

SOUTH WESTERN HIGHWAY — COOLUP AND WAROONA

Grievance

MRS R.M.J. CLARKE (Murray–Wellington) [9.34 am]: My grievance is to the Minister for Road Safety on the speed limit along South Western Highway around the towns of Coolup and Waroona. For the people of Coolup, South Western Highway is the main connection between the town and the larger centres of Pinjarra and Mandurah. Almost all residents use the road on a daily basis to head north to these areas, making safety on the road paramount.

Approaching the Coolup town site, the speed limit on South Western Highway is reduced from 110 kilometres an hour to 90 kilometres an hour. However, this is only for an area of approximately 700 metres either side of the town's main turn-off. Many members within the community, including the Coolup Progress Association, would like to see this reduced speed limit expanded further north, past the Placid Ark roadhouse. The roadhouse is located 650 metres north of the current speed change, and including the roadhouse in the reduced speed zone would make entering and exiting the roadhouse significantly safer for all users. The roadhouse is often very busy due to its location along the highway and its facilities for heavy haulage, and although there are run-off lanes, there are no run-on lanes back onto the highway.

The section of South Western Highway from Pinjarra to the south west regularly has heavy haulage vehicles travelling to and from nearby towns and mines. There is also a high number of horse floats due to the proximity of the Murray Regional Equestrian Centre, which is also located in Coolup. On event days at the centre, there can often be hundreds of floats using the road, in addition to regular traffic. Although extending a speed limit 650 metres to the north may not seem like a major change to a road, it would make a big difference to the Coolup community and to regular users of the road and the roadhouse. There is a history of accidents in the area, and any measures to help improve safety in the area will be well received.

Only a short distance south of Coolup is the town of Waroona. Towns such as Waroona see many drivers speeding, which endangers pedestrians, cyclists, children and the elderly. A 40-kilometre-an-hour speed zone trial with a demarcated crosswalk would address community road safety concerns about the speeds at which vehicles are driven through country towns, particularly at weekends and during holiday periods. The current trials in Donnybrook, Boyanup, Balingup and Bridgetown will assist Main Roads Western Australia to develop an effective speed signage plan to achieve better driver compliance with a 40-kilometre-an-hour speed limit. Reducing the speed limit by 10-kilometres an hour makes a big difference to the stopping distance of a vehicle, which improves not only road safety, but also the amenity of towns.

I would like to ask the minister whether there has been any progress in expanding the reduced speed limit in this section of South Western Highway from just north of Coolup at the Placid Ark roadhouse, and whether there has been progress on introducing a 40-kilometre-an-hour speed zone, with a crossing, in the town centre of Waroona. These are important issues affecting the towns of Coolup and Waroona on South Western Highway. I thank the minister for any assistance in this matter.

MRS M.H. ROBERTS (Midland — Minister for Road Safety) [9.38 am]: I thank the member for Murray–Wellington for her grievance and for putting forward the views of her community; I think it is an excellent grievance. She spoke to me recently to advise me that her community has been asking for some time for a reduction in the speed limit through the towns of Waroona and Coolup. I am aware from my discussions last year with other towns on South Western Highway that quite a few towns have been interested in lower speed limits for quite some years. The member for Collie–Preston, Mick Murray, approached me about some towns in his electorate last year and invited me to go to Donnybrook and meet with a number of shires with responsibility for a number of towns in his electorate. I had a meeting with the shires at that time, and, as Minister for Road Safety, having listened to what seemed to be perfectly reasonable arguments, I undertook to take this issue up through the Road Safety Commission and Main Roads WA. A number of actions happened over a period of months. The staff from the Office of Road Safety attended, Main Roads subsequently became involved and we agreed to proceed with the trial. A 40 kilometre-an-hour trial for a six-month period is already underway in Boyanup, Donnybrook, Balingup and Bridgetown. The initial response from the community has been very positive. It is a very small reduction in speed from 50 kilometres an hour to 40 kilometres an hour through those towns, but it makes a big difference to the stopping distance of a vehicle. These are great little towns, as are Waroona and Coolup. The reduction in the speed limit improves the amenity of the towns, slows the traffic down, is safer from a road safety point of view, and makes it so much nicer to walk around and enjoy those towns.

I often talk about the growing concern of the community about fatigue being a major factor in regional road crashes. Traditionally, the big killers on our roads, and country roads in particular, have been drink-driving, excessive speed and the non-wearing of restraints. But as we see community behaviour change, with far fewer people speeding and drink-driving and the majority of people wearing their seatbelts, fatigue and distraction are emerging as the two big killers. One way of averting both fatigue and distraction is to get people to slow down when they go through a town like that. As the saying goes, slow down and smell the roses. Look at the towns. If someone is fatigued, they should

break up their journey and stop in one of these towns. They could have a cup of coffee or tea, look through a couple of the local shops and see what makes these towns tick. That is great for the towns, but it is also fantastic from a road safety point of view. Driving for more than two hours at a time is not recommended. As a general rule, I certainly recommend that people do not drive for more than two hours without taking some kind of break.

The member has raised this by way of a grievance. As she is aware, the trial is being undertaken in Boyanup, Donnybrook, Balingup and Bridgetown. A working group, overseen by Mick Murray, with representatives from local government, Main Roads and the Road Safety Commission, is overseeing that trial. I will ask Main Roads and that group to consider the member's suggestion when we move to potentially implement a plan on a permanent basis—the results so far are pretty positive. Some factors need to be considered about the exact location of where a 40 kilometre-an-hour limit starts and finishes for those towns. The working group may also consider whether to gradually bring a speed limit down to 40 kays an hour with road signage, or whether it should be a less graduated situation, but the learnings we get from those towns on effectively the same highway could equally be applied to Coolup and Waroona. When we move to an implementation phase of something more permanent, I will certainly ensure that Coolup and Waroona are considered as well, so that if permanent changes are put in place for those other towns, we could consider Coolup and Waroona at the same time because the learnings from the trial will be equally applicable to them. I expect that many towns throughout the south west, great southern and elsewhere in regional Western Australia will look at these trials very closely. These zones cover a short distance and add very little time to a long journey, but it can add a lot in terms of road safety. The member has asked for consideration of a crosswalk, too. That is something we will certainly consider. We want children, the elderly—everyone—to cross the road safely and go about their lives safely. This is an important community initiative. This is not about government inflicting slower speeds on people for the sake of it; it is about responding to what a community wants. I congratulate the member for bringing forward this grievance as a local member, and I will do my very best to work with her and ensure that the Road Safety Commission and Main Roads WA work with her too.