

**PERTH PARKING MANAGEMENT BILL 2023**  
**PERTH PARKING MANAGEMENT AMENDMENT BILL 2023**

*Cognate Debate*

Leave granted for the Perth Parking Management Bill 2023 and the Perth Parking Management Amendment Bill 2023 to be considered cognately, and for the Perth Parking Management Bill 2023 to be the principal bill.

*Second Reading — Cognate Debate*

Resumed from 19 September 2023.

**HON NEIL THOMSON (Mining and Pastoral)** [7.05 pm]: I am standing on behalf of the opposition today to speak on the two bills that are being debated cognately, the Perth Parking Management Bill 2023 and the Perth Parking Management Amendment Bill 2023. The opposition is opposing the bills.

**Hon Stephen Dawson:** Did you say you are opposing them?

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** Yes, we are opposing them.

My colleague Shane Love, the Leader of the Nationals WA and Leader of the Opposition, opposed this legislation in the other place. We are opposing it because this will create a tax. It is an extension of a very good initiative put forward under the Court government, which was to propose a levy or licence fee for parking within the CBD with two specific aims: firstly, to reduce congestion by getting people out of cars and onto public transport, and, secondly, to use that money through a hypothecated fund—if that is the term the government would like to use—for the purposes of improving public transport and other transport-related matters in the CBD. It is a very narrowly defined process that is aimed at a specific job and the need and the nexus around that. The licence fee was set to make sure that we could achieve those outcomes. It was not supposed to become a taxation, in a broad sense, on parking in the CBD. It was not supposed to become a special purpose account or fund that would then be used for a whole range of purposes outside the transport task. That problem was identified. We all know that we are trying our very best to improve patronage of public transport in the city and the ability for people to get around and CAT bus services—one of those services is funded from this levy—but we have to balance that against the cost to the community, particularly the business community in the city, because it comes at a cost.

I think the business community would prefer that we remove it altogether, but the fact is that at the end of the day, the business community accepted, to a broader extent, that there was an ability to improve the amenity of the city through increasing public transport access, enhancing pedestrian environments, and supporting bicycle access and a balanced transport system. That seems pretty straightforward, but of course we know what happened. This is a case of getting caught out doing something that should not be done. The minister, who happens to also be the Treasurer, has basically tried to extend this and not use the principles of the legislation by allocating provisional—now saying it is a conditional allocation—funding to a project that does not conform with the original purpose of this legislation.

We have seen the damning report by the Auditor General. What do we get? This bill is trying to deal with something after the event—after the decision has been made. The pot of money is not being spent on its original purpose. Businesses were screaming during the challenges around the COVID pandemic. They were ably represented by the Lord Mayor, Basil Zempilas, who got the fee reduced. He is a great advocate for the City, but is not being listened to by the government. It is not just Basil. In fact, the whole business community is not being listened to. The minister does not seem to know what the legislation says.

I worked with Hon Rita Saffioti when she was in the Department of Treasury. I saw her in that place. We worked together. She sat in the corner across from where I was in the open plan area. I was in the competition policy unit and she was in the utilities policy unit. I just wish she had spent a bit longer in Treasury because she probably would have been schooled-up a little bit more about checking out legislation before she makes decisions.

Having looked at Treasury's view on these sorts of funds, I think she probably has a pile of advice saying, "Don't do this." I am sure she has, because it would be completely out of character for the Department of Treasury to give any other advice. Obviously, because of cabinet-in-confidence we cannot see the advice and briefing notes that were prepared on behalf of the Department of Treasury and went to the Treasurer.

Looking back, I do not think she was the Treasurer at that time. She is now the Treasurer and the Minister for Transport, so she has complete control. We have seen reports in the paper about the level of control and influence she has in the party and the concerns about how the Premier has been treated. That comes through in those newspaper reports. The people on the other side will know all about that because they are in the party. I do not get to see the machinations inside the Labor Party, I just read what is in the paper. Obviously, someone in the Labor Party was saying that and we have seen that situation.

Hon Rita Saffioti is now the Treasurer and the Minister for Transport. I refer to an article by Paul Murray, a very reputable journalist, in *The West Australian* of 18 February 2023. This is not what I am saying. This is out in the open and is what the media is saying about the situation.

**Hon Kate Doust:** You should always believe what you read in *The West*, shouldn't you?

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** Well, this is what happens. Stories get out there. People in the Labor Party give background on some of those people. There is obviously a bit of disruption within the Labor Party over all that is going on. I am sure someone backgrounded Paul Murray, but here we go.

