

Rural & Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Additional Budget Estimates February 2014
Infrastructure and Regional Development

Question no.: 163

Program: n/a

Division/Agency: (PAR) Policy and Research

Topic: Office of Northern Australia

Proof Hansard Pages: 10-11 (24/02/2014)

Senator McLucas asked:

Senator McLUCAS: In the remainder of the department that you are managing, what other work is happening in the department?

Mr Mrdak: In relation to northern Australia, we have the Office of Northern Australia continuing their work. In relation to completing their studies, you may be aware that in January we were issued the work of CSIRO in relation to a number of the Flinders and Gilbert catchments. We have got work continuing in relation to a number of projects such as a Pentland Power Project and a range of other analysis being undertaken within the department in relation to economic development in northern Australia.

Senator McLUCAS: And that work is happening in what section of your department?

Mr Mrdak: It is happening in the Office of Northern Australia, which sits inside my policy and research group.

Senator McLUCAS: Working out of the Townsville and Darwin offices?

Mr Mrdak: Townsville, Darwin and a small number here in Canberra.

Senator McLUCAS: How many in Canberra?

Mr Mrdak: I could take it on notice, but I think it is of the order of about five or six people.

Answer:

The Office of Northern Australia has 8 staff in Canberra.

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Question no.: 164

Program: n/a

Division/Agency: (PAR) Policy and Research

Topic: Indigenous Communities and Economic Advancement

Proof Hansard Page: 11 (24/02/2014)

Senator McLucas asked:

Senator McLUCAS: Have you done any work—and, if so, what—on Indigenous communities and their economic advancement and how this process may assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?

Mr Mrdak: I could take it on notice. I am not aware that we directly, in our portfolio, have undertaken that work, but I will take that on notice and come back to you, if I may, just to identify what if any work we have undertaken in that area.

Senator McLUCAS: Have you done any work on contract management—say, for road building—and how, through different contract management, you would get an economic benefit for remote Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people?

Mr Mrdak: I am not familiar with it. Again, I will take it on notice. There may have been work undertaken by our team, with the RDAs in northern Australia, but I am not familiar with it. I will take that on notice, if you do not mind.

Answer:

The Department does not provide specific programmes that contribute to the economic advancement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. However, regional grants programmes provide a range of infrastructure grants to support projects that provide economic and social benefits for communities, including a large number of projects which have provided economic benefit for remote Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities.

The Department also provides partial funding for the Regional Development Australia (RDA) network of 55 local committees to work with their communities on planning and priority setting. Some RDA committees have identified priorities and developed projects which may assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Further details are available through www.rda.gov.au.

The Department administers all grants programmes consistently but delivery arrangements for each project are a matter for the project proponents.

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Question no.: 165

Program: n/a

Division/Agency: (PAR) Policy and Research

Topic: Regional Cost Disadvantage

Proof Hansard Page: 11 (24/02/2014)

Senator McLucas asked:

Senator McLUCAS: ... What research has the department provided to the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet for the white paper on freight costs across the top end?

Mr Mrdak: Again, I think we have provided some information based on some work the bureau has done. Again, I will take that on notice. The bureau has done extensive analysis of regional cost disadvantage, and I would presume that information and some of the datasets are available to the task force.

Senator McLUCAS: If the committee could see that data, that would be very interesting.

Mr Mrdak: It has been published. I will get you the reference. The bureau published about two years ago some studies in regional cost disadvantage, which I can direct you to.

Answer:

Information provided by BITRE to the Northern Australia taskforce

BITRE developed and updated the Northern Australia Statistical Compendium (first published in 2009 publication and updated in 2011) which we understand the Northern Australia Taskforce has drawn on extensively. Both these publications can be accessed on the BITRE web site. BITRE has also provided further updates to the Taskforce.

