

Hon Simon O'Brien; Hon Tim Clifford; Hon Charles Smith; Hon Tjorn Sibma; Hon Robin Scott; Hon Stephen Dawson; Hon Michael Mischin

RAILWAY (METRONET) AMENDMENT BILL 2019

Second Reading

Resumed from 31 October 2019.

HON SIMON O'BRIEN (South Metropolitan) [2.04 pm]: I will address the Railway (METRONET) Amendment Bill 2019 on behalf of the opposition. We will support the passage of this bill. Before we do so, though, it is important to record a couple of observations in the context of the second reading debate. Requirement for a bill of this type is laid down in the Public Works Act 1902, and sometimes particular people in government are inclined to opine that debates in this place about rail-enabling legislation stray into a whole lot of areas that they do not need to. It is a fairly straightforward matter: the railway is either being built or it is not. I beg to differ, particularly when I am in opposition! The fact of the matter is that a railway, whether it be proposed through enabling legislation from 1902 or, indeed, now in 2020, is a major piece of infrastructure that involves very considerable expense, and that needs to be examined at least in a cursory way at this time.

The other aspect about rail is that it is not only an important enabling component of any transport system, but also a very large physical infrastructure, which in many cases also forms a barrier, because other infrastructure and people are going to have to accommodate the presence of a rail reserve with a working railway in it from now for a very long time indeed. That impacts on the localities that the railway traverses and how we go about our business. Contemplate, if members will, the original proposed route of the Mandurah railway, which was proposed to head off at Glen Iris to service those parts of the south eastern metropolitan area that were significantly underserved by public transport options at that time, with the intention that people using that line would access central Perth, if that was their destination, via the Armadale line rail reserve. It is now a matter of ancient history, of course, that the route proposed for that rail line was then altered and did not turn off at Glen Iris, so people in the area proposed to be serviced through to Thornlie remain without a rail line to this day, although there are some arrangements mooted to address that. The rail then proceeding north from Glen Iris through the Kwinana Freeway road reserve has done a number of things, some of them positive. I am sure that people who rely on the interchange at Bull Creek, for example, benefit from having access to that portion of the public transport network. On the negative side, though, when a major rail line is put through the median of a freeway, as has happened north of Glen Iris on the Kwinana Freeway, it means that options are limited. One way a six-lane smart freeway can be built is to jig it so that there are four lanes heading north during the peak hour and two coming back, and then in the evening peak, they can be swapped around so there are four lanes coming south and only two going north. Of course, there is not that capacity if there is a rail line in the median, as was previously discovered when the rail line was similarly placed in the middle of the Mitchell Freeway heading north.

Hon Colin Tincknell: You could put them underground.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: There are other options as well, such as undergrounding rail lines, and I predict that there is going to be a lot more of that in the future.

I just reflect on those aspects for now to remind members that this is a significant piece of infrastructure and the detail does matter. In the course of my contribution to the second reading debate, the minister will be pleased to know that I want to touch only briefly on the background to this proposed railway.

Hon Michael Mischin: Oh.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: Before Hon Michael Mischin groans and expresses disappointment, he should just understand that “briefly” is a relative term! But I intend to be brief, and I am sure the minister is comforted by that, as is the honourable member. The minister and I actually had a quick talk about this just before the house commenced today. After I recently enjoyed a briefing on this bill, I gave some indications of certain matters that I would raise during Committee of the Whole House so that the minister would be suitably prepared, so there are a few things to place on the record and we will come to those in due course.

What we will call, for the purposes of our exercise today, the Ellenbrook rail line—it is more formally referred to in the Railway (METRONET) Amendment Bill 2019 as the “Morley–Ellenbrook Line”—has been around for a little while. I know where it has been, because I was here when it started. Members might be interested to know a few of the things I am about to raise. I have reviewed the debate in another place; perhaps some other members might also be of a mind to do so. They can do that if they want to and find out what was said there, but if they are despairing about the future of humanity and looking for some comfort on that score, they perhaps might not want to look at the *Hansard* record of that debate, because in many respects it generated more heat than light. Some members know what they are talking about—the member for Vasse, the opposition spokesperson, has a very good understanding of these matters; the member for Scarborough, likewise; and a number of other members, including the member for Cottesloe, made very good contributions. Other members gave all sorts of twists and turns to the history of the rail line and their interpretation of it. Let me give members my version.

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At the 2008 election the then Premier, Alan Carpenter, and the Labor government committed to building a rail line to Ellenbrook. I think I have reminded members about the circumstances of that. It was meant to be the 2009 election, but the Premier of the day had a rush of blood to the head and decided to go to the Governor early, without telling anybody, thereby mucking up the retirement plans of a number of his retiring ministers and other colleagues, to their great distress. I remind the house of that, not to upset my friend opposite who was the state president of the ALP at the time and probably does not like to be reminded of the outcome of that election, but in the context of this bill because this is about the chaotic planning processes that took place in the Carpenter government in that era and contributed to that government being thrown out.

The occasion I recall—I think the date was 1 September 2008, which the current member for Southern River reminded the other place was his birthday—was when the Ellenbrook rail line announcement was made, in the traditional manner of the Carpenter government, through a media announcement, having not worried about the policy behind it. It was out there, banging in a sign and saying, “Here’s the railway line we’re going to bring to you.” I remember our former colleague Hon Graham Giffard—or Mr Graham Giffard, as he is now—was out there, being very industrious. He had a mallet and he was there behind the Premier, whacking the sign in. He was a man of action, as the candidate for whatever that seat was at the time! There was Premier Carpenter saying, “We’re going to build a railway here; no worries; it’s all good”, and there was our friend Graham. If he is watching any of this or becomes aware of it, I send him my greetings on behalf of all of us! Graham was there, banging in the sign, saying, “Here we are; we’re decisive!” That is all that ever happened—a sign, saying, “We’re going to build a railway here”, in the context of a surprise and intemperately called early state election.

The pressure then went on for the opposition, with our then new leader—our recycled leader. I use that word to —

Hon Stephen Dawson: Because you care about the environment!

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: I use such words to boost my standing with my Green friends on the crossbench, minister, with whom I enjoy cordial relations.

Hon Darren West: They’re my Green friends. Leave them alone!

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: Perhaps they need to be a bit more selective in the company they keep, as do we all! But if they ever give up talking to the member, he can come and talk to me. I am his friend; do not worry about that!

The PRESIDENT: Member, I think you are going off track!

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: Before anyone else rails against me, I will try to recognise where my station is!

Hon Stephen Dawson: Just train your thoughts!

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: If members are not careful, I will lose my place and have to start again!

Hon Michael Mischin: That would be a signal defeat!

Hon Stephen Dawson: Do you have carriage of this bill?

The PRESIDENT: I think the interjections are getting really unruly!

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: Where were we? Oh, yes, what’s-his-name’s birthday. The recycled Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and future Premier, Colin Barnett, had everyone on him, asking, “What are you doing about this?” Undertakings were given to say, “Oh, well, if there’s going to be a railway built to Ellenbrook, if we’re the government, we’ll get on and build it.” I think that was probably expressed in a few permutations at the time, but the thing that really stuck in my mind at the time happened on that day, Terry Healy’s birthday. That was not what was stuck in my mind. What stuck in my mind while Alan was there doing his press release and Graham was whacking the sign in was that someone was missing. The person who was missing was the then Minister for Planning and Infrastructure. We have renewed acquaintance with that person, who is now back as a member of this house. I know that she is, unfortunately, detained outside the chamber this week on urgent parliamentary business, and I genuinely wish her well and look forward to her coming back in the next sitting week. The Minister for Environment will be glad to know that the Minister for Regional Development’s unfortunate but necessary absence and, therefore, her inability today to respond through unruly interjection will truncate my contribution to the second reading debate no end. However, the one thing that struck me on that day in 2008 was: where was Hon Alannah MacTiernan? Where was she? She was nowhere near that announcement, as the minister synonymous with railways. We soon found out why not.

As members opposite will fondly recall, when we came to government, I became Minister for Transport. I said, “Right; let’s progress this Ellenbrook rail.” I sought briefings from the Public Transport Authority and the advice I received was exactly the same advice that the then minister in the Carpenter government would have received: “Minister, this project is a dog.” I think I am quoting the head of the PTA accurately there. I asked why and was basically told that no business case could be made in 2008 for committing massive resources for a rail line to

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Ellenbrook, because there were so many other priorities that should have been in train at that time—no pun intended. I asked what was the business case and was told that there was none. Nothing! Barely even anything was scratched on the back of an envelope, yet a commitment had been given for many hundreds of millions of dollars on the run so that the candidate for the ALP for whatever that seat was could bang in a sign that said that Labor was going to build a railway. That is no way to go about business, but that was how the then Labor government was going about business. I said that I needed to go to cabinet and the Premier and ask whether we could look at the viability of this project to see whether we could make it fly. Now, the PTA loves building railways—it loves it—but it came back in due course and said that it could not make a case for this prior to about 2031. We need to bear in mind that this was back in 2008.

