

McGOWAN GOVERNMENT — TRANSPARENCY

Motion

MS M.J. DAVIES (Central Wheatbelt — Leader of the Opposition) [4.00 pm]: I move —

That this house notes the Office of the Auditor General’s findings of persistent transparency failures by the McGowan Labor government, including reporting of progress of major projects, and calls on the Premier to deliver on his promise of “gold-standard transparency”.

This is a very important motion; it is the last that we will move before we enter into the six weeks of winter recess. It comes off the back of another report that has been tabled by the Auditor General into the reporting and transparency of major projects. It is one of a long line of reports that this Auditor General has created. We could never accuse the Auditor General of shirking her responsibility. I think that she has been a wonderful servant of the Parliament and the people of Western Australia. I have to say that, when we attend briefings and read the reports, we can feel her frustration that these sensible and well-founded recommendations are being ignored by this government. That is the plain fact of it: this government is ignoring the recommendations of the Auditor General. When reports are published giving recommendations and opportunities for improvements—because everyone accepts that they do not always get things right the first time—it is most disappointing to see that in subsequent follow-up reports, the same issues are being raised, and, in fact, have become more serious and more concerning. We will go through some of the detail of the Auditor General’s reports. Also, we have some information on how difficult it is to get information through the freedom of information process. There are certainly some concerning statistics in relation to section 82 of the Financial Management Act. Under that provision, if ministers do not want to provide information to the Parliament, they have to provide a reason, it has to be reasonable, and the Auditor General has to provide an assessment of that reason. Certainly, this government got off to a flying start with the number of times that it refused to provide information under that particular section of the Financial Management Act.

Let us go back and set the scene of how this government came to power back in 2017. The Premier made some very bold statements about the kind of government that he would lead, and, in particular, that he would be in charge of improving transparency and would make sure that he delivered a gold standard of transparency. He promised not just to improve functions and financial transparency, but a gold standard of transparency. That was his promise. Members opposite rolled into government and made the decision to commission the special inquiry into government programs and projects on the back of making certain assertions while they were in opposition on particular programs that we ran such as royalties for regions and others. They commissioned John Langoulant to create an inquiry into some major projects, and, as a result, he released a report containing a number of recommendations. I am on record as saying that I disagreed with parts of that report—I have been very up-front about that—but this government accepted those recommendations and said that it would go about putting in place all the recommendations that resulted from that inquiry.

It is very clear that that inquiry had nothing to do with transparency. It was more about demolishing the record of the previous Liberal–National government, particularly royalties for regions, so that the government could walk away from it, bury it and discredit the previous government. That is straight out of the Labor playbook, as is introducing and bringing machinery-of-government changes so significant that they have really thrown the cat amongst the pigeons in being able to find a common thread of comparison when we look at budgets and trying to understand where the lines of reporting are within the mega-departments that have been created. It all adds to the concerns that we see raised as part of the Auditor General’s report—that it is very difficult to follow what should be publicly available and reported to the Parliament.

With the machinery-of-government changes, the failure to act on the recommendations of the Auditor General again and again, and our experiences as the opposition in trying to tweak out information through freedom of information legislation, we have found again and again that we have to go back and haggle with the department. In some cases, we have to go right through to the Information Commissioner and ask for a ruling because these processes are stretched out for such a long time that it has become completely impractical and very obvious that there is something to be hidden that the government is unwilling to share. If we put all those things side-by-side with a government that is adhering to a promise that the Premier himself made to deliver gold-standard transparency, it does not add up. Alarm bells should be ringing.

There is a catchcry. I will read exactly what the Premier said. He said —

“My government will continue to strengthen governance, accountability, transparency and the focus on the key economic and social benefits of government decisions when dealing with taxpayers’ money.

That was on 20 February 2018. Five years down the track, what has gone wrong? We have seen the Premier get more and more arrogant. Perhaps he thinks that he is above responding to the Auditor General and that his cabinet does not need to; perhaps he thinks that he is doing this in the best interests of Western Australians, so everyone

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should just accept it. Perhaps, after five years, that is how this Premier has decided to approach the role, but it certainly was not the promise that he gave to the people of Western Australia when he stood up. I think he has put it in the file labelled “I said it but I didn’t really mean it”, a bit like what he did when he said he was not going to pursue electoral reform, but then he did. That file is getting bigger and bigger. “I said it but I didn’t really mean it”. It is a big file.

A government member: You’re misleading the house!

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Misleading the house? The Premier was asked multiple times about electoral reform before the election and he said that it was not on the agenda, but the first order of business when he came in was to introduce electoral reform. We will put that in the file of “I said it but I didn’t mean it”, along with “I will deliver gold-standard transparency”. It is not just the opposition saying this. We are happy to chime in, because clearly our experience is that there has been a lack of transparency and accountability, but also the Auditor General—the independent umpire; the person who is responsible to the Parliament and the people of Western Australia—is utterly frustrated. We can see that her reports, and they have been prolific, are scathing of how this government is dealing with the questions and recommendations that she and her office are making.

From our perspective, I think that this latest report is a big red flag for this government. In question time today, when the Deputy Leader of the Opposition asked the Premier a question on major projects and whether there would be additional reporting on these major projects, as has been recommended by the Auditor General’s report, there was a chorus from the minister and members opposite that said, “We do that through the budget. We answer questions in this house. We won’t be doing anything else.” Essentially, they were saying that there will be no consideration of what the Auditor General has put forward. If the Premier and government are planning on adhering to the Auditor General’s recommendations and doing what she has suggested not once, but twice, I would be very happy to be corrected and see that come to pass. I have a feeling, given the response we saw during question time today from the Premier and the chorus behind him from his cabinet, that we will not be seeing the Auditor General’s suggestions and recommendations taken up.

I wonder at the hypocrisy that we have to deal with. I go back to when the Premier was the Leader of the Opposition and moved motions regularly about transparency and accountability. He moved a matter of public interest and in June 2014 he used this exact line —

It is very important that, as much as possible, public money is not wasted. It is also very important that these projects have smooth and transparent approvals processes.

That was in the context of reporting on progress, and delays and approvals for major projects under the previous government. That hypocrisy, arguing for transparency, promising that gold standard and then doing the exact opposite is breathtakingly arrogant on behalf of this Premier. There really is nowhere to hide, because the Auditor General has been very succinct in laying those facts very bare. In 2020, the Auditor General released a report with this statement —

The State Government, often with joint investment from the Commonwealth Government, —

I am sure the member for Moore will have something to say about that, and a follow-up from the question that he asked in question time —

invests billions of dollars each year in major projects to build roads, hospitals, schools, prisons ... for the people and economy of Western Australia. Despite this significant investment of public money, Parliament and the public cannot easily access information on the progress of these projects.

This is the Auditor General. Let me read it again —

Parliament and the public cannot easily access information on the progress of these projects.

My Office has commented on this lack of transparency in a number of previous reports.

This was the first report into reporting on major projects. The Auditor General is referring to previous reports. This is the second time in a formal report on reporting on major projects, but she has raised those concerns across a number of different reports in the past five years. She said —

... it would be a simple matter for Government to regularly report publicly on the status of projects to improve transparency to both Parliament and the public.

It would be a simple matter. Three years after coming to office with those grand statements of gold-standard transparency, this government is absolutely in the crosshairs of the Auditor General, because we read the material that accompanies those reports and the speeches she gives in public forums and we can tell that there are serious concerns about the way this government is operating. This is an independent umpire. She has no axe to grind. She is not the opposition, nor a political party; she is an independent umpire reporting to Parliament. Her only duty, that we can tell she takes absolutely seriously, is to make sure that the people of Western Australia and their taxpayers’ dollars are looked after, spent prudently and that decisions made by government are made appropriately and transparently.

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When the government responds we ask that these observations, recommendations and criticisms coming are noted but coming from that independent umpire. Of course, I expect that we will see an explanation or an explaining away of why these recommendations do not need to be adhered to, but we have already seen ministers in this government disagree when asked questions in this place about recommendations from the Auditor General.

The Minister for Housing was asked by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition for a response on why he, as a minister, had presided over four of the worst performing COVID stimulus initiatives. A report was put out by the Auditor General about the COVID stimulus initiatives. Obviously, governments were moving fast to try to react and respond to the challenges of the pandemic. The Auditor General has been quite generous in acknowledging that all government departments operated under an enormous amount of pressure during that period, and that was a circumstance that could lead to poor decision-making or structures. That is the role of the Auditor General, who has been very accommodating of that. But there were some serious concerns about the initiatives within the Minister for Housing's portfolios. From memory, it was in relation to the fact that only a fraction of the money that had been announced for the stimulus packages had actually been expended. That is another pattern that we see from this government. There are big announcements and big dollars up-front, but when we delve into the detail, very little of it actually hits the ground. Work is still being done on those COVID incentives and the packages put together to see how much of it got to the people who needed it the most. The Auditor General's assessment on this particular matter in the Minister for Housing's portfolio was backed up by data provided by the government. The Minister for Housing specifically said that he disagreed with the Auditor General and her finding.

When I was a minister, there were uncomfortable moments when the Auditor General created reports, particularly in relation to some of the projects that our government was responsible for. When that criticism came, I stood up in Parliament and copped it. I said, "That's a fair assessment", and I moved on and tried to address it. I used to put it on the agenda for my department and also our ministerial office to say, "I want updates on how we are progressing against the recommendations that the Auditor General has made." I took it seriously, because the Auditor General is independent. This was something they were doing to try to improve processes. Accept the criticism, even when it is uncomfortable, as a government and as a minister, and get on with attending to it. I do not think, and I cannot recall—happy if the government can dig up comments from me in the past—but certainly, from my perspective, when reports had concerns in relation to our portfolios, I was the first to say we need to get on and deal with it. We cannot argue with the umpire. If that response from the Minister for Housing is more broadly indicative of how cabinet chooses to respond to the concerns raised by the Auditor General, that is very concerning, because it is hardly the respect or adhering to the standard that the Premier has stated that his government should be trying to deliver. It is consistent with what we have observed and experienced over the past five years from this government.

It did not take very long for the rot to set in and the government refusing to provide information. I mentioned those section 82 notices earlier. I wonder: if we went back and asked another question, and we will do this, how many of those have now come to pass in the past five years? In the first 18 months of the McGowan government, it invoked section 82 under the Financial Management Act to avoid answering questions in Parliament nearly 40 times. The Auditor General has to assess whether that is reasonable or unreasonable. There is a mixture of both in there. There have been occasions over the past five years when the Auditor General has found that the minister was not reasonable in not providing that information. I will provide a comparison for the house, just to give context about why we think this is important and goes to the point of the transparency and accountability argument that we are putting forward today. In comparison, the previous government used that particular clause only 67 times in eight and a half years. In the first 18 months of this government, it used it 40 times. We will find out what it looks like now, five years in. I suspect it will be significantly higher, but over the entire eight and a half years we were in government, we used it 67 times. That is not a government coming to Parliament thinking, "We will be free and open with the information that we think the public deserves." That is something that we as an opposition will continue to highlight.

The freedom of information process is a really important part of opposition for the media, the opposition and public scrutiny. It is very difficult to get information out of this government. It is quite frustrating when we eventually do get documents; quite often we get full pages of blacked out information. My colleagues sitting here have all had similar experiences of just entire pages blacked out. We might get the title page or a couple of sentences and the author, perhaps, and that is it. That is after we have gone back and forth to the department several times trying to negotiate or find out the parameters or whether it is reasonable. I have noted also that there has been a significant increase in the number of times that ministers, particularly in the Legislative Council, will come back and say, "We are not using government resources to answer that question; it simply will not be answered." That is very concerning as well.

When it comes to freedom of information requests, we have had a quick look through our office. In the last 12 months, the longest time we have been waiting for an external review is for one that was lodged on 4 January, so at the beginning of this year. We are still waiting for that process to be completed. In the last 12 months, of the five external reviews that we have had to lodge because we have not been able to get an outcome from government,

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two are outstanding, and three have been received. We regularly get a request from a government department or the minister's office for an extension of time to respond. Again, it is very frustrating when we are trying to seek information to assist us to do our role from an opposition's perspective. I have no doubt that there are journalists in the media who experience that same frustrating processes. It does not add up when all these things are sitting alongside each other and we get a statement from the Premier that he is delivering gold-standard transparency in government.

Those are the overarching reasons that we have cause for concern about a government that has a \$5.7 billion surplus and is rolling out a significant major projects budget in conjunction with the commonwealth or private sector operators. There is a lot of money in Western Australia and the government is in control of a significant number of projects. It is not unreasonable for us to ask for what the Auditor General has suggested more than once—that is, a more open and transparent reporting process.

Let us go back and look at the Auditor General's report *Transparency report: Major projects*, and the hard work that has gone into filling the gap, essentially. The Auditor General states in her report that she will fill the gap in reporting on these projects until such time as either the government makes the decision to come forward or another alternative is put forward. At this point in time, she has asked that that gap be filled; and, if it is not, she will fill it until such time as the government makes the decision to do it or is dragged into doing it.

The Auditor General makes this recommendation twice in that report —

... the Department of Finance should work to improve transparency through regular reporting to Parliament and the public on the cost, time and status of major projects.

