

26 June, 2020

“The proposed relocation ... has become like a rotting carcass around the Coalition’s neck.”

Robert Borsak, Chair of the Select Committee on the Government's management of the Powerhouse Museum and other museums and cultural projects in New South Wales

(<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/listofcommittees/Pages/committee-details.aspx?pk=264>) writes of his long experience in arguing in Parliament against the move, his rationale for better spending of the money, and his hope for ‘a compact with NSW to reprioritise infrastructure investment to drive economic recovery across the whole state’.

He says:

‘The proposed relocation of the Powerhouse Museum to Parramatta has become like a rotting carcass around the Coalition’s neck. A thought bubble for Western Sydney championed by former Arts Minister Don Harwin of Pearl Beach fame and now further decomposing in the hands of the new Arts Minister, the Premier.

It has become emblematic of how this government does business – fake consultation backed by a dodgy business case that lines the pockets of their developer mates. It simply doesn’t stack up, particularly in this dire economic climate.

Many in the NSW Cabinet know this. Even the Deputy Premier, John Barilaro, used to publicly oppose this monstrous vanity project, although these days he tries his best not to talk about it. Yet the \$1.6 billion Powerhouse Museum relocation project survives while regional NSW continues to be denied its fair share.

With the economy in recession and the Government claiming we must do everything to invest in jobs, jobs, jobs, including trying to cut the wages of our dedicated front line nurses, police and teachers – how can this be so?

When I travel around NSW, I see communities struggling in the face of years of drought, the recent devastating bushfires and finally COVID 19. These communities are strong and resilient but now more than ever they need help and hope – they need to know that Government is really on their side. This takes more than a bunch of sugar hits in the form of a much needed hand up as they rebuild – it means investment in their future, in hard economic infrastructure that will create wealth and jobs over time.

That’s why the Shooters Fishers and Farmers party met with the Government last month to propose a new way – a compact with NSW to reprioritise infrastructure investment to drive economic recovery across the whole state, not just Sydney.

The first step was to cancel wasteful projects like the Powerhouse Museum relocation and ANZ stadium upgrade and postpone the \$15 billion Western Harbour Tunnel and Beaches Link in favour of fast tracking regional infrastructure projects. Things like the completion of the duplicated Bells Line Expressway to open up a central west development zone, investment in inland water diversion schemes and hydro-energy projects for our Northern Rivers and re-building our key regional roads, railway lines, hospitals, TAFE campuses and schools.

We also put forward new policy initiatives such as the introduction of zonal regional payroll tax and stamp duty exemptions to incentivise businesses to relocate to regional NSW, the creation of new

regional pharmaceutical, biotechnology and medical equipment manufacturing hubs and cutting wasteful expenditure on consultants and the Senior Executive Public Service.

Our compact and the dreams of many in regional NSW were flatly rejected in a frankly disappointing 15 minute audience. The Premier and Deputy Premier refused point blank to budge – preferring the extravagant largesse of the Powerhouse to the real economic future of regional NSW.

John Barilaro must really be bonkers not to back the bush. I challenge him to stop playing Powerhouse power games in the parlour with the Premier. If he can't stand up to the Liberals over the Powerhouse then he should resign, rather than keep threatening to. The bush is sick and tired of the Nationals saying one thing out here and then disappearing to Sydney to say another as the lazy lapdogs of the Liberals.

Our door remains open if the Government wants to work with us. It's time regional NSW received its fair share backed by a vision and long term commitment to drive growth and prosperity into the future.'