thing I noticed last week was this: I was watching a commercial news station, Channel Seven, on 22 February, and the opposition’s shadow Minister for Transport was out there. He said in one of his normally well-thought-out sound bites, “What we should be doing in this state is spending four times as much on public transport and—oh—twice as much on roads.” Four times as much on public transport and twice as much on roads! Now, I thought —

Mr C.C. Porter: He didn’t really say that.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: He did say it, Treasurer; he did.

I thought that that was an easy throwaway line, but in light of the Leader of the Opposition’s commitment to fiscal responsibility, I thought I would just work out how much that would cost—and he said that it had to be over four years. Twice as much on roads over four years, Leader of the Opposition, would cost \$4.5 billion; four times as much on public transport would cost only \$13 billion. So in his one throwaway line, he has added \$17.5 billion to state debt.

Mr C.C. Porter: The shadow minister for debt!

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I do not know. There are only three reasons he would say it. First, the opposition intends to cut maybe the education and the health budgets to pay for it; I do not know.

Mr C.C. Porter: All of it.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: All of it. Secondly, he is wrong and the Leader of the Opposition's views on fiscal responsibility reign supreme; and, if that is the case, I am expecting that the Leader of the Opposition would indicate such; or the third one is that the shadow minister does not really care what the Leader of the Opposition says and he is prepared to say what he will. As I was reflecting further, as one does occasionally, on some of his comments in relation to transport and infrastructure planning in Western Australia, I concluded that they are not always what one would call gems of wisdom. We have had his \$10 million plan to paint taxis gold; we have had his miracle plan—I have showed this before—to put a railway line from Bunbury to Merredin, loosely following the 200-mile-wide arrow; we have had his brilliant plan—this is the “noodle nation” plan—for the rail network in Perth, which, if he has his way, will see a heavy train pass every front door in the Perth suburbs. No wonder he is the shadow minister for suburbs!

So I thought I would help him out, Leader of the Opposition; I will leave this blueprint that I am holding for the Leader of the Opposition to take to him. As he next battles with the major problems in transport planning, I have a blueprint for the Labor Party election strategy on transport planning. We bought it down at the early learning centre. We made sure tractors were on it to keep our country cousins in the National Party happy. So I will leave this blueprint for the shadow Minister for Transport. It is not a laughing matter, because what he has effectively done is commit the opposition to increase state debt by \$17.5 billion by doubling spending on roads and increasing spending on public transport by a factor of four. It is easy to make throwaway lines, but as the opposition heads towards the election, it starts to cost money.