Specific data and information supplied to the taskforce in addition to the Compendium includes:

- Sealed and unsealed roads data
- Infrastructure assets (ports and airports)
- Population, population by remoteness and population projection
- Schools in Northern Australia
- Hospitals in Northern Australia
- Education attendance in Northern Australia
- Health workers in Northern Australia
- Information on geographic labour mobility
- Exports through Northern Australian sea ports
- Defence employment
- Draft report on evolution of Australian Towns
- An internal report on spatial patterns of household living costs: retail
- Comments on the draft green paper

Regional costs and prices

The Bureau undertook a study of spatial variation in prices in 2006 with a view to determining the extent and patterns of price variation of a broad range of goods and services across Australia. The study looked at prices in 132 towns and cities, including 32 towns and settlements across Northern Australia. The study showed significant variation in living costs, with higher prices being closely associated with smaller populations, the distance from a centre that had a major chain store and the level of local competition. The highest costs were associated with community stores in isolated indigenous communities. While the

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personal transport costs of consumers associated with accessing competing stores were found to be important, the freight costs for the goods themselves were not significant explanators of price differences.

A paper based on the study was provided to the ACCC grocery inquiry in 2008 as Impact of location on grocery prices and availability in regional Australia and published by the ACCC as part of that inquiry. This paper can be found on the ACCC and BITRE web sites. A much more detailed and technical account of the study, Spatial patterns of household living costs: retail, was finalised in 2009 and circulated to other government agencies for their internal use. The forthcoming BITRE report The evolution of Australian Towns, expected to be released in April, draws on the study and provides additional analysis of the data.

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Question no.: 166

Program: n/a

Division/Agency: (PAR) Policy and Research

Topic: Heavy Vehicle Accidents

Proof Hansard Pages: 104-105 (24/02/2014)

Acting Chair asked:

ACTING CHAIR: Would you be able to break down state by state the amount of heavy vehicle accidents?

Dr Dolman: Yes, I can. Would you like me to provide that now?

ACTING CHAIR: Yes, if you could provide that to us that would be good, thanks. When is this from?

Dr Dolman: As I said, we publish a quarterly heavy vehicle report and this covers the period January to March 2013. I have those state totals.

ACTING CHAIR: Because they are probably very informative and there are probably a lot of stats in there, could you table that for the committee?

Dr Dolman: I think that is probably the best thing.

ACTING CHAIR: But that only goes to March 2013, does it?

Dr Dolman: Sorry, I might not have brought the most recent one. I could table the most recent statements.

Mr Mrdak: We will provide the most recent one for you.

ACTING CHAIR: Is that information also available on your website or not?

Dr Dolman: It is. The quarterly reports that we produce are placed on our website.

ACTING CHAIR: Well, maybe if you could provide for the last couple of years that would be helpful.

Dr Dolman: Yes.

ACTING CHAIR: Also, crashes that involve heavy vehicles on their own and also with heavy vehicles and other categories of vehicles; is that all in that same document?

Dr Dolman: Sorry, it has just been taken away. We can definitely provide a breakdown of heavy vehicles. If it is not in that publication, we can provide that separately.

ACTING CHAIR: It is a lot that we ask for the information, we do not expect you to have it sitting at the table right in front of you at this very stage. So, if you could do that for us that would be very good.

Answer:

Fatal road crash data are collated by BITRE using the States' and Territories' crash data. It is published on BITRE's website in the form of bulletins and an online database. Fatal crashes involving heavy vehicles are summarised in the quarterly bulletin, which is available at http://www.bitre.gov.au/publications/ongoing/fatal_heavy_vehicle_crashes_quarterly.aspx.

The following tables present latest fatality data for fatal crashes involving heavy vehicles (articulated trucks, rigid trucks over 4.5 tonnes and buses). First, counts of single vehicle crashes are shown, and then multi-vehicle crashes are listed. Pedestrians involved in fatal crashes are not shown. These account for around the same number of deaths as single-vehicle crashes.

