

MICHAEL BERKMAN MP

Queensland Greens Member for Maiwar



15 May 2019

Hon Jackie Trad MP

Deputy Premier, Treasurer and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships

1 William Street

BRISBANE QLD 4000

Via Email: treasurer@ministerial.qld.gov.au

Dear Deputy Premier,

With the State budget to be announced next month, I am writing to outline the needs of my community in Maiwar and identify some top priorities for our area and the State for your consideration.

I hope you will consider the following local priorities alongside some key statewide initiatives that I hope to see funded. Some proposals require a significant investment which is why I have included some of the Greens' ideas for big revenue raising opportunities which you may wish to consider. Proposals raised in this letter include:

- Funding for a new school on the west side
- Financial contribution to purchase the old ABC Site in Toowong
- Fund a review of the Planning Act
- Free public transport for kids
- Train station accessibility
- Strong action on climate change
- Protecting National Parks
- Creating Universal housing
- Raising Revenue

Funding for a new school on the west side

Rapid development in the inner west has left our local schools severely overcrowded. While I am grateful for the work the State government is doing to address some immediate concerns, with upgrades to existing schools, this can only ever be a short term stop-gap. We need long term solutions and planning for the inevitable continued growth in the area, including a new school or schools catering for students from Prep to Year 12.

I am requesting that the forthcoming budget include funding to identify and acquire land, and begin the planning process. With limited space on the west side, one solution could be a vertical school, similar to the one due to open in Fortitude Valley in 2020. I have conducted wide consultation in my electorate via a hard copy survey mailed to all households, and have found there is strong support for a vertical school if options for land are limited. I would happily work with Minister Grace to move this forward.

Financial contribution to purchase the old ABC Site in Toowong

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As I have previously suggested to you, I believe the State government should contribute funding to purchase the former ABC site on Coronation Drive in Toowong, alongside contributions from Brisbane City Council and the federal government.

In previous correspondence about this matter you deflected responsibility to Brisbane City Council, but revitalising the former ABC site could be a city-making project similar to revitalising South Bank, so I believe there is a strong case for State government support. Transport infrastructure is failing to meet demand in Toowong, highlighted by ongoing traffic congestion on nearby Coronation Drive. The ABC site would make a perfect landing place for a walking and cycling bridge to West End. In fact, the South East Queensland Regional Plan proposes one of several new green bridges at this site as “economic enabling infrastructure”. Delivering this bridge is a shared State and local government responsibility which would be facilitated by the purchase of the site.

Given the former federal government privatised the site in 2010, I am also seeking federal support to buy it back. I am hopeful that creating a new publicly owned riverfront sanctuary on the west side can be a non-partisan issue.

I recently conducted a community vote of local residents, asking whether they would like to see the site bought back for public use. The results showed that 88% of nearly 2,500 respondents supported governments at all levels working to buy back the site.

Fund a review of the Planning Act

Every week local residents come to me with significant concerns about developments that do not comply with neighbourhood plans, or which are not impact-assessable and therefore shut them out of having a say. Residents across Queensland are fed up with being shut out by our planning laws. As you know, I have previously called on the State government to launch a root and branch review of Queensland’s planning laws to enable local democracy and put people ahead of developer profits.

Our planning system as it stands is unfairly stacked against everyday residents, yet it allows big developers to do whatever they like with our communities. The Act needs reform.

This budget, I request that you fund a State-led, intensive consultation process across Queensland as a starting point to returning power to local communities. I believe this is an opportunity to begin building and restoring faith in a planning system that works for all of us.

Free public transport for kids

Over the past few months, constituents have been contacting me in growing numbers with concerns about the safety of children during school drop-off and pick-up times and the acute pressure caused by congestion around our schools. Earlier this year I called on the government to consider making public transport free for kids under 18 all across Queensland. I am asking that you seriously consider making this plan a reality in the budget.