A lot of claims and counterclaims have been made about what is now being called the Morley–Ellenbrook rail line, but those were the facts as they stood at this project's point of genesis back in 2008. There was no business case, yet the need for a rail line to Ellenbrook has become part of the political folklore, with claims and counterclaims made in various places. I was reminded of that when I reviewed the *Hansard* from another place. The now member for Southern River said that he remembered the occasion—I have since described it as the notorious occasion—because it was his birthday. He was there waving a placard. At least Graham got to hammer one in; the best that Terry could do was to wave one in the background and be a nodding dog. That is what it was all about; it was a political imperative. The Premier and government were panicking because they were going down like the *Titanic* in the polls and were terrified of losing government, which of course they ultimately did. When we came to government, we were completely surprised that neither a business case nor a budget had been provided for this project. We undertook a study to understand the transport requirements for the Ellenbrook area and made some arrangements in due course to increase the public transport presence by providing buses and so on. All this is now ancient history. However, it was interesting that the recommendation of the Public Transport Authority at that time was that patronage projections and costs indicated that a rail line should not be built until about 2031, and that the short-term public transport needs of the area should be based on an enhanced rapid bus transit system. I was not a thousand per cent happy to find that that was the situation I had inherited, but that was the reality. Members might be interested to discover that about that little piece of our history.

There have been other claims and demands from different parties over ensuing years, but at the last election, the Labor Party committed to building the Ellenbrook rail line, without having secured any commitments from the federal government. That presumably meant that it was committed to funding 100 per cent of its construction and operating costs. We had earlier accepted the advice of experts that the state simply could not afford to build and service the Ellenbrook rail line on its own, without adding significantly to state debt and recurrent costs. That is the bottom line. The same reality confronts this government, which is determined to build it. I imagine that we would all welcome the contribution of half a billion dollars to the building of the Ellenbrook rail line from the federal government. That funding ensures that the project is more viable by reducing the capital contribution required by the state, thereby reducing the debt that would otherwise have been incurred, as well as the debt-servicing costs that would go with it. It is now incumbent upon the McGowan government to deliver on its repeated commitments to the people of Ellenbrook. It was an election undertaking. A substantial amount of funding has been provided by the federal government. Recognising all those things, as well as the time it will take to deliver this rail service, the Liberal opposition will support the passage of this bill.

The current government was elected with a whole range of commitments in its platform, including building the Ellenbrook rail line, but all Western Australians still have a right to know what it will cost to build it, the interest repayments on the debt that will be incurred and, of course, the ongoing operational costs. Members not only now but also in the future will be interested in monitoring all those aspects through their committees and other work, so I will be asking some brief questions in the course of the committee stage about cost projections and related matters. It will be interesting to see in the upcoming state budget how the state government intends to fund its share of the capital component of both the Ellenbrook rail line and a whole lot of other infrastructure projects to which the federal government has committed funding and which have been promised in so many announcements and even in pithy rejoinders in the course of political debate. Federal government contributions to infrastructure projects are always welcome, regardless of who is in government in this state. I do not think anyone in Western Australia could complain about the federal government's commitment in this respect.

I will not rake over any further coals in relation to the history of this project; I think we now need to look forward to the future. Back in early 2017, the McGowan opposition—that is a good term; it sounds better than “McGowan government”—released a media statement highlighting that if Labor were elected, construction of the Ellenbrook line would commence in 2019 and be completed in 2022. That is already looking decidedly shaky, particularly when the first three McGowan government budgets did not allocate any project-specific funding for construction of the Morley–Ellenbrook line in any year of the forward estimates. We await the next budget with great anticipation as those particular chickens come home to roost. Further announcements from the government on this matter indicate that these time lines have already dropped away to some extent. Indeed, I think even the

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Metronet project team has indicated that construction will not commence until at least 2022. Perhaps the minister can provide us with an update or a rejection of that view if I have that wrong, but I have referred to a Metronet page that gives the potential project target of construction as commencing in 2022.

During its first two years in government, the McGowan government has been a bit misleading to the people of Western Australia about the Ellenbrook rail line—a bit; I do not want to engage in hyperbole! A joint media statement by Premier McGowan and Transport Minister Saffioti on 21 August 2017, which, now that I think of it, was 12 days before the member for Southern River's birthday, stated that the business cases for both the Yanchep and Thornlie lines had been submitted to Infrastructure Australia. However, in October of that year, a federal government estimates hearing contradicted this announcement and highlighted that, at that time, nothing had been submitted. Senator Slade Brockman, a fine federal member, asked —

Can I just go to Metronet in Western Australia? What contact have you had from the WA state government regarding the Ellenbrook rail extension in particular? Where's that in the process?

The government officer responding at the hearing, Mr Davies, said —

We met with the state government back in September, Senator, and had discussions around the Thornlie extension and the Yanchep extension of Metronet. Whilst we were there we also talked about Ellenbrook. We have some preliminary information on Yanchep and Thornlie, but we haven't received the full business cases yet as they are being worked on, —

That sounds familiar —

and we haven't received anything in detail on Ellenbrook at this stage. We are led to understand by the WA government that that is something they're working on.

Senator Brockman asked —

So you haven't received business cases for any parts of Metronet?

Mr Davies responded —

We've got some information but not the full business case at this stage. They are currently being pulled together and we're providing advice to the WA government on how we would like to see those come together.

This hearing highlighted that no business case was prepared in 2017, in the same way that there was no business case in 2008. This is the way that the Labor Party in government operates its programs, and that poses a threat to the finances of Western Australia. It poses a severe threat to orderly planning processes for our infrastructure for not only our transport networks, but also everything else that relies upon it.

A 2019 Infrastructure Australia stage 1 evaluation of the transport connectivity between Morley and Ellenbrook highlighted that the Western Australian government established the Metronet office in 2017 to develop business cases for a number of Perth rail network projects and that this included a potential rail line between Morley and Ellenbrook. So somewhere it has gone from being an absolute definite starter that has been promised again and again since time immemorial back to a potential one. The next steps identified by Infrastructure Australia were for the proponent to identify initiatives and to develop options in accordance with stage 2 of Infrastructure Australia's assessment framework. Infrastructure Australia has cited the framework for this to occur as long term—10 to 15 years. There are some contraindications here that I and any observer can see, so now is a good time to place on the record the time line for this project to be commenced and the time line for it to be completed. I do not think that that is an unreasonable thing to ask and it is certainly pertinent to ask in the context of a second reading debate on this rail-enabling legislation. Members, as I have indicated, as at today, as I understand it—I may be contradicted—a business case has yet to be submitted to Infrastructure Australia for consideration. If I am countermanded on that, that will be good news and I will be delighted to receive that good news.

The bill itself is a little interesting in a number of ways. As we know, it is rail-enabling legislation as required under the Public Works Act 1902. It proposes substantively to deal with the Morley–Ellenbrook railway line, and, you will be pleased to know, Madam President, I will come back to that in just a moment. It also deals with a couple of other things that are a little novel. The opposition does not take exception to any of this being included in this bill, but some other schedules will be amended. This bill is called the Railway (METRONET) Amendment Bill 2019 and it amends the Railway (METRONET) Act 2018. This government has decided that it wants to badge everything as Metronet, whether or not it started it and whether or not it was its idea. It wants to incorporate different elements—future rail extensions and the like—into a consolidated act called Metronet so that it can own it in perpetuity. The minister will be glad to know that I am not suggesting a change to the short title or the long title, because, frankly, I do not care. However, it shows something of the psyche of not only the McGowan government,

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but also the Carpenter government that government is more interested in a press release and the banging in of signs and other virtue signalling than it is in actually getting things done: “We have to have ownership of something.” Perhaps that is because it has never done anything in recent history.

The Metronet act 2018 is proposed to be amended by this 2019 bill by amending several of the schedules. Schedules 1 and 2 of the act are to be amended via clauses 6 and 7 of this bill by inserting “1994” after “Map Grid of Australia”. The reason for this is to make sure that there is precision in the schedules that describe the previous rail lines shown in the act, which are, of course, the Thornlie–Cockburn Link and the Yanchep rail extension. It is not really a correction; it is just further information that gives greater precision to the grid references in those schedules, and that has been necessitated by changes that have been made in another jurisdiction. I do not see that we could find any fault in doing that and I do not propose to spend any more time on it. The bill before us also proposes to insert in that act new schedule 3, “Line of Morley–Ellenbrook Line”. Members can read that at clause 8 of the bill, and it describes where the railway line is to go. I understand that the two changes to the earlier schedules that I have just mentioned could potentially mean that the rail line might be out of alignment from the original line by 1.6 metres or so, which is about five foot four in the old money. Given that rail-enabling legislation describes the route from A to B, the rail can be built either side of that line by 1.6 kilometres, or a mile, depending on the needs that become apparent during construction. It makes a lot of sense if we are contemplating a railway line from Midland Junction to Kalgoorlie perhaps and all the topographical twists and turns that we might have to contemplate in building that. But, of course, it is a fair bit of leeway when one is building a railway through what are, in some places, very highly populated areas. Nonetheless, that is the provision. If we were out by five feet with the other two, it probably is not going to matter. We are about to endorse a new rail line and there are some matters that I know some members find a little bit sensitive, but I will leave them to discuss that in the course of their contribution. I will not.