Several members interjected.

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** Order, members!

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** We saw issues raised the other day in *The West* about the behaviour of the Treasurer. Look at the headline: "Pinching park levy without notice is devious". Paul Murray, in his very eloquent style, wrote about what is going on there. We can go through it. The City of Perth, ably led by Lord Mayor Basil Zempilas, was "...only informed just before the raid was announced." Of course, we know that under the current act, the City of Perth is meant to be consulted. A lot of this is actually its money because a lot of those parking bays are owned by the City of Perth. It has to raise a levy on its customers and then put it into this fund.

The expectation is that cycleways and access will be improved. I am sure disability access to public transport will be included. That is all included. That very noble set-up was done under the Court government. It was a great initiative. One thing we can say is that Liberal governments have put in place great initiatives to drive people back to public transport, making sure it works properly so there are proper incentives, rather than just ignoring things and recklessly spending this massive surplus. For many years I have watched public transport patronage under a Labor government drop away, despite the billions of dollars spent on the public transport system.

Paul Murray's article is titled "Pinching park levy without notice is devious". Let that sink in for a moment. We know who was involved in this. The article reads —

Intruders broke into a bank, got access to the safe and then spent the contents on a fling in Northbridge.

Now, the news reports weren't exactly couched in those terms—much of the media, especially ABC TV, completely missed the story—but that's the essence of the heist the McGowan Government pulled off this week.

I commend *The West Australian* for taking up the story. It was great to see. There is a massive majority on the other side and a Treasurer who does not take any account of the legislation and the lawful intent of the fund. She says, "I'm just going to go ahead anyhow." She does not take those things into account. All we have to do is read what *The West* said. The article continues —

For those who fear the McGowan Government's massive majority is making it authoritarian and undemocratic, here's further evidence.

The levy costs Perth businesses \$40 million a year and is one reason that parking in the CBD is so expensive. The City of Perth is forced to pay \$17 million annually for its 10,500 bays across 35 sites, which is then passed on to the public—as it is by private parking operators.

We see that. Within the realms of reasonableness, within the realms and intent of the legislation, if those projects had focused on building up the central area transit system and made sure there had been proper planning and consultation with the City of Perth, we would have seen benefits flow to businesses in the Perth CBD. After all, the businesses are paying. The intent of this levy is not to penalise CBD businesses—just let that sink in—it is to enhance CBD businesses. Yes, there is a penalty in the sense that if someone comes to the city in their car and they are not a resident and they do not have an apartment or a resident's parking bay, they have to pay this levy. That is a penalty, but the benefit is that when someone comes to the CBD, they get great internal transport systems, transport system amenity and transport system access. That will flow through to businesses—again, it will encourage people to be in the city, spend money there and enjoy it because it will not be so congested. That is a benefit. It all makes sense in its current framework. The problem is that with this Treasurer—I will make a couple of other comments here—there has been this massive build-up of the total amount sitting in the fund and it is all just too tempting. Instead of doing the hard work putting a plan together for transport projects, engaging with the City of Perth, working with it in a partnership and helping develop the city, the government just looks to commandeer the fund for projects that would normally be funded out of the consolidated fund, like the swimming pool, for example. Maybe the work that the Metropolitan Redevelopment Authority would have done to capture value might have been part of it.

Under the Barnett government, there was a very big focus on the CBD. Funds were put aside for the Elizabeth Quay project. Some of those funds for the planning initially came from the Western Australian Planning Commission out of the metropolitan region improvement fund. It was totally appropriate because that is a metropolitan-wide fund, which is for the purpose of planning. Money was put in to do the amazing infrastructure development there.

We also saw the work and commitment under the Barnett government to get work done with the commonwealth to fund the tunnel in Northbridge to make the north–south connection so people could walk from Northbridge all the way down to the river. It was fantastic planning that was undertaken to help transform the city. Under the McGowan–Cook government, we have seen an absolute neglect of that process. It is only now that some of those Perth City Deals are starting to move, such as the university precinct coming forward and working on the appeal of the city. That should not be funded out of the Perth parking levy. That is part of a broader, strategic capital cities project. It should be funded as part of the joint commitment of the commonwealth, private partners and the state government and, in some cases, the local government. The local authority is the City of Perth. That is why we are opposing this legislation—because it is just not right. I will read again from the article —

Last year, after the government again raised the levy, —

There was no hassle about raising the levy, even though businesses in the CBD were having some of the most difficult times. It continues —

Zempilas referred his concerns about how the fund was being administered to the Auditor-General for investigation. It was widely known that report would come out this week.

