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MEMBER FOR BRADFIELD
MINISTER FOR URBAN INFRASTRUCTURE AND CITIES
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TRANSCRIPT – 4BC BRISBANE DRIVE WITH BEN DAVIS

Topics: M1 upgrades; South East Queensland infrastructure, Budget funding.

BEN DAVIS:

We need to be keeping up with population growth as far as infrastructure is concerned. And you know what? That falls on the shoulders of my next guest. He is the man who has to deliver the projects to cope with that growth; he is the federal Infrastructure Minister Paul Fletcher.

Paul, good afternoon. Thanks for coming in.

PAUL FLETCHER:

Good to be with you, Ben.

BEN DAVIS:

Thanks for washing the mud off your shoes, too, because you've been getting your hands dirty today, you've been down on the M1.

PAUL FLETCHER:

That's right. Look, I've been down doing a sod turn with Karen Andrews and Bert van Manen, my hardworking LNP federal colleagues down there, and Mark Bailey, the State Transport Minister. So, we're doing a sod turn on two projects on the M1: Mudgeeraba to Varsity Lakes and the Gateway Merge. These are projects that the Turnbull Government committed funding for in the 2016 election. We took some time to get an agreed position with the Queensland Government; we got there last year and today, with the Comm Games now being over, it's time to get started on the substantive work. So, that's kicked off today.

BEN DAVIS:

Alright. You and I spoke last week after talking to Mark Bailey - after I spoke to Mark Bailey, and it was all over this blue, again, the funding – 50-50, 80-20. How was it, standing next to Mark Bailey today? Did you two have words? Constructive words?

PAUL FLETCHER:

Paul Fletcher, Minister for Urban Infrastructure and Cities, Sydney

We had a constructive meeting this morning. And that, of course, is in relation to not just the two projects that are kicking off today, but also the two projects that the Turnbull Government last week committed \$1 billion in funding for - that's Varsity Lakes to Tugun at the southern end and Eight Mile Plains to Daisy Hill, which is the next one down from the Gateway Merge. And we've put that billion dollars on the table, Commonwealth funding, because what we want to do is when the two projects that are kicking off today on the M1 get finished in 2020, we want to roll into the next two projects to widen the M1, provide additional capacity.

BEN DAVIS:

And that's what everyone wants to happen, it's just about splitting the bill. Were there any common grounds? Were there any grounds given from either yourself or Mark Bailey on this?

PAUL FLETCHER:

Look, we had a constructive discussion today. I repeated to Mark the position that the Turnbull Government has stated consistently, which is we'd provide our funding on the M1 corridor on a 50-50 basis - M1 corridor between Brisbane and the Gold Coast. That's been the position throughout the Federal Coalition Government's time and also, interestingly, under the previous Federal Labor government's time. And also, interestingly, we saw this week when Federal Labor followed the lead of the Turnbull Government and also announced that they'd match our funding on the M1 - those two projects on the M1 Brisbane to Gold Coast corridor - but on a 50-50 basis.

BEN DAVIS:

Exactly. I spoke to Anthony Albanese about that on Monday. So, I was just wondering, basically, if Mark Bailey has given ground and said righto, it's going to be 50-50.

PAUL FLETCHER:

What we agreed this morning was sensible, was that the Queensland Government should get on with the next steps, which is developing the detailed business cases on the two projects - Varsity Lakes to Tugun and on Eight Mile Plains to Daisy Hill. That's extensive, detailed work; that'll take probably 12 months or so, so they need to get on with that. And that's the immediate next step. We want to focus on the things that need to happen to make this project work. Our position on funding is pretty clear, but look, I look forward to - I'm sure I'll be spending time with Mark Bailey over coming months and years. I just make the point that in 2016 when we announced the funding for Mudgeeraba to Varsity Lakes and Gateway Merge, the position from the Queensland Government was: no, no, no; we couldn't possibly cop 50-50. Ultimately, we agreed a position last year and the work's now underway.

BEN DAVIS:

Yeah, it was 60-40, wasn't it?

