

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FIFTY-FOURTH PARLIAMENT

FIRST SESSION

29 February 2000

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The Lieutenant-Governor

Professor ADRIENNE E. CLARKE, AO

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FIFTY-FOURTH PARLIAMENT — FIRST SESSION

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The Hon. S. P. BRACKS

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Deputy Premier:

The Hon. J. W. THWAITES

Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Leader of the Opposition:

The Hon. D. V. NAPHTHINE

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Deputy Leader of the Opposition:

The Hon. LOUISE ASHER

Leader of the Parliamentary National Party:

Mr P. J. RYAN

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary National Party:

Mr B. E. H. STEGGALL

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Leighton, Mr Michael Andrew	Preston	ALP			

¹ Resigned 3 November 1999

² Elected 11 December 1999

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Tuesday, 29 February 2000

The SPEAKER (Hon. Alex Andrianopoulos) took the chair at 2.06 p.m. and read the prayer.

NATIONAL PARTY LEADERSHIP

Mr RYAN (Leader of the National Party) — I advise the house that I have been elected as the Leader of the parliamentary National Party, with responsibility in the shadow cabinet for police, corrections and emergency services, and regional development.

I also announce that my deputy is the honourable member for Swan Hill, who has responsibility in the shadow cabinet for agriculture.

The Honourable Ron Best, a member for North Western Province in the other place, has assumed responsibility for housing and rural health.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Questions without notice

The SPEAKER — Order! Sessional order 3 requires all questions and answers to be direct and succinct and to seek or provide factual information. As issues have arisen on the interpretation and enforcement of that sessional order, I am setting out my expectations:

1. Members may not give information under the guise of asking a question. The purpose of question time is to seek information or press for action.
2. Points of order should not be used as a means of repeating a question. Such repetition serves only to waste the time of the house.
3. Notwithstanding the requirement of a minimum of 10 questions, I consider an overall time limit of 40 minutes should normally be adhered to. I expect all honourable members, particularly ministers, to follow that guideline.
4. Questions should not be used as a vehicle for the discussion of issues. Ministers should therefore not attempt to debate issues when giving answers.
5. Should a minister wish to make a lengthy speech or statement the proper form is via a ministerial statement.

Finally, I remind all members that sessional order 3 was adopted by the house and that, as such, the phraseology ‘direct, succinct and factual’ was specifically endorsed. The order having been made, I expect all honourable members to comply with it. It is incumbent on all honourable members to follow both the text and the spirit of the order adopted by the house.

Mr McArthur — On a point of order, Mr Speaker, I understand that at least part of the reason for your announcement is the point of order I raised in the house on 15 December last. If that is so, I point out that I also referred to the rulings of former Speakers. In 1981 former Speaker Plowman is reported as having stated:

Questions without notice should be brief, thereby inviting brief answers. Questions seeking a great deal of detail should be upon notice or should be answered by way of a ministerial statement.

I seek clarification on whether you intend to also rule on that matter and whether you have given it further consideration.

The SPEAKER — Order! I have examined the record, which shows that during the last session there were several instances of points of order being raised that related specifically to sessional orders 3(4) and 3(5). Previous rulings were examined in that context, including the points of order raised by the honourable member for Monbulk. I expect honourable members to adhere to the expectations I have put before the house.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Victoria Integrated Technology Park

Dr NAPHTHINE (Leader of the Opposition) — I refer the Premier to today’s unfortunate announcement that the \$1 billion Victoria Integrated Technology Park project in Portland is on the verge of collapse. The park is the latest in a litany of major projects to have fallen over under the Labor government, and I ask why the government has allowed it to be lost to rural Victoria.

Mr BRACKS (Premier) — As the integrated technology park project required the support and advocacy of the honourable member for Portland, I should have thought he would be acutely aware of it! I advise the house that a representative of the local council met with the Minister for State and Regional Development and me on one occasion. We were informed by the department that the principal company had not advised whether it would back the industrial park, which in the future could be subdivided and let.

As it should, the Shire of Glenelg pushed hard on that issue. However, the government received advice from the investor that it was not prepared to give the necessary support until a commitment was made by the overseas company. The council was unable to secure that commitment.

The question raised by the Leader of the Opposition about whether the project is falling over raises a wider point: he is the only person talking about projects falling over.

Mr Perton interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member for Doncaster will come to order.

Mr BRACKS — The Leader of the Opposition continually talks down Victoria.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The house will come to order, particularly the honourable member for Frankston.

Mr BRACKS — I repeat that the only person talking down Victoria is the Leader of the Opposition. One would hope that at the supposed two-day retreat held by the partnership parties future policies and proposals would be discussed.

The SPEAKER — Order! I have already called the house to order once. The honourable member for Cranbourne is objecting rather vociferously. I will not tolerate that level of interjection from him or from any other member.

Mr BRACKS — The so-called partners, the National Party and the Liberal Party, had two days together on investment for Victoria.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr BRACKS — Well, it is their question time. Mr Speaker, you made the ruling, it is up to you.

On the question of investment for Victoria, the Leader of the Opposition gave a speech to the press club in Melbourne, of which not one line was about the policy proposals of the former coalition parties. That is because, after three months, they had nothing to offer.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Premier is now debating the question. I ask him to come back to answering and concluding his answer.

Mr BRACKS — I reiterate that the only person talking down the Victorian economy is sitting opposite me in the house. The government is about promoting the state, encouraging job growth and building on the investment climate in Victoria. What the opposition is doing is sniping and carping — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I shall not call the honourable member for Bentleigh to order again.

Rural Victoria: employment and investment

Ms ALLAN (Bendigo East) — I refer the Premier to the government's commitment to grow the whole of the state and ask him to detail for the house the employment and investment growth in Victoria that has been secured by this government.

The SPEAKER — Order! In calling the Premier I remind him that he must be succinct in his answer and not make a ministerial statement.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member for Wantirna! I will not call the honourable member to order again.

Mr BRACKS (Premier) — I thank the honourable member for Bendigo East for her question and for her continued commitment to regional and country Victoria.

Once again the government starts a parliamentary sessional period with more good news for regional Victoria. The government is delivering on its commitment to attract jobs and investment to Victoria and is talking up the state — as distinct from the opposition, which is talking down the state.

I will list briefly some steps the government is taking to attract investment to regional Victoria. Honourable members will be interested to know that this morning the Minister for State and Regional Development announced the latest investments secured for Victoria, which include \$22 million and 226 jobs in Wodonga through a software engineering company known as Adacel Technologies.

Mr McArthur interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member for Monbulk!

Mr BRACKS — My government, as part of its job plan for Victoria — which includes a commitment to

spreading growth and economic benefits around the whole state — has played an active role in securing that project. The securing of Adacel's new regional software centre will mean that Victorians in Wodonga will work on contracts coming from around the world, including major software projects coming from Silicon Valley. Adacel is a major jobs win for regional Victoria and follows many other significant regional and metropolitan jobs wins secured since this government came to office.

Mr Speaker, in keeping with your ruling I will keep my list of some of those investments brief. The investments include the Corning Noble Park Pty Ltd investment of \$30 million that will offer 100 new jobs in Noble Park; the National Australia Bank's Homeside mortgage facility — which I had the privilege of opening — valued at \$23 million that will offer 430 new jobs; Murray Goulburn — —

Mr McArthur interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! Members of the opposition will cease interjecting.

Mr BRACKS — Murray Goulburn Co-op Pty Ltd is investing \$42 million and offering 30 new jobs at Rochester; Bruck Textiles is undertaking a \$12 million expansion, creating 150 new jobs in Wangaratta; Vitasoy/National Foods is establishing a new \$25 million soy milk plant in Wodonga, creating 48 new jobs — —

An honourable member interjected.

Mr BRACKS — We are looking after Wodonga.

Heinz Wattie's is making a \$10 million investment in baby food manufacturing in Echuca, creating 85 new jobs; Ausfresh at Cobram is investing \$8 million, creating 194 jobs; DHL International is investing \$7 million, creating 187 jobs at Tullamarine; and George Weston Foods is investing \$10 million, creating 100 new jobs in Altona.

These projects, secured under the current government — —

Opposition members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! This is the third time it has been necessary for me to call the house to order. On this occasion I single out in particular the honourable member for Mordialloc. He will not be warned again. The Premier, concluding his answer.

Mr BRACKS — Those projects, secured by this government, total almost \$500 million in new investment in the state and create over 2600 jobs in country and regional Victoria and in metropolitan Melbourne.

My government is committed to securing even more jobs by means of its \$170 million Regional Infrastructure Development Fund, which is providing seeding capital for infrastructure and growth in the future. This is in stark contrast to the actions of the previous government, whose agenda was city-centric, not growing the whole state, ignoring new developments in regional and country Victoria. We are proud of the new \$500 million investment and the thousands of jobs — and there is more to come.

World Economic Forum

Dr NAPTHINE (Leader of the Opposition) — I note that while the Premier was overseas recently Virgin Airlines and its 750 jobs went to Brisbane, Olympic Airlines stopped direct flights to Melbourne, Mirvac pulled out of Docklands, Studio City collapsed and the power went off, just to name a few.

Will the Premier advise the house — —

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask the Leader of the Opposition to come to his question.

Dr NAPTHINE — Will the Premier advise the house what business he directly attracted to Victoria through his trip to Davos?

Mr BRACKS (Premier) — I am pleased to inform the house that on Wednesday or Thursday I will do what the opposition never did when in government: I will make a ministerial statement on the trip to Davos and the benefits to Victoria of that trip. That demonstrates the accountability of this government, which distinguishes it from the previous administration. The previous government was never accountable on its business dealings.

Two comments made by the Leader of the Opposition in his question are instructive and interesting. He said that Mirvac had pulled out of Docklands. That is news to Mirvac! That is a big concern. The Leader of the Opposition is trying to scuttle projects for his own political interests.

Honourable members interjecting.

Questions interrupted.

SUSPENSION OF MEMBER

The SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member for Cranbourne has persisted in interjecting despite repeated warnings from the Chair. Under sessional order 10 I ask him to vacate the chamber for half an hour.

Honourable member for Cranbourne withdrew from chamber.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Questions resumed.

Mr BRACKS (Premier) — I advise the Opposition to have discussions with Mirvac and examine the report on its suspension of the project. It is committed in the future — —

Dr Napthine interjected.

Mr BRACKS — You should get your question right. The Leader of the Opposition — —

The SPEAKER — Order! The Premier will answer the question and not respond to interjections across the table.

Mr BRACKS — I will conclude my answer. Mirvac has said it will resume the project in the future if the circumstances are right, and the government is working actively with it. I advise the Leader of the Opposition to have discussions to find out what is happening rather than asking misleading questions. I remember the words of the Leader of the Opposition; he said that Studio City had collapsed. Is that right? Studio City has collapsed?

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr BRACKS — That was the accusation — Studio City has collapsed. That is news to Studio City, and it is also news to all the institutional investors who are negotiating with Studio City. The words of the Leader of Opposition will be reported to those institutional investors. If the Leader of the Opposition continues to talk down the state it will be for nothing more than short-term politics. When the six-month review takes place in May he will be out!

Linking Victoria

Ms BEATTIE (Tullamarine) — I refer the Premier to Labor's commitment to link Victoria through a comprehensive infrastructure plan that connects Victoria's major regions with Melbourne and ask him

to advise the house of the latest action the government has taken to include Victorians in the development of its transport plan.

Mr BRACKS (Premier) — I thank the honourable member for Tullamarine for her question. As the member for that area she is keenly interested in Melbourne's transport hub, which radiates from the curfew-free airport at Tullamarine through the Western Ring Road, City Link, access to the port, Geelong and other regions.

Yesterday I gave a speech at a business breakfast hosted by the *Age* in which I detailed the most comprehensive, integrated transport infrastructure program Victoria has ever seen. The government's plan, under the title 'Linking Victoria', will link Victoria's regional areas with the city, particularly with the private sector. It will involve \$1.5 billion of new expenditure and create more than 30 000 jobs in this state.

As most honourable members know, the plan includes the redevelopment of Spencer Street station to a commercial concourse and will have significant private sector involvement. It also involves the fast transit link from the airport to the city, fast rail links from regional centres such as Ballarat, Bendigo, Traralgon and Geelong into the city and vice versa; reopening some country train lines in the future; standardising railway line gauges, including the grain lines that were not standardised by the previous government; the Eastern Freeway extension; the Calder Highway upgrade to Bendigo — it is now up to the federal government to match the government's contribution to that project so that it will be completed by 2006; the Geelong freeway upgrade; and the port development, which is crucial to the economic future of Victoria and which is the missing link — it has been missing for the past seven years, during which there has been no port reform in Victoria.

The government is determined to secure a third stevedoring company to provide competition at the port of Melbourne. The government has already moved on port developments, including the dock link road, Webb Dock rail and exploring the feasibility of and preparedness for a third stevedore.

As I have said previously, the proposals also include a \$240 million accident black spot program. Today I announced the first 10 projects under that plan. Funds to deal with the 10 worst accident spots in Victoria were announced under that program today. Several million dollars will be available at the end of this financial year, and the remainder of the funds will come

into play in the new financial year. One half of the \$240 million will go to country and regional Victoria in recognition of the increase in the number of accidents on country roads compared with city roads. The other half of the \$240 million will go to metropolitan areas. I am pleased that the improvements will include the linking up of Victoria as well as the road safety strategy headed by the Minister for Transport.

The government is determined to see a drop in the Victorian road toll: its target is to reduce the road toll by 20 per cent over the next five years. One of the key planks in achieving that aim is ensuring that the infrastructure is available to repair the accident black spots, as announced today. The government has moved to repair roads that have been the site of several deaths and multiple accidents, and it will move on more in the future.

The government is determined to ensure that Victoria is the safest state in Australia in road safety terms. It is also determined to link regional Victoria to Melbourne and the suburbs to the city to ensure that Victoria has vibrant markets. The government's vision for the state distinguishes it from the city-centric crowd we took over from. It is a vision I am keen to pursue over the next three years.

CFA: firefighters dispute

Mr RYAN (Leader of the National Party) — I refer the Minister for Police and Emergency Services to the ongoing industrial action taken by the United Firefighters Union to disrupt Country Fire Authority stations around Victoria. I ask the minister to explain why the chief fire officer of the CFA, Mr Trevor Roach, is not involved in the current negotiations between the CFA and the UFU, given that the negotiations are about operational issues?

Mr HAERMEYER (Minister for Police and Emergency Services) — The dispute between the Country Fire Authority and the United Firefighters Union goes back almost one year. The union bans have gone on month after month, with the dispute not progressing one iota. The previous government did not do one thing to advance the resolution of the dispute. When the current government came to office it immediately sought to progress the dispute to bring it to a conclusion.

At the weekend the Leader of the National Party called for me to intervene in the dispute. I already have — I did that ages ago. I have been working on the dispute; he has only just realised there is one. Then the Honourable Ron Best in another place — a nice bloke

to have a beer with, but with not too much between the ears — came out — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The house will come to order. I remind the Minister for Police and Emergency Services that he must be temperate in his use of language. He must not reflect on other members in the way he has.

Ms Asher interjected.

Mr HAERMEYER — I can understand your interest in this part of the response! The Honourable Ron Best came out and said, 'This sort of dispute would not have happened under the Kennett government' — yet the bans have been going on since March last year! I have been involved in trying to bring the dispute to a resolution. There is only one item — —

Mr Ryan — On a point of order, Mr Speaker, I understand that the minister has been involved in negotiations, which is why we have the chaos we have. But I want to know why Mr Trevor Roach is not involved in those negotiations.

The SPEAKER — Order! I do not uphold the point of order. I remind the house of my expectations for question time, which I outlined earlier. The Leader of the National Party was merely repeating his question.

Mr HAERMEYER — I was only complying with the request of the Leader of the National Party to intervene in the dispute. Now he says I should not!

Discussions between the CFA and the UFU have been going on at a management level for some time. The person with responsibility for industrial relations in the Country Fire Authority is the chief executive officer. The role of the chief fire officer is an operational one. The chief executive officer of the CFA, Mr Foster, has negotiated the industrial issues directly with the union. It is not the role of the chief fire officer to get involved in industrial issues.

Nursing homes: regulation

Ms LINDELL (Carrum) — Will the Minister for Aged Care confirm that despite residents of the Riverside Nursing Home, which is in my electorate, being bathed in kerosene, the state government has no power to assist the residents? Will the minister inform the house of what the government is doing to assist the frail elderly residents of nursing homes in the state?

Ms PIKE (Minister for Aged Care) — I thank the honourable member for her question on that serious issue, which relates to the government's approach to the care and protection of frail and elderly nursing home residents both in her electorate and across the state.

In 1994 the previous government introduced the Health Services (Amendment) Bill to amend the Health Services Act. The bill was opposed by older people, the Labor Party and many members of the community who had as their main concern the care of residents. The bill was also opposed because of its effect, which was to remove the powers of the state government relating to nursing homes. However, the bill was supported by the coalition, including some honourable members who now sit on the other side of the house.

The state has regulations covering child care centres, private hospitals, day surgery centres and supported residential services — that is, most areas where care is provided. However, the previous government threw away the state's capacity to help frail and elderly nursing home residents.

Ms Asher interjected.

Ms PIKE — At the time the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, who is interjecting, spoke passionately in favour of deregulation. In November — —

The SPEAKER — Order! The Deputy Leader of the Opposition will desist.

Ms PIKE — On 29 November 1994 she is reported as saying that the bill would eliminate unnecessary regulation, eliminate duplication and reduce cost to business — but there was no mention of people. However, she went further than that. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition said:

I would be horrified if we were to introduce a bill that reduced standards of care.

Is the opposition now horrified to hear that Victorian nursing home residents are being bathed in kerosene?

The SPEAKER — Order! The minister is debating the question; I ask her to come back to answering it.

Ms PIKE — Let me get to the response of this government. In 1994 the former federal government warned that there would be a significant gap as a result of the bill put through this house by the then state government.

Some of the powers which have been thrown away and which the government wants to restore are: the power to appoint an administrator when a nursing home

neglects its residents; the ability for people to complain to the Health Services Commissioner; minimum staffing requirements to ensure that staff are qualified; licensing powers; and standards of health care. All of those powers were lost as a result of deregulation.

The government does not intend to duplicate the role of the federal government, which has responsibility for funding nursing homes and the primary responsibility for maintaining care standards. However, as has been seen during this past week, some things cannot be done from Canberra. This caring state government will do whatever it reasonably can do to protect the residents when they have been failed so abysmally by the federal system, which relies largely on self-regulation of the industry.

The government has moved to restore the powers under the Health Services Act and it has appointed a legal expert and an aged care consumer advocate to produce a discussion paper on the issue. It has appointed an expert advisory group which includes industry bodies, proprietors, doctors and nurses. Those experts will work with the government on this complex issue.

I gather the opposition will oppose policies to strengthen protection for residents of nursing homes. That is an inconceivable position, and I seek bipartisan support on this issue, because I can assure the honourable member that the government will not stand by and see frail older residents denied the rights that are afforded to other Victorian citizens. Victoria's older residents are valued members of our community and they deserve better.

The government is governing for all Victorians, no matter who they are or where they live. It is getting on with the job; it will not turn its back on older Victorians just because they happen to live in commonwealth-funded nursing homes.

Electricity: Yallourn dispute

Dr NAPHTHINE (Leader of the Opposition) — Will the Premier inform the house when the government was first advised that the industrial dispute at the Yallourn W power station posed a threat to electricity supplies in Victoria?

Mr BRACKS (Premier) — I can advise the house that the dispute and the differences between the parties at Yallourn were ongoing since May last year when the previous government was in office. That is the reality of the situation. I can also inform the house that regular meetings of the cabinet committee on major incidents were held on this matter and that when a serious issue

arose, such as the revision of the weather forecast, action was taken to inform the Victorian public.

Workcover: common-law rights

Mr STENSHOLT (Burwood) — I refer the Minister for Workcover to the former government's abolition of the historic right of seriously injured workers to sue employers, and I ask the minister to inform the house of the findings of the special report into the management of Workcover common-law claims under the former government.

Mr CAMERON (Minister for Workcover) — I thank the honourable member for Burwood for his question and his ongoing interest in and concern for working people; it is refreshing for a member representing Burwood.

Mr McArthur — On a point of order, Mr Speaker, I seek your ruling on whether that question is admissible. I refer you, Sir, to a ruling by Speaker Plowman as reported at page 434 of volume 429 of *Hansard* of 30 May 1996:

Questions that seek information that is readily available in a report are not permitted.

If I heard the honourable member correctly, he referred to a report from a working group or an inquiry issued some time in the past, and I therefore suggest that the question is not in order.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Chair understood that the honourable member for Burwood was asking about the action taken by the government as a result of the findings of the report. So long as the minister answers along those lines I will hear him.

Mr CAMERON — The Transport Accident Commission (TAC) and Workcover are the two large insurance schemes in the government sector in Victoria. To look into criticism by the legal community and the community generally of the management of Workcover common-law claims, a review was set up headed up by Geoff Masel, a former partner of Phillips Fox and a recognised expert in insurance law and litigation management. From the briefing one thing comes through clearly: the Masel report is a damning indictment of the Kennett government's management of common-law claims in Workcover. It concludes that TAC is generationally ahead in dealing with common-law claims.

A few years ago TAC had problems with its claims management, and the former Treasurer, Alan Stockdale, and the board worked through those issues.

When it came to Workcover the approach was different — the board was not able to tackle the problem because the former government wiped out common-law rights and cast to one side working people who unfortunately suffer serious injury. They wouldn't manage the — —

The SPEAKER — Order! The minister is now debating the question. I ask him to come back to answering it.

Mr CAMERON — The government intends to act on this report. At the election the government promised to restore common-law rights for seriously injured workers. It was an express commitment. The government wants to ensure that the new scheme works well, with integrity.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr CAMERON — One day he says one thing about common-law rights, the next day he says another!

The SPEAKER — Order! The minister will ignore interjections and answer the question.

Mr CAMERON — The Leader of the National Party is a supporter of common-law rights, and the government looks forward to his support.

The previous government would not redress critical issues in the management of common-law claims concerning Workcover and wanted to cast working people aside. Such issues include protecting the threshold; using specialist firms for cases involving low-onset injuries or traumatic injuries rather than using firms on a rotational basis; and ensuring that there are appropriate data and information systems. The previous government squibbed on that and did not put in the costs as the TAC has done. That is why there is a problem.

The government wants to ensure the scheme is good and has asked the board to act on the report. The government will honour its commitment, as the public expects.

Electricity: Yallourn dispute

Dr NAPHTHINE (Leader of the Opposition) — In light of the fact that the South Australian Treasurer, the Honourable Rob Lucas, knew that power supplies in that state were threatened due to industrial action and publicly warned South Australian citizens on 2 February to brace themselves for blackouts and took other actions to protect South Australia through a press release — an article the next day in the Adelaide

Advertiser — I ask the Premier whether he has now investigated why the then Acting Premier, Mr Thwaites, kept Victorians in the dark, told no-one and did nothing to alert Victorians to the impending blackout throughout Victoria.

Mr BRACKS (Premier) — What is the Victorian public reminded of every time the Leader of the Opposition gets up to speak publicly on this issue? The privatisation of electricity in Victoria.

On the question of investigating the events — —

Mr Cooper interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! I shall not warn the honourable member for Mornington again.

Mr BRACKS — I can inform the Leader of the Opposition that the government is doing everything possible to ensure that what was left to the government with the privatisation of electricity — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr BRACKS — The opposition was involved in a contract.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I again call on the Leader of the Opposition to cease interjecting or I will use sessional order 10 against him as I did against the honourable member for Cranbourne. The Premier, completing his answer.

Mr BRACKS — An investigation is taking place as to why the previous government signed a contract that did not oblige any electricity company to supply power in Victoria. That is the material matter; that is the negligence. I say to the Leader of the Opposition: keep talking about it and keep reminding the Victorian public about the mess you left with privatisation!

Former Premier: Bolte portrait

Mrs MADDIGAN (Essendon) — I refer the Minister for the Arts to the disappearance of a \$50 000 portrait of Sir Henry Bolte from government offices and the subsequent discovery of the portrait at a Surrey Hills address. I ask the minister to inform the house of what action she has taken to investigate the breach of protocol and to ensure valuable state assets do not go missing.

Ms DELAHUNTY (Minister for the Arts) — I thank the honourable member for her question because it reminds us of the government's responsibility for the

stewardship of valuable state assets. The government has responsibility for managing and protecting the state's cultural assets. Paintings held by the National Gallery of Victoria are some of the most significant and valuable assets in the state's collection, so it is easy to imagine the alarm that greeted the news that a significant portrait had gone missing and had been unaccounted for for more than five months.

The news of the missing portrait brought flooding back memories of the last great heist from the gallery back in the mid-1980s when Picasso's *Weeping Woman* disappeared. It prompted panic across the state. Ransom notes signed by the Australian Cultural Terrorists were sent to 1 Treasury Place. The then opposition leader, Mr Jeff Kennett, expressed outrage that the valuable painting had disappeared from the gallery.

Let me fast forward from the mid-1980s to 1999-2000.

The SPEAKER — Order! I remind the minister that she must be succinct.

Ms DELAHUNTY — Yes, Mr Speaker. An asset audit conducted by the government revealed that the portrait of Sir Henry Bolte painted by Paul Fitzgerald, which had been on loan to the former Premier and had been hanging in the Premier's office, had gone missing. Honourable members will recall the hanging of the painting with much affection and fanfare and the shrine that was created in the then Premier's office, complete with cigarettes and an open bottle of whisky.

On 25 February the National Gallery of Victoria wrote to the personal assistant of the former Premier asking whether the painting had been transferred to the former Premier's new office in the Old Treasury building. However, yesterday the gallery alerted the government that the much-loved portrait was not at the Old Treasury building and was not at 1 Treasury Place. The much-loved portrait of Sir Henry Bolte had been found at the private residence of a former Premier in The Avenue, Surrey Hills. The portrait of a former Premier had been held with great affection and looked after with great care at the home of another former Premier.

It has now been retrieved and is in good condition. So far the only explanation received is that it was an inadvertent mistake by the former Premier, who apparently thought the painting had been given to him as a gift. I am advised that no such gift was ever listed on the former Premier's register of interests.

It is a serious matter. The removal of the painting was a clear breach of National Gallery lending protocols, which provide that works of art are to be loaned for display in ministers' offices, not in ministers' homes

and not in former Premiers' homes, no matter how august the private residence or the private person.

Paul Fitzgerald's portrait of Sir Henry Bolte was independently valued at \$50 000. It is extraordinary that such an important part of Victoria's cultural heritage was not on public display but was tucked away in a private home.

I have written to the trustees of the National Gallery of Victoria requesting that they immediately carry out a review of the lending procedures and protocols. I have requested that as a matter of urgency they examine how a painting on loan from the collection found its way into a private residence and why it remained there for such a long time.

I look forward to the trustees' response by Friday. I believe that although the public might have tolerated the former Premier taking home a publicly owned exercise bike, bolting with Sir Henry is not on.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

Ms GARBUTT (Minister for Environment and Conservation) — I desire to make a personal explanation. On 16 December last year I was asked on the adjournment about delays in replying to correspondence. At that time I recalled having recently signed a letter of reply on the issue and I informed the honourable member who inquired that he was not correct. A check with my department revealed that the reply was still awaiting my signature. It was then promptly dealt with.

PETITION

The Clerk — I have received the following petition for presentation to Parliament:

Planning: Casey foothills

To the Honourable the Speaker and members of the Legislative Assembly in Parliament assembled:

The humble petition of the undersigned citizens of the state of Victoria draws to the attention of the house that:

1. Recent actions of the City of Casey strategic planning department demonstrate an intention to promote subdivision in the Casey foothills in contravention of the Casey foothills strategy, the recommendations of the three-person advisory committee and panel for the Casey planning scheme (1998) and of Casey's own statutory planning department, the municipal strategic statement, the minister's direction no. 6 and the advice of the EPA, South East Water and neighbouring shires.

2. We believe the Casey strategic planning department has been less than open and objective in dealing with this issue, especially regarding the summaries of advice, evidence and submissions it has presented to councillors and to the related ministerial panels of June 1998 and 1999.
3. Having failed to convince the 1998 panel to approve an overall reduction of minimum lot size in the foothills from 8 hectares to 4 hectares, and having been foiled in an intent to use an excision clause as a means of achieving 4-hectare subdivisions, the Casey strategic planning department now seeks to use a loosely worded exceptions clause in the foothills strategy to achieve even smaller subdivisions (down to 0.86 hectares) with amendment L1 which is being promoted as a model for future subdivision applications in the Casey foothills.

