

Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Budget Estimates May 2010

Infrastructure and Transport

Question No.: P&R 01

Division/Agency: Policy and Research

Topic: Medium Term Oil Prices

Hansard Page/s: 109 (26/05/10)

Senator Ludlam asked:

Senator LUDLAM—From the thinking that you do or the modelling that you import from BITRE—we can talk to them as well—what is your understanding of the medium-term, 10-year horizon oil prices in Australia? Can you show us whether or not that is influencing your thinking?

Mr Mrdak—I think we have the policy group and the bureau appearing later. I do not have those officers with me. I would probably get Dr Dolman to comment on that, if that is okay.

Senator LUDLAM—Can you pass on a heads-up on that? If I am still here at 10.30 at night then we will put that question to them.

Mr Mrdak—Otherwise, we would be happy to take questions on notice in relation to that and give you a more fulsome answer.

Senator LUDLAM—If you like, that would be my question then.

Ms O'Connell—There is also published research work on the bureau's website within our department that we could refer you to.

Mr Mrdak—Let me take that on notice. We will get you a comprehensive answer from Dr Dolman in relation to the assumptions they are using in relation to fuel prices and their current projections for transport demand.

Answer:

There is no consensus around the medium-term world oil price with 2020 price estimates ranging from US\$60 to US\$150 a barrel (in 2008 dollars).

Given this uncertainty, BITRE's recent approach has been to undertake sensitivity testing of transport activity forecasts which may be influenced by oil prices. For instance, in making aircraft passenger demand forecasts to 2025 (published in 2008) the impact of a possible 50 per cent increase or decrease in fuel prices was evaluated.

Current BITRE modelling is using low, medium and high oil price assumptions of US\$60, US\$117 and US\$121 per barrel by 2020 (in 2008 dollars). The difference between the medium and high price scenarios is assumed to be minimal up to 2020. Under the medium oil price transport demand projections (the US \$117 per barrel), BITRE projects transport growth rates to 2020 of two percent per year for passenger kilometres and three and a half percent per year for freight tonne kilometres.

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ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

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Question No.: P&R 02

Division/Agency: Policy and Research

Topic: Heavy trucks and fatal road crashes

Hansard Page/s: 113 (26/05/10)

Senator Nash asked:

Senator NASH—When the statistics are collated for truck accidents, I am interested in whether the departmental information actually attributes responsibility for the accident. When we have truck accidents, it certainly seems like everyone assumes that the truck is the cause of the accident, just in general layman's terms. I am interested in whether there are any figures that are published in any way that put the responsibility on the truck or whatever else is involved in the accident with the heavy vehicle.

Mr Mrdak—I will just check with Mr Motha. He looks after our road safety area.

Mr Motha—Yes, there is causal and attribution data available. There is what we call a fatal file that has coroners' data in it, and analysis of that database can tell you who is at fault in many cases. Also the states and the territories do their own investigations in relation to causality—blame, if you like—and responsibility. So that data is available.

Senator NASH—Thank you. Where do I go to find that?

Mr Motha—The bureau will be able to give it to you.

Senator NASH—We will do it through them. That is fine.

Mr Mrdak—If there are certain questions that you have, we are happy to take those on notice with the bureau and come back to you.

Answer:

Data from the Fatal Road Crash database shows, for the period 2000 to 2006 as a whole (the latest period for which these data are available):

- A heavy truck was the vehicle responsible in about 4% of all fatal crashes.
- A heavy truck was the vehicle responsible in about 30% of all fatal crashes in which a heavy truck was involved.
- In a small number of all fatal crashes (3%), more than one vehicle was deemed responsible. The above figures include these.

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ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

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Question No.: P&R 03

Division/Agency: Policy and Research

Topic: Key Directions of Regional Research

Hansard Page/s: 134 (26/05/10)

Senator Nash asked:

Senator NASH—That is great. Just finally, in terms of the research projects you are doing at the moment and particularly, obviously, any regional ones. I know that the answer on notice will say ‘go and look at the website’, which I am happy for it to do on this occasion, but if there is anything else that you think would be useful for the committee to have in terms of the information about the projects that you are doing that is just not the basic stuff that is available on the website, if there is some more detailed information, that would be really useful.

Mr Mrdak—We can provide an outline of the key research directions.

Answer:

BITRE’s current work of relevance to regional development includes:

- Assessing the spatial implications of population growth in Australia’s regions, including internal migration patterns in Australia and consideration of possible drivers;
- Developing Information on Regional Australia (IORA), a web-based product supported by a comprehensive database and access tools which will provide a single point of entry for information about Australia’s regions;
- Examining residential and employment location trends and commuting patterns in capital cities (progressively for Perth, Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane);
- Updating the BITRE small area economic performance indicator, by adding data to the series and upgrading the methodology to account for changes to taxable income thresholds;
- Redeveloping the Interregional Freight Movements database and model to help inform infrastructure investment evaluation and policy development.

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ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

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Question No.: P&R 04

Division/Agency: Policy and Research

Topic: Access to Zone Tax Rebates Data

Hansard Page/s: 46 (27/05/10)

Senator Macdonald asked:

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Thank you. Is your department, in its role looking after rural, regional, northern, remote and Western Australia, for which I see the parliamentary secretary also has responsibility, able to access information on the zone tax rebates for rural and regional Australia?

Mr Mrdak—We do not hold that information.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Are you able to access it?

Mr Mrdak—I would have to take that on notice. I do not know if we can. I think that material is held by the tax office. I do not know whether we as a department would be able to access that information.

Answer:

BITRE is not aware of any published data on zone tax rebates at other than the national level. Any request for more detailed figures would be best directed to the Australian Taxation Office through the Treasury.

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ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

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Question No.: P&R 05

Division/Agency: Policy and Research

Topic: Central transport research body

Hansard Page/s: Written Question

Senator Ludlam asked:

What consideration has been given to the development of a central research body for transport, along the lines of the US Transportation Research Board?

Answer:

The Australian, state and territory governments have been actively considering how to ensure that transport research needs are effectively met. There are currently a range of existing government and non-government national transport research bodies, including the Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics, Austroads, the Australian Roads Research Board and Rail Cooperative Research Centre.

An examination by officials of various approaches, including a central research body, revealed the need for strengthened coordination mechanisms amongst existing researchers.

In November 2009, Australian Transport Council ministers adopted an Australian Strategic Transportation Agenda for Research and Technology, which sets out six national strategic themes as a coordination/reference tool for transport research by government and non-government organisations alike.