

METRONET

Motion

Resumed from 8 November on the following motion moved by Hon Alanna Clohesy (Parliamentary Secretary) —

That this house congratulates the McGowan government on its Metronet policy and notes the benefits Western Australia will derive, including the jobs to be created, from this transport and planning initiative.

HON SIMON O'BRIEN (South Metropolitan) [2.17 pm]: It is a greatcoats on, greatcoats off sort of day. I was not tiring at all since we last dealt with the motion complimenting the Australian Labor Party on its Metronet slogan/program. I thought that perhaps my colleagues could do without it today—maybe there is a silver lining—having just consumed a good deal of the house's time on other matters. I might have something to say another time about some of the rubbish that I heard spoken, but that is something for another day. Right now, we have to get onto Metronet, which gives me the opportunity to point out a few things to members: firstly, while the government is patting itself on the back and, in the terms of Hon Alanna Clohesy, while we are congratulating the McGowan government on its policy, that we also note the benefits that Western Australia will derive, including the jobs to be created from this transport and planning initiative. After all the other opposition members have spoken, I look forward to Hon Alanna Clohesy's reply to my questions: What jobs are going to be created? How will they be sustained? What numbers can the government give us? I think that it is a hollow sounding sort of motion; that is all it is. I do not think that there is any substance to it. When and where will these jobs be created, and how many will be created? I know that the honourable member will have no trouble fielding that question, so I look forward to her answer.

This is the second election campaign running in which we have seen Metronet. I alluded to it in my opening remarks when last we canvassed this motion. This is the second time we have seen Metronet. We saw it in 2013, and we saw then that, by some extraordinary coincidence, just about every marginal seat the then opposition was trying to either defend or capture happened to have an offer of a railway going through it. Is this one of the key drivers of the Metronet policy? I suspect it is, and perhaps the honourable member can tell us that. I am not aware that the architects of this Metronet policy have necessarily done all the homework that needs to be done. Transport is all about getting goods and people from a point of origin to a place of destination. That is what it is all about. It is measurable; we can work out the transport demand and then we can work out the way in which we address that demand. I am hoping that the mover of the motion, being a parliamentary secretary, will have easy access to the information to advise us just what work has been done prior to very expensive commitments being made.

Going back a few years, I know that there has been a bit of form in this respect. I have previously recounted the efforts of then Premier Carpenter, with our former colleague Graham Giffard, candidate for an Assembly seat, banging in a sign saying, "This is where the Ellenbrook railway goes." I can still see Graham there—bang, bang, bang—energetically, behind the Premier of the day, whacking in a sign saying that the government is going to build a railway here. Lo and behold, when we got into government—I have told this to the house before, so I will cover it briefly—I was tasked with doing some actual hard work. I got my agencies to work out the viability of a rail line to Ellenbrook. I discovered then that no work had been done—not even the most preliminary work—yet a promise had been made by the Labor leader, a Premier to boot, saying that his government would build a railway here. It would take resources from wherever they needed to be taken for this priority. Of course, that is not the way we should go about this. I do not know how much confidence we can have that that is not reflected across this entire Metronet network. Is it all about political advantage and plundering the public purse to do it, or is it a proper infrastructure program? We shall see.

Again, away on urgent parliamentary business outside the chamber is someone to whom I never thought I would be able to put this, but unfortunately she is on urgent parliamentary business outside the chamber now. Why was the then Minister for Planning and Infrastructure nowhere to be seen when Graham Giffard and Alan Carpenter were outlining the railway to Ellenbrook? When they were out there announcing the holy grail of Labor transport policy, why was the then minister in that government nowhere to be seen? Was it because she knew, having received the same advice that the head of the Public Transport Authority in due course gave to me, that this project was a complete dog and that she should not touch it? I do not know, but again it casts a shadow over the planning processes we are now seeing in this government, because it has now determined that it is going ahead with its Metronet. We shall see.