That is a reasonable suggestion. There is precedent for that in other Parliaments. I am advised that one example is a major ICT project in Queensland. ICT projects are always complex and subject to cost blowouts when they are implemented across government departments, and they are an area that quite rightly should be scrutinised. The Queensland government reports on ICT projects in a similar manner to what the Auditor General has suggested in her report. That is also the case with federal government defence projects, which is what we would expect, because they are major investments and involve national security. We do not have defence projects of that nature, although we do have many ICT projects because of the big push from this government for digitisation. We also have a number of other big infrastructure projects that would fit into that category. I do not want to see that suggestion dismissed just because we are not the federal government and we should not have to adhere to that. This Premier has set the standard. He wants the gold standard. The gold standard would be to work with the Auditor General to make sure that we adhere to that recommendation. I do not understand, and I do ask, why there has been a severe railing against these recommendations.

I turn now to the Auditor General's *Annual report 2020–2021*. The annual report outlines the work that the Auditor General has done over the year. The report contains a significant amount of information summarising the audits that have been conducted. I will go through a few of them. The Auditor General also has duties in relation to local government, but I do not need to bring that in because local governments have a different set of responsibilities. We are talking about the state government. The first report that we referred to was the *Transparency report: Major projects*, which was tabled on 29 October 2020. The annual report states, in the summary of that major projects report —

This limited assurance review provides information and a cost and time performance of 15 major State government projects. Of the 15 projects none publicly reported cost and time progress on a regular basis. However, all were being managed within their current funding. Detailed planning has resulted in increased funding for 3 projects and 5 have had their funding reduced. The Departments of Treasury and Finance and Infrastructure WA supported, in principle, the report's recommendation to work together to improve transparency through regular reporting to Parliament and the public on the cost, time and status of major projects.

That was in October 2020. We then we go to the seventh report from the Auditor General. That is about the financial audits of state government entities. The Auditor General looked at the financial year audits for 143 state government entities and reported that 26 per cent of the financial management control issues and 41 per cent of the information system control weaknesses that had been reported in the previous year were unresolved. There is a pattern in the reports that have been created by the Auditor General. The Auditor General is saying on an annual basis that her suggestions, recommendations and concerns have not been addressed and resolved. The annual report states that clearly in black and white on page 79. That is very concerning. If the government cannot look after that part of its business, how can we expect it to look after those massive projects that have a propensity to become complex, to blow out in costs and to cause wastage from a taxpayer dollar perspective?

Grants administration is always contentious. In the final sentence of this section of the *Annual report 2020–2021*, which was tabled on 28 January 2021, the Auditor General states —

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We found that only 2 of the 8 entities displayed sound policies, practices and controls.

That to me does not marry up with gold-standard transparency. That is particularly the case when this is the government that initiated the Langouant special inquiry into government programs and projects. That report made a whole raft of recommendations. The government said that it accepted that report. However, in January 2021, as part of her inquiry into grants administration across a number of state government entities, the Auditor General found that only two of the eight entities that it had looked at displayed sound policies, practices and controls. This is a government found wanting in the expenditure of taxpayers' dollars.

I could keep going, members, because there is no shortage of concerns. I highlight the fact that what concerns us is when the Auditor General is not only making statements in the reports that she is creating, but also summarising that in her annual report. I refer to the report *Opinions on ministerial notifications—tax and funding information relating to Racing and Wagering Western Australia*, dated 24 February 2021. The Auditor General summarises that in the annual report by stating —

In this report the Auditor General found the decision by the former Minister for Tourism not to provide Parliament with 5 post-campaign performance reports in full and the number of people booking travel as a result of the Hotel Perth Campaign was not reasonable and therefore not appropriate. Some of the information was publicly known or not commercially sensitive and, in some cases, there was no obligation of confidence. The former Minister tabled redacted documents in Parliament however, the extent of redaction was not clear in the tabled documents. There were numerous undisclosed redactions, resulting in a higher implied level of completeness and transparency than was apparent from the tabled documents.

That is not marrying up with gold-standard transparency, members. It is certainly very concerning that it is not marrying up with the experience we have when we try to find information and get heavily redacted documents. The report dated 24 February states that the former Minister for Racing and Gaming did not provide Parliament with tax and funding information relating to RWWA. The Auditor General found that it was not reasonable and therefore not appropriate because the information was not commercially sensitive and was later published. The government was just being belligerent because it actually published it, it became public, but the government would not provide it when asked. We go on. This government has clearly taken a position of secrecy, which is seriously concerning when we think of the state of our budget, the number of major projects that we have underway here in Western Australia and the confidence that this government needs to provide that it is not wasting taxpayers' dollars and is being open and transparent. It should not be railing against decisions and recommendations from the Auditor General as the independent umpire to Parliament on behalf of the people of Western Australia.

I would suggest that anybody who has not read the speech that Caroline Spencer, the Auditor General, made to the Institute of Public Administration Australia integrity and accountability conference on 28 April get a copy of it and read it. I can tell that she takes her job as a public servant incredibly seriously. She works through some really concerning statements, including saying that there are cracks emerging in the foundations of our public service and sometimes—on only a few rare occasions—ministers have refused to provide her with access to information to properly discharge her functions, which she considers a very serious matter indeed and one that directly contravenes the will of the Parliament and the spirit of transparent and accountable government. Any number of concerns are reflected in her official public reports, which she refers to in this speech. I would highly recommend that if this government is to find a pathway back to that gold-standard transparency that the Premier promised when Labor came to government in 2017, it starts listening to the Auditor General and starts being respectful of those recommendations. It is a serious matter when we see governments ignoring the independent umpire when it comes to the expenditure and accountability of taxpayers' funds.

DR D.J. HONEY (Cottesloe — Leader of the Liberal Party) [4.31 pm]: I rise to join this debate —

That this house notes the Office of the Auditor General's finding of persistent transparency failures by the McGowan Labor government, including reporting of progress on major projects, and calls on the Premier to deliver on his promise of gold-standard transparency.

Members, we do not need to go to the Auditor General's report to see a lack of transparency on the government's part. In question time today, I was appalled by the performance of ministers on the other side. I asked the Minister for Planning, who is responsible for market-led proposals in the government, about the sale of the Landgate building in Midland. The minister talked about the refurbishment of the old Treasury building in town—an iconic, historic building in the centre of Perth. I asked for the disclosure of the business case behind that deal, and the minister just waved it away; there is nothing to see here! I think this information is really important for this house.

Members and ministers opposite are competing for government money across their portfolios. We know that housing is a major problem. Money has been given to housing, but I am sure the Minister for Housing would like more. Hamish Hastie did a good analysis of the details of the Landgate case in an article in *The Sydney Morning Herald*

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published on 20 June. Go and read it, members. The Minister for Planning should go and read it. I do not know how much the minister was involved in this before this was handed to her. She is a serious minister, and I think that if she looked at the details, she would be utterly appalled and disgusted by what she finds out about that. This refers to 13 700 square metres on three nodes of rentable area, and these are buildings are occupied. This is not an abandoned old government building; these are Landgate offices and the government is looking to move more public servants into government-owned property. These 13 700 square metres would conventionally sell for around \$5 000 a square metre. If a person had a property of that size out in Midland, that is how much they would sell it for. That property's valuation is \$68.5 million. The minister said that improvements need to be made to that building. The government has already flagged in the budget and other sources upgrades to air conditioning and other things of about \$10.5 million. Let us say that money will be invested by the company taking over that building; if we add that \$10.5 million to the \$17.3 million, that equals \$28.8 million. The amount that the government got for that building is still \$40 million less than the market value.

These are not pie-in-the-sky figures. There is another building in Keane Street, Midland, that is occupied by the department of works and sold recently for \$7.2 million. Given the area that is available in that building, that accords with the numbers that I have given, so these are not some pie-in-the-sky figures that I have made up. I have spoken to people who carry out these sorts of investments, and that is what they tell me. Members opposite might say if the government sold that building for a low cost, it would be getting a good rental arrangement. But for that building that I am talking about, it is paying \$300 a square metre, and, according to the information that is available, the government is paying between \$358 and \$440 a square metre for that building. That will average out to about \$5.6 million a year that the government will pay in rent for that building—if we look at the numbers the government has actually provided—which comes up with a total cost for that rental, assuming no escalation, of \$85 million over the 15-year lease of that building.

The government is known as a blue-chip customer; that is: it is the perfect customer. The government always pays its bills. This is a long-term lease. If a person had a \$28.8 million building and they wanted to lease it—I spoke to a major property developer in Perth who deals with commercial properties—they look for a blue-chip customer and a long-term lease. They look for around a five per cent yield on that investment. Let us assume that the government would pay \$10.5 million for refurbishment on top of the \$17.3 million, the annual rent would be only \$1.4 million. The Minister for Planning has either been given bad advice or the facts I am stating are wrong. I would be disappointed if the information that is out there is wrong, but that is why I asked the minister today to please table the business case because there is something profoundly wrong here. Honestly, of all the commercial people I and my staff have spoken to about this deal, none of them can understand how it has come about. This is the deal of a lifetime for the company that has bought the building. It is absolutely the deal of a lifetime or the government has just gone mad with money, giving away a building at tens of millions of dollars below its real worth or otherwise it will pay massive rents way above the level of rent it should pay for that building.

I am always happy to be educated. Sometimes I might come to this place and I might get a bit embarrassed, but I tell members that I am always happy to learn. That is why I asked the minister whether she would table the business case. I think the public of Western Australia deserves to see the business case. There should be nothing commercial-in-confidence about that. The rental rates for this property are already publicly known. The price the government sold the building for is already publicly known; therefore, how does it add up? Who in Treasury did the numbers to justify this? Someone has made a monumental mistake in this deal that is going to cost the taxpayers tens of millions of dollars. Do not forget that the government owned this building, and, might I say, I get long lectures from members on the other side about how this government is opposed to privatisation. We hear long lectures about how we should not privatise X and Y, yet, in this case, the government has sold a building it owns for a fraction of its value, and it is going to rent it back at top value at a massive loss to the taxpayers of Western Australia.

Again, where is the transparency? Please give us transparency. If I were the minister, I would be asking my department and Treasury to explain to me how that happened. We never want to see this happen again when a public asset is sold. Table it so that the people of Western Australia can be satisfied. If there is a good reason or a good excuse—if the proponents are going to spend \$100 million on the building or something—let us know so that the public of Western Australia can be satisfied they are getting value for money. At the moment, on the facts to hand, there is no satisfaction.

Today, I asked the Minister for Energy questions about pumped hydro at Collie. I sent the questions to the minister two hours before question time. I had the courtesy of ringing his office to let him know. If he was the wrong person to ask, he could have done me the courtesy of telling me. In the past, other ministers I have dealt with have said, "That's fine, member, but the minister you should be asking is X." He did not bother to do that or to give me the courtesy of saying, "You should be asking someone else about that question." He instead came in here and tried to score cheap points, but otherwise obfuscated about it. I will give members a bit of homework to look up. If members wonder why I am worried about pumped hydro at Collie and those mine pits filling up with water without proper

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remediation, they can look online. I will spell it out. Look up the failures in the rehabilitated pits at Nachterstedt in Germany. Google that and also the failure of a coalmining pit in Knappensee. Have a look at the videos to see what happens when coalmining pits are not properly rehabilitated. It is devastating. It was an area in East Germany that was taken over by West Germany when Germany was reunified. It had large coal pits that were not remediated properly. Now there are thousands and thousands of hectares where humans cannot go. When we are talking about pumped hydro at Collie, we are talking about potentially gigalitres of water being pumped from one place to another and the pits filling up with water. When I have driven along Coalfields Highway towards Arthur River from Collie, which I do not do infrequently, I have looked at some of the attempted rehabilitation of that area. I have seen that they have pushed some hills out and put a bit of grass on them. What I see in those hills is major erosion, major soil failure and slippage. That is why I asked the Minister for Mines and Petroleum about the due diligence that has been done. That is why I asked the questions about the estimates for the rehabilitation costs and whether he can guarantee to the public of Western Australia that they will not pick up the rehabilitation costs. That is why I asked him.

I have some experience in this area from my previous career. I do not believe the estimate of \$1 billion plus for remediation of that area is unwarranted. What I do not want to see, which is what we have seen from this government, is a headlong rush into a market-led proposal for pumped hydro that is going to excuse the miners of their rehabilitation responsibilities. Ultimately, the taxpayers of Western Australia would be left with that cost. That is why I asked the minister those questions. All of us deserve transparency. Look up those websites I have suggested and tell me that we should not have some level of concern about this being done properly, thoroughly and transparently. The taxpayer should not pick up a liability because people do something that is called renewable but it hides the fact that they are avoiding the critical remediation work that needs to be done on those sites. They are massive sites. I am sure it was a throwaway line, but the minister quoted \$40 million for the rehabilitation of that site, which is utterly farcical. I know that for a fact. I have some significant experience of these sorts of things from my previous life.

We heard the Premier today in response to the Leader of the Opposition. The Leader of the Opposition went through and outlined the detail of the Auditor General's report and the fantastic job that the Auditor General does. I have the utmost admiration for the fearless way in which the Attorney General does her job. I think she is an exemplar of a fearless public servant doing their job.