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Table 1. Fatal crashes involving a heavy vehicle (articulated truck, heavy rigid truck or bus)
— Single vehicle crashes

Quarter	NSW	Vic	Qld	SA	WA	Tas	NT	ACT	Australia
Dec-10	5	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	8
Mar-11	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	4
Jun-11	1	1	4	0	1	0	0	0	7
Sep-11	6	2	1	0	1	0	1	0	11
Dec-11	0	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	4
Mar-12	2	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	4
Jun-12	4	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	7
Sep-12	2	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	5
Dec-12	3	4	1	1	0	0	0	0	9
Mar-13	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Jun-13	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2

Table 2. Fatal crashes involving a heavy vehicle (articulated truck, heavy rigid truck or bus)
— Multiple vehicle crashes

Quarter	NSW	Vic	Qld	SA	WA	Tas	NT	ACT	Australia
Dec-10	7	7	8	3	6	3	0	0	34
Mar-11	9	7	8	5	2	1	0	0	32
Jun-11	6	7	9	5	4	2	1	0	34
Sep-11	14	4	10	3	2	0	1	0	34
Dec-11	14	6	8	1	1	0	1	0	31
Mar-12	11	6	10	6	1	2	0	0	36
Jun-12	12	6	10	2	3	0	1	0	34
Sep-12	11	14	15	2	5	1	2	0	50
Dec-12	10	10	13	4	6	0	0	1	44
Mar-13	8	8	6	3	1	1	0	0	27
Jun-13	13	6	7	3	3	0	0	0	32

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Question no.: 167

Program: n/a

Division/Agency: (PAR) Policy and Research

Topic: Road Safety Remuneration Tribunal

Proof Hansard Page: 105 (24/02/2014)

Acting Chair asked:

ACTING CHAIR: Are you working alongside the statistics provided and the expertise with the Road Safety Remuneration Tribunal?

Dr Dolman: We have had meetings with that tribunal and have provided them with data.

ACTING CHAIR: Are you able to table for the committee the amount of meetings, when you met and the information that was released to the tribunal, or provided? If you are not sure or if it gives you a hiccup, I understand.

Dr Dolman: As far as I am aware, we have only had one specific meeting with them, but I can look back through the records and provide that information.

Answer:

The Bureau met with Road Safety Remuneration Tribunal staff to discuss data available from BITRE on Thursday, 14 June 2012 at our Department. There have been no further meetings.

After the meeting, BITRE provided information on truck productivity, road freight movement, truck use by industry sector and grocery prices.

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Question no.: 168

Program: n/a

Division/Agency: (PAR) Policy and Research

Topic: Age of the Australian Fleet

Proof Hansard Page: 106 (24/02/2014)

Senator Gallacher asked:

Senator GALLACHER: What is the age of the Australian fleet? Because that will put the ABS and the ESC into some sort of context. I know in my home state of South Australia that that is a critical point.

Dr Dolman: I have not got that. I think the Australian fleet is roughly about 10 years old on average, but on notice I can give you a more accurate figure.

Answer:

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) publishes an annual Motor Vehicle Census. The latest published data was collected on 31 January 2013. At this date, the average age of the Australian registered motor vehicle fleet was 10.0 years. This has been constant since 2009.

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Question no.: 169

Program: n/a

Division/Agency: (PAR) Policy and Research

Topic: Port Metrics

Proof Hansard Page: 32 (24/02/2014)

Senator Conroy asked:

Senator CONROY: Can you inform the committee of progress the department has made on implementing the National Ports Strategy? I know you have had a little bit of discussion about it earlier, but I wanted to be a bit more precise.

Ms O'Connell: Certainly. In terms of the National Ports Strategy there were some key initiatives the department was to progress. One of those was better metrics on port data. The Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics has taken the lead on that and undertaken some significant work looking at port metrics. We also hold regular consultations with Ports Australia on work that they are doing. They have recently issued a significantly important document on port master planning and some guidance on port master planning.

Senator CONROY: You indicated that the bureau was doing some work. Is that finished? Is there anything the committee could have access to? I am particularly interested in the metrics.

Ms O'Connell: Certainly. We can make the metrics available in terms of the work the bureau has done. With regard to the other areas, our surface transport policy area does support the work of the National Ports Strategy and assists with the engagement work with Ports Australia.