The government is going to connect the Mandurah line with the Armadale line through the Thornlie line—the Thornlie–Cockburn rail link. This is the same rail link that was in the Court government's project, but was taken out when the Labor Party last came into government. That is what happened. Imagine if Hon Pierre Yang had been a member for South Metropolitan in those days. He would have been appalled, as we all were. Hon Nick Goiran became a member for South Metropolitan in part because he was so appalled about what happened back then. He

is here today, rejoicing with me that finally we will see some progress in this matter, but when? I will conclude this point with this observation. When the route of the Mandurah line was changed by the incoming Labor government back then, I thought that was curious, because Eric Ripper, the then Treasurer, was slashing and burning everything. He was cutting road funds and doing all sorts of things, and slashing expenditure left, right, centre and in all directions. Why then, would the government be proceeding with the big project of the Mandurah line? The PTA was able to point out that the route could be changed if aspects such as the Cockburn line harmonising with the Armadale line were cut out. Of course, that would drop construction back a year or two, which is one of the oldest tricks in the book when it comes to appealing to Treasurers who want to push out \$1 billion worth of capital expenditure. Make it look like something new is being done, but in fact just push it out a few years. Such are the dark arts of Treasury. I am sorry if this is news to some members, who innocently would never suspect that such things happen, but I have to tell them that they do, and I reckon they are happening under the present government as well.

We will watch with great interest the progress of the Metronet implementation. One of the interesting things we have discovered is that there cannot seem to be any bipartisan approach to these matters. I wanted to give it a stab in government, but I did not get anywhere with the leadership of the day. That is just the way it was. Labor clearly wants to claim everything for itself, whether it is in opposition or in government, so it gives it a badge, calls it Metronet and says that it now owns it. The fact of the matter is that this is the sort of infrastructure that would be delivered by successive governments in due course anyway. We will see how many terms of government have to happen before this comes to fruition. I do not have a bucket of water to pour over the whole idea. Of course we need planned public transport infrastructure, and I hope we can all agree on that. To that extent, I would support the theme of the motion. Obviously we are going to argue a lot—when I say “we”, I mean the public at large—about some of the details that are always included in projects of this scale.

I do not know whether the member is in any position to respond, so I am not necessarily asking Hon Alanna Clohesy to respond to this. She is not the minister; she is the mover of a motion in a private member's capacity. I raise this in the context of this debate for the information of the house. A matter is going on at the City of Canning at the moment, and there seems to be some confusion. I have been a ratepayer of the City of Canning for these last 32 years, so I am close to becoming permanent.

Indeed, I once got elected to the City of Canning, back in 1989. I once got sacked, along with the rest of the City of Canning, on one of several occasions that that has happened—though not the most recent one or two—by a Labor government, I might add. The current issue, which was raised with me by another prominent Canning citizen, Mr George Beacroft, relates to a transport corridor plan. I do not know how many members here are familiar with the location of the City of Canning offices. I would not expect them to be. I am looking forward to taking Hon Darren West to show him around.

Hon Darren West: I will have a tour of the chambers!

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: There are so many ways I would like to improve Hon Darren West's education!

Hon Tjorn Sibma: Is he good for the learning?

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: Now, now, now. I am eternally patient, but there is a standing offer there, as there is to anyone who wants to come to the South Metropolitan Region where Hon Nick Goiran and I would be delighted to show them this most vital part of the metropolis. Coming off the rather busy Manning Road is Fleming Avenue, heading, generally, south east. It passes to the south west of the City of Canning's offices. There is an open area there with some bowling greens and what have you. It terminates at the Canning River Regional Park. It is a lovely area; it has been revegetated in recent years. I frequently ride a pushbike around that part of the river behind the city parks. What is apparently being contemplated by the City of Canning, and has certainly been put forward by the Public Transport Authority, is a transit route. It is not clear to me yet whether it is permanently for buses or for some other purpose. It has been put forward so far as a bypass route, if you like, to cut bus commuter times by some minutes by getting it off Manning Road and that very busy bit of Albany Highway, and going down Fleming Avenue, up Civic Gardens, down Carden Drive and then up Richmond Street, back to the highway. That would presumably save some time, particularly in peak traffic times, if buses had their own free busway to use as an alternative. I do not know how effective it would be for the catchment of passengers. I was talking earlier about passenger numbers in relation to Metronet. I do not know whether that would work, but that is the PTA's problem. The city's problem, though, is that suddenly we are talking about putting a new bus transit way not only along Fleming Avenue—there may be some residents who do not think that is a very good idea—but also through the Civic Gardens and the river foreshore at the bottom of Fleming Avenue. It is a problematic point, I should think, in terms of a number of criteria, but certainly not conducive to the lovely parkland and revegetated foreshore setting.