The affected parties always see a draft of the audit report areas that affect them to allow their input pre-publication. So the government knew what criticism was coming and decided to get in first.

No wonder they wanted to dampen their embarrassment with a pre-emptive strike.

Most damning was that Auditor General Caroline Spencer caught the government unlawfully spending the fund. She clearly had to change her report at the last minute to take in Saffioti’s statement on Tuesday that the legislation would be changed to fix that breach.

How cynical. If this report is accurate and I do not doubt its accuracy, how cynical is that? This is the legislation that had to be announced just before the Auditor General’s report came out because we knew what was going to happen. I think Caroline Spencer is doing a fantastic job. I hope members opposite get to experience what it is like being over this side in 2025 because the forty-first Parliament has been very difficult for the opposition. We are small in number, but we are doing our best to hold the government to account. We are doing our very best to hold members opposite to account. It is good that the media picks up these issues—in this case, Paul Murray. He has run with it, with the title “Pinching park levy without notice is devious”. That is what he said; I am just quoting him. This is a question for this place: how can we trust the Treasurer if that is the impression that is given? That is the person who is in charge of all the special purpose accounts, which we have questioned in this place on multiple occasions. It is the hollow log theory, “Let’s set up all these special purpose accounts!” On multiple occasions during the estimates process and during discussions around the budget process, I have raised why we are putting all this money into accounts that bear an interest rate that is quite a few basis points less than what we would be getting if we paid down debt.

I know that some very creative characters on the other side talked about the debt, what debt was projected and what debt was actual and so forth, but we have gone through a long period when an incredible amount of money poured into the state through royalties and the GST fix by the Morrison government. An incredible amount of money poured in and continues to pour in, yet we still cost the state unnecessarily because the government creates all these slush funds through the special purpose account, and we saw this in the fourteenth report of the Auditor General titled *Administration of the Perth parking levy*. I did a back-of-the-envelope calculation, and I thought it was around the figure that is being stated in here—I was just reading it. It was something in the order of \$14 billion.

The Auditor General’s overview, on page 5, states —

The findings of this report also apply more generally to all SPAs ...

Therefore, it is not just this little Perth parking levy, which is small by comparison; it is still huge. Roughly \$200 million is sitting in that fund, but a figure here in the state’s special purpose account has over \$14 billion currently sitting in accounts. We are coming up to the election year, and I would be very interested to see what now gets rolled out. We have all these hollow logs and suddenly all the money comes out of them. For people who are watching this and thinking about it, it is like having a mortgage and not having a line of credit whereby they pay down the mortgage as much as they can so that they reduce the interest on a mortgage. If they pay seven per cent or so on their mortgage, they might get only four per cent of it in the bank. Think of it like that. When people are running a household, generally they try very hard to get that seven per cent down, but that is why the banks offer line-of-credit arrangements on that small residual on the mortgage or have a redraw facility on the mortgage. Think of it that way. That is how people should manage their finances at home because they should be trying to reduce that interest. When they get a small extra windfall, a gain or their pay comes in, they should pay it straight in but then draw it back out again so that they always have the minimum amount of debt that they are paying the seven per cent on. However, this government does not do it like that. We have a Treasurer who operates very differently from that because we have so much money. The government does not care or has a different attitude toward money and likes to have these special purpose accounts whereby it does not matter what the legislation says, the government

just uses it at whatever whim the Treasurer feels to do, and, in this case, it was the Minister for Transport at the time. What is that costing us? It is costing us \$14 billion. Who knows the difference? I think the difference might be 50 basis points. It could be 75 basis points. It could be 100 basis points. It is the difference between the mortgage rate, which is the debt that the government owes, and what we get in the rate of return in the government's general account. Theoretically, if it were 100 basis points—I think it might be fewer than that—and if my calculation is right, that should be \$140 million a year, but I think it is probably less than that. However, it is still not an insignificant amount of money.

