



**PAUL FLETCHER MP  
MEMBER FOR BRADFIELD  
MINISTER FOR URBAN INFRASTRUCTURE AND CITIES  
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TRANSCRIPT – SKY NEWS LIVE, AM AGENDA WITH KIERAN GILBERT

*Topics: Federal Government spending on road and rail infrastructure; foreign interference laws*

**KIERAN GILBERT:**

Welcome back to the program. With me now is the Minister for Urban Infrastructure and Cities Paul Fletcher.

Thanks so much for your time. Earlier this week I spoke to Anthony Albanese. He had some criticisms of the Government's infrastructure spend, that it's all far too long down the track. What do you say in response to that in the context of the Melbourne Airport rail link, the Sydney Airport infrastructure and other projects?

**PAUL FLETCHER:**

Well, good to be with you Kieran. And look, the Turnbull Government is spending at record levels on infrastructure around the country - \$75 billion over the next ten years. Just last week, we committed to invest up to \$5 billion into a Melbourne Airport rail link. Sydney has a rail link between the airport and the city, Brisbane has one, Perth is building one; Melbourne doesn't have one. A city of Melbourne's scale needs a rail link to the airport. And so, the Turnbull Government has really taken the lead on that. Just last week, we committed \$1 billion to two major upgrade projects on the M1 corridor between the Gold Coast and Brisbane – a very busy corridor. Over 150,000 vehicles a day use that corridor and we've committed funding for two projects. The money's there. Varsity Lakes to Tugun and Eight Mile Plains to Daisy Hill, and the money is there.

**KIERAN GILBERT:**

So, what's happening in the short-term though? What's happening right now?

**PAUL FLETCHER:**

Well, can I make the point, the Turnbull Government is spending considerably more than Labor ever spent. On the Commonwealth Budget papers 2013-14 to 2020-21, we're spending around \$8 billion a year on infrastructure. When Mr Albanese was the minister, it was a little over \$6 billion a year. And what we've seen from the shadow minister is continually making misleading comparisons. He quotes one particular line item, which is grants to states for infrastructure, and that's one form of spending. But we are spending substantial amounts in other forms as well, including equity investments - \$8.4 billion on Inland Rail, \$5.3 billion for Western Sydney airport.

**KIERAN GILBERT:**

Why not the Cross River Rail in Brisbane?

**PAUL FLETCHER:**

Well because Infrastructure Australia advised us that while this was a worthwhile project, at this stage they don't believe the benefits exceed the costs and there are other higher priority needs. Now, Mr Albanese can't have it both ways. Infrastructure Australia gave us that advice. He seeks to criticise the Government for not giving due credit to Infrastructure Australia. That criticism is completely incorrect, and indeed, we are following the advice of our independent infrastructure advisers. But we are spending at record levels around Australia and in Queensland over \$13 billion between 2013-14 and 2020-21.

**KIERAN GILBERT:**

Okay, but does it get to a point where the Queensland – you know, with its support of that project – Cross River Rail – does it get to a point where you say: okay, it's going to go ahead anyway, we may as well support this initiative, which would help free up traffic flows in south east Queensland?

**PAUL FLETCHER:**

Well, the point I make, Kieran, is that we are spending on substantial projects in Queensland and around the country. There are certainly many projects around the country which are initiated by state governments and completely delivered by state governments. There are plenty of other projects that the Turnbull Government is supporting, and we do so on the basis of the expert independent advice of Infrastructure Australia. Now, just last week, as I've mentioned, we committed \$1 billion to major congestion fighting projects on the M1 corridor. So, we are continuing to invest very substantially in Queensland; and we are, as I've indicated, investing very substantially, for example, on an airport rail link between Melbourne and Tullamarine Airport.

**KIERAN GILBERT:**

Just finally I want to ask you, just quickly, I want to get your view on the Chinese ambassador's statements in relation to the debate around the foreign interference laws. He says it could have an adverse effect on trade. What do you say to that?

**PAUL FLETCHER:**

Well look, as both the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister have pointed out in the last few hours, we have a strong and longstanding relationship with China. Obviously, there are ups and downs from time to time; as the Prime Minister pointed out, those are ups and downs coming off a high base. Where we have differences of view, we'll express our point of view, but we do have a strong relationship and we put a lot of work into that.

**KIERAN GILBERT:**

Thank you so much, Paul Fletcher, appreciate it. Minister for Urban Infrastructure and Cities, we'll talk to you soon.