



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Proof Committee Hansard

**HOUSE OF  
REPRESENTATIVES**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PETITIONS

**Reference: Petitions presented before 14 November 2008**

**WEDNESDAY, 3 DECEMBER 2008**

**CANBERRA**

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**[PROOF COPY]**

[11.39 am]

**BROWN, Mr Brian, Vice-President, Curfew4Canberra**

**FERGUSON, Mr Rob, Secretary, Curfew4Canberra**

**WILLIAMS, Mr Neil, General Manager, Rail, Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government**

**ACTING CHAIR (Mr Broadbent)**—Although the committee does not require you to speak under oath, you should understand that this meeting is a formal proceeding of the parliament. Giving false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of the parliament. Do you have any opening statement on the petitions that have arisen before you?

**Mr Williams**—No. I understand the minister has provided responses on all the petitions.

**ACTING CHAIR**—I am referring to the King Street Bridge in Glenelg, South Australia. The federal funding is provided through various programs, and the responsibility for the bridge rests with local council, who is free to use some of this funding to upgrade King Street Bridge. Firstly, how do you monitor that if there are a number of programs? Are there any special circumstances in this case such that a petition was needed in the first place? I will leave that with you for a moment.

**Mr Williams**—In terms of the two programs mentioned in the minister's response, firstly I suppose the financial assistance grants are a general program of government to local councils across the country. I do not believe there is any particular monitoring of what that money is spent on. As is mentioned in the response, it is untied funding. In terms of the Roads to Recovery program, there is some monitoring of that through the department. I understand payments are made from the department on a quarterly basis. There is also provision of audited statements from local councils as to where that money has been expended. Sorry, I did not get your third question.

**ACTING CHAIR**—It was a very general question: do you get many of these requests on a regular basis that are really local government issues?

**Mr Williams**—I think the department, being the local government department, certainly does get a lot of requests for infrastructure—right across the spectrum, not just roads.

**ACTING CHAIR**—How do you handle those requests? Do you fold them back into the minister's office or back into the department?

**Mr Williams**—It depends on the nature of the request, and what programs the government has. This is obviously under the 'roads' area. But, as I said there, is a whole range of infrastructure issues and there are other parts of the department that primarily look after local government.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Are there any questions?

**Mr CHESTER**—Is there any reason that you are aware of why this one has got to the stage where it has become a petition to the House of Representatives rather than being dealt with directly by local council? Are you aware of any of the background of this one?

**Mr Williams**—This has a bit of history. I understand the council put forward a submission to the previous government under the Strategic Regional Program. It was unsuccessful in that process and has continued to lobby, I suppose, the federal government. There are also particular avenues through the state government. I understand they have applications in for the Special Local Road Program run by the state of South Australia, and there is a potential avenue for funding there. I understand applications for that close in April 2009.

**Mr SIMPKINS**—Is this a local road?

**Mr Williams**—It is a local road, yes. It is just a bridge going—

**Mr SIMPKINS**—It is not a major arterial? It is not a state road or a national highway?

**Mr Williams**—No, it is a local road

**Mr CHESTER**—Just on the Roads to Recovery, I know local government in my area love the program—they get to decide their local solutions, solve their local problems and that type of thing—but there is never going to be enough money. Do you know of any push towards increasing that level of funding to local government in the future?

**Mr Williams**—Yes, the current government announced that the Roads to Recovery program has been extended for another five years from 2009-10 to 2010-14. So it is also currently going this year as well. The funding has increased from \$307.5 million per annum to \$350 million per annum.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Can we move to Canberra airport? We note there has been considerable movement on the issue since the response from the minister. If you turn over the page, you will see the media release from the minister, entitled *Minister refuses to approve Canberra airport master plan*. Have there been any further media statements since that one on 21 November? The letter from the minister was received on 1 December.

**Mr Williams**—Not specifically for Canberra airport. Obviously, the minister released the government's green paper on aviation yesterday.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Where do we go from here on the master plan?

**Mr Williams**—In refusing the plan in accordance with the act, the minister asked Canberra airport to submit a new plan within 180 days of the decision. That is around May next year. In that process Canberra airport has to take on board the minister's concerns and issues and those raised by members of the public and then resubmit that for another public consultation process of 60 business days within that timeframe before submitting it again to the minister.

**ACTING CHAIR**—I note with interest that the minister has gone out of his way to make sure there is appropriate public consultation in the process you have just outlined. That has been a response to the community concerns that have been raised. Is there a group involved in the long-term planning of Canberra that has involvement with the Canberra airport master plan development? Is there a territory government body in the ACT that is represented on the long-term planning for the airport body?