The news article “Pinching park levy without notice is devious” by Paul Murray is about the minister allegedly being devious. A more honest approach would have been to say that the levy will be set aside for a particular purpose and that we have to look at it in a broad sense. Do we have a need for which we can provide some additional public transport or some improvements? Do we have a way to develop some projects that need long-term planning and engage the city and talk to the city about how it will do that and what it would like do? Can we work with the city to maximise return for businesses? If there are not enough projects, maybe the government could look at reducing the levy. That might be an option, rather than to keep increasing it. Maybe it is doing its job. The government needs proper modelling on what is going on in the city. We know that things have improved a lot because of all the projects that have been undertaken in the city. The Northbridge tunnel has taken a lot of congestion out of the city. Some massive improvements to ingress and egress have been done in the city. Work was done some years ago to improve accessibility to and from the city off the freeways. In that way, motorists do not spend too much time circling the city or allowing their vehicles to idle. The one-way streets caused motorists to circle the city, which was always a curse. Murray Street is now a two-way street. All those projects were done on the back of good modelling work on how to reduce congestion in the city. That work has happened, and it continues.

The city is improving as we move to electric vehicles. Obviously, there is a whole range of opportunities; for example, we could look at improving the CAT service or having an autonomous vehicle trial or something like that to improve amenity in the transport space. But, no, the government wants to take another approach that will just muddy the waters. The government is creating an unusual tax. In fact, under the Constitution Acts Amendment Act, it will have to be defined as a tax in the legislation because it will not be a licence fee; it will just be a broad tax. The problem with that is that there is no guarantee that the money will be used to reduce congestion in the city. All \$200 million of the tax revenue might end up being used to offset other government spending on something that is completely unrelated. The government will be able to do that under this legislation. It will have a much broader scope to do things that will not achieve the goal of dealing with congestion. That is not a good thing. That is why, on principle, we cannot support the bills.

I commend the Auditor General, the media and the opposition for their tireless work to challenge and hold the government to account and ensure that it is honest. When we see Paul Murray's headline “Pinching park levy without notice is devious”, we need to have a conversation in this place. That is what we are all about. All I can say is that the Auditor General is doing a great job. She should not be intimidated. She should get on with it and make sure that the Treasurer is held to account. She needs to dig in and use her powers. I encourage the Auditor General to use her powers and get into Treasury's world. Treasury is obviously not going to say that the Treasurer is not doing the right thing. I worked in Treasury from 1997 to 2008, with a few gaps when I went out. I know the culture of that agency. It is really important for the Auditor General to dig into the agency and the advice that is given. The report states —

The findings of this report also apply more generally to all SPAs, of which the State has over \$14 billion allocated. Some SPAs provide for infrastructure investment, and others for recurring purposes. All represent publicly stated funding sources and priority uses, with varying restrictions.

That is very important —

Robust planning, consultation with key stakeholders, and clear and comprehensive policies and procedures to assess the relative merits and eligibility of funded projects reduce the risk that SPA funds will be mismanaged.

This is very important. Those are not only words on a page. Those are words from the Auditor General. It is very important to maintain the integrity of our governance system and parliamentary system. It is very important to retain the governance and integrity of the executive—the cabinet. That is why the laws of this place are made. The people elect the members of this place, we make the laws and then we expect the executive to act lawfully.

There was a finding and a conclusion. I could read a few of the different conclusions here. The Auditor General states —

The Department's administration of the Perth Parking Levy is only partly effective.

Only partly —

The absence of a plan that specifies how the account funds will be used has contributed to a significant increase in the levy account balance from \$54 million to \$192 million over the past five years.

We have that statement from the Auditor General and the government expects us to say, “Here are the keys to the kingdom, folks. We’re going to give you a much broader scope.” It is like saying we can reduce crime by getting rid of the definition of crime. That does not reduce the crime. In this case, we cannot simply get rid of all the guard rails that were put around this levy. We cannot simply get rid of them and say, “It’s not a problem anymore.” It does not work like that because it is all about good governance. This Treasurer does not inspire me with confidence about the government’s ability to govern the state in a way that is orderly and with the finances being accountable.

I know that some members opposite will say, “I actually agree with what he’s saying.” They agree with me, but they probably do not have the capacity to say it.

**Hon Stephen Dawson:** I can safely say, on behalf of everyone on this side, that none of us agree with you.

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** None of you agree? Well, I am very disappointed by that because I thought that there were members opposite who were concerned about the management of finances within the full integrity of the law. I think that is quite sad. I hope that is not what he believes. I hope that is just a political statement.

The Auditor General goes on to say that —

The Department has not always consulted with the City on projects before seeking ministerial approval to use the account, despite being required by the Act.

Let that sink in—“despite being required”. Nobody is above the law. The law is here; it is made in this place and we are expected to come into this place and change the law so that the government does not have to comply with that aspect of the law. That does not make sense. This is quite upsetting. The government should stop and think about what it is doing here. The department has not always consulted, despite being required to. The report continues —

Inconsistent consultation could see account money used for projects that do not align with management and improvement plans for State and City assets.