Answer:

The National Ports Strategy contained three recommended actions relating to BITRE involving forecasts of trade, ports and landside efficiency and Waterline key performance indicators. Regarding these actions:

1. Forecasts of trade by commodity, including scenario modelling:
 - BITRE published a report on Australia's bulk ports (BITRE Research Report 135) which provides a profile of Australia's bulk ports and the logistics chains that deliver commodities through those ports
 - BITRE is completing forecasts of the export and import volumes of several commodities which have significant movement through ports
 - BITRE will also shortly commence a new publication series called 'Freightline' to report data on freight with a commodity focus covering all modes (road, rail, sea and air).
2. Research to support improved ports and landside efficiency, including the feasibility of dedicated land freight infrastructure:
 - BITRE commissioned an investigation of the potential for dedicated and priority freight infrastructure and a rapid cost benefit analysis of selected case studies. These investigations suggest that, outside of bulk port exports, dedicated or priority freight infrastructure will very rarely perform better than infrastructure with open access.
3. Review Waterline index and develop strategic KPIs to support improved ports and landside efficiency linked to the strategy's intermediate objectives and outcomes:

In April 2013, BITRE co-chaired with Ports Australia a workshop (involving ports, stevedoring companies, sea freight councils and other stakeholders) to consider new proposed indicators. A priority list of new wharf-side and landside KPIs was agreed. These are being progressively added to Waterline.

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Waterline 52 (April 2013) introduced a new indicator:

- Average lifts per hour a ship spends in berth.

Waterline 53 (January 2014) introduced the following new indicators:

- The number of ships waiting in anchorage for more than 2 hours
- Per cent of ships waiting in anchorage for more than 2 hour
- Average waiting time in anchorage
- Median of waiting time in anchorage
- Total time ships are available to stevedores
- Average lifts per hour of stevedoring operation.

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Question no.: 170

Program: n/a

Division/Agency: (PAR) Policy and Research

Topic: Road Infrastructure Spending

Proof Hansard Page: 35 (24/02/2014)

Senator Conroy asked:

Senator CONROY: The Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics indicates we have spent about \$19.5 billion on our roads; however, we only raised \$18 billion in road-user revenue. Is that accurate?

Ms O'Connell: I would have to double-check the figures.

Senator CONROY: Does that sound accurate?

Ms O'Connell: That more is spent than revenue is raised?

Senator CONROY: Yes. There is a gap of about \$1.5 billion.

Ms O'Connell: I would have to check the figures.

Answer:

The BITRE Infrastructure Statistics Yearbook for 2013 published data on public road-related expenditure and road-related taxes and charges.

The latest BITRE published data show road-related expenditure at \$19.5 billion in 2011-12.

Selected road-related taxes and charges for the same period were estimated at \$18.0 billion. This estimate excludes Fringe Benefit Tax (FBT) on vehicles, and Goods and Services Tax (GST) on motor vehicle purchase, maintenance and vehicle fuel consumption. It is difficult to estimate road-related FBT and GST because these items in recent years are aggregated, in official reports, with other non-road items. In 2004-05, the last year when disaggregate data were available, BITRE estimated road-related FBT and GST at \$5.8 billion.

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Question no.: 171

Program: n/a

Division/Agency: (PAR) Policy and Research

Topic: Age of the Fuel Tanker Fleets

Proof Hansard Page: 115 (24/02/2014)

Senator Gallacher asked:

Senator GALLACHER: If we were to hone in on the fuel tankers which fill our service stations 24 hours a day in the major cities, and they are B-doubles, could we get on notice an indication of the age of that fleet?

Ms Zielke: I will take that on notice and try. I know numbers of those vehicles are difficult to calculate, in the first instance. That is a question I have taken previously. I will come back and confirm whether we can get the age.