Several members interjected.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Did I say Attorney General? I mean Auditor General.

A member interjected.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I mixed them up. I love the Attorney General sometimes; sometimes I am not so keen. Thank you, members. I do mean the Auditor General. I believe the Auditor General is an exemplar of a fearless public servant. I think that is something that all of us, whether in government or opposition, really want and need. The Premier was asked a question today about the Auditor General's report and transparency. What did the Premier say? The Leader of the Opposition outlined this. When she was a minister and the Auditor General made a finding, she did not sit there and wave her hand. That is what the Premier did today; he basically waved his hand and said, "I don't care what the Auditor General says. I'm going to utterly ignore what she said." Even though she said this information is not available and even though this respected, experienced public servant has said that the government is not making this information available, the Premier, just with a wave of his hand, said that he was going to ignore that. He did not even answer the question from the Leader of the Opposition on that matter. I think that is utterly appalling.

We had a debate here a couple of days ago about the arrogance of this government, but it was an appalling response from the Premier to just dismiss, out of hand, the concerns that the Auditor General has raised. As we have heard, this is the second transparency report into major projects prepared by the Auditor General. Unfortunately, the report findings are exactly the same as they were two years ago. It is not just that the Premier has ignored the findings of the Auditor General on this report; for two years, the Premier and this government have ignored the findings of the Auditor General, who says that it is her responsibility to provide greater transparency in the way that projects are managed, but more particularly around the progress of projects. It is information that the public and Parliament are entitled to have.

It is not the government's money. It is not the Minister for Planning's money. It is not the Treasurer's money. It is the public of Western Australia's money. The government is not spending its own money. I hear from time to time that the government says, "We're doing X, Y and Z". No; the public of Western Australia is paying for all of those things. Members of the public of Western Australia are paying for that, and the government is doing it on their behalf. They have a right to know whether that money is being well spent and whether the projects are being well managed. It is not sufficient for government members to say that they know it is and they are satisfied it is. That is not how transparent government works. That is how a dictatorship works. Transparent government provides the information to the opposition, the media and the general public to allow them to interrogate and challenge the government. Sometimes, that will be embarrassing. As the Leader of the Opposition pointed out, yes, the government might be

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embarrassed, but it will learn from that. Ministers will go back to their departments and say, “How do we do better? How do we improve on that in the future?” That is not happening.

As I said, the transparency report on major projects was released in 2020. There are two important aspects to that report. One is the management of projects and the other important factor is the government’s preoccupation with secrecy. I share the thoughts of the Leader of the Opposition on this. After many months, I recently received a freedom of information report. The amount of information in the justification for essentially not providing any information was about 10 times longer than the combined total of information that was sent.

[Member’s time extended.]

Dr D.J. HONEY: The excuses went on for page after page, but, otherwise, I got essentially no information back. I got a bit of paper that has a title on it. It has “if”, “and”, “but” and “them”, but every single other thing is blacked out. I know that for some ministers, this is quite clearly a sport. Their sport is that they will not give anything to the opposition. That is not something members opposite would have tolerated or thought appropriate when they were in opposition. The Auditor General’s report states —

Our office’s previous report on major projects in 2012 highlighted that publicly available information on major projects is disparate and inconsistent, making it difficult to get a full and accurate picture of progress and performance.

Those government members who are more alert will go, “Hang on! That’s when you were in power!” Do they know what the former Liberal–National government did in response to that? It started providing detailed reports for the then opposition to interrogate and use in this place, and otherwise publicly. That is what the former government did in response to the Auditor General. That is why the Auditor General did not make another finding on that until the McGowan government came to power. The detailed reports on projects were available on the website. That was the former government’s response to the Auditor General’s recommendations. The government said yes and accepted that sufficient information was not provided, and it changed its practices to give the then opposition the information it required. The former opposition had that information available to it. That is why the Auditor General did not make another finding of that nature until 2020—after members opposite came into power.

What happened then? The McGowan government made grand announcements about the projects it would do and it made promises on costs. All of a sudden, the costs started ballooning and then we saw a complete lack of transparency on reporting on those matters. It requires the skills of Sherlock Holmes to go through all the different government papers to try to weed out the actual spend when the government talks about a particular project. Is it the same project the government talked about before? Is it another project? We constantly hear the government announcing a new program, whether it is for housing or health or another area. Even in the Collie announcement, the government said it will spend \$660 million on job-creating projects, but when we dig into it, it includes the announcement the government made more than two years ago about the Collie recovery fund, the transition fund and so on. The government is deliberately confusing people by doing that; it is a deliberate lack of transparency by the government on that matter.

The Auditor General’s 2020 report reminded us of the Labor government’s own Langoullant report in 2018. It touched on this topic. I will quote from the Auditor General’s report, which states —

Similarly, the Western Australian Government’s 2018 *Special Inquiry into Government Programs and Projects* recommended that government ‘provide information about major projects in an accessible and transparent way to the public.’

The Premier’s chosen person made recommendations about capital projects. The perverse thing is that we know why that was done. It was done to humiliate the former Liberal–National government, to reinforce the then Labor opposition’s view of how terrible and how incompetent the former government was in relation to capital projects. Premier McGowan’s appointed person came back with recommendations, but what does the government do? It proceeds to ignore those recommendations. It ignores reports from an inquiry on transparency that it appointed! The McGowan government ignored the recommendations of the Langoullant report into infrastructure spend and it ignored the Auditor’s General’s recommendations in 2020. From the response we heard today from the Premier, it sounds as though he will ignore the recommendation by the Auditor General to the government in her latest report. The irony is that the whole process of the 2018 report was aimed at criticising the former Liberal–National government. If the former Auditor General came back today, he would have to say that this government has ignored two out of three of the major recommendations that he made about the management of major capital projects.

In 2020, the current Auditor General said —

... Parliament and the public cannot easily access information on the progress of these projects.

...

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It is my view that Government should provide regular public reporting on the status of major projects to Parliament and the public ... It is my intention to periodically report and track a selection of major projects until Government fills the gap.

That reinforces the outcome of the Langoult report. It is two years hence. The government has had two years to respond to someone who I think is an outstanding public servant in her substantive role as Auditor General. It is two years later and what does the Auditor General say? She says that Parliament and the public cannot easily access detailed or consolidated information on the cost and time performance of these projects.

As I pointed out, there was a criticism of the former Liberal–National government in 2012, but it acted. That is why this adverse finding was not made again until 2020 when the McGowan government was in power and it stopped adequately reporting information so that the public of Western Australia could properly see the progress or lack of progress, whether a project was on budget, over budget or under budget or whether it had changed the scope of the project. As I said, the government deliberately makes that as hard as possible to discover.

The Auditor General explained the need for the information. She states —

It is my view that Government should provide regular public reporting on the status of major projects to Parliament and the public. Public reporting will serve to satisfy public interest, promote accountability, and build community trust and confidence around the management of these major public investments.

As I said, that is the public's money—it is not the government's money—and it deserves some accountability on that.

We do not have to go back far in history to understand why transparency and accountability matter. It matters because if governments are not transparent, we will end up in the situation we had in the past with the government side of politics with the issues that arose around WA Inc, when there was not transparency around government dealings and public money was misused. It took some considerable time and effort to find that out. I would think, knowing that history, that this Labor government would make itself above and beyond reproach and be open and accountable.

The Auditor General said that she will follow up on this. We had a presentation today from the Auditor General on this report. She explained that, in fact, that is exactly what she will be doing. In the absence of the government being open and transparent and publishing readily accessible information around this, she will have to. Is that not a waste of her resources to have to do that? She sees that the only way she can get open and accountable information on the progress of these projects is to use her good officers to do that. This information is not hard for the government to provide. I have had some significant involvement in major projects. I can tell members about the management of major projects. These projects are not trivial. There is no doubt that many of them are complex. They consist of thousands or even tens of thousands of individual steps. Project managers track their progress every day—they have to! They track progress and costs every day. Fortunately, we have had computers for some considerable time and all that information is very readily consolidated. If I went out to people on those major projects today and asked where they were at with progress and expenditure, they could tell me that today. They could tell me whether the schedule was slipping. It is a simple matter for the government to provide this information. It does not have to introduce whole new processes. As was pointed out by the Auditor General, this information is available within government. The government has this information. It is not that it does not have this information or that it has to invent a new process to explain or provide this information to the community and to Parliament. It can do that now.

Let us look at what the Auditor General found. I put a question on notice to the Minister for Transport asking for an update on the progress of a rail crossing project. It was a simple request. The minister replied —

Project timeframes, budgets and milestones are, and continue to be, detailed in numerous publicly available Ministerial Media Statements and the State Budget Papers. Updates will continue to be provided as projects progress.

As I pointed out, that information is not readily available. It is hidden away. It is confusing. Changes in scope are not detailed and changes in time lines are moved without any public explanation. We do not find out and we do not get that information. Either the minister had that information or she did not. To say that it is publicly available —

Ms R. Saffioti interjected.

Dr D.J. HONEY: The minister will have her chance in a minute. To say that that information is publicly available in some form is simply not true. It is not just me saying that; that is what the Auditor General said, although not in relation to that specific case.

In relation to project management —

Several members interjected.

Dr D.J. HONEY: For God's sake; it is a peanut gallery!

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Project information is not provided in a transparent and readily accessible manner. We see that constantly when we ask for information of that nature. I cannot understand why the government is so fearful of this. Is it scared to be embarrassed that it is over schedule on a project or over cost? We hear plenty of excuses in this place; the government gives detailed explanations of excuses. The simple fact is that it could provide that information. That information is readily available. The Auditor General made a reasonable request in two reports—in 2020 and 2022. If the government does not give a positive response and start providing that information in a readily available form, it is proving, along with the Premier, that it does not meet the gold standard of transparency that it promised when it came to power.

MS R. SAFFIOTI (West Swan — Minister for Transport) [5.02 pm]: I rise to speak on this motion because, to be frank, I could not tolerate listening to someone else lying and trying to deceive the public and the Parliament. What we heard in this Parliament was an hour of mistruths and lies. I will go through it.

Withdrawal of Remark

Mr R.S. LOVE: The minister has accused the Leader of the Liberal Party and the Leader of the Nationals WA of lying to the Parliament. I ask that that be withdrawn.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms C.M. Collins): There is no point of order. Just be careful of using that kind of language.

Debate Resumed

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Just to clarify, I am the lead speaker, so I will be taking more than 20 minutes.

We listened to an hour of mistruths and an attempt to deliberately mislead the Parliament.

Point of Order

Dr D.J. HONEY: It is absolutely outside standing orders to say that someone is deliberately misleading Parliament. I have been pulled up on that in this place.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms C.M. Collins): Member, if we can just be very careful how we use our language. Thank you.

Debate Resumed

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: The opposition is misleading this place. I will go through a number of things that have happened today. I will start with question time because that is a good place to start. The member for Moore stood to ask why we allocated \$100 million to a project that did not go through Infrastructure WA. I think the member was trying to find some details, but that project was announced by the federal government—by Barnaby Joyce, a colleague of the Nationals WA—on 8 March.

The Leader of the Opposition is not in the chamber. That is what happens. I have never seen the Leader of the Opposition stay in this place for more than two hours at a time. She made some ludicrous claims and then disappeared. Maybe there is another conference over east. Maybe she is on her way to the Qantas chairman's lounge. She would stand up and say how appalling it is that not every member is in this chamber while she is on her way to the airport. I expect that is what is happening. If members are going to use private members' time, they have to stick around. If they are going to make ludicrous claims, they have to stick around.

Mr R.S. Love interjected.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I was not talking about the member for Moore; I was talking about the person who sometimes sits next to him.

Welcome back, Leader of the Opposition! It is really important to take in what the Leader of the Opposition said and compare it with the facts.

I want to go back to the former Auditor General's report *Opinions on ministerial notifications* of 2015, and his comments on the stadium. It states —

This report deals with three decisions by the Minister for Sport and Recreation, not to provide information to Parliament about the arrangements to design, build, finance and maintain the new Perth Stadium. The Minister refused to provide some information from the State's agreement with the Westadium consortium and refused to provide an unredacted copy of the contract.

Section 82 of the *Financial Management Act 2006* applies if a Minister decides that it is reasonable and appropriate ...

The report continued —

The three decisions to refuse to provide information to Parliament related to requests made to the Minister for Sport and Recreation on 10 September 2014, 3 February 2015 and 16 March 2015. In the time between

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the first and second question being asked, the Minister, the Hon Terry Waldron MLA resigned as Minister and was replaced by the Hon Mia Davies MLA.

In all three cases the Minister decided that the information sought was commercial-in-confidence and would not be provided.

I remember what occurred before the stadium was built. The previous government loved the stadium. We all love the stadium. The Liberal–National government never told us how much it cost. I remember what occurred. We saw media statement after media statement. We heard about the size of the cup holders. We heard about the size of the seats. We heard about the music that was going to be played in the toilets. We heard about every bit of the stadium, but the then government never told us how much it cost. It refused to provide a copy of the contract.

