

**Mr MARTIN** (Elwick) - Madam Deputy President, I would like to start by thanking the honourable member for Apsley for putting this motion before us. There are many issues of course that could be commented on because it is a broad-ranging department and members who have spoken have raised a number of those issues. There are some questions that could be asked but they are probably better left for Estimates committees in a month's time.

There are also a lot of very good, positive things that the department have done. There are many things that the department can be congratulated on, many good achievements throughout the year but in the interests of brevity I am going to focus on two issues in particular.

On page 29 there is a section entitled Hobart north and approaches project and I will just quote a fairly brief section:

'The department is preparing an alternative project proposal to the Bridgewater Bridge replacement project, the Hobart north and approaches project. The Australian Government is maintaining its funding allocation for the new Bridgewater Bridge, while allowing the Tasmanian Government to bring forth this alternative proposal for its consideration.'

That is good, but I would like to take this opportunity to comment on what I believe to be a very serious case of neglect and that is the state of a major national highway in southern Tasmania. The reality is that for more than a decade, in fact probably two decades, going back to my early years in local government, local government has been crying out for something to be done about the traffic bottleneck on the Midland Highway between Dysart and Granton. Anyone who drives along the Midland Highway - and there are probably a few people in this Chamber who do that more than most - would be well aware of what I am talking about.

Madam Deputy President, I think it is an absolute and utter joke that traffic along the main artery linking southern and northern Tasmania is reduced to a crawl through this busy stretch at many times of the day. It is also extremely dangerous that sections of the road put lives at risk every day, and unfortunately there have been some fatalities in recent times. Drivers used to doing 110 kilometres an hour on the Midland Highway suddenly find themselves having to drop back to 60 kilometres -

**Ms Forrest** - And 50.

**Mr MARTIN** - and I think at one part it drops to 50 kilometres. Where else in Australia on a Highway No. 1 is a driver reduced for a period of about 20 to 30 minutes to 50 kilometres per hour? The reality is, in my opinion, we are being treated like second-class Australians.

Regarding the Bridgewater Bridge, I think that for too long we have had to watch the Commonwealth and State point the finger and blame each other for the current situation. Do we fund the bridge or the bypass, et cetera? The reality is that given the quantum of funds available for Commonwealth road funding nationwide, we Tasmanians should rightly be expecting the Commonwealth Government to fund both projects. That is the reality. Given that we are in an election year, I think the time is right that you now say enough is enough. I think it is time to stop passing the buck and get to work on fixing the situation. This is not about pork-barrelling, though if I were a cynic, I think if this problem was in a marginal seat, like Bass or Braddon, for example, it probably would have been addressed long before this. For example, there was an interesting article in the

*Mercury* last November which pointed out that over the last six financial years of the major federally funded road projects in Tasmania \$90.8 million had been spent in the north-west, and rightly so, \$20.5 million in the north, and rightly so -

**Mr Dean** - Not enough.

**Mr ◀MARTIN▶** - Well, that is for the people in the north to argue, but that is a total of \$111.3 million in the north and north-west in the two marginal seats of Bass and Braddon compared to a tenth of that, \$10.9 million, in the south.

**Mrs Jamieson** - You had more the year before.

**Mr ◀MARTIN▶** - No, this is over six years. I am not advocating for one moment a parochial north-versus-south approach to funding roads, I would never argue that, however I do believe that the problems of the southern end of the Midland Highway have been ignored for far too long and this is a campaign that all Tasmanians should take up. I think there are few people in this State who would not travel the Midland Highway at some time during the year, some people travel it almost daily, so everyone in every electorate is affected and the bottom line is that it is dangerous, lives are being lost, it is also inefficient and delays add costs to all businesses which rely on road transport. What needs to be done?

The four councils affected - Brighton, Derwent Valley, Southern ◀Midlands▶ and Central Highlands - I think have led the way calling for urgent funding to address the major problems. These include the urgent need for first of all an improved intersection of the Midland and Lyell highways at Granton -

**Mr Dean** - Fairly ordinary, isn't it?

**Mr ◀MARTIN▶** - It is a really dangerous intersection and for a National Highway it is extraordinary for its danger, and as well as that it is a traffic snarl.

