



House of Assembly

Extract from Hansard

Thursday 6th September 2012
Page 2845

Robin Bridge

Mr PICCOLO (Light) (12:43): I move:

Leave out all words after 'house' insert 'notes the government gives priority to safety over aesthetics in its bridge maintenance program and that the Robin Bridge is scheduled for repainting in the 2014-15 financial year.

This is an important matter because what we have been asked to do is to give priority to appearance or aesthetics over safety. I will explain that because it is very easy to bring these matters up but you have to remember that the department is responsible for the maintenance of 1,470 bridges across the state, and its primary and first concern is for public safety. I would hope that every member in this place would put public safety ahead of appearance.

However, we have heard it said today in this chamber that, yes, it is an issue of appearance etc., and other members

(who are not aware of the priorities) are prepared to give priority to painting this bridge because of appearance—and that is important—but I would be most concerned if a member stood here and said, 'Well, appearance is more important than safety.' That is exactly what I have heard. I also heard the words 'it's a gimmick'—to say that a gimmick is more important than public safety is of concern to me, as well.

I understand that the member for Schubert has been writing to the minister about this matter since 2009. When determining to allocate funds, the department, and in my view quite rightly, gives priority to continued safety rather than improved aesthetics. In fact, the member for Waite raised this issue about the safety of bridges on a number of occasions when I was on the public works committee. He raised a number of issues about his concern for safety. At least the member for Waite, even though I did not agree with him, said that safety was paramount.

We have here today a motion before us which says that appearance is paramount over safety. I hope the member for Hammond, in supporting this motion, will ensure that this work does not occur before some bridge in his electorate which requires work for safety—and that is very important. The bridge is on the routine bridge inspection program and has been inspected every five years, on average, since 1980.

The deterioration of the paint on the handrails, while its appearance might suggest otherwise, is not considered to

be a safety issue and, therefore, funds have been directed to areas other than the Robin Bridge in this financial year. None of the inspections have reported serious corrosion on the pedestrian barrier but it has been noted that the bridge should be repainted at the same time as the girders. So there is recognition of the work and, when they are there for the safety maintenance of the bridge, this work, which is for appearances, will be done at the same time, therefore saving taxpayers' money.

Following the most recent inspection in 2011—and it is important to note that the bridge was inspected in 2011 and, therefore, is not being ignored by the government—it was recommended for repainting in 2014 and that the handrails should be painted at the same time as the girders, which are of greater importance from a public safety point of view. By his own admission, the member to Schubert said that we should put effort into the handrails and ignore the issue of the safety aspect in terms of this bridge.

The bridge has now been placed on the DPTI Periodic Bridge Repair Program for 2014-15 and funds have been allocated to paint the girders. As part of this process, a detailed paint assessment was commissioned (as mentioned by the member) which confirmed that paint loss on the handrails and railings is significant but corrosion is low. The handrails will, therefore, be painted at the same time as the girders.

Previous reports identified that the handrail paint contains lead and its removal needs to be managed

professionally. Painting will involve the removal of existing rails in order for them to be sandblasted and the installation of temporary barriers. A traffic management plan will need to be in place for alternative road access to ensure worker safety. Conducting these projects—that is the whole lot—at the same time will minimise inconvenience to road users and make the best use of available funds.

The issue was raised regarding why sometimes public projects perhaps cost more than in the private sector, and part of it is the process but also the expectation by the community that there is a higher level of accountability in the public sector. I suggest that this house support my motion of safety first with priority over appearance. I would hope that every member would support that motion.

TIME EXPIRED