I will ask a question about this later today. I have given the government some notice of this. I am sure members will wait with keen anticipation. This is the sort of thing that is important to a local community and we need to get to the bottom of it. A further suggestion has been raised and I will raise it again in my question this afternoon.

I hope I do not just get an answer to put it on notice, because that would be quite anticlimactic now! Is this not intended to be a permanent busway, per se, but possibly a light rail route instead of a bus route, or, in addition to a bus route, a dedicated public transport corridor? I do not know, but it is something a lot of people are waiting to get some more information about. It is probably the lack of information that is concerning. I believe the council will consider this matter again on 19 December, but in the meantime I want to raise it with members, and in good faith to Mr Beacroft and others, who are, frankly, a bit frustrated that they cannot find out what is going on.

I guess that then raises the question that always relates to Metronet, or whatever the name is given to key public transport projects. Everyone reckons they are a great idea and everyone reckons they need one. When the Labor Party tries to win an election, by jeez it goes around promising them everywhere it wants to win a seat. It is probably not a bad idea, but it is easier said than done because of course the question is: where is the public transport corridor going to be located? With Metronet, I see that the Labor Party has tried to use existing reserves to the extent it is possible, and that is the sensible thing to do, but of course it is not always convenient to do that and it does not always give the best public transport outcome. Sometimes land has to be resumed and streetscapes changed, if we are going to do things such as put in light rail or other mass movement alternatives that are needed between universities and other places. This is a little example of that. I wonder how much trouble there is going to be in the Cannington example I have just given, and I wonder how much other trouble there might be in the wider and larger scale of public transport planning in the future.

I will address my closing remarks to the mover of the motion. Although we can be a bit partisan about this in some of our remarks, I take the charitable view that the member's motion is trying to recognise that there are some initiatives being taken, which in general—putting the partisanship to one side—I think we all recognise are necessary for the development of the metropolitan area. I could offer a lot of other things to the debate, but I will refrain from doing so just now. There will be other occasions when we will need to talk about some of the things that are often promised or spoken about without proper consideration. Everyone wants light rail, for example. Everyone except Hon Aaron Stonehouse wants light rail, for example. It is all very well for places such as Fremantle to say, "We want light rail."

Hon Darren West interjected.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: The Agricultural Region probably needs it a little as well, but jokes aside, it has to be part of a coordinated and harmonised plan. There is no point building what in effect in this day and age will become stranded assets by way of light rail systems that do not connect with a larger network and therefore cannot achieve their potential. Maybe that is something we will talk about on another occasion. It allows me to conclude my remarks with a not unsupportive note to say that yes, I recognise that the government is doing a lot of planning and hopefully will do a lot of work in this area. It is premature, though, to be congratulating the government on a policy. Let us see what it actually comes up with before we conclude that great congratulations are due. That being said, I hope we can conclude this motion without a division. I do not think it really deserves that, but I will see what happens in due course.

HON ALANNA CLOHESY (East Metropolitan — Parliamentary Secretary) [2.40 pm] — in reply: I thank all members who participated in the debate. A great deal of information about public transport was discussed and some of it was very interesting and useful. That is important, because it is only through debate that we actually get to tease out important issues, whether in government or not, to get a better understanding, in this case, about the importance of public transport in the community.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Honourable members, there is a great deal of conversation happening around the chamber. I am trying to hear the summation of the honourable member, so could members please keep it fairly quiet or take it outside.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Thanks, Mr Acting President. As I was saying, this debate was important for a couple of reasons, not the least of which is that we got to discuss a range of public transport issues. A substantial part of the motion is about the benefits to the community of good public transport planning like Metronet. I spoke in great detail about the range of benefits that Metronet, as an example of good public transport, will provide to our community. I think it is important that we do not lose sight of that in this debate and that we do not get hung up on political or non-political gestures. It is important that we focus particularly on that part of the debate that referred to the importance of public transport in our community.

