

INFRASTRUCTURE AUSTRALIA BILL 2008 – 13th March 2008

Mrs VALE (Hughes) (10:01 AM) —The [Infrastructure Australia Bill 2008](#) is of particular interest to the people of my electorate of Hughes because of two key infrastructure proposals which are of concern to my residents—namely, the long-overdue F6 corridor through Sutherland and the more recent suggestion of a large intermodal freight hub at Moorebank. Hence I am pleased to be able to speak on this bill.

The bill's purpose is to establish an entity, Infrastructure Australia, to advise all levels of government, investors and infrastructure owners on matters relating to the provision of infrastructure across Australia. This advisory body will undertake a national infrastructure audit and develop a set of guidelines to replace those currently used by the governments of each state and the Commonwealth. To make this legislation as effective as possible on a national level, I respectfully contend that the federal government should give favourable consideration to the amendments which will be proposed by the coalition. These amendments will ensure that the new infrastructure authority created by this bill will not simply be another useless entity to excuse state Labor's failure to act on infrastructure planning and development. It is feared by many that this proposed advisory authority could take years to develop a list of priorities and could take further years to make any contribution to improving national infrastructure.

The coalition will move three technical amendments which will address the lifting of restrictions upon Infrastructure Australia to allow it to undertake reviews, of its own volition; to make the minister's power to give new functions subject to parliamentary scrutiny; and to ensure that the minister seeks advice from Infrastructure Australia before appointing the Infrastructure Coordinator, to reduce the temptation to appoint a special mate to this important post.

With great optimism, I therefore wish to bring a number of local issues to the attention of the House to support the argument that the proposed authority needs to be a body that will not simply continue Labor's appalling record of neglect and indifference at state and territory level on the planning and construction of major roads and rail. These continue to create bottlenecks in and around our capital cities. For instance, past infrastructure debacles instigated by the New South Wales state Labor government include the Cross City Tunnel, the Lane Cove Tunnel and the Kurnell desalination plant, to name a few in our Sydney region.

At a local level the most important infrastructure proposal that concerns those of my constituents in the Sutherland shire area of my electorate is the long delayed extension of the F6 corridor from Loftus to Captain Cook Bridge and Taren Point. Around 2,500 motor vehicles and freight vehicles travel daily through the Sutherland shire from the Wollongong and Illawarra region to Sydney and return again. The traffic congestion on the Princes Highway and the other important arterial roads in the shire is monumental and the greatest cause of frustration to all road users. The stopping and starting at the many traffic lights in the long lanes of traffic on the highway adds to the greenhouse gas emissions but, more importantly, it is an issue of road safety for local residents. In Heathcote alone there have been four deaths on the Princes Highway in the past three years due to intense traffic use, one being a small boy on his bike at the lights at Heathcote.

The corridor extension of the F6 has been planned since the early 1950s. Indeed, when my husband and I purchased our home near President Avenue in Gynea, one of the major arterial roads of the shire, we were advised that the F6—just a few blocks away—would be built in the next 10 years. That was in 1965 and I and the rest of Sutherland shire are still waiting for this vital modern improvement to the 1950s road system that currently exists in the area. The extension of the F6 through the Sutherland shire is now critical. My constituents are sick of wasting precious time sitting in the traffic for hours on end each and every day of the week. We need a properly planned F6 corridor to provide the modern roadway that people in modern Australia have come to expect. Better road infrastructure means less time on our roads for local families but also less pollution. This roadway is decades overdue.

Without the F6 corridor, the future is grim for shire residents travelling to the city. The future will bring more of the same, but increasingly worse. With the expansion of the port facility at Port Kembla and the exponential growth in the Illawarra region, it is expected that several hundred trucks alone will be added to the roadways of my electorate in the next few years. That means around 200,000 trucks per year increasing wear and tear on our 1950s roadways, making them even more dangerous. The F6 corridor would create a safe, direct route for all motorists. It would mean fewer large trucks on our local roadways and safer conditions for pedestrians and families in my electorate.

At the last election the coalition government committed \$20 million for the New South Wales state government to undertake planning and preliminary works for the proposed F6 corridor. In the interests and safety of all road users of the Princes Highway from Wollongong through Sutherland shire to the city, it is vital that the current government confirm and follow through on this commitment that was ardently supported by me and the member for Cook, Mr Scott Morrison, on behalf of the people of our electorates during the 2007 election campaign. This promise of \$20 million represented great hope for the many road users who use the roadway, not only the people of Wollongong but especially the residents of our electorates. After nearly 60 years on the planning table this vital infrastructure is well and truly overdue.