A news headline of 27 August 2015 stated “WA auditor-general slams Government’s refusal to release Perth Stadium details over commercial in confidence concerns”. That was about the current Leader of the Opposition. The Leader of the Opposition has said, “When the Auditor General used to criticise us, we used to stand up and say, ‘Fair cop, we’ll change our practices.’” That is exactly what the Leader of the Opposition said: “When the Auditor General used to criticise our government, we used to stand up and say, ‘Fair criticism; we accept that. We will change our practices.’” Of course she did. She said that when there was criticism, she used to say, “Fair enough; you criticise us. I’ll absorb all that and I will change my practices.” In 2015, she was criticised for not providing information. In 2017, the Auditor General’s report *Opinion on ministerial notification* found —

... decisions by the former Minister for Water —

The Leader of the Opposition —

not to provide Parliament with business cases for the Water for Food project were not reasonable ...

In 2017, in a report relating to the conduct of the previous Minister for Water, the current Leader of the Opposition, the Auditor General found that the non-disclosure of information was not reasonable. To stand in this place and say that somehow she took on board everything said by the Auditor General and changed her practice is completely false. She was criticised in 2015 for not disclosing information about the stadium, even though her government was talking about the size and orientation of the cup holders, the size of the seats, the type of material used for the seats, the music and the number of speakers in the toilets. I remember hearing about every single part of that project. Every bit of fluff the then minister could have done, she did, and she refused to provide information. The minister did not change her practices, because in 2017, she stood up and said, “I’m not giving you any information about the Water for Food project.” In Parliament on 8 September 2016, Hon Darren West asked the minister whether a business case had been prepared for each Water for Food project. The minister responded, yes, but the business case cannot be released because they are cabinet-in-confidence documents. The minister was asked again and again and she said no, but the Auditor General found that those documents should have been released. The first point is that what the Leader of the Opposition said was completely wrong. She said that the Auditor General would comment on the former government and that it would absorb it, change its practices and release all the information. That is clearly not the case.

The second point I will make is on the question asked today about the North Ellenbrook interchange. A commitment was given for that in the federal budget. A media release by Barnaby Joyce of 8 March talks about how Western Australians will benefit from that significant infrastructure project, the North Ellenbrook interchange. Of course I went out there and supported the project. When the federal government gives us \$50 million and the private sector gives us \$25 million and we get to build a \$100 million project for \$25 million, that is a pretty good deal. Unlike the previous coalition government, which never used to seek federal government funding—maybe it did for one deal; the Perth Freight Link—and was not able to secure funding under Tony Abbott for public transport or to negotiate cooperatively with any federal government to secure significant funds, we have done that and we will continue to do that. Even with Barnaby Joyce, a key member of the National Party, we were able to negotiate \$50 million of federal funding. Let us be clear about this: that federal funding is funded by the fuel excise that Western Australians pay. My duty always has been, and continues to be, to secure as much federal funding as we can for state projects in Western Australia. That was a case in point in the federal budget. I do not remember the member for Moore standing up and saying, “Shock, horror! Barnaby Joyce shouldn’t have given us \$50 million for the North Ellenbrook interchange.” I do not remember that at all. But today he does not want federal funding of \$50 million because he does not think it stacks up. I do not know what the member thinks stacks up, because I am telling him that if he is of the view that every project needs a benefit–cost ratio of more than one to get federal funding, he will find that many regional projects will never reach one. I will let him know that. Most regional projects do not go over a BCR of one, but if that is his approach to not fund anything with a BCR over one, fair enough.

I will make three other points. First, the Leader of the Opposition did not give the Parliament the truth today about her response to the Auditor General’s report. In 2015, the Auditor General said that the government should provide information but it did not, and in 2017 the Auditor General published another report saying that the previous

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Minister for Water should have provided the business cases. Second, we saw the Deputy Leader of the Opposition say that we should not have accepted money from the federal government for a project. He obviously does not understand how budgets work. The third point is that opposition members are somehow saying that when they were in government, they produced reports for all their projects on a monthly basis. I do not remember seeing them. The Financial Administration Act discusses what documents governments should produce. I remember studying it when I was in opposition. The Financial Management Act was replaced by the Financial Administration Act. I remember it. The first time I wrote an amendment to legislation was when I was working in Geoff Gallop's office when he was in opposition and I made three changes to improve the transparency of documents provided in Parliament, and they were all accepted at the time, which was quite a big achievement. That was the first time I ever wrote legislation, the Minister for Finance would be happy to know. That legislation stipulates what we need to release. At the time of the budget, we release all the information that has been committed by the state government to projects and in the midyear review we update that information. By way of media statements, we also provide information when there are significant changes in scope and cost. That is what we are required to do, and that is what we do. I do not recall the idea that the previous government somehow produced a monthly report of asset investments. People might know that I used to spend a lot of time on the opposition benches. When I sat there, I think I would have seen the monthly reports of asset investments if they came through, but I did not see them. The idea that somehow the former government had improved reporting on asset investment is wrong. It is false. I do not remember seeing them. The reality is that the former government did not do much. Opposition members do not do much now, but in government they did not do much either. The former government followed a couple of big projects and it was obsessed with the PFL, but that is about it. The whole idea that I have to take up the time of the hundreds of people I have delivering projects to provide monthly reports to the Leader of the Opposition is not the way government operates, I am sorry.

Mr R.S. Love interjected.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: The legislation requires that we provide information, which we do.

Mr R.S. Love: Take it up with the Auditor General. She's not happy with the way you do it.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: The Auditor General says that she wants to do this reporting, and that is her role. She is allowed to do that. If that is how she wants to use the resources, that is up to her. She is independent. I have read the executive summary, which is slightly different from the introduction in the Auditor General's overview. I will go through the executive summary. I have gone through the conclusion of the executive summary of the report—I am now talking about the Auditor General's report—and I have to say that it is not that bad. I am reading the report, and it is pretty good. The report might be a bit different from some of the presentations or something, but I am reading the actual report. After going through it, and given what is happening around the world, we are doing okay. The conclusion states —

In compiling this transparency report, nothing has come to our attention to indicate that, in all material respects, information provided in the project summary sheets within this report is not accurate and reliable.

...

All projects had adequate high-level financial and governance controls, including monitoring and internal reporting processes. We did not identify any significant issues for the 5 projects included in our detailed controls review. All entities were able to provide reasonable and substantiated explanations of cost and time variations when requested.

That is from the executive summary of the report. Like I said, if the Auditor General wants to assess how our projects are being delivered every year or every couple of years, that is fine. That is the Auditor General's job. We are fine with that. If that is how she wants to use the resources, that is fine. Let us go through it: we report in the budget, in the midyear review and we have annual reports. When there are significant changes to the scope or cost or time frames, we make that public. I know that members opposite do not like the fact that there is a lot of activity around the state. I know it must irritate them immensely that when they drive around, they see activity everywhere. The feedback I get is, "I can't believe how much you're doing." I will be honest about that. No-one comes up to me and says, "Jeez, you should be reporting on these projects monthly." They are admiring the work being done by Western Australians around the state. They all say, "I can't believe how you keep across all the details of all those projects you're delivering, because it is a record amount." That is the case, and it is challenging. I have always said that in this place and I will not argue that it is not challenging. We have had COVID, labour shortages, supply chain interruptions, a storm that took out a rail line that shut the east-west train traffic for 27 days, and a war in Ukraine that is impacting on commodity prices and, of course, key production inputs. When we started our asset investment program, there are things that we honestly were not anticipating. We were not anticipating that we would be building the biggest ever infrastructure program amidst a one-in-100-year worldwide pandemic. We did not get that. We did not think that there was going to be a war between Ukraine and Russia, and we did not quite understand

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that a rail line would be swept away and there would be a 24-day outage, but we kept managing it and we keep being very honest about what we are doing.

I am going through the projects that members opposite have outlined today. I think they talked about the Tonkin Gap project. Members opposite do not understand what we are doing!

Mr R.S. Love: It's in the report! Page 32.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I will read it out, because I think the member has misinterpreted or has been misled on what it said.

Mr R.S. Love: I am not misleading anybody. That is in the Auditor General's report.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Moore, thank you.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: That is because the project was changed to enable the Morley–Ellenbrook rail works, and we said that. I tell this to members and anyone who is watching. Do they know what we did? We had two projects. We had the Morley–Ellenbrook line, which will operate in the median of the Tonkin Highway, and we had the Tonkin Gap works. We thought, “You know what? We should combine that project into one, because that makes financial sense.” That is what we did, and that is what we announced in media statement after media statement. I am sorry that you guys do not do the work. I am really sorry about that, and I am sorry there are not many members opposite to do that work. It is partially our fault, but it also their fault that they do not have enough members. But members opposite should not come in here and criticise us on lack of transparency when they do not do the work, because I will point to the media statements that outline that. I will point to the budget that outlines that. I will keep pointing to documents that outline that. Members opposite come in and make false claims in question time that do not marry with the report. It is just not the case! Members opposite can keep going through all these projects. To be honest, if I go to page 5 of the Auditor General's report, for all those interested who are playing at home, given all the shocks that are happening around the world, this is really, really good. We are progressing on these projects really, really well.

Mr W.J. Johnston: All the green!

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: All the green says we are doing well. Again, I am sorry that members opposite want to pull some quotes that may have been said on the radio or in an overview, but I am actually reading the report, and the report seems reasonable. It says that there has been a two-year delay in the Forrestfield–Airport Link. Of course there has been; I have said it about 10 times. Members should remember that we intentionally delayed the project to make sure that workplace safety was a top priority. Initially, we were not happy with how it was being managed, so we said we want to delay this project to make sure that the workers' safety is paramount and workers are protected. That was our number one priority. We intentionally did that. We intentionally delayed the project. More recently, COVID has also had an impact. Members stand up and say that the FAL is delayed—yes! We have said that. It is a complex project. We wanted to make sure that the contract was delivered well and in the safest possible environment.

The Auditor General's overview notes that we intentionally spread out the pipeline of works. I will go through this. It says that projects were intentionally smoothed to basically ensure that they were going to be delivered more responsibly. We will continue to monitor the smoothing of the works to make sure that we can deliver our projects in the best possible way. I am reading from the Auditor General's overview, which states —

We note the Government has responded to these market pressures by smoothing its pipeline of works through delayed commencement of some projects, particularly in the Transport portfolio. It is important the State Government considers predictable events, such as stimulus measures and the impact of closed borders on labour supply, when planning the delivery of its Asset Investment Program ...

I accept that. We will continue to monitor how we emerge from the COVID pandemic, because we understood the pressures of being in the COVID pandemic and the pressures of emerging from it are now becoming more transparent. We will continue to monitor the entire program of works to make sure that we can deliver it as responsibly as possible, and we will continue to do that.

As we saw, the Leader of the Opposition was found out today. She stood up and said, “We always accepted and agreed with the Auditor General's reports and changed our practice.” That was completely false. We showed that the member for Moore was completely wrong when he outlined some of the interpretations of the Auditor General's report.

I now want to go into, as I said, the reporting and accountability mechanisms. People may understand that as a result of getting federal funding, we have an obligation to report to Infrastructure Australia. I do not think the previous government did that at all. I do not think that it ever had to go through a four-stage process.

Mr W.J. Johnston: Barnett used to say he made the decisions. He wouldn't submit anything to Infrastructure Australia.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Exactly. When members opposite built the stadium, they were asked how they chose the location—“I drove past and saw an empty site.”

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Mr W.J. Johnston: Which was a site that had been allocated for housing development by John Day, the Minister for Planning.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: That is right.

That was the analysis undertaken by the previous government. The process now is that we submit a business case to Infrastructure Australia. Again, I do not think members opposite would even understand the amount of work that goes into preparing a business case for Infrastructure Australia. We have to identify the need. We have to go through an options analysis. I think, for the Ellenbrook rail line, we went through more than 20 options. We have to compare and contrast, for example, in this case, rail versus bus versus a different rail alignment. We have to look at different alignments and different modes of transport. We then have to go through a project development plan—a PDP—in which we look at the operation costs and all the other costs, and develop and submit a benefit–cost ratio. That is volumes of volumes of work and millions of dollars spent in preparation of these business cases. That is a process that we undertook for all major projects to secure funding. That is a very, very tough process.

Then, of course, there is Infrastructure Western Australia. When we prepare major business cases, Infrastructure WA has a role in endorsing and assessing them as well, whether they are submitted to Infrastructure Australia or are just state funded. I have to say that most of our projects—nearly all our transport projects—are Infrastructure Australia–approved projects, so that is a process that we have followed and will continue to follow. Infrastructure WA has a role in accepting the business case and passing it through to Infrastructure Australia, but we already have a very rigorous process. We have a much more rigorous process than ever before. We release the summary PDPs onto the website so that people can understand them. For all our works, just go to the website, such as Main Roads. We have all these projects on websites, which give people the current costs and the estimated completion. As well as the budget, the midyear review, annual reports and other questions, through our agencies, we also have a one-page summary of all our projects. They exist. Again, that is what we do and that is what we aim to maintain. Again, there is all that transparency.