I do not know whether the minister will want to respond as he closes the second reading debate shortly. I have already indicated a couple of matters by assertion if he feels there is any need to correct me on any points, but I think some other matters are best reserved for consideration during the Committee of the Whole House stage, the format of which will allow a freer flowing exchange. Of course, the minister will also have the benefit of advisers at the table with him to make sure that those matters are laid down. As I have already indicated, they will be matters that relate to timing, cost and other related matters in connection with this railway.

It has been suggested—this is just to keep faith with others in the community—that it is a pity, and some have put it stronger than that, calling it a grave misjudgement, that this rail line will not directly service the Morley Galleria precinct as that would be seen as a prime location for commuters, perhaps working in the Galleria complex, and others wishing to access it. I do not want to make a great deal of moment about this now, but I think it might be helpful for the record if the minister could explain why the route will not go to that area. As has previously been indicated to me outside the house, there are some valid reasons and considerations that make that idea problematic. But the minister is in government and it is up to him to explain why that will not happen.

It is interesting to see the history of railways in Western Australia, and this one is no exception. There have been some extensions to the metropolitan rail network from time to time over the years to build upon the original heritage lines—Fremantle, Midland and Armadale, as they are called. The massive extension to the northern suburbs, the Joondalup line, together with all its attendant considerations about placement and so on, has added to the fabric of our community. I want to acknowledge that and, in the same way, the Mandurah line extension, first mooted I think under the Richard Court government, possibly under Minister Charlton, but certainly advanced through Minister Criddle, who I notice has just been appointed to a new board in Fisheries. Both those gentlemen were fine transport ministers. There has been, historically, a lot of arguing about the route of rail lines in connection with the Mandurah line, as it is called. I touched on some of that in my opening remarks today, but, overall, it makes a solid contribution to the passenger movement infrastructure in Western Australia in the same way that people are looking forward to the Ellenbrook rail line.

As to the priorities of government, we will see how much priority it will give to this particular rail line. The indications are that it is more about banging in signs and making media statements than it is about actually getting on and doing the job. We have set a rail line to Forrestfield via the international airport, which was initiated by the previous government and which has yet to be finished. Again, I mention that in passing because it touches very significantly on the confidence of this Parliament and whether this government is capable of delivering in good shape, in a suitable time frame and within certain cost parameters a project of the nature contemplated by this bill. History will show us, I suppose, in due course how dinkum the government is about this. The product of experience as the project proceeds will show other aspects of commitment and delivery, which we can assess against some of the undertakings and promises that have been made in the past.

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With those closing remarks, I will reserve the rest of my consideration for the committee stage and indicate again the opposition's support for the passage of this bill.

HON TIM CLIFFORD (East Metropolitan) [2.46 pm]: I rise today as the lead speaker for the Greens to speak on the Railway (METRONET) Amendment Bill 2019, but I will be brief. It is no surprise that the Greens have always been strong supporters of public transport that is well integrated into where people live and work. There are huge benefits to public transport and a well-integrated system, such as reduced congestion and commute times, cost savings in transport infrastructure, individual household savings and increased productivity by enhancing access to jobs and businesses. I pay credit to former Greens Senator Scott Ludlum for all the work he did in this space. Some of his planning has led to a lot of people advocating for some of the measures he put forward. Hopefully, in the future, we will see many of those measures that he put in place around the metropolitan area.

However, years of poor planning and insufficient investment, and inefficient and unreliable transport options in Perth have created a city that is heavily dependent on emission-heavy private vehicles. This has caused ever-growing congestion in commute times, increasing associated mental health issues, reduced productivity and a contribution to the climate crisis. We all know that transport carries one part of the heavy burden of emissions in this state. This pursuit of low-cost development has resulted also in urban sprawl issues and the destruction of our biodiversity and key ecosystems. Suburbs such as Ellenbrook have limited access to services such as health care and employment. In reflecting on that, we are still grappling today with a lot of negative planning issues from the past. Insufficient planning has also created the situation in which we now find ourselves of Ellenbrook's isolation, which means there is more infrastructure to navigate to connect to public transport. There are not only students trying to get to university but also a lot of other people trying to get into the city from Ellenbrook. Basically, all these issues have sprung from getting access to transport around the metropolitan area.

I have received several expressions of concern from my constituents about the Morley–Ellenbrook line and specifically how it will impact the local area. We are looking closely at the land around Marshall Road. There is some concern that that land will eventually be used for housing. We all know how this type of land can be opened up to developers and so forth and result in unsustainable development. As some members may know, the original owners of the land around Marshall Road sold the land on the basis that it was to be owned by the community and used for community public services. Over the years, there has been some contention over the rezoning of the area that is currently used for parks and recreation. In 2007, the then Labor government attempted to rezone the area to build housing on the land surrounded by Marshall Road. Fortunately, with the backing of the community, Hon Giz Watson moved a successful disallowance motion against that. Since then, planning documents for the area strictly state that the Marshall Road land is not to be used for residential purposes. The "Whiteman Park Strategic Plan 2017–2021" states that the land must be used as both a buffer and to provide integration with suburban developments to the south of Whiteman Park, with any development complementing and supporting the core Whiteman Park land. It is not entirely clear—I therefore seek clarification on this—what the state government's intention is for the Marshall Road land once the train station is complete. That issue has been raised by a number of people in the community, and I am sure a number of those concerns have filtered back to members of the government. It would be great to clarify those points.

Before I wrap up, it is good to put these things into perspective. Planning legacies and how things change over time are a common story, some of which have filtered back to my office. I will take a moment to highlight comments made by a constituent whose father sold the Marshall Road land to other landholders to form what was to become Whiteman Park. That constituent has raised considerable concerns about this bill and about the development of the Ellenbrook line opening up this land to be used for a purpose for which it was not intended. My constituent said that the men who handed over the land had the foresight to see that future generations would need these areas to give people somewhere to go to escape their suburban blocks and get back to nature and enjoy family time. The legacy of handing over this land for public use should not fall by the wayside and the land should not be put under the bulldozers for housing; it should be reserved for community access. The concerns raised in the community are well founded because nature is suffering from a thousand cuts across the metropolitan area. We are seeing the degradation of Bush Forever sites and other reserve land. Some land is degraded. However, the Marshall Road land forms a buffer between the park and urbanisation. Just because a parcel of land is degraded is not an excuse to put housing on top of it. I think there is a good opportunity to put money into the land so that it can be enhanced and the community can enjoy nature and the facilities. Potentially, the Marshall Road land could be a key ecological area for species or simply remain a buffer between urbanisation and nature to ensure the future preservation of the current biodiversity of Whiteman Park and its associated wetlands.

In closing, I think we need to look back on what this parcel of land was originally intended for and we need to respect the decision of the original owners and the community by ensuring that the land continues to be used for its intended purpose. I look forward to listening to the minister address my concerns about this land and I will listen

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intently in the Committee of the Whole to any suggestions that are put forward. I hope to get more clarification on the points I have raised so that I can provide feedback to those in the community who have concerns about this.

HON CHARLES SMITH (East Metropolitan) [2.55 pm]: I have a few brief remarks to make on infrastructure in general and the Railway (METRONET) Amendment Bill 2019 in particular, or, as I like to call it, the “Why Infrastructure Can Never Catch Up Bill”. Over the last 15 to 20 years, rapid population growth in Western Australia, and Perth in particular, has driven a massive infrastructure deficit across the city. By 2066, Perth is projected to be home to around four million people. We cannot even cope with creating infrastructure for two million people. In 40 years, we have to create a whole new Perth—homes, business, roads and railways. I will wager that is never going to happen.

Infrastructure delivery is obviously and visibly struggling to keep pace with rapid growth and change. Unfortunately, we can now only play catch-up to support our population. Our infrastructure mechanisms have not kept pace with growth and our communities are increasingly disappointed by the experience of unchecked population growth. Think of congestion, crime, low wages, underemployment and so on and so on. We are told, in particular by the growth lobby, that this kind of growth is good for the economy. I note a recent infomercial by an infrastructure lobby group in a Western Australian newspaper that said what a great job it is doing around Perth. Of course it would say that. Building infrastructure is a great, profitable enterprise. Just look at Transurban in the eastern states. It is making a killing from those congested cities.

Let us examine a few facts. In its 2019 audit report, Infrastructure Australia reiterated the failure of infrastructure development to keep pace with the increase in population, noting that growth in congestion is in spite of significant investment in new transport infrastructure. It is also worth reminding ourselves of an article in *The West Australian* titled “Four Perth roads tipped to be worst for traffic congestion in Australia by 2031”. It stated that Perth is tipped to become Australia’s most-congested city over the next 12 years. Despite increasing investment in infrastructure, we are running faster to stand still. In fact, we are moving backwards, with more congestion and a reduced quality of life. I read today in the *Business Review Weekly*, or a similar publication, that Metronet will cost us an additional \$2 billion or so, and it has not even started yet.