Your petitioners therefore pray that the house take the necessary action to ensure that the unique rural landscapes of the Casey foothills to the Dandenong Ranges, which are an important and irreplaceable asset to the City of Melbourne, are protected from inappropriate development and preserved for the benefit of future generations.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

By Dr DEAN (Berwick) (560 signatures)

Laid on table.

PUBLIC SECTOR ASSET INVESTMENT PROGRAM

Budget paper

Mr BRACKS (Treasurer) presented *1999–2000 Public Sector Asset Investment Program — Budget Information Paper No. 1*.

Laid on table.

SCRUTINY OF ACTS AND REGULATIONS COMMITTEE

Alert Digest No. 1

Ms GILLETT (Werribee) presented *Alert Digest No. 1 of 2000 on:*

Audit (Amendment) Act
Crimes at Sea Act
Essential Services (Year 2000) Act
Federal Courts (State Jurisdiction) Act
Freedom of Information (Miscellaneous Amendments) Act
Gas Industry (Amendment) Act
Health Practitioners (Special Events Exemption) Act
Legal Practice (Amendment) Act
Local Government (Best Value Principles) Act

Melbourne Sports and Aquatic Centre (Amendment) Act
Parliamentary Committees (Amendment) Act
Police Regulation (Amendment) Act
Public Prosecutions (Amendment) Act
Rail Corporation and Transport Acts (Miscellaneous Amendments) Act
Regional Infrastructure Development Fund Act
Water (Waterway Management Tariffs) Act

together with appendix.

Laid on table.

Ordered to be printed.

Alert Digest No. 2

Ms GILLETT (Werribee) presented *Alert Digest No. 2 of 2000* on:

Constitution (Reform) Bill
Courts and Tribunals Legislation (Amendment) Bill
Crimes (Criminal Trials) Bill
Domestic Building Contracts (Amendment) Bill
Fair Trading Bill
Fair Trading (Inspectors Powers and Other Amendments) Bill
Gas Industry Acts (Further Amendment) Bill
Interactive Gaming (Player Protection) Bill
Juries Bill
Labour and Industry (Statute Law Revision) Bill
Land Titles Validation (Amendment) Bill
Melbourne City Link (Amendment) Bill
Rail Corporation and Transport Acts (Amendments) Bill
Year 2000 Information Disclosure Bill

together with appendix.

Laid on table.

Ordered to be printed.

PAPERS

Laid on table by Clerk:

Adult Parole Board — Report for the year 1998–99
 Alpine Health — Report for the year 1998–99
 Australian Food Industry Science Centre — Report for the year 1998–99
 Beechworth Hospital — Report for the year 1998–99
 Benalla and District Memorial Hospital — Report for the year 1998–99

Corangamite Regional Hospital Services — Report for the year 1998–99

Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978 — Section 17DA Orders granting under s 17D leases by Kingston City Council (two Orders)

Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981 — Documents pursuant to section 12H — Poisons Code —

Standard for the Uniform Scheduling of Drugs and Poisons No 14

Amendment No 1 to the Standard for the Uniform Scheduling of Drugs and Poisons No 14

Notice regarding the amendment, commencement and availability of the Poisons Code

EcoRecycle Victoria — Report for the year 1998–99

Financial Management Act 1994:

Reports from the Minister for Agriculture that he had received the 1998–99 Annual Reports of the:

Emu Industry Development Committee

Murray Valley Wine Grape Industry Development Committee

Northern Victorian Fresh Tomato Industry Development Committee

Report from the Minister for Environment and Conservation that she had received the 1997–98 Financial Statement of the Grampians Regional Waste Management Group

Report from the Minister for Environment and Conservation that she had received the Report for the period 30 April 1998 to 30 June 1999 of Alpine Resorts Co-ordinating Council

Reports from the Minister for Environment and Conservation that she had received the 1998–99 Annual Reports of the:

Central Murray Regional Waste Management Group

Melbourne Parks and Waterways

Trust for Nature

Report from the Minister for Environment and Conservation that she had received the 1998–99 Financial Statement of Gippsland Regional Waste Management Group

Reports from the Minister for Environment and Conservation that she had not received the Reports for the period 1 November 1998 to 31 October 1999 of the:

Falls Creek Alpine Resort Management Board

Lake Mountain Alpine Resort Management Board

Mt Baw Baw Alpine Resort Management Board

Mt Buller Alpine Resort Management Board

Mt Hotham Alpine Resort Management Board

Mt Stirling Alpine Resort Management Board

Reports from the Minister for Health that he had received the 1998–99 Annual Reports of the:

Alexandra District Hospital
 Casterton Memorial Hospital
 Cobram District Hospital
 Heywood and District Memorial Hospital
 Infertility Treatment Authority
 Maffra District Hospital
 Mansfield District Hospital
 Nathalia District Hospital
 Numurkah District Health Service
 Tallangatta Hospital
 Upper Murray Health and Community Services
 Yarrawonga District Hospital
 Yea and District Memorial Hospital

Financial Management Regulations 1994 — Order in Council pursuant to Regulation 11: Authorisation of expenditure of a Royal Commission

Goulburn Valley Health — Report for the year 1998–99 (two papers)

Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984:

Notice under s 32(3)(a)(iii) in relation to Statutory Rule No 110/1999

Notice under s 32(4)(a)(iii) in relation to Amendment No 5 of the Building Code of Australia 1996

Lake Mountain Alpine Resort Management Board — Report for the period 30 April 1998 to 31 October 1998

Latrobe Regional Hospital — Report for the year 1998–99

Melbourne City Link Act 1995 —

Melbourne City Link Ninth Amending Deed
 Melbourne City Link Tenth Amending Deed
 Third Amending Deed to the Integration and Facilitation Agreement
 Statement of Variation No 9/1999: Changes to the Project Scope and Technical Requirements, Request for Change No 6
 Statement of Variation No 10/1999: Changes to the Project Scope and Technical Requirements, Request for Change No 11
 Statement of Variation No 11/1999: Changes to the Project Scope and Technical Requirements, Request for Change No 13
 Statement of Variation No 12/1999: Detailed Tolling Strategy

Mt Buller Alpine Resort Management Board — Report for the period 1 May 1998 to 31 October 1998

Mt Hotham Alpine Resort Management Board — Report for the period 30 April 1998 to 31 October 1998

Mt Stirling Alpine Resort Management Board — Report for the period 30 April 1998 to 31 October 1998

Parliamentary Committees Act 1968 — Response of the Premier to the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee Report entitled Review of Auditor-General's Reports Nos 39 to 41

Planning and Environment Act 1987:

Notices of approval of the following new Planning Schemes:

Bass Coast Planning Scheme
 Bayside Planning Scheme
 Boroondara Planning Scheme
 Hindmarsh Planning Scheme
 Hobsons Bay Planning Scheme
 Hume Planning Scheme
 Loddon Planning Scheme
 Maroondah Planning Scheme
 Mildura Planning Scheme
 Moyne Planning Scheme
 South Gippsland Planning Scheme
 West Wimmera Planning Scheme

Notices of approval of amendments to the following Planning Schemes:

Ararat Planning Scheme — No L6
 Bacchus Marsh Planning Scheme — No L58
 Ballarat Planning Scheme — No C25
 Brimbank Planning Scheme — No C6
 Bungaree Planning Scheme — No L31
 Buninyong Planning Scheme — No L63
 Campaspe Planning Scheme — No C1
 Cardinia Planning Scheme — No C5
 Doncaster and Templestowe Planning Scheme — No L138
 Frankston Planning Scheme — Nos L114, 118
 Glen Eira Planning Scheme — Nos C3, C7
 Greater Bendigo Planning Scheme — No L82, L91
 Greater Geelong Planning Scheme — Nos R196, R235, R241, RL248
 Greater Shepparton Planning Scheme — No C1
 Hobsons Bay Planning Scheme — No L21
 Indigo Planning Scheme — No C1
 Macedon Ranges Planning Scheme — No L27
 Melton Planning Scheme — No C1, C2
 Melbourne Planning Scheme — No C15
 Moonee Valley Planning Scheme — No C10
 Moreland Planning Scheme — No L71
 Mornington Peninsula Planning Scheme — No C4, C13

Port Phillip Planning Scheme — No C19
 Wodonga Planning Scheme — No C1
 Wyndham Planning Scheme — No C1, C9
 Yarra Ranges Planning Scheme — No L87

Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986 — Revised Code of Practice for the Welfare of Wildlife during Rehabilitation

Seymour District Memorial Hospital — Report for the year 1998–99

Statutory Rules under the following Acts:

Administration and Probate Act 1958 — SR No 2/2000
 Conservation, Forests and Lands Act 1987 — SR Nos 137, 148, 9/2000
 County Court Act 1958 — SR Nos 3, 5/2000
 Dangerous Goods Act 1985 — SR No 142
 Dentists Act 1972 — SR No 147
 Electricity Safety Act 1998 — SR Nos 139, 140, 141
 Forests Act 1958 — SR No 137
 Legal Practice Act 1996 — SR No 144
 Magistrates' Court Act 1989 — SR Nos 135, 136, 149, 150, 6/2000
 Marine Act 1988 — SR No 145
 Metropolitan Fire Brigades Act 1958 — SR No 138
 Occupational Health and Safety Act 1985 — SR No 143
 Road Safety Act 1986 — SR No 146
 Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 — SR Nos 7, 8/2000
 Supreme Court Act 1986 — SR Nos 131, 132, 133, 134, 1, 4/2000

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994:

Ministers' exception certificates in relation to Statutory Rule Nos 111, 116, 131, 132, 133, 134, 135, 136, 147, 149, 150, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8/2000

Ministers' exemption certificates in relation to Statutory Rule Nos 142, 146, 148, 9/2000

The Constitution Act Amendment Act 1958 — Statement of function conferred on the Electoral Commissioner, dated 14 December 1999

Wangaratta District Base Hospital — Report for the year 1998–99

Western District Health Service — Report for the year 1998–99

Wildlife Act 1975 — Wildlife (Control of Hunting) Notice No 1/2000

Wodonga Regional Health Service — Report for the year 1998–99.

Audit (Amendment) Act 1999 — All provisions on 1 January 2000 (Gazette G51, 23 December 1999)

Electricity Industry Acts (Further Amendment) Act 1999 — Section 8 on 31 December 1999 (Gazette G50, 16 December 1999)

Melbourne Sports and Aquatic Centre (Amendment) Act 1999 — Act comes into operation 3 February 2000 (Gazette G5, 3 February 2000)

Rail Corporations (Amendment) Act 1998 — Remaining provisions on 23 December 1999 (Gazette G51, 23 December 1999)

Rail Corporations and Transport Acts (Miscellaneous Amendments) Act 1999 — Part 2 (except for s 7 and s 9(1)) and ss 10, 11 and 12 (except for s 12(1)(a)) on 23 December 1999 (Gazette G51, 23 December 1999).

ROYAL ASSENT

Message read advising royal assent on 21 December 1999 to:

Crimes at Sea Bill
Freedom of Information (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill
Gas Industry (Amendment) Bill
Local Government (Best Value Principles) Bill
Melbourne Sports and Aquatic Centre (Amendment) Bill
Police Regulation (Amendment) Bill
Public Prosecutions (Amendment) Bill
Rail Corporations and Transport Acts (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill
Regional Infrastructure Development Fund Bill
Water (Waterway Management Tariffs) Bill

APPROPRIATION MESSAGES

Messages read recommending appropriations for:

Courts and Tribunals Legislation (Amendment) Bill
Juries Bill

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Sessional orders

Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Transport) (*By leave*) — I wish to advise the house that after consideration in a number of quarters, the government proposes to adjourn for lunch breaks on Wednesdays and Thursdays, and on Fridays if the house is sitting.

The decision has been made after the trial conducted during the last parliamentary sessional period, when a

The following proclamations fixing operative dates were laid upon the Table by the Clerk pursuant to an Order of the House dated 3 November 1999:

fair attempt was made to see how the system would work. However, approaches have been made by members on all sides of the chamber — the government, the opposition, and the Independents — and concern has been expressed by a whole range of parliamentary staff, not only by Hansard, on whom the procedure placed an additional burden. The government's proposal — which has broad support across the chamber — is that to improve the working conditions and to meet the needs of honourable members the house should have the traditional luncheon break on those days.

I thank all staff members who, in the last sessional period, provided the additional services to cope with the extra workload and to facilitate the change. Notwithstanding that, the government believes the legislative program can be accommodated within the time frames that will now operate.

Mr McARTHUR (Monbulk) (By leave) — The opposition parties support the government on this issue, and we welcome the about-turn. During the debate on the sessional orders last session the opposition parties pointed out the difficulties associated with sitting through lunch time, particularly the occupational health and safety difficulties. I am pleased that a government that pretends to be concerned about occupational health and safety is taking into account the working conditions of the staff of the house, the Department of Parliamentary Debates and others.

The opposition parties think it is a terrific idea. We only wish we had known it was a trial when it was introduced. If we had, perhaps our concerns might not have been as great.

Committee sittings

Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Transport) — By leave, I move:

That leave be granted to:

1. the House, Library and Printing committees to sit within the Parliament buildings during the sittings of either house of the Parliament, but not while either house is actually sitting.
2. the Privileges and Standing Orders committees to sit within the Parliament buildings during the sittings of the house, but not while the house is actually sitting.

The motion will enable the select committees to carry out their work when most members of Parliament are in the building and therefore available. The members of those committees will work during their lunch breaks,

unlike other members, who will be having a rest or catching up on other work.

The motion is necessary because standing order 204 states that a select committee may not, except by resolution of the house, meet during the sittings of the house. The motion will therefore allow the committees to meet on sitting days at times other than when the house is actually sitting. As I said, it will enable meetings to take place while the sitting of the house is suspended for lunch or dinner.

A similar motion is being proposed in another place. I commend it to the house.

Motion agreed to.

DRUGS AND CRIME PREVENTION COMMITTEE

Drug reform strategy

Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Transport) — By leave, I move:

That:

- (a) there be referred to the Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee for inquiry, consideration and report all records (including minutes of evidence) of the previous committee, presently under the control of the Presiding Officers, of the lapsed inquiry into the implementation of the government's drug reform strategy originally referred to that committee by order in council dated 25 June 1996 in order to determine which of those records (other than confidential submissions and minutes of evidence taken in private) of the previous committee could be made available to Dr David Penington, AC, Chairman of the Drug Policy Expert Committee for his personal use; and
- (b) the present committee is required to finally report to the Parliament by 14 March 2000; and
- (c) on the final report of the present committee being made to the Parliament, a copy of all records identified by the committee in the report as being records which could be made available, be made available for Dr Penington's personal use as soon as possible by the Clerk of the Parliaments and these records are not to be released or published by Dr Penington in any way or form.

I advise the house that the motion results from a request from Dr David Penington, the Chairman of the Drug Expert Policy Committee, for access to the records of the parliamentary Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee.

In the 53rd Parliament the Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee had been undertaking an inquiry into the implementation of the former government's drug

reform strategy. However, the committee had not completed its inquiry when the Parliament was dissolved in August last year. Although the parliamentary committee has been reappointed in this Parliament, the government has decided not to renew its reference in light of a similar inquiry now being undertaken by Dr Penington.

In December last year the Speaker received a request from Dr Penington for access to the records of the committee's lapsed inquiry. Under the standing orders of both houses and the Parliamentary Committees Act the records are not available because a report has never been tabled in the Parliament.

Wishing to assist Dr Penington, the government sought ways of making the records available to Dr Penington in a manner that accords with the practices and rules of the house. It found that that could be achieved only by Parliament asking the Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee to consider and report on which records of the previous committee, which are presently under the control of the Presiding Officers, should be made available to Dr Penington for his personal use. Tabling a report on the inquiry in the Parliament satisfies the requirements of the standing orders of both houses of Parliament and the Parliamentary Committees Act.

I acknowledge that the motion is unusual. However, I am sure honourable members will understand the necessity to observe the practices and rules of the Parliament and will therefore support it.

Motion agreed to.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Correction of bill titles

Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Transport) — By leave, I move:

That where a bill has passed through both houses and the citation of the bill includes a reference to a calendar year earlier than that in which the passage of the bill was completed, the Clerk of the Parliaments be empowered to alter the calendar year reference in the citation of the bill and any corresponding reference within the bill itself to the year in which the passage of the bill was so completed.

Motion agreed to.

Program

Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Transport) — I move:

That pursuant to sessional orders 6(3) the orders of the day, government business, relating to the following bills be considered and completed by 4.00 p.m. on Thursday, 2 March, 2000:

Melbourne City Link (Amendment) Bill

Domestic Building Contracts (Amendment) Bill

Courts and Tribunals Legislation (Amendment) Bill

Mr McARTHUR (Monbulk) — The opposition will not oppose the government business program. However, I wish to speak about the workload before the house, particularly in view of the earlier comments of the Leader of the House when proposing that even though the house will in future break for lunch it might just be able to accommodate the legislative program.

The government business program contains three bills for debate this week. If the house does no more than that, a further bill will be dealt with on Tuesday and Wednesday of the following sitting week. That will be the case unless agreement is reached for a shorter than traditional period of adjournment of the bills for which notice has just been given. The government has given notice of only four bills. Unless something extraordinary happens in the two-week period before it resumes, the house will deal with only two bills a week.

I compare that with the government business program during the last sittings when, despite sitting shorter hours and stopping for lunch, it was normal to deal quite capably with six to eight bills a week. In a heavy week often more were dealt with.

That is clear evidence of the lack of preparedness of the government to govern. It might have some aims and ambitions while its members occupy the Treasury benches but it does not have much of a program. The spring sessional period was used for training the neophytes on the other side. Training was clearly needed and they will receive much more training during the autumn sessional period.

The government business program contains nothing serious, significant or earth shattering. It could be dealt with in one day and the house could proceed to more important matters. Although the opposition does not oppose the program it believes the government should get off the rhetoric train and start developing some legislation. If it has a magnificent program of reform, as claimed in the wider arena, it should let honourable members see it and get on with it.

Motion agreed to.

MEMBERS STATEMENTS

Victoria Integrated Technology Park

Dr NAPHTHINE (Leader of the Opposition) — I refer the house to a statement released today by the Mayor of the Glenelg Shire Council casting serious doubts on the future of the \$1 billion Victoria Integrated Technology Park project at Portland. Besides creating many thousands of jobs in rural Victoria it would have provided an enormous industry infrastructure in south-west Victoria and taken advantage of the port of Portland, the Portland aluminium smelter and the major engineering facilities in the area.

I refer to an article in the *Herald Sun* of 13 November 1999 where the Premier welcomed the project and stated:

I will do everything I can as a new government to support that development to ensure that we get the \$1 billion investment.

The project was on track under the former Kennett government with senior ministers meeting regularly with the project proponents and the local shire council. However, it has fallen over under the Bracks government through mismanagement, incompetence and lack of leadership. It joins the myriad projects now in doubt due to a lack of leadership and confidence in the Bracks Labor government.

The Premier announced that the headquarters of Virgin Airlines would be in Melbourne yet those 150 jobs in Virgin Airlines went to Brisbane. Studio City and Mirvac are in doubt and Olympic Airlines — —

The SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member's time has expired.

Chelsea Community Rehabilitation Service

Ms LINDELL (Carrum) — On 9 December last I was pleased to attend the Peninsula Health Care Network annual general meeting where several volunteers were presented with Life Governor certificates. I congratulate Mrs Dorothy Bennett of Edithvale, Mrs Evelyn Gateley of Carrum and Mrs Dorothy Young of Edithvale, three of the volunteers honoured on that occasion.

Those three women have volunteered their time and skills at what was for many years the Chelsea Day Hospital. Renamed the Chelsea Community Rehabilitation Service, the range of services has changed recently and the scope for volunteers has altered considerably.

I thank the Peninsula Health Care Network for its recognition of the vital role played by volunteers, and in particular the contribution of the three ladies mentioned to the lives of many older people who attended the Edithvale Road centre. They have offered warmth and companionship to many older people while they assisted with various tasks including making refreshments, assisting clients and running errands. They are valuable members of the team and it is my pleasure to acknowledge their contribution to the Chelsea Community Rehabilitation Service.

CFA: firefighters dispute

Mr RYAN (Leader of the National Party) — During my travels through country Victoria a major issue raised is the grave concern about the future of the Country Fire Authority (CFA), particularly the unmitigated and unrelenting attacks on that organisation by the United Firefighters Union (UFU).

The community wants to know where the government stands on the issue. Where is the minister who looks after those 63 000 volunteers who are part and parcel and form the backbone of that great community organisation that has served country Victorians in particular so well for many decades? Where does the government stand on protecting the CFA from attacks by the UFU?

Bans were implemented recently that will seriously impede the capacity of the CFA to carry out its important tasks. Many areas of Victoria are bone dry. The prospect of fire is being faced by all country Victorians, yet the United Firefighters Union is implementing bans that diminish the capacity of the Country Fire Authority to answer the emergencies that fall to it.

People I meet when I travel in country Victoria want to know what the Premier of the day and the minister are doing to protect the CFA. They also want to know why Chief Fire Officer Trevor Roach is not involved in the current negotiations supposedly being conducted between the CFA and the UFU and why the government is siding with the union movement as opposed to — —

The SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member's time has expired.

Friends of the Melbourne Colo-rectal Service

Mr HOLDING (Springvale) — I draw the attention of the house to the high incidence of bowel cancer in Australia, as in most countries of the Western world. In particular, I wish to acknowledge the work of the

Friends of the Melbourne Colo-rectal Service. Many of the members of this volunteer organisation are based in the electorate of Springvale, and particularly in Noble Park.

Cancer of the colon and large bowel is the most common internal cancer in the Western world. Though it may occur at any age, more than 90 per cent of patients are aged 40 or over. From the age of 40 the risk doubles every 10 years. Honourable members may be aware that the disease is potentially curable if diagnosed in the early stages, because appropriate surgery by colorectal specialists can remove the cancer and cure the disease. Thanks to modern technology less than 5 per cent of all large bowel cancer patients require colostomies.

There is active research at the Royal Melbourne Hospital into the prevention and early detection of large bowel cancer. That work is supported by the group. I had an opportunity last Sunday to attend a progressive luncheon put on by the group in the Noble Park area. It raised over \$800 for the funding of a research position at the Royal Melbourne Hospital to continue research into this vital area of health. Finally, I acknowledge the fine work of Peggy Cox, Beverley Hargreave, Enid Blake and Ann Tarrant.

CFA: firefighters dispute

Mr ROWE (Cranbourne) — I raise for the attention of the house the appalling lack of attention given to a crisis in the Country Fire Authority (CFA) by the Minister for Police and Emergency Services.

There is a crisis of confidence among the 63 000 volunteers serving our rural and fringe metropolitan communities. The honourable members for Ballarat East, Ballarat West, Bendigo East, Bendigo West, Carrum, Dandenong, Sunbury and Werribee, and the Geelong members — all Labor Party members — are stooges and puppets of the Trades Hall Council and are being dominated by the United Firefighters Union. That union is withdrawing services to their communities and is putting the lives of our wives, our children and our senior citizens at risk in their own homes through its irresponsible actions and as a result of the leadership of the mad dog running the union. He is absolutely out of control and is controlling the Minister for Police and Emergency Services and the Premier like puppets. That's how he runs the state, too.

Every major fire in this state is attended by members of the CFA. They attended at Longford — —

The SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member's time has expired.

Bendigo: Telstra call centre

Ms ALLAN (Bendigo East) — I refer to the potential loss of 65 jobs from Telstra's 013 call centre in the electorate of Bendigo East. Those jobs, like many other Telstra jobs that have already disappeared from our town, are being lost to Bendigo as a direct result of privatisation. The philosophy of privatisation drives the current federal coalition government just as it drove the former state coalition government.

Honourable members interjecting.

Ms ALLAN — I note the mirth of members opposite at the loss of jobs in my electorate, even though it is a matter of serious concern to people in regional areas.

Coalition governments have a blind commitment to that philosophy which results in losses of this sort in country areas. I, along with the honourable member for Bendigo West and the federal member for Bendigo, the Honourable Steve Gibbons, condemn this latest round of job losses. Bendigo has already lost too many Telstra jobs. Indeed, we have already lost too many jobs overall as a result of the privatisation policies of the federal and state coalition governments. About 2000 jobs have been lost in our region because of those policies.

As the member for Bendigo East I am personally concerned that 95 per cent of the 65 jobs proposed to be lost are held by women, many working as casuals. They are loyal Telstra employees — —

The SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member's time has expired.

CFA: firefighters dispute

Mr KILGOUR (Shepparton) — I bring to Parliament the grave concerns of the great Country Fire Authority volunteers who continue week after week to turn up at their fire stations only to find bans imposed on some stations by the United Firefighters Union.

Let us recall what that union is trying to do. It is trying to push out the boundaries of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade from the city into regional centres. In doing so it is discrediting the firefighters in the volunteer forces of the CFA. It has put bans on equipment and is creating a direct threat to the way our brigades operate.

Members of the union are saying that the CFA has reneged on all matters. That is totally incorrect. Only three issues remain to be resolved: consultation versus agreement — that means the unions seeking the power

of veto over the statutory responsibilities of the chief officer and the authority; the community support facilitators that the union wants removed and replaced with operational firefighters; and the period of the agreement. From the outset the CFA has understood that the wage increase would be offered over three years and eight months. The union is now seeking to get it over three years and three months.

We are witnessing the bully-boy tactics of the union, whose members are placing our volunteer firefighters in an invidious position.

The SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member's time has expired.

Students: Sunshine school awards

Mr LANGUILLER (Sunshine) — I take this opportunity to congratulate two students in my electorate who have done exceedingly well and triumphed despite the odds.

Recently I attended an awards night at Sunshine Secondary College, Sunshine North campus. Student Luong Truong, aged 13, was presented with a certificate for high distinction in the Australian mathematics competition.

Receiving that award has put him in the top 2 per cent of the Australia–South Pacific region. He also received an award for outstanding academic achievement for his work in year 8. Luong's life has at times been difficult, but that has not affected his academic performance. The principal of the school told me that Luong has been accepted to attend Melbourne Boy's High School this year.

Another high achiever at Sunshine Secondary College is Gamilla Kha, who is a year 8 student. During her time at the school she has displayed an enormous amount of talent in volleyball and badminton. The college won the Western region interschool volleyball competition and it was very much because of her ability that the team made it to the all-state final. The school is ranked sixth in Victoria. If that were not enough, she also plays clarinet and saxophone in a band.

They are only two of the many success stories of my electorate. I also wish to congratulate the parents and teachers of the Sunshine Secondary College.

CFA: firefighters dispute

Mr PATERSON (South Barwon) — I raise a matter of concern about the United Firefighters Union campaign of thuggery against the Country Fire

Authority, and in particular the behaviour of ALP candidate, Cr Michael Crutchfield, who was doing nothing much in the Corio fire station on Friday night when the call went out to attend the Shell refinery, which is located not far from the station. Cr Crutchfield, who will be trying at the upcoming mayoral election to become the mayor of Geelong, refused to attend. His pager went off, but he did not respond. He was then phoned personally by the chief fire officer, who pleaded with him to attend the serious situation that was unfolding at the Shell refinery. Again Cr Crutchfield in his role as a fire officer refused to attend.

Cr Crutchfield needs to come clean and understand that is unacceptable to the community. Firstly, he needs to remove himself from the mayoral race until he is prepared to support the people of Geelong and not jeopardise — —

The SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member's time has expired. The honourable member for Melton has 40 seconds.

Melton Lions Club youth quest

Mr NARDELLA (Melton) — On Sunday night I attended the Lions Club of Melton Youth of the Year Quest. There were five contestants: Mr Hew Murdoch from Mowbray College, Ms Natasha Forder from Melton Secondary College, Ms Marion Tatenhove from Kurunjang Secondary College, Ms Jessica Deveraux from Mowbray College and Mr Richard Rosewall from Catholic Regional College, Sydenham. They performed the public speaking duties at the quest.

The SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member's time has expired. The time for members statements has also expired.

MELBOURNE CITY LINK (AMENDMENT) BILL

Second reading

Debate resumed from 16 December 1999; motion of Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Transport).

Mr LEIGH (Mordialloc) — The Melbourne City Link (Amendment) Bill is one part of what has to be described as one of the greatest projects in modern Victorian history.

Government members interjecting.

