

MITCHELL FREEWAY — WIDENING

Statement

HON TJORN SIBMA (North Metropolitan) [8.43 pm]: This will be brief. Today I received an answer to a question without notice that, I must confess, flummoxed me somewhat. I am taking this opportunity to highlight what I believe to be a problem. The problem, quite frankly, is a deterioration in the quality of answers provided to questions without notice and, I think, a creeping contempt for the process entering into the official record.

Today I asked what I thought to be a reasonably simple question that related to the prolonged works on the southbound lanes of the Mitchell Freeway, from Joondalup now extending to Leederville—in particular, a dimension of the project that on the southbound lanes extends from Hodges Street to Hepburn Avenue, which is the creation of a lane. Works have been underway for some time, and I understand that things take a while to do, but they have been reasonably prolonged. There is also now, and there has been for some time, two other projects rolled into this. One is a smart freeway project, widening the lane from Cedric Street to the Vincent Street exit as well as the overlap—I will put it that way; if not strictly accurate in engineering terms—of the Stephenson Avenue project. All I asked today was: When is that project likely to finish? When did it start? When is it likely to finish?

There is a prehistory to this. I was referred to question without notice 722 asked on 22 June 2023. I thought it was a reasonable assumption that that was directed personally at me—that I was somehow in error and I had forgotten an answer to a question that I had previously raised four months ago. I think, on a reasonable assessment, I have asked a number of questions each question time that I have been present for, and I have probably asked about 100 or so questions without notice this year. But I have a reasonable grasp on the kinds of questions that I have asked and the answers that I have received, and I could never recall asking this particular question. I spent the remainder of question time actually searching to see whether I was at fault and whether the rebuke that I took from this answer was actually a fair smack. I determined after question time had finished and we had gone on to formal business that frankly, no, I had never asked that question. It was asked by my colleague, not the same question but a related question, Hon Peter Collier in June.

It was within the gift of the Minister for Transport and the office of the Minister for Transport that provided the answer that the Minister for Emergency Services read in, and I am not critiquing—underscore this—the Minister for Emergency Services, to very easily put: “Member, this started in 2021. We anticipate that it will be complete in 2024.” That was all that needed to be said. Instead, the answer was a contemptuous dismissive: refer to this. I find that to be beneath the parliamentary standards that we should accept and certainly beneath the practice that has long been established in this chamber.

I might just explain—if I need to do this—why I asked the question in the first place. I asked the question in the first place because, frankly, all engineering and construction works by their very nature cause a temporary inconvenience. Therefore, I was asking on behalf of the tens of thousands of commuters who use the southbound lanes of the Mitchell Freeway when they might expect to get to a position in which there is a consistent speed limit from Joondalup to Leederville, in the very least. It was a fair question, I think, asked without any real political loading. But there is another reason why I asked this question. This is, frankly put, a reasonably straightforward engineering proposition. This has been going on now for nearly two years; it will probably extend somewhat beyond that. The reason I am interested in the capacity of any statutory authority, particularly that of the transport portfolio, to deliver a project on time and on budget is that I have been given absolute assurances, as has the public, by the Minister for Transport that the shutdown of the Armadale line will take precisely 18 months and not a day longer.

So confident is the minister of that, there is absolutely no plan B. I recall asking precisely whether there is a contingency plan, and I was advised accordingly that, no, there is not. If I cannot get at straightforward, partisan-free, political-free answer to a simple question about a project that is being delivered, albeit slowly, right now, what guarantee can I, and the public, take from the minister that the Armadale shutdown—which is a complicated piece of work, a great inconvenience, and arguably one that could have been delivered in another way—is going to take only 18 months? On the basis of the contemptuous answer that I received today, I have absolutely no faith in Minister Saffioti’s ability to deliver that Armadale shutdown period within 18 months.