Hon Darren West, for example, talked about the importance of transport, particularly rail, to his community, the Agricultural Region. I learnt from Hon Darren West's contribution what happens in a community when rail lines are closed. He spoke in particular about the closure of the tier 3 rail lines under the previous government. I think that there have probably been two harvests since those rail lines closed and, today, one million tonnes of grain that would have gone through that rail network is now on the roads. Hon Darren West's contribution was very important because it told us about the impact that closing rail lines has on our community, and the importance of rail. He also pointed out that without rail lines in his community the road toll continues to increase. He pointed out that before the closure of rail lines, the road toll in the Agricultural Region or in rural areas was higher than that

of the national road toll of Kenya. I think they were important contributions to the debate about not only the benefits of public transport, but also the impact of having no rail in a community.

Metronet will have a range of other benefits to the regions, not only on roads. The government will invest about \$32 million into the rail future fund to deliver a revitalised rail service, which, of course, will provide benefits to the regions. It will invest \$10 million for rail planning for the Kemerton industrial park and to commence planning for crucial developments around Bunbury port. They are only a few examples of how rail in particular under the Metronet badge, if you like, will provide improvements in the Agricultural Region and rural areas in particular. Hon Darren West's contribution was particularly useful.

Hon Donna Faragher talked in a fair amount of detail about the ownership of transport plans, particularly the Forrestfield–Airport Link. I do not have much to comment on about that contribution because I do not think that that kind of a debate is really useful in understanding the contribution of public transport because one person's memory of political party policy is another person's forgotten memory. It was particularly interesting, though, that Hon Donna Faragher also chose to concentrate on whether Metronet was fully funded, particularly given that the government has not made that claim. The previous government of course went to at least two elections claiming that its transport plans were fully funded and fully costed. We know what happened, for example, to the Ellenbrook line, not to mention a number of other prior commitments. Although Hon Donna Faragher discussed public transport, I do not think that her contribution particularly advanced the debate on the benefits of public transport to our community.

Hon Donna Faragher asked about the Midland line, particularly the government's commitment to moving the Midland train station and extending the Midland line to Bellevue. The government released tenders early in November—I think it was around 17 November, so in the time since the motion was first debated and now—for the development of a concept plan, options analysis, preliminary land use investigation, and concept designs including grade separations. The government is moving ahead with the extension of the Midland line. Of course, all that information goes into the development of proper and very clear budgeting for a business case. That is a real commitment to moving forward and to looking forward to the development of the Midland line to Bellevue and relocating the station to a revitalised Midland activity centre. Can I say that it is a delight to see that real commitment to the people of Midland.

They have been waiting for a really long time for some attention from government, because they have been ignored for a really long time.

Hon Tim Clifford made a really interesting contribution to the debate on light rail. It was important to hear his information on how light rail can make a particularly good contribution to a public transport system overall, and about the positive nature of light rail as a transport option in the inner city that provides people with choices. That was a particularly interesting contribution, which I valued. His other important contribution to the debate was about the importance of having public transport hubs and how increasing density around public transport nodes or sites can be good for communities, the economy and the environment. That was a particularly important contribution to hear, and I think we share some similar views on that. A feature of Metronet is precinct planning to revitalise and increase density and diversity around transport hubs. That was a particularly useful contribution. He also talked about public transport needing to tie into how we plan our cities overall. I support that concept. We need to plan right across the metropolitan area, but we also need to consider the impact on regional and rural areas and not just areas of isolation.

Hon Pierre Yang talked about the importance of public transport and how it will improve access to jobs and education for his community. Another particularly important point Hon Pierre Yang raised was around the need for public transport to be connected. Circle routes was the example he provided. We need to connect not just north–south routes but also east–west and across-suburban routes. With the planning for Metronet, it is important that there are discussions with local communities around that. He raised some very important points.

Other members, including Hon Alison Xamon, also spoke about the importance of connectivity. Hon Alison Xamon provided us with one example that she would like to progress. It was useful to hear about the importance of hubs, which help to create stronger suburbs. It is important that people have input into that. Hubs also promote a compact and connected city. I agree, and I support that idea entirely. We need to make sure that around our transport hubs are those things that communities want and need. We need to have diversity in our community, which comes from having a higher density. Those hubs will need connections to other public transport services and to schools and work. We need to have the services that are central to a healthy and thriving community near those hubs, like childcare centres, schools and places for young people to go so that they can be a part of their community, rather than be run out of town, as one young person put to me. They were very useful contributions around public transport. Whether plan A is better than plan B is a political conversation. What is important is that we have the conversation about what good public transport can do for our communities. When public transport is done well, the government should be congratulated. The framework of Metronet does that well.

Question put and passed.