Mr LEIGH — Government members may laugh, but I offer them a prediction. I, like many other people, have problems with City Link, but I must say that — —

Mr Haermeyer interjected.

Mr LEIGH — I am interested that the Minister for Police and Emergency Services has compared the construction of City Link to the bombing of Pearl Harbour. I think that is a disgrace, given the many who were lost at Pearl Harbour. For you to make that comment, Mr Minister, shows how derelict you are in your duty — —

The SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member for Mordialloc will address his remarks to the Chair.

Mr LEIGH — Leaving aside the clowns who want to misbehave when running the government, I must say that it is clear the government has a problem. Government members know that, as does everyone else.

The major parts of City Link are open. The Burnley Tunnel is not ready to be opened, but the Domain Tunnel is ready. The only reason the Domain Tunnel is not open is that the Premier is too chicken to go there to open it. He is too chicken! No matter what anyone says about the problems associated with the project, it is worth some \$2.3 billion to the economy. If one looks at the project in the context of what happened to Victoria in the 1990s — —

Mr Holding interjected.

Mr LEIGH — You wait a minute, sonny, and you might get a surprise!

If one looks at what happened to the Victorian economy in 1992 one sees that Victoria needed to generate a project of some significance. The City Link project has created thousands of jobs. Some \$2.3 billion has been spent in Victoria — —

Mr Holding interjected.

Mr LEIGH — There is a chihuahua on the other side of the house that wants to make some noise. He is entitled to do that out of his place if he wishes. If the honourable member for Springvale ever had a job in his life he might understand something — that is, at least 1000 people are employed by City Link.

I agree there are problems with the project. However, the interesting thing about the Domain Tunnel project — and the government will face a few problems

with it in the coming months — is that people are coming from all over the world to look at it.

A government member interjected.

Mr LEIGH — They are! It is, with all its mistakes, one of the major engineering feats in the Southern Hemisphere.

Mr Nardella — Like the Leaning Tower of Pisa.

Mr LEIGH — You can have your laugh! In considering the series of amendments proposed by the government it is interesting to compare the government's current position on tolls with its position when it was in opposition. The Labor Party is supposedly anti-tolls, but after I did a little research I found that the Labor Party has not held that view all the time.

I refer to a press release dated 4 March 1992, which is worth reading to the house. It states:

The state government has given the go-ahead for two new toll freeways — the Domain Tunnel and the Western Bypass.

The Deputy Premier and major projects minister, Mr Jim Kennan, said yesterday he would call for expressions of interest from the private sector to build and operate the key transport links next month.

The projects, which are worth between \$800 million and \$1 billion, would create up to 3000 direct and 4000 ancillary jobs and take about five years to complete.

The Western Bypass would link the Tullamarine Freeway to Footscray Road then cross the Docklands to the West Gate Freeway.

The Domain Tunnel would join the West Gate to the South Eastern Arterial —

the Monash Freeway.

Business groups, the RACV and the state opposition have been hammering the government over its refusal to commit itself to the projects. The pressure increased with the closure of Swanston Street.

'They are major bypass links and must be done and are the challenge to the community in the 1990s,' Mr Kennan told a Building Owners and Managers Association lunch yesterday.

I see the chihuahua opposite is a little quieter at the moment.

Mr Kennan said there was general acceptance that infrastructure provision was no longer up to governments alone.

He said the projects could be funded mainly by the private sector by devices such as 'shadow' or indirect tolls.

Approval of the Domain Tunnel, also referred to as the Southern Bypass, has been a contentious issue in cabinet. In 1985 the then transport minister, Mr Crabb, rejected opposition calls for a tunnel as 'lunatic' because it would damage the botanic gardens. Two of three private consortiums who submitted proposals to the government have recommended that the projects be considered together.

The Transfield, Acer Wargon Chapman and Infrastructure Development Corporation consortium proposed a 9 km link, costing \$600–800 million between Tullamarine, West Gate and the south-eastern via a tunnel under the Domain.

That is a little different from what the Labor Party said in opposition, when it loudly proclaimed that it was against tolls. Yet who was involved in tolls back then? The Labor Party! And who was the key link in Premier Kirner's office? In those days nobody did anything unless it was first agreed to by the current transport minister, the then Socialist Left secretary and powerbroker! He was involved in the creation of that little scheme.

I turn to what the then opposition leader, Mr Brumby, is reported as saying on 21 November 1995 during the debate on the Melbourne City Link Bill, just so the minister knows the relevance of it all. Mr Brumby was against everything! He said:

If a future Labor government put in such a fast light-rail between Tullamarine and the Melbourne CBD, for example, and it carried 15 000 people an hour, our government would have to pay twice as much for that project. Firstly, it would have to pay for the project and, secondly, it will have to pay compensation to Transurban.

Today's *Herald Sun* contains a story about another Labor lie. While announcing another Kennett government project, the renovation of Spencer Street station, none other than the Premier is reported as saying that the government is going ahead with the rail link to Tullamarine. No compensation is to be paid, yet I have just quoted Mr Brumby as saying that compensation should be paid to City Link. He is wrong again!

Mr Brumby also said:

Worse still, one must think about the long-suffering motorists in this state who are already being slugged by the 3-cent-a-litre Better Roads levy. Motor registration charges have already doubled ...

The former government looked at that. Through the Better Roads levy the former government raised about \$170 million a year, one-third of that being spent in the country and two-thirds of it in the city. If that money had been spent on City Link, not a cent would have been spent on roads anywhere else in the state. In other words, not a cent would have been spent on country roads or country bridges. When in opposition the

government used to say, 'Spend the Better Roads money on City Link'! If a government has only \$173 million to spend on a \$2 billion project, clearly it would have to spend a few years funding to make the project a goer.

The former government was against surveillance. However, the then opposition leader stated:

All sorts of activity will be subject to the surveillance by the Transurban tollway transponder system.

In bringing in the bill the minister is introducing his own form of electronic parking system. Once when motorists broke the road laws they were chased up through the PERIN system. Now every time motorists travel inappropriately on the roads they will get on-the-spot fines, just like those the good old parking officers might issue. Motorists will no longer be able to find out how much they are being fined and where the money is going, which is how the PERIN system has operated.

The then opposition transport spokesman, Mr Batchelor, said that at least \$20 million a year would be made available as a result of people misusing our roads — —

A government member interjected.

Mr LEIGH — I am not arguing about whether it is \$10 million or \$15 million. Now we will not be able to find out what the money is being used for, because the government will hide it.

Before she got into government the honourable member for Gisborne made a lot of noise about what she thought should happen, but since the election I have heard nothing but silence from the honourable member. A few of her constituents might be wondering what she is thinking these days — but it's obviously not a lot!

When he was opposition leader the current Premier, Mr Bracks, said, 'This is a disaster. It is a disgraceful project, a waste of money and a shocking outrage'. Yet today, the Minister for Transport — —

Mr Haermeyer interjected.

Mr LEIGH — No, I am not saying that at all. When the Minister for Transport was shadow minister he would often simply break the law. For example, he invaded other people's property — and the next day someone got killed — —

Mr Haermeyer — On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker, I believe the honourable member for

Mordialloc has just impugned the integrity of the Minister for Transport and I ask for a withdrawal.

Mr LEIGH — I have no intention of offering a withdrawal to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. If the minister concerned — —

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! I did not call the honourable member for Mordialloc.

I do not uphold the point of order. However, I remind the honourable member that, as he should know, he is required to address the house through the Chair and that, in using the expression 'you', he is taken to be addressing the Chair. I suggest that he be careful in the way he expresses himself.

Mr LEIGH — It is interesting that in all sorts of areas, including City Link, the government is claiming there is nothing it can do: 'Look, we have washed our hands of it. It is the Kennett government's fault. It is everybody else's fault. We can't make any decisions four and a half months later.' You can make decisions — —

Mr Haermeyer — Do you think — —

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! I have reminded the honourable member for Mordialloc once.

Mr LEIGH — You can object all the time, that is fine!

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! I remind the honourable member for Mordialloc that when the Chair is speaking it is considered polite and respectful for members to cease interjecting. I once again remind the honourable member that he is not allowed to refer to a member as 'you' or point at members across the chamber in that rude way.

Mr LEIGH — Madam Deputy Speaker, perhaps you could ask the Minister for Police and Emergency Services if he wishes to interject. Perhaps it is a two-way street in this instance.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! I ask the honourable member for Mordialloc to address his comments to the bill.

Mr LEIGH — I will do my best. The government obviously has an opportunity to negotiate with City Link in a number of ways to do a number of things. Does this legislation really do a lot? I have spoken with various people about it, and the answer is that it does not. For example, Transurban says it is an infringement on its company because it can prove that

99.9 per cent of the time its records are correct. Despite that, it can still be fined between \$2000 and \$10 000, unlike any other company. That is something about which Transurban can argue with the government.

I concede that the zones are a problem, but it is interesting that the government is now correcting the problem even though it does not have to. If the whole roadway were open and someone had a pass to use the western section but chose to use the southern section, under the current legislation that person would not be fined. The government is now agreeing with Transurban — I do not necessarily disagree, but it is an interesting approach by the government. The government now agrees with Transurban that if a person buys a pass for the western section but uses the southern section that person should be booked. Admittedly, there is a flaw in the act and the government is now correcting that, for which I commend it because it is a good thing. I wonder what many members of the Labor Party will be quietly saying about the government's action, but that is not my problem.

I am not convinced that the PERIN court is the best way to go because the government is just trying to get its hands on the money. The way this story has been portrayed so far on many programs — I have listened to the ABC — would make one think that City Link was getting the \$10 million, \$15 million or \$20 million. The fact is that City Link is not getting that money — the government is. City Link will get the \$7 plus an administrative charge; the rest of the money will go to the Bracks government. In future the government will get the money that is collected in fines from anybody who is booked in the honourable member for Essendon's electorate.

The government is now trying to hide the facts. If it can arrange to have on-the-spot fines fewer people will object. The net result will be that if anybody ever tries to find out how much money is collected each year in fines — whether it be \$5 million, \$6 million, \$10 million or \$20 million — it will be a lot harder to do so. That is one of the things the government has done in its typical devious way to hide the facts. It also wants the money in advance.

Ms Duncan interjected.

Mr LEIGH — The honourable member for Gisborne thinks it is humorous. I am sure her constituents will think it is humorous too.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr LEIGH — It is very interesting from that point of view. People have to understand something about City Link. The Minister for State and Regional Development has said a lot about how detrimental City Link will be to the residents, and so on. In 1995 when he was the Leader of the Opposition, the minister is reported in *Hansard* as saying:

... the project is a dud! It is a total dud that will steal money from Victorian families. It is extravagant, oversized and unnecessary ...

I do not think it is a dud. I think that in the end when they get it working it will be seen as a major engineering feat. The point is that the government has a problem.

The government has to decide where it will get the money to enable it to do a range of things. The previous Labor government took money from funds allocated for roads and put it into public transport. Will the government do that again? People in Geelong are seeking an eastern ring bypass that will cost in excess of \$400 million; and people in the eastern suburbs are requesting various options, one at a cost of \$363 million — a figure underestimated by up to \$100 million. The Scoresby freeway is another issue, if the Labor government has a serious interest in it. What about rail funding arrangements? The issue of tolls will not go away but will come back to haunt the government.

Members of the Geelong council — some of them Australian Labor Party members — say there are two ways to get the eastern bypass built: the first is through an indirect tax, similar to that proposed by the Moonee Valley council — an increase of 0.8 per cent in the price of petrol. The opposition would not support that tax under any set of circumstances.

Mr Nardella interjected.

Mr LEIGH — Without a shadow of doubt the opposition would not support an increase in petrol taxes. However, the government will be faced with that option in Geelong: when the Geelong road is extended motorists will be stuck with a set of traffic lights. They will go down a terrific freeway, then hit Geelong and the traffic lights. What then? If a tanker goes over the wrong way the whole sector of Geelong will be in gridlock.

The government is under pressure to construct the eastern bypass or the western bypass. How does it decide? The cost of each one is over \$400 million.

I have spoken to a number of Geelong residents, including Labor Party councillors, at least one of whom supports tolls — imagine Labor Party councillors supporting tolls!

Mr Nardella interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! the Honourable member for Melton will have the call later if he wishes to contribute.

Mr LEIGH — I refrained from using the word ‘you’ on that occasion.

The Labor government is faced with some difficult issues. As well as the people from Geelong and the eastern suburbs, Moonee Valley residents are saying they want to buy back the Tullamarine Freeway. The other day the Moonee Valley mayor held a press conference, and the previous day the Minister for Transport was there having discussions, which from what I hear were not pleasant. The residents want a 0.8 per cent levy put on the Tullamarine section of the freeway to buy it back.

What will the government do? Will it say to the eastern suburbs people, ‘Congratulations; here is your road. No, we are not going to look after you over here’? The government has a problem because it has gone too far and made too many wild promises. This is but the beginning of a problem for the government, and it knows it.

The opposition does not oppose the legislation, but aspects of it need to be clarified. Some people in the business community will look at the bill and say, ‘On one hand you want someone to invest \$2.3 billion and create thousands of jobs in the state, and on the other hand you make it more difficult for them’.

There are serious issues about some aspects of past arrangements concerning City Link. Members of the Labor Party run around crowing that because they are in government they have changed the arrangements — but they are not the facts.

What was always going to drive the project and what will continue to drive it in future is that if City Link personnel want people to be on their roads they must make sure they charge a price that enables people to use them. If they do not, people will avoid the roads, and that will cost City Link money and have a big impact on its internal arrangements.

City Link personnel must also correctly structure the day passes and e-tags. I have an e-tag that was not bought out of a parliamentary account or my electorate

allowance. I paid for the e-tag, and I do not have a problem with that. The City Link project has had a major impact on helping people move across the city and preventing gridlock.

The Burnley Tunnel is not under 5 metres of water, as the Minister for Transport is trying to make out, but there is water in the tunnel and that problem must be fixed. As any engineer will tell you, if an engineering problem exists there is always a solution. The problem will be solved, and obviously the solution will involve time and money.

If the project had been a government project, as was the case with such projects in days gone by, the government would have to bear the costs. The government does not bear the costs with this project. If there is a problem between Transurban and City Link, that is a battle between those parties, not a battle with the state.

Recently the Minister for Transport allegedly signed off on the risk to the state for the southern section, as the former Minister for Planning and Local Government, Mr Maclellan, did for the western link, so clearly the state is out of the picture. Ultimately the state is not at risk for the loss of hundreds of millions of dollars. If the state were the bearer of the costs, in the end taxpayers would be significantly disadvantaged.

The sad thing about the situation is that the government has not learnt to act like a government. Whether it was elected because of three individuals who wished to trade their secrets or for some other reason, the former opposition now sits on the government side of the chamber. The net result is that it must now act like a government and ensure that the project is completed with a minimum of fuss and that Victorian motorists are assisted.

I point out to Labor members who criticise the project that if it does nothing more than get trucks off major roads it will be a significant benefit to Victoria. The business community will attest that one reason for the western suburbs having a march on the south-eastern suburbs is spending on road infrastructure.

Mr Haermeyer interjected.

Mr LEIGH — So, you are planning tollways for the south-east, are you?

Mr Haermeyer interjected.

Mr LEIGH — With the greatest respect, Madam Deputy Speaker, it is not worth answering a suggestion from a clown. If the minister had ever owned a business

he might have some vague understanding of what happens in business.

One of the biggest costs to business is transport, and if transport costs can be reduced particular areas become more attractive for people wishing to run businesses. Clearly City Link is of considerable benefit to the business community and will assist the movement of cargo around Victoria. If goods are moved more quickly with fewer slowdowns and less wear and tear on trucks, transport costs are significantly reduced. The cost of the toll is less than the cost of operating more trucks.

At a recent breakfast the Minister for Transport admitted that City Link will be a success. The minister said 600 000 e-tags will be sold. If 600 000 e-tags are sold, the project is beginning to be successful.

Inside the chip in the e-tag is a component that measures what is called 'real-time' travel. For example, an organisation such as Coles Myer that has large quantities of goods being delivered — at any one time a third of the stock is on the road — can change the delivery destinations if a particular road is busy and send the stock to other areas, thus saving time. A couple of major companies around Victoria are already operating under real-time arrangements.

As the city becomes busier and the transportation of goods becomes a more significant issue the government must seriously look at how it will fund infrastructure. If the government is against tolls, is it against increasing the petrol levy? Does the Minister for Transport believe there should be a 0.8 per cent increase in petrol levies to support a government buy-back of the Tullamarine Freeway? The minister does not respond — silence is golden. Does the minister support it? A good many government backbenchers do, and some of them have been saying that they want to buy it back. The opposition has evidence of one or two government members saying that. Is the government proposing to increase the petrol levy imposed on every motorist in Victoria so it can satisfy Moonee Valley motorists?

An honourable member interjected.

Mr LEIGH — Does the honourable member for Essendon support the Moonee Valley council's proposal?

Mr Nardella — What do you support?

Mr LEIGH — The government must make the decision. I believe many backbenchers from the same faction as the honourable member for Melton are saying — —

An honourable member interjected.

Mr LEIGH — I knew well in advance. There are leaks everywhere. The faction the honourable member for Melton belongs to is running around saying it wants to buy the freeway back. There are petitions about buying it back. I have heard western suburbs people say, ‘They are looking after the eastern suburbs with \$300 million. What about us, the workers?’. What does the Minister for Police and Emergency Services say? Nothing. Probably he does not know, but it is more likely — —

Mr Nardella — He is not the Minister for Transport.

Mr LEIGH — The Minister for Police and Emergency Services does not live in the area, so it does not matter that much to him. Other honourable members, such as the honourable member for Gisborne, have made many promises, and they will have to live up to those promises in the future.

The government is not sending a good signal to the business community. The *Australian Financial Review* and other newspapers have referred to Victoria as the State of Chaos and said that the business sector is declining. Most current arrangements creating jobs are former coalition projects that are finishing off. If the government wants to attract new business it will have to ensure that the transport issue is given a high priority. It is important for Victoria to have good, competent government, and this government is starting to look a bit shoddy.

The opposition does not oppose the bill because it cleans up certain aspects of the City Link project. Some Labor members thought they would be able to use the whole link on one pass but have now found out that the government has agreed to do the right thing and ensure that zonal passes are used, so that motorists caught travelling in the wrong section will be booked.

The current government has now been dragged into the process, as the former government was dragged into it. As I said at the outset, the whole proposal was not a coalition government proposal — and I would be happy to provide a copy of the press release to any member who wants it.

Members of this government have holier-than-thou attitudes about what they think they will and will not do and about their opposition to tolls. However, I remind the honourable member for Gisborne, who may not have been aware of the situation, that it was her party that proposed the whole arrangement. It was the former Kirner government that issued the tender documents for

the construction of the Domain Tunnel and Western Bypass.

The Kennett government carried out the proposal, but did not complete it in totality. Perhaps it could have done some things better, but we are all human and errors are made in all — —

Mr Nardella interjected.

Mr LEIGH — When the honourable member for Melton becomes perfect he should open his mouth about it. The fact is that all governments make mistakes, and the longer this government lives, the more mistakes it will make.

Although the opposition does not oppose the legislation, the hypocrisy of the Labor Party is starting to be borne out. The Labor government has been dragged into the process. It now supports the cleaning up of City Link and is making it easier for the operator to collect the fines.

I will repeat at the end of my speech what I said at the beginning: the money does not go to City Link; it goes to the state. The Moonee Valley residents who say that the buyback, or whatever, is \$35 million a year should remember that the Minister for Transport is collecting between \$15 million and \$20 million in fines. The opposition will be interested to see what he does with the money. As I said, the opposition does not oppose the legislation.

Mr CARLI (Coburg) — The Melbourne City Link (Amendment) Bill introduces a small but important amendment to the legislation.

This is the first time I have spoken in favour of a City Link bill of any type. I do so now because the bill represents a breakthrough for City Link users, including my constituents, who have lost the free use of the Tullamarine Freeway. Although the breakthrough is not all that I had hoped for, it is a demonstration of this government’s commitment to its election promise that it will ensure that Transurban is honest and correct with its fines and use of data. More importantly, Transurban is considering new products that will make it cheaper for motorists who use the Tullamarine Freeway so that people will no longer have to spend a flat fee of \$7 for a day but will be able to use a considerably cheaper Tulla pass.

Firstly, I shall comment on the contribution of the honourable member for Mordialloc, who created a certain level of confusion during his speech. On many occasions the honourable member seemed to suggest that the bill will make it easier for City Link to collect

fees. That is a misreading of the proposed legislation. The bill is not about that; it is about using the PERIN Court to deal with on-the-spot fines and infringement notices involving Transurban if the company does not do all it is supposed to do and goes against the provisions of the legislation.

That is an important part of the bill. The bill is in favour of the consumer, the motorist. The government made an election promise that it would make the City Link operator honest and accountable. That is what the bill will do. It has been introduced because of Labor's election commitment. The honourable member for Mordialloc suggested that the legislation was prepared by the previous government. That is not true. The legislation comes directly from an election commitment by this government and demonstrates the commitment it has to consumers and to the people who live close to the affected freeways.

The government will continue to have problems with City Link, but at least there has been a breakthrough. For the first time legislation has been introduced that will redirect power away from Transurban in favour of the consumer. I support the bill, which results from an election commitment by the Labor Party. The bill is not about collecting more fines from City Link users. The fines will apply to Transurban, which will have to pay if it infringes certain conditions.

For the benefit of the house I will detail some of the on-the-spot fines associated with Transurban. The provisions are an important aspect of the bill and will make the whole system fairer than it otherwise would have been. Fines will be imposed in the form of on-the-spot fines or infringement notices if Transurban utilises private information in a detrimental way. The information it gets from transponders can be used for tolling purposes, for purposes to which people have consented, and for serious criminal investigations — and that is it. That means no marketing, no selling off lists to private agencies, and no conducting private work for research companies on traffic or on individuals using the City Link.

It also means that people's privacy is protected. As honourable members know, with new technology and the power of computers in analysing information City Link is a potential major infringement on individuals' rights to privacy. The bill will ensure that their interests and rights to privacy are protected. That is a major plus.

In the past Labor has opposed City Link bills. It has pointed out that a significant amount of information could be found about individuals, that such information could be used against them, and that they could be

identified and followed. That will not happen with this bill because the use of information will be limited.

Another important issue relates to the failure of the operator to keep proper records. There is something peculiar about the principal act. Under that act, in cases where there is some conflict about a fine, Transurban can provide records or certificates in court as proof that such people have been toll evaders. Under the principal act such documents will constitute proof that such persons are evaders. If Transurban is to have that much power, it is incumbent on the state to ensure that such information be accurate. That is what the government is demanding from Transurban. It is a big ask, but the company has considered the issue and has said it does not find the provision too onerous.

It should be understood that Transurban has enormous authority to fine individuals. Equally, the state now has the power to ensure that individuals are not fined in any cases in which proper records have not been kept. Inspectors will ensure that records are kept. Currently the only people who can fine or take Transurban to court are police. However, under this bill independent inspectors authorised by the minister will ensure that record keeping is accurate and that information is truthful. Consequently, people trying to fight Transurban in court will not be confronted with the operator producing documents and saying, 'This is the proof, we have a certificate to show that we are right', without there being a sense that its record keeping is 100 per cent accurate. With this bill it will be 100 per cent honest, because there will be a legislative stick and on-the-spot fines in cases involving transgressions.

The potential for the imposition of on-the-spot fines also arises when inspectors of tolling records are stopped from carrying out their inspections. If Transurban is to have the right to impose fines, independent inspectors must be given the complete liberty to ensure that the records are accurate. If Transurban prevents those individuals from inspecting the tolling records or examining the record-keeping methodology or anything else to do with tolling, on-the-spot fines can be issued.

That certainly represents an improvement for City Link users, who can be confident that unless they are criminals their privacy will not be infringed. People now know that laws will be put in place to protect their right to privacy. They know that independent inspectors will have considerable powers to inspect and to impose infringement notices if anything is done to hinder their inspections.

Victorians can be confident that when Transurban sends people notices for having evaded its tolls — its system is coherent and accurate — infringement notices and on-the-spot fines will not be used to assist Transurban to deal with the toll evaders. Instead, they will be used to ensure that in certain cases Victoria has the ability to use a stick against Transurban. Notices will not be issued at random; they will be used only at appropriate times. Transurban will have the ability to challenge and dispute any allegations in court if it feels it has been hard done by.

Issues involving fine evasions and infringement notices against Transurban are important given that, when it is fully functional, the tolling system will be expected to cope with 700 000 transactions a day. The government wants to ensure that the system will run effectively. The use of infringement notices, which will be issued only in clear-cut cases of a failure to maintain adequate standards, will be important for added protection. I strongly support that element of the bill. It is a major improvement and makes for a fairer system.

The other part of the bill which has particular importance for my electorate and which is a concession the government has been able to obtain from Transurban deals with the Tulla pass. It is hoped that the pass is the first of a series of similar products. The Tulla pass does not compensate for the fact that access to the Tullamarine Freeway has been taken away from the people who historically have used it without having to pay tolls. The pass does not lessen the problems and costs associated with traffic coming off the freeway, particularly for residents in the Coburg and Pascoe Vale areas.

The Tulla pass is a cheap day pass for infrequent users — and many people in my electorate are and will be infrequent users. It means that instead of having to pay a flat fee of \$7 for a day pass for the entire City Link, which would have been the case if the government had not obtained the concession from Transurban, Victorians will now have access to a \$2.50 pass for the Tullamarine Freeway. It is not quite as good as getting back their free road, but the concession the Minister for Transport negotiated with Transurban is a better deal for the occasional users of City Link. It recognises that the government cannot reverse what has happened with City Link. The government cannot suddenly say that there will be no tolls. However, it will ensure that the users of the Tullamarine Freeway get the best possible deal. It will also take every opportunity to get a better deal for local residents by improving the amenity of the areas around the freeway.

In the past few weeks Bell Street, which is in my electorate, has been chock-a-block with cars coming off the freeway. I understand the same is true for Mount Alexander Road. The government has still not found a way to compensate residents in the areas affected by increased traffic. Nevertheless, the government is committed to ensuring that Victorians get a better deal. The Tulla pass is a breakthrough. It is a fairer deal for local motorists, and it is also a fairer deal for country people. At the moment the City Link toll acts as an entry fee to the city for people coming from the northern regions of the state, particularly those coming along the Calder Freeway from places such as Bendigo. The government has not been able to totally get rid of the toll, but it certainly has improved the situation.

The government is also looking at other problems, the extent of which have become evident since the start of tolling. I have in front of me an article published in the *Age* of 26 January, in which an English tourist wrote about his disappointment with the use of the expression 'toll cheats'. Honourable members may recall the newspaper stories published on the days when tolling commenced. There was a lot of talk about toll cheats, toll evaders and so on. The tourist in question, who was visiting Victoria during the summer season, was diverted from his intended route and ended up having to use the Tullamarine Freeway. He tried to find somewhere to pay but was unable to do so. After he went home he talked to some locals, who found an old copy of the *Age* that contained information on Transurban. He found out that it was possible to purchase an electronic ticket over the phone, which he did.

In the article he wrote about the time that took and the confusion it created. He described how the technology was not user friendly, certainly for those coming to Melbourne from, for example, Mildura or overseas, for whom the Tullamarine Freeway is the principal route into the city.

Neither the Tulla pass nor the day pass is readily available to users; you cannot walk into any post office and obtain one. There is a need to make the passes more readily available, particularly the cheaper passes that the government is keen to introduce.

An article by a Warragul man who expects to have to pay a fine was published in a recent edition of the *Warragul-Drouin Gazette*. He went to the local post office to obtain a pass, which he found was unavailable. Because he did not have a credit card he could not pay over the telephone. His is a further example of someone who, even though he wanted to pay and sought the means to pay, will probably be fined due to the lack of

available options. The unavailability of passes and the different tolling rates for various vehicles are creating confusion and should be examined.

My electors are some of the first to try out the new system, and they are having to deal with the practical problems associated with tolls and passes. The government is committed to sorting out those problems through the bill and, by negotiating with Transurban, to ensuring a better deal for consumers.

The goodwill is there. Transurban has made several changes, but I do not believe it all depends on market forces, as claimed by the honourable member for Mordialloc. It is not simply about the market, it is also about the costs to and the amenity of local residents. The government has a legitimate role to play in endeavouring to provide a better deal for people.

