

## GREAT EASTERN HIGHWAY

### *Grievance*

**MS M.J. DAVIES (Central Wheatbelt — Leader of the National Party)** [9.36 am]: My grievance today is to the Minister for Transport and relates to the state of Great Eastern Highway. I thank the minister for her consideration.

Great Eastern Highway runs directly through my electorate and is the major east–west road into and out of the state. This year we had some significant summer rains, which, no doubt, contributed to some of the failures we currently see. I have raised this with the minister, as have many of my constituents and those that use the road. Main Roads Western Australia has given me assurances that some remedial work is being done, but I think that the current state of the road and the sheer number of complaints and concerns I have received in my office warrants me raising it in this place. The complaints are not frivolous.

I am realistic about the huge task the minister has to work with local governments and the federal government to manage Western Australia's enormous regional road network. This is the major highway in and out of the state and in all my time driving on the road, I have never seen it so bad. I have received feedback from people who have used the road for far longer than me over 40 years, including—I would like to put this on the record—Geoff Herbert. I jumped in a truck with him and did a run to Southern Cross from Merredin. He does that trip daily. When we contacted him, he commented that he had never seen the road this bad. On Tuesday, 10 October, Geoff Herbert drove on Great Eastern Highway in his prime mover and took the time to provide a very detailed description of the poor road conditions along the way. He travels that 544 kilometre return trip from Northam to Southern Cross almost daily and has done that since the 1970s with his business, Great Eastern Freightlines. At some points on the stretch between Northam and Southern Cross, potholes have pushed the adjacent road surface up so high that it hits the undercarriage of some small vehicles that travel on the road. The drivers are forced to slow down and swerve around the potholes to avoid damage. I have had people call my office to say that they are concerned about their safety on the road, particularly the kids who are driving smaller cars. I know that Main Roads has received a number of complaints at the Northam office about tyre blowouts. A cost is associated with this because if the road user can prove that the road has caused that damage, Main Roads is obliged to consider their complaint and may have to pay for the repair or replacement of tyres. Geoff observed numerous potholes and surface separation issues between Northam and Meckering. Between Meckering and Cunderdin, near Burgess Road, there is severe tramlining and foundation degradation. Between Cunderdin and Tammin, a lack of maintenance has been exacerbated by significant rains. A lot of summer rains, particularly in that area, have obviously undermined the surface of the road. I am getting many complaints about the delaminated surface and severe foundation failure within the Tammin town site. There is severe delamination five kilometres east of Tammin in the eastbound lane, and five kilometres west of Kellerberrin. Geoff goes on to say, for those who do not know, that delamination refers to the loss of the wearing, coarse layer—the top most surface of the road that protects the sub-base. As a result, Main Roads has had to put “go slow” signs along this major highway, so people have to slow down on the major highway in and out of our state because the surface of the road is so unsafe. People are either swerving on or off the road or into incoming traffic, or are having to avoid using that road altogether. That is one account. I have photos here, and I have taken my own as well. The minister would have been provided with many photos also. Numerous letters have been sent to my electorate office. I have raised this matter with the federal Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development because I understand there are some funding requirements, presumably given it is a national highway, and there would be some interaction between the state government and the federal government.

Although remedial works are being planned—I am told when the weather warms up—today I am seeking confirmation that the minister agrees that the state of this major east-west highway is an absolute disgrace at this time and that more than just the funding for the planning of the design is allocated to fixing the solution. The CEO of the Shire of Westonia, Jamie Criddle, has been working with Main Roads on the Carrabin section in particular, where there was an accident not long ago when a car shot off the road and ended up hitting the petrol bowzers of the Carrabin roadhouse. It was partly due to driver error, but when the road is unforgiving, we end up with far more catastrophic circumstances. That could have ended far worse than it did. As it was, it required everyone from ambulance drivers to local government people to come out and manage that main piece of highway. The impact on the communities along the highway is that when there is an accident, it draws in those who need to control the traffic—the police and the ambos. With the state of that road—I do not say this lightly—we are absolutely heading for a serious accident. Today, on behalf of those who use that road, I seek the assurances that the department has more than just the planning and design funding allocated, and that funding is actually allocated for repair and construction—some sections need a complete redo, particularly through Tammin and Kellerberrin—and also a time line for when this will occur. It is not acceptable for us to have that number of failures along such a significant piece of road, with no time line provided for the community and those who use it for freight transport, to ensure the safety of the people who use it between those communities and in and out of the state. It is hardly the welcome to

Western Australia that we want to provide, and I am sure that the Minister for Transport agrees with that. I seek the minister's assurance that these concerns are being heard and that there will be some real action in the near future.

