

RAILWAY (JANDAKOT TO PERTH) BILL 2002

Second Reading

Resumed from 14 August.

MR R.F. JOHNSON (Hillarys) [1.30 pm]: I want to make it quite clear to the House that I am not the lead speaker for the Opposition on this Bill. The lead speaker for the Opposition is the member for Carine, the shadow Minister for Planning and Infrastructure. Hopefully, she will retain the right to be the lead speaker while the Bill is in its second reading stage. I put on record that, in my experience, this is the first time a Government has brought on a Bill knowing full well that the opposition lead speaker is absent representing this Parliament. It is incompetence on the part of the Leader of the House and the Government to allow this to happen.

Mr J.C. Kobelke: The member knows that is not true. The Opposition has reneged on the agreement.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: The Opposition did not renege on it at all. The Leader of the House wanted this legislation brought on as an urgent Bill because he knew the member for Carine, the shadow spokesperson, would be away on parliamentary duties. There was not enough time for the opposition spokesperson and other members of the House to have the benefit of enough time to read closely the Bill, the minister's second reading speech and the explanatory notes. However, it gets worse! I have been told that the Leader of the House wants the second reading stage of this Bill completed by the weekend. That is totally unreasonable and undemocratic.

Ms A.J. MacTiernan: It is a one-clause Bill.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: It is more than that; this is the start of \$1.42 billion of expenditure on behalf of the taxpayers of Western Australia. This is probably the biggest infrastructure project this State has ever had. I predict that when the project is finished it will cost more than \$2 billion. However, \$1.42 billion is more than enough to warrant this Bill having serious consideration and debate. The minister said that the Bill has only one clause. It is the gateway that allows the expenditure of \$1.42 billion for the Perth to Mandurah railway. This one Bill allows the Government to go to tender and borrow money for the railway. Many other integrated issues have to be considered. I assure the minister that there will be many questions from this side of the House during consideration in detail because the minister has not given us full and open access to all the costings of the railway. The shadow minister has on many occasions asked for details and been fobbed off. Accurate detailed costings for the railway have not been provided; we have simply been told that it will cost \$1.42 billion.

Mr N.R. Marlborough: You have been given more detail than that.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: No, we have not.

Mr C.J. Barnett: This is the opportunity for the Government to come clean on this project.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Yes. There will be a lot of questions for the minister to answer during consideration in detail. However, that leads to another problem, because the minister will not be here! The minister responsible for expenditure of \$1.42 billion will not be in the State when this significant Bill is debated in this House. She will be on a jolly in the eastern States. We are told that the Leader of the House will deal with the Bill during consideration in detail. Quite frankly, that is a dereliction of duty. The minister will be missing in action. I am told that the minister is going to the eastern States to discuss road funding; she is to attend a ministerial council. I would have thought that with such a significant Bill before the House and with so many questions to be answered - which have not been answered by the minister to date - she would be here. We require much more detail about the expenditure for the railway. What is going to happen? The minister will be missing in action and the Leader of the House will control the Bill during consideration in detail. I am told that the minister may even not be here next Tuesday, when the shadow minister will be back.

Ms A.J. MacTiernan: So it is okay for her not to be here but not me. Get real!

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: That interjection is quite uncalled for. The comment made is totally untrue; the member for Carine is representing this Parliament. She was selected by this Parliament to represent it. Why does the minister not get her colleague, the Treasurer, to go to the eastern States? I am told that the conference is concerned with road funding. I assume I am being told the truth. If it is to do with road funding, the Treasurer should go, as he is responsible for funding and taxes in this State. He should represent the minister at the ministerial council to argue for as much funding as he can obtain for the State. The minister should be here dealing with this Bill. I am told that the minister will not be here on Tuesday because she is unsure what time her flight is. Tuesday is quite a long sitting day. It is essential that the minister be present when the shadow minister makes a contribution to the debate. The minister should respond after all other members have spoken on the Bill; that is the normal practice. If she is determined to go, the minister should leave later on Tuesday.

I do not know all the intricacies of this Bill but I know how it will affect my constituents. The people of my electorate, who were hoping to use a station at Greenwood, will have to wait a further two years. It should have been opened by now. Under this minister it will take another two years before there is even a hope in hell of it being opened.

Ms A.J. MacTiernan: The member's Government said that the station would be open by 2000.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: We never said 2000; we were perfectly honest and open about things. That is more than I can say about the present Government! This Government does not give answers to our questions.

Ms A.J. MacTiernan: Your Government did not add one centimetre of rail in eight years!