The bill is a creditable attempt to improve the situation. City Link is a legacy of the former government that has created considerable problems in my electorate, which is one of the hardest hit. The residents must pay tolls on frequently used roads while suffering the unfortunate situation of having traffic spill out of Bell Street onto local streets. The locals have not been compensated for those problems. As their representative I will continue to ensure that they receive a better deal. Equally, the cities of Moreland and Moonee Valley are trying to achieve the best possible outcomes given both the circumstances and the detrimental effects on the local amenity of the City Link project.

Mr SPRY (Bellarine) — Although the opposition is not opposed to the Melbourne City Link (Amendment) Bill it agrees with the Royal Automobile Club of Victoria that the minister has more important issues to deal with than fiddling with the edges of City Link.

The honourable member for Coburg admitted that the bill is designed to honour the government's election commitment to finetune the City Link project. The bill flies in the face of the rhetoric the Labor Party carried on with in the lead-up to the election and its strident opposition to the City Link concept when it was on this side of the house, when it completely ignored the fact that the city was gridlocked and something had to be done.

It is interesting to reflect on the comments of the honourable member for Mordialloc, who said that when the Labor Party was in power in the early 1990s the then transport minister, Jim Kennan, flagged his support for a concept such as City Link even if it were a tollway. Having driven the state to the edge of bankruptcy, the then Labor government had to embrace

the concept of charging tolls as part of an attempt to address the city's gridlock.

Strident opposition to the City Link culminated in the farcical and irresponsible publicity stunt conducted by the current Minister for Transport, who trespassed on the western link in an effort to demonstrate that it could be used even though it had not been opened.

To highlight the Labor Party's opposition to the original bill I refer to the extraordinary comments made by the then honourable member for Thomastown during the 1995 debate on the Melbourne City Link Bill. At page 1358 of *Hansard* of 21 November 1995 the honourable member for Thomastown is reported as having said:

... the Transurban tollway is fundamentally flawed. It will not work because BOOT schemes do not work ... The scheme will not work because of the massive aversion to or avoidance of tolls that Victoria historically has shown.

I believe all honourable members would agree that when the coalition came to power in 1992 it recognised that something had to be done to bust the city's gridlock. It had the courage to embrace ways of financing that sort of infrastructure other than through government funding. The innovative program the City Link Authority embarked on and the mechanisms by which it attracted investment and introduced competition into the tendering for the whole program were extraordinarily good.

There is no doubt in my mind and the minds of all thinking Victorians that City Link will confer tremendous benefits on all Victorians and particularly on Melburnians when the system becomes fully operational. When that happens Victorians will recognise even more readily than they do now the tremendous advantages of having that system of roads bypassing the centre of the city. They will take enormous pride in one of the greatest and most significant engineering feats of inner-city infrastructure of our time.

The builders and the authorities have had to overcome many challenges, but despite the problems, including the tunnelling problems referred to by the honourable member for Mordialloc and others, the whole project has been built with minimal disruption.

Several recent publications have outlined the benefits of City Link. One of them, a promotional pamphlet produced for distribution by the *Herald Sun*, gives a summary of the benefits of City Link. Mr Kim Edwards, the managing director of Transurban, is reported in the pamphlet as saying that the traffic

congestion around the city costs the state \$5 million a day. He goes on to say:

City Link will also have a positive impact on the Victorian economy, delivering savings to business of around \$265 million a year as a result of reduced travel times and vehicle operating costs, fewer accidents and more efficient movement of goods. It has been estimated these savings will deliver a permanent increase in gross state product of about \$382 million a year.

The enormous benefits City Link will confer on this state are quite clear, and they will eventually translate into greater prosperity for the state, quite apart from the number of jobs created by the project, as mentioned by the honourable member for Mordialloc.

Some of the fears held by Melburnians and by people in my electorate are addressed by the questions and answers in the publication. An example is:

Why do we need City Link?

The answer offered is that we need it to alleviate Melbourne's chronic traffic problems.

Is there another project like City Link in Australia?

The answer is that City Link:

... is the first fully electronic toll road in Australia, and this country's largest urban infrastructure project. There are 18 entry and exit points along the length of City Link ...

What volume of traffic will City Link remove from suburban streets?

By 2001, City Link will take an estimated 80 000 trips a day out of suburban and city streets.

The concerns expressed by the honourable member for Coburg are addressed in those figures.

What will be the maximum speed on City Link?

Most of the link will have a maximum speed of 100 kilometres an hour. The two tunnels will have a maximum speed limit of 80 kilometres an hour.

Are there any safety concerns about City Link?

Well, of course there are. However, the Transport Accident Commission is quoted as saying:

... freeways are seven times safer than arterial roads. Vicroads estimates that City Link will prevent about 150 serious accidents each year.

That is a very significant safety issue.

The publication goes on to deal with whether there will be signs telling people when they are about to enter the City Link infrastructure project. It says:

There will be prominent signs at 5 kilometre, 2 kilometre and 1 kilometre intervals before each entry point ...

And as Melburnians have seen there are signs there already.

How long will the tolls remain on City Link?

That was, of course, one of the fundamental issues when the whole concept was first being considered and developed. The answer is:

Transurban will own and operate City Link for 34 years, after which ownership will transfer to the state government at no cost ...

In the long term, therefore, the benefits of City Link will transfer entirely to the state.

As the honourable member for Mordialloc said, amendments under the contracts entered into by the previous government allow Transurban toll payers to use City Link and the Exhibition Street extension. It is apparent, despite the strident opposition to which I referred earlier, that the current government recognises the good work of the previous government.

The Melbourne City Link (Amendment) Bill initiates only minor changes concerning toll evasion and record keeping. Only one change will have an effect on motorists, the introduction of day passes for specific sections of the tollway. That change is commendable.

I point out that the sorts of changes needed for Transurban to develop into a more user-friendly system and to diversify its product do not have to be driven by government or legislation. Presumably Transurban does not wish to drive people away from the system. Like any other service provider it tries to encourage more people to use its system. In due course it will develop better products that are more user friendly and the system will be used with far more enthusiasm. Those changes will come about more easily than would be possible if they had to be driven by legislation.

The bill enables infringement notices against Transurban to be issued if it fails to maintain accurate records of City Link usage. For the City Link system to be effective Transurban would have needed to develop those sorts of modifications anyway; it was not necessary to force them by legislation. As I said earlier, I do not object to the tone of the legislation. It is appropriate, although not absolutely necessary.

The intention of the bill is to strengthen and clarify certain arrangements. It can be inferred from the introduction of the bill that the government agrees with what was happening with the project, but believes that in some instances the initiatives embodied in the initial

Melbourne City Link Act need to be strengthened and clarified.

In conclusion, I make the point that normal market forces will encourage Transurban to develop an increasingly diverse product, including better point-of-sale access, off-peak passes and the Tulla pass, which was mentioned by the honourable member for Coburg. I expect country users will be specifically targeted, because they are not as used to the concept of City Link as urban dwellers are. In my area of Geelong and the Bellarine Peninsula many people are already using City Link and gaining the advantages of the e-tag system. It is not difficult to understand, and I am sure, as with any modern technology, people will use it as a matter of course. People will get used to the payment system so as to avoid being fined.

I refer to one issue raised by the shadow Minister for Transport concerning the government's philosophy on paying for the infrastructure because it could affect the Geelong area. When the three-lane highways to and from Geelong are completed the government will face a dilemma. A huge amount of traffic travels into Geelong and there is a bottleneck in Latrobe Terrace. The City of Greater Geelong recognises that urgent thought must be given to the establishment of a ring-road around Geelong to avoid that bottleneck. Each day something like 20 000 to 30 000 vehicles use that stretch of road, which extends beyond Geelong to the Bellarine Peninsula, the Surf Coast and into the Western District. The City of Greater Geelong favours the solution of an eastern ring-road that would connect Point Lillias to Point Henry and five or six arterial roads leading into the Bellarine Peninsula, Barwon Heads, the Surf Coast and beyond. I have a great deal of sympathy for that view. In fact, I espoused that view in my maiden speech in 1992.

The City of Greater Geelong also believes consideration should be given to extending the western part of the proposed ring-road at least as far as the Midland Highway and eventually the Hamilton Highway. There is also much merit in those arguments. Above all, the eastern ring-road, which is estimated to cost about \$300 million to \$400 million — it has not been clearly defined yet — has to be seriously considered. When that consideration takes place the question of how to finance the necessary construction will also have to be dealt with. The City Link project has shown one way, but there are many possible methods. Whether the Labor Party will abide by its philosophy and finance such a project from the public purse or whether it will see the light and understand that the user-pays philosophy embodied in City Link might

also be extended to other projects such as the eastern ring-road for Geelong remains to be seen.

Finally, I draw the attention of the house to the fact that the Minister for Transport has the ability to negotiate with Transurban to bring about changes that will benefit particular user groups. The honourable member for Coburg referred to the Tulla pass, which is a commendable initiative put forward by the minister. The minister likes to imply that he was instrumental in bringing about that innovation.

I wrote to the minister some time ago about an issue raised by a constituent of mine, a Mr Wilkinson of St Leonards. Mr Wilkinson talked to me about the City Link classifications of light commercial vehicles. He said he was using a Holden Rodeo for domestic purposes. Along with other light commercial vehicles, the Holden Rodeo comes under a City Link category that attracts a higher toll than domestic vehicles. In addressing that issue the minister said that the government would continue to publicly push Transurban to improve its products and services.

I make a final plea to the minister to vigorously pursue the issue, which affects many motorists throughout Victoria. That would be to the advantage of light commercial vehicle users like Mr Wilkinson from St Leonards and the many others who are beset by the problem. I would be grateful if the minister would take the issue up with Transurban to try to get an appropriate response.

Ms ALLAN (Bendigo East) — I am pleased to speak on the Melbourne City Link (Amendment) Bill. Although the bill proposes only small amendments to the act, as has been mentioned, it is important that motorists across Victoria keep reminding themselves that they are faced with a tolling structure on City Link for the next 34 years. The act severely disadvantages country motorists, and I will seize every opportunity that arises to speak on the disadvantages that motorists in my electorate experience as a result of City Link.

The region the honourable member for Bellarine represents is not the worst affected by the tolling system. He sits over there wondering why many government members have problems with the difficulties City Link is imposing on motorists in their electorates. That is because motorists on the Geelong freeway, the main road into Melbourne from his electorate, are not faced with having to pay a toll just to drive into their capital city. Most motorists from central Victoria use the Calder Highway, which links with the Tullamarine Freeway, to enter their capital city of Melbourne. Lo and behold, they are soon faced with the

first tolling gantry on the Tullamarine Freeway, just after the Bell Street exit. That affects every motorist from central Victoria who travels into Melbourne. Honourable members can hypothesise about the alternative routes, but the majority of motorists from central Victoria and northern Victoria use the Tullamarine Freeway to enter Melbourne.

I am not surprised that the honourable member for Bellarine does not understand how the toll impacts on motorists in central Victoria in particular. During the election campaign many angry constituents talked to me about City Link. They could not understand why people in central Victoria were being singled out. The former government decided that the people who lived along the Calder Highway would pay for a road they had been travelling down for 20 years. Local people saw it as the privatisation of their freeway. I could talk all night about the impact of the former government's privatisation program, because it continues to have extreme ramifications for my electorate.

City Link and the former government were taken aback by the hostility many people in central Victoria felt towards the toll. It has taken the Bracks Labor government to introduce important changes that will make the tolling structure fairer for country motorists. On 15 December the Minister for Transport announced a number of initiatives, including the Tulla pass, which is a \$2.50 Tullamarine Freeway day pass that is specifically designed for motorists who live in my electorate or along the Calder corridor and who go through only one toll gantry to get into Melbourne. Before that change, which is now enshrined in the bill, the people of Bendigo East had to pay \$7 to go through just one toll gate to travel into Melbourne along a road they had been travelling down freely for years — and a road they had paid for through their petrol taxes!

A \$3.50 day pass was also introduced, which provides for unlimited travel on the western link. That is also important because motorists were being charged \$7 to travel on the western link even though the charge was intended to apply to motorists travelling on the entire City Link tollway.

The government has also made the day passes more flexible, with a 24-hour pass that is available during the week and a weekend day pass that applies from midnight Friday through to midday Sunday. They are also important changes. During the election campaign Labor candidates flagged their intention to lobby Transurban for a fairer deal for all motorists, and country motorists in particular.

Victorians should remember that they will be stuck with this tolling system for the next 34 years. I am pleased to see the local media is picking up on that. An editorial in the *Bendigo Advertiser* of 25 January said the following about motorists having to pay to enter Melbourne:

The new Labor state government cannot overlay any sanity on this issue because the deal was all bundled up in the contractual arrangements between Transurban and the Kennett state government. It just doesn't seem right.

It is not right that motorists in my electorate are being sluggish with an unfair and discriminatory tax.

It was important that Labor lobbied Transurban as soon as it came to government. Various Labor members, particularly those who campaigned hard on the issue in their electorates, spoke to Transurban and tried to strike a fairer deal for country motorists. The bill goes some way towards achieving that.

The house has heard that the bill will protect City Link users from billing errors, tighten up Transurban's record keeping and enshrine in legislation the introduction by the Bracks government of cheaper toll options for country motorists — and I am expanding on the third component.

The introduction of tolls in country Victoria was nothing less than a shambles. The information provided to country motorists on how to purchase e-tags and how the e-tag system worked was poor. Trying to communicate with people through one or two stores in the local shopping centre is not adequate given that the system will affect them for 34 years.

Transurban found that in country Victoria fewer motorists than expected had purchased e-tags, which led to the problems that arose with the day pass tolling system. The day pass and Tulla pass system was meant to cover only motorists without e-tags and occasional users. I held out for as long as possible, but when I had to purchase a day pass at the Bulla Road service centre I noted with interest that only a temporary structure had been set up. That fact, together with the comments made by Transurban as reported in the media that it was surprised by both the number of motorists who did not have e-tags and the amount of interest in day passes, indicated that it was not expecting the low take-up of e-tags.

That has occurred because the e-tag system does not make sense to country motorists — and it is expensive. My comments may not be relevant to the bill, but under the tolling structure motorists have to spend a minimum of \$25 on tolls in any calendar year, and they are

charged \$3.50 for the monthly accounts that are sent to their homes. Country people feel that all those in-built charges are incredibly unfair.

I am really pleased that the proposed legislation enables the introduction of the Tulla pass. Clause 5 deals with registration for specified toll zones, which will allow country motorists to travel to Melbourne via the Tullamarine toll gate by purchasing a \$2.50 day pass.

Many motorists in my electorate continue to avoid the tolls on the Tullamarine Freeway. I have sympathy for the councils located alongside the Tullamarine Freeway that have their suburban roads choked with motorists avoiding the Tullamarine Freeway. It is very easy to take an alternative route in and out of Melbourne instead of paying \$1, or whatever it is, every time one goes through a toll gate on the Tullamarine Freeway or \$2.50 for a Tulla pass to travel through the same toll gate. The bill has many other very important components dealing with problems involving toll prosecutions, but for me the Tulla pass is a practical solution that will help ease the burden for country motorists, particularly those in my electorate of Bendigo East.

I remind honourable members that the Bracks Labor government, the Minister for Transport, and members of Parliament, such as the honourable members for Bendigo West, Gisborne, Tullamarine, Coburg, Essendon, myself and many others, lobbied Transurban very hard to get the company to recognise how unfair the original tolling system was.

An honourable member interjected.

Ms ALLAN — I am sure the honourable member for Pascoe Vale lobbied equally hard. My knowledge of some of those outer suburbs is poor. We lobbied Transurban very hard. We tried to lobby the former government but, surprise, surprise, it did not listen to us, so we had to try to talk to Transurban. I am pleased that the negotiations with the Minister for Transport and Transurban resulted in the practical solution of the Tulla pass for country motorists.

I have one gripe in particular about the system — I wish Transurban would make more accessible the day passes designed for country motorists. One article in the *Herald Sun* reported that Shell service stations would start selling toll passes. Previously, day passes and the Tulla pass could be bought only over the telephone or through Australia Post.

Many people contacted my office after the tolls were introduced on 3 January because they suddenly realised they had to purchase day passes or Tulla passes and that

they were not available in country Victoria outside business hours. They could be bought only from Australia Post during the week and on Saturday mornings in some places. If a person did not have a credit card — and let's face it, not everyone does — a day pass could not be purchased over the telephone. That led to many country Victorians running the risk of being fined for not having passes. I understand that during the initial tolling period fines were waived by Transurban, but people had to run the risk of being fined because they could not purchase day passes or Tulla passes over the telephone.

Many people in my electorate were very angry because they had heard through the media that the Bracks government had made practical changes to the tolling structure and had introduced a new system, including the Tulla pass, which would be a fairer and cheaper alternative for them. Despite that, they could not readily purchase the Tulla pass through outlets in Bendigo. As I said, if a person does not have a credit card it is virtually impossible to purchase a pass outside business hours. It is a shame, particularly considering that the opening of the toll system was delayed for many months. The original date for the commencement of the toll system was 26 April 1999, and 3 January 2000 was a long time after that. One would have thought that during the intervening period a system could have been put in place that would have ensured that the relevant and necessary products were easily available to country motorists. It should have been simple and straightforward to purchase a day pass in country Victoria.

While the changes in the bill and some of the products introduced by Transurban are welcome, the availability of day passes and Tulla passes in country areas should be pursued. They will now be sold through Shell service stations, but not every country area has a Shell service station. There is also a problem caused by people who do not have a credit card attempting to purchase products.

The difficulty for Transurban and the government is that people are still avoiding tolls, and further discussions and negotiations are needed on how the system can be made more fair. If Transurban wants motorists to use the road, it must make the means of travelling on it more readily available to motorists, particularly country motorists.

The issue must be pursued and a better deal achieved. As I said earlier, the issue was important leading up to the last election. Many motorists in the Bendigo and central Victoria areas were frustrated when they tried to talk to members of the former government about the

issue but were shrugged off and told what a great system they would be able to use; that a toll of \$7 is not expensive. For people to travel to Melbourne once or twice a year, \$7 is expensive, particularly when it is for a one-way journey and another payment of \$7 is needed to get out.

The toll also has an impact on tourism in country Victoria. Not every motorist in Melbourne has an e-tag, particularly those who live and work in the same area and do not often travel on the new City Link system. What happens when they want to come to Bendigo for the weekend? They have to pay a toll. They do not have to pay a toll to go to Ballarat or Geelong or the Goulburn Valley, but they do when coming to Bendigo. That is why the tolling system is unfair, and I will continue to pursue the issue in the interests of my electorate. It affects not only traffic going to Melbourne but also traffic leaving Melbourne to go to Bendigo.

In opposition we tried to get information from the former government but were brushed off — not surprisingly! The question of how the tolls would impact on tourism did not seem important to the former government.

The City of Greater Bendigo has similar concerns about the impact of the tolling system. Bendigo is a great city and everyone is encouraged to come and visit it. A great deal of work, time and money goes into promoting the region and attracting tourists. The toll adds another charge for motorists coming to Bendigo.

In conclusion, I am grateful for the opportunity to talk about the issues in more detail. Last year some discussions about City Link and the effects of the tolling system on electorates were held in Parliament. It is interesting to note the diversity of its impact: for example, how it affects the electorate of Coburg as distinct from the electorate of Bendigo East.

The state of Victoria is locked into a contractual arrangement by the former government. Motorists in my electorate have difficulty understanding that they will still be paying tolls for 34 years. Since people will be faced with the system for that period, it must be made fairer and more readily useable, particularly the purchase of day passes and Tulla passes.

Further discussions on the issue with Transurban are welcome. Discussions have been constructive and will continue because motorists in the country must be protected. Not everyone wants an e-tag, and not every country motorist needs an e-tag, so we have to make the system fairer for them, and that is what the bill does: it enshrines in the legislation the commendable

announcements last year about the Tulla pass. I commend the minister on the introduction of the product and I commend the bill to the house.

Mr McIntOSH (Kew) — The bill is a celebration of the single largest infrastructure project seen in Australia, the benefit of which flows to all Victorians. There is no doubt on either side of the house of the importance of the City Link project. The bill and the associated debate is a vindication of the previous government's vision for Victoria, a blueprint that was based on development of all sorts of infrastructure of which the City Link project is the pinnacle.

When one looks at the present government one wonders what its vision for Victoria is and whether it has a blueprint and a plan for this state. The debate is also an opportunity to celebrate the achievements of Transurban.

City Link joins three major freeways — the south-eastern or Monash Freeway, the Tullamarine Freeway and the West Gate Freeway. It provides some 22 kilometres of uninterrupted freeway and is a major city bypass, the only major city bypass in Australia.

Major changes such as the widening of the carriageways on the three freeways have provided a tremendous benefit to road users and others. New freeway access has been provided at Dynon Road, Footscray Road and Exhibition Street. Traffic congestion will be reduced and traffic conditions improved. Travelling time into and around the city will be reduced by 50 per cent once the link is fully open. Another benefit will be travel time certainty, and fuel usage and vehicle maintenance will also be reduced. Transurban estimates that the saving to businesses alone will be in the order of \$250 million a year. Fuel emissions will also be reduced.

Other intangible benefits will flow not so much to users of the link but to nearby residents. Transurban has constructed abatement walls between Brunswick Road and Bell Street that reduce the noise level from 72 decibels to 63 decibels. That is not just a set of figures, noise levels have been halved. In a six-month period accidents in the area between Brunswick Road and Bell Street have been reduced by one-third.

The link infrastructure involved \$2 billion worth of investment, and some 8000 jobs were created during the construction phase. After the construction is completed some 2000 permanent jobs will remain in maintenance, control, supervision, traffic management and other areas of the City Link project. The huge technological advances made not only in the tolling

system but also in traffic management will benefit Victoria and Australia.

The financing of the \$2 billion cost of the project is where the views of the opposition and the present government really come asunder. No-one from the government side got up and said, 'We don't need City Link'. City Link is a great infrastructure project that will improve the lives of all Victorians.

A government has two choices: it can spend \$2 billion of its own funds on constructing the project, which can mean funds for other essential areas such as education, policing and health services are diminished, or it can levy a tax via motor registration or fuel. One can imagine what the Minister for Community Services would say if a tax were introduced to pay for the project. The minister would be bellowing from the rafters. The important thing to remember is that City Link is a great project that has been funded with not one cent of taxpayers' money. The project has been funded by the private sector.

I will tell the Minister for Community Services, through you, Mr Acting Speaker, that the project will become a benchmark for infrastructure projects around Australia. When the government comes to its senses about the Scoresby freeway it will realise that that, too, could be a major project that would benefit the state. The government could fund the project through the private sector.

As one travels along the Western Ring Road one sees the major infrastructure developments there. Every day there seems to be a new storage facility or transport depot. However, government members are a bunch of Luddites who cannot cope with the simple proposition that the market will set its own level. Transurban has 34 years in which to get a return on its capital because of the government licence of this project.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr McINTOSH — It is not slugging motorists. The market will determine its own level.

The honourable member for Bendigo East talked about day passes being available through Shell service stations. She may know something I do not know, but it was recently reported in the press that that is the case. That is a reflection of the fact that the company will be responsive to the market. It is in Transurban's interests to ensure the users of the link and all Victorians are proud of the project and will continue to use it. If it becomes too expensive Victorians will not use City Link.

It is interesting to note that the number of people using the link is growing. People are realising that savings can be made in costs and time, and they are appreciating the consequent benefits that will flow to business. Fewer accidents are occurring. I challenge the honourable member for Springvale to stand up and say it is a bad project that will do nothing for Victoria. It is a great project for Victoria.

The bill tarts up some of the requirements for keeping records imposed on Transurban and the tolling company; that is fair enough. However, the main issue referred to by the honourable member for Bendigo East was the ability to provide flexibility in the day-pass system. If during the election campaign this was such a huge issue for the then opposition and such a huge issue with constituents around Victoria, including road users, it is incredible that it has taken this long to get such a simple bill into the house.

I agree that flexibility in the mechanisms that Transurban and other tolling companies use in providing their services is a good thing, and that flexibility can be demonstrated by way of the day pass. If it is sold through Shell service stations or other outlets, that is well and good. Any mechanisms that allow people flexibility and enable them to get cheap passes that are commensurate with their road use is a good thing.

The bill is a recognition of what a great infrastructure project City Link is.

Ms DUNCAN (Gisborne) — The bill is just another example of the government trying to mitigate against draconian, unequal legislation introduced by the previous government. Yet again legislation has had to be reintroduced — this time to make a 34-year contract workable and equal. I do not understand how honourable members on the other side, particularly those from country electorates, let not only City Link legislation but also other amending legislation that has already been reintroduced go through in the form they were in. I cannot believe they can sit there with smug looks on their faces.

The purpose of the bill is to meet another election commitment by this government — which was that it would introduce heavy fines on toll companies that overcharge motorists or misuse credit cards. In 1995 the previous Kennett government allowed for Transurban to be prosecuted in open court for administrative offences, with a maximum fine of \$10 000. Honourable members would all agree that that is a fairly heavy fine. It is just another instance of a sledgehammer being used to crack a walnut; it required courts to be occupied with

matters that should have been handled in the way other traffic offences are handled — that is, by on-the-spot fines.

The bill will improve the enforcement regime in a number of ways. Firstly, it will strengthen the existing requirement to maintain proper tolling records by setting out in detail Transurban's obligations to have accurate tolling records. Secondly, it will enable the use — a much more appropriate use, in my view — of on-the-spot fines against Transurban in respect of the following three existing toll administration offences.

The first is the misuse of private information. An example of that is sending marketing information to a person who did not consent to the information being used in that way. Increasing examples of that are being seen in society, and it should be addressed and taken seriously. The second offence is the failure to keep proper records. An example is failing to record an account, which could result in an unwarranted evasion infringement notice being issued against a customer. The third offence is the prevention of an inspector of tolling records from carrying out his or her inspection.

In my view the bill introduces a number of important measures to address the problems that exist with the City Link system. Each infringement notice will carry a penalty of \$2000. However, the provision for issuing on-the-spot fines allows some flexibility, in that not every Transurban error will result in an on-the-spot fine. Discretion will be used according to the sensible protocols outlined in the bill. Therefore, on-the-spot fines will provide a less severe and more efficient alternative to prosecution in open court.

I will now address some issues that have been raised by previous speakers. Honourable members would agree that the City Link road system is an amazing engineering feat. We are not here today to debate whether or not that is so. I have many friends who have worked on City Link, so I do not doubt for one moment the benefit it has brought to Victoria in terms of growth in employment and some transport systems around Melbourne. City Link has resulted in growth for Victoria; I am sure no-one doubts that. I look at it every day and think what an amazing feat it is. Therefore, it is entirely missing the point of the bill to continue to talk about the magnificent engineering feat Transurban presents to us.

In his contribution the honourable member for Mordialloc said, 'When people see this working' and 'when people see that working'. Putting aside the positive aspects of the system, what people will see working for the next 34 years — all day every day,

morning and night, 24 hours a day, weekends and public holidays included — is a tax, particularly on casual users of City Link, such as weekend and public holiday users who do not use it every day of the week in their working capacity.

Many of my constituents who travel on the City Link turn off at the Flemington Road exit. It seems to me that it never occurred to anyone that that might be the case, and that day passes were structured to create a disincentive to use them. It is assumed that people will travel the full length of City Link and back again in a day, because that is the only way a day pass makes any economic sense. I do not know how many people from my electorate that would relate to, but I can assure the house that the number of them who use the City Link in that way would not be large and would be far from the majority.

An honourable member interjected.

Ms DUNCAN — I will comment on remarks that have been made in the house. This morning I travelled along the Tullamarine Freeway, when I had the privilege of paying \$1.10 for sitting in a queue for 5 or 10 minutes trying to exit at Flemington Road. A year ago I sat in a queue at the same spot for nothing. The price of petrol has gone up, so I am now paying more for the privilege of sitting in that same exit with two lanes. I would like to know where the improvement is for people who use that part of the Tullamarine Freeway. The barriers have been removed — that has been a bonus — but it is now back to what it was before. I have to pay \$1.10 to sit there and wait to get off the Flemington Road exit while the rest of the traffic appears to move through City Link with no problem.

For the people from my neck of the woods the situation is inequitable. I do not believe in its negotiations with Transurban the former government even considered anybody who lives outside of the Melbourne central business district. The previous Premier believes Melbourne starts and finishes at the end of the tram tracks. The necessity for the introduction of this bill confirms that. Did anyone not think, 'Hey, hang on, if it is \$7 a day it will cost people from Gisborne, Woodend, Kyneton, Bendigo or anywhere up the Calder Highway wanting to stay in Melbourne overnight \$14 to get into the city and back again?'. That is yet another example of this government having to mitigate against the excesses of previous government policy.