We estimate that making all existing public transport services free for all children in Queensland from Coolangatta to Cooktown would cost just \$56 million per year, but the broader benefits would be enormous. By supporting safe transport options for kids via active and public transport, we would significantly decrease the number of cars on the road at drop-off times. It would make kids healthier, build great habits for adulthood, and give kids across the State a new sense of freedom. Compared to the \$2.5 billion which the

government planned to spend on roads this financial year, and high rates of fare evasion on some school routes that have contributed to the \$25 million revenue estimated to have been lost, \$56 million is a tiny investment.

Train station accessibility

I have been raising the urgent need for accessibility upgrades to train stations in Maiwar and throughout Queensland with Minister for Transport and Main Roads Mark Bailey for more than a year. Currently, around half of the train stations in Queensland do not comply with Federal disability standards. This is reflected in my electorate, where two out of four stations are not independently accessible. I understand a tender for upgrades to Auchenflower Station should be released mid-2019, but there are still no plans to upgrade Taringa Station, where platforms can only be reached via stairs.

Accessibility at Taringa Station is an issue many constituents have raised with me. A number of my constituents were disappointed to see Minister Bailey's letter of 1 May 2019 where he suggested that people with accessibility needs who need to travel to Taringa should "instead disembark at Indooroopilly" and find a staff member to help them with "alternative transport". Some pointed out that "there is very little accessible and convenient transport between these two places", and this euphemism for "ask staff to call you a taxi" was unacceptable, especially given Indooroopilly Station is often unstaffed.

Obviously, the lack of accessibility at Auchenflower and Taringa stations presents a massive barrier to any residents living nearby who have difficulty using stairs. Both stations are very near to hospitals and medical centres, but navigation is practically impossible for people who use a wheelchair or walking frame for mobility, or parents with prams.

As I have clearly communicated to Minister Bailey, full accessibility at train stations in my electorate and all other stations on the QR network is incredibly important to ensure each and every citizen can exercise their right to engage with our broader community. With this in mind, accessibility upgrades are clearly an investment, not a cost. I am aware the Government is committed in principle to making Queensland train stations fully accessible. I also understand that a comprehensive upgrade program is a significant undertaking. However, the feedback I have received from the community is that upgrades must be urgently prioritised, and "in principle" support is no longer enough.

I, and all Queenslanders, would welcome this funding for urgent station upgrades in this year's budget with time-bound, fully funded plans for all stations.

Strong action on climate change

People in my electorate are ardent supporters of strong action on climate change. In both of my electorate-wide community surveys, climate change and the Adani coal mine rated as the number one issue for respondents.

This budget should begin the complete transition away from fossil fuels in every sector of our economy, from electricity to mining and export. The IPCC Special Report on 1.5 Degrees warned that we have just 11 years to make sweeping changes across society in order to cut carbon pollution by 45% on 2010 levels by 2030. Under the safer 1.5 degree scenarios, thermal coal must fall to 0-2% of global energy consumption by 2050.

I acknowledge the government's long-term target of net-zero carbon pollution by 2050, but, without more ambitious action now, this target will not be realised.

Sweeping changes like transitioning away from thermal coal and fracking, both domestically and for export, require detailed, well-funded planning. The transition must create a fairer future as well as a cleaner one, with jobs, housing, justice and security for fossil-fuel dependent workers and communities.

I urge you to use the budget as an opportunity to begin this transition, including by stopping the Adani coal mine and all Galilee Basin coal mines, allocating significant funding to job-creating infrastructure projects in coal-dependent communities, and by expanding and properly resourcing the work of the Just Transition Group.

The Queensland Greens have proposed a long-term target of 100% public ownership of electricity generation, alongside our short-term target of 100% clean energy by 2030 to create thousands of good steady jobs. Our plan would also bring electricity retail back into public hands by phasing out private retailers like AGL, Origin and Energy Australia. This would cut household power bills and further smooth the transition to clean energy. I urge you to consider these plans as credible alternatives as you formulate the upcoming budget.

