

FREMANTLE TRAFFIC BRIDGE

Grievance

MRS L.M. O'MALLEY (Bicton) [9.55 am]: My grievance today is to the Minister for Transport. I thank the minister for taking my grievance.

The Fremantle Traffic Bridge is a local icon. It is much more than just a bridge. It is symbolic of the history of Fremantle and the surrounding suburbs, including those in my electorate of Bicton. The traffic bridge is located at a site that has been a river crossing point since 1866, when an earlier bridge was built in the same spot by convict labour. The current bridge as it stands was built in 1939 by E.W. (Ernie) Godfrey, who was in charge of the bridges section at Main Roads from 1928 until his retirement in 1957. The traffic bridge has served us immensely well, but now the 88-year-old icon is at the end of its long and highly memorable life. The bridge, which was originally built as a temporary structure, has deteriorated and is rapidly becoming a liability. For the electorate of Bicton, the Fremantle Traffic Bridge is an important local connection point across the river as the only other nearby river crossing in the 12 kilometres between the Stirling Bridge and East Fremantle and the Narrows Bridge in Perth. The bridge has the capacity to divert 30 000 vehicles a day away from Stirling Bridge, thereby easing congestion for Bicton locals commuting to and from work, study and leisure, to visit our closest beaches at Port and Leighton Beach and beyond, or the many other reasons we southerners cross to the north side of the Swan River and back.

The Fremantle Traffic Bridge is special to locals in many ways. For those who fish, it is knowing the best spot to catch dinner. For young people, it is a rite of passage to walk across the wooden plank ways. For others, it is a spot to take beautiful photographs and reflect on the history of the roman numerals on the old timber pylons. Another vital element to the bridge upgrade is that it will improve safety for Bicton boaties. As a water-loving electorate, local boat owners have told me that the current misaligned pylons make navigation difficult, and they look forward to improved access beneath future aligned structures. That is why constituents have contacted me seeking an update on our government's announcement last year that it had secured a 50–50 contribution from the commonwealth to fund the upgrade of the traffic bridge. I understand the \$230 million project will put an end to expensive interim repairs like those needed in 2016, when the pylons deteriorated, resulting in the temporary closure of the bridge.

Replacing the bridge will also be an opportunity to unlock the next phase of our government's commitment to expanding freight access into Fremantle, both for passengers and freight trains. The amount of container freight moving to and from the Fremantle inner harbour by rail is reaching record levels under our government, which is easing pressure on arterial roads to the port, particularly those that run through the Bicton electorate. The constraints caused by rail bridge capacity at the Swan River crossing in Fremantle will restrict further growth in the share of freight movements servicing Fremantle port by rail, which is another reason this project is so important to the people of Bicton and Fremantle. Given that the project will generate around 1 500 jobs, it seems even more pressing in light of COVID-19 to get progress underway as soon as we can.

Local cyclists and walkers in Bicton are particularly excited about the inclusion of modern standard cycling facilities and a dedicated pedestrian walkway. They have also expressed concern about any potential delays to the project. For locals in Bicton, this project will improve access for freight, cars, pedestrians, cyclists and boat users. Therefore, on their behalf, I ask the minister for an update on the progress of this vital and necessary project.

MS R. SAFFIOTI (West Swan — Minister for Transport) [9.59 am]: I thank the member for Bicton for her grievance and interest in this very significant project. We have a lot of projects on our agenda, but the Fremantle Traffic Bridge project is the most challenging and interesting one. It is not every day we get to build a new river crossing. I am happy to say that we have already built one with the Matagarup Bridge, but this one is a very exciting project. The Fremantle Traffic Bridge is iconic to Fremantle and its surrounds, but it is nearing the end of its life and we all understand that it has to be replaced with a more modern, functional bridge.

This project is one of the most interesting and challenging projects. I will outline some of the constraints to building this new bridge that are currently being worked on, but I will initially highlight what this new bridge will bring to the area. A new bridge will expand rail capacity, as the member explained, through the building of a new rail bridge as well as the principal shared path, which will connect through to Perth. Our PSP through the western suburbs has been very popular so far. We have finished stage 1 and we are about to commence work on stage 2 this year, which will connect the path through to the Fremantle PSP. A new dedicated PSP will run from Fremantle through to Perth. We have seen a massive uptake in the usage of the cycling path since it was constructed. Significant numbers of cyclists are already using the PSP, and we are very excited about moving to stage 2 and stage 3 of that project. The member expressed concerns about the PSP. We will provide a dedicated PSP and connect that with the western suburbs PSP that goes all the way into the city.

I want to talk about some of the constraints to building the new Fremantle Traffic Bridge and what we plan to do over the next few months. As the member knows, it is a very busy part of the river. That is one of the factors that needs to be taken into consideration in both the design of the bridge and the way it is built. We know that the Fremantle Port Authority uses a particular part of the river there, so we are very keen not to impact or stop river usage and traffic during the construction of the bridge. We also want to ensure that the new design facilitates easier navigation for all those boaties in the member for Bickton's electorate in particular.

The other key constraint are the rail lines being used by both freight and passenger trains. We cannot have lengthy closures of those lines, particularly the freight line. Stopping those freight lines from operating for a long period would have a significant impact on both the budget and freight and rail. That is another constraint that we are working through. There will potentially be some small stoppages, but we are currently working through that. They would not be lengthy and nor would they significantly impact freight movements.

The third constraint on the construction of this bridge is keeping the road bridge open for as long as we can. If traffic is not able to use the Fremantle Traffic Bridge, it would impact the Stirling Highway bridge and other areas significantly. That is another constraint that we are working through.

As the member can tell, it is a challenging project and we have to be really wary of freight rail lines in particular, and their gradient, how that operates, and also the curvature of the tracks because they cannot do a 90-degree turn as we have found in our planning.

Mr R.H. Cook: The trains aren't trying hard enough.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: No. They do not tuck their tummy in as they turn around. That is another constraint we are working on with regard to how we align the road and new rail lines.

I am pleased to say that a preliminary concept plan has been designed and we have consulted with the stakeholder reference group and the Heritage Council of Western Australia. We are about to start further onsite investigations. In the coming months, there will be a lot more activity, and environmental, heritage and geotechnical surveys will be undertaken. We will see some activity on the river and around the bridge as all the surveys required to start this project are carried out. We will also undertake community consultation in the upcoming months and hopefully commence a tender process in July. The contract structure going to market will be in the form of an alliance project because of the challenges and difficulties with this project. When we go to market, one of the key aspects is that we will ask a construction firm to partner with an architectural firm. This will allow us to marry engineering, architectural and budget requirements into one process. With the Matagarup Bridge, those three things operated separately—what could be done from an engineering perspective, an architectural perspective and a budget perspective. Those three things were married very late in the process. We will learn from those mistakes and bring the engineers, the architects and the finance people together earlier so that we understand what is doable, and how we can marry the constructability with how the bridge looks. The project will garner a lot of attention on how it looks and works with Fremantle.