

## CHARLES STREET PLANNING STUDY

### *Statement*

**HON NEIL THOMSON (Mining and Pastoral)** [6.25 pm]: I rise to talk about the disarray in our land use planning system at the moment under the Minister for Planning, as was highlighted by the amazing backflip of Olympic gymnastics proportions in relation to the Charles Street upgrade. This really demonstrates how much this minister has held the Western Australian Planning Commission in contempt over the last few years. To go out and place in the community such a detailed proposal without socialising it in the normal way just demonstrates how dangerous this minister is. That project has now been set back by a year or several years—who knows? It is a very important project. Charles Street needs to be upgraded and there needs to be an allowance for the traffic demands of the 3.5 million people who are projected to be living in the metropolitan area by 2051. We need to proceed with it, but the right body to do that is the Western Australian Planning Commission. We have seen how this minister has sidelined that body. This year, in an answer during question time, it was revealed that the capital cities committee, a committee that has played a very important role in the deliberations and design of the future of Perth, has not held a single meeting this calendar year. We have seen how local governments have been sidelined from major decisions. The City of Vincent was obviously blindsided by this process.

I am not going to comment on the specifics of the proposal, but we have to do something. It is a challenging environment, but unfortunately we have now had this backflip by the minister in that process. I was actually out on Charles Street an hour before the backflip, doing a video for my social media to encourage people to make submissions. I am encouraging people to get involved in the process, but sadly this has been handled very badly. I do not know how the minister goes about decision-making in this process. Maybe she heads out to West Swan thinking, “Okay, I’ll head out to one of my rental properties to check on the tenants, and we have a situation of congestion, so I’ll get on the phone to the Commissioner of Main Roads to ask how we can get something delivered to make it happen.” That is what the minister is doing instead of working in collaboration with Main Roads, the chairman of the Western Australian Planning Commission and the director general of the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage, and bringing back the primacy of our planning profession in the design of our city into the future. Instead, the engineers are brought together; there is this fixation with engineering solutions. It results in a pretty much finished product being rolled out into the community while the minister says that the government is going to consult. Of course, people will react, because they are shocked. It is very telling. I do not want to make light of this. It is a very serious issue. I managed to get the transcript of the video that was put out for consideration, before it was taken down. I ask the minister genuinely, “What part of this is now so bad that you are not going to proceed with it?” I will not read the whole transcript, because it is quite long. It states, in part —

Extensive transport investigations have demonstrated that while Charles Street can meet the growing demand of north–south traffic, the key challenges are the intersections with east west links.

In response to these challenges the traditional approach to addressing increasing congestion is to build wider roads and bigger intersections, but these solutions offer nothing to pedestrians and cyclists trying to cross them, or the communities who create their lives around them.

Given the constrained nature of Charles Street, it was necessary to develop —

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creative solutions, thinking beyond two dimensions. Planners have developed innovative vertical bypass solutions—what you might call a duck and dive.

These vertical bypass options provide a compact, elegant solution when compared to the traditional approach.

Okay. This video went up as part of the consultation. The Labor Party has so many spin doctors. It spent its time trying to find a solution, it got some engineers to put together a design, and the government wanted to ram it through. It then went out for consultation, and suddenly all this innovation, creativity and thinking beyond two dimensions was thrown out the window. Who knows how much that process cost? That process was sent back. It was just not on.

I can imagine the phone call that came from the Prime Minister’s office. The Minister for Planning says, “Oh! The Prime Minister is calling me! This is fantastic.” She picks up the phone, but it is not the Prime Minister. It is actually the Assistant Minister to the Prime Minister, Hon Patrick Gorman, and he says, “What are you doing, Rita Saffioti? You’re upsetting all my constituents in the electorate of Perth.” The next minute, there is another phone call, and it is the Minister for Housing, Hon John Carey. The minister is thinking that she must be very popular today. He says, “What are you doing? The City of Vincent is up in arms. All my friends and colleagues there are ready to sign up to the Greens Party—who knows? They’re ready to walk.” I can just see the panic that struck the minister, and all that innovation and creativity was suddenly thrown out the window.

All I would say to the Minister for Planning is talk to the chairperson of the Western Australian Planning Commission and sit down with the land use planners and experts, who have done so many good pieces of work. We are about to

see off Hon Alannah MacTiernan. She was at least a consultative and inclusive Minister for Planning. As a public servant, I went to the huge workshop that she ran a few years ago for Network Cities. I was very impressed with the way that minister included people to talk about how this city should look. We need to address this. Sometimes governments have to make hard decisions. I am not going to criticise the Charles Street program. We could argue for duck-and-drive structures. Planners do not really like dive structures because they tend to create isolation in the surrounding area. There were a lot of great graphics in that plan, and a lot of extensive work was done. The fundamental issue was that the land use planners should have had some gentle discussions with the community. The planning commission should also have been involved. Every time I ask about planning matters, I find that the planning commission is becoming less and less involved. The planning commission should be involved. That is because there is a mechanism in the metropolitan planning scheme to enable a gentle way of obtaining the land and houses that we need by acquiring that voluntarily over time. I saw that process happen with the widening of Great Eastern Highway. About 50 per cent of the properties that needed to be acquired for that work had been acquired before that process even began. That meant that the community was already on board for that change.

We need to think long term. I also say to Minister Saffioti that we need to have strategic land use planning. I do not think that is part of the minister's vocabulary. I do not think the minister understands what that means. She wants to get up there with a great big lever and ring the Commissioner for Main Roads and put together a plan and ram it through because she is worried about congestion. She needs to be strategic about these things. She also needs to bring on board not only the community but also her parliamentary colleagues, particularly her cabinet colleagues. I dare say that she also needs to bring on board her federal parliamentary colleagues. I would suggest that some harsh words have come back to the minister. She has performed a backflip that is of Olympic proportions and deserving of a gold medal. We can speak lightly. I hope the minister will now learn a lesson and will get involved and sit down with the planning experts, because we need this transport link to work. I can read so much from the transcript of that video, because it is vital for our city at 3.5 million people that we enable our public transport system and general transport network to operate efficiently and well.