



**Andrew Wallace MP**

**Federal Member for Fisher**

*Deputy Chair, Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence & Security*

### **Sunshine Coast Rail Put At Risk Thanks to Vested Interests**

#### **STATEMENT / OPINION**

**30 JANUARY 2025**

In 2022, the Member for Fairfax, Ted O'Brien and I secured \$1.6 billion in Federal funding to make heavy passenger rail from Beerwah to Maroochydore a reality. In the years since, the State Labor Government dithered, delayed, and obfuscated to avoid committing to the project, despite grand promises over the better part of three decades. Premier Miles only reluctantly pledged his support for the project in the dying days of his administration as it teetered on the cliff of electoral annihilation. Even then, Labor only committed to delivering rail to Caloundra in a vain attempt to salvage their political fortunes in that electorate.

The three years of delays by Labor have resulted in outrageous cost escalations, with thanks to the extortionate practices of the CFMEU adding billions of dollars to the cost of delivering this vital infrastructure project to the Sunshine Coast.

Regrettably, this week we have learned that DSCRL has now been dropped from Infrastructure Australia's Priority List. That, in and of itself, should not sound the death knell for Federal Government funding. Infrastructure Australia (IA) is supposed to be independent of Government. Therefore, despite IA's recommendation, the Federal Government could and should still support this project – Anthony Albanese should keep his promise to the people of the Sunshine Coast. I call on the Infrastructure Minister, Catherine King to lay Federal Labor's cards on the table and tell the people of the Sunshine Coast whether it will retain the \$2.75 billion it has budgeted and committed to deliver Sunshine Coast Rail.

Sunshine Coast Rail remains a critical piece of infrastructure to the people of the Sunshine Coast and the Federal Coalition. Together, Ted O'Brien and I are committed to its delivery. We note the very strong assurances given by State LNP leadership in the lead up to the State election just three months ago, that the Direct Sunshine Coast Rail Line would be delivered to Maroochydore by 2032 under an LNP State Government.

Prior to my entering politics in 2016, I was a barrister, specialising in construction law. I worked as a barrister, mediator, and adjudicator over 16 years on many large construction projects. As a former builder, I know that all things are possible from an engineering perspective, if there is the political willpower and the money to deliver a project. I am absolutely of the view that the DSCRL can not only be delivered to Caloundra by 2032, but it could be delivered to Birtinya by 2032 – and even Maroochydore, with project acceleration, in time for the lighting of the Olympic torch.

What we need is political leadership, and for leaders to put their money where their mouth is. In my discussions with Department of Transport and Main Roads engineers, I was assured that the project could in fact be delivered all the way to Maroochydore, from design to handover, with 8 years – or less, if accelerated. Would it be difficult? Yes. Would it be tight? Of course. But would it be worth it? Absolutely.

Much has been made in recent days of a submission by Sunshine Coast 2032 to the State Government's Games Independent Infrastructure and Coordination Authority, which purports to rely upon unidentified "industry experts" who allegedly assert among other things that the DSCRL Stage 1 cannot be completed to Caloundra by 2032 and that the overall cost of Stages 1, 2 and 3 will amount to around \$20 billion.



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It is regrettable that SC2032 did not consult with me prior to the release of its submission, particularly as 90% of the project falls within the Fisher Electorate. SC2032 quote an unidentified major civil contractor who has provided what could best be described as a “back of the envelope” costing for a dedicated busway from Beerwah to Caloundra, including 19 kms of roadway, two bus interchanges and a bridge over the Bruce Highway at just \$171 million. Let’s be very clear, that estimate is fanciful.

SC2032 relies upon the costs of constructing the 8 kms stretch of the Bells Creek Arterial Road at a cost of \$70 million at 2022 prices. The length of the proposed dedicated busway to Caloundra is almost three times that of the Bells Creek Arterial. It fails to account for the cost of construction for two bus interchanges, a large bridge over the Bruce Highway, and the significant uplift in engineering and construction costs for a dedicated busway for buses with capacity for 170 passengers - big, heavy buses.

It is interesting to note that the Brisbane Metro’s 21kms of dedicated busway will cost at least \$1.55 billion when its finished; some \$600 million over the original budget.

According to the SC2032 submission, once the Beerwah to Caloundra busway costs are factored in at just \$171 million, using the current Commonwealth and State Government funding, there would be \$5 billion with which to construct more dedicated busways connecting the entire Sunshine Coast. That is an admirable goal. The issue is, however, that no one has identified the costings or the course of the new routes, stations, or connections – let alone the resumptions, commercial agreements, and environmental considerations which will need to be made. Those non-existent details are important, and they would need to be ironed out and the works designed and completed within 7 years.

Interestingly, SC2032’s submission also states by some form of osmosis, that the adoption of its plan would enable the Walker Corporation to increase the number of dwellings in SunCentral by as many as an additional 14,000 homes. This begs the question as to whether there are any conflicts of interest which have not been disclosed by any of the “industry experts” or other consultants relied upon in the formulation of SC2032’s submission. It is also noteworthy that the submission makes no mention as to how SC2032 have arrived at such an alarming uplift of dwellings and how this uplift would differ from heavy rail terminating at SunCentral as currently planned.

SC2032’s submission also states that “for much of” the Birtinya to Maroochydore Stage 3 section, the rail infrastructure would be elevated by 18-20 metres above ground level. In fairness to all Sunshine Coast residents, I call on the Department of Transport and Main Roads to release the designs (which as I understand it, have not even been done yet) showing these 18 to 20 metre elevations.

Further, if SC2032’s proposal were to be accepted, and running along the currently proposed heavy rail route (CAMCOS Corridor), the Sunshine Coast would likely never, I repeat, never, ever get heavy rail. In fact, SC2032 recommend the selling off of large swathes of the CAMCOS corridor to developers.

The SC2032 submission included as an annexure, its February 2024 submission to the former State Government’s 60 day Olympic Review. In that submission, SC2032 says that it does support the building of the upgraded Kawana stadium, the multi sports indoor centre and the Parklands Mountain Bike facility. Interestingly, in support of the stadium and indoor sports centre, their submission says that these venues are well situated because they are adjacent to the planned heavy rail Kawana Station. Yes that’s right, the same heavy rail station that SC2032 now says we shouldn’t build. Go figure!

The whole idea of bidding for and securing the 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games was to use them as a catalyst for legacy infrastructure on the Sunshine Coast. We have just one shot at securing heavy rail. This is it.



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Thanks to the intransigence of the former Labor State Government, that window is rapidly closing. But if we as a community do not band together and sing with one voice, governments may take their funding elsewhere. Worse still, if we don't get our act together, the Sunshine Coast might just lose the chance to host Olympic and Paralympic events to another region within South East Queensland – robbing Sunshine Coast families and their businesses of a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

**[ENDS]**

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