Let us have a brief look at the project. According to a government press release, by 2031, the Metronet railway line project is estimated to take more than 10 000 car journeys off our roads in the north eastern suburb of Ellenbrook and the surrounding suburbs. According to population forecasts, by 2031, Ellenbrook and its surrounds are expected to grow by between 30 000 and 50 000 people. How many more cars will that put onto the road? Will it be 30 000, 40 000, 50 000, 60 000 or 70 000 more cars? But we are taking 10 000 more cars off! Is there any point? Perhaps the opposition, when in government, knew that was the case and that is why it did not bother.

Despite the colossal white elephant infrastructure project that is Metronet, I am sure that it will help some residents with their transport needs. The train line to Ellenbrook will possibly be about 15 to 20 years too late and it will be billions and billions of dollars over budget. Is it worth the money? Again, perhaps the last government knew this fact. Perhaps it knew it was just running to stand still and it knew the costs, but it just did not bother going for the business case.

There is no doubt it will help some families—mums, dads and students—get into the city for work, which is a good thing. I will explain it to the house like this: with infrastructure, the truth of the matter is that the magnitude and speed of investment and planning required to catch up to a rapidly moving target becomes increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to achieve, especially when governments continue to see immigration population growth as a cheap economic bandaid to put off the real problems that face our domestic economy. That is what this government has embraced. By its own admission, it has embraced the population Ponzi scheme. It wants to import tens of thousands of people to give the illusion of economic activity, without addressing the real underlying issues that our domestic economy faces—low wage growth, underemployment, high energy costs and high land prices. None of those will be addressed.

Furthermore, the sheer pace of change due to this rapid growth and strong interests and pressure from big property groups all create incentives for suboptimal planning outcomes. Wandering around all these new suburbs, we see newer homes being built on increasingly smaller and smaller lots. These appalling planning processes produce inferior results in land use zoning, aesthetics, environmental protection, quality of building design and construction, and social inclusivity. Rapid population growth is the cause of these bad planning outcomes. The more we grow, the more costly, disruptive, logistically difficult and suboptimal each additional increase in capacity becomes. In already built-out cities like Perth, the cost of retrofitting new infrastructure, such as Metronet, to accommodate greater population size and densities becomes prohibitively expensive as we buy back, bridge over or tunnel under existing assets, and as each new project disrupts more heavily trafficked services, it causes greater productivity losses. These are what economists call “diseconomies of scale”. The cold, hard truth is that the quantity of infrastructure investment required for this state is now impossible to meet.

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I will conclude my brief statement with a submission to the Productivity Commission back in 2013 by Dr O'Sullivan in which she identified three key ways in which the cost of additional people is not linearly proportional to the number of people added, but escalates with growth rate and population density. Her findings included —

- population growth drives up the inflation of land values;
- population growth has overrun Australia's natural endowment in areas such as water provision, meaning governments have been forced to turn to expensive technological solutions like desalination; and

Perth has done that —

- increasing density in our cities caused by population growth requires retrofitting already built-up areas with higher-capacity infrastructure (e.g. tunnels).

That is what we are doing.

The truth is that wherever infrastructure is delivered, it will be crush-loaded almost before it is launched. It will not lift productivity, incomes or living standards; it will lower all three as we continue to jam pack Perth.

HON TJORN SIBMA (North Metropolitan) [3.04 pm]: I rise very briefly to make some observations about the Railway (METRONET) Amendment Bill 2019. In so doing, I will not deviate, of course, from the position of the Liberal Party, which is to support this bill, as we supported a prior bill of a very similar nature concerning the extension of the main passenger rail line to Yanchep and also the creation of a Thornlie spur line. It is with some reflection on that bill and its consequences that I rise to speak on this amendment bill.

Metronet is a public works program for which there is little clarity in terms of capital cost, but, more importantly, operational cost. Previous speakers today have talked about a debt burden being placed on future generations. Our Greens colleague Hon Tim Clifford talked about the need to adequately plan for the future. At the moment, the current rail passenger network in the Perth metropolitan area costs about \$900 million a year in fare subsidies. That is for the current network, with no real surge in demand or change to patronage numbers. When patronage numbers decline, the Public Transport Authority initiates campaigns to try to drive demand again. There are probably reasons why those passenger numbers have fallen off in recent years. They come, obviously, with some cost. I do not know whether the scale of decline in passenger uptake has driven the requirement for further subsidisation by any significant degree. However, what we know is that for the kind of expansion promised here by at least the Yanchep and Thornlie facet of this, and now the Morley–Ellenbrook line—we do not know what the operating subsidy required to operate those two facets of the Metronet program will be—there have been guesstimates that future governments will have to find in the order of \$2 billion annually to fund the operation of this scheme. Never has it been this government's practice to disabuse any member of the opposition or, indeed, any other political commentator from speculating on the potential operational burden or operational subsidy required to operate Metronet at that level. Either the government implicitly agrees with that estimate or it knows it to be somewhat higher at this stage and is happy for people to concentrate on a lower figure. I do not know where the truth lies, but I do know that we have no direct line of sight on the financial consequences of building this right now on the scale that is proposed.

Some fundamental questions about this subproject of Metronet remain unanswered. I will not go beyond what is proposed in the bill. My questions are actually around issues of sequence. I will quote directly from the second reading speech concerning the physical parameters of the project. It states —

The 21-kilometre line will run from the growing Ellenbrook town centre, along the western side of the new Lord Street, through land north of Marshall Road and down the middle of Tonkin Highway, connecting at Bayswater station on the Midland line.

I will concentrate on that paragraph. The subtitle of this bill is the Morley–Ellenbrook line. I am a member for the North Metropolitan Region, I am not that familiar with the East Metropolitan Region, although I hope to be more familiar with it, but Bayswater and Morley are different. Where is the connection into the Morley town centre? I will get onto that because it is implied in a further paragraph. I just want to understand the sequence of this. The government has brought a bill of this nature to this house with the implied connection of Morley and Ellenbrook, but I think the Morley bit is missing, at least from what I have read so far.

The next paragraph of the second reading speech talks about Morley as being a new station. This to me opens up a new range of questions, similar to the ones I put to the minister probably 18 months ago that concern three new stations that will be built simultaneously for the Yanchep line, because I think there is a cost impact of doing that. I do not know whether the transport and patronage modelling justifies those three stations going up at the same time. I will never know that until the thing is built. I seek from the minister, perhaps during the Committee of the

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Whole stage, when these new Metronet stations planned for Bayswater, Morley, Noranda, Malaga, Whiteman Park and Ellenbrook, with a special station planned for —

Hon Stephen Dawson: Further station.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: Sorry, a further station; I correct myself. There is a further station planned for Bennett Springs East as that area is developed. When it is anticipated that these stations will be built in a sequence, will they be built all springing out of the ground simultaneously, as is the case for the Yanchep line, or will there be some sort of methodology to the sequence of this? What are the financial implications of building simultaneously or building sequentially? What is the logic behind station development or redevelopment, as the case may be? This leads us to the fundamental information gap with us as members of the opposition and other parliamentarians. We do not have visibility of the business case and subordinate business cases that justify the capital expense. For us the consequence is generational; a burden is going to be placed on future taxpayers of Western Australia and future Western Australian governments to find the money to subsidise this system. We really have to go into debate on this bill fully understanding the consequences of what it enables. We do not have that understanding, although I am given to understand that a considerable amount of work has been invested in that process. I draw that conclusion only because of two questions submitted by my colleague the member for Vasse in the other place that were answered on 11 February, so last week. For the record, they are parliamentary questions on notice 5825 and 5826 from the member for Vasse to the Minister of Transport. Parliamentary question on notice 5826, which was answered on 11 February, reads —

- (a) Excluding consultancies, have any other contracts related to the Morley–Ellenbrook Line been let; and
- (b) If yes to (a):
 - (i) who was the contract with;
 - (ii) when was the contract let;
 - (iii) what was the contract for; and
 - (iv) what was the cost of each contract?

The answer is very difficult to discern in the format it is prevented—presented, sorry; that is a Freudian slip there! Effectively, I see up to 84, it would appear, individual contracts that have been let, presumably by the Metronet Taskforce, out to the market to undertake a range of, probably, individualised, bespoke pieces of analysis, which, I would surmise, help prove up a business case, develop it or take it on to the next stage, certainly beyond the stage of what Infrastructure Australia had previously advised the development of the project concept had been. For the benefit of members, I will pick some things at random. For example, there are contracts for the provision of probity advisory services, which is always a good place to start for any project management. There is a constructability and maintainability consultant. There is a feasibility analysis consultancy service. There is a detailed market analysis. There is a transit alignment business case adviser. This sounds sensible. This is the kind of orderly work that should probably be done before these grandiose commitments are made, but, nevertheless, they have come after the political commitment. It proves that there is a business case that we have not seen. I think we should see it, because the commitments to undertake that kind of work are not inconsequential. We have contract amounts—I am quoting from the answer to a parliamentary question—such as \$715 204.55. These are significant contracts. There are around 84 contracts all up—I am just guessing because there is a lot of data—and that work would be in the order of millions and millions of dollars already. Some front-end work has presumably gone into the development of a business case that should provide some guidance about the full financial implications of building, as I understand it still, the Morley–Ellenbrook train line.