The Leader of the Liberal Party stood up to ask questions today about the market-led proposal processes. I think the Minister for Finance has probably provided information to the media about that; he may provide some more detail. But, again, members opposite come in, make allegations and try to do a calculation when they do not understand the scope of the works. As the Leader of the Liberal Party outlined, I inherited one of these projects a bit late, so I went through the media statements to make sure that we explained the scope of the works properly. I read those media statements, in particular one from December last year about the scope of works, and they are much wider than what the member stood up and said. The member took this narrow interpretation that he does not believe it is cost-effective, but he did not incorporate all the aspects outlined in the media statement. Again, I ask members opposite to do their work.

We operate under the same FOI legislation as the former government did. The same people are doing the FOIs. I refer to fishing expeditions. Members cannot write in and say, “We want every document with this word in it for the last two years” and expect us to devote the resources to do that. That is why they have to narrow their requests. That is what happened to me in opposition; I narrowed my requests. Again, I do not know what opposition members want us to do. They want us to do their work for them, instead of actually reading the budget papers and asking questions in estimates. It could have asked about all these issues, including north Ellenbrook, in estimates. They asked for a shortened estimates time, because it was too taxing on them.

A member interjected.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Yes, you did. I was surprised: “We didn’t want to be here until 10 o’clock every night.” They asked for a shorter estimates process, because they did not want to be here until 10 o’clock every night. Now they are come in here saying, “You should guess what we want information on and provide it”, instead of doing the work and asking questions.

We will continue to operate under all the legislative frameworks that exist for financial accountability and transparency. Members might have noticed that I do not do media stunts every week about the size of seats or cup holders. When information is available, we report on changes in scope and cost. That is the sensible and right thing to do. When decisions are made and contracts are changed, we will report that. That is what happens. We do that by way of media statements or statements in this place, but the opposition manufactures this outrage, like it always does, over something that does not exist.

I go to the range of works underway, because I would like opposition members to just one day give us some credit for all the work that we—and all those Western Australians who have been working over the past two and a half years, through tough circumstances—are doing to deliver our projects. Over 10 000 Western Australians are working on Metronet. We are building railcars here for the first time and building rail lines that the opposition promised and failed to deliver when it was in government. We are delivering our election commitments and spending more on regional roads than any government before us. We are working on regional freight lines. I know that must be galling for the opposition. It sold them and shut them down, and there I am and we are working with the federal

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government and local councils investing in a rail line that the Liberal–National government sold and shut down. We are trying to help with that task of moving grain to port much quicker. We are spending a record amount on ports across the state, supporting regional communities. The opposition never comes in here and gives any credit to those workers who are out there delivering those projects. We will continue to invest. Opposition members come in here with false claims, and people can see right through them. They come in here without doing their research and without understanding projects. I do not understand how some of them sat around the cabinet table, because they cannot read a budget paper.

A member interjected.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I tell members this —

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members! Thank you.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I am very optimistic that the member for Moore is claiming the next election.

We continue to invest around the state. When there are challenges, we make those challenges clear, and we continue to inform the public.

Like I said, we cannot do the work for the opposition. I read some key parts of the Auditor General's report. It says that the financial management and governance of the projects is adequate. That is good. If members want to change legislation, they can go and work on it. If they want to change the reporting requirements of the Financial Management Act, they can go and do that. They can do a private members' bill if they want to do that. The idea that somehow I have to sit here and report to the Leader of the Liberal Party with monthly or weekly project management reports of the over 100 contracts under my portfolio typifies the arrogance of opposition members. They do not want to do any work: "We're the Liberal and National Parties. We don't do work; you do it for us. You do the work for us to attack you", because they are so lazy. Nothing better demonstrates it than what we saw last week with the Leader of the Opposition catching a plane to New South Wales during a parliamentary week to attend what was an intimate conference on climate action.

Mr R.S. Love interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Moore!

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I am here. Today, the member did not want to ask me the question about the north Ellenbrook rail line. He asked the Premier. I was sitting here and was very keen to answer that question, but the member refused to ask me that question. Even when we are here, they do not ask questions.

It is the arrogance. When they were in government, frankly, I do not think they worked very hard. Now, in opposition, they want to keep that going. They did not work that hard in government, and now they want to keep that going. They are saying, "We don't want to do the research. We don't want to read the budget papers. We don't want to access documents online. We don't want to ask questions in estimates. We want a shorter estimates period. We don't want to do any of that. We believe that you have to provide us a mountain of information that we will misuse and mistreat." That is what they do, or they misinterpret it, because I do not think they have a very good economic background, and that is what they want us to do instead of actually doing the work.

I am proud of the achievements of this government. We are out there delivering in the most difficult of circumstances around the state. We are partnering with companies and industry bodies like CBH.

A member interjected.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: What?

Mr W.J. Johnston: In the regions.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: In the regions?

Mr R.S. Love: I didn't say anything. The interjection was from over there somewhere.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Well, you are throwing your voice!

We are partnering with industry groups such as CBH. We are partnering with the federal government and with councils, delivering projects around the state, and all the opposition can do is come in here and make false claims. I read the Auditor General's report. To be honest, when it landed on Friday, my office read it and said that it was quite fine. There were not any issues, because as we went through it, we saw that the Auditor General said that the governance and project management is pretty good. As I said, I was not involved in the IPA, but it is up to the Auditor General to do whatever the Auditor General sees fit. If she wants to do this periodically and assess how we manage our major projects, that is fine; that is her job. I will not do something to prevent the Auditor General from doing her job. I cannot. I would not want to do that. If she wants to do this every six months, every year or every

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two years, that is up to her. We respect the independence. Is the idea that we would want to do something to thwart the role of the Auditor General? We do not want to do that at all. We will continue to provide the information.

Mr R.S. Love: Surely, you would have that level of information already? It is a matter of reporting.

Mr W.J. Johnston: We report exactly as we are required to do by law.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I do not understand. What does the opposition want? What else do they want?

Several members interjected.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I have read it. What do they want?

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms C.M. Collins): Leader of the Opposition, can you please stand if you would like to contribute.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: She cannot stand.

The ACTING SPEAKER: You cannot stand? Do not stand! Continue, minister.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I will take the interjection.

Ms M.J. Davies: It is laid out specifically that the reporting is done internally in government. The minister is suggesting that it is reported through the Parliament.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: So what does the member want?

Ms M.J. Davies: I want the minister to adhere to what is in the Auditor General's report.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: What information do they want? They do not even know what information they want.

Ms M.J. Davies: You are on your feet, minister. We have laid out what we want.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: No. You tell me. You know what? They do not have any depth. They say that we should report more. They do not even know what they want.

Several members interjected.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Tell us what you want. We report the budget.

Ms M.J. Davies: I am not participating in you diminishing what the Auditor General has requested quite seriously. It is laid out in black and white. I have made my case. I have made my contribution. You are now just being vexatious, and quite revolting, actually.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: What information do you want? Why do you stand up and accuse the Premier of not being here, and then catch a flight to Sydney and miss two and a half days of Parliament?

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister for Transport, if you can please go back to the motion and not make it personal.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: The Leader of the Opposition makes accusations against us all the time. When we bring it back and hold a mirror to what the Leader of the Opposition does, she cannot handle it. That is why she walks out of the chamber, and that is why she does not ever look up, either. She says whatever she wants about us. But when we point out the facts, the fact is that she stood in here and made a political stunt about the Premier not being here during question time, but then flew to New South Wales for a conservatives for climate change intimate affair, so, yes, we are going to call that out. Again, the Leader of the Opposition comes in here and says she wants more information.

Ms M.J. Davies interjected.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: She posted it only after people were aware. She did not post it the day that she was there. We saw the timing of it.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Thank you, members. The Minister for Transport has the call.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Actually, on Thursday, because I was here, I asked the Deputy Leader of the Opposition where the Leader of the Opposition was, but no-one said anything. I remember saying, "Where is the Leader of the Opposition?", and no-one would say anything. I am asking the opposition what information do they want. It goes back to the core issue here. What information do they want? "Oh, we don't know." The basis of this whole private members' debate is that they say they want more information, and when we ask them what they want —

Mr R.S. Love interjected.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Honestly! There is no credibility from the deputy leader at all. The opposition comes in here with false claims every day. They have no idea about the substance of their questions and no idea about how to

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ask relevant supplementary questions. Let us face it. We have asked what information do they want. We report the estimated total costs in the budget and the midyear review. Any substantial changes are reported between those two financial documents. When there is significant change in scope or cost, we put that out through media statements. That is what we do.

Mr R.S. Love: Do you comply with the act?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: We comply with all the legislation. The idea that somehow we would produce some sort of weekly report about the management of every component of every contract is false. We are the executive government. The opposition hates that. It believes that somehow we are not up to it. That is what opposition members think. They still cannot believe that we are in government and that we have these numbers. They still cannot accept that. This goes back not to any claim of arrogance on this side, but to the arrogance on their side.

Mr R.S. Love: The entitlement.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Yes, the entitlement. The fact is that they do not believe they should do work. They do not believe they should sit up late at night, as we used to do, and go through reports. They believe that everyone else does not deserve to be here, but you guys do. They do not believe we should be occupying the Treasury bench. They do not believe we should be able to make decisions to deliver projects. That is the point of it.

Mr R.S. Love interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Moore, you are repeatedly interjecting. Can I ask you to cease and let the Minister for Transport finish her remarks.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: This is more about the arrogance of the opposition, that it should not have to do any work. The member for Moore will stand up and make all these claims. I bet him that everything he said is in a budget document or a media statement. I have asked them what information do they want. They will not tell us. The Leader of the Opposition cannot tell us. What do they want? I do not get it. What information do they want? All they can do is read a paragraph. We do not understand what they want, because it is all out there. I am sorry that the opposition has to do work. But that is what oppositions have to do. They come in here and complain when they have to do work. They do not want to do estimates. They do not want to have to be in Parliament. They have managed to hold five members here. That is good. That is much better than normal. The five opposition members have been sitting here for a few hours. That is great. They do not even sit here and debate legislation. For all your posturing and claims about this side, you guys cannot even hold a proper debate on legislation. Many of you do not even speak on bills, or you speak for a minute on a bill. All this posturing —

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members!

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I am saying that opposition members should stop being so entitled. That is what I would like. I would like them to stop being so entitled. That would be great. They come into this place all the time with a sense of arrogance and entitlement. As I said, I spent eight and a half years over there. You know what? We had to work. The idea that I would stand up and say, “Premier Barnett, could you provide this information to us, because I want to go home and I do not want to do any work?”, or the idea that I would stand up and say, “Give us all the information; I want a monthly tracking of every expenditure and cost item on all your projects because I do not want to have to ask a question, I do not want to have to read an annual report, and I do not want to have to read a budget paper,” I would not have done that.

I cannot wait to hear the contribution from the member for Moore. This is yet another demonstration of an opposition that realises that it might need to do some work in opposition. We have seen what its response is. We are very, very transparent about our projects and we will continue to be.

MR R.S. LOVE (Moore — Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [5.47 pm]: I am pleased to speak to this excellent motion put forward by the Leader of the Opposition today. We have seen today in question time a prime example of why this Premier and this government do not get the idea of what is true transparency. In question time today, I asked a question of the Premier about a particular piece of infrastructure, a roundabout on Tonkin Highway just north of Ellenbrook. I asked —

I refer the Premier to the new \$100 billion Tonkin Highway interchange, north of Ellenbrook, announced on 8 May 2022 by your Minister for Transport. Given this new project is valued at \$100 million, was it assessed by Infrastructure WA prior to the funding decision being made?

The Premier replied that it was a Morrison government announcement. I can assure the minister that it was also an announcement from Hon Rita Saffioti, Minister for Transport, because that is what I have right here. The media statement refers to a new \$100 million interchange on Tonkin Highway, with an allocation of \$25 million from the McGowan government, \$25 million from private investment, and \$50 million from the commonwealth government. I am well aware that it was not all Western Australian state government money. But the minister and the Premier

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do not seem to be aware that the wording of the act is that any major project worth more than \$100 million, no matter what is the source of funding, has to be put through Infrastructure WA.

Ms R. Saffioti: You don't understand.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I do understand. That is what the government's own legislation states it should do. Let us look at the Infrastructure Western Australia Act 2019. Division 3, section 19, "Infrastructure WA to assess major infrastructure proposals prior to investment decision" states —

- (1) This section applies to a major infrastructure proposal of a State agency, whether or not —
 - (a) funding for the proposal is or will be sought from the Crown or is to be provided by a State agency; or
 - (b) the proposal is intended to result in the infrastructure being held by the Crown or a State agency; or
 - (c) the proposal is a joint proposal.

Quite clearly we have a joint proposal here. It continues —

- (2) The major infrastructure proposal must be submitted to Infrastructure WA, and Infrastructure WA's report on the proposal must be received by the Premier, prior to the investment decision for the proposal.

The act goes on to define "investment decision". It states —

investment decision, in relation to a proposal of a State agency, means the decision by the Government or the State agency to implement the proposal.

Clearly, the minister's department will be implementing the proposal.