**Ms Forrest** - If they duplicated the bridge across there it would be all right.

**Mr ◀MARTIN▶** - I am coming to that.

**Ms Forrest** - Sorry, I didn't mean to pre-empt you.

**Mr ◀MARTIN▶** - The second thing is the need for a new interchange for the Bridgewater industrial estate where new lots have just been made available. With heavy vehicles and all expected to use it, as the area becomes a major freight hub it is only going to get worse and it is going to get more dangerous.

The third thing is the need for a new section of highway to bypass Brighton, which has been on the drawing board for many years. It is supported by the Brighton Council and in the meantime Brighton has become more congested with shops, service stations, hotels and schools.

The fourth thing is the need for a bypass at Mangalore and Bagdad and that then brings us to the need for a new Bridgewater bridge. Everyone knows the problems with the bridge. It is in urgent need of replacement or duplication from an engineering point of view. We also know that it has heritage values with convict-built arches beneath the current surface. It is also apparently a rare architectural design and there are also trees commemorating Australian World War I servicemen on its approaches.

**Mr Dean** - There is special welding in the bridge as well.

**Mr ◀MARTIN▶** - Yes, that is right.

**Mr Aird** - Special rivets.

**Mr ◀MARTIN▶** - Yes, very important. It is also the sole bridge for trains to cross the Derwent which makes it both a major rail and road artery. We also note that it has a

single lane each way, again creating a traffic snarl. Allowance also needs to be made for water traffic, both recreational and transport, and that case has been constantly argued by the Derwent Valley Council and especially the mayor.

**Ms Forrest** - So is the fact that they have put a permanent counter on there at the moment a positive sign, do you think, that they are going to do something about it? On Sunday they were putting a permanent counter on.

**Mr ←MARTIN→** - I am not sure.

Madam Deputy President, the four councils directly involved - the Central Highlands, Brighton, Derwent Valley and Southern ←Midlands→ - together with the State Government and the Commonwealth undoubtedly will have different views about the priorities and what order of funding they should happen in, however there is no reason, I believe, for further delaying making decisions. There have been plenty of reports on what needs to be done and it is now time to take action.

I realise that it may be unrealistic to expect the Australian Government to do all of this in one budget but what we really need is a commitment from both the current Howard Government and the Rudd Labor Opposition to a staged upgrading of the highway. We need them to commit and at the very least we should expect it in this election campaign.

**Mr Parkinson** - You are anticipating a change in the Federal Government?

**Mr ←MARTIN→** - That would be really good, would it not.

Madam Deputy President, just on a connected but slightly different issue, the reality is that southern Tasmania is also discriminated against when it comes to AusLink funding. The Hobart-Burnie corridor forms part of the AusLink national network, however while the rail corridor extends to the Port of Hobart, for AusLink funding purposes the highway extends southwards only to the Brooker Highway at Granton.

In other States the national network is extended through a system of urban links to ports and airports of the capital cities. All 12 councils in the southern Tasmanian region believe that as a matter of equity Tasmania should be treated in the same way as other States and I strongly support that view. A key objective of policy makers should be to allow a better and more efficient integration of road, rail, air and sea transport links in order to promote economic development of the region.

The Prime Minister, Mr Howard, and the Federal Treasurer, Mr Costello, have been critical of the States for not taking the need for better ports infrastructure which they say is holding back Australia's economic growth. Here is a perfect example of how the Commonwealth could do something immediately to improve the efficiency of the Hobart port, Hobart airport and the southern regional economy.

If the AusLink Burnie-Hobart corridor was extended to the Port of Hobart and across the Tasman Bridge to the Hobart airport, I believe it would qualify for additional funding to address issues such as the congestion of traffic on the Brooker and the Tasman Bridge, and it is our right because it happens in every State except Tasmania.

Madam Deputy President, in summary I would encourage all Tasmanians to tell their Federal members, the senators and their prospective candidates for the coming election that these issues are a priority and that we expect a firm commitment and a timetable for action now.