PAUL FLETCHER:

Look, it was - we managed to get to an outcome where we stayed pretty close, consistent to the position that we had articulated.

BEN DAVIS:

Of 60-40?

PAUL FLETCHER:

Paul Fletcher, Minister for Urban Infrastructure and Cities, Sydney

And for the money that we put on the table, we got the outcome we wanted and as a result, Queensland motorists will see that work is commencing today on Mudgeeraba to Varsity Lakes and on the Gateway Merge.

BEN DAVIS:

Alright. Now, let's get in to, then, what else we could be seeing here in the South East. Last hour I spoke to one of the heads at the RACQ and not only did he identify- he said: yep, great; work starting on the M1, this is good. But the duplication of rail - Sunshine Coast to Brisbane, that Nambour line - that's imperative. Cross River Rail - that's imperative. The metro system, which has been identified by Infrastructure Australia, a high priority here in Brisbane - that's imperative. Even the extension of the light rail on the Gold Coast - imperative. It all marries up. Yes, you can fix the roads, but to actually help the congestion, rail lines and metros - they need to be built.

PAUL FLETCHER:

Well, certainly as a principle, what we're seeing around the country as our cities grow is increased investment, both in road and in rail - heavy rail, light rail - we're seeing that around the country. Now, we have a clear process by which the Commonwealth Government, the Turnbull Government, looks at the projects that we'll support, bearing in mind that there are plenty of projects both in Queensland and in other states that are initiated and fully funded by state government, but there are plenty of others that the Commonwealth Government, the Turnbull Government supports.

And so our process is: we ask for a business case to come forward to Infrastructure Australia, which is our independent advisor, and it's our requirement that wherever there's an investment of \$100 million or more from the Commonwealth sought into a project, that we must have that independent assessment by Infrastructure Australia.

Now, in relation to the Sunshine Coast duplication, that is one which has gone to Infrastructure Australia; it's now on the Infrastructure Priority List. Similarly, Brisbane metro, which is a bus way project which is being advocated for by Brisbane City Council and is supported by the State Government as well, that's also on the list.

BEN DAVIS:

On the list, but where's the Coalition as far as possible funding for that? Is that on your radar?

PAUL FLETCHER:

Where it is, is it's on the Infrastructure Priority List. Beyond that, I'm not in a position to make any commitment or statement in relation to that. But what I do say is that we have a process by which we look at things and so...

BEN DAVIS:

But you're the Infrastructure Minister.

PAUL FLETCHER:

I am the Infrastructure Minister, part of a Government, and our Government has a set of processes. We work through those processes, so when there are things to say, I'm happy to say them, just as last week, Prime Minister Turnbull announced \$1 billion for the M1, if there are other things we can say, we'll say them. I'm not in a position to say things now.

Paul Fletcher, Minister for Urban Infrastructure and Cities, Sydney

BEN DAVIS:

Okay. What about Budget wise? You hear about Santa Clause - ScoMo being Santa Clause - and I know that was a nice little photo there on the front page of the paper, but when it comes to next month's Budget, will there be relief there as far as infrastructure - you've spoken about rails and metros for Queenslanders - you may not be in a position to say this now, but, you know, are we going to expect something in the budget?

PAUL FLETCHER:

I'm not going to pre-judge what's in the Budget.

BEN DAVIS:

You've had a say.

PAUL FLETCHER:

Other than to repeat what the Treasurer has said. It's going to be a fiscally responsible Budget, and we'll wait and see how that plays out. But what I would say is that there's a range of rail projects in South East Queensland that have been completed over the last couple of years that do have Federal Government funding in them - so, for example, the second stage of Gold Coast light rail was partly funded by the Turnbull Government, the Moreton Bay rail line, the Redcliffe Peninsula line.

BEN DAVIS:

And, Minister, I don't know if you know the history of that - that was a hundred years in waiting. So, you're getting a lot of people here in South East Queensland going: do not talk about the Redcliffe rail line - we were waiting a hundred years for that; we cannot wait a hundred years for metro, for the duplication of the Sunshine Coast. And I guess that's what people in their cars right now, sitting on the M1, on the Bruce Highway; if you duplicate that rail line, if you make sure there are regular services there as far as infrastructure's concerned - I know there's state responsibility - but this is where your role is to make sure these projects can be delivered.