Answer:

There are currently no statistics collected specifically on fuel tanker trailers in Australia.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics' (ABS) latest published Motor Vehicle Census (MVC), collected on 31 January 2013, contains records for registered vehicles provided to the ABS by state and territory motor vehicle registries. The MVC classification of vehicle types includes semi (articulated) trailers. This refers specifically to the trailer; 'prime mover' is a different category—though some trailers may be registered as a combination with their prime mover, and these will not be counted in this estimate.

For semi trailers typically used in B-double vehicle combinations—two or three axles with a tare mass in excess of five tonnes—the median age is 11.0 years and the mean age is 14.1 years, slightly above the age for the registered vehicle fleet as a whole. Twenty-six per cent of these vehicles are less than five years old.

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Question no.: 172

Program: n/a

Division/Agency: (PAR) Policy and Research

Topic: Health Benefits and Roads

Proof Hansard Pages: 38-39 (24/02/2014)

Senator Ludlam asked:

Senator LUDLAM: The now Prime Minister from opposition made the comment that roads have strong environmental, social, physical and mental health benefits. To me it sounds completely off the wall, like he might be hallucinating at the time. But, if there is any evidence or anything at all to back that up, you would be the people who would have that.

...

Senator LUDLAM: ... Within that large research community of which there is substantial expertise within the Commonwealth, can you point me to any paper, any research project or anything at all that would back up the Prime Minister's statement?

Mr Mrdak: I will take that on notice and get back to you.

Senator LUDLAM: That would be very much appreciated. Thank you.

CHAIR: Could we get some guidance please, Senator Ludlam, on when he made this statement?

Senator LUDLAM: 8 January, last year, I believe.

Answer:

Road investments can lead to reduced travel times which have been linked to increased personal well-being.

A recent study by the UK Office of National Statistics (ONS), *Commuting and Personal Well-being, 2014* (<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/wellbeing/measuring-national-well-being/commuting-and-personal-well-being--2014/index.html>), investigated the relationship between commuting and personal well-being. The study controlled for demographic factors such as age, health, employment status and relationship status but did not control for factors such as income and housing as the ONS wanted to test how well travellers are compensated for their commuting behaviour. The study found small but statistically significant links between personal well-being and commuting behaviour. The ONS found that other things being equal (excluding income and housing) average happiness levels begin to fall and anxiety begins to rise after the first 15 minutes of travel time. The sense that one's daily activities appear worthwhile is negatively affected when travel times reach more than half an hour. Average life satisfaction decreases when the commute time is more than 45 minutes. Negative effects on well-being disappear when commute times are higher than three hours.

The ONS study also found that holding other factors constant (excluding income and housing), people who commute by bus or coach had on average lower levels of life satisfaction and a lower sense that their daily activities are worthwhile than those who commute using private vehicle. People who take the train (excluding underground trains and light rail) to work have higher anxiety levels on average than those who travelled to work by private vehicle.

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Question no.: 173

Program: n/a

Division/Agency: (PAR) Policy and Research

Topic: Office of Northern Australia

Proof Hansard Page: Written

Senator Sterle asked:

1. In 2009 and 2011 the Office of Northern Australia published a Northern Australia Statistical Compendium, is there an intention to update this document?
2. As at 7 March 2014, how many current Ministers had visited and conducted Ministerial Business in Northern Australia [in this term of Government]?
3. Can you outline the consultation process that lead to the release of the terms of reference for the white paper on Northern Australia?
4. Did this consultation, if any, include discussions with Senator Ian Macdonald?

Answer:

1. The Office of Northern Australia is not currently planning to update the Northern Australia Statistical Compendium.
2. As at 7 March 2014, the Hon Warren Truss MP, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development and the Hon Jamie Briggs MP, Assistant Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development have both visited and conducted Ministerial business in Northern Australia. Details of other Ministerial visits to Northern Australia should be directed to relevant departments.
3. The terms of reference were agreed by the Government.
4. The terms of reference were agreed by the Government.

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Question no.: 174

Program: n/a

Division/Agency: (PAR) Policy and Research

Topic: Closure of the Gove Alumina Refinery in East Arnhem Land

Proof Hansard Page: Written

Senator Sterle asked:

Prior to the election last year, the now Minister for Industry Ian Macfarlane was adamant that a Coalition Government would do anything possible to keep the Gove refinery open.