I turn to what actually constitutes a major infrastructure proposal in the definitions in section 3. It states —

major infrastructure proposal means a proposal, for an infrastructure project or for a programme of infrastructure projects, if —

- (a) the project has or the projects have an estimated capital cost of \$100 million or more, or another amount prescribed for the purposes of this paragraph; or
- (b) the proposal is nominated by the Premier ...

There are some exemptions that would apply under section 71 regulations, but no regulations have been gazetted for this; therefore, there are no exemptions. The Minister for Transport should have put that project through Infrastructure WA, and I wonder why she has not done so. We heard that it was because there was a funding opportunity. I am sorry, but we have an act of Parliament and that means that the government has to submit that proposal before it makes a final investment decision. That is the law that the government brought in, but it is not following its own law. It is not following its own legal situation. There is nothing in this act that would allow the government to exempt that particular investment decision from Infrastructure WA.

I had a discussion with the Premier, who made some disparaging remarks about the opposition in estimates. I had quite a lengthy discussion with the Premier about Infrastructure WA when the chief executive officer of Infrastructure WA was here. The member for Wanneroo, who will no doubt make a contribution later on, was in those proceedings as was Hon Mia Davies, Leader of the Opposition and I. We were here and I note that it looks like only one member of the government showed up to that estimates hearing—only one is mentioned here in *Hansard* anyway.

Several members interjected.

Mr R.S. LOVE: In *Hansard*. We were lucky to have a quorum.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members!

Mr R.S. LOVE: Lazy government could not be bothered showing up.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members!

Mr W.J. Johnston: That is incorrect because if the government wasn't here, there wouldn't have been a quorum; we provide the quorum.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I acknowledge that the government provided a bare quorum. But it would have been instructive for some of the government's other members to have been listening to the discussion because they might have learnt what Infrastructure WA is!

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Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members!

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members, one moment! I remind you that Hansard needs to be able to hear the recordings. Thank you.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Thank you and I am happy to receive the Acting Speaker's protection.

During the estimates, I said to the Premier —

The assessment of major infrastructure proposals on page 292 of the *Budget statements* reads —

Infrastructure WA assesses major infrastructure proposals with a capital cost of \$100 million or more ... and provides relevant advice to the Government to support informed investment decisions.

The Premier said, yes, "Infrastructure WA assesses major infrastructure proposals" as outlined in the act. He continues —

Under the act, it is required to assess major infrastructure proposals prior to an investment decision. This includes proposals with a capital cost of \$100 million or any proposal nominated by the Premier.

This is exactly what the act says; I do not dispute that. That is what the act says. This proposal clearly should have gone to Infrastructure Western Australia. He went on to say —

A summary of IWA's assessment —

Mr W.J. Johnston: Member, can I ask a question?

Mr R.S. LOVE: No; the member can have a say later on. I have only limited time.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms A.E. Kent): Ministers, hold on. Member for Moore, are you taking interjections?

Mr R.S. LOVE: No, I am not because I have only very limited time, and I have a fair bit to say.

A member interjected.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I am answering the questions that were already asked. The Premier said —

A summary of IWA's assessment is required to be published within six months of the advice being provided to the Premier.

We know that this proposal has not been to Infrastructure WA because last month I asked the Premier how many projects had already been assessed. He went on to say —

The project that has been assessed to date is the Geraldton port maximisation project. Funding of \$332 million for that was announced in the budget.

Therefore, in May, there had been no such assessment of that \$100 million investment on the Tonkin Highway. One of the reasons why a number of projects have been exempted was the commencement date of the Infrastructure Western Australia legislation was in January this year, so projects that had already been announced before then were not subject to it—that is okay—as were projects that were part of a continuing project that had already been advanced. We discussed the work on the Armadale line, for instance, and the soon-to-be-discrete sections that were over \$100 million in value and had not been through that assessment. But because they were part of an overall package, that was deemed to be fair enough in the Premier's eyes. But this matter is clearly a new piece of infrastructure that has come onto the Tonkin Highway on what was NorthLink WA. We know that NorthLink WA had already been completed because on 23 April 2020, the Minister for Transport released a joint media statement titled "WA's biggest road project, NorthLink, open, finished and ready for business". Clearly, this was a new piece of infrastructure, not part of an expanded, existing or continuing NorthLink WA project. That project had come to an end, and that was announced on 23 April 2020. Therefore, there is absolutely no justification for the Premier, in responding to me, to ignore the fact that there is a requirement under the legislation for him to have that new project assessed.

If there is some technical reason in law that that is not the case—good! I am happy to have the argument with someone who actually understands the law well. But, on a plain reading of the legislation, it seems very, very clear that that project should have been assessed by Infrastructure WA. Why would the government not bother doing that? Apparently, the government took advantage of a gift of \$50 million from the Morrison government. That may be so, but many of the projects that the government is building are funded or co-funded by the federal government, so I do

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not think the government saying that it is just making use of an opportunity is the appropriate response. If we have a piece of legislation that requires the government to undertake an assessment, it should undertake that assessment.

Rather than explain why there was a technical reason that a \$100 million project that clearly should have been put through Infrastructure WA was not—instead of offering reasons—the Premier became quite nasty, which is what members on that side seem to do when they get a bit unhappy. He started referencing all sorts of irrelevant things to do with the former Deputy Prime Minister and the former Prime Minister and did not answer any further questions. I thought it was an opportunity for him to outline exactly how Infrastructure WA would respond when another entity comes forward with a large amount of money that is going to be a state asset, is on a state road and is a \$100 million asset. Clearly, it should have been assessed, but it has not been assessed. The government has failed to undertake the appropriate processes and has again chosen the easy path. Rather than going through a process of transparency, the government has decided to take expediency over transparency. That seems to be what we heard from the minister today during her discussion point about it being too hard to provide the opposition with information and that it was not important. We are representing the people of Western Australia. We are the opposition. Members opposite might not like the fact that we still exist. We are small in number, but we are a mighty team. We do a lot of work. Despite what we have heard, I will bet members that no collective of six on the government's side has ever asked over 1 000 questions at estimates! Do not accuse us of not doing our work when you offer the feeble excuse that it is too hard to provide information. You should have that information at your fingertips. The member for Cottesloe has operated at a very senior level as an executive for building projects. He guided the development of projects that were hundreds of millions of dollars in scale. He will tell us that the information is available. It is monitored. We are seeing periodic announcements with projects blown right out of the water when the government can no longer hide the costs.

In Parliament on 17 March, I asked the Minister for Transport about divulging to Parliament some of the cost blowouts of Metronet. This was after the midyear review. A number of the cost blowouts that emerged in the budget were not in the midyear review, but they would have been known in March. At the time, there was an article about this in the newspaper, but the questions were going to be asked anyway. I asked —

- (1) Has the government adjusted its cost expectations for Metronet to reflect two years of ballooning steel prices, critical workforce shortages, and a surge in fuel prices placing upward pressure on the cost of construction?
- (2) How much extra does the government expect to spend to complete the suite of projects?

They were quite reasonable questions. I would have expected that the minister responsible could have given an answer. All I got was —

What we do is to keep monitoring the projects ... They have different styles of contracts and some of them have different levels of contingency too. There are a number of variable factors, and as I said today, we have had a significant increase in steel prices and some projects are quite vulnerable to that, particularly if a large component of that structure is steel.

She then goes into more fluff about rising prices and says —

... we continually monitor those. If cost pressures materialise and crystallise, we acknowledge that through the budget process and through midyear processes.

That had not been done in the midyear review. Those cost pressures were already there. We had been asking questions and we had been batted off with brickbats about it.

Today the minister asked what we wanted to know. We want the government to do what the Auditor General, an officer of this Parliament, had suggested. The recommendation is to be found on page 11. I invite members to have a look and read it. All we are asking for is for the government to follow the recommendations of the Auditor General. The Auditor General's recommendation on page 11 is quite short. The Auditor General's words read —

Similar to the recommendation in our 2020 report, the Department of Finance should work to improve transparency through regular reporting to Parliament and the public on the cost, time and status of major projects.

She said “work to improve transparency”, not accepting as sufficient what the government does now. The Auditor General is saying it is not sufficient. She is saying, “work to improve”; that is not an A-grade or a gold standard on transparency. She is asking the government to work to improve transparency similar to the recommendation in the 2020 report. It is necessary to go to the 2020 report for detail on what she is asking for. The 2020 report was released on 29 October. It says the same, really. I quote the recommendation —

The Departments of Finance and Treasury, and Infrastructure WA —

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That is the body I mentioned before, which had been ignored on the \$100 million project on Tonkin Highway — should work together to improve transparency through regular reporting to Parliament and the public on the cost, time and status of major projects.

[Member's time extended.]

Mr R.S. LOVE: The joint response from the Department of Treasury, the Department of Finance and Infrastructure WA was to, I quote —

... support the recommendation in principle. Factors that would need to be taken into account in implementing this recommendation include:

- establishing agreed parameters to identify priority projects for public reporting;
- establishing the appropriate format, function, timing and frequency of reporting that meets the needs of the intended audience;
- ensuring that the report is consistent with and complementary to other reports, with minimal duplication of information. In this regard, enhanced transparency in public reporting must deliver a balance between the public benefit of such reporting and the costs of providing that transparency;
- ensuring that the data and narrative provided in any public reporting is sufficiently clear to minimise (and, preferably, eliminate) the potential for ambiguous interpretation and inference;
- ensuring that appropriate protections are in place to preserve the confidentiality of information, where applicable ...

A fair bit of that is along the same lines. It continues —

- formalising appropriate governance arrangements for report development and approval and consultation with relevant agencies noting in particular the need for Ministerial involvement in any reporting to Parliament.

We suggest the Works Agency Council be consulted on the design of any report. At its most recent meeting, on 14 October, —

That is in 2020 —

members discussed publication of publicly-available information on the state's capital works program. There were some diverging views on the nature of the report, and the level of detail required. Overall, while members viewed the Council as having a role in developing the report, it ultimately concluded that projects related to economic and regional stimulus, and achieving Government's social policy objectives, should have a higher priority at this time.

At that stage, they were looking at doing it but nothing happened. There was maybe a minor change in some of the descriptions in the budget; I do not know. Ostensibly, nothing changed. That Auditor General's report is similar to the recommendation in the report we had a briefing on today. It continues —

Similar to the recommendation in our 2020 report, the Department of Finance should work to improve transparency through regular reporting to Parliament and the public on the cost, time and status of major projects.

It is virtually the same recommendation. It is asking for the same thing that was not given after the 2020 report.

I know you lot love to quote the Langoulant report. That report is also interesting because the special investigator asked for "continual disclosure". I think that was the term used—I could be wrong; I have lost the report I had with me—but certainly his view was there was a lack of transparency in government project reporting and that it needed to be improved. Today I asked a question to the Premier again on the Auditor General at the same sort of level about what could be done to make sure the public had better information. Again, I was batted off by the Premier with no commitment to improve public access to information on these major projects. These are very major projects. I am looking at the member for Bunbury; I might talk about one of the projects in his patch in a minute, just to illustrate how major these projects are. It is important for the state's budget and it is important for Parliament to be kept fully informed on some of these projects because of their size and the value, and the need to ensure the public is given that level of assurance that the projects are being well obtained. I found the quote from the Langoulant report. Recommendation 6 reads —

Information about Government programs and projects should be open for scrutiny. Based on shared principles, the Government should develop a transparency framework for reporting details of major projects. The framework must require continuous disclosure.

Clearly, that has not been done or the Auditor General would not have released the report that she did today. Some major programs are underway. I acknowledge that the state government has a large suite of projects. We are not

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disputing that. We are saying that the oversight of those projects is problematic. We have seen one such example in the transformation of the Bunbury Outer Ring Road project addressed in a press release on 9 May.

Yes, it is true that on 9 May the minister announced that the Bunbury Outer Ring Road had struck a deal of trouble and needed a bit more money to continue. It was very good that the minister did that, but why did it take until the project had blown out by \$400 million of additional funding to complete the project? The project was announced in 2018 and costed at \$852 million. The government has bumped \$400 million onto that project, so it has become \$1.25 billion, which is \$0.24 billion more than NorthLink WA, which at that stage was the most expensive piece of road infrastructure in Western Australia, which was half again as long and has many more flyovers than the BORR. The project cost had blown out from \$850 million to \$1.25 billion—but, wait, there is more! Included in that announcement was a reduction in scope, and there would be roundabouts. When this project was assessed by Infrastructure Australia, it was assessed on being a freeway but, now, there are four roundabouts instead of a freeway. I asked the Minister for Transport in the estimates hearings what savings resulted in that reduction in scope of those four roundabouts. The answer I got was \$250 million. In fact, the budget for this project is now \$1.25 billion, but if it had been delivered at the original scope, the cost would have been \$1.5 billion. Do the people of Western Australia not deserve a heads-up that these projects are going just a wee bit over cost? The budget has almost doubled! It would have cost \$1.5 billion if the government had delivered the project as promised. It is now spending \$1.25 billion for a suburban road, because we are not getting flyovers; we are getting roundabouts. By the way, those roundabouts will by Main Roads WA's own admission suffice only for a fairly short time before traffic loads become such that it will have to build flyovers anyway. This is pushing that down the track and making it another government's problem in maybe 10 or 20 years. Eventually, those roundabouts will have to go and the project will be delivered in its original scope. Incidentally, we are two-thirds of the way through that project before it got environment approvals for the southern section. They only came through the other day! The project would have been in real strife if the Environmental Protection Authority had said no, or even the federal Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment, because we know there are environment protection and biodiversity conservation conditions that need to be overcome in order for that approval to be given. That project was either absolutely poorly costed in the first place or it was disgracefully delivered. It is truly frightening to have a cost blowout of that scale.