**Mr Williams**—Not specifically. As a federal east airport, the jurisdiction for planning comes under the Airports Act. Decisions on the master plan and major developments are all made by the minister through the Airports Act. I understand that Canberra airport may have a community consultation forum. If they do not certainly—as flagged in the green paper yesterday—the government is interested in ensuring that all the major airports have a community group for that broader consultation not just with the community but also with different levels of government as well.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Mr Ferguson and Mr Brown should be involved in this. Do you have any quick statements you would like to make before we ask you a couple of questions?

**Mr Brown**—No, I think the petition states clearly what we are after.

**ACTING CHAIR**—At this stage you would not have received a copy of the minister's response—is that correct? You just got it this morning?

**Mr Brown**—Just now.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Have you got any comments you would like to make on the minister's response?

**Mr Brown**—Not other than that we need to sit down and read it through thoroughly now. In relation to the Canberra airport or other airports that currently do not have a curfew and are unlikely to look at getting one, I think that is unfair—especially considering the Canberra airport's plan to grow to the size of Sydney airport, four kilometres from the centre of our bush capital. A curfew certainly needs to be looked at seriously for Canberra airport.

**Mr Ferguson**—It was interesting for the minister to almost pre-empt that a curfew would not be considered at Canberra airport, and it would be interesting to see the further developments of the public consultation period, particularly since the concerns of a great number of people in the community in Canberra are with noise, and there does not seem to be any particular short-term solutions about how that will be solved. We will be very interested to see how the airport can turn around its position with regard to noise and the concerns of the community in 180 days.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Mr Ferguson and Mr Brown, are you happy with the process the government has outlined for further consultation?

**Mr Brown**—Yes, we are happy with the green paper. We are pleased that the government has put out a green paper and is moving to a white paper. It is much needed and long awaited, and we will certainly be putting in a further submission to address our concerns.

**Mr CHESTER**—From my experience in my electorate and in my previous work in the Victorian state parliament, school zones seem to have developed in a very ad hoc and, I think, entirely inefficient manner around Australia. We have motorists who are confused about when they are actually entering a school zone and when the times actually apply. I believe that motorists are sometimes inadvertently speeding through these school zones because they do not actually know about them, due to the lack of signage, inconsistent application of road markings and that type of thing. Obviously there are potential injuries and fatalities waiting to happen. It is a very serious issue that they have raised, and I understand that it is primarily a state issue. Carmel Zollo's second last paragraph in her response probably makes my point better than I can. The speed limit for school zones in South Australia is 25 kilometres per hour. This speed limit is the lowest in Australia, with all other jurisdictions having a 40 kilometre per hour speed limit in school zones. Why don't we have national standards and guidelines in relation to speed limits, road treatment, signage and that type of thing, in the interests of children's safety around these school zones? I understand that it has developed very much in an ad hoc, state based manner. Do we have any responsibilities at federal level to take up the running on this one?

**Mr Williams**—I am not aware of that issue. I can certainly go back to the department and provide a written response to the committee if that would help. I think that you have probably hit the nail on the head. It is probably primarily a state matter, but I am not aware of whether there is any call for a national approach.

**Mr CHESTER**—Carmel Zollo does refer to some sort of national standard for pedestrian crossings, but I do not think that relates specifically to these school zones. I know I am being made more and more aware by constituents in my electorate that they just do not know when these school zones are actually operating. Some of them have flashing lights and some of them have static signs. Hardly any of them have any road treatment in terms of rumble strips or anything like that. I think they have turned into a revenue-raising device in some regards. The police are patrolling them in good faith, but the drivers driving through do not even know that they are entering a school zone, and I think we have a problem. No national standards seem to be applied at all.

**Mr Williams**—As I said, I will take that on notice and can provide some advice to the committee.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Is there any process at the moment whereby your organisation deals with those issues? What is the process of getting that put before that committee? You have a national group, don't you, that deals with these issues?

**Mr Williams**—There are a range of structures, I believe, underneath the Australian Transport Council and through the ministers. There are various subgroups, working groups and things, and I suspect that somewhere in there some of these issues might be looked at.

**Mr CHESTER**—Thank you. I would appreciate that.

**ACTING CHAIR**—What questions do we want to ask about the Adelaide rail petition? We just got the response this morning, so it has just been approved. Thank you very much.

Resolved (on motion by **Mr Simpkins**, seconded by **Mr Chester**):

That this committee authorises publication, including publication on the parliamentary electronic database, of the transcript of the evidence given before it at public hearing this day.

**Committee adjourned at 11.54 am**

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