

AUSTRALIND TRAIN SERVICE

Grievance

MR D.T. PUNCH (Bunbury) [9.40 am]: My grievance today is to the Minister for Transport; Planning; Lands and relates to the recent timetable changes for the *Australind* train service between Bunbury and Perth. I promise not to mention South Perth bus routes at all! The *Australind* service is very well used by the people in Bunbury and the communities of Brunswick, Harvey, Yarloop, Cookernup and Pinjarra. It is a highly valued service and I appreciate the strong commitment the minister is giving to replacing the current train with a new car set, and making improvements to journey times and upgrades to stations, to name but a few. This reflects a long tradition of Labor governments with a commitment to public transport that is unparalleled. I applaud the fact that the government is having a red-hot go at improving the service for the benefit of both locals and visitors alike, including trialling new timetable options to help boost day visits by tourists from Perth, but the current trial of an alternate timetable on Saturdays and Sundays has been poorly received in my electorate. A large number of constituents have contacted me expressing concern that the trial timetable basically renders the *Australind* train an unviable travel option for them on weekends. The *Australind* train is the central public transport option between Bunbury and Perth. It is important to enable the people from Perth and tourists visiting our state to access a public transport option to take them into the south west, but it is more than that for many of my constituents from Bunbury and elsewhere in the south west. It is actually a vital service for them. Many south west people who are unable to drive or do not have access to private vehicles need to get to Perth for medical treatment, employment or study or to stay connected with family. They consider the *Australind* to be an essential service and they rely on it and its timetable. It goes without saying that one can never keep everyone happy with a single timetable, but for decades the *Australind* has left Bunbury at 6.00 am and arrived in Perth at 8.30 am, with the return leg of the trip leaving Perth at 5.55 pm and arriving in Bunbury at a very respectable 8.24 pm. At the same time, travellers from Perth boarded the train at 9.30 am and arrived in Bunbury at 11.55 am. They departed again at 2.45 pm and arrived back in Perth at 5.12 pm. The traditional timetable is flawed in that it leaves daytrippers from Perth with only a very short time to enjoy Bunbury and other nearby south west towns, unless they stay overnight. For Bunbury people, it ensures that they have a full day to do all their business in Perth. Leaving Bunbury at 6.00 am and returning at 8.30 pm makes for a long day—I must admit the 6.00 am start is a bit tough when a person gets up at 5.00 am—but it is manageable.

In April this year, the trial of the new weekend timetable saw no change to the morning train from Bunbury to Perth, but the evening train did not depart Perth until 7.55 pm and arrived in Bunbury at 10.18 pm. That is essentially a 16.5-hour day for people who undertake a daytrip to Perth. If the traveller is not from Bunbury and has driven from nearby towns such as Busselton or Bridgetown to catch the train, they have to add an extra couple of hours to that trip making it an untenable option. Constituents have expressed all sorts of concerns to me about not just the length of the day, but also safety. Many people have said that they feel unsafe stranded in the centre of Perth for three hours after the closure of many businesses in the CBD, and they likewise feel unsafe when they have to wait for transport at the Bunbury station after arriving at about 10.30 pm. People who have to go to work or to school on Monday morning do not want to be arriving back in Bunbury pretty late on a Sunday night. I thought that as much as the trial timetable did appear inconvenient in terms of a late-night arrival back to Bunbury, there would be other public transport options, so I checked the bus timetables. I discovered that there is no Transwa bus from Perth that stops in Bunbury on a Saturday, making the *Australind* the only public transport option. On Sunday, three buses leave at 12.15 pm, 1.30 pm and 2.30 pm from the East Perth terminal. It is not a very convenient time in terms of the departures back to Bunbury if a person has to spend a full day in Perth on a Sunday. It is also worth noting that it appears that as of 30 September, the 2.30 pm Sunday bus service will be discontinued.

I support my constituents in their disagreement with the trial timetable. My constituents have said to me that although they understand the reason for the trial, surely regional people should not have to give up their single convenient evening connection from Perth to Bunbury in the process of trying to support a tourism opportunity. There is a silver lining to the trial. The trial timetable allows daytrippers from Perth to spend an extra two hours in Bunbury as the return trip is delayed from 2.45 pm to 4.45 pm. This provides a great opportunity for them to enjoy the restaurants, the new waterfront that we are working on —

Ms R. Saffioti: And Toyworld.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Yes, Toyworld. It is a brilliant place to go to and it has some great ninja turtle toys.

