

BUSSELTON MARGARET RIVER AIRPORT

576. Ms E.J. KELSIE to the Minister for Regional Development:

I refer to the Cook Labor government's \$11.2 billion infrastructure investment program.

- (1) Can the minister update the house on the long-term plans at the Busselton Margaret River Airport?
- (2) Can the minister advise the house why it is important that any investment in infrastructure is based on proper planning considerations?

Mr D.T. PUNCH replied:

- (1)–(2) I thank the member for the question, and I am delighted to have a question about regional development in this place. I do not often get asked them for some reason. I thank the member for the question, and I am very pleased to inform the house that the Cook Labor government will be partnering with the City of Busselton to develop a business case for the future development of the Busselton Margaret River Airport.

Ms L. Mettam interjected.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I am sure the member will be very interested in this.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, please, members! If we want to be able to conclude an MPI motion today, we will really need to progress with question time. Otherwise, we will not even get to a vote.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: The \$250 000 business case includes funding contributions from the City of Busselton and other south west local governments that see the value of a business case. It builds on the collaboration that was built some years ago and that I was very pleased to be a part of.

I have agreed to make this contribution on behalf of the government. We are planning for the long-term future of the airport's infrastructure needs because the policies of the Cook government have resulted in strong passenger growth and potential for additional services.

Those policies, members, are very responsible financial management. What did we inherit when we came to government in 2017? We have developed policies to promote the economic development of regional Western Australia and Western Australia, so we are in a great position to look at investments right around the state. It was our government, through Hon Alannah MacTiernan, that helped secure direct flights between Busselton and Melbourne and look in those new opportunities for investment. The member was full of energy, and it has given south west residents far more flexible options.

The Jetstar service commenced in April 2022, and it has been very successful. The success of that service so far has given us the confidence to proceed with planning for the next stage of the airport's future. Planning will consider factors such as passenger and tourism growth, existing infrastructure, economic impacts and opportunities, and sustainability and funding strategies. The South West Development Commission will continue to be involved in the project, chairing the working group that is made up of the City of Busselton and key stakeholders, and pursuing the direction of the development of the business case. That is on top of the interim arrangements we made last year to help debottleneck some aspects of the airport.

I know that members on this side will absolutely welcome this work, but I choked, members, a few weeks ago when I was drinking my morning coffee at home and I read the *Bunbury Herald*. What did I see? I saw —

Mettam slams new business case for airport

The article reports that she said the delay in acting on the airport was a “stalling tactic”. The plan was developed in 2015 and, basically, we should be getting on with it. What has happened since 2015, members? Let me think. The previous government managed to trash the state's finances—that is what we inherited. We had to go into budget repair and take major steps to address the problems that we inherited.

Ms L. Mettam interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, please!

Mr D.T. PUNCH: The member who is commenting in the background was a member of that government.

What else did we have to do? We had to deal with COVID, and we have gone through COVID. What have we got today? We have totally changed conditions; we have an economy that is the envy of the nation, if not the envy of many people overseas. That is why people want to come to WA, why they want to invest in WA and why the Busselton airport is so important. That is why regional WA is benefiting from \$11.2 billion of investment.

When we have a member who does not understand the importance of looking at contemporary issues to make decisions, I need to go back to the definition of a business case that the federal Department of Finance has put out. I think the Minister for Health has been down this pathway once before, but it bears repeating. The definition states —

A business case sets out the problem or opportunity, considers options, analyses costs, benefits and risks, and ultimately supports an investment decision.

That is what the City of Busselton wants. It does not want to put risk onto its ratepayers. It wants to know the contemporary circumstances. If the member wants me to withdraw the business case and leave the city to make a decision, she should tell me. Does the member want the airport built, and does the member want it built on sound principles? That is the issue.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, please. I am going to give the call to the member for North West Central for the last question. Members need to keep in mind that private members' business starts at four o'clock sharp. If we eat further into the time, it will mean that either you will need to curtail the MPI or the MPI will not come to a vote until possibly tomorrow.