

addition it will provide a solution to the issue of traffic exiting from the service station located in the heart of the problem area. It is the fastest growing region of Australia. It needs action now.

### **Cunningham Electorate: Infrastructure**

**Ms BIRD** (Cunningham) (8.40 pm)—I rise to speak in the grievance debate tonight to indicate that last week in Wollongong a new report on youth unemployment in the Illawarra was publicly released at the Wollongong art gallery. The Illawarra Regional Information Service report, jointly funded between IRIS, BlueScope Steel and the Wollongong University, was developed to put some facts on the table about the extent of youth unemployment in the Illawarra. It finds that it is a complex problem involving education and training, transport, housing, government coordination, income support, drug and alcohol addiction and job creation. I do not have time in this debate to go through all the findings, but one finding did stand out significantly, and that was the comment that more jobs need to be created in the Illawarra for young people.

Wollongong, in the heart of my electorate, is about 80 kilometres away from the Sydney CBD. It is less than one hour from Campbelltown, Ingleburn and Liverpool. Over the last 30 years, Wollongong and the Illawarra generally have tried to readjust to the new economic world. We are now largely a service based regional economy. Tourism, education and health are now the biggest employers in the region. In the mid-1980s the biggest employers were manufacturing and production, mainly in the steel and coal industry. Wollongong and the Illawarra have come through massive restructuring to reflect a new economic world. The Port Kembla steelworks is the most efficient steelworks in the Southern Hemisphere—so efficient that BlueScope Steel only a fortnight ago announced a massive investment in its new blast furnace. In 1982-83, BHP was planning to close down. The coal industry has sprung back to life, with new coalmines having been opened in recent years.

The Hawke and Keating Labor governments over 13 years made massive investments in the University of Wollongong. It grew from an old college with demountable buildings under the Illawarra escarpment to a massive precinct of educational excellence. The Hawke and Keating governments provided public investment by constructing the Wollongong tax office in Burelli Street, the Navy hydrography office just across the road and the old Commonwealth office blocks next door to the current council administration building. Those governments made financial contributions to Wollongong and the Illawarra's external transport links, including the F6 through my electorate. I have also spoken in this place regularly about the massive \$140 million investment by the New South Wales government in the port of Port Kembla. This port will become a key destination for car imports—at least 250,000 each year—as well as container trade. The port will continue its existing bulk-handling tasks of shipping grain, coal and steel.

While Commonwealth Labor governments contributed to the restructuring tasks of Wollongong, the Howard government ignored the region for over a decade. In 11 years the Howard government made no significant comparable investments in Wollongong. When it launched AusLink mark 1, it acknowledged the Sydney to Wollongong corridor in a single paragraph and allocated nothing to it. We were frozen out of AusLink for a full five years. I am pleased that the Rudd government recognises that the transport corridor in Wollongong is significant. I am particularly delighted that the 2008-09 budget allocated \$300,000 to conduct

a prefeasibility study into the potential to complete the Maldon-Dombarton rail line. I have already held informal discussions with the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government on the scope of the study. The department will meet with representatives of the Port Kembla Port Corporation later this month to finalise the terms of reference for the prefeasibility study, which I hope can be completed by the end of the year.

The key point about the infrastructure requirements of Wollongong and the Illawarra is that the growth of Port Kembla will drive the infrastructure we need. The potential of completing the Maldon-Dumbarton rail link will provide a key trade corridor to the Western Sydney areas—areas like Minto, represented by my colleague the honourable member for Werriwa. The port of Port Kembla can become a port of choice for Western Sydney manufacturers. We have the potential to develop a trade-coast link between the port of Port Kembla and Wollongong and the third largest economy in Australia, western and south-western Sydney.

I have often stated in this place that the Wollongong-Sydney corridor is the largest commuter corridor in the country. At least 20,000 commuters leave Wollongong and other Illawarra suburbs to travel to the Sydney CBD every day and return each night. Indeed, a recent statistic which quite startled me was that 23 per cent of the working population in my electorate commute out of Wollongong to Sydney every day. It is like a tide going out and coming in each and every day. I have long held the view, having travelled that commuter corridor myself for seven years, that a portion of these employees can and should be working either in Wollongong offices or from their own homes. This would require affordable, accessible broadband platforms, which are key to ensuring that outcome. But there are also nearly 5,000 people who travel from Sydney to Wollongong each day to work, so people flow in both directions. They use the main Illawarra rail line and the Picton Road. These workers have been dubbed the 'countercommuters' by demographer Bernard Salt, from KPMG. He said in an article in the *Illawarra Mercury* on 16 May 2008:

Perhaps this is showing a maturing of the Sydney relationship with Wollongong and Sydneysiders are embracing work opportunities Wollongong has to offer ...