The problem is not even that the money was not used for the purpose of the act, but that there was no plan. No planning has been done. No consultation has been done. That, to me, is a real problem. After one strike I would say that that is not good. After two strikes, that is a real problem. After three strikes, you are out. No planning and no consultation and not conforming with the requirements—that is three strikes. The Auditor General’s report continues —

Projects with unspecified priority received approval to use account funds.

What is going on?

People in the public service have a lot of integrity and are quite long-suffering. I am sure that all politicians probably deal with it and work with it. As a former public servant, I know that one of the big things that was absolutely drilled into us as part of our training, as we worked our way up through the ranks of the public service, was the need to understand the legislation and understand the law. That was one of my bugbears. As a senior public servant or even in my middle-management years, I always drilled into public servant graduates the need to understand the law and the legislation. Enculturation into that provided the guardrails that kept them out of trouble. It was the stuff that made sure that they did not get swept up with a heavy call from the minister’s office or whatever it was. If someone came barking down the chain a bit excited or a media officer from somewhere said, “I have to have this”, or “Why is this happening?”, I told the public servants to always go back and get out the legislation and find out whether they were on firm ground. They could then hold their ground because of what was said in the legislation.

I do not know what happened here. I hope that the department provided the advice. We do not know. This is one of the problems. I have mentioned it many times. We do not see the memoranda presented to the minister, and we cannot sit in at meetings at Dumas House and hear advice and what is said by senior public servants and directors general. We cannot. If any directors general are watching now, all I can say is that I hope they give that advice and work in the old-fashioned sense of conforming to black-letter law. It is really important. There are no shortcuts. Shortcuts always end up in tears. We see how that can easily happen. It is easy to get caught up in it—it is human nature—but if people just follow the rules, they will be safe. The Auditor General’s report states —

Projects with unspecified priority received approval to use account funds. One of these did not align with the account’s purpose, yet received conditional approval to set aside funds subject to legislative changes to allow spending on non-transport projects.

That was the comment. Thank goodness for the Auditor General. The report has plenty of damning stuff, like a headline on page 13: “The Department’s account administration is not fully transparent”. That is a problem. “Consultation with the City is inconsistent with the Act”; that is a problem. “The Department could improve its assessment, evaluation and public reporting processes”. That is not a request; it should happen. There are other points here, such as —

Project assessment—the Department has not fully documented its project assessment criteria or funding reasoning and outcomes.

This is just real slackness. Thousands of public servants are employed for a purpose, and ministers must take it very seriously. Ministers must be on the detail. Ministers should not be driven by their media branch or their own whims. Yes, they should set the broader objectives in representing the people of Western Australia. Of course, that is the job of the cabinet, and ministers of the Crown have been given a very great privilege to represent the party that wins government. What a great privilege to do that incredible job. In that sense, I say to the ministers present here that they have a very profound and important role that makes a difference to people's lives. That is important, but do not take shortcuts with project assessments. Ministers should check in with their departments and their directors general to ensure that they are doing their role as accountable officers. Here is the common hint —

Segregation of duties—it is not clear from Department records if appropriate end-to-end accountability controls were in place to segregate the assessment and final recommendation of two projects ...

That is pretty basic—the assessment and final recommendation. We always have to look at the separation and segregation of roles so that we do not end up with this sort of group thing, which is probably like the minister wanting to make these short cuts and saying, “I have a great idea, let us do this,” and suddenly the pressure comes on to do the assessment and the advice. Ultimately, cabinet will make the decision, but that should be gained through proper budgetary process. The report states —

Robust probity measures, that include proper segregation of duties, increase public confidence that decisions made by the Department are free from perceived or actual bias.

The last two points are about public reporting. There were some issues around that as well. The department's annual report refers to account money using multiple descriptions. The lack of clarity was an issue. The monitoring and evaluation was an issue —

... the Department does not evaluate how well projects achieve the aims of the Act and policy ...

I would have thought that was pretty basic. We have imposed this cost on businesses in Perth CBD, and we will introduce more penalties in this bill. This government loves penalties and upping the fines to this and that and sending people to court. It does not matter what the government is doing; it seems to love doing it. People are in court at the moment for things that would not normally have gone to court, but now it is suddenly all happening. We will see what happens about that.

