COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

MOTIONS

Infrastructure

SPEECH

Monday, 21 May 2018

SPEECH

Mr TED O'BRIEN (Fairfax) (11:02): I am delighted to stand and speak about this motion today, the threshold theme of which I don't disagree with: the importance of ensuring we have productive and livable cities in Australia. I think both sides of the House certainly share that broader vision. It is extraordinary when you think about how quickly Australia's population is growing and how quickly Australia is ageing. When I first read this motion, it made me think of that Peter Allen song from about 1980, *I Still Call Australia Home* and those lines —and I'm sure I'll misquote them:

I've been to cities that never close down

From New York to Rio and old London town.

To think that the likes of London at the stage when Peter Allen wrote that song were barely larger than Sydney is today, with over five million people! Australia indeed is growing quickly, with large cities.

Where this motion falls down drastically, though, is the typical politicisation and a baseless argument when it comes to fact, suggesting that the Labor Party actually has a good track record on infrastructure. If you look at the spend, you see that through the Rudd-Gillard-Rudd era there was an average of $6 billion a year spent on infrastructure. The coalition government has spent $7.6 billion a year on infrastructure. I understand that those opposite aren't very good at economics. I get that, and I want to cut them some slack, but $7.6 billion is, in fact, more money than $6 billion. There is $1.6 billion more, on average, spent on infrastructure. What is extraordinary about this is I'm comparing this to a Labor era of an absolute spendathon. It was an era where they overreached with their stimulus post-GFC and still they underspent on critical infrastructure for our cities.

In contrast, look at what this government has done and also what it forecasts to do. It has a $75 billion infrastructure plan for the years ahead. This motion was based on Victoria, where $7.8 billion of major projects for Victoria were announced in this year's budget. If you go up towards Queensland, my home state, and you look at the region for the Sunshine Coast, we scored big time in this budget with a trifecta of $800 million for section D on the Bruce Highway, $880 million between Pine Rivers and the Sunshine Coast on the Bruce Highway, and, of course, that beautiful $390 million for the North Coast line for upgrades between Beerburrum and Nambour. That's $2 billion just for the broader region of the Sunshine Coast because the coalition government understands the importance of investing.

There is another point here, and you can see it through the motion. When it comes to ensuring that our cities have the vital infrastructure they need, it isn't just about 'show us the money'. Even though, yes, we have spent more and invested more than Labor, this motion is just another example of a long wish list—show us the money, the money, the money, the money. Such is the complexity around managing the growth of our population, amidst a time when we have a knowledge based economy that is integrated with the global economy, that we can't just throw money at it. That is why we have crafted a Smart Cities Plan. It is one plan that ensures that we have smart investment, smart policy and smart technology. Smart investment prioritises projects, takes long-term investments that also take into account value capture and leverages the strength of the federal balance sheet. Smart policies ensure we have not just three tiers of government working in concert in our major cities—whether they be metro or regional—but also three sectors, being business, government and community. It is through this smart approach that we can continue to be ahead of the curve and invest in infrastructure to ensure population growth does not overtake it.