The honourable member for Mordialloc suggested that people will not thank the government for introducing Tulla passes. He said the system identifies what part of the City Link people are on, and if they are not on the

appropriate part of the link they have paid for they will be fined. The honourable member suggested that people would not thank the government for that. He said the people who were purchasing Tulla passes — one presumes that he means those people who purchase Tulla passes now and will purchase them in the future — were purchasing them for the purposes of toll evasion, that they intended to use the whole of City Link, and that this government is forcing them to do the right thing.

What an insult to the people in my electorate, in central Victoria, and to the north of the Tullamarine Freeway! It is outrageous that the honourable member suggests that Tulla passes will stop people from evading tolls, and that the only reason the government introduced them is so that people can get off paying for travelling the full length of City Link. I cannot believe the honourable member was the previous transport minister.

Honourable members interjecting.

Ms DUNCAN — That explains a whole lot about the way City Link has been transported!

Honourable members interjecting.

Ms DUNCAN — All opposition members who are now interjecting sat through previous debates and agreed with the lot.

There were no opportunities for members opposite to express alternative views when they were in government. They still do not get it. They cannot see that the Tulla pass is a way of making sure that some of the inequities in the system are addressed. Instead members opposite are suggesting not that the Tulla pass is a fairer pricing structure but that it provides motorists with a way of avoiding having to pay the rest of the tolls even though they use all of City Link. According to the honourable member for Mordialloc there is no merit in introducing a Tulla pass. The opposition still does not understand.

Rather than acknowledging that they got it wrong, that they did not think about the effects City Link would have on city users, country users, weekend users and occasional users and that they did not consider the effects on an entire part of Victoria, and rather than praising the government for sticking to its election promise, members opposite degrade the new system and suggest it is just a rort. The suggestion made by the honourable member for Mordialloc is outrageous.

His comments also suggest that there is no merit at all in the introduction of a Tulla pass. That fails to

acknowledge that the introduction of the pass will benefit users. There are still loads of problems with City Link, and the government continues to lobby Transurban on a number of issues. One issue that is continually brought home to me — I cannot believe that members opposite do not face this in their electorates — is the discrepancy in the classification of commercial vehicles. Many of my electors drive twin-cab utes for personal use. Although those vehicles are not used for commercial purposes, their owners are charged an excessively high rate. The owners of similar vehicles such as four-wheel-drives, which are bigger, heavier and faster, are charged a lesser rate.

Mr Spry — What are you doing about it?

Ms DUNCAN — The government continues to negotiate, which is why we are here. ‘Negotiate’ is a word opposition members are not familiar with. ‘Negotiate’ is what you do when a previous government has locked the state into a 34-year contract that in my view is watertight. The government is keen to negotiate, which is what distinguishes it from its predecessor. The word ‘negotiate’ is a dirty word to the opposition.

Similarly, to members opposite ‘consultation’ is another dirty word and a waste of time. Whenever the government says it will try to resolve a sticky issue by discussing it with the various interest groups involved with a view to negotiating a way forward, the opposition parties bag it. Their view is that negotiating and discussing in an attempt to bring people together to resolve an issue are signs of weakness. We have seen what the Victorian electorate thinks of that style of leadership. That is why we are on this side of the house and the opposition parties are on the other side.

Government Members — Hear, hear!

Ms DUNCAN — I turn to some of the comments I have noted during the debate. As I said, the bill implements a policy commitment that Labor made during the last election campaign to negotiate a better deal for country users of Transurban’s carriageways — and the evidence of that is before us. The government will continue to negotiate with Transurban to try to reach agreement on a better deal for Victorians than the one entered into by the previous government.

Members opposite asked why, if this were such a crucial election issue for those who reside along the Calder Highway, the government has waited so long to introduce the bill? I have been a member of this place for barely 5 minutes, and there have been only five or six sitting weeks in the new Parliament. The bill has

been introduced within a short time frame, especially given that the house is not sitting until 3.00 a.m. or 4.00 a.m. to push legislation through. The government is still trying to keep reasonable hours — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Ms DUNCAN — I agree, they are still not good hours! The suggestion that the government has put the bill off is mind blowing, staggering and outrageous.

It may not have occurred to the opposition that Transurban had to agree before the government could introduce legislation dealing with the issuing of the Tulla pass. I raise that in case the process had escaped the attention of members opposite. I know ‘process’ is another word the opposition hates. For them processes are time consuming. I agree that things can be done more quickly under a dictatorship!

We keep hearing about market forces. I am at a loss to understand what members opposite mean when they talk about them. I think they mean that if City Link is a good system people will use it and that if it is a lousy system or it is too expensive they will go elsewhere. Where else can motorists go? The answer is that they are going there now, and you can see the effect of that in the municipalities around the City Link project. Motorists are trying to exercise choice — a word the opposition parties love — but they are finding clogged roads, and local councils are having to introduce processes that militate against road blockages in their quiet suburban streets. I am fully aware of the increase in traffic along Mount Alexander Road, Bell Street and Melville Road, all of which are suffering terribly as a result of the introduction of City Link.

A monopoly exists no matter how you dress it up and pretend that people can choose from the entire Melbourne road network. When the roads are choked the only choice is to pay the toll or sit in traffic — as we continue to do on the City Link project. I hope in months to come the government will introduce more legislation to assist those community members who are suffering from City Link.

Approximately a year ago I wrote to a local newspaper about how a spontaneous Sunday trip to Queen Victoria Market by a local person with no mobile phone or credit card could cost \$108 a day. Banks and post offices are closed and there is no Shell service station in the area. To avoid a fine the person must pull up at Bulla Road and wait up to 25 minutes to purchase a Tulla pass to get to the market. I am here to ensure that my prediction does not come true. I commend the bill and the minor changes introduced to the house.

Mr KILGOUR (Shepparton) — It was incredible to listen to the honourable members for Bendigo East and Gisborne whingeing, carping and carrying on about the most magnificent engineering feat carried out in Victoria. The City Link project will ensure that the former Kennett government is known as the government with vision for Victoria.

Let honourable members look at the city’s present position and then think about what happened to the South Eastern Freeway, now the Monash Freeway, during the Cain–Kirner era. What happened when the Labor Party sold the land put aside by the Liberal government? What happened to the thousands of people who sat in their cars day after day in the so-called South Eastern Car Park? They could not get into the city and when they got to Punt Road they could not get off.

Along came a government with vision, a government that realised that Victoria could not afford to spend the billions of dollars required to build the freeways and links needed to get traffic going in Victoria. The former Kennett government had to make up the \$70 billion lost by the Cain and Kirner governments. A road or a link suitable for Victoria’s future had to be built and the only way to do it was to ensure that people using the road paid for it.

Residents of my electorate in Shepparton may choose to use City Link or not. So far as my electorate is concerned the best thing is that people who do not use the freeway do not pay for it. The honourable member for Bendigo East whinged about the cost of using the road but she does not have to use it if she chooses not to. However, if you want to save time and money getting to the city you have only to look at figures from the taxi industry and from companies that are paying freight drivers. Shepparton’s fruit is exported worldwide and is the best fruit in Australia. Hours in time and effort can be saved in freighting the produce to the Melbourne wharves. Savings are also made on the clutches and brakes of cars. For the measly few dollars it costs to travel on City Link the saving of time in getting produce to the markets is fantastic.

The residents in my electorate believe City Link is the best thing to happen to Victoria. The honourable member for Bendigo East whinged about the expense of travelling to Gippsland once or twice a year. The cost is just \$14 a year, and you save time, money and wear and tear on your car. If people do not want to use City Link they do not have to; they can get off and use another road. However, if they want to use it and save time going from Shepparton to Gippsland, for example, they will discover why it is a great thing for country

Victoria. When the City Link system is complete, the savings in time, effort and road trauma will be incredible.

We hear the complaints from the other side of the house. They want to go back to the Cain–Kirner era. We will see if they have the guts to construct the tunnel to link the Eastern Freeway with the rest of the system. If they do have the guts, they will need tolls to pay for it.

The sad word we have heard today is ‘privatisation’. It would not matter who built the road or how it was funded, whether by the government or not, any problems would still be blamed on privatisation. No matter who built the road, a toll would have to be levied on the people who use it.

There is no fairer means of paying for a road than getting the people who use it to pay for it. People in my part of country Victoria certainly agree with that. Only about 10 per cent of people living in Shepparton are likely to use City Link, so the other 90 per cent are not paying tax on a road they are not using. The city people who use it day in and day out can pay for what they get, too.

So far as country people are concerned, City Link is fabulous, and we cannot wait until the rest of it is open. Then we will be able to get from one side of Victoria to the other using a road so brilliantly planned by a government with a vision for country Victorians.

I have visited Docklands a few times and looked up at that fantastic construction, built with the latest technology, the Bolte Bridge. I could see the vision of the former government of taking the traffic away and up into the air. Some cities, such as Hong Kong, have chosen to go underground. We have chosen to go up, and it is fantastic. Every time you drive along that stretch of City Link you realise what a wonderful feat of engineering it is. Users of that bridge are very happy to pay.

Listen to the grizzles from the other side of the house at having to pay \$50 for an e-tag. E-tags are a good way to do it. You pay \$50, and even if you do not use it for 12 months it is still okay. When you do use it you hear the whistle blow and a little bit of it clicks off. When my e-tag gets down to \$10 another \$40 is automatically taken out of my bank account and my credit goes back up to \$50. I never have to worry about it.

My wife does not have an e-tag on her car, but I have registered her number so that when she comes to Melbourne her toll can be paid out of my e-tag account. No problem.

The grizzles we can hear are coming from people who are earning \$90 000 a year, yet they are complaining about a measly few dollars for using City Link every now and again.

Mr Hardman interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Loney) — Order! I remind honourable members on the government benches that constant interjection is disorderly.

Mr KILGOUR — The honourable member for Seymour does not have to use City Link when he comes down to Melbourne. He might do what I do on most occasions — go down Sydney Road through Coburg. However, when I am pushed for time or do not want the extra fatigue of traffic lights and so on, I whiz around the Tullamarine Freeway. I invite the honourable member for Seymour to do the same. The honourable member for Seymour can dance very well. He joined me on the stage in Shepparton the other night. It was a special night, and I learnt that the honourable member moves very well.

I invite him to improve that movement and use it on the Tullamarine Freeway occasionally. Zoom over the Bolte Bridge, slip around into Flinders Street and see what a magnificent thing the previous government has done to ensure traffic linkage in Melbourne. City Link will do the city proud for a hundred years. Every time I drive on City Link I think about what a great thing it is for Melbourne, even though I do not use it very often. City Link will alter traffic patterns forever. The people will get used to using it and will come to enjoy it.

Consider the alternatives available in cities such as London. In London you simply have to use the underground train because the traffic clogs up so much. You travel for miles and miles following cars all the way. In Melbourne, on the other hand, you can hit the freeway.

Remember what the Tullamarine Freeway used to be like? If you wanted to fly into Essendon Airport at 8.30 in the morning it would take you an hour to get into town. I caught a plane to Essendon Airport recently and found that it still takes 45 minutes to get into town. That is ridiculous. The area of land taken off Essendon Airport at the point where the two freeways join is insufficient. It will have to be fixed up. A few extra metres will have to be taken off Essendon Airport up as far as Bulla Road to allow for two more traffic lanes. That would make it a nice, quiet drive into town.

I cannot believe the honourable member for Melton. I have driven with him on one of those roads. I wonder what road he uses now. When we were members of the

parliamentary committee on drugs the honourable member for Melton drove on the Tullamarine Freeway. I bet he is too lousy to use it now. He would not like to use it and be forced to recognise that what the previous government did was to provide the best way of getting from one part of Melbourne to another.

Country people accept tolls because they know they only have to pay when they use the roads; the dollars are not coming out of the back pocket day after day. When the honourable member for Benambra comes to town he can make a choice about whether he uses Sydney Road or not.

Mr Plowman interjected.

Mr KILGOUR — I understand he has an e-tag and is pleased to be able to use it.

Mr Plowman interjected.

Mr KILGOUR — I understand his kids are also on his e-tag. My kids are in the system, too, but their tolls do not come out of my account.

The bill is housekeeping legislation. It is not possible to get everything right the first time you do it. There needs to be some negotiation with motorists and the RACV. I am concerned for country people who do not have the opportunity to buy the Tulla pass. We need to do something about that. I understand arrangements are being made with Shell service stations. You might not have a Shell service station in your town, but every arterial road into Melbourne has a Shell service station, so if you cannot slip into one of them and buy a pass there is something wrong.

A lady rang me in Shepparton the other day to say she wanted to go to the Melbourne showgrounds. She did not realise you could turn off at the first traffic lights and use Pascoe Vale Road. She had never done that before. She did not have a credit card and said she was not able to buy a pass. I explained to her that she could go down the street in Shepparton and buy a pass there. She had not realised that, either.

I believe people will get used to the operation of the system. Similar systems work in many other places. There are toll roads along the Gold Coast and the Sunshine Coast in Queensland, for example. It is an everyday part of life for people in those areas. People will get used to it here, too. Everybody will understand how to use toll roads and will realise they are the best way to get from one place to another.

If you want to return to the Cain–Kirner era, do not build any more toll roads. Do you want to go back to

the days of the South Eastern Car Park? Do you want to take 45 minutes to get from Essendon Airport to the city? In those days all the freeways took us into the centre of the city and then stopped. All the traffic banked up and up.

It still might, but we have not finished. I do not know whether government members understand the situation, but the link is not finished. If government members understood the final arrangements they would know the road will mean the easy movement of traffic around the city, through the tunnel and out onto the Monash Freeway. The many thousands of motorists who will no longer experience the daily bank up of traffic when travelling to the Kooyong tennis courts or the Essendon airport will say that the link works. When motorists get their bills and realise how much they have saved in petrol, wear and tear on their vehicles, time and effort as a result of not having to drive in bumper-to-bumper traffic as they did before, they will pay due credence to the Kennett government.

The Kennett government had magnificent vision and the guts the Labor government does not have to build the next tunnel. The Labor government will not have the guts to build the tunnel at the end of the Eastern Freeway to link up with the other freeways, and again we will see kilometre after kilometre of cars banked up. But we will also see the result of the Kennett government's vision for both country and city people — the fast movement of traffic from one side of the city to the other at a reasonable cost to motorists, particularly those using commercial vehicles.

I welcome the bill, which has been introduced to accomplish the necessary tidying up. I also welcome City Link as it is now and look forward to its completion. Victoria is a much better place because of the visionary Kennett government.

Ms BEATTIE (Tullamarine) — As I sit here and listen to the debate I find it incredible. The honourable members for Mordialloc, Bellarine, Kew and Shepparton have spoken on the bill, but they have not been greatly affected by City Link. On this side of the house the honourable members for Coburg, Bendigo East and Gisborne have spoken, and the honourable members for Essendon and Melton will follow me in the debate. In contrast to the opposition members who have contributed to the debate, all government members who have spoken on the bill represent constituents who are profoundly affected by City Link.

I am not talking about constituents who earn \$90 000 a year like members of Parliament are privileged to earn; I am talking about people who earn \$24 000 to

\$25 000 a year. As a result of the impost of City Link those people will have to pay \$1.01 in tolls every time they travel on a road they previously owned. Opposition members think it is a magnificent infrastructure project — given that it is a great example of engineering I agree with that. However, it is not a freeway any longer. The people of Tullamarine now have to pay for a road that they have travelled on for years. They do not travel along the road any quicker, in fact, they travel along it slower.

The honourable member for Shepparton spoke about the honourable member for Melton being too lousy to pay \$1.01 to travel along the road, but I know the honourable member for Melton has a philosophical objection to paying tolls, as does the Labor Party.

I refer to my predecessor, who was a great fan of City Link. He said that for 80 cents a day a person would be able to sit at home and have breakfast with his or her family. He can do that now. He was a great stalwart for City Link, and he can now sit at home and have breakfast with his wife and kids!

A government member interjected.

Ms BEATTIE — He needs to learn how to count first.

I am one of the people opposed to using the tollway. I do not travel along it; I travel along Mount Alexander Road. I say to those people who claim that people have a choice that I now sit in the traffic on Mount Alexander Road. The buses that travel to Sunbury, Tullamarine and Coburg and the trams that travel along Mount Alexander Road cannot meet their schedules as a result of the imposition of tolls on City Link. I do not intend to make a private company rich for the next 34 years. That is the shame of the project — we are stuck with the contract for 34 years, yet all the people from the other side of the city, the leafy suburbs, defend the cost of travelling to Tullamarine.

The people of my electorate do not travel along the Tullamarine Freeway to go to the airport because they are going on holiday to Fiji; they use the freeway to go to work and to return home. To do that now costs them between \$1500 and \$2000 a year, and people who do not have that money because they earn only \$24 000 to \$25 000 a year have been denied choice — because of the money it will cost them they have no choice but to stop using a road they had previously paid for through taxes.

I am sure the honourable member for Melton will follow me in the debate with some terrific insights into his experience. Opposition members should have been

at Bulla Road on 3 January when government members used an electorate car that did not have an e-tag. It was absolute chaos. City Link was giving misinformation; its call centre was telling people that Bulla Road would be open until 4.00 p.m. That was incorrect as it was open all night. At 4.00 p.m. a great mass of people arrived at the site because they were hostile about paying for a road they had previously paid for. They had not travelled on the road for free; they had paid for it out of their taxes.

City Link was also selling e-tags but telling people they had to purchase day passes because their credit cards had not been processed. People who had e-tags were given misinformation by City Link and slugged for day passes as well. That is great organisational ability!

The purpose of the bill is to keep City Link honest. With that sort of misinformation going around, I am glad the government has introduced the bill to tidy up those aspects. City Link cannot be trusted with its own information.

The house heard the honourable member for Shepparton wax lyrical about how he drives down Sydney Road. It is a long way for people from Tullamarine to drive to Sydney Road to get stuck in traffic! The increased petrol costs must also be considered. The few times I have used City Link I have still ended up in the traffic I would have been sitting in if I had used Mount Alexander Road!

The honourable members for Mordialloc, Bellarine, Kew and Shepparton do not use that road every day; they do not know what the residents of Tullamarine are faced with. They do not live on the other side of town, and they do not drive over there. They are not faced with paying \$1.01 to go from Moreland Road to Flemington Road. In the first few weeks, because the traffic was banked up so far a lot of people did not even bother going to Flemington Road; they got off at Brunswick Road. They were paying \$1 to travel a couple of hundred metres! They soon learnt the folly of that practice and went instead to Mount Alexander Road.

Motorists have seen the problems on Mount Alexander Road, yet Transurban and City Link deny there is anything wrong. They say it is just a few teething problems with a few extra cars that will all suddenly go through the tunnels when they are opened. I have news for them: those motorists are not going to go through the tunnels because they cannot afford the tolls already imposed on the short section of road. They will not go on the longer section to go through the tunnels! Many

of them work in the western suburbs, so why would they take the tunnel to save time?

The project has been compared to the Western Ring Road. In terms of engineering it is probably comparable, but the Western Ring Road was a great federal Labor government initiative for the good of the people, and Victorians have seen what great benefits an infrastructure program like that can provide. In the northern suburbs we are left with mopping up a project that people do not want, cannot afford and will not use! I do not know what the measure of success for City Link is, but if it is getting traffic off it, it is certainly successful; if it is motorists not paying tolls, it is successful.

I do not like the new language creeping into the debate, such as toll evaders and toll bludgers. People are merely exercising their freedom of choice and choosing not to go on City Link. I do not understand where the people saying those things are coming from. If they think it is such a great infrastructure project why are they not suggesting tolls for other roads?

City Link is often compared to toll roads in Brisbane, Sydney and overseas. Most toll roads in Australia and overseas have a method whereby motorists can pay as they go in some way or another.

Mr Spry — This is new technology — face up to it!

Ms BEATTIE — People are resisting this new technology. It is interesting that City Link would not release its figures for the number of motorists caught without e-tags in the first month. It decided to waive the fines for the first month. It probably did that because it would have been embarrassed about the number of people avoiding the tolls. One does not have to be a rocket scientist to sit in the traffic, look at the cars going up and down the Tullamarine tollway, or payway, and note that many motorists still do not have e-tags or day passes. I believe some have decided to avoid the charges. Victorians will get a real shock when City Link issues its first fines because there will be quite a bit of public disobedience. I certainly do not want to encourage public disobedience, but I believe there will be some.

I cannot understand people who do not see the loss to the residents of Bendigo East, Gisborne, Tullamarine, Essendon, Ripon and Seymour caused by this supposedly great infrastructure project. People have rejected the tollway out of hand, yet some honourable members — who earn \$90 000 a year, as the honourable member for Shepparton said — are telling people that they should use the road every day and be

thrilled to bits about paying for it. I can tell those honourable members that the people out in my area are not too excited about paying for the road they have travelled on for nothing for 20 years!

I agree with the honourable member for Shepparton that something needs to be done about the Calder–Tullamarine interchange around Essendon Airport. The Kennett government was wedded to the project, as was the former member for Tullamarine, who is now sitting at home having breakfast with his wife and kids every day, at least it has allowed him to do that. In that case I would have thought improvement of the interchange would have been part of the negotiations to which the honourable member for Gisborne referred. It should have occurred to the previous Minister for Transport — I notice he is not in the house very often these days — to negotiate with City Link to allow it to have the section of the freeway that is now the Tullamarine tollway if work were carried out to widen the road at the interchange. What are Victorians left with? A feeder road that feeds right onto the tollway, with no benefit!

When one gets off the Calder Highway at the airport there is a mickey mouse lane from the airport to just near Gladstone Park. That has created a traffic hazard because it widens for about a kilometre and then narrows again. People pull out to go quickly and then the road narrows down again past the airport. The great City Link sales people need to take a trip to the northern suburbs in peak hour — and not in the back of a taxi on their way to a holiday in Fiji! They should drive there during peak hour day after day; they should drive in peak hour traffic around the Bulla Road interchange on their way home and see how long it takes to get there.

The bill tidies up a few matters, but it will never make the Tullamarine Freeway a great infrastructure project. It has turned our freeway into a tollway and made the road we have travelled on for many years expensive. The vision is there, but it is a vision that only the people in the northern suburbs will pay for.

The vision is not that the people in the eastern suburbs should pay; it is that the people in the northern suburbs who can least afford it should pay.

If the opposition were really concerned about roads why did the former government not widen Pascoe Vale Road? People from Broadmeadows do not really matter. The Pascoe Vale Road project was put off so that Mickleham Road in Tullamarine could be widened — I agree that was needed — in order to try to save the seat of Tullamarine. Nothing could save my opponent, who used to say the toll would cost only

80 cents. His picture appeared in the newspaper with his 80 cents in his hand. What a nonsensical approach when by the time the road was opened the toll was already up to \$1.01. The charges can be increased quarterly, and the GST must be added to that. Who knows what it will cost in 34 years with all the CPI increases added. The disposable income of northern suburbs residents will slip backwards unless they choose to use Mount Alexander Road.

The opposition does not seem to understand that people would rather sit in traffic every day than pay tolls. They can afford to pay the daily cost of a little bit of petrol, but they cannot afford to pay the monthly bills associated with City Link. Honourable members representing the leafy eastern suburbs do not seem to understand that.

An Honourable Member — Or Shepparton!

Ms BEATTIE — Or Shepparton or Bellarine. It is just beyond them. Punish the people in the northern suburbs! I am yet to hear about great infrastructure projects with charges on them in the eastern suburbs. Dish those up to me and then we can judge which are the good ones!

I am in favour of the Tulla pass, but even with the day passes there are huge anomalies. If students or people who work split shifts use their day passes to travel up and down the road a couple of times a day the actual cost of travel for that day will be greater than a day pass. If they have an e-tag, they can't use a day pass. They will be caught in this catch-22 situation. No wonder they are flocking to the roads of Essendon and Coburg! Sydney Road has been mentioned as an alternative. No wonder those roads are jammed. City Link has created traffic jams.

I can see City Link ending up as a corporate road. Trucks and fleet cars use the western link a lot, but private motorists are rejecting City Link and are adopting the choice that was bandied about by the former Premier, who now seems more interested in collecting pictures than worrying about people on the roads! They are rejecting City Link and will continue to do so for 34 years. A government with vision would have foreseen that people would never accept this road, especially the Tullamarine section which was previously paid for. I have been told by many people that they would have accepted a toll over the western link but they cannot accept paying a toll on the same road that they have travelled on for years. We are told the road has been widened. Of course it is wider, but I still travel in the same lane I used to travel in. I don't see any great benefit.

Members of the opposition may call me what they like; they can call me a toll evader or a toll bludger, but I don't like City Link and the people in Tullamarine don't like it either. My predecessor liked it and look where it got him — he lost his seat! Look where it got the former honourable members for Bendigo East, Gisborne — the 19th man came in at the last minute in that seat and that was unsuccessful — Ripon and Seymour. They tried to sell this road and they were rejected out of hand and will continue to be rejected in future.

The bill tidies up some aspects of the principal legislation; it ensures City Link will keep proper records, which it should. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr VOGELS (Warrnambool) — Most of the issues have been covered by speakers ahead of me.

The previous government, in conjunction with the use of private capital, put up some \$2 billion to build the fantastic and magnificent transport link. This morning I was pleased to hear the Premier announce that the Labor government is also combining with private enterprise in spending \$1.5 billion on improving rail links into the city: fast rail links from Bendigo, Geelong and Ballarat and from Melbourne to the airport. Are they going to be free? What is the difference between a tollway that allows motorists to scoot into the city and a fast train from Geelong, Bendigo or Ballarat? Paying a toll and paying a train fare are the same thing.

Allow me to outline my view of City Link as a rural resident when I come to Melbourne. Now I can get to Gippsland an hour faster; I can get to the airport 30 minutes faster. Toll costs pale into insignificance compared to petrol and LPG prices in rural Victoria.

Further, by using private capital, the previous government freed up hundreds of millions of dollars to be spent on other more important projects in areas such as health, education and country roads.

People in rural Victoria pay more for their transport than urban dwellers ever will. Rural fuel prices are much higher than prices in Melbourne, and country residents travel greater distances to do business and to socialise.

The major benefit of City Link is that it links the airport with the city and connects the major trucking routes with both the wharves and the airport so that industrial and rural products can reach destinations more quickly. The largest exporter from the port of Melbourne is the dairy industry. The sooner products can arrive at the wharf or the airport, the better for all concerned. There

is not much point having a truck sitting at a stop light, locked in a traffic jam in the middle of the city and burning fuel while trying to get to the airport.

Mr Nardella interjected.

Mr VOGELS — A lot of exports go through Tullamarine airport.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr VOGELS — Access to day passes, especially in rural Victoria, needs to be looked at — at the moment they are difficult to access. Transurban is looking at defining and refining systems as they move along, and these things will improve — they need to improve.

I look forward to the completion of the City Link project and to using it whenever necessary. I also congratulate the Labor government on its intention to spend \$1.5 billion on complementing City Link with rail transport into the city. Melbourne will become the most accessible city in Australia for people who want to get in and out of it. City Link has been a great project. I am happy to use it, as are the majority of Victorians.

Mr NARDELLA (Melton) — What a load of waffle we have just heard from the honourable member for Warrnambool about how his constituents are going to use City Link to get to Tullamarine airport more quickly. What a load of rubbish! If he knows where his electorate is he understands that the quickest way to get to the airport is to get to Geelong, take the Bacchus Marsh–Geelong Road over to Bacchus Marsh or Melton, then go along the back road to Tullamarine. Motorists do not go to the city then use City Link to go back up the Tullamarine Freeway into the airport. It is a ridiculous argument, a stupid argument. The member for Warrnambool does not understand what this side of the house is on about.

The tollway is not about efficiency, it is a cash cow for City Link and Transurban. Members of the former government have gone out and paid the price for their folly, for their vision of economic rationalism and privatising anything that moves. They are so fond and proud of the famous Bolte Bridge, which was named after a decrepit former Premier. The bridge is too low and cruise ships cannot come in and berth in Melbourne! That is the situation supported by the opposition. Opposition members support a bridge that looks good but will set Melbourne back in the long term.

The 34 years of privatised roads is a disgrace. It is a monopoly foisted on the Victorian community under which any improvement to public transport or road

systems must get the tick from Transurban. In the recent past the contract for the extension of Exhibition Street had to be submitted to Transurban to ensure it was not put at a financial disadvantage.