1. What measures did the Government undertake to prevent closure of the alumina refinery at Gove?
2. What practical difference did any of these measures make to the ultimate announcement of its closure?
3. After Rio Tinto made the announcement to close the refinery, what commitments were sought from the company with regard to the long term (more than two years) well-being of north-eastern Arnhem Land?
4. What work has been commissioned to understand the social and regional impact of the decision by Rio Tinto at Gove?

The impact of losing 1000 jobs in a community with a population of 4000 will be massive. What measures does the Government plan to put in place to:

1. Provide additional assistance to Centrelink and Job Services providers to cope with the numbers of unemployed?
2. Support local small businesses cope with the down turn in employment, and possibly reduced population?
3. Support local workers to retrain to gain employment in either Gove or elsewhere as required?

Answer:

The Department of Industry are leading the Australian Government's response to the decision by Rio Tinto to close the alumina refinery at Gove and have been consulted in the preparation of this response.

Part 1:

1. The Australian Government worked closely with the Northern Territory Government and Rio Tinto from mid-2012 to facilitate a commercial gas supply agreement for the Gove alumina refinery.
In October 2013, the Department of Industry established the Gas to Gove Taskforce, which consisted of representatives from the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development as well as the Northern Territory Government, The Export Finance and Insurance Corporation and financial analysts. The Gas to Gove Taskforce successfully developed an aggregated gas supply solution to meet Rio Tinto's requirements. On 29 November 2013 Rio Tinto announced it would suspend production at the refinery. Rio Tinto has publically stated that the key reason for this closure was the state of the alumina market and the forecast of alumina prices, and there is nothing more the Government could have done.
2. The Australian Government and the Northern Territory Government's ongoing work in 2012 to 2013 enabled the refinery to continue to operate while commercial gas supply negotiations occurred between Rio Tinto, the Northern Territory Government and gas companies.
3. While Rio Tinto continues to operate the mine and hold the associated leases it is legally obligated to operate the town including providing services such as power, water and sewerage to Nhulunbuy

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and surrounding communities. Rio Tinto has also made further commitments to support the transition of the community, including a commitment to a Regional Economic Development Fund.

4. In late 2012 and early 2013 the Australian Government prepared an internal Government document outlining the expected impacts of the closure of the refinery. Rio Tinto also undertook its own assessment of the impacts, which was updated in November 2013 at the time that the curtailment was announced.

Part 2:

1. No additional assistance has been provided to Centrelink or job service providers at this stage. Centrelink will be resourced as required.
2. The Australian Government, the Northern Territory Government and Rio Tinto have made a range of programs available to those affected by the suspension of refinery operations. The Attachment contains details on these Programs. In addition the Gove Task Force, consisting of community members and representatives from the Australian Government, the Northern Territory Government, Rio Tinto and the Northern Land Council, is considering a range of measures to retain and attract economic activity in the town.
3. The Australian Government, the Northern Territory Government and Rio Tinto have made a range of programs available to those affected by the suspension of refinery operations. The Gove Task Force is considering training issues.

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Question no.: 175

Program: n/a

Division/Agency: (PAR) Policy and Research

Topic: Congestion

Proof Hansard Page: 108 (24/02/2014)

Senator Sterle asked:

Senator STERLE: With all your costings, and we have been asking questions about the cost to Australia's productivity—environmental, social, the whole lot—if public transport rail projects are not funded by the Commonwealth and not funded by the state, where the heck is our country going to be in terms of congestion in the next foreseeable few years? Have you done all that? You do not have to answer it all now, but if you can take it on notice and provide us with any figures; it would be an interesting read. Does the Chair agree with me?

Answer:

BITRE published in 2007 Working Paper 71: *Estimating urban traffic and congestion cost trends for Australian Cities*. These estimates are currently being revised. The Working Paper and revised estimates consider the impact on road traffic volumes from public transport use.