

BUNBURY BYPASS, TRAFFIC PROBLEMS

Grievance

MR BARRON-SULLIVAN (Mitchell - Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [9.14 am]: My first grievance today is to the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure. I am sure that the minister has been briefed about the road network in the vicinity of the Bunbury Regional Hospital and the south west campuses of Edith Cowan University and TAFE. The problem has existed for some time, and it continues to grow. The area to which I refer is colloquially known as the Bunbury bypass. Some people say that a new bypass will be built to remove the load from this road and to alleviate some of the safety issues. Everyone realises that this would be a long-term project. Maybe the minister can shed some light on whether there is an existing schedule to build that bypass, because the issue is continually put on the backburner.

Clearly problems exist in the vicinity of the Bunbury Regional Hospital that must be resolved immediately. At the moment, people are experiencing problems when they enter and leave the hospital because it is difficult and dangerous to get across the four-lane highway. This problem is compounded during peak hour traffic, and because of the increase in tourist traffic. Further, although industrial growth is welcome in the region, it has created difficulties in travel management and the like.

I have already mentioned that people experience problems when they travel to and from ECU and TAFE. This area is also a major tourist travel route, so it is vitally important that it is made as safe as possible. There has been an increase in the use of this area by pedestrians and bicycle riders from College Grove and Gelorup. As Dalyellup grows - it is in the electorate of the member for Vasse - it will be important to provide for bicycle links from that area.

At the instigation of a number of people in the local community, ShawMac Pty Ltd carried out a traffic study of Robertson Drive and Bussell Highway was carried out. I am indebted to Main Roads WA, and in particular to its former manager Derek Lee, for agreeing to fund this report. The report reinforces all the points that I have just mentioned -

Ms MacTiernan: When was that report produced?

Mr BARRON-SULLIVAN: It was published in January 2001, and it forms the basis of the recommendations for improvements in the area. The report also revealed the likely travel-flow growth, which is very significant. For example, when the traffic flow in the rush hour period of June 1998 was compared with that of February 2000, it was found that the increase on the north and southbound lanes was between 52 per cent and 131 per cent. That is a 131 per cent increase in the flow of traffic in just over two years. The report has also estimated that further growth will occur as a result of residential development in College Grove and Dalyellup. It has been estimated that there will be an additional 70 000 vehicle trips each day. As the report stated, and as Main Roads, the local community and the member for Bunbury know, the problem is very serious. There have been serious accidents on the Busselton Highway. Unfortunately, I am aware of at least one fatality in that vicinity. The local community hopes and prays that we will not see a tragic accident in the near future as a result of the lack of the necessary infrastructure. The ShawMac report stated that the traffic management in this area was creaking at the seams. I draw the minister's attention to page 20 of the report, which states -

Assessment of the Robertson Drive and Bussell Highway intersections suggests that under normal peak flow conditions the left turn into Bussell highway is nearing saturation and may become unstable by the year 2003 given an annual growth rate of 5%.

That is a realistic, if not conservative growth-rate estimate. In engineering terms, this equates to the fact that the road will not be able to cope by 2003 - that is, next year. I raised this matter last year and requested that money from the budget be allocated to fix the problem as a matter of priority. No money has been allocated. I am looking for a firm commitment from the minister that Main Roads will be given the money to fix the problem in the coming budget. I urge the minister to take into account the warning that has been provided by an independent consultant on behalf of Main Roads, so that we do not see a total failure of the road system. I hope the minister will indicate the other safety improvements that will be made in the area.

The ShawMac report stated that two types of roundabouts could be installed. However, it alluded to the fact that if a small roundabout were built, there might be a problem because B-Doubles would not be able to get around it. It stated that it would be feasible to build a larger roundabout that would cater for those types of vehicles. I commend Main Roads, the Shire of Dardanup and the City of Bunbury for the large roundabout that was recently built near Eaton. People are looking for a firm commitment to ensure that we do not experience a tragedy in the near future.