We have to understand the consequences of engaging in a project such as this, because the burden will be borne by a future government and the future taxpayers of Western Australia. It is very, very easy—I think all governments can fall into this trap—to make the announcement about the big capital spend up-front, and we get assistance from commonwealth, which is always welcome, but when it comes to the operation and responsibility for sustaining and maintaining our own transport grid, the cost is borne by the state government and Western Australian taxpayers and ratepayers. We will wear the consequences of this. We act in haste and we will probably regret it at leisure. I hope we do not regret it to the degree that I fear.

Why are these individual business cases important? It is important to get some access and insight into them, because they reveal the implied assumptions. The implied assumption that largely drove the Yanchep extension, as best I can recall from debate in this chamber nearly two years ago, was that it was largely predicated on population growth in Perth's northern suburban corridor. Indeed, in the years 2006 to 2013, there was significant growth in that corridor; however, the growth rate, just to reflect on the observations made by our colleague Hon Charles Smith

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about population growth, does not necessarily sustain the kind of investment that we are talking here, because the population forecasts that apparently drove the Yanchep extension were redundant seven years later when the bill came into the Parliament. There had obviously been a trailing off. To contradict the member, if there is an issue in Western Australia, it is not population growth; it is actually population stagnation or decline. That has been the problem in Western Australia for the last few years, and it is borne out by the very fractious and delicate nature of the domestic economy in Western Australia. We can trumpet our export success, but, frankly, the Western Australian domestic economy has been ignored for a number of years by this government.

Let me move on from that point to reflect on this: I understand there is a request for proposals for the construction of this Morley–Ellenbrook line. If I can implore this government to do one thing, it is not to repeat the procurement model it used for the Yanchep extension and the Thornlie spur line. The government will avoid this, because this is one separate project. What occurred was that two projects that were very different were packaged together. Few firms in Western Australia have the balance sheet and market capitalisation to bid on infrastructure projects worth more than \$1 billion. There was not an opportunity for Western Australian mid-tier civil contractors to be subcontractors to a head contractor, as is the case now. There is an opportunity here to drive improved jobs growth and to assist our mid-tier constructors and contractors—an opportunity to develop scale, build expertise and retain Western Australian–earned dollars in Western Australia. What is going to happen here? There are no top-tier civil constructors left in Australia, and certainly not in Western Australia. They are all owned by Spanish, German or Chinese companies. We are seeing a great hollowing out of that sector. We are price-takers and we get piecework, and I think that is a shame. This is something that is avoidable for this project, and I encourage the government to be a bit more creative and supportive of Western Australian industry when it comes to making its final decision about who will win the contract to construct this project.

I might leave my contribution there. Suffice it to say, it is opportune for this chamber to interrogate the Railway (METRONET) Amendment Bill 2019. That we are given the opportunity to do so as some sort of historical artifice of the Public Works Act is, I think, to all our benefit. I am not sure that these questions, as modest as they are in scope and scale, will be answered in a way that I and other members will find satisfactory, but we must ask them. It is our sworn duty as legislators to uphold this process of interrogation and scrutiny. Nothing in my comments should be taken to suggest that this project is not supported; it is supported, but it comes at such enormous cost and consequence, and there is such limited insight into what is actually going on behind the scenes, that those questions demand answers. The state opposition has been asking for this modest form of clarity around Metronet for the last few years, but particularly for the last few months. We have been rebuffed in other fora and in the other place that shall not be mentioned. I truly hope that we start getting some insight, clarity, hard numbers and understanding of what we are getting signed up to.

HON ROBIN SCOTT (Mining and Pastoral) [3.22 pm]: Pauline Hanson's One Nation supports the proposed Ellenbrook rail line. In fact, Ellenbrook residents deserve and need a railway line. Many residents bought their properties and blocks of land believing that a rail line would be built sooner rather than later. However, although I support the rail line, I do not support the government's motives. This is another example of our city-centric government building a rail line to shore up votes at election time—a rail line that my grandchildren's children will be paying off well into the future, a rail line for which not one sleeper will have been laid before the next election. I can say that with confidence, because when I look at the pocket-money projects that have been allocated to my electorate, such as the MRI for Kalgoorlie Health Campus and work at Laverton Hospital and Meekatharra Hospital, not one shovel, hammer, screwdriver or paintbrush has been picked up yet, because none of them has started—all promised, but no action. The Labor government still seems to forget where much of the money is coming from to prop up its metropolitan projects.

What about the critical railway infrastructure needed in the regions—for example, the rail realignment in Kalgoorlie–Boulder and the intermodal hub on the west side of town? The benefits to the goldfields and the government would be immense. Firstly, when completed, it would remove many of the heavy vehicles from the highway, which would mean less road maintenance and repair costs. Secondly, it would remove the need for freight trains to travel through the centre of Kalgoorlie at all hours of the day and night. Thirdly, the intermodal hub would encourage future industries to set up in the goldfields, knowing that they have access to the rail line. Fourthly, and best of all, it would open up land that is sterilised by the existing rail line. This land is rich in mineralisation that has already been proven through past exploration. It would mean more mining activity, it would create more jobs, and provide more taxes and royalties.

Moving up to the midwest, a rail line to the coast would open up the iron ore mines at Mt Weld, north west of Cue. If we were to continue that rail line through to Wiluna, iron ore could be mined in that area also. Rail lines used to exist in the Murchison, but Sir Charles Court's government decided to remove all evidence of previous rail lines. While most developed countries were expanding their rail systems, we were ripping them out. In fact, I actually

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lived in the Murchison during those years, and for 18 months you could see the fires burning every single night, as they burnt every single sleeper that they picked up.

Iron ore cannot be transported by road; the tonnages make it completely cost prohibitive. These are rail lines that would contribute to jobs, taxes, royalties and further growth in the regions, while at the same time swelling the state's coffers. But if we really want a big, big picture, how about a rail line north that could take tourists and freight to Kalbarri, Shark Bay, Coral Bay, Exmouth, Karratha, Port Hedland, Broome, Derby, Fitzroy Crossing, Halls Creek and Kununurra? What a great vision for opening up Western Australia's incredible coastline. In fact, we would have every train buff from all over the world wanting to travel on this line. But if big visions and spending money in the regions scares the government, how about starting small by just sealing the Wiluna–Meekatharra road and the Meekatharra–Carnarvon road? Thank you, Mr Deputy President.

HON STEPHEN DAWSON (Mining and Pastoral — Minister for Environment) [3.26 pm] — in reply: I am very grateful to all those who made contributions to debate on the Railway (METRONET) Amendment Bill 2019 that is before us this afternoon. I thank Hon Simon O'Brien for his contribution and, indeed, for his indication that the opposition will support the legislation. I thank Hon Tim Clifford for his contribution; Hon Robin Scott; Hon Charles Smith; and Hon Tjorn Sibma. Various members have indicated that it is their intention to go into Committee of the Whole House this afternoon, so I will provide some answers, keeping in mind that further answers will be sought during Committee of the Whole.

Hon Simon O'Brien in his contribution asked about the business case. I advise the house that the business case for the Morley–Ellenbrook line has been endorsed by cabinet and was submitted to Infrastructure Australia in November. In fact, I understand that there is information about it on the Infrastructure Australia website. Work commenced on the project around the Bayswater station precinct just before Christmas and is well and truly underway this year. Our target date for completion of the project is the end of 2022–23.

Why does the route go the way it does? I can say that, as part of the planning process, more than 100 options were considered before they were narrowed down to the final preferred options. Each option was assessed against project objectives and key criteria such as community benefits and opportunities, community and environmental impacts, development opportunities, rail operations, and value for money and operating costs.

An alignment along Reid Highway was considered; however, exiting Tonkin Highway at Reid Highway was technically very challenging, due to the new NorthLink WA interchange, and would have restricted opportunities for new stations to serve Noranda, Malaga and Bennett Springs East, as there is insufficient land in and around Reid Highway for stations.

Hon Tim Clifford asked about the state government's intention for the Marshall Road land. I can say that the Marshall Road land is predominantly cleared of vegetation. The route purposely avoids the conservation wetlands and does not impact any of the Bush Forever component, unlike NorthLink WA. The state government's focus is around the development of the future station at Malaga, and finalising planning in the area around the proposed Bennett Springs East station, so there are no future plans for the Marshall Road land.

Hon Tjorn Sibma asked about stations in his contribution. I indicate that all stations will be built simultaneously, because the business case for the line is justified by the immediate presence of all stations. As I indicated, the business case has been with Infrastructure Australia since November. Works will continue this year at Bayswater station and Tonkin Highway.

I am not sure whether Hon Charles Smith is supporting the bill, but he asked whether this project is worth the money. I would say that the people of Ellenbrook and along the 21-kilometre route from Morley to Ellenbrook would certainly believe that it is worth the money.

Hon Robin Scott spoke in his contribution about people buying houses out there in anticipation that a train line would be built to that community. Obviously, Cue is not between Morley and Ellenbrook so it does not feature as a station on this line. I heard the member's contribution. Perhaps a future government may well look at the Butler to Broome extension of the train line, but it is not on the cards at the moment or in the foreseeable future. I think it would bankrupt the state at this stage, so it is not a government priority. Indeed, I am ruling it out, just in case anyone thinks I am prevaricating!

