

ROAD SAFETY — SWAN HILLS ELECTORATE

Grievance

MR F.A. ALBAN (Swan Hills) [9.25 am]: My grievance is to the Minister for Transport. I raise this grievance as a key safety issue within my electorate of Swan Hills that threatens local residents, state industry and visitors to the Perth hills region. As most members here would appreciate, each electorate has particular concerns that constituents continually raise with them on a regular basis, although not on a daily basis, and this is one of these concerns. I am talking about Great Eastern Highway or National Highway 94 and specifically the section that stretches from Bilgoman Road, Glen Forrest, to Mann Street, just west of the Mundaring town site. As with Great Northern Highway, this stretch of road is part of a major trucking route. Areas of Great Northern Highway will receive significant benefits from the NorthLink Western Australia project, which is a state and federal Liberal government initiative, and significant amounts of heavy haulage will be diverted and upgrades in Muchea will form the route from Perth to Darwin. Meanwhile, the problems with this section of Great Eastern Highway remain unresolved.

Discussions of the orange route have previously been raised as an alternative to Great Eastern Highway, but the idea seems to be shelved, at least for the immediate future. A traffic count in 2007–08 found that 24 340 vehicles use the area east of Bilgoman Road daily, with 10.6 per cent being heavy vehicles. As of 2014, that number has increased by more than 24 per cent, although heavy vehicles now form only 9.1 per cent of the traffic. They have still increased their number, but not by the predicted 60 000 to 80 000 truck movements that the opposition would have us believe. I personally have campaigned for some years for these upgrades—as far back as 2008 when I was newly elected. In the Pearce electorate office I met with Warren Truss, then shadow Minister for Transport; Hon Judi Moylan, then member for Pearce; and representatives from both the Shire of Mundaring and the City of Swan.

I must acknowledge the initial work that has been undertaken by both state and federal governments to improve this area of road. In 2010 there was a trial of electronic variable speed limits throughout the town of Mundaring, which was followed by the installation of a significant pedestrian crossing. For those members who are unaware, the crossing islands look more like the tram stops we see in Melbourne's malls. They separate the two directions of traffic at different heights and provide guardrails for the safety of pedestrians. Last year, pedestrian crossings on the eastern side of the town site were adjusted to allow easier crossings, and dedicated turning arrows were installed. The federal government completed upgrades to the road east of the Mundaring town site and at Sawyers Valley in the late 1990s. It is therefore imperative for the safety of all commuters in the region, especially those locals who use it regularly, that this last section is undertaken. A road safety review prepared by Main Roads Western Australia in September 2004—10 years ago—resulted in a number of audit findings covering widening and sealing of shoulders, clearance of trees and stumps, drainage, vehicle barriers, kerb works, additional turning lanes, seagull channelisation treatments, sight distances, and advance warning signs among others. A number of these recommendations were noted as high priority in the report. In short, it was extremely comprehensive.

As noted previously, works on Great Eastern Highway between the intersections of Stoneville Road, Mundaring Weir Road and Mann Street were completed in mid-2012. These included improved capacity by extending the right-turn pocket into Mann Street for westbound traffic, upgrading the median islands, improvements to lighting and drainage, an increase of verge parking facilities, and two new pedestrian crossings meeting latest disability standards. These works resolved the key issues within the township and were funded by the state government with contribution from the Shire of Mundaring.

In April 2013, a Royal Automobile Club publication entitled “Federal Priorities for Western Australia” placed this project in tenth position in terms of transport projects facing the state. In part it reads —

The upgrade of the section of Great Eastern Highway between Bilgoman Road in Greenmount and Mann Street in Mundaring is a key priority. This section of Great Eastern Highway carries in excess of 20,000 vehicles per day including a large number of trucks which conflict with directly abutting properties. There are currently no sealed shoulders along much of its length and there are safety issues with pedestrians walking in the unsealed shoulder to access ... bus stops. Sealing the shoulders will additionally provide safer access to Great Eastern Highway from adjacent properties.

The 2014–15 state budget included in its 2015–16 and 2016–17 forward estimates a total of \$12 million for Great Eastern Highway works from Bilgoman Road to Mundaring. This line item is found in the 2014–15 budget paper No. 2, *Budget Statements*, Volume 2 on page 819. Although we have not yet received commitment from our federal counterparts for contribution to these upgrades, I believe they are a strong candidate for Nation Building Program 2 funding under the previous federal government, as noted by the RAC publication from which I just quoted. I have contacted the federal member for Pearce, Hon Christian Porter, MP, for his

support in advocating the need for these upgrades to Hon Warren Truss, MP, Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development. Notwithstanding the significant works my electorate and surrounding areas have and are receiving from this state government, this stretch of road remains the single most urgent safety issue within Swan Hills. Minister, I ask: what can be done on a state government level to progress any federal contribution to these upgrades, ensuring this stretch of road is improved as a matter of urgency?

MR D.C. NALDER (Alfred Cove — Minister for Transport) [9.32 am]: I thank the member for this grievance and I acknowledge his efforts over a number of years to draw attention to this matter. Great Eastern Highway is part of the national highway network, and therefore its maintenance and upgrade is largely the responsibility of the federal government. It is certainly acknowledged that this section of the highway between Bilgoman Road and Mann Street has not been improved for decades and consequently is a hazard for both road users as well as pedestrians and landowners trying to enter or leave their driveways. As many members may be aware, the roadside verges along this section generally consist of a drainage gully and gravel shoulders. The area lacks footpaths connecting to crossing points, and schoolchildren catching buses have to wait on the rough gravel verge.

The member referred to a road safety review undertaken by Main Roads in 2004—some 10 years ago—yet the problem has not been addressed and the same substandard conditions remain. Over the years, Main Roads has developed a program of works to address safety issues on this seven-kilometre length of national highway. The proposed upgrade includes widening and sealing road shoulders, new bus embayments, new shared path facilities between Mann Street and Kintore Road, intersection improvements, upgraded street lighting, improved drainage systems and removal of roadside hazards. The estimated cost of the identified improvement works is \$24 million. During the 2013 state election, and largely as a result of the member for Swan Hills' efforts, the Liberal–National state government gave the local community a commitment that if re-elected, the state would provide 50 per cent of the estimated cost of the improvements. True to our word, our commitment has translated into \$12 million of state funds being allocated in the budget. As I have said on a number of occasions, we now have a federal government with which we can talk and negotiate in a positive manner. Although this Great Eastern Highway upgrade project was never supported by the previous federal government, I am confident that the new Liberal–National federal government will be more open to working in partnership. This is already proving to be the case on a number of other important road projects across our state.

For the member's information, I have recently written to Hon Warren Truss and nominated this project as our highest priority for consideration of future funding. I would anticipate a response on the state's request in the next month or so. In the meantime, I have asked Main Roads to continue planning for the proposed improvements and arrange the necessary preconstruction activities such as service relocations. This will enable works to commence as soon as the federal government confirms its commitment. The member's continued advocacy on behalf of the Swan Hills community is welcomed.