



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Proof Committee Hansard

**HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PETITIONS

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[10.47 am]

McCORMICK, Mr Gordon, General Manager, Community Infrastructure Program, Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

STARR, Ms Clare Maree, Director, Western Australia and South Australia Network Roads, Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

WHITE, Ms Heather, Director, Queensland and Northern Territory Network Roads, Nation Building—Infrastructure Investment Division, Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

CHAIR—Welcome to the representatives from the department. Although the committee does not require you to speak on 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 contempt of the parliament.

I want to go to a petition that was tabled in the House regarding the relocation of East Gippsland TAFE and the development of a multi-sports complex. The committee notes that the petition does not present any detail of the proposal or the funding request for the relocation of the Gippsland TAFE and the possible establishment of a new multi-sports complex. Is the department able to offer any advice through the committee to the petitioners as to what the proposal might be or how funding has been requested?

Mr McCormick—Yes, I can confirm that the application by the Wellington Shire Council for the relocation and the sports development has been successful under the Community Infrastructure Program strategic projects program and negotiations are currently underway with the council. They have had a funding offer of \$3.25 million from the federal government, with an expectation of partnership funding from the state government as well as a contribution from the council.

CHAIR—I might pass over to Mr Chester because I know that he is very, very interested in this petition.

Mr CHESTER—There is not too much more to report than what Gordon has already mentioned. It was a very strong community campaign to raise the issue. Minister Ferguson was in Gippsland a matter of weeks ago to announce the funding, and it has been very well received in the community. The pressure now rests with the shire to meet the very tight deadlines and to encourage the state government to come to the party. But I think there is a good feeling in the community that this project will progress quite quickly from now on. I think the petitioners will be very pleased with their work.

CHAIR—That is good to hear. I am sure that the petitioners will be happy to hear the advice that we have just received. I gather there are no further questions on the East Gippsland TAFE

and development. We will go to another petition, regarding Waterfall Gully Road in South Australia. It was 6 April, and the minister stated:

Waterfall Gully Road is a state arterial road and, as such, the responsibility for the development and upgrade of this road lies with the South Australian Government. I have, therefore, forwarded a copy of your correspondence to the South Australian Minister for Transport, the Hon Patrick Conlon MP for his consideration.

I do not think we have received a response from the South Australian minister. The petition asked the House to encourage the South Australian government to ensure that Waterfall Gully Road is repaired immediately. Clare, can you advise the committee and the principal petitioner how state and territory funds are allocated for road projects?

Ms Starr—I look after network roads, as I indicated. I can speak very broadly. There are several streams of funding, I guess you would say. The main stream that I look after—and that is the one I can speak about—is for network roads. The majority of the projects that have been funded on network roads were announced during the 2007 election. They were very much a matter for the government, having regard to input from the states, of course. As far as the funding streams are concerned, I do not have an intimate knowledge of the processes that the petitioners could go through, but there are examples—for instance, the Black Spot Program—that are always open to them to apply to.

CHAIR—Does anyone want to ask a further question on this petition that is before us?

Mr SIMPKINS—Surely the Black Spot Program would not apply for a whole road. I have only ever seen it applied at intersections and things like that.

Ms Starr—Again, I do not have an intimate knowledge of the Black Spot Program, but for a whole road I do not know the magnitude of the upgrade and the cost. Of course, the Department for Transport, Energy and Infrastructure in South Australia probably has a better idea of that because it is under its responsibility. But the major funding for roads, such as for major \$10 million and \$20 million upgrades—I am just talking off the top of my head—was announced during the 2007 election.

CHAIR—Are there any further questions on this petition? As there are not, we will go now to a petition on the Toowoomba bypass. The petition was strongly supported by the local council, who I understand placed advertisements in local newspapers which showed the petition terms so that people could actually cut out the petition and sign it, and then they collected a lot of signatures. Actually they collected 26,602 signatures. Is the department able to provide a comment or update on the matters raised in the petition? For example, is the request technically possible that funding be committed from the Building Australia Fund for construction of the bypass?

Ms White—The Toowoomba bypass was one of the projects put forward by the state government as part of the Infrastructure Australia assessment process for funding out of the BAF, the Building Australia Fund. It was on the interim list of 94 projects which was released by IA in December 2008. The successful projects that were to be funded were announced in the 2009 budget and the Toowoomba bypass project was not awarded any funds.

Mr ADAMS—Could it be rightly said that this has been on the agenda for an awfully long time? There is a tunnel proposition. Is this a part of that?

Ms White—Yes, there was a study commissioned in 2006, I think. I will check the date for you.

CHAIR—You might take that on notice.

Ms White—Yes, I will take that on notice. It was to see if the proposed range crossing—it was only proposed—would be viable as a PPP, a public-private partnership. That study indicated that it was not viable to be funded as a PPP. In other words, the commercial proponents would not be of any great interest in having that and the initial cost for government would be quite exorbitant. The study was released on 1 May and is available on the department's website.

Mr ADAMS—So the economics on this is a bit tricky.

Ms White—Yes.

Mr CHESTER—Given that they have missed out on this current round, what is the process going forward? When will they be likely to be reconsidered in the future? Is there a time frame of rolling funding?

Ms White—I am not aware, and that is a decision for government.

Mr CHESTER—So there is not another program and they will be considered in the next 12 months or something?

Ms White—Not that I am aware of.

Mr CHESTER—That is it for now?

Ms White—Yes.

Mr BROADBENT—Is there a heavy truck route around Toowoomba?

Ms White—Heavy vehicles follow the main road through.

Mr BROADBENT—You do not actually drive into the township?

Ms White—They go through the centre of town.

Mr BROADBENT—I thought you went up the side of the township.

Ms White—No. I will just try to find the actual route.

Mr BROADBENT—The truck route goes through an industrial area.

Ms White—I would have to take it on notice to give you that information.

Mr BROADBENT—I might have the wrong town, mightn't I!

Ms White—There are three main streets that form the route through the town before it then goes down the range.

Mr CHESTER—In terms of the state government's priorities, was this high on their priorities? It was on their list, I take it. Did they give a batting order for you?

Ms White—I am not aware of any batting order, but they did put it forward as part of the state's submission to Infrastructure Australia.

Mr ADAMS—Did the federal minister make any representation during his last 12 years in government?

Mr CHESTER—Is that a question, Mr Adams?

Mr ADAMS—No, it was a statement.

CHAIR—There are no further questions?

Ms Starr—I would like to make a minor correction to the title of the program in paragraph 3 of the letter. It is actually the nation building program 2008-09 to 2013-14.

CHAIR—That is in the ministerial response? Could you please repeat that.

Ms Starr—Yes. It is just a minor correction of title, really. The government's nation building program is from 2008-09 to 2013-14, just so the record is correct.

Ms White—I did take on notice the date the study was conducted. I can provide that now if I may be allowed.

CHAIR—It would be appreciated.

Ms White—It was between 2006 and 2008, with the draft study outcome being provided in about late 2008. As I said, it was published on the department's website on 1 May.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. Thank you for appearing before the committee today. We only had the three petitions. Thank you for your responses. I am sure that the principal petitioners will be looking forward to reading our website.