

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Budget Estimates 2016–17

Melbourne—12 May 2016

Mr T. SMITH—Minister, I again return to the level crossing removals program. I refer to your commitment to remove the level crossing at Toorak Road, and I ask: will you rule out using a rail-over-road or a sky rail approach to remove the level crossing at Toorak Road?

Members interjected.

The CHAIR—Order! Mr Smith has asked a question. There is a question before the minister.

Ms ALLAN—Let us be clear. I am going to take the advice, and the government will take the advice, from the experts and the engineers when it comes to delivering the best outcomes in removing level crossings. That will also be informed by consultation that will be undertaken with the community to understand what their needs and priorities are. That is what we have done all the way through this program, and we will continue to do.

Mr T. SMITH—So you will not rule it out?

Ms ALLAN—As I said, we have got work underway. By the 2018 election there will be level crossings either removed or under construction and on their way to being removed at 35 sites across Melbourne.

Mr T. SMITH—Okay, so that is a no. You will not rule it out.

The CHAIR—Order! Mr Smith!

Ms ALLAN—What we will do at each of those sites is undertake extensive consultation at each of those locations. We will work with the community at each of those locations—

Mr T. SMITH—Is that a yes or no? You are speaking all this gobbledegook. Is it yes or no?

The CHAIR—The minister is answering your question, Mr Smith.

Mr T. SMITH—She is not answering my question, Chair.

The CHAIR—I heard the minister indicate that she will be seeking professional advice and will be guided by the professional advice received by the experts in relation to what option may or may not be used at Toorak Road.

Mr T. SMITH—The question is yes or no. The answer is no.

The CHAIR—I would encourage you not to verbal the minister, Mr Smith.

Ms ALLAN—This is of course, Chair, a level crossing that the Labor government committed to remove. There was not a commensurate commitment from others to remove this level crossing.

Mr T. SMITH—So that is a no.

The CHAIR—Order! Mr Smith, I would encourage you again not to verbal the minister.

Mr T. SMITH—I ask the same question for Grange Road, Alphington.

Ms ALLAN—Are we going to go through this for the entire program?

Mr T. SMITH—I ask the questions, you answer them. That is how it is meant to work.

The CHAIR—Order! I would encourage you, Mr Smith, to speak to the witness courteously and respectfully, as the rules of the committee dictate.

Mr T. SMITH—I am asking some very specific questions here. They are actually very tightly worded and very specific.

The CHAIR—Yes, and the minister was merely seeking some degree of clarification in relation to the 7 minutes remaining as to whether you were going to go through every one of the 50 level crossings.

Mr D. O'BRIEN—She does not need to ask what we are going to do next.

Mr T. SMITH—It has got nothing to do with her.

Mr D. O'BRIEN—She just answers the question. She does not ask it back to us. That is how this works.

Ms SHING—We cannot hear from up there on your high horse, Mr Smith.

The CHAIR—Order! Mr O'Brien! Ms Shing! I think a witness is entitled to seek a degree of clarification, which I think the minister was seeking to do.

Mr D. O'BRIEN—Not about what we are going to ask next.

Mr T. SMITH—It was really simple.

Mr MORRIS—The clarification the minister was seeking was not about the question; she was asking about what comes next and what comes next. That may well be determined by her answer to this question.

The CHAIR—I encourage all members to speak to witnesses respectfully and courteously.

Mr T. SMITH—Grange Road, Alphington—rail over road, sky rail. Yes or no?

Ms ALLAN—Again, we will undertake the approach consistently, if I can anticipate that this may be a matter that comes up again in the remaining time we have, at each of the locations as we have done to date and will continue over the balance of the program—a program that is committed to removing 50 dangerous, congested level crossings across the state, a program that has not been done at this size or scale ever before. We will remove these level crossings in consultation with the community to understand what their priorities and questions are.

Mr T. SMITH—Okay. You are not going to answer my question.

Ms ALLAN—If I can, Chair, just to complete that, we will consult with the community to understand what their priorities and preferences are, not the priorities and preferences of the Liberal Party but

the priorities and preferences of the local community, and also base that on the best of expert advice from the experts and the engineers. That is responsible. That is responsible and appropriate. And if I—

Mr T. SMITH—Okay. So—

Ms ALLAN—Okay. You are going to go on.

Mr T. SMITH—In terms of the Frankston line, will you rule out the use of elevated sky rail on the Frankston line?

Ms ALLAN—I am really glad you asked that question, because it gives us an opportunity to put to rest the mischief making that is going on in this corridor. This is a very different project. The Dandenong line was an opportunity to get rid of all remaining level crossings as part of one project. The Frankston corridor is very different, where there are eight level crossings as part of this program. They are not all in a row. There will still be, I think, 19 along that corridor, so they are all very different. At each location we have started the consultation; at each location the treatment may be quite different to the one before it. If I can quote from someone, who says:

... rail over river or road is not sky rail, which is rail elevation along a corridor.

That was a tweet from Inga Peulich, and she is quite right. Rail over road is not sky rail; rail over road is an elevated rail bridge, which we do have in many locations across Melbourne, so that is why—

Mr T. SMITH—Do you want to answer my question?

Ms ALLAN—I am answering the question. We are undertaking consultation. The communities along this area know their area, can I suggest, far better than some around this table who are making speculative comments about what may or may not happen.

Mr T. SMITH—No, I am asking questions, and you are not answering them.

The CHAIR—Order! Mr Smith!

Ms ALLAN—And we will be going through a respectful and consultative process. There will not be a Dandenong-style solution coming to the Frankston corridor, because they are very different projects. Let me be clear. I know Mr O'Brien has given you the next question, so I will let you ask it.

Mr T. SMITH—You do not answer the question, so it is really—

The CHAIR—The minister has answered the member's question.