I will not comment on it specifically, but this government seems to love taking court action on people and putting them under stress and pressure for pretty much no good reason, as far as I can see. That is what is going on, and we are again expected to pass a whole bunch of penalties—\$2 000, \$50 000 or more in penalties. Maybe it is valid or okay. Of course, penalties should go up over time; they should follow that. However, there also must be accountability to make sure that the original purpose of the charge, the whole architecture of this levy system, which has all these penalties, red tape and inspectors imposed across the business community, is not just another cost. We have to make sure that when we weigh all that up, that it provides a benefit to the community overall. How can that be done if the government is not monitoring and evaluating? These are absolutely the basics, but here is what the Auditor General, Caroline Spencer, says —

... the Department does not evaluate how well projects achieve the aims of the act and policy ...

That is a problem to me. Again, the government expects the opposition to come to this place and say, “Fine, we will just up the penalties,” but where is the evidence that it is doing the evaluation? The last report from an independent person with the powers to investigate properly said the government was not doing that evaluation and, “therefore, the effectiveness of spending from that account.” It is really important that it monitors projects for time and cost delivery and requires completion certificates for projects. That is pretty much the very base level. That is like a two out of 10. The department told us it is developing a framework to monitor and evaluate whether the account helps to reduce congestion from vehicles and benefits those who pay the levy, such as a city businesses and people who live and work in the city centre. I find it staggering that the government has the audacity to come to this place with a bill when all we have is an assurance from the department that it is developing a framework to monitor. This process has been in place since 1998, I think. This process has been around a long time and we still do not have a framework. I find that absolutely staggering. I will not let predecessors on our side off as well. I do not know whether this was what was going on at the time. It has obviously come up as an issue because of the way this minister has been spending on this project.

The spending is outlined in appendix 2, “New funded projects 2017–2022”. That is in the term of the Labor government. There is a whole litany of different situations—for example, the East Perth multi-modal transport footpath extension. Is it in the CBD transport plan column? No. Cross. Did it meet policy purpose column? Tick! Okay, it got one out of two. Is the Windan Bridge in the CBD transport plan? No. Going through this, I can see a bus stop accessibility, the Roe Street enhancement and the bike lane shared path projects. They have ticks in both columns, which is good. The government got something right. The WACA aquatic facility is part of the Perth City Deal and the WACA ground improvement project. I find that one very interesting. It is not in the CBD

transport plan, and it does not meet the policy purpose. That is the one that I suspect has been motivating the minister. The minister probably should have spent a bit more time in Treasury. I think she should have done that before she went off to work for Geoff Gallop. She should have spent a bit more time there and got inculcated a little bit more in the discipline that comes with —

Several members interjected.

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** I think it would have been a good idea. Talk about being a failure here. It is a complete and utter fail by the Auditor General's own assessment. What does Rita Saffioti say about this bill? Her press release —

Several members interjected.

*Point of Order*

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** When the honourable member refers in this place to a minister and to a former Premier, he should call them "the honourable". Please do not be disrespectful. I remind you to use the correct terminology, please.

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** I remind members that points of order should be made to the chair, not to other members, but the point is valid. There is a way of addressing members of Parliament, whether they be in this place or the other place, and that is by their title or their position.

*Debate Resumed*

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** Thank you, Deputy President. I note that the hurly-burly of debate and maybe the familiarity from having been a colleague of Hon Rita Saffioti, Treasurer; Minister for Transport, have possibly tripped me up a little.

I will move on. Maybe Hon Rita Saffioti would have done well to spend more time being inculcated in the disciplines of Treasury. I hope that the Under Treasurer has a chat to the Treasurer and has the courage to have a discussion about the management of these special purpose accounts because that would be a very useful thing. I was a senior public servant in the dying days of the Barnett government when many senior public servants started talking to members of the Labor Party. I know what goes on. There is a reality check during an election year. I can speak from authority because I can recall that happening when the polls started coming out. Despite the professionalism of the public service, it is vital that public servants are reminded that, ultimately, there could be a change of government in 2025. I just say they should stand up and speak the truth to their ministers. This is their opportunity to start speaking the truth to their ministers about the law and how it applies to them, and about the management of funds. I speak to the directors general, whether they be in the Department of Transport or Treasury, to start to speak to their ministers with truth, integrity and independence because it is that frank and fearless advice that will hold this government to account on matters such as the headline "Pinching park levy without notice is devious". That is the kind of headline government members absolutely do not want to see in an election year as we head into the next round of government. That is my message to my former public service colleagues, many of whom I know. In relation to Rita Saffioti—sorry; excuse me, Deputy President. Hon Rita Saffioti, Treasurer; Minister for Transport; Deputy Premier, has a number of hats. It is quite profound. Who knows, maybe she will be Premier?

