

## **PUBLIC TRANSPORT**

**6 June 2008**

### **Adjourned debate on motion of Hon. D.G.E. Hood:**

That the Environment, Resources and Development Committee inquire into and report on the current and future public transport needs for South Australia, and in particular—

- 1.the development of an efficient and integrated public transport system incorporating all forms of public transport and necessary infrastructure improvements;
- 2.the needs of metropolitan and outer metropolitan regions;
- 3.the opportunities and impediments to increasing public transport patronage with a view to reducing greenhouse emissions and other relevant matters; and
- 4.an assessment and report of the feasibility and cost and benefits of the following proposals (to include the benefit to car users who remain on the road network, road crash cost savings, benefits to car drivers who shift to public transport, revenue, journey time savings, emission reductions, noise reductions, avoided car ownership)—
  - (a)the introduction of a high speed passenger train service between Adelaide and Angaston to service the Barossa tourist area, with a report on the feasibility of co-use leasing or of purchasing the current line from Gawler to Angaston from GWA to restore rail coverage to Lyndoch, Tanunda, Nuriootpa and Angaston;
  - (b)the introduction of a passenger train service between Adelaide and Mount Barker via either the duplication of a broad gauge line from Belair to Mount Barker or conversion of the Belair metropolitan train line to standard gauge during scheduled re-sleeper works in such a way that the metropolitan line can reconnect with the standard gauge ARTC line from Mount Barker to restore

rail coverage to Mount Barker, Littlehampton, Balhannah, Bridgewater, Aldgate and Stirling;

(c)the re-laying of the now defunct Northfield line to include 'Park and Ride' stations at Port Wakefield Road and Main North Road, and to provide high-speed passenger rail coverage to the suburbs of Gepps Cross, Pooraka, Walkley Heights, Northfield, Gilles Plains, Ingle Farm and Valley View;

(d)the re-laying of the now defunct southern suburbs line from Reynella to Huntfield Heights (known as the 'Willunga line'), with an investigation as to the feasibility of using either the old corridor from Hallett Cove station, or of alternatively linking viable portions of the old corridor to a new line extending from Tonsley station to provide high-speed rail coverage to Sheidow Park, Trott Park, Fountain Valley, Reynella, Woodcroft, Morphett Vale, Hackham, and Huntfield Heights (and provide new coverage to Flinders University and Medical Centre, Darlington and O'Halloran Hill should the line extend from Tonsley station);

(e)costs and feasibility of providing high-speed rail services from Adelaide to Aldinga via a restored Willunga rail line and the feasibility of re-using the existing but defunct Willunga line bridge over the Onkaparinga River as an alternative to a new extension and new bridge from Noarlunga to restore rail coverage to Seaford and provide new coverage to Aldinga; and

(f)the re-instatement of regular regional passenger rail services, including services to Murray Bridge, Victor Harbor, Whyalla, Mount Gambier and Broken Hill;

and such report to include any other factors or recommendations that the committee deems appropriate, along with a summary of submissions provided in response to a request for community input regarding each proposal.

**The Hon. D.G.E. HOOD (16:02):** I would like to thank the Hon. Mark Parnell for his contribution and his indication of support. I certainly appreciate it. This is a very important issue for the state of South Australia. Our rail infrastructure has been allowed to deteriorate for many years. That is not necessarily pointing the finger at this government: I think it has been an issue for all governments over many decades. The tragedy is that not that many years ago we had a very advanced rail network infrastructure available to us but, through decades of neglect, we now find ourselves in the state that we are in. We are clearly lagging behind every other mainland capital in Australia. We are the only capital city that does not have electrified rail and, in fact, as members will note from some of the points I make during my summing up, we have become somewhat of a laughing stock to various bodies.

This motion expands on one proposed by the member for Schubert, which was passed in the other place on 2 April with support from both sides of the house. The Environment, Resources and Development Committee is now committed to some form of inquiry into public transport, as outlined by the Hon. Mark Parnell a moment ago. We have called for an earlier than usual vote on an expansion of the terms of reference, because research and discussion is already under way on this issue.

Now is the time, in the small window of opportunity we have left, to act on this important matter, before petrol prices become absolutely prohibitive for many people and before the environmental concerns become overwhelming, if they are not already. Indeed, Adelaide has the worst public transport of any capital city. One tourist web page states:

Adelaide has the worst metropolitan rail service in the nation, and is the only major city in Australia without electric train services. In contrast to all other cities there are no plans for any development of the services and in fact there are even mild threats of service reduction and route curtailment.