Earlier today the shadow Minister for Transport gave a dissertation on his view of City Link, and what an appalling dissertation it was. He has no understanding of the needs of constituents in the northern suburbs and he does not understand the bill. He waffled on about everything other than the bill and explained everything other than what his policy would be, except for supporting the former government's policy, which is the only thing the opposition can do, even though it understands that policy is wrong. How could opposition members not understand it is wrong when the former honourable members for Tullamarine, Ripon, Gisborne, Bendigo East and Seymour lost their seats because the former government was not listening to what ordinary motorists and others were saying!

Constituents in the northern suburbs do not use the link because they want a holiday, they use it to get to work. They use it to get to the Royal Children's Hospital or the Royal Melbourne Hospital. They use it for important aspects of their daily lives.

Using the tollway costs at least \$40 a month, money that is ripped out of their pockets. The honourable member for Shepparton said earlier that when the sum in his e-tag account goes down to \$10 it is then boosted through his bank back up to \$50. The honourable member for Shepparton does not feel it, but constituents in my former electorate and the electorates looked after by the honourable members for Gisborne, Tullamarine and others know that \$40 a month is a lot of money, money they do not have. Opposition members do not care that our constituents do not have that money because they are on about their ideology — private is good, public is bad.

Members of the government were asked, 'What would you have done? What was your position?'. I will tell honourable members what our position was. We were going to link Melbourne. Our plans were out there and were debated. Guess what was not in the plans? There were no tolls. We would have built the tunnels and linked the Tullamarine and West Gate freeways, but there would have been no tolls. That is the critical aspect. It can be done when you do not have to provide profit to private companies. A \$1.8 billion project will ultimately cost the Victorian community \$4.2 billion. It was not necessary to go down that path, because the freeways could have been linked for approximately \$800 million to \$900 million. That was our plan.

Opposition members have not learnt a thing in their time in opposition. They say no public money was put into the tollway. Let me inform the house and remind honourable members of the \$260 million of government funds that went into the City Link project, into building the pylons on the Bolte Bridge and the Salute to Viagra on the way into Melbourne on the Tullamarine Freeway. It was even painted yellow!

Opposition members misrepresent themselves and their parties when they say no public money went into the tollway. Public money went into the link through federal tax concessions, and that can be seen from the initial price of the shares. At one stage they were \$1600 to \$1800 a share. Why was that the case? Because Transurban got tax concessions from the federal government. On top of that City Link got the \$260 million from the previous Kennett government. Yet, what is the opposition's catchcry? No public money going into public roads.

Just prior to the last state election \$10 million was shoved into the hands of Transurban and City Link to fix up the blue and make sure the project would open on time. That was a further \$10 million on top of the \$260 million. What could the previous government have done with \$270 million? I will tell you, Mr Acting Speaker. It could have done what the government is doing at the moment, it could have fixed up the massive accident black spot problems, but it did not care about them. That is what the government is doing, it is fixing up the black spots.

Opposition members say that private is good and public is bad, yet the record is a disgrace. The contribution from the shadow Minister for Transport was also a disgrace. He obviously does not understand the bill, which is not hard to understand. The Tulla pass provisions are a simple part of the bill, but the shadow minister accused people in the northern suburbs of wanting to use the Tulla pass to evade fares. That shows how little he understands the legislation.

I realise how hard it is to be a shadow minister when there are six or seven bills on the go: it is difficult to get a grip on what they are all about. However, the bill is in the shadow minister's portfolio and he has had months to read up on it and get advice, yet he does not understand it. The shadow minister kept asking rhetorically, 'What are you going to do? How are you going to fund the Scoresby freeway?'. The government is not going to fund the Scoresby freeway; it has made its decision on that issue.

The challenge I throw back to the shadow Minister for Transport is to work through what his role as shadow

minister involves and establish a policy that will get his party and the partnership out of the mire and into a competitive situation. The shadow minister has no idea.

Sitting suspended 6.31 p.m. until 8.02 p.m.

Mr NARDELLA — This legacy of the Kennett government — this economic rationalist policy — has meant that motorists are avoiding the Tullamarine Freeway and are taking all the other avenues so as to not pay \$40 a month in fees.

It is important to understand the effect that is having on local residents in the Pascoe Vale, Essendon, Coburg and Brunswick areas, where there is a permanent peak-hour traffic flow for 12 hours because of City Link. People, especially those from the western or north-west suburbs, are avoiding City Link and taking alternative routes, such as the Western Ring Road and the West Gate Bridge if they can, or the Western Highway, the old Ballarat Road, if that is an option to them.

It is amazing that the Liberal and National parties have not learnt from history. The Victorian community despises tolls; history shows that. The West Gate Bridge Authority that was established by the Hamer government was a plaything of Victorian motorists who wanted to avoid the West Gate Bridge and use other avenues to get into the city. It took a Labor government, in 1985, to take off the tolls so people would use the West Gate Bridge.

However, the coalition government did not learn from history. It went one step further in perfecting its technique by getting a private operator to impose a toll essentially for the northern suburbs for the next 34 years. When a lot of us in this chamber are long gone, the toll will survive. It will be the Kennett government legacy to the Victorian community. It is so perfidious that this great monument to the previous government will cost the Victorian community and motorists dearly.

An Honourable Member — It is a disgrace.

Mr NARDELLA — It is an absolute disgrace, because our constituents, the people whom we look after, are paying for it. One can isolate some of the argument and agree with a toll road and new tolls. But the previous government decided to use the Tullamarine Freeway for City Link, the cash cow for Transurban, for which it thought there was a captive market. But there is not necessarily a captive market with City Link. There will be a captive market with the Monash Freeway, but the Tullamarine Freeway was the

initial cash cow the previous government gave to City Link for it to survive. That is a real tragedy.

The constituents whom I used to look after, and whom the honourable member for Tullamarine now looks after, will not forget. They are not like honourable members opposite. They have long memories and understand that honourable members on the other side will use the links only to go on holidays and jaunts up the freeway to the terrific tourist attractions at Kyneton, Woodend or Bendigo. For them it is only a minor trip, but it is part of the lifeline of our constituents.

The most striking feature of the contributions of honourable members opposite is that they have the not-in-my-backyard syndrome. Imagine the screams from the honourable member for Bellarine — and rightly so — if the government proposed tolls to upgrade the Geelong freeway or from the honourable member for Shepparton if it proposed tolls to upgrade the Goulburn Valley Highway. The screams would be heard from here to Canberra and across the world. Yet the same people supported and continue to support the constituents I represented, and now others represent, paying the tolls. The double standard — the not-in-my-backyard syndrome — is absolutely stark. They are prepared to support the measure for the people we represent in the working-class suburbs, but not for the people in theirs, because they are different. They do not believe the system would be so magical for them and their constituents. I could imagine what would happen in Bellarine and Shepparton if the honourable members representing those areas supported such policies for their constituents.

The honourable member for Shepparton, whose primary vote dropped to 34 per cent at the last election, comes into the chamber and tries to tell government members how to run government and what they should be doing to support City Link tolls and to not protect motorists. However, protecting motorists is what the legislation is all about. The bill will put into place further mechanisms in relation to privacy and ensure that the fees motorists have to pay are fair and legitimate. The Tulla pass is a product, I suppose — to use that type of language — that people have been asking for, and the legislation provides for that.

The government attempts to listen to both local people and motorists. Not only does it attempt to listen, it also attempts to put in place the programs that people request. The government does so not because it has to but because it believes in doing so. Government members believe in consultation. Our constituents are worth that because they have put us here to represent their best interests — and the proof is in the pudding!

That is why we are on this side of the house and why for a long time to come the opposition parties — the Liberals and the Nationals — will be on the other side. Government members listen and understand their constituents, but the opposition parties do not. I support the legislation.

Mr PLOWMAN (Benambra) — I am delighted that government members recognise that City Link is one of the greatest projects ever undertaken in Victoria. I have heard that said by honourable members who recognise that the project is about looking 50 to 100 years ahead, not a measly 2 years or thereabouts, which involves building freeways and links to meet only immediate demand. It is delightful to hear government members recognise that City Link is the largest infrastructure project ever undertaken in Victoria and one of the biggest infrastructure projects ever undertaken in Australia over the last century. It is interesting to note that, despite their acceptance of all that, government members still cannot accept the fact that City Link is a good project because of the opportunities it affords drivers.

I turn to some of the comments made by various government members. The honourable member for Melton, with whom I worked on a committee and for whom I have a high regard, said that opposition members would not have accepted the building of toll roads in country Victoria. I am on the record, Mr Nardella, as having supported — —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Seitz) — Order! Honourable members should be addressed by their correct titles.

Mr PLOWMAN — I apologise, Mr Acting Speaker, but I did not want to mistake him. I am on the record as having supported the idea of a toll road for the Hume Highway some 25 years ago. Had we been brave enough to accept tolling as a proposition back then, we would have enjoyed 15 to 20 years ago the benefits we now gain from having access to the most magnificent highway in Victoria, the Hume Freeway.

The honourable member for Melton also said the Bolte Bridge was too low. I wonder why anyone would want to build a higher bridge when big ships are not wanted further upstream, anyway? You would want to maximise the benefits that shipping provides by having a port that is centrally located rather than being dispersed along the waterfront. The benefits of not taking the big ships beyond Bolte Bridge are easily demonstrated. The development proposed in the Docklands upstream from the Bolte Bridge will be

magnificent, provided the government gives it sufficient support.

The honourable member for Melton claimed that the Labor Party had a plan for all transport in Melbourne. It might have had a plan, but during the 10 years in which the Labor Party was previously in office I did not see any development going on. The reason was that the Cain–Kirner government ran out of funds. There was no way that the plan, which the honourable member for Melton announced tonight as having been part of a greater program, would ever have been built.

When the coalition was elected there were not many options left. There is no doubt that the project has been and will continue to be a major contributor to employment, and the benefits to industry and to drivers — not only those in the city but also those from the country — will be extraordinary.

Government members are prejudging the end benefit of City Link, which cannot possibly be judged until the project is seen to be up and running. It is a bit like the debate we are having about whether to have a freeway that runs through Albury–Wodonga, and until that is built the benefits certainly cannot be judged.

The honourable member for Bendigo East talked about Shell service stations being outlets for the passes, an idea that I commend. I am not sure why we should stick with Shell, but any opportunity to optimise motorists' ability to obtain day passes will be a great improvement on the current system.

However, the honourable member for Gisborne said the toll is a tax. The former government could have arranged for it to be a tax, but a toll is certainly not a tax. The beauty of the toll is that it will continue for 34 years for the benefit of our children and some of our grandchildren. Rather than having to pay a tax at this stage to meet the \$2 billion cost, I know what I think is the more equitable solution — that is, to spread the cost over those who consume the product over that time. The fact that City Link becomes a state-owned asset after that time means that the state will be no worse off by having done it that way.

The honourable member for Tullamarine suggested that people do not have a choice. Any member who was in the house when the honourable member for Shepparton was speaking would recognise that, as he said, the choice is clear: if you do not want to use it, you do not have to pay for it. It is as simple as that.

I was disappointed to hear the honourable member for Tullamarine say that the City Link has caused traffic jams. What a short memory she has! I can remember

coming in on the Tullamarine Freeway during peak hour, morning or evening, when it was always bedlam. You could spend an hour on the freeway getting from Tullamarine to the Flemington Road interchange. How long does it take now to travel along there?

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr PLOWMAN — It takes very little time, even during the peak, which is the point I am making. Now you can set your clock based on the time you will get to Melbourne, whereas before you could not do that. Before City Link, if you were coming from the north, as I do, you would always go along St Georges Road into Melbourne because it was quicker and more reliable. City Link has already provided benefits to people living in the north of the state.

It is disappointing when people come up with reasons why we should not be using it. We should be using City Link. If we were all using it the honourable member for Tullamarine would not have the difficulties she has at the moment. It is cheap at \$50. I have four cars on it — my wife's car and my kids' cars — and I know that will cost me dearly.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr PLOWMAN — I advise the honourable member for Melton that my children do not live in Wodonga — they live here. It will cost me more for them than for me. We all use it and sharing it among all the vehicles one has is a cheap way of using it. I wonder why the honourable member for Tullamarine is not using it and setting the example of how it can benefit those who live in the northern suburbs. We will have to leave that for her to decide in the future.

Honourable members who have been to Sydney recently will have noticed the state of the roads there. If ever there was a just-in-time case of building roads that is it. Sydney has had no long-term planning. It has all been designed to get there just in time for the Olympics. There would be no way in the world Sydney would be ready for the Olympics if it were not for the toll roads. The New South Wales government is of the same persuasion as the Victorian government. The Labor government in New South Wales did not hesitate to introduce toll roads. At least it is more forward looking than members on the Bracks government benches at the moment — although it is still looking at the project in the short term as against what we have, which is a project that is looking at 50 to 100 years hence. We will still have the City Link project well after Transurban has finished tolling it in 34 years.

Mr Hamilton interjected.

Mr PLOWMAN — If the Minister for Agriculture suggests that is the reason we are on this side of the house, I will debate that with him. I do not believe that has much to do with it at all. Although it may have been an issue in one or two seats, the majority of drivers and commuters in Melbourne gain the benefit of using the entire City Link system. The majority of voters in Melbourne are in favour of the vision of a City Link system that is looking 50 years out.

The project is costing about \$2 billion of private funds, which means the estimated saving to motorists is about \$250 million a year. That is significant. If that \$250 million is equated with the capital cost of spending that money on roads, bridges and other infrastructure, it amounts to a significant amount of road building.

A government member interjected.

Mr PLOWMAN — And sewers if you happen to want to build sewers, but at the moment there is a greater need for the improvement of the infrastructure of roads and bridges than sewers. The \$250 million saved every year is certainly a great saving to Victoria. That amount of money can be put back into other infrastructure projects, such as education, health and law and order.

Mr Hamilton — And on country roads.

Mr PLOWMAN — And infrastructure on country roads. The Minister for Agriculture, who represents the Morwell electorate, knows he will need to put money into country roads to maintain his place in the house.

The City Link system will result in a decrease in motor car accidents. An examination of Vicroads figures on freeways reveals that many lives will be saved because of the City Link project. It will not only be the number of lives saved but also the personal trauma that entails. That area has not been properly considered or recognised by the government. If the government understood those matters it would comment more favourably on the benefits and talk City Link up rather than talk it down, as government members have during this debate.

I have no doubt when the honourable member for Wantirna speaks later he will mention the need for the Scoresby freeway. Others have talked about the link between the Eastern Freeway and City Link. Why does the government not have the courage to consider tolling such vital roads? Why does it not have the courage to introduce tolling as an alternative? Why does the government have a blind spot to this? We need those roads in our futuristic approach to road building in

Victoria. So long as the government has a blind spot and tolls are considered the enemy, the development that is essential for the city and the state will stagnate. It is time for the government to take a fresh look and consider it as an option. Why is the government afraid of tolls? I cannot understand it. What is the difference in philosophy between the Labor governments in Victoria and New South Wales? The New South Wales government has been able to accept it as an alternative. It has enabled that state to build the roads needed for the Olympic Games.

The benefits of the whole City Link system are not confined to commuters and travellers in the city of Melbourne. There are enormous benefits to country Victorians. Earlier the honourable member for Warrnambool talked about the increased time benefit in moving produce from country areas to the wharves, the docks, and Melbourne Airport at Tullamarine, so we can more quickly and reliably get that produce to where it has to go. It not only has an effect on rural produce but also on industry in country and regional Victoria which has suffered in the past because of the discriminatory cost in getting industrial produce either to country areas or back from them. City Link will make a big difference to the cost of industry in country Victoria. All travel arrangements for individuals from the country will be enhanced. If an individual is in business in the country and needs to get to the city by a certain time, he or she needs to know how long it will take to get there if travelling by car. City Link gives that person far greater reliability than before.

Most importantly, the main benefit is that the \$2 billion that has been spent privately to build City Link has freed up a lot of money to build roads and bridges in country Victoria. When government members get out into the country they should look at the blue signs on the side of the road that say, 'Vicroads — Another project built by Vicroads in Victoria'. Those projects have been built because the City Link project was privately funded and not funded by the Victorian government.

Country Victorians have received enormous benefits. I am sure the honourable member for Seymour will agree when he sees all the bridges in his electorate that would otherwise never have been built, as I have seen in mine.

Mr STENSHOLT (Burwood) — Honourable members have heard contributions from my colleagues in the northern suburbs and the country, and as a representative of my constituents in the south-eastern suburbs I support the Melbourne City Link (Amendment) Bill. However, I am worried about one

of my constituents who seems to have bolted with a painting.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr STENSHOLT — Unbolted from the wall and bolted off with Bolte!

The bill contains many changes for the benefit of consumers and road users. It is a further example of the good governance that did not exist in Victoria six months ago. The voters of Burwood wanted this legislation, and it is in line with what all Victorians want and expect from the Bracks government.

Victorians want the government to act in the interests of all the people rather than favouring only the big end of town. City Link is an example of the former government's fetish about privatisation and selling off public assets and of its agenda of reducing the public sector and government services, whether they be hospitals or schools.

The establishment of City Link involved a range of contracts with the builders and operators that included arrangements for its operation and tolling system. Some of those arrangements were favourable to the operators as opposed to the users. The bill tightens up the requirements on Transurban and makes adjustments beneficial to commuters. The bill also assists the consumer by widening the choice of tolls, particularly for country people and occasional users of City Link.

The anomalies many people have experienced, especially with the e-tag system, will be removed. I received two e-tags and after returning one had to wait for several months to receive a refund. It took 15 telephone calls and I am still not sure whether it was lost, as were thousands of e-tags. Most honourable members probably had constituents knocking on their doors asking what had happened to their money.

The bill provides better protection for the public and forms part of the government's commitment to monitor and enforce contractual arrangements regarding City Link and its tolling practices. It protects the public interest and rights, as promised in the government's policy of rebuilding the transport network, and forms part of the promised review of City Link's operation. Those promises are the reason the Labor Party was voted into power and the former government is now on the other side.

After my inaugural speech, one of the first things I did on coming into Parliament was to ask a question about contractual arrangements entered into by the former government and to have them audited. The bill delivers

on the government's promise to ensure that Transurban puts procedures in place to properly operate the tolling system. The government is not about secret, shady deals or special treatment for contractors but about good, open government. The Bracks government cares for all Victorians.

The bill ensures equity in the management of the record-keeping process. The government was elected on a platform of equity and access. The bill provides for better protection from billing errors. Errors are possible and have occurred. The government wants to reduce the incidence of errors that cause people to be fined, sought by the police and taken to court. The bill is about good governance. The opposition should remember the words 'good governance', because they will be its nightmare horror story.

The bill provides protection from unwarranted allegations of toll evasions and the penalties flowing from them. The 1995 act provided for the prosecution of Transurban through the courts for failure to keep proper tolling records. The bill tightens and clarifies the procedures that Transurban must follow to keep accurate records of registration and requires those records to be open for inspection. The penalty system is strengthened to deal with improper record keeping by Transurban should that occur. Enforcement officers may issue infringement notices with penalties of up to \$2000 rather than summonses, which is a more efficient alternative and much better governance than pursuing court prosecutions.

The bill facilitates arrangements for a more equitable and fairer system of tolling for country people and occasional users who may use only part of City Link and who were originally expecting to pay for a full-day pass. Honourable members have heard about the \$7 pass and the Tulla pass. Clause 5 facilitates the sale of day passes for part of City Link. Flexible options are now open to the operator. Many people such as retirees will not use City Link every day. To visit the city or the MCG they need pay only for the section used rather than the whole, as was originally intended and advertised.

As was suggested, it is like buying a zone ticket. Rather than buying a ticket for zones 1, 2 and 3 people need purchase a ticket for one zone only. I do not know what this will mean in terms of the Monash Freeway and future extensions, but Transurban will have the flexibility to introduce such a system for those sections.

The southern link has six toll zones. They are the Burnley Tunnel; the Domain Tunnel; the Monash Freeway from Punt Road to Burnley Street; the Monash

Freeway from Burnley Street to Glenferrie Road; Batman Avenue from Punt Road to Swan Street; and Swan Street to Flinders Street on the Exhibition Street extension. The western link has only three toll zones. We could have endless confusion through the charging of full tolls on people who want to travel only short distances.

The bill will provide cheaper tolling for those who want to use only one or two zones in the southern part of the link. It will introduce local toll zones, like the Tulla zone, and perhaps Transurban will introduce Monash Freeway and Exhibition Street passes.

As the house knows, ongoing problems have been experienced with tolling and the introduction of the City Link system. The honourable member for Coburg has already waxed lyrical about the problems experienced by English tourists who tried to pay the toll. I have heard many stories about people who try to find post offices to pay the tolls and about people who do not have credit cards. Not everybody has a credit card. When you reach the age of 83, as in the example of a constituent of mine — particularly if you are on the pension — you may not have a credit card. There are therefore many such people who cannot telephone Transurban and pay the tolls by credit card.

On behalf of my constituents I applaud the increased flexibility already introduced by the government, to be expanded by the changes in the bill.

When the southern link opens, commuters must decide whether they will use it; it should be their choice. People should not be forced onto City Link. Every motorist needs to do his or her own cost-benefit analysis. It is easy to throw figures around but it is a different matter when a cost-benefit analysis comes down to the household income level. I ask the house to consider, for example, a couple living in Glen Iris who may need to travel to the city for the next 34 years. They will face a bill of a couple of thousand dollars a year to use City Link. It would not be easy to convince them of the benefits of paying the toll. They will say, 'How much will I save on petrol?'. They will reap only a marginal saving on petrol. They will need to examine their savings over the years and the loss to them through wasting time on the roads.

A working couple may say, 'There is not much opportunity to be gained through loss of time'; they may rate that as close to zero. They will be paying nearly \$2000 extra a year to use City Link.

Mr Leigh interjected.

Mr STENSHOLT — I am talking about the workers in Ashwood, Jordanville or Ashburton. They do time cost-benefit analyses.

Mr Leigh interjected.

Mr STENSHOLT — Your cost-benefit analyses are suspect. The honourable member needs to have it put simply: many will wonder why it will cost them more than \$1000 a year extra to travel on City Link when they now pay nothing.

That leads to another issue about economic alternatives and the people who are using alternative routes to the city rather than travelling along, for example, the tolled Tullamarine Freeway. I hope that further confusion and loss of amenity can be avoided on the southern link, but much consultation will be needed on that matter.

I understand the Melbourne City Council is considering closing certain roads. I wonder what other councils will do. I urge councils not to add to possible chaos in the inner city by removing clearways on such roads as Toorak Road and High Street. During the Burwood by-election a number of people said, 'Will they change clearways on Toorak Road? It is difficult enough during the day, particularly when you have only one lane each way on Toorak Road and you get stuck behind a tram. People will be forced onto the freeways'.

I understand the City of Boroondara is not contemplating such action at this stage. I urge inner city councils to follow its lead. It is better that changes be monitored before knee-jerk decisions are made on traffic management issues. We should aim to avoid further chaos for commuters, let alone local citizens, when the southern link is opened. People should not be forced to use tollways when they cannot easily afford the cost. Certainly \$30 a week for an ordinary worker, whether he or she be from Jordanville, Ashwood or Ashburton — and particularly for a family man or woman with kids — is not a small amount. A worker may look at the family finances and discover the toll will become a large impost on his or her finances.

One of my constituents works at the airport. It will cost him and his wife about \$4500 a year to use City Link. That is a lot of money for a person on a salary of \$28 000 a year.

Mr Wells interjected.

Mr STENSHOLT — For the two of them.

Mr Wells interjected.

Mr STENSHOLT — They travel in separate cars to different destinations. The kids have to be driven to school before the parents travel to work. The opposition still does not think about such matters. The previous government looked after the big end of town, not after the little people. It ignored services for the people, including education, hospitals and the use of roads by commuters. It forgot about the ordinary people — and they forgot about the former government.

I commend the bill to the house as an example of legislation making adjustments for the benefit of Victorians. It provides them with better access, a fairer price, better governance and a better system of monitoring contracts, and ensures the contractor actually performs. It ensures the police will not be forced to send infringement notices to commuters.

The arrangements now in place are unusual. We do not want people getting surprises in the post because the tolls have been incorrectly levelled. Inspectors will be able to conduct regular checks. I am sure Transurban will be more than happy to cooperate under the new system to ensure the tolls are levied efficiently and properly.

The legislation can force the company to act properly or be fined, rather than having to drag it through the courts to impose fines. The bill will provide better access at a fairer price with more flexibility in the available tolling arrangements, particularly in the south-east and the southern links.

Mr Leigh interjected.

Mr STENSHOLT — The opposition did not think much about the south-eastern and southern links when it introduced the legislation. It did not allow any flexibility. The former government wanted retirees from those suburbs to pay \$7 each to drive to the football at the Melbourne Cricket Ground or to visit an exhibition at the National Gallery. Maybe they can now watch the footy or go to the art gallery — where they might be able to see Henry Bolte, because his picture is back there now. They are much better arrangements that provide people with a more equitable system, better record management and a fairer result, and they also give the people of Victoria good governance.

Mr WELLS (Wantirna) — I will make only a few brief remarks about the Melbourne City Link (Amendment) Bill.

During the late 1980s the Australian Labor Party came out with the idea of linking the Eastern Freeway with the Tullamarine and West Gate freeways. David White and Jim Kennan came up with a plan of action. I had a

vested interest at the time because I was completing my masters degree in accounting. I met with some of the brains behind the project. They were brilliant economists.

Mr Leigh — Who, White and Kennan?

Mr WELLS — No, the bureaucrats who were assisting me with my masters. They were excellent. They realised there was a problem, and they wanted to fix it. The problem they saw was that Melbourne was becoming gridlocked and traffic was going nowhere. When you picked up a container at the wharf and tried to get it out to Dandenong it took too long. They needed to fix that problem.

However, as with all good ideas, what did the Labor government do? It did not deliver. Jim Kennan and David White could not understand the finance and did not have the courage to explain what needed to be done or how the problem could be fixed. They had great ideas but, just as with the present government, they could not deliver on their promises.

The former coalition government came into office in 1992. It said, 'We are going to fix this' and started to do something concrete about it.

To be competitive, businesses in places like Dandenong or Moorabbin need to get products from their business premises to the wharf quickly and efficiently, and then just as quickly from the wharf back to the south-eastern suburbs. Some 60 per cent of all manufacturing in Australia is done in Melbourne's south-eastern suburbs, so distribution costs, which are about 20 per cent of total costs, are significant.

The former coalition government made a commitment and, in order to deliver on it, simply had to work in partnership with the private sector. I was amused to hear the honourable member for Burwood refer to our fetish for the private sector. I am sure his leader would have been pleased to hear him speak about that fetish, especially as an article in today's *Herald Sun* headed 'Spencer Street station on track for revamp' states:

Private sector capital would be by far the major contributor in the project to transform the station from a blight on the city to a major gateway to the Docklands.

It goes on to report the Premier as saying:

'It is an embarrassment'.

The honourable member for Burwood might have to make a few explanations to his leader, who has come out and said that his government can work with the private sector in partnership. The honourable member

for Burwood, on the other hand, says the opposition parties when in government had a fetish for the private sector. I find that amusing. The government of the time had no choice but to involve the private sector.

The Leader of the Opposition at the time, the honourable member for Broadmeadows, said he would use a 3 cent levy, 1 cent of which would be spent in the country and 2 cents in the city. A calculation reveals that that levy would raise between \$90 million and \$110 million a year. Anyone on the government benches who can understand finance will realise that that would not even pay the interest bill at commercial rates on the \$1.7 billion required for the project. It would not turn one sod of dirt. That clearly demonstrates that the government does not understand finance. Not a cent of such a levy would be spent on country roads or city roads, because all of it would be taken up in interest payments. There would be no money in the country, no money in the city, and not one sod turned on City Link. All of it would be taken up in interest payments.

The Australian Labor Party suggested a tax on Victorians. I can assure you, Sir, that country people would have really enjoyed that! The Labor Party suggested that every Victorian, from Mallacoota and Orbost to Portland, should contribute to a city infrastructure project. Wouldn't it have been fairer to introduce a toll — a user-pays system — of the sort implemented by the coalition government? Then members of the business community would be able to decide to do three trips from the wharf in a day instead of two. Who in their right mind would plan to have a \$200 000 truck caught in traffic? It does not make good business sense. Let the operators follow the user-pays principle and get their businesses moving at a far cheaper rate.