Several members interjected.

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** Order, members! I do not think Hon Neil Thomson requires further distraction. I remind members, including the member on his feet, that we are discussing the Perth Parking Management Bill 2023. Perhaps we might recommence debate on the bill before us.

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** Thank you, Deputy President.

I turn to Hon Rita Saffioti's press release on this bill. The first dot point states —

Improved and modernised *Perth Parking Management Act* introduced into State Parliament

I mean, how many times do I have to hear the term "modernisation"? The term was used in relation to the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act. That legislation lasted five minutes and then, suddenly, it was no longer modern enough and it had to go!

The second dot point states —

Act was introduced nearly 25 years ago to reduce inner-city congestion

That is a dot point. The government has not managed, measured or monitored that. It does not even have a model to say how this will work. That is what the Auditor General said—that the government has not managed it. That dot point is fine; it was just a statement. The next dot point states —

Changes include the ability to fund a wider range of initiatives that benefit CBD businesses and residents

Again, no evidence is provided. Basically, this will be a tax on business. We are saying it is a tax. It will be a tax on business that will be collected through parking revenue. It is reminiscent of the old days, back in medieval times,

when a window tax was set for everybody. People started boarding up the windows in their buildings. That is the sort of thing that happens. This is old-fashioned, medieval-style taxation. This is not modernisation; it is old-fashioned.

The next dot point states —

New laws will allow for the introduction of differential rates to encourage development

I have my doubts about that. What will that mean in terms of how the rates will be applied? The final dot point states —

New requirements for spending to be published in the Department of Transport Annual Report

Well, that is a great addition; I will support that! I do not know why the government did not do that before. It could have done that without the legislation—just report it. As the Auditor General said, the government should do its job and report. That is what this bill is all about.

The Leader of the Opposition, Shane Love, spoke about the bill in a similar vein in the other place. I read the *Hansard*. The number of interjections he got were probably in excess of the ones I have received because he had Hon Rita Saffioti opposite him. I am sure that if she were in this place, there would be interjections from her here as well.

**Hon Dan Caddy** interjected.

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** I am sure there would be. If it were not so serious, I would be amused by the number of interjections. A number of the interjections made in the other place during the contribution by Shane Love, the Leader of the Opposition, were “You’re wrong!” All the Leader of the Opposition was doing at that time was reading from —

**Hon Kate Doust:** Do they give you instructions on how to filibuster? That’s all you’re doing. You’re not talking about the detail. This is why your lot won’t get elected.

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** I am just telling members what went on in the other place. It was a shame. Obviously, Hon Kate Doust is anxious to finish this discussion. She has had enough of hearing from me because I have obviously hit a nerve. I will say this: we cannot support the bill in principle.

**Hon Kate Doust** interjected.

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** If the honourable member would listen in silence, I could finish my comments.

We cannot support this bill for all the reasons I outlined: the lack of evaluation, the lack of clarity, the lack of reporting and the fact that the minister has been in breach of the requirements under the act. Suddenly, we have this bill before us today to try to make all that right, so that the minister can pretty much go on and spend the money—the dollars—of hardworking people who have to park in the city for their employment and do not necessarily have an alternative, or of the businesses that have to pay up. Of course, the City of Perth pays a large component of the revenue that it gets from its parking bays into this fund. That is why we cannot support this bill.

**HON STEPHEN DAWSON (Mining and Pastoral — Minister for Emergency Services)** [8.00 pm] — in reply: I stand to make some brief remarks on the Perth Parking Management Bill 2023 and the Perth Parking Management Amendment Bill 2023. I have to say, I am a bit bewildered after the honourable member’s contribution. I listened intently for 50-odd minutes, and I am none the wiser as to why the opposition is opposing these bills. I recognise that the member said he was opposing it, but I am none the wiser as to why.

The member in his contribution mentioned the Right Honourable —

**Hon Neil Thomson** interjected.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** The honourable member had another five minutes; he sat down early and did not take it up. I did not interject on him, so he needs to listen to me in silence, please.