Hon Tjorn Sibma asked that we not use the same procurement model that was used for Thornlie–Cockburn and Yanchep. The Metronet office is responsible for doing that work.

I have answered all the questions that I can answer now. If honourable members do not believe that I have answered their questions appropriately or have further questions, perhaps they will ask those questions during the committee stage. I commend the bill to the house.

Question put and passed.

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Bill read a second time.

Committee

The Deputy Chair of Committees (Hon Adele Farina) in the chair; Hon Stephen Dawson (Minister for Environment) in charge of the bill.

Clause 1: Short title —

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: As I indicated in my contribution to the second reading debate, the opposition is supportive of the Railway (METRONET) Amendment Bill 2019 and will contribute to its facilitation through this place. However, we also wish to examine a few matters of detail. Our purpose in so doing is probably twofold: firstly, to discharge a duty that we have through the Parliament to the community to provide the appropriate level of scrutiny to what is, in many ways, consequential to the passage of this bill; and, secondly, to use the Committee of the Whole process to identify some matters for the record. I alluded to some of those matters in my contribution to the second reading debate, and I will come to them in a moment.

I also indicate that I will seek the call fairly briefly in connection with clause 4. We may touch on clauses 6 and 7, probably at the same time, because that is an interesting point of discussion, but, again, it will be only a brief point. I anticipate that the bulk of this debate will probably centre on clause 5. I use that term not in the sense, at least on our part, of a debate; it is the term we use for an examination of the whole project. Some members may wish to examine some things in detail during the clause 1 debate. I guess that with a bill like this, it is a bit of six of one and half a dozen of the other. With respect, I suggest that discussion of matters of detail about the particular rail line might well be reserved for clause 5, which proposes to insert into the act section 4A, "Authority to construct Morley–Ellenbrook Line". That is how I propose we go about things. I also suggest that perhaps clause 8 might be the time to ask questions about the fine detail of the proposed route. Clause 8 is a very functional or operative part of the bill as it inserts the all-important schedule, which dictates, for the sake of the statute, where the rail is going to go, give or take a mile either way.

I indicate that the opposition will not seek to defeat clause 1; in fact, we support it. However, I will use it as a vehicle to ask a couple of questions. Firstly, I thank the minister for his advice in his closing remarks in the second reading debate that the business case does indeed exist and is with Infrastructure Australia. Will the minister table the business case so that we can all see it?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I am not in a position to table the business case now. As I indicated, it is under consideration by Infrastructure Australia. The likelihood is that we will release a redacted or public version of the document at some stage, as we did with the Thornlie–Cockburn Link and the Yanchep train line. It is under consideration by Infrastructure Australia now so I cannot provide it.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: I thank the minister for that. The business case is with Infrastructure Australia, so we have all these t'othersiders in parts beyond the Nullarbor who are poring over this detail and making decisions about it. Why are they privy to this but the Parliament of Western Australia is not?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: It is common practice to give it to Infrastructure Australia, but access is limited to only the officers who are assessing the proposal.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: I hear what the minister is saying and I thank him for his response. We are public officers, too, and we are responsible for this bill. Why are we not able to view it?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: As I indicated, honourable member, at some stage a public version will be released, but not at this stage.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: I suggest that the "some stage" ought to be before we pass clause 1 of this bill. What I am seeking from the minister is not intended to detain him at the table for longer than is necessary or reasonable, but it seems to me that this Parliament is just as entitled to view and contemplate this business case as are officials from Infrastructure Australia. The minister has indicated that a redacted form will be available in due course. I am not going to get into what might be the nature of that redaction; in due course, it will probably be a heck of a lot beyond our vote on clause 1. I am not 100 per cent satisfied, but one of the things that has struck me about the minister presently at the table is that he always strives to deliver to the chamber and does so in a very positive and respectful manner. So it is with a great sense of anticipation that I rephrase my request to him: What is it that prohibits him from disclosing this business case to Parliament? Is it a rule of Infrastructure Australia or is it some other restriction that he can identify for us?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: There are confidential elements in the business case that may well have an impact on the tender process. The request for proposal for the main works was released to market via Tenders WA in January and that will close in mid-March. There are confidential elements to the business case.

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Hon Simon O'Brien: Who says they're confidential?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: The government. They could have an implication on value for money or on the tender process that is underway. Honourable member, I try to be as helpful as I can and certainly, when appropriate, if members ask me for reports or want to establish committees or whatever, I try to do those things. It has been common practice of governments of all persuasions that when projects like this are submitted to Infrastructure Australia, the business case remains confidential. At some stage in the future—"redacted" is the wrong word to use—a public version that does not have —

Hon Simon O'Brien: What is the right word—"sanitised"?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: No—a public version that does not include confidential information that could have an impact on tenders. This was the process that was used by the previous government in relation to the Forrestfield–Airport Link. We are following the same process. As I indicated, it is likely that a public version will be released in the future.

Hon MICHAEL MISCHIN: Just so I can understand a little more about this, is the minister telling us that a business case that would support this project has been prepared but the government has already released an invitation to tender for the project and that will close in March?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: That is correct, honourable member. The part of the process that is open now is to try to attract a partner to participate in the process and to help build the project.

Hon MICHAEL MISCHIN: Can the minister explain to us the components of this business case and which pieces of it are confidential? Presumably, there is something in this business case to justify the necessity for this project, as well as going through the cost, the resources necessary and the like. Can the minister go through at least the headings in this business case so that we can understand what is in it?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I am told that it follows Treasury's strategic asset management framework. There are confidential elements throughout the business case. As I said, we are following the same process that the previous government followed, but there will be an opportunity for a document to be released after the consideration by Infrastructure Australia and, indeed, once cabinet makes the decision to release the document.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: I have a question that might take us back a little behind this. First of all, how much money has the government expended on putting this business case together?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I am advised that approximately \$10 million has been spent thus far on the project and that, further, about 62 000 hours of effort have gone into the project and planning by staff associated with the project.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: Has the \$10 million that it has taken to put the business case together relied on the task force or the department seeking expert technical contributions? I just want to understand how it has cost \$10 million to put this business case together.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Yes, the member is correct. It has relied on getting experts in the community—for example, Arup—to help put the case together.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: How many individual parties provided advice of this technical nature to allow the government to put together its business case?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I am not in a position to give that information, but the honourable member referred to an answer to a parliamentary question that was given recently and I think he said that about 70 firms had been involved in the process thus far, and that is certainly the information that the advisers tell me is accurate.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: I was speculating in my second reading contribution that that is what was going on—that firms had been commissioned to undertake bespoke bits of work for the department in order for it to put the business case together. It is somewhat comforting to me that my speculation has been validated to a degree, which is good.

Hon Stephen Dawson: You're a smart cookie, honourable member.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: Not really; I am just following the trail.

Can I understand what provisions or strictures or contractual obligations those specialist advisers are bound by in their dealings with the government on this particular work? Are they subject to non-disclosure agreements of any kind or do they have access in any way to a version or a component of this business case as it has been drafted?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I am told that the consultants who have been involved sign a document in which they identify that they will keep the project confidential. They also sign a document to say that they will have no conflicts of interest with the proposal. I am advised that there is a Metronet probity plan that outlines this work.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: Have any of those 70-odd contractors at any stage had visibility of the business case as it was drafted?

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Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I am advised that they would have seen only the parts that are relevant to them.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: I do not want to wear out my welcome. On this matter —

Hon Simon O'Brien: Too late.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: Yes, too late!

Just to clarify that, obviously, the 70-odd contractors who are expert in whatever particular dimension was required for the government to put the business case together have had some insight into the business case. Can I get clarification that they have validated only their part that was used in the business case or have they had oversight? There have been no instances of somebody seeing the whole business case, for example—a privileged access that they might have but that we will not be the beneficiary of if we continue the way we are going.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I am advised that the full document is held by the Metronet team. I confirm that the consultants who have been used would have access only to the part they are working on and providing advice to government on.

Hon MICHAEL MISCHIN: Reflecting on the comments made by Hon Simon O'Brien during his contribution about the history of this project and how the advice he received when he became Minister for Transport back in 2008 was not encouraging for the need for this project, I think it would be fair to say that the department responsible was not supportive of the project. Would that be fair enough?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Honourable member, I cannot comment on advice that was given to Hon Simon O'Brien during a previous administration. I will say, though, that the world has moved on since 2008–09. We are now in 2020 and there is a significant population living out in Ellenbrook. From time to time, members in this place have raised the inaccessibility of some of those suburbs out in that locality and the fact that it is hard to get in and out of at various times of the day, particularly at peak times. We heard from Hon Robin Scott that people bought out there in anticipation of a train line, so I cannot comment on what Hon Simon O'Brien was told. However, we certainly believe this project is warranted and we will deliver it.

Hon MICHAEL MISCHIN: Is the minister telling us that, leaving aside entirely the government's election commitment to build this railway link, the department recommended that there be a rail link from Morley to Ellenbrook and that its previous projection that it not be required until 2030 was incorrect?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Again, I cannot comment on what was said previously, but I can say that the Metronet office recommended the project. There is a positive business case for the project that has been submitted to Infrastructure Australia.