PAUL FLETCHER:

And certainly, the Turnbull Government, the Commonwealth Government, strongly supports infrastructure in Queensland. We're investing \$13.8 billion between 2013/14 and 2020/21, in a whole range of projects. And we've committed, for example, \$6.7 billion to upgrade the Bruce, a whole range of projects up and down the coast, and a whole range of projects in the Brisbane Metro area. The point I make is that the lead time on infrastructure projects is significant. We need to do the proper planning, and what we need to do is make sure we've got that good pipeline of projects which is why, again, on the M1 we've announced funding so that when two projects that kick off today complete in 2020, we can roll straight into the next two projects. Because that is the best way to be responding to and dealing with the growth and providing the additional capacity.

BEN DAVIS:

The argument would be the best way to respond to this - and again, not when you were in power - but was to have this done years ago, and this is the foresight that we're looking for in our leaders. To say: okay, we can be building here on the M1 but this rail needs to happen, or this metro needs to happen, light rail needs to happen. It needs to happen now. And I guess that's what we're craving for; we're looking for vision, for not what's going to happen next year or the next two years or this term. It's what's going to happen in 10 years,

Paul Fletcher, Minister for Urban Infrastructure and Cities, Sydney

because South East Queensland as we know is going to be one of the largest population growth areas in the country – expected to be up to 5 million in no time.

PAUL FLETCHER:

Yeah, South East Queensland is growing strongly, and so it is important that we have a forward plan in terms of infrastructure. And of course, there's a number of...

BEN DAVIS:

What's that plan? Outside the M1, what's the plan? Because right now, we haven't really heard about- I mean, you've told us about what projects are there as far as Infrastructure Australia are concerned. But as far as the Turnbull Government is concerned, what projects are there?

PAUL FLETCHER:

Well, so what I point you to is the Infrastructure Priority List, which sets out a range of projects, and then we make decisions as appropriate as to projects that we can support. So we just saw that last week, as I've mentioned. We've seen that in relation to a project on the Bruce Highway as well, that was announced just in the last week or two. And so, we continue to look for opportunities to support here in Queensland as we're supporting around the country. But very importantly, based upon advice from Infrastructure Australia, so that we're allocating our funds to where there's the best benefit, and we're allocating them all around the country. As I say, \$13.8 billion in Queensland 2013/14 to 2020/21. So, big expenditure in Queensland, reflecting the growth of Queensland and the importance of Queensland.

BEN DAVIS:

Now you've seen that list – and yes, it was last week and we know we've got a federal Budget coming up in a couple of weeks' time – is it something you'll be knocking on Scott Morrison's door and to say: hey, we know Queensland's a key battleground. And we all know that. I had Simon Birmingham sitting in exactly the same chair that you're in yesterday. I've had Michaelia Cash on the phone, saying: I want to come on tomorrow. There's a push on from the Coalition, because you know that this state is imperative to winning the next election. Will there be money in the Budget for South East Queensland as far as infrastructure projects?

PAUL FLETCHER:

Well, what I'd say is Queensland is very important, and I'd also...

BEN DAVIS:

We know.

PAUL FLETCHER:

... point to the announcement just last week. There's money in the Budget right there for infrastructure. Other than that, I'll leave it to the Treasurer to comment on what's going to be in the Budget. But what I can say is the LNP Queensland team working very hard to make the case to the Prime Minister and to the Treasurer about the importance of Queensland and the importance of projects in Queensland.

BEN DAVIS:

Are you backing us in? Are you saying to Scott Morrison this needs to happen? Here's the list that I've seen.

Paul Fletcher, Minister for Urban Infrastructure and Cities, Sydney

PAUL FLETCHER:

I've got some very effective colleagues in Queensland who are making the case, and it's a pleasure to work with them.

BEN DAVIS:

It's a pleasure to have you in the studio. Minister, thank you.