

**Production of documents
Melbourne Airport rail link**

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MELBOURNE AIRPORT RAIL LINK

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (15:18): I move:

That this house, in accordance with standing order 11.01, requires the Leader of the Government to table in the Council by Wednesday, 18 March 2020, the Melbourne Airport rail link strategic business case, or similar, commissioned by the federal and state governments and prepared by Advisian for Transport for Victoria and handed to the government in August 2018, together with supporting commissioned studies and examinations on options and routes for a rail link to Melbourne Airport.

This is a straightforward documents motion. It seeks key documents that have been funded by taxpayers. Malcolm Turnbull made an announcement of up to \$5 billion to support the Melbourne Airport rail link when he was Prime Minister. The state government dithered with that at first but later accepted that this was a sensible way forward. He indicated prior to that that there would be a study. The study was funded by federal money in the order of around \$30 million, and there was also some state money in associated studies. They looked at a number of different routes: the Sunshine route and routes along the Tullamarine Freeway, and they also looked at options through Maribyrnong and associated areas. So different options were examined by the studies, quite appropriately, to see which options might stack up in the best way.

The state and federal governments came to the conclusion that the Sunshine route and a fast direct rail route that was dedicated was the way to go forward. That was the announcement of the federal and state governments jointly. In the recent period there has been a slippage in this position and the state government has begun to talk about the use of Melbourne Metro 1 as an alternative to the tunnel or other direct link options that were considered in this study. The key thing to say here is that this is an important piece of infrastructure for the state. This is something that we have been waiting for for decades. So the study that was funded, the study that this documents motion seeks and the associated piece of information are foundational for the state going forward.

We have waited a long time for a Melbourne Airport rail link. Malcolm Turnbull's decision to put this on the agenda through the provision of \$5 billion of federal money was also important. I pay tribute to his visionary focus and to the fact that the state and federal governments actually got to a conclusion out of that series of studies and they then made a decision to proceed with a dedicated model—less than 20 minutes—with specific tracks, not mixing with the current suburban rail link arrangements. As I say, there has been slippage in

the recent period and the opposition puts on record its considerable concern at that slippage.

The airport rail link is important for a major city like Melbourne, and hence this documents motion is very much in the public interest. Not only should a major city like Melbourne have that clear, direct, dedicated rail link that does not get caught in the hurly-burly of suburban rail and enables people to move very swiftly and cleanly—in this case to Southern Cross—but the fact is that some of the proposals that are on the table also have significance for regional cities. The tunnels that are proposed by the IFM consortium or tunnels produced by public money directly—either mix—would provide dedicated fast movement out of Southern Cross, untangling and disconnecting from the Suburban Rail Loop in a way that would guarantee that fast movement not just for the airport train but for those trains going to Ballarat, Geelong, Bendigo and, likely in the longer haul, also to Shepparton. By bringing trains through that approach, with the capacity of the IFM tunnels—but other tunnels of similar size—would be in the order of 22 movements per hour in each direction. An airport rail link with 10-minute services would need six of those per hour. That would leave 16 services an hour for regional city movements, disentangling from the difficulty of getting out of Southern Cross, which is currently far, far, far beyond capacity already.

The options are very difficult once you start to look at ways to get out of Southern Cross. The challenge there is that the rail system is congested. You could build a high elevated rail, which might be tolerated on the eastern side of the Maribyrnong River but certainly would not be tolerated on the western side of the Maribyrnong River. The tunnels that are being proposed by IFM, or they could easily be built by direct state money, would move straight out of Spencer Street—or Southern Cross, in the modern parlance—out past North Melbourne under the river and would emerge out near Sunshine, so they would completely break free of the current congestion.

All of these matters are examined in detail in the papers—the background documents. I have seen snippets of each of them and I have had direct reports from a number of key people inside the state bureaucracy as to what was seen and what was decided. The reality is that the state government is now in a significantly challenging financial position, and it seeks to use the Melbourne Metro connection, running a standard suburban line from the airport to Sunshine and then effectively pinching capacity from Melbourne Metro 1, which, all going well, would come on stream in 2025 or 2026. We know that project is massively over budget, likely more than \$4 billion over budget now, but we also know of the capacity on the western side of the city—and these are some of the matters that were looked at in some of the associated studies here.

The growth in population in the north and the west of the city is so enormous that there is a massive challenge to provide public transport services as needed. The state government has a *Western Rail Plan*. I have certainly seen the minutes of the steering committee for that *Western Rail Plan*, about 18 months of minutes, and have a good understanding of many of the issues that are faced through that way. We support electrification to Wyndham Vale and electrification to Melton, but we do not support that at the expense of country services. The country services need to retain their dedicated routes and dedicated access. If the state government's view is, as it has expressed it, none of this can happen in terms of fast trains

to our regional cities until the electrification happens, we have a major point of disagreement. We think that the electrification is needed and should proceed but we do not believe that the country people should wait, begging in line, for the access to services that is required. The growth in requirement of passenger movements from Geelong is large, and from Ballarat is significant. A fast regional rail service will have a huge impact on decentralising the state, in actually underpinning a policy of decentralisation. We think that that policy stands on its own and is synergistic with an electrification to Wyndham Vale and to Melton.

But I make the point that many of these issues are canvassed closely in these documents. It is our view that these are publicly funded documents, that they should be in the public domain, that we should be able to see them in detail and that the public debate should be informed by these matters. This, as I say, is a very significant motion in the sense that this is in the public interest. All of us want to see a great outcome here. This is about the choices that are made, and these documents we believe are firmly in the public interest.

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (16:24): This is, as I said at the start, a very straightforward documents motion. These are publicly funded documents. They should be in the public domain. It is our view that this will help inform debate. They lay out options, and the governments—plural—chose one set of options. I think the community should have greater access to these documents, and I would implore members and the government to support that.

Motion agreed to.