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I do not think the minister's Government will add much in the next few years. It is a bunch of "gunnas" - it is gunna do this and gunna do that! The Government has extended the time for the railway to be completed. It will not even be in government when it is completed. It will be the same as last time. Last time the Labor Government did not complete the job in the time that it said it would. It had a grand opening at Wanneroo, and a special train went up there. However, no passengers could use the train. Not one passenger could get on that train until after the election in 1993. The coalition Government then had to officially open the railway line; the minister of the day was not around to open it because she had lost her seat. I predict that that will happen in this instance. When the time comes for the official opening of the line from Perth to Mandurah, the member for Armadale will not be the minister, and she may not even be in this Parliament. Labor certainly will not be in government, because the money it is spending on this railway will blow out to \$2 billion.

I have the impression from the minister that she thinks this is not a significant Bill. She says that there is only one clause so it is not a significant Bill. Is that right? I want to remind the minister of what she said in 1997. I know her memory is not too good, but it was only in 1997. The favourite catchcry on that side of the House was, "I can't recall."

Mr C.J. Barnett: It depends what time of the day you're talking about.

Ms A.J. MacTiernan: You're a scumbag!

Mr C.J. Barnett: Are you going to let that go, Mr Acting Speaker?

Withdrawal of Remark

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I have a point of order.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr A.D. McRae): I ask the minister to withdraw that.

Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN: I withdraw it, Mr Acting Speaker, but it is about time -

The ACTING SPEAKER: Order! The words the minister used were unparliamentary. I asked her to withdraw them. I do not expect an explanation. If some other matter caused the minister to make that accusation, that would require a substantive motion, or the minister was drawing that to my attention. I did not hear what the Leader of the Opposition said that inspired the minister's response. Therefore, we will now proceed with the debate.

Point of Order

Mr N.R. MARLBOROUGH: I am aware that the minister has withdrawn the statement. However, you did say, Mr Acting Speaker, that you did not hear what was said. I did hear it clearly. The Leader of the Opposition knows that he provoked such a statement when he said that the state of the minister's mind depended on what time of the day we were talking about. That is an absolutely provocative statement; it was meant to be provocative. If the Leader of the Opposition makes those sorts of provocative statements, he should not be the bully in the school ground but cop it sweet. He should not have his bloody offsider running shotgun for him. He should get on his feet and say it himself.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Order! What is the member for Peel's point of order?

Mr C.J. Barnett: He did not have one.

Mr N.R. MARLBOROUGH: The point of order is -

Mr C.J. Barnett interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Order! When the Leader of the Opposition wants me to intervene and asks for my protection, he is very quick to do so. The Leader of the Opposition said to me in an undertone, "Are you going to let that one go?"

Mr C.J. Barnett: Too right.

Mr R.F. Johnson: He said it to me, actually.

The ACTING SPEAKER: No, he directed it at me. He was looking at me at the time. The Leader of the Opposition should not argue with what I heard and saw him do. He asked for protection. I gave him protection from the Chair.

Mr C.J. Barnett interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: I call the Leader of the Opposition to order for the first time. I gave the Leader of the Opposition the protection from the Chair that he asked for. I required a withdrawal and refused to allow ongoing debate about it. I am now dealing with another point of order, and I ask the Leader of the Opposition not to intervene while I deal with it.

Mr N.R. MARLBOROUGH: I have made my point.

The ACTING SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Debate Resumed

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: If that was a point of order, I was going to make a further point on that point of order. However, as the Acting Speaker has ruled that there is no point of order, I accept that and I will not carry on with debate on the point of order.

As I was saying, I remind the minister of something she said back on 14 August 1997. There was an article in *The West Australian* by Torrance Mendez headlined "More rail use via Kenwick: manager". In that article, the current minister attacked Mr Peter Martinovich, who obviously had his own views on the rail line. The minister, as she is today - at that time she was the opposition transport spokeswoman - said that a Labor Government would scrap the Kenwick to Jandakot plan. I bet the minister will not argue with that because that is what she said and has done. She called for a parliamentary select committee to oversee all options because of its vast expense and importance to Perth. That is what I am saying about this Bill. Vast expense is involved, and it is of tremendous importance to not only Perth but also the people in the northern suburbs and the suburbs down to Mandurah.

Mr N.R. Marlborough: They are very happy.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: This is of importance to everybody in Western Australia.

Mr N.R. Marlborough: The people in the suburbs down to Mandurah are very happy.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Not all of them, my friend, no. I think my colleague the member for South Perth and others will have something to say about that.

Mr P.B. Watson: You didn't call him a friend; you just called him a colleague.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: He is a friend and colleague. The member for Albany is just a friend - and colleague.