Hon MICHAEL MISCHIN: The Metronet office was established by this government in order to manage Metronet projects, one element of which is this particular rail line. That begs the question: which came first—the business case saying we desperately need a rail link from Morley to Ellenbrook before 2030 or an instruction from the government, "We have made a commitment to build a rail link between Morley and Ellenbrook; prepare a business case to support it"?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I make the point that the Metronet office is made up of public servants and public sector workers from a number of agencies—the Public Transport Authority, the Department of Transport and Treasury—that are all involved in this. They are bureaucrats whose job is to do the business of government. They are in there and they have advised government that there is a positive associated with the business case for Infrastructure Australia. I make the point, too, that the business case follows the Infrastructure Australia framework and, indeed, the state Treasury framework. It is a very, very robust process, honourable member. I assure him that the task force recommended to government that this proposal be progressed. The business case has been submitted now to Infrastructure Australia based on positive economic and financial benefits.

Hon MICHAEL MISCHIN: What are those positive economic financial benefits?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: With the greatest of respect, I have indicated today that I cannot go into the business case for it. I have indicated, too, that we are following the same process that was followed by the previous government and, in fact, administrations before then. We are following the same process. The business case has been submitted to Infrastructure Australia. At some stage, a public version of the document will be released that does not highlight the things that are confidential or that could have an impact on the tender or request for proposal process that is open at the moment.

Hon MICHAEL MISCHIN: I am even more perplexed. Let us see whether I have this right. We are to take comfort from the fact that a Metronet office has been established by the government, the government having as a pre-election commitment stated that it will build a line between Morley and Ellenbrook. The Metronet office is manned by public servants—it is not an independent statutory office to make its own decisions—whose job it is

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to do what the government wants them to do. A business case has been prepared to try to squeeze some money out of the commonwealth that indicates some positive economic and social benefits, but the minister cannot tell us what they are because they are confidential, but in due course, at a time of the government's own choosing, we will get some kind of a document, some extract of that, telling us something but not necessarily those things; yet we are legislating in order to give the government authority to build this railway line. Is that a fair summary of what the minister can tell us about this?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: With this bill, the government is not seeking the authorisation of the Parliament for the finance associated with the project. The member is aware of that. The bill before us does not ask for the money to build the project. That issue, obviously, as the member will be well aware, will be dealt with in the state budget, whether it is this budget or a future budget. This bill before us does not talk about the finances associated with the project.

As I have indicated, a business case was submitted to Infrastructure Australia in November and it is under consideration at the moment. I indicated separately that a request for a proposal is out now. It was released to the market in January via Tenders WA, and that will close next month. We are hoping to identify a partner in the project to help build this. The finances associated with this project are not in this bill before us; they will be dealt with in the budget.

Hon MICHAEL MISCHIN: Thank you; I understand that. I am not interested in the finances at the moment. However, I am trying to ascertain which came first: the business case idea, or is the business case there to justify the government's decision to undertake this project, which it has then given to the Metronet office to execute and to prepare a case for money from the commonwealth? That seems to me to be the sequence of events. Is that correct?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: If I can make the point, the business case has been independently prepared and evaluated. As I indicated in my second reading reply, over 100 options have been on the table and they have been whittled down to one project. That is based on a significant amount of work by not only the Metronet Taskforce but also those consultants who between them have undertaken about 62 000 hours of work on this project. If the member is trying to get me to say that this was an election commitment, it was an election commitment. The government made a commitment that we would do this, but we had to go through an independent process that verified that building this train line makes business sense, and that is what was submitted to Infrastructure Australia.

Hon MICHAEL MISCHIN: If the minister cannot tell us what is in the business case, can he at least give us, firstly, the instructions the minister issued to prepare the business case so that we can know what the Metronet office was required to do and therefore see whether it was told to build a business case to justify getting money out of the commonwealth; secondly, whether the office was told to assess the need for this particular project; thirdly, whether the office assessed the election commitment as one that was worthy of expending taxpayer money on; and, fourthly, whether the project is needed now or in the future?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I am advised that the minister did not need to give instructions to the Metronet Taskforce and that it followed the Infrastructure Australia framework associated with big projects like this. It has undertaken the work and followed the Infrastructure Australia processes and frameworks. It also followed the Western Australian Treasury frameworks, and the business case was submitted.

Hon MICHAEL MISCHIN: So the Metronet office just went off and prepared a business case all on its own without instructions from the minister or the government and submitted it to Infrastructure Australia. Is that the way it worked?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I am advised that the Metronet Taskforce and office are responsible for preparing numerous business cases. Some things might have been election commitments and others were not. This is one project that it was involved with since its establishment. It is run-of-the-mill work for that office to work on business cases. This business case was submitted to Infrastructure Australia based on it being a positive business case.

Hon MICHAEL MISCHIN: The other projects under the Railway (METRONET) Act 2018 are the Thornlie–Cockburn Link and the Yanchep rail extension —

Hon Sue Ellery: Do you support those?

Hon MICHAEL MISCHIN: Every time the Leader of the House interjects, I know that she is worried about something. She always gets concerned when we get too close to a nerve and starts interjecting.

The DEPUTY CHAIR (Hon Adele Farina): Can we focus on the bill before us?

Hon MICHAEL MISCHIN: Were any other projects looked at by the Metronet office balanced against the Morley–Ellenbrook line to see whether they were more worthy and needy of the government's attention, or was its brief limited to assessing and preparing a business case for the Morley–Ellenbrook line?

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Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: The Metronet office works on the business case of the project, but, at the end of the day, the government decides what projects it wants to go ahead with. That is what happened here. Certainly, the business case that was worked on and prepared shows that the project is economically positive for the state.

Hon MICHAEL MISCHIN: What other projects has the Metronet office been instructed to look at?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: The Metronet office worked on business cases for the Thornlie–Cockburn Link and the Yanchep extension, and it has done work on the Byford, Lakelands and Karnup train stations, as well as on high-capacity signalling and level crossing removals. They are the various bits of work.

Hon MICHAEL MISCHIN: Has the office evaluated whether any of those projects are more necessary or have a greater financial, economic and social advantage to the people of Western Australia than this particular one?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: No. They are evaluated independently. As I said earlier, the government decides which is a priority.

Hon MICHAEL MISCHIN: Did the government give the Metronet office a list of these projects to look at and evaluate and prepare business cases for or did the office come up with all these on its lonesome?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: It is guided by the election commitments made by the Labor Party at the last election.

Hon MICHAEL MISCHIN: Now we are getting somewhere.

Hon Stephen Dawson: I am glad you think so because I don't believe we are. You are going around in circles.

Hon MICHAEL MISCHIN: I am getting to the points that I am trying to extract.

Hon Stephen Dawson: There is no conspiracy theory. Make the point.

Hon MICHAEL MISCHIN: I did at the beginning. I wanted to know whether this project—this particular link—was determined on its merits or whether the Metronet office is simply following the Labor Party's election commitment and hence a business case was prepared to justify the project, rather than the Metronet office, having looked at all the transport infrastructure to do with rail in the state, plucking out this one and saying it is more important than all the others and ought to be given priority and we ought to get commonwealth money for it. Which came first: the chicken or the egg? It seems that the Metronet office, established by the government and manned by public servants whose job it is to execute the government's will, has decided to prepare a business case that serendipitously happens to match an election commitment. I suggest that the office is being required to justify this project over others. That is the point I was trying to make, and the minister seems to have confirmed it. The minister says there are positive social and economic benefits out of this project but he has not told us whether they are more positive than those for any other project. He cannot even tell us what they are, yet he is carving out this authority to build a railway line and all that is associated with it and issuing tenders for it and committing the state to it when we do not even know whether it is a good idea compared with every other transport necessity in this state.

I have some further questions to ask but not necessarily on this particular topic. I think Hon Simon O'Brien has a number of questions to ask.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I will provide a quick response. These projects were identified as being needed in the Perth and Peel@3.5 million plan. That plan is published and is out in the community. The state government thinks it is a good project, and so too do the people of Ellenbrook and those along the train line—absolutely they do. Yes, we made commitments at the last election but the Metronet office needed to undertake proper work following the frameworks of Infrastructure Australia and Treasury to be sure that there was an economic positive benefit associated with it, and that has been done. As I indicated, a business case will be released in the future, albeit one that removes the bits of information that need to remain confidential. That is not about hiding stuff; it is purely about probity issues because we are following that probity plan.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: I accept what the minister is saying in respect of his responses to my earlier questions about this. Perhaps we can wrap up that subject by just saying we look forward, in due course—whatever that ultimately means—to seeing that detail that has been alluded to. I was listening very closely to what the minister said and I noted his reason for the response that was ultimately provided was that this is the same way the previous government went about doing things. Hopefully, we will not have any more complaints about how the previous government did these sorts of things.

Hon Stephen Dawson: I was not being disparaging or anything in that comment.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: No; indeed, neither am I.

Hon Stephen Dawson: I was simply making the point that it is just the same process that has been followed by previous administrations. I was not reflecting on a previous government.