When the ALP came up with the South Eastern Freeway — as it was then called — as a solution, it put a traffic light on the intersection of the freeway and Warrigal Road. It could not find a solution. The coalition government subsequently had to build a bridge there. The Labor government put traffic lights at Burke Road as well as at Warrigal Road. It was a disgrace. It did not make sense.

I have listened to the squawking of Labor members. The honourable member for Melton says he is not going to use City Link. I say he should stand up before his constituents, along with the honourable members for Tullamarine and Essendon, and demand that the Bracks Labor government purchase the Tullamarine Freeway section of City Link.

Mr Nardella interjected.

Mr WELLS — It is perfectly possible. I am sure Transurban would have no problem with selling it at the right price. The former coalition government left this government with an enormous budget surplus. Government members are philosophically opposed to the toll. Why don't those chicken-livered backbenchers stand up and tell Hullsly, Thwaites and the Premier that they want to use some of that enormous surplus to purchase that freeway section? Why don't they stand up for their principles and demand it?

A government member interjected.

Mr WELLS — Look at the facts. You were all opposed to it. Get some courage. Be prepared to stand up against your leader. None of you has done that so far. You have got the money, but you are frightened to stand up in caucus and in party meetings and say, 'Premier — —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Seitz) — Order! The honourable member for Wantirna will address the Chair and use the correct titles when he describes members opposite.

Mr WELLS — Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker.

I will recap briefly. The facts are clear. Government backbenchers are not prepared to stand up to their leadership team. They are philosophically opposed to the toll, and they have the money from the surplus to purchase the Tullamarine Freeway section from Transurban, yet not one of them has ever said it publicly.

Government members interjecting.

Mr WELLS — Transurban would, I am sure, at the right price — at the net present value — sell it. Perhaps it has been advertised as staying with Transurban for 34 years, but the government has the money. It is all sitting there. It is a simple solution. Stand up for your principles! Not one member of the government has offered to stand up for his or her principles.

I have offered one solution and I will now offer another. When in government the current opposition put money aside to undertake feasibility studies for the development of the Scoresby freeway. The solution of the current government is to widen Stud Road, which cannot be widened any further. It demonstrates that members of the government have no idea. I doubt that any members of the government have been out to Stud Road. If they had been, they would realise that during the day and night it is clogged with traffic and is a death

trap — it will not be long before someone is killed. Members of the government do not have the conviction to attempt to fix the problem by undertaking a feasibility study so that they can go ahead with the development of the Scoresby freeway.

On considering the purpose of the bill, I was interested to note that although Transurban might get 99.9 per cent of its billing correct — let us assume it is doing pretty well — the bill provides for Transurban to be fined every time it makes a mistake. Out of interest I wonder whether the Labor government will do the same for Slater and Gordon, for example. If they make one mistake, will the government fine those solicitors? If union fees — which are up to thousands of dollars — run out because a mistake is made, will the government fine the trade unions? It can do so — there are so many jobs floating around it seems that any mate of the Labor government is getting a job.

I support the opposition spokesman on transport who said that we are not opposing the legislation. We will be watching with great interest how the legislation works and just how often Transurban, which will be seen to be doing the right thing, will be fined.

Mr LANGUILLER (Sunshine) — Firstly, the people of the Sunshine electorate, and I am sure the majority of Victorians, agree that we should honour the contractual arrangements that the previous government entered into. The government will do so because it is in the business of working constructively with the private sector. Unlike other sections of the community, particularly in the opposition ranks, the government is in the business of working through the issues and remains confident that on every occasion it will be able to find solutions that meet the interests not only of the private sector but indeed of the general broad community.

In addition, I put on the record that one of the promises made before the election was that the government would make every possible endeavour to protect the users of City Link. The government is doing so. Unlike the previous government, now the opposition, the government is mindful of the users of City Link and the general community. A number of arrangements are being put in place that will deliver protection for those who are or will be using City Link facilities.

Prior to the election the Labor Party indicated to the Victorian community that a Labor government under the Steve Bracks new style of leadership would protect Victorian users. The documents on rebuilding the transport network and providing a better transport network for all Victorians contained the undertakings

that the government is implementing today. The majority of Victorians considered that what was said was responsible and they indicated that they wanted the Labor Party to take charge of the state. The Labor Party promised to review the City Link contract and introduce heavy fines on abuses by the toll company. The bill reflects precisely what was promised before the election and under the leadership of Premier Bracks and Minister Batchelor the provisions of the bill will protect Victorian users. Someone has to do that, because the previous government did not do so. Had we left it to the previous government we would have found ourselves — particularly those in the community who cannot afford the charges and tolls that have been put in place by the previous government — under a lot of pressure.

The bill aims to strike the right balance. It protects the interests of companies with which the government will continue to work very constructively, develop other arrangements and build Victoria together. At the same time the bill will protect users. The government recognises that companies are entitled to protect themselves against toll evasions. Provisions of the bill will ensure that companies can prosecute simply, efficiently and cost effectively those who may choose to evade tolls. At the same time, and equally importantly if not more, the provisions being put in place will ensure that users who receive unwarranted penalties are protected.

The government believes in access and equity and will implement them at every possible opportunity. Members on this side believe that government must intervene and play a constructive role to protect all members of the community. The Bracks government will protect everyone and govern for all Victorians — not just a section of the community.

The bill is a breakthrough for all users of City Link, including country Victorians, and particularly those who reside in the north-western suburbs. The shadow minister in particular does not appear to recognise that sections of the community cannot afford to pay the tolls that have been put in place under the policy of the previous government. Some people would have found \$14 an excessive amount of money. Think of pensioners, for instance, whether in the bush, working-class suburbs or those suburbs where the average income is in the order of \$19 000. Along with the honourable members for Tullamarine, Keilor and Melton, I represent a community that faces high levels of unemployment and lack of access to services. For many families attempting to educate their children all the costs imposed upon them amount to expenses that are not affordable.

Unfortunately, members of the opposition are not sensitive to such matters. They continue to maintain that one can leave absolutely everything in the hands of the market. Members of the government believe the market makes a contribution to the growth of Victoria but we also believe that on occasions it must be regulated and that government must play a role by intervening to protect the have-nots in society — that is, low-income earners, pensioners, students and others.

The bill is about protecting consumers. It reflects the Bracks government delivering again on another election promise. The government is saying to the people of Victoria, 'Every accountable promise we made is being put in place and gradually we will deliver our entire plan'. Members of the government listen to the people of Victoria. I look forward with interest to hearing the contributions of members of the National Party.

The Kennett government introduced the principal act, and the shadow minister defends it passionately. But he wants to have it both ways, given that he tries to distance himself from the former Premier, who featured in the newspapers today for taking home a painting that should be in the hands of the public. The opposition believes so deeply in assets being in private hands that he took it home.

I look forward to the contributions to the debate of members of the National Party, because if the government had not intervened and introduced the amendments to allow cheaper and more competitive access to City Link, the bush would have been particularly affected by the arrangements put in place by the previous Kennett government and supported by the shadow minister.

I refer to toll administration infringement notices. The bill will enable on-the-spot fines to be imposed on Transurban in respect of three toll administration offences. The first is the misuse of private information, which is a serious matter. The offence involves private information being sent to other private sector companies if the release of that private information is not authorised. We often see the results of the misuse of private information in our letterboxes. A person who provides information to one company may subsequently receive junk mail or other merchandising literature. The government is committed to ensuring that private information is not misused, which is one reason why the bill is before the house.

The bill also deals with the failure to keep proper records — that is, failing to record an account properly. The government is of the view that corporations must keep proper records of their activities, and the

companies involved have not objected to the government's proposals set out in the bill. The community is entitled to those measures. Parliament is entitled to introduce the amendment to ensure that corporations maintain proper records so that infringement notices, if and when issued, can be pursued thoroughly and in a crystal-clear way.

The bill also refers to preventing an inspector of tolling records from carrying out an inspection. The maximum fine for each of those offences prosecuted by summons is \$10 000. Prosecution by summons is currently the only way of enforcing the offences. The penalty to be imposed by a toll administration infringement notice will be \$2000.

The proposal will also allow infringement notices to be issued by persons authorised by the minister, such as independent inspectors. At present only the police can take enforcement action. The principal act authorised only police officers to carry out that activity. It imposed on police officers additional duties that would have taken up a lot of their time. The government would prefer independent inspectors to carry out those activities. That is in line with the government's commitment to efficiency, because activities should not be duplicated by different departments. The proposal will give police officers more time to concentrate on the primary activities assigned to them — namely, activities involving community safety. I support the appointment of independent inspectors to carry out these activities. It is an improvement to efficiency and effectiveness.

The government believes commuting is a fundamental right. Where possible governments should facilitate the right of a person to travel around the city. It is not always possible for individuals to commute. I recall a story told in my office of a person who was unable to travel to the bush during the Christmas period because she could not afford it. That is of concern to the government, and it should be of concern to the opposition. It should be of particular concern to National Party members, and I repeat that I look forward to their contributions to the debate.

Government members believe we should listen to the people of Victoria and be sensitive to their needs. Whenever possible the government will try to deliver policies that reflect its traditional commitment to equity and social justice.

I refer to a number of arrangements put in place to deliver cheaper day passes for City Link users. The Bracks government has delivered on its pre-election commitment to achieve a better deal for country

motorists and other occasional City Link users. The government will enable them to take advantage of cheaper City Link services and provide flexibility that did not exist under the principal act introduced by the previous government. Negotiations between the government and Transurban have taken place and arrangements have been put in place. The companies are agreeable to cheaper tolls and more flexible arrangements.

In the context of cheaper tolls and greater flexibility I refer to the new \$2.50 Tulla day pass, which will be introduced as an alternative to the existing day pass. The government has done everything it can under the circumstances. It believes the Tullamarine Freeway should have remained a freeway, but it must adhere to the contractual arrangements made by the previous government. Despite that, the government is trying to deliver better, more competitive services to the community.

New \$3.50 day passes have also been introduced. Those flexible passes will be particularly relevant to users of the western link, and they will be welcomed by country Victorians. Under the previous legislation country Victorians would have had to pay \$14.00 for a day pass. The new arrangements will enable users to pay tolls only when they need to and only on the sections of road they use. These arrangements allow the sale of day passes to parts of City Link rather than the whole network, which means the passes will be cheaper.

Importantly, as I said earlier, the amendments enable the implementation of a government policy commitment given during the last election — to negotiate a better deal for country motorists and other occasional users of City Link.

The Bracks government has been particularly critical of the imposition of tolls on existing roads. The residents of surrounding suburbs, such as Tullamarine, Melton and Sunshine, which I represent, are penalised for making journeys that have not previously involved tolls. The government looks forward to making improvements in that situation.

The act passed in 1995 allowed for the prosecution of Transurban for failing to keep proper tolling records. The offence incurred a maximum fine of \$10 000.

The bill will strengthen the existing legislation by spelling out the record-keeping requirements. Specifically, Transurban must keep accurate records of tolling registrations and exemptions so that it can be

determined, with certainty, whether or not evasion has occurred.

The bill will also enable infringement notices to be issued against toll companies in respect of three classes of toll administration offences, to which I referred earlier.

In conclusion, the bill facilitates the introduction of cheaper tolls for country and occasional users of City Link. The bill will strike the right balance between, on the one hand, protecting companies and their interests and entitlements to pursue and prosecute toll evaders, and on the other protecting users who behave properly.

The government considers the amendments are consistent with existing arrangements between Transurban and the state. The intention is to strengthen and clarify those arrangements. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr JASPER (Murray Valley) — I support the Melbourne City Link (Amendment) Bill and remind the house and the honourable member for Sunshine that I am a National Party member representing Murray Valley in north-eastern Victoria and have an interest in the development of the City Link project.

In the 1980s the then Labor government recognised that a situation was developing in Melbourne where freeways were developed on the basis of the increasing traffic volumes but that they led nowhere. Traffic congestion was growing at such a pace that the then Labor government indicated clearly through its transport minister that metropolitan Melbourne's road system had to be upgraded and the freeways linked to move transport more efficiently. That would not only help motorists generally but also assist with transporting goods from country Victoria. Country members of Parliament recognised that need.

When the government changed in 1992 one of the major projects examined by the coalition was how to upgrade metropolitan Melbourne's roads to carry larger volumes of traffic, particularly heavy transports and trucks travelling from country Victoria to the ports.

The coalition government should take credit for the \$2 billion project to connect the freeway system. There was much discussion in the coalition room about how the project should be funded. Options included increasing the state franchise fee on petrol, government funding of approximately \$170 million a year through the Better Roads program and introducing a toll system. There was no hope of the government funding such a project, even with a third of the funds being guaranteed for country Victoria. The National Party thought there

was only one option — the introduction of a toll system. It considered that the project should be privately funded to ensure that it would be completed and successfully connect the freeway systems operating in Melbourne.

Mr Acting Speaker, in your contribution you spoke about the former South Eastern Car Park and the difficulties experienced on that freeway and other freeways in metropolitan Melbourne. The coalition government agreed that the project should be a private enterprise project, which brings us to where we are today. The legislation does not change the system to one of government funding or a buyback of the project. Rather, the principal act is refined to make it operate more effectively. The National Party opposed a fuel levy but supported the introduction of the tollway and user-pays system.

In his second-reading speech the Minister for Transport states, in part:

The amendments are designed to strike a better balance between the rights of toll road companies and the rights of the users of toll roads.

Nobody would oppose that. That is backed up by Transurban. The minister further states:

In his address to Transurban's annual general meeting on 23 November, Transurban's chairman stated that Transurban is comfortable with the government's intention to 'rigorously enforce privacy obligations and the accuracy of billing'.

The government recognised that it had a responsibility to do so. However, Transurban acknowledged that it also had a responsibility not only to bring the project to finality but also to ensure that it provided a service to road users. As a private enterprise operation it also had a responsibility to be profitable and to produce returns for those who provided the funds for the project.

I note that the second-reading speech says that:

... record-keeping errors on the part of City Link operators could result in unwarranted prosecution of a toll evader ...

In the government's view, it is just as important that City Link users be protected from billing errors and from unwarranted allegations of toll evasion and penalties.

I support the comments that have been made, as does the chairman of Transurban, about the bill's strengthening the legislation:

... by spelling out these record-keeping requirements. Specifically, Transurban must keep accurate records of tolling registrations ...

Like many other country members of Parliament, when the tolling system started I received representations

from a number of people about the difficulties it posed for country people. Transurban has already responded to those difficulties by making changes, albeit following representations from the Minister for Transport and the government about making the tolling system more effective and assisting people who use City Link only occasionally and who would not need e-tags unless they often travelled on tolled roads.

I received a representation from a Wangaratta constituent who had inadvertently travelled on the tollway and received a notice to pay. He wanted to pay the toll at a major post office in Wangaratta, where he was able to purchase day passes, and he was unaware that that was not possible. When I checked it out I found that the only way he could pay was through one of the three major Transurban offices in Melbourne or by using a credit card. He did not want to pay by credit card, and he believed he should be able to pay the toll the next day at a post office.

I have made representations to Transurban on the matter. Transurban has responded positively, saying it agreed that there are anomalies in the tolling system and that a settling-in period over a number of months is necessary to bed down the system. Transurban confirmed that the penalty imposed during the first three months would be \$25, rising to \$100 after that time. Apart from the associated administration fees, the penalties collected go to the government and not to Transurban. That point needs to be made clear.

During the discussions the people from Transurban said that the settling in period has been effective even though it has been having problems. They said that they will continue to look at anomalies such as the one I have brought to the attention of the house.

The availability of day passes in country Victoria needs to be extended. Consideration needs to be given to making day passes available not only through major post offices but also through all postal outlets and service stations so they are easily accessible by people who wish to use the tollway only on the few occasions they go to Melbourne.

Most Victorians are aware that they can pay gas, electricity and a range of other accounts through Australia Post. However, no proper system exists to enable people to pay tolls, and fines where applicable, through Australia Post. I hope the minister will take that on board and make the appropriate representations to Transurban. However, Transurban's response to me in writing and in discussion was that those issues will be investigated and addressed as the tolling system

becomes more effective and City Link comes into full operation.

Country people are not opposed to paying a toll to use the Melbourne tollway system. However, they want an effective system that can be easily accessed, given that they will use it on only a few occasions. National Party members, including me, supported the development of the City Link project. The bill refines the project and makes clearer Transurban's responsibilities to the users of the system. I hope the system will become more effective and be utilised more easily by country people by their being given greater access to day passes when required.

Mr HELPER (Ripon) — It gives me great pleasure to support the bill, because it directly affects my electorate. Residents of the southern parts of my electorate commute to Melbourne down the Western Highway, and as such escape the toll web of City Link. However, residents in the northern parts of my electorate, from St Arnaud to north of Maryborough, tend to commute to Melbourne down the Calder Highway, and as a result they get funnelled into the trap of City Link.

It is therefore important to my electors that toll users are protected against toll companies abusing their special position. I talk about toll companies and their special position because they have exactly that.

There are not too many other situations, if indeed any, where the record keeping of private enterprise companies can determine whether or not somebody is faced with a fine. I find that situation abhorrent. The government needs to impose close checks on the activities of City Link, including its toll record keeping. I will return to that aspect of the bill.

An aspect of the bill that will ease the toll burden on my constituents is the provision for registering vehicles for particular toll zones, the benefit of which is obvious. Not too many people commute from my electorate down the Tullamarine Freeway and across to the other side of the city. Why should they purchase a day pass for a system they will use only a fraction of? Admittedly, the southern part of the system is not being tolled, but that is because the tunnels are full of water so the whole system does not work. However, one presumes that Transurban will one day get its act together and that the Burnley Tunnel will become operative, making the whole of the system available.

Without the bill the day pass toll would go up. However, the only viable option for most of my constituents, who go to Melbourne to visit a hospital or

a relative or whatever else country people occasionally come to Melbourne for — and I say 'occasionally' because they do not wish to purchase an e-tag — is obviously a day pass. As I said before, why on earth should they buy a day pass for a whole system rather than for the section of the system they wish to use?

The legislation will benefit the eastern part of the state as well through the potential for Transurban to introduce more toll products.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr HELPER — It wouldn't be going through the tunnel at the moment. I suspect it would get bogged.

It is relatively easy to dwell purely on the problems that have beset Transurban in the development of City Link, but one could reasonably expect with a development of this size for a few mistakes and — pardon the French — stuff-ups to occur, but I guess Transurban is stretching the credibility a little.

To demonstrate that point, I shall reflect on how the marketplace views Transurban's performance in developing this major project. In March 1999 Transurban's shares were priced at \$4.90; the closing price today was \$2.65. That is a sad reflection of how the market views the competence of Transurban and its earning potential — a 37 per cent drop in the capital value of shares to investors.

An Honourable Member — Have you got any shares in it?

Mr HELPER — No, fortunately not, and I hope the parliamentary superannuation trust doesn't either!

Why do the investors view Transurban as being a 37 per cent dud? That is probably due to the public acceptance or otherwise of the toll products offered. Why pay for a day pass to a whole system when all you want is to go into the city?

The bill will give Transurban the opportunity to develop appropriate and more acceptable toll products for country Victorians. Let me reflect on how country Victorians view the products that are offered. The products offered by the City Link operators are probably analogous to a supermarket without cash registers. If you are a country resident and you want to travel on City Link how on earth do you buy the product? If you live in a small town you can't go to your local post office because only a handful of small towns have post offices. It is said that down the track the product will be available through Shell service stations and so on. Hopefully that will work so that

country Victorians can at least use the City Link, although it is a bit stiff to charge them for a road for which they have already paid taxes. But never mind!

The user friendliness of the system is atrocious. As I said, it is like going to a supermarket without cash registers — you are constantly told that the products are magnificent and that you should purchase them, but at the end of the day you can't buy them because you don't know how to pay for them. People who live in metropolitan areas take it for granted that they can spontaneously travel from one side of Melbourne to the other and to the country. They do not think about the logistical problems of ringing up for a day pass and virtually having to have a secret handshake with the post office to travel on City Link. My point is that the product range offered by Transurban is discriminatory against country Victorians. The bill at least provides Transurban with the opportunity to market relevant products.

I want to take up the point raised by the honourable member for Tullamarine that it is offensive for people exercising their choice not to travel on City Link — whether they be from the country or metropolitan areas abutting the City Link system — to be abused as toll cheats. If the opposition were still in government such people would probably be called un-Victorian. I do not use City Link for a number of reasons, a very important one being that it simply does not suit my travel needs. It does not lead to where I want to go and it is just as congested to get on and off City Link as it is using other roads.

I shall touch on another provision of the bill — that is, City Link operators will be liable for on-the-spot fines as a result of toll administration offences. Just as the opposition now stands condemned for it, the government could rightly be accused of being derelict in its responsibilities if it left the toll administration of City Link without checks and balances.

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Kilgour) — Order! The honourable member for Doncaster should cease interjecting.

Mr HELPER — One need look no further than the track record of Transurban in terms of the endless excuses for why the tolling system did not start on time. Remember the endless front page newspaper coverage — there was always another excuse: the computer was not working or somebody forgot to plug it in. It was always somebody else's fault.' The former government signed a contract to allow the City Link

operators to fine people willy-nilly for toll evasion, yet the people running the system had to delay their opening time by more than six months. What an absolute dereliction of duty on the part of the former government which signed the contract. It is absolutely outrageous!

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr HELPER — Ten, actually.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Kilgour) — Order! The honourable member should not be concerned about interjections across the house.

Mr HELPER — Mr Acting Speaker, it is not much of a concern, but I take your point.

In conclusion, I support the bill because it provides Transurban with the opportunity to improve its product range. Irrespective of how the government feels about toll roads, the state is lumbered with City Link for 34 years and will have to make the best of it for all Victorians. Obviously the former government had no concerns for country and regional residents when it signed a range of City Link contracts. This government is now picking up the pieces in effect so that the City Link operators can at least offer products that have some relevance to residents of regional and country areas.

My second reason for supporting the bill is that it holds the City Link operators accountable for tolling errors and mistakes. As I said, they do not have a proud record in the implementation of the tolling system.

City Link may well claim that its technology is state of the art and therefore has some teething problems, but it is pretty sad that six or eight months after it was all supposed to happen with a big fanfare we are still waiting for one part of the system to be opened. The word around the traps is that when the southern link actually opens the tolling system is likely to collapse again, and the same for the western link.

This opposition, which was then in government, signed off on a set of contracts that allow City Link to fine individuals and impose a burden of proof on motorists, who may be falsely accused of having misused the tolling system, and impose on-the-spot fines on them. What an absolutely ridiculous proposition for the now opposition to have signed off on!

The third point of the bill relates to compelling City Link to keep appropriate tolling records. What an onerous burden to put on City Link! Surely one would expect a company that had the privilege of being able to

fine motorists, with the backing of the state government — irrespective of that government's political denomination — for toll system abuses to be compelled to keep appropriate, accurate and extensive records of the basis on which it intends to fine those motorists.

The fact that the substance of the provisions in the bill was not included in the original contract reflects sadly and shabbily on the now opposition, which was in government when the contract was signed and which had the ability to think ahead on such simple issues as the types of products City Link was capable of providing. The former government failed to do that in its quest to privatise and sell off to the private sector whatever it possibly could, including the freeways, for which all of us have had to pay taxes over the years. In its ideological slavery to privatisation the former government did not see such obvious things as the need for City Link to be able to provide a range of simple and relevant products.

At least City Link is prepared to take up the option of the Tulla pass and other product options for the southern part of the network when it is finally opened — which one would imagine would have to happen one of these days. I am glad City Link is considering taking up those options, but in the meantime it is a travesty of justice for the community to be expected to trust City Link to get its tolling to the point that it can issue fines or cause fines to be issued to motorists without appropriate record keeping or accountability. The bill sets those three key issues right, and I commend it to the house.

Mr THOMPSON (Sandringham) — The importance of Melbourne having an effective transport network for the movement of freight, goods and traffic cannot be underestimated. In their contributions Labor Party members often comment on the importance of pensioners to the state. The greatest contribution the Labor Party will make to pensioners in this state if it continues with its present myopic policies will be to create more of them. The City Link project is integral to the future economic development of Victoria, not just over the next 5 or 10 years but over the next 100 years.

In 1839 the road between Melbourne and Williamstown was 26 kilometres long. I can almost hear the forebears of today's honourable members talking back in those days about reducing the journey from Melbourne to Williamstown — some 26 kilometres — to 10 kilometres. The early roads of Melbourne were constructed through tolls in a number of circumstances. Convict labour gangs from New South Wales were used to dig drains, to grub trees out

of Bourke and Collins streets and to provide an effective early road network. St Kilda Road was a tollway. The extension of the Swanston Street bridge on that roadway was tolled — that is, the punt and bridge network. Later on, when roads were built between Melbourne and Donnybrook and Melbourne and Plenty, local property owners were levied for the construction of roads. The history of Victoria has established a precedent where some of the great roads were built through tolling.

Let the record stand that in March 1996 the Labor Party opposed the City Link project as part of its election policy and platform, again underestimating the importance of an effective road network for Melbourne in terms of the movement of freight and commerce, and ignoring the benefits of reduced fuel consumption costs and reduced pollution as a consequence of less fumes being emitted because cars would not be idling for the same length of time.

On Sunday night I used City Link for the first time as I travelled out past Sunbury and back to Melbourne.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr THOMPSON — The question about tolls has been raised, too. Residents from the southern parts of Melbourne have a choice: they can either go down Kingsway, over the West Gate Bridge and around the Western Ring Road if they want to avoid using City Link, or, if time is of the essence, they can go straight onto the Tullamarine Freeway, via the Bolte Bridge, and thereby save considerable time.

It is interesting to note that 9 minutes or so was added to the journey because of the necessity to get from the Bolte Bridge section onto the Monash Freeway. When that part of the link is completed there will be a saving of some 9 minutes; and that time saving will be replicated time and again by the many motorists who will be using that linkage.

In relation to other benefits generated by the development of the road, one may consider the improved access for all commuters in and out of the city. The precise benefits are yet to be quantified, but experts in urban traffic have estimated that of the number of people who wish to access or travel through the city, 90 per cent would have a city centre destination, which means that a smaller number of people would be seeking to travel around the periphery of the city. That quantum in non-peak times and the quantum at other times of the year represent an important cohort of transport operators: users, who will

be using City Link transport networks to move freight, people and goods.

The Labor Party policy in this area has been one of opposition to the project. It has failed to recognise the importance of there being swift access to the port of Melbourne and swift access to Tullamarine airport by people from the southern parts of Melbourne. The Labor Party will be judged over the next three years, and perhaps beyond, against the benchmarks of employment, export opportunities and investment levels in this state.

It is true that visionary work was undertaken by the former coalition government, which took the bull by the horns and purpose-developed a road network that would serve Melbourne not just over the next 5 or 10 years but over the next 100 years — just as those forefathers of the City of Melbourne had done when they determined to build the St Kilda Road boulevard and when they purpose built Swanston Street bridge and other road networks that were important to the settlement and the building of the city in its early days.

The bill seeks to amend the principal act and to provide for vehicle registration to be limited to specified toll zones. That is perhaps a constructive refinement, and ongoing measures will be incorporated by Transurban to respond to usage patterns and market forces to optimise use of the road so that it is of the greatest benefit to all Victorians.

Secondly, the bill provides for infringement notices to be issued in respect of offences relating to toll administration on the part of a number of consumers, and is designed to improve the efficacy of the system.

Debate interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.

ADJOURNMENT

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! Pursuant to sessional orders the time has come for me to interrupt business.

Portland Maritime Discovery Centre

Dr NAPTHINE (Leader of the Opposition) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Environment and Conservation. I seek the minister's agreement to waive a \$650 per annum fee to be paid by 8 March by the Portland Maritime Discovery Centre for a commercial wildlife display licence. For a non-profit organisation the fee is considerable. It is wildlife licence number CDI022147.

The fee of \$650 a year is paid to raise revenue for the Department of Natural Resources and Environment so it can carry out inspections and ensure adequate feeding, watering and care of wildlife.

At the Portland Maritime Discovery Centre the wildlife consists of a whale skeleton. The centre is paying a \$650 fee to make sure a whale skeleton is being well looked after. The skeleton is in the centre because a whale was washed up on the beach at Narrawong in the 1980s and the minister for conservation at the time, the Honourable Joan Kirner, ordered that the whale be buried on the beach and perhaps later used for scientific purposes. The body of the whale was exhumed early last year by the Portland Maritime Discovery Centre with support and assistance from the general community, and the skeleton was cleaned up and presented for display in the maritime centre.