All of these trends—the expansion of the port, the stable commuter corridor to Sydney from Wollongong and the discovery of the nearly 5,000-strong countercommuters—will continue to place pressure on the transport infrastructure in Wollongong and its links to Sydney. It is because of these pressures not only in my region but across other vital centres in Australia that the government has established Infrastructure Australia, the \$20 billion Building Australia Fund and the Major Cities Unit in the department.

I am pleased that in Wollongong stakeholders are starting to again discuss the infrastructure needs that will link Wollongong to Sydney and south-western Sydney. The Property Council of Australia, Illawarra chapter, recently hosted a luncheon to discuss a major report that it has commissioned on infrastructure. I have been involved in discussions with the Illawarra Business Chamber recently on the most important transport infrastructure that Wollongong needs, and I understand they will be cohosting and convening a Regional Development Australia Illawarra task force to begin that task of developing a strong case for those vital transport connections.

My message to Wollongong stakeholders over recent months has been that it is essential to do the hard work of developing the case for transport infrastructure investment for the region. That means fully developed arguments with comprehensive data in support of the region's

claims for government funding and investments. It also means that—if it is desired that there be Commonwealth involvement in projects—we as a region will be working through Regional Development Australia, Illawarra, as the coordinating Commonwealth agency in Wollongong.

I am essentially calling for an end to what can be an easy and lazy process by some stakeholders of issuing a press release on a Sunday announcing a wish list, which may well garner them a headline in the local media the next day but which adds nothing to the task of making the case for government investment in infrastructure. All stakeholders will admit to having done this at one stage or another. The business community in Wollongong would never invest money into any project on the basis of a smartly worded press release, so why should they expect the government to do likewise? It is time for all stakeholders—businesses, unions and community groups—to work together to prioritise the projects that should meet the important national objectives. Those are: reducing the congestion of our cities; adding to the productivity, business and job creation opportunities in our regions; maintaining crucial freight links with Sydney; and developing a close link with the \$80 billion economy of western and south-western Sydney.

Wollongong and the Illawarra have restructured. We are well into the process of diversifying the region's economy. In my very first speech in this place, I outlined to the House how we had been resilient in the face of change arising from the 1980s restructuring of our coal and steel industries and that we had in fact achieved great outcomes. We must continue that task in a professional and coordinated manner. This calls for not only government but also private sector investment in the economic capacity of Wollongong and the Illawarra. Everybody should be singing from the same song sheet. We should have an argument for infrastructure founded on a solid case and solid data so that we can then legitimately ask for our share of national investment and once again see a federal Labor government that will take up the call to invest in our region. To take me back to where I started, on the report on youth unemployment: this is the only way to ensure that more of the jobs that are needed will be created in the Illawarra for our young people in the future.

#### **Mitchell Electorate: Toll Roads**

**Mr HAWKE (Mitchell)** (8.50 pm)—I want to acknowledge the member for Cunningham and her contribution. I was born in Wollongong Hospital and still have some family down in Wollongong. Part of my family still commutes out of Wollongong every day of every week, so those matters raised by the member for Cunningham are important.

I would like to draw attention to my grievance for the electorate of Mitchell: the ongoing issue of toll roads. Tolls are a significant burden on families and a consistently acknowledged public issue for the residents and commuters in my electorate. Firstly, let me record my support for public-private partnerships and government encouraging private capital into infrastructure and investment. Properly done, public-private partnerships deliver quality infrastructure. They deliver a commercial benefit and they deliver a good outcome for the consumer. In the case of toll roads, value is returned to the motorist in the saving of time—which can be spent with the family or for private purposes—less wear and tear on a car, lower running costs and lower expenses.

A good example of what I am talking about is the properly functioning government funded toll project, the M7. This project was funded and implemented by the Howard government