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Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: Indeed, and that is noted. The minister would get from my remarks and the tone in which they are delivered that I am not having a go either, but I do faintly recall a previous opposition would have taken a particular point of view that would have been less than charitable about such a response. Hopefully now, with the minister's declaration that he is doing just what the previous government would have done, we will not hear any more of that. We will not have to see it revisited in the announcements that come from the government. I know we certainly would not see it from the minister at the committee table because he is a man of decency and integrity.

In his closing remarks to the second reading debate, in response to a question from somebody, the minister made the observation, "Is it worth the money?" He said that the people of Ellenbrook certainly think it is. I think he has just repeated a similar sentiment now. It is about not only whether the people who live in Ellenbrook think it is worth the money, but also whether the people who do not live in Ellenbrook think it is worth the money. As always confronts governments, when there is a limited pot to spend on transport infrastructure and running that transport infrastructure in perpetuity, if someone from some section receives a very large proportion of available funds, that means that some other section, indeed sundry other parts of our community, will not be the direct beneficiary of those funds. That was the basis for the questions raised just now, which the Leader of the House got so upset about, when asked about priorities and how to assess the priority of one project against another. Hon Michael Mischin had a great deal of legitimacy in pursuing that matter, and I thank him for doing it because I think it has enhanced the quality of our consideration of clause 1. Nonetheless, the minister is quite right: a lot of people in Ellenbrook will be in favour of this railway line—they have been for quite some time. Hon Robin Scott gave us the benefit of his observations about how people had bought in the area; no doubt it will enhance the value of residential properties that are to be serviced by this rail line and so on. Of course, there are some people in Ellenbrook who will be waiting for this.

I also caution members, secure in the knowledge that I will not have to be answerable to these people, that there will be people in Ellenbrook in due course who will be complaining long and hard that they did not expect to have the noise of trains going past every 10 minutes and how there is a screeching sound as they go around the bend near their property. People will complain, as people are wont to complain, that undesirable elements are coming into the town, committing havoc and burglaries and what have you, and then hopping on the train to get back out again. There will be all sorts of things going on in the course of construction, such as complaints about people's properties being examined by contractors to see whether there are any existing cracks in their walls. People will also complain that there are cracks in their walls as a result, they would contend, of construction. Given all those pleasures, minister, hug yourself in the certain knowledge that you are the minister representing the minister responsible for these works and not the minister herself, or, if there is to be a cabinet reshuffle, the Minister for Environment might well inherit Transport.

Hon Stephen Dawson: I am very happy where I am, honourable member.

Hon Michael Mischin: He has not been that bad!

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: He has not been that bad really!

Hon Michael Mischin: He doesn't deserve that!

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: No. Compared with some of his colleagues, he has not been that bad in his current portfolios. In the cabinet reshuffle that is no doubt imminent, when Mick goes and who knows who else goes, he might pick up Transport! I warn him of these things in advance. I offer my sympathy in advance of his promotion. I am glad it is him and not me!

In his remarks, the minister asked quite succinctly, "Is it worth the money?" Clearly, this government thinks it is—it is its priority. That brings us to the questions: How much money? What is the cost of this project? I am sure the minister is contemplating how he responds to this question, but it is interesting in a project like this to contemplate: When does it start? What are the elements of cost that go into it? When do we stop counting? There must be some sort of global figure, and sometimes these figures are very round figures. Let us face it, we already know about a \$500 million contribution from the federal government. I must say that that is a very round figure. What is the estimated value of this project from before the initial dollars have been spent? We know that a considerable amount has been spent already, and necessarily so, but what is the final figure that we are anticipating for this project, please?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Although there is a figure in the business case that has been submitted to Infrastructure Australia, it is fair to say that the Metronet Taskforce is still doing a great deal of work in trying to "tighten" that figure, if I can use that word. There is some more work to be done. It is in the early stages, so I am not yet in a position to release an overall figure. I guess, too, with the request for proposal for the main work that was released to market last month, the responses to that will also impact any figure for the project. It is early days.

I want to go back to the benefit to people. The honourable member mentioned that I said the people of Ellenbrook would benefit and will be supportive of the project. It is a 21-kilometre corridor, so it is not only the people of

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Ellenbrook who will benefit from such a project, but also the people of Brabham, Dayton, Morley, Embleton, Malaga and Noranda. I was not being flippant in saying that it is only the people of Ellenbrook. That is the last corridor, essentially, in the metropolitan area that does not have heavy rail. Social equity is involved with it, as is travel time savings, and the removal of cars from the road, hence the positive benefits for the environment. There are multiple benefits associated with a project like this, as the honourable member would be aware, having been Minister for Transport and having been involved with the delivery of the Mandurah train line. He would be well aware of the positives associated with a project like this.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: I take the minister's point, and I think all members should take it as well. As I suggested, it is a bit hard to know where the costs start and where they are going to end up, although I would have thought there would have already been some figures with us. The government committed to this project back in 2008 in circumstances I have already described. At that stage, I think the figure was put at about \$700 million. Indications even then were that that was manifestly inadequate, and that is now quite a few years ago. Another complicating factor is if the rail line was not really necessary by conventional assessment until 2031-ish, it is 23 years ahead of time, and of course we know that values change dramatically over decades. Indeed, values have changed dramatically since 2008. I do not take any issue with the money that has already been expended. If there is to be responsible contract management and it ensures that there are not what some describe as "cost blowouts", it is important to spend the money up-front in planning and preparation, in this case to the tune of many millions of dollars. It is worth it to avoid those cost blowouts. But to get back to the point of how much it is going to cost, I have already observed that there does not seem to be any money in any of the government's three budgets to date. I do not know whether that is the case and whether there are some dollars hidden somewhere that have not been disclosed for the project. I have indicated how we would be looking to see what is disclosed in the upcoming budget, because it is getting to a stage now at which these sorts of amounts need to be pencilled in to the budget that is presumably coming down only a few months hence. When are we going to see some dollars put into the budget, not only for the upcoming year, but also in the out years as well? Otherwise, it is not a genuine budgetary exercise.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: There was a provision in last year's budget for projects in development and that was a figure of \$1.3 billion. Some of that money will be used for this project. I anticipate there will be more money in the budget that is almost upon us, but I cannot tell the member definitively that the whole amount is going to be in this year's budget. I do not know to be honest, because we have just commenced the budget process. There is certainly a provision in the 2019–20 budget for projects under development and that is \$1.3 billion, and some of that money will be used for this project. I have also identified that about \$10 million has been spent on the planning thus far.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: Let me see. We do not know what it is going to cost, we are not prepared to nominate an amount, but we are determined to spend it anyway. That is an interesting approach. No doubt, that will be a subject for the hurly-burly of public debate in due course. I am coming to the conclusion of the matters I wanted to explore in the clause 1 debate, and I know other members want to get your attention, Madam Deputy Chair. In due course, the government is determined to build the Morley–Ellenbrook line, so it will be done regardless of the cost.

My next question then, of course, is: when will it be built? The project is already underway. There must be a timetable. Can the minister give us some key dates, please?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Obviously, I have mentioned that the request for proposal is out there at the moment, closing in mid-March. I am advised that the request for detailed proposals will be done in the middle of the year. I have previously mentioned that a small amount of work has commenced at Bayswater station, and we are almost at the end of the tender process for the extra work associated with this project at Bayswater station. I am further advised that work on Tonkin Highway will happen this year, too. The Minister for Transport has previously indicated, and I mentioned this in my reply to the second reading debate, that it is anticipated that the project will come to a close in 2022–23. That is the time line at this stage.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: Will 2022–23 be when the rail is up and running?

Hon Stephen Dawson: That is the government's objective.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: That is the objective, okay. That is possibly ambitious, because these things take a while, with the environmental approvals and all sorts of other things that have statutory limits on them. At some stage in the future we are going to look forward to some rail being laid. That seems to be a significant thing. There are a lot of processes in all this. There are requests for proposals, there is consulting, there are environmental approvals, there is the development of business cases and all the rest of it, but it is interesting when the actual rail gets to be laid—sleepers going down, as Hon Robin Scott calls it. We have some idea when the rail might be laid on this proposed line. By way of comparison, has any rail been laid on the Yanchep extension?

Hon Stephen Dawson: The early work has started on that, but no, there is no rail laid.

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Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: No rail has been laid. What about on the Thornlie–Cockburn Link? Has any rail been laid there?

The DEPUTY CHAIR: I suggest the honourable member sit down so that the minister can answer the question. I give the call to the minister.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Again, the early work has commenced, but there is no rail laid yet.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: When was the last time that rail was actually laid on a rail extension? Would that have been on the Butler line?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: The last lot of rail that was laid was at the Perth Stadium station.

Hon TIM CLIFFORD: I just seek a quick clarification on the response at the end of the debate about the Marshall Road lands. Has there been any correspondence between the City of Swan and the government about the use of that land? The government indicated that it has no plans for that area, but does that mean that it would not stand in the way of any proposed resources being put into the area for the community for, say, green spaces, public facilities and whatnot?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Obviously, the project does not require any development, honourable member. I cannot say what might or might not happen in the future, but certainly there is no plan at this stage. In terms of correspondence with the City of Swan, potentially there has been correspondence, but I am not aware of it.

Committee interrupted, pursuant to standing orders.

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