I am sad to say that those are not just mild threats, as the quote states. In fact, in some cases they have been carried out, and I will outline those cases in a moment.

As South Australia continues to let its rail infrastructure crumble, New South Wales, on the other hand, is pouring vast amounts of money into new rail infrastructure such as the new North West Metro line, the Epping to Chatswood line and, indeed, the new CBD line. Queensland is doing similar things, and Western Australia has spent enormous amounts on its rail infrastructure, especially in the past decade. Victoria, which now has its own dedicated minister for public transport, has just put on an extra 200 new train services a week.

Overseas, China has spent a staggering \$100 billion on its railways in the past three years. In the US, Dallas, Denver, Houston and Phoenix have recently chosen to build multi-billion dollar rail systems as traffic on their roads has become increasingly congested. Adelaide, unfortunately, lags behind. Instead of increasing funding for public transport infrastructure, it shows what can be called, at best, indifference towards it. For example, during its short history, Adelaide has laid—and then ripped up—14 separate rail lines, including a line that went straight past Seaford. We have closed lines to our premier tourist region, the Barossa Valley, and closed lines to places such as Mount Barker and Victor Harbor. Once upon a time they were sparsely populated regions but now, of course, they are thriving centres that have significant populations in their own right. They once had a train line but they no longer do.

We are still cutting back on our already limited rail services. In fact, the Greenfield station on the Gawler line has very recently lost 10 services a day. Dry Creek has lost five trains a day. A number of stations have also been closed on the Belair line, including Millswood and Clapham. We allow our historic railways stations, such as Angaston, to fall into ruin and disrepair—as I highlighted in question time today.

Even when other countries are lowering public transport fares, there are persistent rumours of a significant increase in the cost of Metro tickets in the upcoming budget tomorrow. Our use or patronage of rail services tells of its despair. Melbourne caters for over 162 million trips per year; Brisbane some 49 million trips per year; and London has over 1 billion metropolitan trips per

year. Perth is a similar sized city to Adelaide and is, I think, a genuinely comparable capital city. It is marginally bigger, but very similar, and it has some 34 million rail trips per year. The Adelaide number is about 8 million. What is the explanation for that? The answer is simply that they have better infrastructure and they have trains that get people where they want to go quickly.

Although the Strategic Plan contains a target to increase public transport usage to some 10 per cent of metropolitan weekday passenger vehicle kilometres—which I understand equates to doubling our public transport usage by 2018—frankly, we are not doing anything to achieve that target, or anything substantial, anyway. *The Advertiser* today has the Prime Minister roundly criticising the funding of public transport as Australia falls far behind other OECD countries, and Adelaide falls far behind other Australian capital cities.

The Book entitled *Back on Track: Rethinking Transport Policy in Australia and New Zealand* makes the point as follows:

Bus speeds are universally non-competitive with car speeds...we conclude that the only way to ensure speed competitiveness of public transport in any city is to develop a quality rail system.

When I spoke to this motion only a few weeks ago, I raised the fact that the government needs to do more about petrol prices. Only 10 years ago crude oil was \$US10 a barrel—just 10 years ago; \$US10 a barrel for oil. In January this year it was \$US100 a barrel. When I made my speech a few weeks ago, crude oil had just hit an all-time high then of \$US119.48 a barrel—a jump of almost \$US20 per barrel since January.

Now, just a few weeks afterwards, that seems cheap, with oil now spiking at around \$US140 a barrel. A week ago Adelaide motorists were paying \$1.64.9 a litre for petrol. It is not surprising that reports from the US mention that some farmers are turning back to mules—can you believe—to gather their crops. The farmers were reported to say, 'The fuel price is so high you can't afford it.

We can feed these mules cheaper than we can buy fuel.' I certainly do not want to see Adelaide head in that direction.

It will only get worse because demand for oil across the world is frantic at a time when the production of oil is no longer increasing to keep pace. Car sales in Russia were up 60 per cent last year—just last year; 30 per cent up in Brazil; and 20 per cent up in China—the world's most populous country. Indeed, the \$2,500 Indian Tata car (so called) was recently launched, allowing literally millions in that country to drive and consume even more petrol than has previously been the case.

