LNP refuse to pledge rail link funds

Jessica Marszalek, The Courier-Mail
July 18, 2017 12:00am

THE LNP has refused to commit to funding Cross River Rail without the help of the Commonwealth, leaving a massive question mark over the future of the $5.4 billion new train link if it wins the next election.

Opposition Leader Tim Nicholls on Monday declined to match the Palaszczuk Government’s Budget pledge to build the second river crossing whether Queensland has Malcolm Turnbull’s help or not.

An artist’s impression of Exhibition Station, part of the Cross River Rail project. The Government last night demanded the Opposition Leader be frank with Queenslanders ahead of an election as the state’s peak infrastructure industry group called for its support.

But asked directly whether the LNP would be prepared to go it alone, Mr Nicholls would only commit to working with the Prime Minister on the project.
“Unlike Labor, the LNP won’t cut infrastructure funding,” he said.

“After 12 months Labor still hasn’t released the secret business case for Cross River Rail — if the project stacks up they should release the business case.

“The LNP has a track record of working with the federal Government to get the best deal for Queenslanders, not picking petty political fights.”

Queensland LNP leader Tim Nicholls said he would only commit to working with the PM on Cross River Rail. Picture: AAP/Darren England

Mr Nicholls said he had “always said that there’s going to be a need for another link across the Brisbane River”, but didn’t support the project going ahead “without a business case being made publicly available and at the expense of infrastructure throughout the state”.

A sanitised business case is due for release next month.

Mr Nicholls’s comments follow his claims that Labor’s promise to build was “nothing more than a blatant political face-saving exercise” for Deputy Premier and Infrastructure Minister Jackie Trad’s South Brisbane seat.
The Opposition Leader’s comments throw doubt over the $5.4 billion new train link, should he win the next election.

Ms Trad said it was time the Opposition made its position clear and she predicted that only a Labor Government would build the underground train line.

“We saw the LNP cancel Cross River Rail the first time, which set us back years, and now Tim Nicholls is refusing to reveal his position on the project,” she said.

“You can’t trust the LNP to deliver public transport infrastructure for Queensland.”
Jackie Trad has called on the Opposition to make clear its position on the project. She said “grandstanding tactics” by Mr Nicholls that the project was just for the inner city showed he didn’t understand it was needed to unclog the bottleneck over the Merivale Bridge, increase services and build the Sunshine Coast, Flagstone and Springfield rail extensions.

Infrastructure Association of Queensland chief executive Steve Abson insisted Cross River Rail had “tremendous benefits” and a “project worth backing”.

“What we don’t want to do is go back to the last seven years of seeing three different incarnations of this particular project,” he said.

“What we don’t want to see is squabbling over major investments and believe that the LNP should be supporting the state’s number one priority project.”