The minister spoke before about the Infrastructure Australia assessment process and how rigorous it is. Yes, it is rigorous. The evaluation summary of Infrastructure Australia is pretty interesting. It does not actually say that the business case is that strong. It states —

Our review found some limitations in the proponent's —

Either Main Roads WA or the government —

social cost–benefit analysis. Overall, we consider that the benefits of the project will marginally outweigh its costs.

The cost–benefit analysis in the report showed a net present value of benefit over cost of \$242 million. The project has blown out by \$750 million. I am not sure that the original analysis stands up at all. Infrastructure Australia probably feels there has perhaps been a little bit of an understatement of some of the risks in this project and excess costs. I raised this in debate in Parliament and I was told by the minister that a lot of sand had to be moved, so it was an expensive project. There was always going to be a lot of sand that had to be moved; the project did not change in that sense. The only real change in the delivery of the project has been a scaling back of the scope of the project for \$250 million in savings, which would have left the cost of the project at \$1.5 billion. That is a lot of money. I am not begrudging the people of Bunbury a road. I am disappointed they will have a road that will have four roundabouts and will cost \$1.25 billion, when the government said it would cost \$850 million. Someone will have to pay for this sooner or later. We see a lack of concern in this open-ended chequebook approach of, “Oh well, if it costs more we'll get more money!” instead of, “How can we deliver this properly?” That would not fly in private business. None of you people would survive in private enterprise. I am sure you would all be destitute and out on the street somewhere, needing help from the Minister for Homelessness!

Several members interjected.

Mr R.S. LOVE: You would be looking for the Minister for Homelessness! The government's project management is appalling. We heard the discussion —

Several members interjected.

Point of Order

Dr D.J. HONEY: I literally cannot hear the member speak for the interjections from the Minister for Housing.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms A.E. Kent): He did go for the government, so I think it is only fair.

You only have a short amount of time left, so let the member for Moore finish his statement, please.

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Debate Resumed

Mr R.S. LOVE: I want to talk quickly in the last couple of minutes left about the process of smoothing. The Yanchep rail line was one of the projects “smoothed”. Work started in 2019, when the project value was \$531 million. The expected costs on that Yanchep extension have gone up by \$175 million. We heard about this smoothing that took place on the Yanchep line. I asked questions about the changing status of that line—the failure to deliver the principal shared pathway that was originally proposed and who would get the recoup on that \$14 million being saved. Apparently it will go into helping to keep the project alive. That project was already in trouble. It underspent nearly \$100 million in one year. The project was virtually stalled and was not being delivered. Obviously, the choice to pick that one out to smooth papered over the fact that, again, the government was not delivering what it promised to deliver. I will sit down as I expect the member for Roe has something to say on this.

Mr P.J. Rundle: Madam Acting Speaker.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Oh, dear, sorry. Minister.

MR W.J. JOHNSTON (Cannington — Minister for Mines and Petroleum) [6.18 pm]: I am always entertained by the member for Moore, because apparently he does not understand what he is talking about. He picks up a report from the Auditor General—we all respect the Auditor General’s report—but he does not seem to understand it. That is because the Auditor General actually finds that that the overwhelming majority of our projects are on time, on budget and well-managed. In fact, she finds that the governance arrangement for managing these projects is good. That is what she finds! She also made the suggestion, which apparently she has made before, that we should increase the number of reports on projects from two a year to 12 a year. The Department of Treasury pointed out in its response to that recommendation that it values the independent assurance provided by the Auditor General in relation to the cost, time and status of major projects and would welcome the continuation of its existing program of transparency audits that are reported directly to Parliament. Treasury is saying that the Auditor General has the role of conducting these audits and bringing the matters to Parliament. She reviews these projects, finds that they are overwhelmingly well-managed and reports that to Parliament. That is exactly what the member for Moore asked for. I remind the member for Moore that after the budget comes down, there is a *Quarterly financial results report*, the *Government mid-year financial projections statement* and the *Annual report on state finances*. They are all required under the Financial Management Act and they are all adhered to by the government. The Auditor General has never once questioned our adherence to those matters, which is very different from what happened under the previous government.

I also point out that the member referred to a media release on a particular date in May and asked why there was no reporting prior to that. I point out to him that the budget closed on 10 April this year, I think—a month before the budget. It is the usual practice in every state and territory in the commonwealth of Australia that the budget closes about a month before it is published because Treasury has to go away and put it all together.

When we have cost pressures and whatever in the system, we have to get government approval for the extra money. That is the Expenditure Review Committee process, which is what informs the budget. The reporting of those decisions is the budget. That is the purpose of the budget. That is why it exists. I do not understand why the member would not read the budget papers and take out the information he is seeking from them. A further series of decisions are made post-budget, which are then reported in the midyear review. Again, when cost pressures or other decisions are made of government, Treasury is required by law to report those to the Parliament through the midyear review, and it does. The Auditor General might suggest that we should compile those reports more frequently, but the ERC does not meet for many months of the year, so the government does not make fresh decisions about expenditure. Whatever the cost pressures are, there is no approval from government.

The member for Moore is performing urgent parliamentary business elsewhere. He challenged the process involving the new works on Tonkin Highway and its relationship to Infrastructure WA. He obviously does not understand the words he read out because Infrastructure WA is required to review a project before an investment decision is made, not before a project is developed. There is no investment decision on that project. The government joined with the former federal government to commit to the project. There is no binding decision to contract the project. Infrastructure WA will deal with it in accordance with the law before that is made. Let us contrast that with a few things that occurred under the last government.

I refer to the Muja AB power station. I remind members that the Auditor General found, firstly, that the *Annual report on state finances* of the former Liberal government was wrong because a \$250 million loan was taken out by that joint venture, and the Crown provided a guarantee for that loan, which was not included in the *Annual report on state finances*. When I asked a question in this chamber of Hon Troy Buswell in his capacity as Treasurer, I remember that he was ashen-faced when he realised the consequences of the fact that the Liberal government had not properly reported all the liabilities of the state to the people. The *Annual report on state finances* was wrong. The opposition talks about transparency!

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Then there was the question of what was described by KPMG as an asymmetrical risk allocation between the government and the private operator. The government guaranteed the loan and put in the asset. The other party put in \$82 000. When the project ended up costing \$320 million, the counterparty, which was the contracting party benefiting from the blowout in the costs, put in only \$82 000 and then walked away from the project with no penalty. None of that was ever reported to Parliament. It took us years to get all that information. There are so many things we could go through with Muja AB. What an embarrassment! Again, the Auditor General said that \$20 million had not been included in the budget for the project that was reported to Parliament. The former government justified that by saying that there had been \$20 million in revenue from the project and that was offset against the capital allocation. That is just disgraceful. The Auditor General said that. Hon Dr Mike Nahan said it was an argument between accountants when the Auditor General found that the government had hidden \$20 million of expenditure. It was deliberately hidden from the people of the state.

Let me talk about the Forrestfield–Airport Link project. Where is the business case? Can we please have the business case? We are building the project and the opposition is criticising us for being late delivering the project, but it will not give us the business case. It will not release the business case that is the property of the former government. What is so embarrassing about that business case that it does not want to make it public?

I now turn to the South Hedland power station. Let me go through this and remind members what happened. Horizon Power asked the former Liberal government for approval to build a power station, and it was denied. Out of recurrent money, it built a switchyard. Let me explain this to members. A switchyard is only used by a power station. The former government built a switchyard not out of capital but out of recurrent funding. That meant that it was paid for by Synergy customers because the extra costs of running Horizon are paid for by Synergy customers through the tariff equalisation contribution. Horizon took that money and built a capital item. It then put a temporary power station on the site to use the switchyard. Horizon said it needed that because it would run out of power. The power station was never used because it did not get the huge volume of electricity that Horizon claimed it would have. It then contracted with a particular company on a 27-year capacity agreement under which the government does not pay for electricity. It does not buy the power station; it buys the use of the station. If we want to generate electricity, the government has to use its own gas in the power station. That power station effectively locks out renewable energy in the Pilbara until it is fully utilised. It is a 27-year agreement. I think the total value of the contract is \$550 million, which is more than the total assets of Horizon. Talk about transparency!

Then there is Perth Stadium. The contract for that stadium has never been released. In the *Annual report on state finances* there is a footnote about the treatment of financing leases because the stadium was partly funded through a finance lease. I asked what was the implied interest rate in the financing lease. It was seven per cent. At the time, one could get a house mortgage for 4.5 per cent but the government of Western Australia was paying seven per cent for the debt that the private sector has on the stadium. It was paying three times more than it would have if it simply borrowed the money. It did that so it could hide the debt so it did not have to be included in its net debt. Then, of course, the accounting standards body changed the accounting standard after we came to government, and we have to include it in our net debt. Then the opposition says that our net debt went up by \$700 million. Yes, that was the debt the former government hid and it made us pay seven per cent for! That is just one example of the crazy dishonesty we get from the other side.

Then we have Perth Children's Hospital. Where do we start on that? It was the biggest stuff-up in the history of hospital building. There were instances of asbestos, and lead was found in the water. The relevant minister—it was being handled by the major project section that answered to the Treasurer, not the Minister for Health—came into Parliament and said that the lead poisoning was caused by a pipe under a road. When I asked where the pipe was and which road it was under, he could not answer because we now know that the lead was caused by the tap mixers in the hospital, not by the pipe under the road because there was no pipe under the road. There were some other issues with the pipes in the hospital, but that was not the one. It was because they reversed the direction of the flow of water in the ring main and all the rubbish in the ring main, because it had all been going in one direction, was pulled out and put into the children's hospital. Members opposite talked about the recommendations of the Langoulant review. The Langoulant review was about recommending how to conduct reporting in government so that government can be more transparent and people can understand what is going into the *Annual report on state finances*. We implemented those suggestions.

In the lead-up to the 2017 election, the Liberal and National Parties proposed to sell Western Power. Thank God they did not get their way. They said that would have reduced state debt. It would have reduced state debt—the net debt figure in the budget—but not the debt service obligations of the state of Western Australia, because our debt service obligations do not include the debt serviced by the government trading enterprises. They pay their own interest and other matters. Even after the former government lost, its members still came here and said that if we sold Western Power, net debt would be \$12 billion less and therefore the government would save X amount in interest payments. That is completely untrue. The debt serviced by Western Power is paid for by Western Power customers.

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It is not paid for by the government and is not included in the budget report of debt service obligations. It is just wrong. That is an example of how that lot do not understand how the state finances work.

I remind members about the City Busport. Everyone loves a busport. I am not criticising public transport, but that is the most expensive busport in the world because the former government put it underground. Whenever anyone else wants to make new land available and move their busport, they put it on the first or second floor of a building so that there is a building above and a busport below. The former government built the busport underground and put a park on top of it. There is no revenue from the land above, but it cost \$270 million to build it underground. It is the world's most expensive busport. Why did the former government do that? When Kevin Rudd came to government, he offered to partner on the Northbridge Link project, which was the sinking of the rail line through the city. Instead of pocketing that as savings and reducing net debt, the then Premier, Colin Barnett, increased the scope of the project. He spent every dollar on want-to-haves instead of must-haves. It was the same with the Elizabeth Quay project. That is a financial disaster. Selling all the land down there does no more than return the expense that went into building the quay. It was a silly project at the time. A lot of people thought they would be able to use all the open space in the quay. They never realised that that is where the buildings were going. The largest single space after all the buildings are built there will be about 4 000 square metres, or the size of a large Berlin nightclub! The sum of \$350 million of taxpayers' money was used to give the land away for \$350 million, so there was no net benefit. It is some of the most valuable land in the state and it was effectively given away for free. It is just unbelievable.

Then there is the Metro Area Express. The member for Mirrabooka loves this one. The former government had animations and television ads for it, and there was the tagline "getting things done" or whatever it was; I cannot remember the specific tagline. There were pictures and animations of MAX going along the road. They had life-sized — Several members interjected.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: I know. It was too big to go through any of the malls, even though that is where it was supposed to run.

Ms M.J. Hammat: They had the Premier saying —

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: "Buy land in Mirrabooka." I was about to get to that. The Premier said, "Buy land here now because MAX is coming." The former government did costings for MAX in the lead-up to the 2013 election, and *The West Australian* FOI-ed those costings. Remember, the former government said MAX was a government announcement and that these were government costings, so *The West Australian* requested the costings under freedom of information. However, the freedom of information request was rejected on the basis that the costings had been done by the Liberal Party and therefore they were not government property and could not be disclosed to the public. How does that work? How does a government announce its costings with television ads that are paid for by government but the costings are done by the Liberal Party? The Leader of the Liberal Party should come in here and tell us about that the next time we have private members' business. How is it that TV ads were made for a project, yet the costings were done by the WA division of the Liberal Party of Australia? That is ridiculous and disgraceful. I do not understand how people did not go to jail for that. That was unbelievable. Talk about financial management.