Petrol consumption is increasing at a time when it is becoming increasingly scarce and prices are becoming prohibitive. So, what is the solution? The solution, of course, is to get people into public transport, and rail is the best form of public transport, as I have quoted previously from the experts. The environmental benefits alone are worth it. Our calculations put the greenhouse gas emissions saved from a revitalised high-speed rail system in Adelaide at approximately 200,000 to 300,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide per year. Pollution would be even less if the system were to be electrified, which is something that must happen sooner rather than later.

I remind members that, of all Australian capitals, Adelaide is alone in still running the noisier, slower, and indeed substantially more polluting diesel trains. I commend the opposition for its support of rail electrification. It simply seems that the time has come.

I have recommended that the committee examine six often discussed proposals for a cost-effective revitalisation of our rail network. In each case, the lines already exist. That is the key point here: these lines already exist. I am not proposing the building of massive infrastructure that does not exist. The lines are there. Why are we not maintaining them? Why are we not using them? They are currently occasionally used for freight in some cases, so they operate. In fact, in some cases the lines have been pulled up in small sections, but tunnels and bridges already exist and the lines can easily be replaced.

The first of the six proposals put forward under this motion is the reintroduction of passenger train services between Adelaide and Angaston to service the Barossa tourist area along the already existing rail freight line which, for some bewildering reason, was leased to a company called GWA some 10 years ago. This would restore rail coverage to Lyndoch, Tanunda, Nuriootpa and Angaston. Again, this area is now world famous. Whenever I travel overseas and mention Australian wine, everyone mentions the Barossa Valley: it is the standard response. We need to do more to ensure that this area is well serviced with adequate infrastructure and that people can move in and out of these areas quickly. We should be able to restore the Barossa Valley tourist line and have it running out to the Barossa again so that people can enjoy the wine region on a day trip or for a couple of days, as was the case just a few short years ago.

From a more inward-looking perspective, this area is now well populated. It used to be sparsely populated, but many housing estates have sprung up there in the past several years. This is a thriving community and it is no longer an outlying area that it perhaps was once thought to be. Some argue that it is now really the outer fringe of the Adelaide metropolitan area and, indeed, there is some credibility to that argument.

The second aspect is the rebuilding of the Northfield line to provide high-speed rail services to Pooraka, new Northfield sub-developments, Walkley Heights and Valley View, with major park'n'ride stations to be built on Port Wakefield and Main North Roads. Again, this entire corridor throughout that whole region was once not very well populated. Adelaide sort of built around those areas and almost let them be but now, of course, it is filled with housing and with young families and people who need to commute to and from the city.

The third proposal is for track extensions to reinstate Bridgewater rail services and service the booming Mount Barker subdivisions, as well as Stirling, Aldgate, Balhannah and Littlehampton. I probably sound a bit like a broken record, but the same argument applies here. These were once sparsely populated areas but they are now densely populated areas. These people

deserve a rail network that can get them in and out of the city as quickly as possible.

The fourth proposal is an extension of the Tonsley rail line to provide high-speed rail to the Flinders University and the Flinders Medical Centre and Darlington, and then connect with elements of the now defunct old southern suburbs rail line (which, sadly, has been pulled up, but with the corridor and bridges and tunnels still in place) to restore rail coverage to Sheidow Park, Reynella, Woodcroft, Morphett Vale, Hackham and Huntfield Heights. Can we seriously believe that we do not have a rail service to Morphett Vale?

Morphett Vale is a massively populated suburb filled with young families, many of whom work in or near the city and deserve to have quick, efficient and cheap access to the city.

The fifth proposal is an investigation into reusing the old Willunga line bridge to connect this restored line to Seaford and Aldinga at a cost saving of some \$51.7 million, instead of a costly new bridge from Noarlunga. The final proposal is for the reinstatement of regular regional passenger rail services, including services to Murray Bridge, Victor Harbor, Whyalla, Mount Gambier and Broken Hill.

I do not propose to have all the answers in terms of the precise costings for all of these issues; that is not my job. It will be the job of the committee to examine these issues and to report on their feasibility: whether or not it is possible or, indeed, desirable. I believe that Adelaide and South Australia need a fast, environmentally clean and cheap mass transport system. My proposal has outlined some avenues of inquiry for providing such a system in a cost-effective way to the government and the taxpayers of South Australia.

This is something we should do; this is something that South Australia needs to do. Our public transport is behind the eight ball. No matter which way we look at it, the truth is that our rail system really is the worst in the country. It should not be that way. Why should it be that way? If Perth can do it with a similar population base, why can't we do it? The answer is simple: we have

not tried and we have not invested the money that we should have invested. I commend this motion to members.

Motion carried.