I heard the member talk about the Right Hon the Lord Mayor of Perth. I am very pleased to say that in a social media message of 10 August last year, the Lord Mayor indicated that he was essentially supportive of the changes proposed in these bills. I know that consultation on the bills before us was undertaken over a number of years because, as has been pointed out, the original bill is from 1999. With regard to the amendments proposed, the minister met with the Right Hon the Lord Mayor and the CEO of the City of Perth on at least two occasions: on 11 April and 7 August last year. I am advised that the City of Perth was supportive of the changes. Certainly, feedback provided by the Lord Mayor and the City of Perth was taken into account throughout the drafting process. For example, arrangements regarding the ability to fund traffic management for events was a specific request of the City of Perth that has been included in the legislation. Although it was never proposed that levy funds could be spent on anything, anywhere, the provisions on expenditure were tightened as a result of feedback from the committee.

As I said, the original legislation was introduced in 1999, and it was a joint initiative between the City of Perth and the state government. It was designed to tackle rapidly increasing traffic congestion in the Perth central area and a deterioration of air quality. I think it has done that over the years, and I am very pleased to say that initiatives like the CAT bus service, which has been expanded under this government, were funded out of this levy. Those of us



who have ever caught a CAT bus or availed ourselves of the free-transit zone—as many visitors to this city do—think the spend on those initiatives was well worthwhile.

There are other initiatives, transport-related projects in and around the city, that were not funded by the Perth parking management levy—things like the Perth train station forecourt upgrades in 2021; the Perth Public Transport Operations Control Centre, which was an approximately \$50 million spend; the new ferry, MV *Tricia*, which was announced in 2019; the raising of the Hay Street overpass to Matagarup Bridge; upgrades to the Elizabeth Quay bus station; and so on. Other things could have been funded out of the levy but the government chose not to.

The balance of the levy is currently around \$200 million, and a significant proportion of that revenue is earmarked to contribute to the implementation of key city transport projects, including the new Swan River walking and cycling bridge, over the next few years. The bills before us also propose a new special purpose account for licence fee revenue, with the balance of the existing Perth parking fund to be transferred to the new account. The purpose of the new account will remain hypothecated to delivering transport and other benefits to the area in which the levy is raised.

As I said, since the introduction of the current act, the levy has been used to fund the CAT bus service and the free-transit zone in the city. In more recent years, the levy has also been used to fund pedestrian amenity and safety initiatives—that is, things like bike lanes, public transport improvements, street enhancements, shared walking and riding lanes, and active traffic management services. I certainly argue, and I think others would agree with me, that these have contributed to the amenity and accessibility of the city. They have made the city a better place. All the while, the CAT buses and the free-transit zone have taken traffic off the roads in the city, so that certainly aligns with the reasons that the act was introduced all those years ago.

Money has been set aside over the next year for Perth inner-city projects, such as electric buses and charging infrastructure in the city, bus stop accessibility upgrades, the Aberdeen Street bike lanes, the Riverside Drive shared path, CBD travel demand initiatives and the Causeway pedestrian and cyclist bridge. Those projects will be welcomed by many in the city and those who come into the city for work or play.

I appreciate and I thank the honourable member for making a contribution, but I disagree with, I think, everything he said. I am sure, in fact, I disagree with everything he said! I will have to read *Hansard* tomorrow. Without *Hansard* in front of me, I am confident that I disagree with everything the honourable member said in his contribution.

**Hon Neil Thomson:** What about the bit when I read the Auditor General’s report?

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** Notwithstanding that fact, I bring my contribution to a close. I commend the Perth Parking Management Bill 2023 to the house.

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** The question is that the Perth Parking Management Bill 2023 be read a second time.

*Division*

Question put and a division taken, the Deputy President casting his vote with the noes, with the following result —

Ayes (17)

Hon Klara Andric	Hon Sue Ellery	Hon Martin Pritchard	Hon Pierre Yang
Hon Dan Caddy	Hon Lorna Harper	Hon Samantha Rowe	Hon Peter Foster ( <i>Teller</i> )
Hon Sandra Carr	Hon Jackie Jarvis	Hon Rosie Sahanna	
Hon Stephen Dawson	Hon Shelley Payne	Hon Matthew Swinbourn	
Hon Kate Doust	Hon Stephen Pratt	Hon Darren West	

Noes (8)

Hon Martin Aldridge	Hon Donna Faragher	Hon Steve Martin	Hon Wilson Tucker
Hon Peter Collier	Hon Louise Kingston	Hon Neil Thomson	Hon Colin de Grussa ( <i>Teller</i> )

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Pairs

Hon Ayor Makur Chuot	Hon Nick Goiran
Hon Kyle McGinn	Hon Dr Steve Thomas
Hon Dr Sally Talbot	Hon Tjorn Sibma

Question thus passed.

Bill (Perth Parking Management Bill 2023) read a second time.