Mr P.B. Watson: That could be the poisoned chalice.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: No, it is not. The current minister also went on to say -

"If we put the line underground we wouldn't have another penny to spend on urban transport," . . .

That is what the minister said back in 1997 when she was the shadow transport spokesperson. Only five years ago she said, "If we put the line underground we wouldn't have another penny to spend on urban transport". We have moved on in five years, and the line will go underground. Therefore, my question to the minister is: where are the other pennies that the Government will find for other transport? Have things changed, because the original costings have blown out from \$900 million-odd to \$1.42 billion, and that is just the latest estimate?

Mr N.R. Marlborough: The broader question is: where do you want the railway to go?

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I was happy with the original concept.

Mr N.R. Marlborough: So you think that there should not be a station underground at all coming into Perth?

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: No, I am not saying that.

Mr N.R. Marlborough: What are you saying?

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I am saying that the original plan was a good one, but because it was devised under the previous coalition Government, the current Government automatically does not like it.

Mr N.R. Marlborough: I will tell you the reasons that we don't like it.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I am sure that the member for Peel will take the opportunity to have his say, and I will listen to him. I will try to listen to him in silence, but it is very tempting to interject on him sometimes because he says some rather amusing things. I must say that many of his comments are amusing.

There is not just one clause in the Bill, as the minister said; there are three clauses and a schedule. I was looking at the minister's second reading speech to see where she was coming from on this. Parts of that second reading speech are all over the place. The minister seems to place a great deal of importance on a saving of 12 minutes travelling time from Thomsons Lake to Perth.

Mr N.R. Marlborough: It is a massive saving. It will get backsides out of cars.

Ms A.J. MacTiernan: It is one and a half million hours a year.

Mr N.R. Marlborough: Yes, and the northern suburbs railway line was supposed to get people out of cars as well. That was the thinking of the previous Labor Government when it -

Mr N.R. Marlborough: It did get people out of cars. The figures show it.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: No, it did not. Very often it took people off buses and they then got onto trains. I accept that.

Ms A.J. MacTiernan: Why were you going to build the Kenwick line then? Wouldn't that apply to the Kenwick line as well?

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: No. We thought that was a more sensible route and would be used more by the people in those areas; it would have better patronage.

Ms A.J. MacTiernan interjected.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I do not know anything about the allegations the minister is making. I know nothing whatsoever about that issue. However, I know how this issue affects me and the people who live in my electorate. They were all hoping that the new Greenwood station would open. People who live further north are looking forward to the Clarkson station being opened, but that will be delayed as well.

Ms A.J. MacTiernan: That is only because of the way in which you designed the tender. Unfortunately, you did not design the tender documents properly. As a result, the tender process took a lot longer. You were trying to hide in the budget in excess of \$300 million of expenditure, so you would not contemplate the public purchase of those railcars. That is why it has taken longer. There was no reason for that, other than your attempt to hide \$300 million worth of expenditure.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I am extremely generous to my friend and colleague the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure and member for Armadale. I always interject; I play the game. I allowed the minister to give the whole of that interjection, which was quite distasteful in some ways. I do not believe it was true at all. It was an accusation.

[Leave granted for the member's time to be extended.]

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I am concerned about two areas of this Bill.

Mr N.R. Marlborough: This is about priorities. You have a priority for the railway to go to the northern suburbs, and we have a priority to service the south.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: No. Of course I want the people of Mandurah to have a railway.

Mr N.R. Marlborough: You want to talk about your own electorate.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: No.

Mr N.R. Marlborough: Yes. That is exactly what you want to do.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: The previous Government put in place the plans for the railway between Perth to Mandurah, the link-up and all the rest of it.

Mr N.R. Marlborough: What you have said today is that you are opposed to the railway going south.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: The member for Peel can interject as much as he likes, but he is not really speaking commonsense at the moment. I have two main areas of concern with this Bill. The first is the cost blow-out. The second is the fact that the minister has not, I believe, been open and accountable by giving the Opposition all the information that it needs to ensure that public money is being spent wisely and correctly. The Opposition has not had that opportunity. I do not know whether we will get that opportunity during the consideration in detail stage. We will not get that information from the minister because she will not be here. We will have to rely on the Leader of the House, who in all honesty will not be able to give us all the detail, because I assume that he is not as knowledgeable about this portfolio as the minister.

Mr C.J. Barnett: Who is going to handle it?

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: The Leader of the House will handle the Bill during the consideration in detail stage. This important Bill, which involves a massive amount of expenditure, will be handled by the B team.

Ms A.J. MacTiernan: We could move it this week. That is fine. If you want to do it while I am here, we can do it this week. We do not have a problem with that.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I want the minister to be here. I want her to take the responsibility that is on her shoulders as a minister of the Crown and be here when this Bill is debated. That debate will occur without the shadow minister being present, which, to my knowledge, has never happened in the 10 years that I have been a member of this Parliament.