The centre, which also provides tourist information, attracts a large number of visitors, and the whale skeleton is a major attraction. It has the name Skeletonia and can be touched and felt; the size of the sperm whale can be seen; and visitors can even do a Jonah and sit inside it.

It is inappropriate that a whale skeleton be the subject of a commercial wildlife display licence intended for live animal displays, particularly the display of Australian native animals, where there is a need for supervision to ensure the animals are cared for. Such displays should attract a licence fee and regular inspection, but I fail to see how a whale skeleton warrants this. I ask the minister to waive the fee.

Powercor: Geelong supply

Mr LONEY (Geelong North) — I wish to raise with the minister representing the Minister for Energy and Resources in another place the issue of the performance of Powercor in the Geelong area, particularly during this summer and the last four summers.

Since the Kennett government embarked on its electricity privatisation experiment, Geelong has become used to substandard reliability from its electricity supplier during the summer.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr LONEY — You sold Loy Yang! Check your facts. You sold the lot! You have condemned the people of the state to a substandard electricity supply.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr LONEY — They have the wrong station.

Over the past four years, particularly during the summer, the people of Geelong have had to suffer blackout after blackout as a result of pole fires cutting off the electricity supply. Blackouts reached almost plague proportions this summer in the hot weather. The problem became so significant in the local community that the local answer to Rip Van Winkle, the honourable member for South Barwon, woke from his seven-year slumber to make a comment. That shows how significant the situation is!

Residents have been putting up with that lack of reliability. Powercor has confirmed that washdowns are no longer occurring as frequently as they did previously. Geelong has had blackout after blackout.

I would like the minister to tell me two things. Firstly, can the minister advise the house whether there is any impediment in the deal written between the former Kennett government and Powercor that would stop Powercor giving a discount to Geelong electricity consumers in acknowledgment of the number of days they have not had a power supply in recent times? Secondly, can the minister advise whether anything under those agreements would stop Powercor relocating its head office from another retailer's area to its own area near Geelong?

Frankston: safe boat harbour

Ms McCALL (Frankston) — I would like to raise an issue with the part-time Minister for Planning, who I note is not in the chamber. He is probably trying to work out which of his five offices he needs to be in to raise this issue, or perhaps he is still reading some correspondence. I refer the minister to a letter I wrote to him on 12 November 1999. I have yet to receive either an acknowledgment or a response of any kind.

The letter concerns the proposed Frankston safe boat harbour. I realise with some hesitation that I must have sent it to the wrong office, but I can correct that immediately. The proposed Frankston safe boat harbour has been discussed in the electorate of Frankston over the past 10 to 15 years as a development for the community of Frankston and the Mornington Peninsula as a whole.

During the course of the previous government an environment effects statement was issued, a survey was undertaken within the community of Frankston and, most recently, a brochure was issued by the Frankston City Council. That documentation details at great length the benefits to the community of the Frankston safe boat harbour, the only safe boat harbour proposed

to be located on the eastern side of Port Phillip Bay. It mentions the respondents and options 1, 2 and 3. The project has the support of the community and the Frankston City Council.

I ask the part-time Minister for Planning, when he finds time to get through the correspondence in his office, to respond to my letter of 12 November in which I request his assistance regarding the Olivers Hill–Frankston safe boat harbour facilities. If he has difficulty in finding the letter because in error I may have sent it to the wrong one of the five offices, I am happy to fax a copy to whichever office he likes first thing in the morning.

V/Line: wheelchair access

Mr MAXFIELD (Narracan) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Transport. Recently I uncovered a serious situation regarding the use of V/Line trains by persons in wheelchairs, of whom we have many in Gippsland. I was contacted by several wheelchair users who have had difficulty accessing V/Line trains. Because the old V/Line trains do not have wheelchair access, passengers in wheelchairs, although paying full fares, have been put with the luggage in the guard's van. That practice is clearly unacceptable. People in wheelchairs pay the same fares as other passengers but are forced to travel with the luggage because of their wheelchairs.

The question arises of what else is in the guard's van. Recently, on a day when the temperature reached more than 30 degrees, a person in a wheelchair was forced to travel with a calf and a number of chooks in the guard's van. Because calves and chooks do what comes naturally to them, it was an extremely unpleasant trip to Melbourne.

The situation has been continuing for some time. Sadly, over seven years the Kennett government did absolutely nothing about this issue, which shows its total disregard for rural users of V/Line trains. Disabled persons, like many country Victorians, have suffered immensely under the vicious, uncaring Kennett government.

I ask the minister to investigate the lack of wheelchair access on V/Line country trains.

Mildura: building inspections

Mr SAVAGE (Mildura) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Local Government, and opposition members will be pleased to know it is not another flogging of the former government.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr SAVAGE — I should not have encouraged them, Madam Deputy Speaker! Recently the Mildura Rural City Council issued 2000 notices to constituents to chase up final inspections for building permits. This in itself is not a problem except that some of the notices are nine years old and are significantly out of date. The letter sent to the residents was somewhat threatening, and one can imagine the response of an elderly resident receiving such a letter stating that her insurance may be invalid because she does not have a certificate of occupancy. This is irrelevant if a person has just had a fence, tank or carport put up for which a certificate of occupancy is not needed.

The matter has been handled in a very heavy-handed way, and a number of constituents could nominate the day of final inspection. However, council administration was uncooperative and resistant to accepting that advice. One gentleman told me he could name the day the inspector came. Because of the council amalgamations the records are incomplete but, as is usually the case with bureaucrats, they are never wrong. One woman was able to prove the matter to the council and it said it would review her \$50 fee. The council then issued another fee for administrative costs.

Half the money collected by the council goes to the private provider who does the inspections, so there is an element of money raising that is unjustified and not needed in the community.

I call upon the minister to inquire whether it is appropriate after nine years for a council to issue notices under these circumstances. The council should be called to account for being so tardy in administering the Building Act.

CFA: firefighters dispute

Mr McARTHUR (Monbulk) — Earlier today the Minister for Police and Emergency Services proudly told the house he is happy to intervene in disputes between the Country Fire Authority (CFA) and the United Firefighters Union (UFU). I will read to the minister some quotes from a letter I received from the Montrose Fire Brigade — and before he objects, I am happy to table the letter. It is so good I would like to have it incorporated in *Hansard*.

The letter states, among other things:

The UFU represents the CFA's career firefighters (approximately 280), yet it is attempting to impose its will on the 63 000 volunteer firefighters —

in the CFA —

the silent majority has had enough of the UFU's interference.

The UFU has been conducting a prolonged campaign to denigrate the professionalism and performance of the CFA's volunteer firefighters and now has attempted to disrupt a program aimed at providing additional training for volunteers in the outer metropolitan area.

The letter is from the captain of the Montrose Fire Brigade, one of the best performing and most well trained CFA brigades in the outer metropolitan area. That brigade has an outstanding record and a captain with a proud history.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member is required to ask the minister to take some action.

Mr McARTHUR — I will ask him to take some action, Madam Deputy Speaker. The UFU firstly sought to disrupt the training program by putting pressure on two Victorian state ministers, the Minister for Post Compulsory Education, Training and Employment, and the industrial relations minister who has no industrial relations powers. When that failed the UFU sought to disrupt the training program by attempting to prevent suitably qualified CFA volunteers from providing training to other volunteers who wished to upgrade their skills. What is the training program?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member has 1 minute. I ask him to ask the minister now to take action.

Mr McARTHUR — The program is endorsed by the firefighting authorities council. It is a national competencies-based program with good credentials. It is well researched and run by the TAFE divisions of the Swinburne University of Technology and the University of Ballarat; yet the UFU is trying to block CFA volunteers from gaining access.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! What action do you wish the minister to take?

Mr McARTHUR — Firstly, the UFU criticises the CFA for lack of skills and tends to denigrate its professionalism. Secondly, it tries to block volunteers from being trained. I ask the interventionist minister, who proudly told the house today he would intervene, to take his hands out of his pockets, intervene and prevent the UFU from trying to deny loyal, expert and qualified volunteers access to proper national training programs offered by the CFA.

Geelong bypass

Mr TREZISE (Geelong) — I refer the Minister for Transport to the growing community awareness and support in Geelong for an eastern bypass route around

Geelong as an alternative to the long-proposed western bypass that would also go around the city. For as long as I can remember the Geelong community has discussed the need to construct a western bypass around the city — that is, a bypass extending from the Melbourne road along the western boundaries of the city of Geelong and onto the Princes Highway towards Colac. The weakness of that proposal is that such a bypass would not service the Bellarine Peninsula.

An alternative proposal that is quickly gaining support in the community of Geelong is an eastern bypass that would service not only the western side of Geelong but, importantly, the Bellarine Peninsula. The proposed eastern bypass would separate from the Melbourne road at Lara. It would traverse the Corio Bay spit via trestle bridges and tunnels under the bay to Point Henry and then motorists could head left to the Bellarine Peninsula or right towards the Princes Highway and Colac.

I ask the minister to avail himself of information that has already been provided to Vicroads in Geelong. I ask also that he seek from his department an initial report on the eastern bypass as an alternative to the western bypass proposal. It would provide a medium to long-term solution to the traffic problems that have increased in Geelong over the past decade.

Monash: council elections

Mr SMITH (Glen Waverley) — I raise for the attention of the Minister for Local Government the forthcoming Monash City Council elections. I live in the Napier ward of the Monash City Council. Many brochures have come through my letterbox to date. Interestingly, the material does not in any way claim to represent either political party. There are seven candidates in Napier ward; the seventh on the list will in next week's Waverley *Gazette* declare herself as a member of the Liberal Party. Another candidate will also declare membership of the Liberal Party.

So far as the Labor Party is concerned, at the top of the ballot paper will be the name Geoff Lake. According to the parliamentary telephone directory, Geoff Lake works for the honourable member for Frankston East, an interesting proposition. I hope that in this case the Minister for Local Government will enforce the Local Government Act and ensure that members who stand for particular political parties come out and show their colours.

The letter that has gone out to date in the Napier ward has given no indication of the political parties of the various people. As it is a blue-ribbon Liberal area, I am sure that if the same trickery was carried out as was

carried out under the old Waverley council, people would be elected who were pretending to be Independents but who were in fact members of political parties and were — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! There is too much audible conversation.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr SMITH — That comment from the honourable member for Springvale is interesting, because when he stood for Waverley council some years ago — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr SMITH — I thought he would come in and fall for this one. I was hoping he would, because he said that he was standing as an Independent, when he was president of Young Labor. How interesting. Anyway, as far as I am concerned — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! Honourable members seem to be overexcited this evening. To those who wish to participate in the adjournment debate, I suggest they stay. To those who are having some trouble controlling themselves, I suggest they take themselves elsewhere.

Mr SMITH — I want the Minister for Local Government to ensure that elections are conducted fairly and that political members come out with their political colours.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member's time has expired.

Nursing homes: regulation

Ms LINDELL (Carrum) — The matter I wish to raise tonight with the Minister for Aged Care is the distressing situation that has come to light in the past few days of the inadequate care being provided to frail, aged nursing home residents in my electorate.

The electorate of Carrum has a number of retirement villages, hostels and nursing homes providing excellent care to their residents. But my electorate has a higher-than-average number of older Victorians, and the reports of the past week about inadequate care being provided at Riverside Nursing Home have alarmed and distressed many of my constituents.

However, what has outraged people primarily is that the responsible federal minister knew for a month of the disgraceful treatment being administered at the nursing home. The federal minister knew for a month that residents had been bathed in kerosene, but she took no action to either protect the residents from further abuse or inform their families or the general community of the appalling situation that existed. No advice was forthcoming to ensure that families who may have been looking for residential care for their relatives were adequately informed so they could make appropriate decisions about the quality of care available.

I inform the minister that this has been an extremely horrible and distressing time for many people in my local area. Personally I have found it particularly frustrating that I cannot assist those unfortunate and abused residents of my electorate. My constituents need to be reassured that basic standards will be adhered to. They need to be confident that nursing home residents will be protected from unscrupulous operators and that a fail-proof system of reporting inadequate care is in place. They need to know absolutely that when a complaint is made it will be investigated immediately, and that a regulatory framework exists to ensure that appropriate action is taken when nursing homes fail in their duty of care to their residents.

Schools: counselling service

Mr LUPTON (Knox) — I raise for the attention of the Minister for Education a matter concerning a seven-year-old girl who was violated and raped in February last year. As a result of a phone call to my office, I contacted the then Minister for Education and obtained an amount of \$5000 to provide counselling for that distressed child.

Last Tuesday, 22 February, I received advice from the parent of the child that an incident had occurred in the school playground and the child had become distressed again. Through her department I applied to the current Minister for Education for funding to be made available so the child could be counselled. I received a phone call the following day advising that the matter was being looked into. Last Friday I received advice from the child's mother that the school had been visited and that the so-called bureaucrats recommended that professional advice be obtained about the emotional stress being suffered by the child.

The child in question was violated by the paedophile, who was given an indefinite sentence last Friday, as reported in last week's newspapers. Although the child has suffered enormous trauma as a result of being violated by that individual, I cannot obtain financial

assistance to have her looked after without having to make appointments, having her further traumatised and then having a report go to the minister's office for consideration to be given to having funding made available for the child to be counselled.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! Will the honourable member explain what action he wants the minister to take?

Mr LUPTON — Give us a go. Fair's fair, Madam Deputy Speaker. The minister's office has not seen fit to make any provision for funding within the first week, which is a damned disgrace! The child has been traumatised and violated by an animal, yet we cannot get any money from the minister to assist in the child's counselling. The department has recommended a procedure of making appointments and having the child examined and further traumatised before a report is produced for consideration by the bureaucrats.

I ask the minister to intervene and provide an amount of about \$5000 to ensure the child receives the counselling she needs.

Bendigo Easter Fair

Ms ALLAN (Bendigo East) — I refer the Minister for Major Projects and Tourism to correspondence I sent him dated 9 November 1999 and 31 January about a request for funding for the organisation that annually runs the Bendigo Easter Fair.

The four-day festival is important to the economic viability of Bendigo and attracts many visitors to our region. The festivities range from art exhibitions to street carnivals and processions featuring our wonderful Chinese community, which has great historical links with Bendigo, and the magnificent dragon, Sun Loong. I am pleased to hear that Sun Loong will feature in the Federation parade in Melbourne next year.

The committee, headed by its president Simon Mulqueen, has sent deputations to my office requesting government funding to assist with the promotion of the festival. Not only does the event attract a wide range of visitors to Bendigo, it also has great community support. The festival is a community event in which the people of Bendigo take pride. In all of my years living in Bendigo I have never been anywhere else at Easter time and I enjoy participating in the events as well.

As I outlined in my correspondence to the minister on behalf of the committee, I request that he consider the application for funding and respond positively to the committee's request because it is an important event for Bendigo. It would be a significant sign to the

community that the Bracks Labor government is supporting this important community and cultural event.

Responses

Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Transport) — The honourable member for Narracan raised with me the difficulty experienced by one of his constituents when travelling by train. The constituent has a disability and uses a wheelchair. Notwithstanding the mirth displayed by opposition members when the honourable member for Narracan raised the issue, it is a serious matter. My understanding is that in the older style V/Line carriages the design and construction is inadequate to deal with this type of wheelchair so that the constituent has to make the journey in the guard's van, which on some occasions is completely unsatisfactory. I can understand the concern of the constituent and the honourable member. The issue obviously needs careful attention by the operators of the V/Line Passenger service — that is, National Express — and I will take it up with that organisation.

The government and National Express wish to look after the needs of passengers with disabilities who travel on our public transport system. It is obviously a difficult situation because the rolling stock has been in service for some time. Nevertheless, there are both moral and legal responsibilities in looking after the interests of passengers with disabilities. I will ask the operator of the privatised passenger service, National Express, to see whether it can see its way clear to make some improvements, such as changing the rostering of rolling stock or perhaps introducing a service where people can book a special type of carriage so that passengers with disabilities are able to travel in wheelchairs. I will take that up with the company on behalf of the honourable member for Narracan.

The honourable member for Geelong raised the Geelong bypass and the eastern route alternative that is being put forward. As many honourable members would know, for some time there has been an attempt to identify a western bypass around the heart of Geelong to take the through traffic out of the centre and the near city centre parts of Latrobe Terrace to ensure that the central region of the Geelong road network is available for locally destined vehicles. For some time there has been talk of a western bypass and now through initiatives from the local council and some Geelong residents there has been much talk of an eastern bypass. It is an adventurous and creative solution but it is not a short-term solution that is acknowledged by the Geelong community.

However, I will ask the Department of Infrastructure and Vicroads to examine the proposal to ascertain whether we can finalise some of the many issues that flow from it and whether there is any possibility of having a much more thorough and detailed examination that might lead to some long-term planning process. It is not a short-term solution, and it is an expensive option. The honourable member for Geelong has asked the government to examine the option. There is widespread interest in the Geelong community, and such a bypass would go a long way towards opening up economic opportunities on the Bellarine Peninsula. For those reasons I will undertake the actions I have indicated.

Mr CAMERON (Minister for Local Government) — The honourable member for Mildura raised a matter concerning final building inspection notices. The Rural City of Mildura has written to many people requesting that they now pay \$50 for the relevant permits. A letter regarded as threatening by some people was sent stating that their insurance may be invalid if the permit is not taken out. I understand from the honourable member that some final inspections took place years ago. However, those people have now received the letter demanding the \$50 fee. It is a brave council to take that action in the lead-up to an election. However, we live in a democracy and people may do what they wish in a few weeks.

I will refer the legality of the matter to my department. That is the extent of my jurisdiction. Members of the public will make up their minds about whether the action is appropriate. On the face of it, it seems a trifle odd to receive an account for something that is nine years old, particularly if people initially paid for the permit that included the building inspection, although that did not occur at the time.

The honourable member for Glen Waverley raised a matter concerning Napier ward in the Monash City Council elections. His complaint seems to be that people are not saying whatever it is he wants them to say. We live in a democracy, and it is not for me to say what candidates should or should not say. Notwithstanding their political allegiances, many honourable members have been councillors in the past. The shadow Minister for Local Government fits into that category, as do the honourable members for Wimmera and Warrnambool. I am surprised that the honourable member for Glen Waverley has attacked them and other colleagues.

When you visit the City of Monash you find a Liberal Party war zone. Ros Clowes, a candidate in Napier

ward, was recently mentioned in the newspaper promoting the Chisholm fundraising group of the Liberal Party. Another candidate, Christopher Sluice, may well be the electorate officer of the honourable member for Glen Waverley. There appear to be Liberals galore — a little like worms in a tin when you go fishing. In University ward, Cr Peter Vlahos is a failed 1998 candidate for Chisholm. In Wellington ward Liberal Cr Kathy Magee is opposed by Des Olin, who is a former preselection candidate.

The City of Monash has a collection of Liberal people who are obsessed by the goods and services tax (GST). They want a GST on everything. Will they publish their election material with 'Endorse the GST' on it? What is the betting? I understand a deal of interest has been expressed among the warring factions of the Liberal Party in the City of Monash as candidates jostle for council positions because they see council positions as springboards; they have their eyes on the seat of the honourable member for Glen Waverley. I can only say to the honourable member, 'Look out, they're coming to get you!'

Ms GARBUTT (Minister for Environment and Conservation) — The Leader of the Opposition raised with me the \$650-a-year fee for a commercial wildlife display licence. The Leader of the Opposition has not stayed in the house to hear my answer, so he obviously does not care. His question is something of a superficial stunt. I will examine the issue to see if anything can be done, but it seems strange that somebody should pay that sort of levy for a skeleton.

Mr HAERMEYER (Minister for Police and Emergency Services) — The honourable member for Monbulk directed to my attention a letter from the Montrose fire brigade. I am pleased that the honourable member is taking note of letters from fire brigades in his electorate because, unfortunately, a few years ago one of the fire brigades in his electorate expressed concern to him about the state of fire preparedness in the Dandenong Ranges shortly before the fires there, and after the fires it was prompted to complain to the honourable member about his inactivity and his failure to respond to the brigade's concerns and correspondence.

I find it extraordinary that members opposite have suddenly discovered the dispute between the United Firefighters Union and the Country Fire Authority. That dispute had been running for nine months before the government came to office. If honourable members opposite want to do their constituents a favour they could try to assist in resolving the dispute rather than attempting to inflame it.

The letter from the Montrose fire brigade relates to accreditation and training. I assure honourable members that whatever resolution is reached between the CFA and the United Firefighters Union will ensure that appropriate training and accreditation is in place for firefighters and that the training is properly delivered. Any resolution to that dispute will need to be approved by the CFA board, which the honourable member may well learn is a statutory authority. The board must decide whether it accepts the resolution, as will the parties to the dispute — namely, the United Firefighters Union and the CFA — need to agree.

Members of the CFA, whether they be volunteers or career firefighters, get on together and cooperate well. Honourable members opposite seem to have some difficulty understanding that. Most members of the Country Fire Authority want to get on and do their job, and do it effectively. They resent members of the opposition trying to drive a wedge between career firefighters and volunteers, both of which groups have served the state extremely well. Honourable members can be assured, as can firefighters, both career officers and volunteers, that appropriate accreditation and training will come from the resolution of the enterprise bargaining agreement between the CFA and the United Firefighters Union.

Ms PIKE (Minister for Aged Care) — The honourable member for Carrum raised with me the issue of the treatment of residents at the Riverside Nursing Home at Patterson Lakes. I am sure all honourable members were horrified at the news last Friday morning that people living in a nursing home in Victoria had suffered a deplorable experience. Further concerns are now being raised about other Victorian facilities which have unacceptable standards of care and which have not been effectively investigated by the federal government, the responsible authority at the moment for standards of care in Victoria's nursing homes.

From the early 1920s Victoria had regulations that gave it responsibility to protect people living in nursing homes in a manner we would consider appropriate and adequate. In 1994, however, the former government amended the Health Services Act to withdraw those regulations from the authority of the state. The change was controversial at the time and was opposed by many members of the community, particularly advocates for older people. Many people who had family members living in nursing homes also opposed it. The Australian Labor Party opposed it vigorously. We knew the effect would be to take away the powers of the state over nursing homes and that, in the long term, standards of

care and the state's capacity to monitor that care would tend to decline.

However, the amending bill was supported by members of the coalition. It took the view that the industry had the power to self-regulate and that duplication existed. That is also the view of the current federal government. The ALP, on the other hand, believed there was — and always is — a significant role for the state in the regulation of all facilities where care is provided, including child-care centres, supported residential services and various other facilities where there is state responsibility. The state continues to maintain a regulatory role in those places. In the case of the care of our frail and elderly, however, that capacity has been taken away.

Even the former federal government acknowledged at the time that a significant gap would be left as a result of the action of the former Victorian government. Now we find ourselves in the unfortunate position where a terrible circumstance has occurred at Patterson Lakes. Nursing home residents have been bathed in kerosene.

What role can the state take? The government cannot appoint an administrator or assist residents to complain to the Health Services Commissioner. A family with a member in a nursing home cannot even ask about the staffing ratio or the qualifications of the people caring for their relative. No protection exists for maintaining the confidentiality of patient records, and the government does not have the capacity to license standards of health care.

As Minister for Aged Care I would be trespassing if I sought to go to the nursing home at Patterson Lakes to find out what is happening to citizens of this state. The situation is unsatisfactory. The government will seek to reintroduce regulations in this state so that it can fulfil its duty of care to its citizens.

We must be clear that the federal government has a significant role, which the government does not want to duplicate — but it also recognises there are gaps. It has clearly been shown not only that the federal government is failing in its responsibility to inspect nursing homes and to ensure and maintain standards of care but also that there are gaps. The government believes there is a role for the state and does not seek to shy away from that role, so it is working towards reintroducing the regulations.

I assure the honourable member for Carrum that the government has already appointed a legal expert, an aged consumer advocate, who will produce a discussion paper that will be distributed widely through

the sector. She will be assisted by an expert advisory group with representation from industry, non-government organisations, doctors, nurses, unions — from all those who have an interest in and a care responsibility for people in our nursing homes.

I assure the honourable member for Carrum that the government considers the matter to be extremely important. The fact that people are living in commonwealth-funded nursing homes does not allow the state to abrogate its responsibility and the government will be working hard to ensure that regulations are put in place to protect some of our most vulnerable citizens.

Ms DELAHUNTY (Minister for Education) — On the subject of our most vulnerable citizens, the honourable member for Knox raised for my attention the inexplicable tragedy of the abuse of a seven-year-old girl. The honourable member was quite visibly distressed by the matter and unfortunately was rather imprecise on the details surrounding it. However, I have gleaned from what he said in the house and subsequent discussion that the matter relates to the member's view of the ongoing counselling needs of the little girl.

The honourable member for Knox raised with me that when the tragedy occurred the then Minister for Education provided a sum of \$5000 for counselling of the child — on the basis, as the honourable member said, of a phone call. The honourable member seemed to be distressed that on the basis of a further phone call to my office this Monday further public funds were not instantly elicited. He seemed concerned that, although the school had been visited as a result of that phone call to my office, the need for further professional advice to assess the needs of the young girl was seen to be a delay that the young girl and her parents would not accept.

The house would know that there is available to all parents in such a hideous situation the Victims Referral and Assistance Service, which is operated and supported by the government and administered by Judy Dixon. That is a 24-hour help line that immediately puts a counsellor who is instantly available in the region of the call and who is experienced in that type of counselling — in this case in child molestation cases — in touch with the person making the phone call. I am told that the service provides 10 counselling sessions at no cost whatsoever. The sessions are funded by the government for incidents of that type.

I assure the honourable member for Knox that I believe it is a tragedy and that as Minister for Education I will

investigate the matter urgently to see that the child is given all the assistance and counselling required.

Mr PANDAZOPOULOS (Minister for Major Projects and Tourism) — I thank the honourable member for Bendigo East for the keen interest she has shown in tourism in her electorate and the Greater Bendigo region.

The honourable member for Bendigo East wrote to me on 9 November 1999 and again in late January this year about the possibility of the government supporting the Bendigo Easter Fair. Following the January correspondence and at the invitation of the honourable member I took the opportunity of visiting Bendigo to open Living Wings and Things and to visit Bendigo Pottery and Sedgewick Camel Farm. There is no doubt that Bendigo has a great tourism product and even more potential for tourism than it has had in the past. It is wonderful to see the local community creating that opportunity through events such as the Bendigo Easter Fair.

The government went to the election on the basis of a stronger focus on supporting regional events, and it was extremely disappointed from a tourism perspective that the previous government was tokenistic in its support for regional events across country Victoria. Regional events are vitally important because they create an opportunity to brand a locality around an event and because they not only increase visitation to the event and attract business to the area but also make the public more aware of what the region has to offer, thus attracting future visits.

The government promised additional resources, and I hope funding will be allocated in the budget to support regional events. Only about \$333 000 a year has been allocated for regional events, and as I have travelled around Victoria people have told me that there was no recognition of regional events and their ability to provide opportunities for growth by the previous government.

Events such as the Bendigo Easter Fair make important contributions to local communities. A four-day event is significant, and Bendigo has a whole range of attractions for tourists from beyond the region. The challenge in all areas of regional tourism is to attract tourism from places such as Melbourne and to promote events across a broader community. When we promote events such as the Bendigo Easter Fair we consider whether the event can be promoted interstate and whether accommodation packages can be included in the marketing so that people get both access to an event and accommodation. Providing those packages benefits

the area because it increases the amount spent by visitors. Tourism is about jobs and economic growth, and events are an important part of tourism.

The Bendigo Easter Fair is attractive because it is so diverse. It offers so much for so many people with different interests. It includes the family fiesta, the fire brigade's children's carnival, the grand fireworks display, the torchlight procession, and the gala parade and awakening of the dragon on Easter Sunday. The Easter fair focuses on different interests in the community, which is why it is one of Bendigo's premier events. The government is interested in supporting it.

I thank the honourable member for Bendigo East for her solid presentation. The government is allocating \$5000, the maximum grant available under the minor regional events funding program, to promote the event interstate and to increase the opportunities for developing accommodation packages. I thank the honourable member for Bendigo East for the hard work she has done with her community on this matter.

Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Transport) — The honourable member for Frankston raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Planning about a proposed safe boat harbour. I will ask the minister to examine the matter.

The honourable member for Geelong North raised a matter about electricity in the Geelong region and the problems consumers are facing with discounts and refunds due to them because of poor service. I shall raise it with the Minister for Energy and Resources in another place and ask her to get back to the honourable member.

The SPEAKER — Order! The house stands adjourned until next day.

House adjourned 11.00 p.m.