Bunbury also has fabulous restaurants and can provide a great time for Perth daytrippers. The timetable definitely supports the tourism potential of the *Australind*, but that is not a reason to maintain the trial timetable in and of itself because it comes at the expense of access for regional people. We need to find a better way. Our government has made a great commitment to the *Australind* service. I know that many people in my community rely on the train and are very much looking forward to that work getting underway. I have had many expressions of ideas for

additions to the new *Australind* service such as the inclusion of an exercise bike for those who want to do a little exercise on their way to work. All sorts of ideas have come forward. I am not sure that they can all be accommodated, but it shows how valuable that service is to the people in Bunbury. An enormous number of people are also using the service for business commuting purposes. Every day I find that more people are using it either three or four days a week for a regular return trip to Perth, and some of that includes use on the weekends, so it has affected business commuting on the weekends.

I welcome the consideration given by the minister to the train service, but I ask for an end to the trial timetable and seek a commitment that the needs of regional people will be considered as a priority in any future amendments. Thank you, minister.

MS R. SAFFIOTI (West Swan — Minister for Transport) [9.47 am]: I thank the member for Bunbury for that grievance. Yes, shopping in Bunbury is very exciting. As the member knows, Toyworld stocks giant ninja turtles, one of which I bought for my children. It still stands in the kitchen and it does freak you out in the middle of the night when you turn on the light and there is a giant ninja turtle standing there, looking at you, but the kids like it.

I will go through a bit of the background of what happened with the changes to the *Australind* service. In April this year, the PTA commenced a trial weekend service with the aim of increasing tourism to Bunbury to allow passengers to spend more time shopping in Bunbury on daytrips and enjoy the beautiful waterfront, and to assist in alleviating the congestion of the rail line between Optus Stadium and Perth city station during stadium events. The new trial was basically set up to see how the service could be changed to not only accommodate the Optus Stadium's operating requirements, but also potentially serve more people in Bunbury. The success of the trial was based on weekend service patronage and a survey of passengers. As I said, the six-month trial was undertaken to allow tourists and daytrippers to spend more time visiting Bunbury, and the aim was to reduce congestion on the track feeding Optus Stadium. The trial also introduced additional train-road coach services during the Australian Football League season to benefit the communities of Busselton, Bunbury, Northam and Toodyay. As part of the trial, as the member outlined, the *Australind* departs Bunbury at 4.45 pm to go to Perth, and then it departs Perth at 7.55 pm to arrive in Bunbury at 10.18 pm.

As part of the evaluation of the trial, Transwa commissioned an independent survey of passengers who caught the new services and passengers who had caught the services prior to the trial, but no longer caught the services. A link to the survey was sent to 2 622 invitees with 394 participants and was conducted over three weeks. This allowed Transwa to assess public reaction. The patronage results, unfortunately, show that the new weekend *Australind* timetable meant a decrease in patronage by approximately 2 000 passengers between 2016–17 and 2017–18. The survey results were mixed as Perth passengers travelling to Bunbury were supportive of the new times but Bunbury passengers travelling to Perth were against the new times. Taking patronage and public opinion into account, and of course the member for Bunbury's lobbying, discussions between Transwa and Transperth Train Operations concluded that each football game in the future should be assessed individually and solutions considered based on the level of train congestion anticipated rather than applying a seasonal solution.

The six-month trial of the new *Australind* weekend and public holiday timetable will cease from 8 October 2018 and the weekend afternoon *Australind* timetable will revert to the pre-trial times. In 2019, *Australind* services clashing with events at Optus Stadium will require case-by-case solutions for the weekend *Australind*. We will get the timetable at the beginning of the year and see what we need to do to accommodate the throughput. Hopefully a path can be determined in most cases for the *Australind* train through that busy time, but other considerations will also be taken into account.

The *AvonLink* Northam and Toodyay Australian Football League special train service is also currently being reviewed as well as the coach services from Bunbury. After looking at some questions in the upper house, I know that private operators down there have some concerns about the bus services to the football. We will continue to look at that.

I thank the member. I am sorry about the inconvenience to Bunbury passengers. We aimed to try to make it all work for both the operating requirements and the stadium. The number of trains using the track between the city and the stadium in particular at the start and finish of the games is at capacity so there are some operating constraints, but we understand that the people of Bunbury do not support this new trial. As a result, the trial will cease in the first week of October. I thank the member again for his advocacy. I will be down in Bunbury soon!