Ms A.J. MacTiernan: We gave you an opportunity last week and you sabotaged it.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: No. The minister should not mislead the House. We have cooperated with the Government and the Leader of the House on many issues. The Opposition helped clear legislation that the Government wanted to get through before the end of the last session because we wanted to cooperate. We were happy to do that because we want Bills to go through this House. We may not agree with them all, but we accept that the Government has the prerogative to bring Bills into this place. However, the Opposition has the absolute right to question in detail those Bills about which it has concerns. This is one of those Bills. As I said earlier, it is the biggest project any Government in Western Australia has ever taken on. The cost of this project will blow-out from \$1.42 billion to \$2 billion. However, the minister will be missing in action when it is considered in detail. When the Leader of the House has the conduct of this Bill during the consideration in detail stage, he will have to rely 100 per cent on the advisers. I have seen the Leader of the House act for another minister during the consideration in detail stage of a Bill, and I do not rate his performance.

I am surprised that the Premier is prepared to allow this to happen. The Premier has just entered the Chamber. I look to the Premier to show some leadership. He is prepared to allow this to happen. This Bill, which is of great significance, will be debated when the shadow minister is not here. That has never happened before. The Premier is setting new standards. I think that the Premier has some integrity. I do not agree with many of the things he says or his ideology - I absolutely oppose a lot of it - but I think he has some integrity. I am surprised that the Premier is letting the Leader of the House bully this Bill through the Parliament when the shadow minister will not be here. He is prepared to let the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure go off on a jolly to the eastern States or wherever it is next week.

Dr G.I. Gallop: She is supporting Western Australian interests.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: The Premier could send the Treasurer. The Treasurer could support Western Australia's financial interests, because it is a funding matter. The Treasurer is far more knowledgeable about funding in Western Australia than is the minister. However, the Premier is prepared to allow the B team to run this Bill through Parliament next week. As I said earlier, many questions will need to be asked. However, the Premier will still let that happen. What is the urgency behind ramming this Bill through the Parliament in this way? Does the Premier know what it is?

Dr G.I. Gallop: I am sure you are going to tell me.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I will not, because I do not know why the Bill is so urgent. I do not know why the Government will subvert the normal democratic processes of this House to ram this legislation through -

Ms A.J. MacTiernan: It is not ramming it through.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Yes, it is. When we were in government, the current Leader of the House often approached the Government and said that the Opposition did not want a Bill brought on at a certain time because the lead speaker for the Opposition would not be present. That happened many times. When the Labor Party was on this side of the House, its members were often missing in action.

Dr G.I. Gallop: Rubbish!

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Members opposite were often missing in action.

Mr J.C. Kobelke interjected.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: The Leader of the House made a nice little comment last week. I will come back to him one day with it. He made a lot of nasty comments. He inferred that I told untruths. He knew that I had not. He not only said that I was being untruthful, but also spoke in a derogatory way by referring to certain body parts.

Mr J.C. Kobelke interjected.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I would not dream of saying those things about the Leader of the House. Quite frankly, he is looking in the mirror when he says some of those things. I reckon that the Leader of the House belongs down the bottom of my garden with a lot of the other little things I have down there. I would not normally say that.

Mr N.R. Marlborough: You are like a teenager getting ready for his first date. You are being so precious.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I am very precious. I am very sensitive. I do not mind if the Leader of the House wants to get down into the gutter by making personal, snide attacks on me. That is fine. I am a big boy; I can take it. Nevertheless, it is not the sort of thing that one would expect from a minister of the Crown. We expect some standards from ministers. Unfortunately, we do not see those standards here, because we get this sort of thing all the time. Ministers need to rise above that. The Premier needs to pull his team into line. He needs to get them to behave like ministers. Once they start behaving like ministers -

Mr C.J. Barnett: It is a tough call.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: It is a tough call, but the Premier needs to do that because he is the Premier and head of Cabinet. I know that he did not choose all his ministers; they were foisted on him by Caucus. The Premier's only prerogative is to hand out the portfolios. The Premier is stuck with his ministers. However, he could still use his authority to ensure that they behaved like ministers, even if they should not be ministers. However, the Premier does not do that. He is presiding over a Government that will ram this Bill through Parliament. He will go against all the normal parliamentary convention to ram this Bill through while the shadow spokesperson is not present. We never did that whilst in government. When we were in government our Leader of the House would always try to help opposition members.

Debate interrupted, pursuant to standing orders.

[Continued on page 777.]