The new advisory authority Infrastructure Australia could not be more welcome if it delivers on its promise. The \$20 million announcement by the previous coalition government was part of the 2020 plan for Australia's transport future—an integrated vision tackling local roads and national highways, much needed by local residents as well as interstate, long-haul freight vehicles. The need for the F6 corridor is also a key priority identified in a survey conducted by the NRMA, which reflected the widespread community concern about the urgent need for this road link. Yet the New South Wales state Labor government continue to regard the needs of motorists and residents in this area with indifference and have effectively shelved the F6 corridor for some unidentified time in the distant future. The \$20 million commitment was to be funded through the AusLink National Network program and was based on a 50 per cent share of the funding required, with the remainder to be paid by the New South Wales government. It is with some hope that this legislation will mean that the need for this road corridor will again be brought before the state government as a vital piece of infrastructure and they will no longer be able to sit on their hands.

While I am fully aware of the strong support in the community for the extension of the F6 corridor, I am determined to ensure that there is extensive community consultation in relation to its environmental impact; that the latest roads construction methods are used to maximise the retention of open space; that the road allows for future traffic growth; and that all contract details are transparent so there can be no secret deals to close local streets, which forces motorists onto a toll road with no viable free alternative, as in the cross-city tunnel fiasco. Improved transport options should be integrated into any proposal and any other legitimate concerns of the majority of residents should be properly and justly addressed. The New South Wales state Labor government has ignored the F6 corridor for far too long and the time for some real action is now overdue.

Whilst speaking of public consultation and transparency relating to large infrastructure projects in my electorate I would like to refer to the recent suggestion to place a large intermodal freight hub in my electorate at Moorebank near Liverpool. It is critical that my constituents are consulted and given every opportunity to have their concerns made known to the state planning authority on this proposed container terminal at Moorebank. While freight demand is forecast to almost double by 2020, it is essential that projects of such scale are carried out in an open and transparent way. My constituents have so far been kept in the dark about this proposal. There is uncertainty surrounding the proposal, which is said to be established on the present site of the defence school of military engineering utilising the M5 from Port Botany and other major roadways and upgrading and specially designating a freight rail track at Liverpool to distribute freight across the state. While this proposal for a significant infrastructure project is in its very preliminary viability planning stages, the New South Wales state government must be aware that such infrastructure, although vital for the economic life of our state and our nation, must take into account the needs and concerns of local residents at Moorebank and Wattle Grove. They must be taken into consideration and, if necessary, must be addressed in a generous way.

I assure all of my constituents and families in this area that, should this project proceed at Moorebank, I will ensure that their needs and concerns regarding the traffic, noise, pollution, environmental issues and any negative impact on the local neighbourhood amenity will be listened to and addressed by the government. As one Wattle Grove resident recently wrote to me: 'Proposals to situate container terminals at the Defence sites at Moorebank have exposed unsavoury aspects of the state government's freight policies. Firstly, the closure of commercial container vehicles from Sydney Harbour turned the greatest deepwater port in the world into a developer's water feature. Secondly, the shift to expand Port Botany was against independent environmental advice. Thirdly, because the port at Botany is too small to handle and store the freight, terminals have to be built all over the city—but the biggest proposal so far is for Moorebank. The East Hills rail line happens to have a lead-off spur right into one of the proposed sites. The line is identified as a shared passenger/freight line. St George residents should take note or end up with the possibility of thousands of containers on 24-hour 600-metre-long trains keeping

them awake all night. Also the port expansion will see even more on the roads. What an awful mess we are in. Residents should complain to their local MP.' And complain they certainly have.

While we need to continue to reform and invest in the transport sector, it needs to be done in an open and transparent manner. That is why I am committed to fighting for the rights and concerns of my constituents. They have a right to know what is going on in their own backyard and I am determined to ensure that the federal and state Labor governments do not allow mistakes made on other infrastructure projects in the Sydney region—like the Lane Cove Tunnel—to reoccur and create any negative impact on the lives of my constituents and the peaceful enjoyment of their own homes.

I am also committed to securing a long-term transport solution for my constituents suffering in the Wattle Grove area. I have previously called on the New South Wales state government to build a new railway station at Wattle Grove as a matter of urgency to ease congestion on the Heathcote Road and to reduce the intense parking pressure at nearby Holsworthy railway station. Local residents have been crying out for a solution to the gridlock on our local roads in the Holsworthy area during morning peak hours for some time. This situation is set to get worse as more housing developments are opening up in the area of west Wattle Grove and the Georges Fair at Moorebank. Heathcote Road is choked with traffic in the morning, and there is also a chronic shortage of parking at Holsworthy railway station. Residents continue to express their frustration to me at the state government's indifference to their concerns—it has no solution to the growing traffic problem. The population is fast growing in this region of Sydney. Local families must be assured that they can access local rail transport to get to work in a safe manner. The only answer is to have a new railway station on the East Hills line. Wattle Grove is the ideal position between Holsworthy railway station and Glenfield. I am determined to fight on behalf of local residents to see this solution delivered.

In conclusion, this bill sets up an advisory authority to do an audit of infrastructure requirements across the nation and develop a set of guidelines to which all governments can refer as their priority register of the infrastructure needs of many communities within each state. It is the hope of all of us here in this place that the federal and state governments will act on those priorities when they are identified, and it is with great optimism that I refer this new authority to the infrastructure projects in my electorate. Therefore, I warmly commend this legislation to the House.