



APPROPRIATION BILL 2021

Gawler Rail Electrification Project Delay

The Hon. A. PICCOLO (Light): I would like to make a brief contribution to the Appropriation Bill. The reason I need to do so is that there were some announcements during the estimates process that really upset my community, and I would like to focus perhaps on just one announcement.

In a media statement issued by the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport, under the heading 'Hard work means fewer project delays despite COVID-19 pandemic', the minister tried to spin how he is going to sort these delays to the community. What has really angered my community about that is the delay in the electrification of the Gawler rail project and also his lack of commitment to improving the substitute bus services. Those two issues really did anger my community. First of all, he played down the delay;

in other words, it meant nothing and it was just a minor glitch in the system. But for the people who have had to put up with this delay for over 12 months— not a few weeks of the lockdown we have had—it really does grate on them. Secondly, they have to put up with a substitute bus service, which has improved a bit after heavy lobbying by the community, but it is still not free and the reality is that for a lot of people it is still a lesser service in the sense that it can take up to 1½ to two hours to get to work. For those people who can catch the express services, it is not too bad, but there are those who cannot. There are a lot of people who do not travel in peak times.

Because of their work arrangements, they work different hours. A lot of people work outside of peak times. A lot of people do not have the advantage of a second vehicle. Often people who work as cleaners and other people are doubly punished by having to take a slow service to work early in

the morning or late at night or even during the daytime. In this three-page media statement, the Gawler project has one small mention. It is an insignificant little mention. I can assure you that the outrage of the community was palpable.

The Facebook page put out by the local newspaper was inundated with complaints about the minister's refusal to even consider modifying substitute bus services to improve the quality of life of those people who live in that electorate, particularly a lot of students who try to balance study and work commitments in part-time jobs to get ahead. The minister's treatment of this project, in the sense that he has not come clean and explained these delays, is really sad. Another thing that needs to be mentioned was that there was no clarification about the future of Curtis Road – another hot-button issue in my community. People are now starting to believe very strongly that this government does not care about people in the northern suburbs. Certainly, the impression I get from all the survey work I am doing is that this government really does not care about

Gawler and the northern suburbs and that is shown by the lack of investment in infrastructure in a whole range of areas. For example, people are concerned about ambulance ramping in local hospitals, which continues despite the Premier giving a commitment that would be resolved. People are concerned not only about ambulance ramping but the lack of

ambulances in our community too. We only have one unit in Gawler. If that is either ramped somewhere or taken somewhere else, our town is not covered by an ambulance service. We have an increasing number of stories about people waiting for an ambulance, causing quite a bit of stress and impacting on people's health and also their lives. Throughout the whole process of estimates, what was really sad was that government ministers spent all their time trying to justify things which could not be supported. It also showed a certain disdain to make themselves accountable and the government accountable as well. That is certainly true about the issue of the electrification project. The minister was asked about when this was due, and we got the normal glib answer from the minister, 'Well, it's actually in the media statement.'

Look at page 24 or 25 of The Advertiser. It's in there'. It was a little story in there. The fact that he was not even prepared to be open and honest with the community shows the calibre of this minister. Health, as I said, is an ongoing issue. There is also the issue that it is clear we need a major investment in infrastructure for what is a huge growth area.

In Gawler and the northern suburbs, and also in my colleague's electorate of Taylor, we have some of the strongest growth areas in the state, and yet the social infrastructure is not keeping pace. Certainly, investment in our schools is not keeping pace. The

investments in schools that is going on at the moment were investment commitments made by the prior government. There has been no new investment made by this government. All that is being done at the moment is the commitment which the previous government had made.

On the one hand, we have tens of million dollars being spent on new eastern suburbs schools, yet I have a school in my area which is literally boarded up because the buildings cannot be used because of a lack of investment in the school. With those few comments, the message certainly from my community about this government's Appropriation Bill is that the government certainly does not care about Gawler and the northern suburbs.