

PERTH AIRPORT — CONGESTION

637. Mr F.A. ALBAN to the Minister for Transport:

As many of us would be aware, there are congestion issues at the Perth Airport for domestic arrivals and departures. With this in mind, could the minister please update the house on what this Liberal–National government is doing to help solve this problem at Perth Airport and whether there are alternative positions to solve this growing problem?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL replied:

I thank the member for Swan Hills for the question and I thank him for inviting me to meet some volunteer bush fire fighters on Saturday morning—I enjoyed it immensely. The member is right, there are some massive issues at Perth Airport for not only domestic arrivals and departures but also international arrivals and departures. My view is that Perth Airport is one of the state's most critical pieces of transportation infrastructure, perhaps, in part, because of the isolation of Perth and Western Australia, and perhaps, in part, because of the sheer size of the state. About 12.6 million passengers and a large volume of freight will pass through Perth Airport this year. There is significant congestion at the airport. That congestion creates delays in take-offs and landings. That congestion means that when I am in Albany talking to Albany Chamber of Commerce and Industry members or in Geraldton talking to people up there, people now say to me that it is too hard to catch a plane to Perth and that they will drive. It is a ridiculous outcome.

Mr P.B. Watson: Get Skywest out of there.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I am not sure that it is an airline issue. I think this issue is related to the ability to take off from and land at Perth Airport. It is a massive issue. I have met businesspeople who, if they have to go to meetings in places such as Geraldton or Albany, will leave the night before so that they get there on time. This is not an acceptable outcome. It has a significant direct cost. I saw it reported that Qantas had estimated it cost about \$10 million in direct costs just from its planes and people sitting around on the ground. If we accept that Qantas accounts for about half the use of Perth Airport, there is a direct cost of about \$20 million. There is a massive cost of labour effectively sitting idle in aircraft. I have asked Treasury to do some modelling around that cost to help inform decent public debate on this particular issue. Perhaps the reason we are in this predicament at Perth Airport is growth. The airport has a master plan that forecasts growth through to 2029 and off the back of that there is an investment plan. However, the level of actual growth has vastly exceeded the level anticipated when this plan was developed in 2009. To put that into perspective, under this plan the current level of passenger usage of the airport, about 12.6 million passengers, would have been reached in about 2017. Therefore, the airport is currently about five years behind and I suspect that gap is growing exponentially. Of course, there is a solution, and the solution, as I think most people would understand, is to build a third runway at Perth Airport. In recent weeks we have been engaged in some public comment around the need for Perth Airport to construct that third runway. I think that it is an acceptable thing for the government to do. I will seek a meeting with, and a briefing from, Perth Airport, and, importantly, from the chairman of the board, to understand what its plans are. It needs to understand that this is a significant issue to the state; that is our position.

I was interested, and the member for Swan Hills asked the question, about how the opposition has been developing its policies in relation to Perth Airport. I will just run through a bit of a time line, and that time line is based on some press releases that I obtained off the internet, of course, because they are public documents. The first I mention is from the member for Cannington, who happens to be the shadow Minister for State Development. The airport will play an important role in enabling or hindering state development. The member for Cannington's press statement is headed "Third Airport Runway: Expensive, Unnecessary and a Vehicle for More Aircraft Noise." In it he goes on to offer a long-term solution, which is about moving fly in, fly out operations to Pearce air base. So, the member for Cannington's position —

Mr W.J. Johnston: Read the press release —

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I am reading off it.

Mr W.J. Johnston: Read what it says.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I will read it, thank you. It states —

“Not only would moving FIFO operations to RAAF Pearce be cheaper than building a third runway, it would also stop aircraft noise from impacting on local residents.

It goes on to state —

Mr W.J. Johnston interjected.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I am reading out the member for Cannington's press release.

Several members interjected.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: Hold on! Stop the presses; someone else wrote it! Let me go on —

“I know for —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members! Take a seat, Treasurer.

Mr P. Papalia: Time to get the toilet paper out!

The SPEAKER: Member for Warnbro, I formally call you to order for the second time today. A question has been asked. We are not even through to the sixth question. Members on both sides of this place—members who have answered questions and members who have asked questions—it has taken us 40 minutes to get to this point.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I will move on quickly.

He then goes on to say —

“I know for a fact that there are business people doing the sums on using RAAF Pearce—this is a better, lower cost option than Troy Buswell and the Liberal State Governments plans to build a third runway.”

He goes on to say that military airports are used all over Australia. They are used at Canberra and they are used at Darwin. Member for Cannington, there is one difference: Pearce is a very busy training air base. There are two Australian squadrons and a Singaporean squadron there.

Moving on, later, on 19 October, the member for Swan Hills and the Liberal candidate for the seat of West Swan put out a press release criticising the comments of the member for Cannington, saying that it was an unfair impost on the people of the Swan Valley. Then the Labor Party policy development continued when the member for West Swan, the leading member of the politburo, chimed in to the debate and said that the Liberals are scaremongering. She went on to say —

“This is completely false. WA Labor has no plans to move FIFO planes from Perth airport to Pearce,”

...

The Labor Party has no plans, Mr Speaker. All I am asking is: What is the Leader of the Opposition’s policy position? Does he support the shadow Minister for State Development, who —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Midland, I formally call you to order for the first time today. Minister for Housing, I formally call you to order for the first time today. Member for Mandurah, I do not want to hear the commentary of a horse race. I formally call you to order—it could be for the fourth time today, but I will keep it on three.

Have you finished, minister? I am glad you did not say a word, minister. I give you the call.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: Thank you, Mr Speaker. It was a trick question. I was reluctant to speak with you on your feet. You nearly got me!

All I was saying, in conclusion, is this: that is a very, very interesting insight into serious public policy development by the Labor Party in Western Australia. The shadow Minister for State Development opposes the third runway at Perth and wants it moved out to RAAF Pearce. The senior member of the politburo, the member for West Swan, wants it to stay at Perth. My question is for the Leader of the Opposition: what is the Leader of the Opposition’s plan?

Point of Order

Mr M. McGOWAN: He is asking me a question. Can I answer?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: No, I am asking the question in the context of my —

Mr M. McGOWAN: No, I am happy to answer.

The SPEAKER: Take a seat, Leader of the Opposition.

Mr M. McGOWAN: Okay; sorry.

The SPEAKER: Member for West Swan, I formally call you to order for the first time today. I want only one member on their feet, Leader of the Opposition. Yes, you have been asked a question. It is up to you if you choose to answer it. I am presuming that the Minister for Transport has asked you a question for a reason. I am

going to take a seat and give the call back to the Minister for Transport. If he wants to take your interjection, we go from here.

Questions without Notice Resumed

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: That is about the conclusion of it. What is the Labor Party's position in relation to the third runway at Perth Airport? It is just another example of the Leader of the Opposition on the fence, moving from "Sneakers" to "Splinters".

The SPEAKER: Take a seat, member for Victoria Park. I formally call you to order for the second time today while you take that seat.