**MS R. SAFFIOTI (West Swan — Minister for Transport)** [9.43 pm]: I thank the member for the grievance and I understand the significant issues on Great Eastern Highway, particularly over recent months. I have a good friend who lives in Moorine Rock whom I have been talking to about this issue, as she frequently travels the road between Perth to visit family and her home. The issue is a significant problem as a result of the weather. I will go through some formal notes about Great Eastern Highway. Basically, the extensive rains and flooding across the wheatbelt in February, the continued rains during winter and the heavy rains again in July and August have resulted, as the member is aware, in significant moisture in the road pavement, causing potholes and the failures of Great Eastern Highway that the member and many people are concerned about. Since July 2017, Main Roads has been actively trying to repair the potholes, and has repaired 2 900 potholes—an incredible amount—on Great Eastern Highway between El Caballo and Southern Cross. That seems to be the area that is of most concern. The areas significantly affected include Tammin, Cunderdin, the Goldfields Road intersection west of Kellerberrin and Hines Hill. Signage has been placed at some of these locations, warning motorists of the uneven road surfaces, and there have been some speed reductions at the Goldfields Road intersection, reducing the speed to 80 kilometres an hour. When there is poor visibility, potholes in particular are very, very dangerous. I experienced one when driving on Welshpool Road the other day. It blew my tyre and I had to pull over with my three kids. It happens, and when a person is far more isolated, the concern is even greater when they hit a pothole and the car is damaged, particularly if they have family in the car. It is not a good thing and of course it is a dangerous thing.

There were some maintenance cuts under the previous government. Maintenance spending was cut by 15 per cent over three years, resulting in a \$150 million reduction across the state from 2014–15 to 2016–17. In the recent state budget, this government reinstated those lost funds, and an initial \$50 million was provided for road maintenance in 2017–18, with the remaining \$100 million provided over the following years. A contract to undertake permanent pavement repairs is pending and is anticipated to commence in November when ground conditions improve and the temperature rises. Of course, as members would be aware, even when there are significant issues, sometimes we have to wait for the rains to stop to go out in the right season to undertake those repairs. Main Roads has informed the public of the road conditions through its online travel map. Main Roads will continue to monitor the condition of Great Eastern Highway and undertake maintenance repairs in the interim. There are also issues to do with the maintenance contract more generally, and other issues that we are sorting through as part of our continued focus on regional roads. Main Roads has also commenced planning for various upgrades and improvements on Great Eastern Highway. They are more significant upgrades, so it will seek funding through the federal budget process and then see how the state can match that or provide its contribution. Those funds will be sought as part of the national partnership agreement negotiations, and, of course, in meetings with the federal minister, we are always looking at programs of improvement. We have seen significant works on Great Northern Highway. We also announced some significant projects for the goldfields–Esperance region, in the regional roads safety package in the wheatbelt region, but as it is Great Eastern Highway, we will continue to work with the federal government on securing further funds for longer-term repairs.

Those are the three parts. We have been fixing the potholes as fast as we can; we have a permanent paving repairs program that is likely to commence in November when the ground conditions improve and the temperature rises; and we are seeking further federal funding as part of the next round of national partnership agreement negotiations. It is a vast road network. It is always hard to try to make sure that we are on top of every part of the road, but Main Roads does a very good job. I have been impressed with its communications with local communities, in particular throughout the wheatbelt and the great southern. We are aware of the issue, and in particular on Great Eastern Highway as result of the significant weather conditions. There has probably been an underspend in maintenance over recent years, so we are catching up to make sure that those roads are in a safe condition. We are doing what we can, given the weather and funding constraints, to improve the safety and the quality of that road.