[Member's time extended.]

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Every time I have an FOI, it is responded to. Public servants send them to me and I sign it. I once asked, through FOI, for the resignation letter of the Synergy directors who had resigned in protest at the interference of Minister Nahan in the internal matters of the board, but it was refused on the basis that it was a confidential document. The directors told me, "I'm not going to say what's in the letter, but you should FOI it." Dr Nahan said that he could not give out that information because it was private. I asked him again in Parliament whether he had asked the people who signed the letter whether they thought it was a confidential document, but he would not answer that because he had not talked to them. Talk about FOI.

Again, there was not a single business plan or business case for the Verve and Synergy amalgamation—nothing. The former government put two assets worth multi-hundreds of millions of dollars together with no plan or business case. It was simply authored by the Premier. Again, Dr Nahan was the Minister for Energy. When he first got the job, he was asked in an interview whether he supported that and he said no, but two weeks later he said that it was the best idea ever. I asked a question on notice about what information he got that changed his mind, but he would not answer.

A government member interjected.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Clearly. He was very convinced. He had deep convictions about driving a big, white car. Talk about transparency.

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As I say, I welcome the Auditor General's report. It is a useful tool that shows that the Labor government is managing our projects well. In table 1 she sets out her findings about how well the projects are being run, and she says that herself. She also thanks the government for its cooperation in her audit.

The Auditor General does important work. Last year there were quite a number of annual reports from government agencies that were late because the audit reports were not complete by 30 September when we are obliged to table them. I had to write to Parliament last year and explain what was happening, as I am obliged to do under the Financial Management Act. I hope that the Auditor General can sign off on the agencies' annual reports on time this year, given that she charges the departments for the work that she does, as she should. That is not a criticism. The departments, rightly, pay for their audits. That is what should occur, but I hope that she can complete them on time, because it would be very good for the people of the state. It will make sure that we are being properly accountable through the Parliament by tabling our annual reports on time so that people can review the reports and see all the decisions that have been made and all the information contained therein on the extensive reporting done by the departments, not by the ministers, on their activities over the year and on making sure that the departments stick to their budgets and all those things. Those reports contribute to the *Annual report on state finances*.

I look forward to continuing to be a member of a transparent government that is far exceeding the transparency that was ever provided by the Liberal and National Parties when they were in government. They deliberately withheld information from the Auditor General and the Parliament. They tried to be tricky and use accounting standards to hide debt. They paid too much for too many things, wasted money and led the state down the wrong path so that we would have \$42 billion of debt, which we are having to deal with.

MR P.J. RUNDLE (Roe) [6.39 pm]: I, too, wish to rise to support the Leader of the Opposition's excellent motion that this house notes the Office of the Auditor General's finding of persistent transparency failures by the McGowan Labor government, including reporting of progress on major projects, and calls on the Premier to deliver on his promise of gold-standard transparency.

I think that motion sums it up. I have to say, every week when we come into private members' business, the first thing that the Minister for Energy says is "You don't understand!" That is the first line he comes out with every week, without fail. It does not matter what the motion is; it does not matter what we are talking about. The first line is "You don't understand!" I am sorry, but what I plan to do today is explain what the role of the Auditor General is so that this government does understand. I also want to explain —

Several members interjected.

Point of Order

Dr D.J. HONEY: We sat here in silence on this side and listened to the Minister for Mines and Petroleum. I expect the same courtesy from the other side.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms A.E. Kent): The point of order is not upheld. Member for Roe, you have the floor. Continue, please.

Debate Resumed

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Thank you, Madam Acting Speaker. The other thing I want to explain is how the people of Western Australia are feeling about the arrogance of this government and this Premier. I think the Leader of the Opposition explained it pretty well at the start. Someone who googles "arrogance" and "Mark McGowan" can find many, many references. They can find reference to the Premier's arrogance towards the New South Wales government, arrogance in relation to the Premier appointing himself Treasurer, we have the *Kalgoorlie Miner*, ABC news, and the Premier's arrogance towards the new leader of the federal Liberal Party.

Ms S. Winton interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Wanneroo!

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The Australian Medical Association refers to arrogance from the Premier. Even the *Kimberley Echo* refers to the arrogance. The list goes on. To be honest, as I said, the people of WA are waking up to it. The media of WA are waking up to it. We see arrogance in the way the Premier refuses to answer genuine questions from this side. All we want is an answer to the question, but what we get is a diversion, a reference to what happened in the previous government, and all the rest of it. We never actually get a genuine answer.

Earlier on, the Minister for Transport made reference to the Leader of the Opposition. We expect the Premier to turn up. We have just had two weeks off Parliament. If the Premier wanted to make an announcement about Collie, he should have made it during those two weeks, not on the first day back in Parliament. I do not think that is unreasonable. The Premier is expected to be here in Parliament to take the opportunity to answer genuine questions from the opposition.

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I must say, it was quite disturbing to me to listen to the Ministers for Mines and Petroleum and Transport say that it was a great report from the Auditor General. The conclusion is that there has been an increase of 11 per cent in project budgets since the original approval across all 17 projects reviewed—there we have it. That 11 per cent is worth \$560 million. I do not know whether the Minister for Transport and the Minister for Mines and Petroleum think that a cost overrun of \$560 million is a great result and there is nothing to see here. I think that is an important figure; \$560 million is a lot of money. As the member for Moore pointed out, the Bunbury Outer Ring Road is probably becoming the world's most expensive ring road project with a cost overrun now at \$400 million. It is quite disturbing.

Mr R.S. Love: It's actually closer to \$650 million.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The member for Moore tells me that it is closer to \$650 million. We are seeing a cavalier attitude from the government to these cost overruns. We know that the GST scenario happened, the iron ore royalties are coming in and there is a \$5.7 billion surplus; the list goes on.

It was really interesting to read the statement from the Department of Finance in the Auditor General's *2022 Transparency report: Major projects*. It said that the budget papers provide a level of transparency over the government's major projects. We have just completed the estimates hearings in the Legislative Assembly. To be honest, the budget papers are not transparent. We asked over a thousand questions in the estimates hearings. The member for Moore asked well over 200 questions. An example is the special purpose accounts that were listed in the budget papers and that came to a total of 20 accounts.

I want to go back to a question asked by Hon Dr Steve Thomas on 6 April. He asked how many special accounts are currently operational and what was the balance of all current operational special purpose accounts. The response, provided on 10 May, listed 24 special purpose accounts, and stated that an update on the balances would be provided in the 2022–23 state budget papers that were to be released on 12 May 2022. If members do a short audit of both lists provided, there are only six special purpose accounts listed in both records. We have the response from Hon Stephen Dawson on 10 May stating, it would appear, that there are 24 special purpose accounts listed that are currently operational, but they are not all listed in the budget papers. The list of special purpose accounts in the budget papers includes 14 accounts that were not listed in Hon Stephen Dawson's response. We have a variation in the lists of special purpose accounts, which, to be honest, are all over the place. We can look at the digital capability fund, which has a balance of \$421 million with a forward estimate of \$573 million in this year's budget. Metronet was left off the list. Even more alarming is the fact that this special purpose account and the Metronet roads account was left off the list provided to Hon Dr Steve Thomas in May of this year. These are the sort of inconsistencies that are coming through. We can only wonder why the Auditor General picks up on the inconsistency of this government, of the \$560 million increase of those projects, and seven of the 14 active projects that have their dates extended by over a year.

I want to go back to the purpose of the Auditor General. I think it would be good for some of the members of this government to actually get an understanding of the role of the Auditor General. This is a quotation from the Auditor General's speech to the Institute of Public Administration Australia's Western Australian integrity and accountability conference. The first quote is —

It is important to understand that the government is not an end in itself.

I think that is what is happening here. This government is getting ahead of itself. The key principles for government are integrity, transparency and accountability, and the community needs to have faith that the public sector is serving it well for democracy to work. I have a couple of other quotes. The Auditor General said —

My office is an independent integrity office, not controlled by the Government. My clients are the Parliament, Western Australian state sector agencies, local governments and ultimately the people of Western Australia.

I report without fear or favour directly to Parliament, not via a Minister. I cannot be directed in what I audit, how I audit or when I audit.

A final quote, which I think is very appropriate, states —

Another unique responsibility, and one that I'm not aware an Auditor General anywhere else in the world has, is our 'section 82' function. Due to concerns arising from the WA Inc. era the 1995 Commission on Government conceived a new function to encourage Ministers to provide all ... information to Parliament.

As members of the opposition, we have all lodged freedom of information requests. Basically, all we get back is a miniature booklet of black text-ed documents. We cannot get any information. We might get a couple of lines, someone's address or something similar, but the black text is used in just about all cases. When I hear the Minister for Mines and Petroleum; Energy talk about the previous government and the like, it is quite concerning to me.

I want to raise a couple of issues, the first relating to the COVID scenario. We have all talked about the history. The people of WA did the right thing. There were certainly extraordinarily high rates of vaccination. Despite the

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grief and abuse directed to the opposition, every member of the opposition supported the vaccination scenario. One contributor to the letters to the editor in *The West Australian* in March this year referred to the fact that the people of WA had done the right thing. It was headed, “We have the brains to handle facts”. That is really important because from our perspective, we could not get information from this government about what was going on behind the scenes. The constant deflection of requests to gain access to medical modelling was very frustrating. That shows another lack of transparency. We saw it again yesterday in the estimates hearing in the Legislative Council. A press release from Hon Martin Aldridge about the rushed procurement of more than 110 million rapid antigen tests states —

“The \$578.9 million investment bypassed normal tendering processes using the emergency provisions of the Procurement Act 2020 to fast track the acquisition,” ...

As we know, the McGowan government dropped the ball on establishing supply chains and supplier relationships after prohibiting the use of RATs for the best part of the last two years. The government was prohibiting RATs in December 2021 and early January 2022; they were no good. Then all of a sudden, in they come with \$578.9 million of investment, bypassing the normal method. Now we have question marks against the saliva testing RATs. Hon Martin Aldridge raised that yesterday. The people of WA are paying a high price for the significant number of tests that the government has procured.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members!

Several members interjected.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: It is not irrelevant. It is very relevant, because the government bypassed the normal procurement procedures and spent \$578.9 million—half the cost of the Perth Children’s Hospital—and now we potentially have a large number of tests that are not getting the job done. They do not have the efficacy. Hon Martin Aldridge wrote to the state Auditor General to request that she probe this significant financial transaction to ensure probity and transparency. Once again, transparency was not being followed.

The Minister for Energy can get up all he likes and say that the opposition does not understand, as he does every week without fail, and falls back on the line. We do understand. We have lodged our freedom of information requests, and have received information with the black texta through them. With the cutting back of the native timber forestry industry, we have seen \$200 000 paid to the Australian Workers’ Union to provide advice and support. What is that? The Australian Workers’ Union is providing advice and support to the government. I would like to see the Auditor General look at that. I find it quite bizarre that \$200 000 was paid to the Australian Workers’ Union. No-one believes the sentiment behind a grant to a union that supports the WA branch of the Australian Labor Party and no-one really believes that timber workers will receive much of anything from that payment. Considering the recent announcement of the \$662 million support package for Collie, where is the equity for the forestry workers? Where is the transparency for them? That is another disappointing element.

The other issue that I want to mention is the \$6.6 million paid to Huawei for breaking the Metronet contract. The contract was broken. The \$6.6 million payment was signed off in December last year, but the minister decided that the public did not deserve or need to know that information.

[Member’s time extended.]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The only thing I can surmise is that the minister is dealing in such large amounts of money that \$6.6 million is just petty cash. Sign that off. Write that off. The people of WA do not need to know about that! Then, sure enough, it was revealed during the estimates hearing. What else is hiding behind the closed doors of the government?

I know Metronet is the flagship election promise of this government, but I imagine that in years to come the Auditor General will have a good close look at many of the facets of the Metronet project. I guess what greatly concerns me is the attitude of this government when we talk about transparency. As the Leader of the Opposition pointed out earlier, this was the promise that the Premier gave before the 2017 election. He even had commissioned an inquiry—the Langoulant inquiry—to validate the need for transparency, and stated for the record that —

“My government will continue to strengthen governance, accountability, transparency ... when dealing with taxpayers’ money.”

The Auditor General has already picked up on that one. Members need to be careful what they promise if they do not intend to follow their own objectives.

The final issue that I want to raise that was picked up in estimates yesterday is the transport executive and licensing information system, which holds the private information of WA taxpayers. There is a concern that information

Ms Mia Davies; Dr David Honey; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr Shane Love; Acting Speaker; Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Peter Rundle

relating to more than 3 000 people who are authorised to use TRELIS has been used illegally. We saw what happened with the SafeWA app. We need to expect that individuals' privacy is protected by this government.

The \$182 000 spent by the Auditor General on the cost of the transparency report is well spent. I expect that the Auditor General will have to spend a lot more money in the years ahead checking on the transparency of the government. We need to stop making a mockery of the parliamentary process.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.