

INFRASTRUCTURE WESTERN AUSTRALIA BILL 2019

Second Reading

Resumed from 14 March.

MR D.T. PUNCH (Bunbury) [1.52 pm]: I rise to speak in support of the Infrastructure Western Australia Bill 2019. I am really pleased that this bill has come before the Parliament, and I congratulate the McGowan Labor government for progressing the bill to this stage. I do that not just because I am a member of that government, but also because my experience of over 35 years in the public sector, much of it in the senior executive service, has allowed me to see firsthand the way infrastructure decisions evolved during that period. Some of that has been quite entertaining, as I will come to further on.

I want to start by reaffirming a number of the key elements of the bill. It creates a statutory authority that is a body corporate, whose role is clear—to provide advice and assistance to the Premier and the government on matters relating to infrastructure, including needs and priorities. Its governance involves an independent board with appropriate government agency representation. As this unfolds, we will see that that is a very interesting part. The board has some government agency representation, but its majority will be non-government. The government representation will include, *ex officio*, the Under Treasurer and the chief executive officer of the department administering the Planning and Development Act 2005. It goes to the core of the two key agencies of the government that have responsibility for infrastructure. The number of government members cannot exceed the number of non-government members, and the Premier must be satisfied that non-government members have the skills, expertise and experience required to undertake the role of a board member. Their expertise must be in areas of infrastructure policy, planning, strategy and, importantly, funding and financing—because in the past we have raced very quickly to an infrastructure concept and then really struggled around the issue of financing that concept—and, of course, delivery. Interestingly, clause 26 of the bill provides that staff members of Infrastructure Western Australia, or individuals who have held positions as members of state, territory or commonwealth Parliaments within the previous three years, cannot be board members. The governance arrangements reflect a commitment to expertise, independence, transparency and non-partisanship. It is designed to try, as far as possible, to take the politics out of infrastructure decision-making.

This is fundamental, given the important role Infrastructure WA will play right across government and with industry in developing an industry strategy over a 20-year time horizon. The proposed state infrastructure strategy will provide a transparent, non-political assessment of how our infrastructure needs will evolve in the near and the long term, and reflects a recognition that in the past some infrastructure projects have had very long lead times. Remember the Forrest Highway. Thinking around the need for a new highway, essentially to remove the traffic blockages we were seeing through Mandurah, started in around 1996–97, and it took a little over 11 years from identification of need locally to a need justification, developing the planning, identifying the financing, and finally to construction, which was completed in 2008. Similarly, the need for the outer ring road in Bunbury was initially identified in 1995, and only now is the financing strategy in place and detailed planning being undertaken that will provide a basis for that project to proceed. The experience of those two projects alone highlights that 20 years is a very reasonable time frame for identifying the issues, considering the strategies associated with design and construction, and undertaking the review process of our ongoing needs. The transparency of the process is enhanced by the requirement for the Premier to formally respond to the state infrastructure plan. The Premier's response will detail the level of support, or non-support, for the strategy's recommendations. It is important to recognise that this affirms that the role of Infrastructure WA is advisory, and decision-making will still remain firmly within the province of government.

The role of Infrastructure WA also involves the development of a state infrastructure program, and requires the Premier to prepare an annual state infrastructure program covering the time frame of 10 years. This is a more precise overview of the government's proposed significant infrastructure investments over the budget and forward estimate years, taking into account the recommendations of the strategy. The bill also requires Infrastructure WA to assess major infrastructure proposals that have been submitted to it in accordance with assessment guidelines, and provide a report to the Premier prior to the government or state agency making a decision to implement the proposal. Finally, the bill requires Infrastructure WA to prepare an annual work program and submit it to the Premier prior to the financial year that it relates to, setting out the work program for Infrastructure WA.

These changes will not be easy for state government agencies and ministers, but they are fundamental to a more rational and objective approach to infrastructure decision-making. In thinking about that, I could not help but think about the ABC television program *Utopia*, which provided a pretty good insight into the mechanics and machinations of infrastructure planning in a process that lacks any sort of rational integrity. I remember the final episode particularly, in which Tony had to evaluate plans for an expanded Ord River scheme in the northern part of our state. Then there was the issue of the fast train service. It always pops up—when in doubt about a fast train

from a political point of view, put a fast train on the table and see how things crank along. Of course, I saw that in my electorate with a very big picture in the *South Western Times* of the former Leader of the National Party, Brendon Grylls, with a choo-choo train calling for a fast train service to Bunbury, regardless of the cost and regardless of any planning—just go ahead and do it. There was also the episode of *Utopia* in which Nat had to address the issue of a stalled highway. We clearly have to move away from the notions that *Utopia* captured pretty well. I think the show must have had a few spies on the inside.

Debate interrupted, pursuant to standing orders.

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