

## **ALBANY RING-ROAD — RAIL FREIGHT**

### *Statement*

**HON DIANE EVERS (South West)** [6.37 pm]: Tonight, I would like to speak about a question I asked about the Albany ring-road during question time today. I asked how much traffic would be on that road. It is of interest to me because I live not very far from that road. I have travelled along these roads for 25 years. This road, which state and federal governments are putting \$170 million into, will carry an estimated 1 200 trucks a day in 10 years' time! That is fewer than one every two minutes—there you go, 50 an hour. When I looked at the Main Roads WA website, it looks like a freeway that would be built for a city of a million people, yet we are putting in \$170 million for this road. Although it has on-ramps and off-ramps, they are limited. For someone travelling west on the road, there is nowhere to turn back into Albany. It makes no sense other than its stated purpose, which was to get people out of the major roundabout at Chester Pass Road because of the number of accidents. It turns out that it has had no more accidents than can be expected on a road like that; most of them are quite minor because the traffic going through it is so slow. But here we go—\$170 million to build a road that really is not needed. Just think what we could do with \$170 million.

The reason we have to build this road and get those trucks out of there is that we failed to invest in rail. My member's statement tonight is about rail. I am very concerned. Even Co-operative Bulk Handling had been setting up a grain receival point there, so the grain could come over from Chester Pass Road, across the new Menang Drive and over to Downe Road and it could be put there. When a ship came in, it could be transported on rail very quickly. An upgrade of the rail would be useful. For the most part, it is ready to go, but we are not doing that. We are putting \$170 million into a road that does not need to be built. I acknowledge that we are contractually bound by a lease that all sides of politics acknowledge has been a mistake. It was made even worse in 2011 or 2012. As I said, CBH was ready to fix the problem itself, but why would it do that now when we are putting in a \$170 million road to make it easier for the trucks to get to and from the port, even though it will be an additional seven kilometres out of their way? We could take that \$170 million and fix this problem without building a road that does not need to be built. We could fix the rail and use the other \$150 million to fix more of the rail. That is what a number of people are looking for. That is what we could be doing with this money. Maybe we need to find a way to terminate the lease with Arc Infrastructure, or Brookfield Rail as it was previously known. Waiting 30 years for the rail to come back into state-owned hands, when we know it was a mistake to lease it out, seems like a loss to us all. Arc Infrastructure does not even have to maintain the rail. It needs to maintain it only if it thinks it is economically viable to do so. Therefore, many of our rail lines are falling into further disrepair and becoming even less likely to ever be used.

When the tier 3 rail was closed in 2010 or 2011, it resulted in an extra 30 000 truck movements. From a sustainability point of view, we know that rail is more efficient than trucks. Trucks are inefficient, they cause more damage to the roads and are involved in more traffic accidents with tourists and locals, yet we continue to use them. In the wheatbelt alone, over 700 kilometres of rail line formerly used for grain has been closed. Those lines are an asset and are not beyond saving. CBH estimates that it will cost between \$60 million and \$70 million to bring them back to operating capacity. I understand that the rail lines are used mostly during the grain harvest season, but most of those towns also have receival bins that can store grain. That grain can be very quickly shipped to the ports if needed, if the rail lines are reopened. Rail is the most efficient way to transport freight, it produces fewer emissions compared with other freight options, and it is economically sound. We just need an initial investment at the state and federal government levels.

Labor has said a lot of good things since it has been in government. I know that the government is not stupid. It has done a lot of good projects and has good policies, and positive things have been happening, especially during the COVID crisis. It has been amazing. I suppose that is why Labor has committed to recovering the tier 3 lines. I will quote from the 2019 WA Labor platform. Item 27 at chapter 5, under the heading "Transport, Roads, Infrastructure and Planning", states —

WA Labor condemns the decision by the Barnett Liberal–National government in 2010 to close Tier 3 rail lines in WA. Failure to properly manage WA's grain freight and the closure of Tier 3 rail lines was illadvised, irresponsible and unsafe.

Yes, it was. Let us do something about it. The government has the ability to do something and would have the support of a lot of the crossbenchers from the regional areas. We could do something about recovering the rail lines in this term, if we got our act together. Item 28 states —

WA Labor will recover closed Tier 3 lines and take a more proactive approach to the networks management.

Woo hoo! I am really pleased. That sounds great and I cannot wait until it happens. I know the time is dwindling, but it could happen if we got our act together. I understand that the state executive of the WA Labor Party recently passed a motion to call on the state government to commission an independent environmental and economic impact statement on the closure of tier 3 and the rail freight lease agreement and the effect that that has had on the state's

economy and future development. We know the impetus is there, but just saying the words will not do it. The government has to do more than that, and that is what I hope to hear. It would be music to my ears to hear that Labor is on track to reinitiating the tier 3 rail lines, because that would work for regional areas, the farmers, the grain industry and tourism. It is a long shot, but members would not believe how happy it makes people when they hear about the trains starting up again. It could be done like it has been done in the United States, where transporting freight by rail has the main right of way, along with passenger rail.

I really hope that now is a good time to do this. Federal money for infrastructure spending is out there. The federal government gave us something like \$800 million. It would take spending only a little of that on rail to do so much more with it. We are spending up to \$850 million on the Bunbury Outer Ring Road and \$170 million on the Albany ring-road. The southern forest irrigation scheme has been given \$60 million. Let us put it to good use. We know that rail is good for the regions. It makes roads and travel safer for tourists and residents, it decreases the costs associated with road maintenance and brings work crews into regional towns. All that is excellent news to stimulate the local economies of regional areas. It is just another idea. I really hope to see something happen, but it will have to happen quickly. The government has to get on to it. Rail makes people happy. It is a vote winner. I will have more questions about the Greenbushes lithium mine. I have not heard any more detail about that. If that is not put on rail, we will see more trucks and more accidents on country roads. We have to acknowledge that in 2019, 60 per cent of road fatalities were the result of crashes in regional WA. That is not acceptable and it should not happen. Only the other day I saw a picture of a log truck that had tipped over. The more trucks there are, the more accidents we will have. It is time for WA Labor to follow through on what it said it would do and recover the rail lines that were erroneously closed under the Liberal–National government. It is time to put freight back on rail, where it belongs.