Protecting National Parks

As mentioned in my correspondence to the Minister for Environment on 7 May 2019, it is essential that this year's budget includes an appropriate allocation for management and expansion of national parks in Queensland. The specific funding requests in my earlier letter, for on ground management, acquisition, growth of private protected areas, and support for Indigenous land management, would be especially beneficial given the lack of dedicated funding allocated for national park expansion in last year's budget.

I would also urge your government to consider allocating funds to manage and encourage ecotourism in private protected areas, to ensure our national parks remain protected from extensive commercial infrastructure and can be managed in accordance with the cardinal principle of conservation. As you know, I have been supporting many community members disappointed by this government's willingness to encourage and support private ecotourism leases in national parks, despite the fact that national parks represent only about 8% of land in this State, and therefore could very easily be excluded from significant commercial infrastructure.

The recent creation of the new Special Wildlife Reserves category represents an opportunity for the government to work with private landholders to develop these types of activities outside national park boundaries, and I would encourage you to consider making allocations in the budget to investigate and manage such efforts.

Creating Universal housing

Housing affordability is another key concern I would like to raise with you. Queenslanders across the state, and in my electorate are suffering because housing is treated as a commodity and a source of profits, rather than a fundamental right. As you are well aware, there are currently over 29,000 people on the social housing waiting list - these are people who are either homeless or about to become homeless, often with children and in incredibly vulnerable situations. Some people have been waiting on that same list for 10 years. A staggering 20,000 people in Queensland are homeless and more than 20% of Queenslanders are struggling to pay their rent or mortgage.

At the conclusion of your government's ten year Housing Strategy, the proportion of social housing in Queensland is expected to fall from 3.7% in 2016 to 3.2% in 2027. In last year's budget it was announced that the State Government is spending just \$270 million building 423 social houses.

I believe this kind of spending is entirely inadequate. Housing is a human right, and should be treated as such. In 2017 the Queensland Greens took a bold plan to the state election, to create a housing trust and build 200,000 new sustainable, well-designed social homes in the first 10 years alone. Doing so would abolish the social housing waiting list, end homelessness and create 16,000 good, steady jobs every year for 10 years.

In this year's budget I hope the State Labor Government will dramatically increase spending on social housing so that, at a minimum, we can house everyone who is currently homeless or on the social housing waiting list.

Raising revenue

In last year's budget, the State Government created four new luxury taxes. While I believe these are a good start, it was disappointing to see the Labor government once again miss out on the opportunity to raise substantial revenue by ensuring big corporations pay their fair share. I believe we can and must raise extra revenue in this year's budget so we can afford to fund the crucial infrastructure and services including those proposed above.

If Queensland simply raised royalty rates for coal and gas to 18.75%, we could raise an extra \$19.7 billion over five years to fund a jobs rich transition to renewable energy, and invest in sustainable, long-term infrastructure and industries. Queensland currently has some of the lowest resources royalty rates in the world. Over the medium term the world will transition away from existing thermal coal and gas. During the final years of these industries it is absolutely crucial that the needs of our communities and prioritised over the profits of big resources companies.

Another major opportunity for revenue raising that the Queensland Greens proposed in 2017 is a Developer Tax which could bring in \$7.6 billion over four years. Currently, large property developers in Queensland get \$2.3 billion of free money every year for doing nothing, as land gets rezoned and the value of that land goes up. You may be interested to know that 87% of the 2,500 participants in my recent community vote about the ABC site supported a developer levy or tax of this kind. I believe there would be widespread support for this revenue raising measure.

Rampant development, without appropriate infrastructure to cope with the pressure this creates in our suburbs, is having a hugely detrimental impact on my constituent's lives. Properly taxing developers would enable funding of better infrastructure in local communities who desperately need it. Such funds could create new green spaces, like at the ABC site, and fund much needed public transport upgrades to support increasing populations in inner-city areas.

I'm grateful for the opportunity to outline these priorities on behalf of my electorate, and hope you will give these initiatives due consideration. I wish you well in your final preparations for the budget. Please don't hesitate to contact my office on 3737 4100 if we can provide any further information or if you would like to discuss these matters further.

Kind Regards,



Michael Berkman MP