I would like the minister to comment on the need for reduced speed limits. Pressure exists to reduce the speed limits right through to Dalyellup, and to implement the safety improvements that were recommended 15 months

ago to Main Roads in the ShawMac report. The report devoted a whole section to the recommendation of a number of safety improvements. Minister, please give a commitment to put the necessary funds into the area, to sort out the speed limits and to make the necessary safety improvements.

MS MacTIERNAN (Armadale - Minister for Planning and Infrastructure) [9.19 am]: I thank the member for his grievance. This issue has concerned members for some time, and it is a matter that was raised in the Legislative Council in 2000 by Hon John Cowdell. The previous Government responded by saying that a problem did not exist.

Mr Barron-Sullivan: That is nonsense!

Ms MacTIERNAN: I have referred to *Hansard*. The point I am making is that this issue has been around for a while and has been of concern to a number of local members. In an ideal world the Government would have the funds to address all the road infrastructure issues that confront it from across the State. The real challenge for the Government is that it must prioritise. It must rely on professional advice in the setting of those priorities. Main Roads Western Australia believes that the intersection of Bussell Highway and Robertson Drive near the South West Health Campus is operating reasonably well for most of the day. It acknowledged that some crashes have occurred, but advised that the crash rate for the intersection is not unusually high. The majority of the crashes are rear end crashes. Main Roads believes it is unlikely that the installation of traffic control signals would result in any significant reduction in accidents of this type. Main Roads advised that at this intersection there are delays of up to several minutes on most weekdays at about 5.00 pm for drivers who are turning right from Robertson Drive towards Bunbury, and for drivers turning left towards Busselton. That peak period of congestion is relatively short. There have also been long queues at the intersection for southbound traffic on long weekends. Main Roads has developed a temporary exclusive left turning lane to enable southbound traffic to move more quickly through the intersection.

The speed limit on Bussell Highway at the intersection is 80 kilometres an hour. The traffic volume south of the intersection is in the order of 18 000 vehicles a day, with an approximately 50-50 split between traffic that continues into Bunbury and traffic that turns right into Robertson Drive. Main Roads does not believe that there is a problem with the current speed limit. I am prepared to look at the speed limit issue and whether there is a good argument for reducing the speed limit through that intersection.

Mr Barron-Sullivan: I appreciate that and I thank the minister for her comments. I am sure that the member for Bunbury will be happy to support me in asking you to look at the situation first-hand. I would be delighted to invite you down.

Ms MacTIERNAN: My experience is that there is obviously a bit of tension with the transport industry, which is concerned about any reduction to the speed limit. The Government is taking a triple bottom line approach. In addition to economic matters, it must consider social and environmental impacts. I am prepared to look at the speed limit. I understand that the report the member referred to indicates that traffic lights will not be required at the intersection for several years. There is a concern that if traffic control signals are installed before they are warranted, they can worsen a problem and lead to excessive delays for drivers during the greater part of the day. One has to be very conscious of the appropriate time for the installation of traffic control lights.

I note that the City of Bunbury is constructing a roundabout at Brittain Road, which is about 500 metres to the north of this intersection. Main Roads believes it is likely that the new roundabout will impact on traffic movements in the area and could ease the pressure on the Bussell Highway-Robertson Drive intersection. The Government recognises that this is a growing area and that the award winning Dalyellup Beach development, as well as a number of other developments in the area, will place increased pressure on the intersection. The Government does not believe that it can now set a position that will hold good for the next four years. It recognises that this situation will require constant monitoring. Traffic lights will be installed when they are warranted. On the one hand they should not be installed too early, but on the other hand they should be put in place in sufficient time.

Mr Dean: One problem compounding the situation is that instead of turning left at the intersection, people are choosing to cut through the South West Health Campus and are turning onto the highway from the campus exit.

Ms MacTIERNAN: That can be considered in terms of internal traffic controls. I thank the member for Bunbury for his contribution. I will take up the concerns of both the member for Mitchell and the member for Bunbury. I am prepared to commit to seriously considering a review of the speed limit and to an ongoing watching brief to determine the point at which traffic lights will be required.