

GREAT NORTHERN HIGHWAY — UPGRADES

**664. Mr F.A. ALBAN to the Minister for Transport:**

As the minister is aware, Great Northern Highway runs through my electorate of Swan Hills and carries thousands of vehicles from Perth to the Pilbara. I am aware that some sections of this highway are in urgent need of safety upgrades. Can the minister please advise the house on any impediments to delivering these upgrades?

**Mr T.R. BUSWELL replied:**

I thank the member for Swan Hills very much. I can, and I will.

As Mr Speaker is aware, because I think it passes through a large part of his electorate, Great Northern Highway is probably one of the great heavy haulage arterial routes in Australia. Members only have to sit on the corner of Reid Highway and Great Northern Highway, as I and the member for West Swan have done —

**Ms R. Saffioti** interjected.

**Mr T.R. BUSWELL:** Member for Swan Hills! I think I might sit down now—I sense my career is over again!

If people do that they will watch truck after truck after truck after truck head north to Newman, and on to Port Hedland. There are some incredibly challenging sections of road, particularly between Perth and Dalwallinu. A lot of money has been spent over recent years upgrading some significant sections of that piece of road, but there is one section in particular that Mr Speaker would be abundantly familiar with. It is the section north of the Bindi Bindi siding—the Bindi Bindi wheat bin—and I think it is about a 10 or 15-kilometre section. It is known as the Bindi Bindi bends. I drove through there one Thursday evening in late June and it is a very, very challenging piece of road indeed.

I am not the only person with that view. I will read a comment taken from the Transport Workers Union website, which states —

**On Monday 21 November 2011 we saw a perfect example of why the Bindi Bindi bends section of the Great Northern Highway is in desperate need of upgrading.**

A truck had rolled over. The article further states —

The Federal Government needs to appreciate **how dangerous this section of road is and how desperately much of the Great Northern Highway needs to be upgraded** before there are other more serious accidents.

And it goes on and on and on.

**Mr W.J. Johnston:** Because the state government will not take responsibility for it! Because the state government won't fund the —

**Mr T.R. BUSWELL:** We will get to that! I thank the member for Cannington! As usual, right on time!

The state does have a plan, member for Cannington, and I will table it so the member can have a look at it. The state has developed a \$40 million plan to upgrade the Bindi Bindi bends section of Great Northern Highway. It is a \$40 million plan that will effectively —

**Mr W.J. Johnston** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Cannington!

**Mr T.R. BUSWELL:** It will effectively replace those bends and make that road much safer for not only heavy vehicles, but all users.

Bindi Bindi is on Great Northern Highway, which is on the national highway network. The traditional funding model for the national highway network is that the state contributes 20 per cent and the commonwealth contributes 80 per cent. The fact of the matter is that there is unallocated money in the current pool of money that has been allocated to Western Australia by the commonwealth and the state—unallocated NB1 money because of some underspends in some areas—that is available to upgrade this road. I wrote to the federal minister Anthony Albanese. I wrote to him in June and I wrote to him again in July, seeking his approval to allocate that \$40 million of funds to this particular project. We were advised at officer level—commonwealth bureaucrat to state bureaucrat—that there would not be a problem with that. We were advised at officer level that that approval letter was on his desk for sign off, so that we could get on —

**Mr B.S. Wyatt:** When was that advice given?

**Mr T.R. BUSWELL:** It would have been after the letter in June and probably after the letter in July—June—July, July, September, August.

So, we were advised that the funding was available to do the much-needed road upgrade to the Bindi Bindi section. Do you know what, Mr Speaker? The money has never been approved.

**Mr B.S. Wyatt:** Have you raised it with him?

**Mr T.R. BUSWELL:** I most certainly have raised it with him!

**Mr B.S. Wyatt:** When did you raise it with him?

**Mr T.R. BUSWELL:** We have been trying to ring his office for about eight weeks! I raised it with him in phone calls back in June. I raised it with him in two letters in June and July —

**Mr B.S. Wyatt:** And when since?

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Victoria Park!

**Mr T.R. BUSWELL:** I have tried to call him since but he does a funny thing; he does not call back! Member for Victoria Park, he does not —

**Mr B.S. Wyatt** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Victoria Park!

Several members interjected.

**Mr T.R. BUSWELL:** Member for Victoria Park, I am happy for you to come in this place and defend Anthony Albanese any day of the week and you can hide behind this new Labor logo —

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Members might be interested to know that I am interested in the answer to this question and I am not interested in interjections.

**Mr T.R. BUSWELL:** So, he refuses to approve the funding. Subsequent to that, I received —

**Mr P.B. Watson** interjected.

**Mr T.R. BUSWELL:** This should worry the member for Albany, too, because we will be chasing money out of this pool to do the road around Albany—the two stages of the outer bypass in Albany. State and commonwealth money will deliver that outcome, as we have already committed.

I was surprised to receive a letter from Hon Anthony Albanese in September.

**Mr W.J. Johnston:** Elizabeth Quay is 10 times more expensive.

**Mr T.R. BUSWELL:** Every time the member opens his mouth, I understand why he got left in the back of the HiAce at the last election campaign—every single time!

**Mr W.J. Johnston:** Elizabeth Quay is 10 times more —

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Cannington, I formally call you to order for the second time today. You might have missed me calling you to order for the first time; this is the second time I am formally calling you to order. If you have questions about Elizabeth Quay, there might be somebody else you want to ask that question of.

**Mr T.R. BUSWELL:** It should be of interest to the member: Great Northern Highway goes past the place the member for Cannington wants to build his new airport!

So, what Anthony Albanese has effectively said in this letter, crystallised in writing, is that he has confirmed the reason that he will not sign off on that money coming to Western Australia; that is, when he went on to our website, [www.getthebiggerpicture.com](http://www.getthebiggerpicture.com), he discovered that his logo was not on there. It is a great Labor irony: the state opposition does not want us to have the website and the federal government wants to be on the website! Little wonder I lose sleep at night! But I move on. So, he is saying to us, “Our logo is not on that website; therefore, you’re not getting that money.” Do you know what, Mr Speaker? There are eight projects on that website. There are three that have federal government money attached to them. When people tap into those three—that is, the light rail project, the Gateway WA project and the Perth City Link project—there are very clear linkages to the project-specific websites. When people click on those, the commonwealth government gets ample recognition. So here we have, for no reason other than petty pathetic politics, a federal government —

Several members interjected.

**Mr T.R. BUSWELL:** Do members opposite support it or not?

Several members interjected.

**Mr T.R. BUSWELL:** Do members opposite support the federal government or not?

Several members interjected.

**Mr T.R. BUSWELL:** Fair enough; but what we have is a federal government that refuses to contribute to fund roads in regional Western Australia. We want those roads upgraded. We want to build them —

Several members interjected.

**Mr F.M. Logan:** It sounds like the Howard government!

**The SPEAKER:** It sounds like me calling you to order for the first time today, member for Cockburn. Member for Victoria Park, I know you can make contributions in other ways and I would prefer you did. I formally call you to order for the first time today.

**Mr T.R. BUSWELL:** I want to conclude with this observation. There is a pool of unallocated money that has already been funded by the federal and state governments. It is sitting there. We are saying to Anthony Albanese that we do not want new money; we want him to pick up his pen and sign the bottom of the letter which gives this state and the commonwealth the permission to access that money to fix that piece of road.