

Queensland Parliament Hansard Green


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SUBJECT: Sunshine Coast Council, Light Rail

MEMBER: Mr BLEIJIE

Sunshine Coast Council, Light Rail

 **Mr BLEIJIE** (Kawana—LNP) (7.00 pm): The Sunshine Coast Council has commenced a multimillion-dollar feasibility study for light rail on the Sunshine Coast. Council has progressed this through to the preliminary business case, with a final version due for completion now. The state government has gifted \$7.5 million of taxpayer dollars to the council to develop the detailed business case for the final stage of the proposed light rail network.

Many within the community, along with myself, have long held concerns about this project. There has been little to no public consultation to date. In fact, the last community consultation occurred back in 2014, well before the new 2017 South East Queensland Regional Plan established different criteria with regard to population growth and infill targets. The fact is that council has not been up-front with the community about what this mass transit system means for changes to land usage along the proposed light rail corridor, particularly on Nicklin Way. Residents have a right to know that this plan could potentially see wall-to-wall high-rise development from Maroochydore to Caloundra. Existing homes and businesses will be displaced, with the land resumed by council and potentially gifted to foreign developers.

In the 13-kilometre stretch from Maroochydore to Kawana, the business case calls for a capacity increase from 11,209 dwellings to 50,751 dwellings. It estimates a population increase from 23,222 to over 100,000 people, so we are talking about a five-times increase in population just along that stretch. Such is the concern from residents that the Mass Transit Action Group, MTAG, has been formed to force council into greater consultation around the light rail and associated development. Two of the founding members, Kate Harvey and Tracey Goodwin-McDonald, are leading the charge to help educate the community on how this development will impact local residents and are simply asking the council to consult with the community before it progresses to a detailed business case. I commend Division 4 Councillor Joe Natoli for publicly voicing his serious concerns about wall-to-wall high-density development along the corridor. What we are asking the Sunshine Coast Council to do is simply put a pause on progressing with a final detailed business case until it has properly consulted with the community.

With regard to another matter, I want to express my serious concern over matters with respect to accountability in the Sunshine Coast Regional Council. On 22 February 2020 the *Sunshine Coast Daily* published an article about former CEO Michael Whittaker and his resignation from the CEO position. The article says that Mr Whittaker resigned from the position on Thursday, citing health reasons, a day after the *Sunshine Coast Daily* asked questions about an ongoing investigation into bullying allegations in the organisation.

Two councillors at the time voted against the extension of Mr Whittaker's appointment. Serious concerns relate to this report. The Crime and Corruption Commission of Queensland was involved in this. There is a secret report floating around the Sunshine Coast Regional Council somewhere. The Sunshine Coast Council has not released it. The question is: did the mayor know about the report? Does he have the report? He knows about the CCC investigation, and I table copies of *Sunshine Coast Daily* articles about the CEO's resignation and an article titled 'Lid lifted on CEO contract'.

Tabled paper: Article from the *Sunshine Coast Daily*, dated 22 February 2020, titled 'Lid lifted on CEO contract'.

Tabled paper: Article from the *Sunshine Coast Daily*, dated 25 February 2020, titled 'CEO resignation: Mayor reveals issues raised a year ago'.

What due diligence did the Sunshine Coast Council do with respect to its CEO appointments? These are serious questions that the mayor and the council still have to answer.

(Time expired)