



House of Assembly

Extract from Hansard

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Barossa Wine Train

Mr PICCOLO (Light) (12:45): On behalf of the government I will speak to this motion and indicate that the government is opposing this motion, and I will explain why. Let me put the record straight from the outset: the government positively supports the notion of a tourist passenger train operation to the Barossa Valley. However, it is the government's view that it is not prepared to compromise on considerations of sustainability and viability.

In keeping with the approach to other project proponents, the ball is in the court of Mr Geber to submit a feasibility study that would incorporate a proven and compelling commercial business case for a Barossa Wine Train service to the Barossa region and, importantly, a business plan that will demonstrate research into: expected product demand,

anticipated costs, covering both return to service and also recurrent outgoings (return to service is very important, because the line is not of a standard that will enable passenger train services to recommence immediately); pricing structure and policy; expected return to investors; and governance model.

The onus has always been on the Barossa Wine Train's owner and the project proponent, Mr John Geber, and not the government, to prepare such feasibility studies and business plans to underpin and make a strong case for the Barossa Wine Train product. Pivotal to the project proceeding is the need to recognise and acknowledge that there are a series of mandatory return to service requirements that must be met before the Barossa Wine Train turns a wheel in revenue service. It is that to which I refer to in making sure that the line is upgraded to meet the passenger transport needs of today.

Further, minister Conlon's office has advised that, while the necessary track access framework is in place for a private operator to provide a service to the Barossa Valley, this is subject to meeting necessary rail safety accreditation requirements. For example, it is a requirement of the Rail Safety Act 2007 that a rail transport operator be accredited for railway operations. The purpose of the accreditation of a rail transport operator is to attest that the rail transport operator has demonstrated the necessary competence and capacity to manage safety risks associated with those railway operations.

All operators, including any proposed Barossa Wine Train, must comply with these requirements to ensure the safety of the travelling public. While the government has and will continue to provide various types of 'in kind' support to the proponents of the Barossa Wine Train, this remains a business matter for the private sector.

I draw to the house's attention the fact that this matter was canvassed in the 65th report of the Environment, Resources and Development Committee back in December 2009. The reason I bring this report to the attention of the house is that, at that time, the committee had a majority of non-government members. The recommendations made by that committee were not government recommendations but were supported by the opposition and minor parties. There were six people on that committee and only two were members of the government. So, clearly, the recommendations were not partisan comments.

Interestingly, the Barossa Wine Train is actually discussed in the report, but the committee failed to make a recommendation to support it. It is very interesting that a majority of opposition members of the day would not make a recommendation to support the Barossa Wine Train. In fact, the mover of the motion is a member of that committee. Not only did the committee have a majority of opposition members but also the mover of this motion was a member of that committee. The question has to be asked: why was he unable to convince the majority of members of that committee, who were opposition

members, to support this motion then and, importantly, why has he raised it two years later and done very little in the meantime? The politics of this is unfortunate, because what is an important issue with both the wine train—

Mr Gardner: You're saying he hasn't spoken about it in the meantime?

Mr PICCOLO: Sorry, you are quite right. He has spoken about it; that is about it though. What has he actually done to achieve it?

An honourable member interjecting:

Mr PICCOLO: That's right. He had a chance in this committee to make a clear-cut recommendation to the parliament and he failed. He was obviously asleep on the train and missed his station, and now the express train is going on. He has missed the train, or got off at the wrong station. I will quote from this report, and I will quote the whole paragraph. I will not do a cut and paste because that is misleading, because this paragraph is very important:

On the basis of written submissions and evidence given to the committee, there are two potential markets to be served by restoring passenger trains to the Barossa line: tourists to the valley and commuters to the metropolitan area, two markets that are quite different and require different types of service, whatever mode of transport is used. The Barossa wine train, packaged and marketed as a tourist experience, illustrates well how the tourist market can be attracted to use rail travel to visit the wineries, restaurants and other attractions in the Barossa.

That is fine. I continue:

In evidence to the committee a senior manager of the South Australian Tourist Commission ... and the General Manager of Chateau Tanunda ... described how such a service could be marketed, delivered and integrated into the existing visitor patterns to the Barossa. Provision of such a service is a commercial enterprise—

and this is important—

and the possibility of reactivating the Bluebird service as part of John Geber's vision for a new wineries-based tourist thrust, including accommodation, a Sunday day out, train charters, special events, etc., was described by Mr McCulloch from Chateau Tanunda. The role identified for governments—

and this is very important; this is what the committee said—

is in assisting in the marketing of the new package nationally and internationally, and expediting the processes involved in gaining access to the line, minimising the associated bureaucracy and costs.

I could not agree more. That is what we are saying. The government has consistently said, 'Our role is the role of a facilitator to support the private sector.' This report says:

...a report which is comprised of a majority of members of the opposition—

not only members of the opposition but the member for Schubert. He was on that committee, too. He supported this recommendation in December 2009. I am not sure what he has done in the meantime but obviously he has gone off the track, because this motion does not reflect the report's recommendations. The case may have been—

An honourable member interjecting:

Mr PICCOLO: He's been derailed, that's right. His case is derailed by his own report, but more importantly if there is new evidence to be heard and if things do change over time where is the new evidence? Nothing has been submitted to this parliament, to this house, about the recommendation made by that committee in 2009, of which Mr Venning, the member for Schubert, was a member. Also, the committee, actually controlled by the opposition parties at the time, made that recommendation. I go on:

However, if the costs of actually running a new tourist rail service prove to be prohibitive, it will be a reflection of the cost of providing infrastructure and other below-rail facilities and will only be lessened if other operators, government or private, provide additional services...

And that is important, too, because ever since this report came out the member for Schubert has gone out and said, 'The government should have a trial run. Run a trial.' What this report makes very clear is that you cannot do that, because to ensure that the passengers are safe you actually have to upgrade the rail line, and the report itself says that. I am not making this up. What I am quoting from is a report prepared by Mr Venning, the member for Schubert, and his opposition members. That is what I am quoting from. So what does he do? He comes and tells us one thing in this chamber and he tells the committee something else. He is obviously on the wrong bus, or at the wrong stop, I am not sure how to describe it. I will go on, just for the benefit of the member for Schubert. It is very interesting:

Regular passenger trains were withdrawn from the Barossa line in December 1968.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mr Griffiths.

I was eight years old, so it would be fair to say I should not take too much responsibility for that decision made in 1968.

TIME EXPIRED

Mr Odenwalder interjecting:

Mr PICCOLO: I was eight years old — older than many, I know. I understand that. From 1968 to 1970, if my memory serves me correct, what government was in then?

An honourable member: Liberal.

Mr PICCOLO: A Liberal government.

An honourable member interjecting:

Mr PICCOLO: I do think so.

Mr Venning: My father was here.

Mr PICCOLO: December 1968?

Mr Griffiths: Steele Hall was premier.

Mr PICCOLO: Steele Hall was premier; thank you, member for Goyder. So the Liberal Party discontinues the rail service. That is in 1968. Then they did a report which they submitted to this parliament saying, 'Well, we shouldn't do this.' So what are we debating today? A motion which has clearly been derailed by its own proponents. It is unfortunate that the member for Schubert has not properly researched this matter. I also bring to the attention of the house —