

METRONET — ARMADALE RAIL LINE — SHUTDOWN

Statement

HON TJORN SIBMA (North Metropolitan) [6.19 pm]: I intend this to be only a short statement because I consider the matter to be urgent. I was not initially preparing to make a statement this evening. However, this statement seems to have prepared itself.

In the time between the cessation of question time and the commencement of members' statements, I had the opportunity to listen to a radio interview on Oliver Peterson's 6PR program. I listened to a lady by the name of Nihal Ischel who lives adjacent to the Armadale train line. Many members would be aware that the Armadale line will be shut down from next Monday for a period of at least 18 months, and as experienced people we all understand the kind of disruption that works of this nature can bring. On a number of occasions over the last month I have inquired into the degree to which the Metronet team and the minister's office have consulted with public transport users who have a disability. I was prompted to do so because I received an email from People with Disabilities WA Inc identifying to me some very serious shortcomings in the quality of consultation that it has had with the government in respect of meeting particular needs.

To cut a long story short, Ms Nihal Ischel believes that she has no alternative but to sell her home because she cannot safely cross busy roads to get to the public transport temporary hubs that have been created. She is blind. It is a long journey to walk across a dangerous road. A number of representations have been made by her and I commend the minister's office for sending someone from the office to visit her and discuss her needs. But, effectively, the two options that were requested—a temporary transport user subsidy scheme so she can have taxis to convey her to her place of employment or a potential temporary upgrade to the pedestrian crossing to make it audible—have been utterly rebuffed. The answer from the Metronet team has been, "Computer says no. Too bad, so sad."

I do not believe for one moment that there is not an alternative that is within the gift of Minister Saffioti. I request members of the government benches to draw this matter to their minister's attention. I have no reason to suspect that Ms Ischel, whom I listened to in a previous interview, is engaging in any degree of hyperbole. There is a serious problem with the level of consultation that has occurred with public transport users with a disability, people who by the very nature of their conditions rely upon the provision of this service. I appreciate that bespoke solutions cannot be provided in every circumstance, but what aggrieves me is that this shutdown was foreshadowed in February last year. There has been nearly 18 months, close to two years, of planning and there are still some serious grievances that have gone unaddressed by the government to the disability sector.

I identify something that aggrieves me greatly: a bureaucratic inertia in respect of this matter. I am just going on the advice that has been conveyed to me. The Metronet dimension, the transport office as it is contained in the Public Transport Authority, appears to be attempting to find some solutions. There is a solution potentially within the gift of Main Roads, an agency under the orbit of the minister's portfolio responsibility, but it refuses, apparently, to be helpful at all. It is completely unacceptable that a person who attempts their best to live a full life, a life of dignity, and to go about their daily work cannot have some accommodation met for their special and unique circumstances.

I believe it is within the gift of the minister to drive an expedient and reasonable solution in this case. I believe a minister who has spent an enormous sum on Metronet can find it within the capacity of government to find an 18-month-long solution, whether it be some pedestrian crossings that are useful and suitable or some transport subsidy vouchers. I think the minister can do it. I implore her to do something. It would be an absolute disgrace if this person feels they have to relocate because they will be effectively trapped at home and their options to go out will be far too dangerous for them to consider.